

CREWE SWIMMING BATHS

An Architectural and Social History

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PREFACE

When I was asked by my Open University tutor to investigate the architectural history and design of a local building, I chose Crewe's Municipal Swimming Baths. These Baths, which were opened in 1937, stand in the middle of the five places I've called "home" and, like many local people, I find that they play a recurring role in my family's life-story.

It was at the Flag Lane Baths that my parents met during the 1940's to "do their courting" and there that I gained my first swimming badges in the 'fifties, while the 'seventies found me back in the little pool teaching my small sons to swim.

By the end of 1982 my research was complete. However, the encouragement of family and friends, coupled with my own reluctance to let so much hard-won information become forgotten have lead me to prepare this book based on my findings. My pleasant task this spring has been to bring the story up to date and to add those interesting details of social history which academic rigour had previously required me to lay aside.

One of the nicest things about this study has been the way in which local people have shown their generosity by offering to share their memories and by giving me their time and expertise. Valuable assistance was given by Mr. A. McDowall of the Borough Amenities Department, Mr. K. Smallwood, the present Borough Baths Manager, Mr. D. Hearne of Crewe Reference Library and Mr. P. Weeks and his technical staff in the Borough Architect's Department. Mr. Leonard Reeves, the Baths' Architect, and his family, Mr. John Blower, the project's Foreman Joiner, and Mrs. Dorothy Rogers who is now in her twenty-second year of teaching Crewe school children to swim, all volunteered their help and have passed on useful information through correspondence and interview. Family and friends have also given much valued advice and practical help with the preparation of the manuscript. Thank you everyone.

Barbara Billups

March, 1984

CONTENTS

Preface

Chapter

1. Opening Day	1
2. "This Handsome Building of Modern Design" (Alderman Frank Bott)	4
3. Doubts and Decisions	11
4. Fitter Britain	17
5. From Basement to Balcony	19
6. Badges, Fun and Frolics	27
7. Looking Ahead	34

Appendix

i. Site Plan	36
ii. Basement Plan	37
iii. Ground Floor Plan	38
iv. First Floor Plan	39
v. Cross Section Through Entrance Block	40
vi. Cross Section Through Bath Hall	41
vii. Long Section Through Bath Hall	42
viii. Long Section Through Ladies' Dressing Room	43
ix. Architect's Report to Sub-Committee re: Swimming! Baths, 15th April, 1934 - Proposed Schemes A-D	44

Bibliography	46
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Acknowledgements	46
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Crewe Corporation Swimming Baths - Flag Lane

OPENING DAY

The
Chronicle,
13.11.'37

The official opening of Crewe's new Swimming Baths on 6th November, 1937 was an occasion of great civic pride. The Mayor, Alderman F. Bott, said in his opening speech that the day "... marked the fulfilment of a long and ardent desire on the part of the Corporation to give the fullest opportunity to develop a healthy, happy and virile people." Mr. J. W. Bowen, Crewe's Labour M.P. for 1929-35, declared the new Baths to be "money well spent" and proof that the Council were once again "...living up to their motto of 'Never Behind'." *

On opening day Flag Lane was closed to traffic and policemen posted to control eager crowds. The following week the letters published in the local press record the disappointment and frustration of those who were not able to get close enough to watch the proceedings. The Chronicle report lists the many official visitors - some of whom can be seen on the newspaper's photograph of the Mayor and his principal guests. Local tradesmen's offers to sponsor a beauty parade had been politely refused, and the opening was celebrated instead by an exhibition of "diving, scientific swimming, fancy swimming, and underwater swimming." The Cheshire Constabulary demonstrated their life-saving skills, a Lancashire water-polo player his speed swimming and the former diving champion of Egypt "illustrated practically every manner of entering the water with the exception of falling in"!



Leonard Reeves,
Architect to the Baths

Chaloner,
p.284

Local government statistics and council minutes suggest that the mood of optimism which surrounded the opening of the Baths was general in Crewe in the mid-thirties. Chaloner found that, like many other towns, Crewe was beginning to emerge from the economic depression of 1929-34. In his study of the social and economic development of Crewe he found a substantial drop in the level of local unemployment from more than 20% in 1933 to between 8% and 9% in 1939.*

Other factors too were helping to ensure a better life for the inhabitants of Crewe. The falling birth rate, which Chaloner cites as a major cause of Crewe's declining population in the 'thirties, increased the importance of survival. Consequently more attention was paid to

CREWE'S £30,000 BATHS OPENED BY MAYOR

"A GREAT SOCIAL CENTRE"—Sir Harold Hartley



Back row: Lady Somervell, Major T. C. Toler, Mrs. Toler, Major H. B. M. Beames, Mr. W. A. Stanier, Sir Donald Somervell, Sir Harold Hartley, the Mayor's servant, Ald. T. Kelsall, and Mr. J. W. Bowen
Front: Mrs. Foulkes, Ald. Foulkes, Mr. L. Reeves, the Mayoress, the Mayor, Master D. Cooke, Miss Bott, and Mrs. Lemon.

