



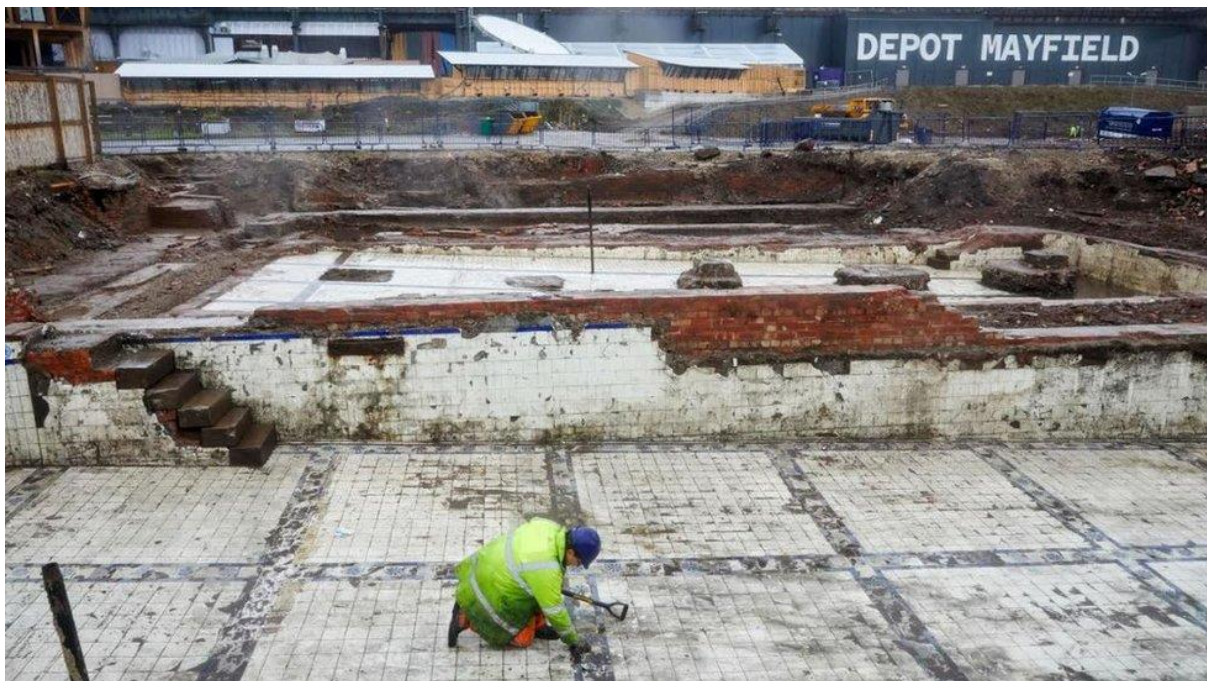
Keith Myerscough has presented conference papers on the social history of commercial swimming. He has written peer reviewed articles and book chapters on individual Natationists and swimming clubs in Lancashire. Keith began his career as a teacher of physical education within the State School sector before moving on to manage the UK's first basketball/netball facility in Stockport, Greater Manchester. He returned to teaching in the FE/HE sectors in 1999. Keith took early retirement from his post as a Senior Lecturer in Sport Studies at the University Centre, Blackpool in 2014.

1st March 2021

Industrial Heritage (Part1)

'Cotton Lancashire's' Victorian Swimming Baths

The "Penny Scrub" is still evoking notions of civic pride in the industrial heritage of Victorian Cotton Lancashire. The unearthing of the remains of Mayfield Public Baths in Manchester has stimulated community interest in the town's cultural heritage. In a series of articles on community bath- and wash-houses, the conundrum of the ubiquitous provision of swimming baths is addressed.



Excavation of Mayfield Baths, Manchester 2021 (Image by Mark Waugh)

During the first week of 2021 innumerable media outlets revealed that the archaeology unit at Salford University had successfully recorded the location of Mayfield Baths. The site was discovered during the construction of Manchester's first new public park in over 100 years. The civil engineering project is part of the Mayfield District's £1.4bn community regeneration programme, designed to bring domestic, commercial, and public life back to the Mayfield Ward of 'Cottonopolis'.



Media coverage fixated on the baths structural remains and on the various artefacts unearthed. The excavation of the baths two swimming pools encouraged the media to draw similarities of community land use from the 1850s to the proposed public park for 2021. At a superficial level the comparison has merit but scholarly research brings greater clarity to the notion of preserving community heritage for future generations. The discipline of industrial archaeology is now defined by its efforts to preserve 18th and 19th century structures as part of a district's 'industrial heritage'. In effect, it is a sub-discipline of cultural anthropology, concerned with studying and explaining people at work in different settings.