Chaloner,
p.187 ff
appendix
charts 1,2

health issues, especially the care of the very young. Local government were justly proud of their efforts in this direction.* Also, as the monthly minutes of the Works Committee show, a vigorous programme of public works was underway during the years 1934-37 when the Baths were being planned and built. Rented accommodation was systematically inspected and extensive structural and sanitary improvements frequently carried out. During this period many private streets were adopted by the Council and their roads made up, the electrification of street lighting was forging ahead, major road works (including the widening of Flag Lane and its railway bridge) were undertaken and the Corporation were finally making real progress with their plans for a municipal aerodrome to help speed up the Irish mail traffic.* Private investors also responded to the more favourable economic climate, for example, the Odeon cinema - built in Delamere Street and recently demolished - was also opened in 1937.

Sadly, however the mood of confidence and optimism was short lived. By the time the Baths were opened the threat of war was very real. On September 1st, 1939 a special meeting of the Baths Committee was called as war was believed to be imminent, and contingency plans were hastily prepared to convert the basement into a public air raid shelter.

Chaloner,
p.285



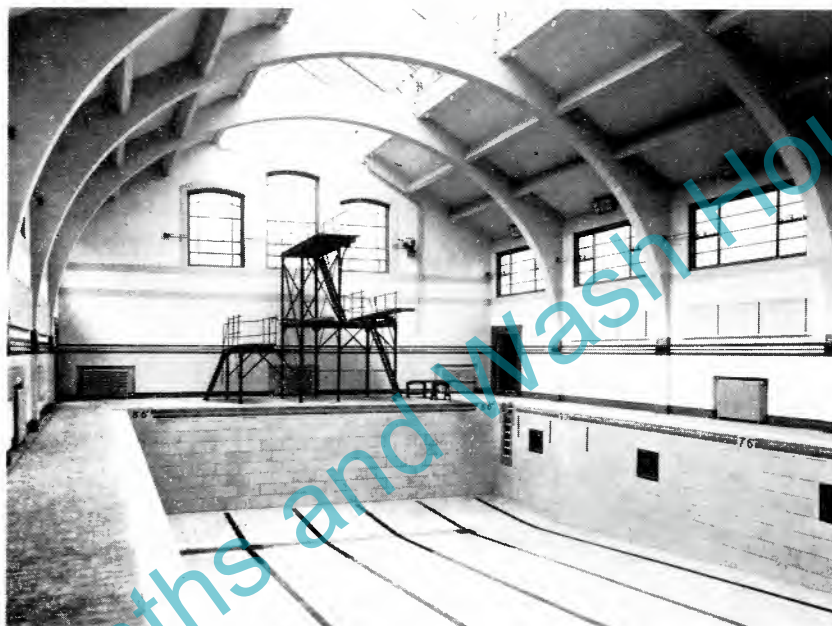
Design of vertical windows on entrance facade

"THIS HANDSOME BUILDING OF MODERN DESIGN"
(Alderman Frank Bott)

Although the matured trees now make it difficult to photograph a general view of the Baths, the frontispiece and site plan give an overall picture of the building and its relation to the site and the adjacent Valley Park.

The Engineer's Land Register shows that the 0.848 acres appropriated for the Baths site in 1936 already belonged to the Borough Council.* It was part of an acre and a half of land purchased from the Trustees of the will of Richard Edleston in April 1924 for £367. This land includes part of the Valley Park, and was acquired for Public Walks and Pleasure Grounds under the Public Health Act of 1875. Leonard Reeves, who was the last of Crewe's all-purpose Borough Surveyors, Engineers and Architects, designed the building with the

Folio '36
p.583



View looking towards the deep end of the main pool - note the diving pit, inspection windows and the original diving boards and sky-light.

help of his architectural assistant H. Knowles. The building contractor was E. Taylor & Co. Ltd. of Littleborough.

Mr. Reeves had total responsibility for the entire project - even down to the ordering of provisions for the café. The Borough Council Minutes for 1934-8 give some indication of the vast amount of work this involved him in, as does Mr. Taylor's comment at the opening ceremony "...that of all the drawings which had been prepared in the Borough Surveyor's Department - one hundred and fifty in number - one had never been questioned."* This was high praise indeed for Mr. Reeves.

The
Chronicle,
16.11.37

As the site plan shows, the land slopes sharply from the north to south by approximately ten feet which has allowed an extra storey, with natural light and direct access from ground level, to be included in the south wing. The facade, with its parapets, heavy concrete structures, decorative courses of brickwork and strongly contrasting horizontal and vertical elements is very typical of many public buildings of the 1930's. At the Baths, the contrast of vertical and horizontal lines help to establish the simple cubic shapes, for example the frontispiece shows how the south-east and north-east corner blocks are comprised of strong vertical elements (the decorative corners standing proud of the block and giving the effect of columns) which are "pulled square" by the horizontal windows linked by bands of decorative brickwork. Also it can be seen that the vertical and horizontal elements of the entrance facade are used to lead the eye inwards towards the doors by creating the visual effect of enclosed diminishing squares.



The south side of the building with its abandoned sun terrace and rosebeds



View looking towards the deep end of the main pool - note the diving pit, inspection windows and the original diving boards and sky-light.



The south side of the building with its abandoned sun terrace and rosebeds

The Chronicle's report and the tone of the opening speeches emphasise the fact that the Baths was thought to be a very modern building. The Mayor called it "This handsome building of modern design", Alderman Foulkes said that it had "... been possible to adopt the latest ideas in construction"* and the Chronicle described the Baths as being "... of modern design" too*. Although it is difficult to assess just what it was about the Baths that impressed people with its modernity (or even, indeed, if the general public shared this view), the following factors were probably influential.

The shape of the building itself would have been very distinctive as it is different from anything built locally before the mid 1930's. However, this style was quite widely used throughout the country-for the fronts of prestige factories and cinemas, for example. Anyone familiar with developments in Europe might possibly have linked the Baths with International Style architecture, for, although the building does not have the Style's distinctive white stucco "skin", its surfaces are very flat; for example, apart from on the facade, there are no window cills or reveals. Also, in common with the International Style, the forms of the Baths are principally cubic, it has windows arranged in horizontal bands, and it has the appearance of having a flat "slab" roof.

The layout of the Baths might have also struck those who were able to make a comparison as being innovatory and, therefore, "modern".



The roof line of the west facade showing the boiler chimney and the parapet which hides the pitched roof.



The entrance hall - note the zig-zag patterns on the floor and pay kiosk

A clear example is the siting of the changing cubicles. It was customary at the time to place these in the pool hall. As will be seen in the Appendix (ix), Reeves' schemes B, C, and D all had the boxes around the pool side. As scheme D was preceded with there was obviously a change made which is not explained. Good reasons must have prompted it as the architect was particularly anxious to have the dressing boxes in full view of the pool attendants so that they could be easily supervised and children kept well clear of them, a precaution which he had found "from experience, is very desirable".*

However, it seems logical to speculate that the final decision to site the boxes in two outer corridors was made in the interests of efficiency and economy, and not as a gesture towards more liberal modern views. As the ground plan shows it allowed for twice as many boxes to be built - 142 instead of 71 - and also reduced the width of roof span needed in the pool hall. To cross it as it was built (at 48 feet wide) was an expensive and skilled job. Poolside boxes would have added at least another ten feet to this problem. The need to span the pool hall must have been a factor in the choice of Taylors as contractors as they were an engineering firm with experience in bridge building.

Although other innovatory features - such as the continuous scum channels round both pools, the up-to-date filtration and heating systems, and the electronically controlled roof windows and ventilators - would have remained unnoticed by most users, there can be no

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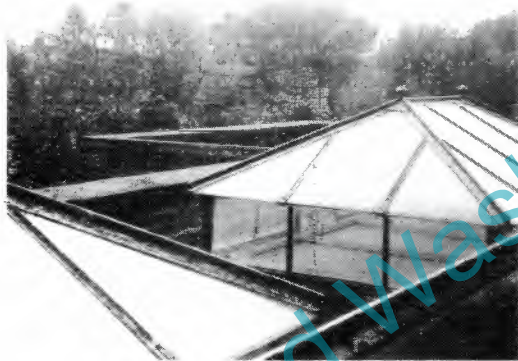


The entrance hall - note the zig-zag patterns on the floor and pay kiosk

Chaloner,
p. 54:
Folio '33,
p. 391

doubt that the new standards of hygiene and comfort that these devices made possible would have been most welcome. Until its closure in March, 1936 the only local swimming facilities were provided by the L.M.S. (the London, Midland and Scottish Railway Company) at their public open air pool in Mill Street. This meant that for over eighteen months Crewe's 50,000 inhabitants were left with no bathing facilities at all, except for the unemployed who had special permission to swim in the Queen's Park lake.*