Industrial archaeology/heritage is a relatively new field, originating in the United Kingdom in the 1950s. It is concerned with the human activity of employment based in domestic and non-domestic locations. Practitioners seek information-based evidence, underpinned by sources such as historical texts, oral accounts, and visual testimony. This multidisciplinary approach is essential to the study of industrial heritage. For example, the tiles decorating Mayfield Baths depict images of blue cotton flowers, acknowledging the source of the investor's wealth from cotton manufacturing.



Mayfield Baths Tiles depict image of blue cotton flowers (Image by Mark Waugh)

Social media reports tend to provide an inaccurate assessment of the function of Victorian public baths provision. The assumption that public baths were provided as a philanthropic gesture fails to acknowledge the social-class structure of the period. In the case of Mayfield Baths, it was built and managed by the *Manchester and Salford Baths and Laundry Company* who were obliged to provide an annual dividend to their shareholders. The supply of water for bathing and laundering was not cost-effective; it could only be offset by the inclusion of financially viable swimming pools. Manchester and Salford, unlike many of their satellite mill-towns, encouraged private subscription in order to build and maintain the swimming pools, bath-houses, and wash-houses.

MANCHESTER AND SALFORD BATHS AND LAUNDRIES COMPANY. — (Provisionally Registered.) — Capital, £35,000, in 7,000 Shares of £5 each. Deposit, 10s per Share.

Chairman, WILLIAM NEILD, Esq.
Deputy Chairman, E. R. LANGWORTHY, Esq.

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Mr. Hugh Fleming, 6, York Hotel Buildings, Manchester.

SOLICITOR.
Mr. William Heron, 24, Kennedy-street, Manchester.

Application for shares, in the subjoined form, must be made to the Secretary; or to the Solicitor to the Company, Mr. William Heron, 24, Kennedy-street, Manchester.

To the Provisional Committee of the Manchester and Salford Baths and Laundries Company.

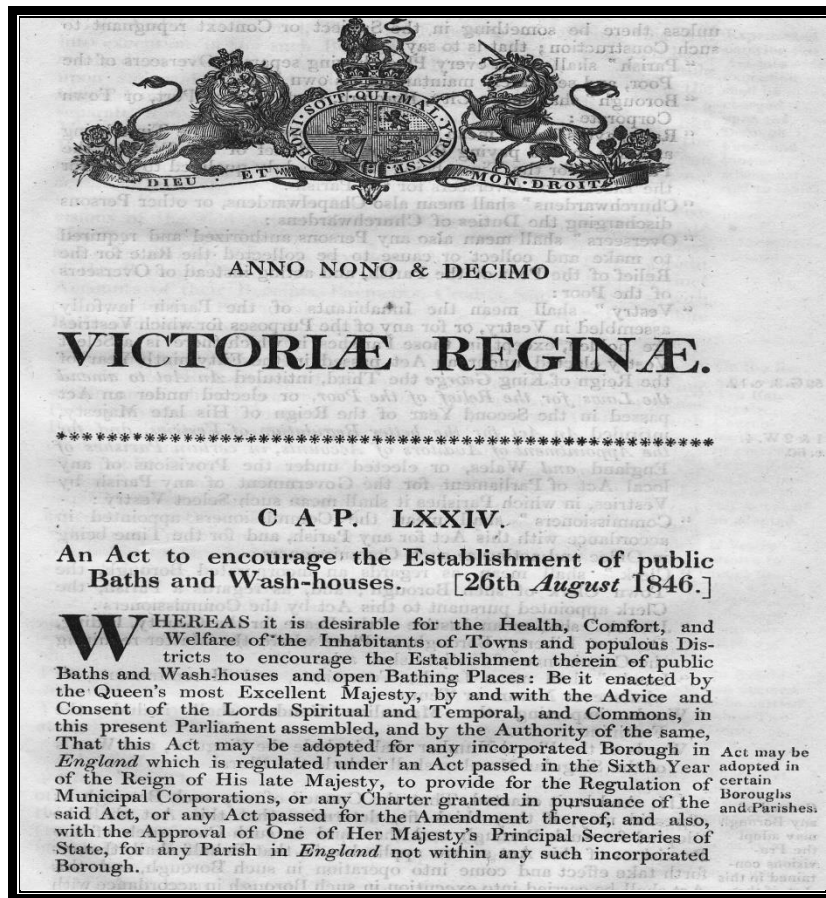
Gentlemen,—I request that you will allot to me _____ shares of five pounds each, in the above company; and I hereby undertake to accept the same or any less number you may allot to me, and to pay the deposit of 10s. per share thereon, and to sign the deed of settlement when required.—Dated this _____ day of _____ 1855