The Mill Street Bath which was opened in 1866 was a simple "fill and empty" pool. It had no heating, filtration or circulation systems. The water was changed weekly and, to compensate for this, the admission charge was reduced as the week went by and the water became increasingly murky. When the Flag Lane facilities are compared with these it is easy to imagine how modern the new Baths must have seemed, and minor lapses of hygiene must be viewed in this wider context. One such lapse occurred when the outdoor sun terrace was made available for sunbathing and refreshments in 1938. Swimmers were allowed free movement between the terrace and the pools via the western "schoolgirls" door - a route which offered no foot washing facilities.



One of the lantern lights which allow natural light into the changing areas



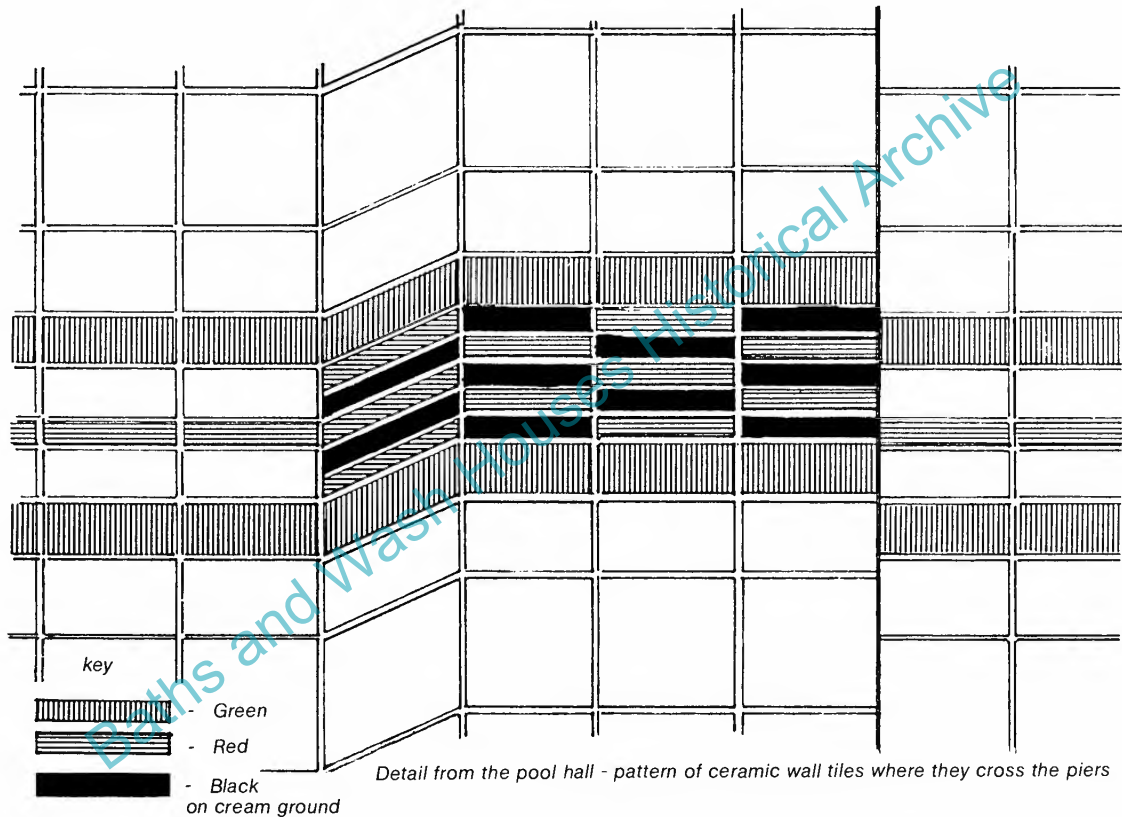
The original teak dressing boxes



One of the lantern lights which
allow natural light into the
changing areas



The original teak dressing boxes



20th October, 1934

Inspection of Park Lake and ravine.

Resolved: that the Borough Surveyor submit plans for a bathing pool at west end of Park Lake with boxes and recovery room; that the island be removed if necessary; that cold water only be supplied; that reinforced concrete specialists and quantity surveyors be consulted.

(Sub-Committee re: Baths)

14th November, 1934

Borough Surveyor asked to submit estimate of cost and to approach Ministry of Health on the matter.

(Sub-Committee re: Baths)

15th November, 1934

Park Curator reported that the lake had been drained, and fish put into east end of lake, the water being retained by building a dam under the two bridges at each side of the central island.