Name in full _____
Place of Business _____
Residence _____
Signature _____
Name, Residence, and }
Profession of R. ferec }

Manchester and Lancashire General Advertiser, 13th January 1855

In 1855 the *Manchester and Salford Baths and Laundry Company* had raised enough money from the issuing of 7,000 £5 shares to build their first public baths in Greengate, Salford. The company built 3 baths: Greengate Baths opened in September 1856; Mayfield Baths in August 1857; and, Leaf Street Baths in June 1860. The company made commercial provision for what many social reformers considered to be a municipal duty. In 22 years, 1856-1878, the company spent £41,150 in building 3 establishments, with profits accrued to its shareholders of £13,627. This was a healthy return for shareholders of 1.6% per annum; there had been 3,733,293 visitors who had paid for a swim, taken a hot or cold private bath, with 617,266 washers tending to their laundry.

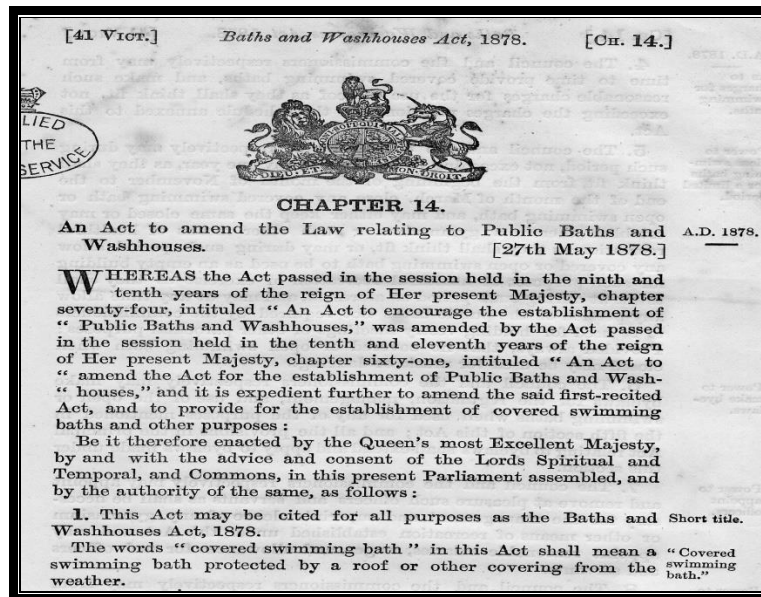
Public baths provision in Manchester prior to 1878 was conducted by the private sector. However, facilities for private bathing and laundering were inadequate for the ever-growing population. Public baths with swimming facilities were a commercial success initially, leading to an expansion in provision. The scheme was intended to bring health, comfort, and welfare to urban-industrial inhabitants in particular. In contrast, many of Lancashire's mill-towns provided municipally owned public baths a decade or more before Manchester and Salford Councils made provision. Local authorities throughout the country treated the municipal provision of public baths with apprehension. Concerns were based upon political, social, and economic considerations despite the *Baths and Wash-Houses Act of 1846* being a permissive piece of legislation.



The Baths and Wash-Houses Act of 1846

Manchester and Salford were two of the wealthiest towns/cities in the country, but councillors feared that by accepting the conditions as laid down in the 1846 Act, they would weaken their political autonomy. It was also a period of significant social reforms that were to be financed by means of local rates. The provision of public health reforms were viewed as a step too far by many ratepayers, revealing deep-rooted social prejudice. Improved productivity through improvements in the physical and moral condition of the labouring classes was a concept often rejected by the new entrepreneurial middle classes.

Other barriers to municipal public baths provision were of a more practical nature. Water supplies were prioritised for manufacturing processes, with many factories building their own reservoirs supplied by subterranean wells, local canals, and rivers. The heating and filtration of water improved as new technologies were adopted. The site of baths establishments and their facility provision were essential factors in their financial success. Given that the labouring classes lived in overcrowded urban districts, land was at a premium for housing rather than as a project to encourage 'municipal trading/socialism'.



Baths and Wash-Houses Amendment Act of 1878

The historical significance of swimming pool provision obscured the original role of municipal public baths. Indeed, many medical historians consider Victorian municipal public baths to have been a prosaic but useful service.