(Parks and Cemetery Committee)

18th December, 1934

Report by Borough Surveyor of meeting with Ministry of Health.

Ministry:-

- a) agree the application for a loan, in principle,
- b) ask that tenders be invited so that loan sanction can be granted,
- c) predict that the scheme would involve a public enquiry.

Borough Surveyor also reported his estimated cost for works to be £15,100 plus £400 for advertising.

Resolved: tenders be invited; application be made to Ministry of Health for loan sanction.

(General Purposes Committee)

15th January, 1935

Borough Surveyor requested instructions regarding the obtaining of tenders, appointment of Baths Superintendent, purchase of furnishings etc.

Letter read from L.M.S. Railway Company offering the Corporation their swimming Baths and its site in Mill Street for £500.

(General Purposes Committee)

18th March, 1935

Borough Surveyor reported problems with "the nature of the ground" which required his estimate to be adjusted to £19,925.

Tenders received were considered, all of which were in excess of £21,000.

Resolved: that the Railway Company's offer be rejected.

(Sub-Committee re: Baths)

16th April, 1935

Re: Council's application for loan sanction in respect of proposed Open Air Bath, Queen's Park. Letter read from Ministry of Health stating that the Minister agreed in principle with the Council's proposals but "... was advised that the site selected was unsuitable for the purpose, having regard to the engineering difficulties to be met and the consequent high cost involved." The Minister then suggested that the Council select a more favourable site.

(General Purposes Committee)

23rd April, 1935

Sub-committee informed of Minister's decision. Resolved:

- a) to abandon the idea of an open air bath,
- b) to erect a closed bath on the Flag Lane site with the following provisions - main pool, learner's pool, laundry, car park, four foam baths, twelve slipper baths, no staging (to cover pool in winter) no cafe or balcony.

(Sub-Committee re: Baths)

16th August, 1935

Borough Surveyor submitted amended plans to comply with above, along with his estimate of £39,866, and additional £1,004 to be added for expenses already incurred on the Open Air Baths project.

Resolved: application to be made to the Ministry of Health for sanction to borrow £40,870 and for consent to the appropriation of the necessary land.*

(Sub-Committee re: Baths)

* The Public Baths and Washhouses Act (1846) empowered Local Authorities to borrow money for the provision of Baths and Washhouses and an additional Act (1882) - passed to facilitate this provision - empowered them to acquire sites as necessary within their Borough or Parish. (Davenport, pp.15, 19)

19th November, 1935

Letter from Minister of Health discussed stating that, as the Council's proposals appeared to entail an annual deficit of 3.8 pence in the pound on the rates, he was prepared to direct a local inquiry, subject to their further consideration of the matter. He would defer making any decision until this was done. Borough Surveyor reported that in his opinion it now seemed unlikely that he would be able to complete the work before 1938.

Resolved: to send a deputation to interview the Minister on the matter.

(General Purposes Committee)

17th December, 1935

Re: letter from Ministry agreeing to receive the Town Clerk and the Borough Surveyor.

(General Purposes Committee)

14th January, 1936

Borough Surveyor reported that, as a result of the interview, the Health Minister had agreed:

- a) to dispense with a local inquiry
- b) that quantities could be prepared and tenders invited.
(General Purposes Committee)

6th May, 1936

The Committee considered tenders received for the construction of the proposed swimming baths and resolved to accept that of E. Taylor and Co. Ltd., for £34,090 - this being the lowest of the five received.

Resolved: to apply to the Minister for loan sanction of £38,219 i.e.:

£34,090	amount of tender
2,865	salaries, fees, advertisements
260	costumes and towels
1,004	expenditure incurred on abandoned scheme

A member suggested provision for spectators at the Baths.

Resolved: that the Borough Surveyor prepare a report on the matter.
(General Purposes Committee)

19th May, 1936

Borough Surveyor submitted a plan with gallery and café.

Resolved: that scheme be approved if it did not exceed accepted tender.
(General Purposes Committee)

3rd June, 1936

Council resolved to adopt the Baths and Washhouses Act.
(Borough Council Meeting)

16th June, 1936

Letter received from Ministry of Health -

- a) forwarding consent to the borrowing of £37,215
- b) stating that they were not satisfied that expenditure incurred on abandoned scheme was the proper subject of a loan
- c) approving appropriation of the Flag Lane site for the purpose of the Baths and Washhouses Act.

(General Purposes Committee)

13th December, 1936

Borough Surveyor finally able to report that "progress is being made" on the Baths.

(General Purposes Committee)



SCALE OF CHARGES.

WINTER SEASON, 1937-38.

Commencing Tuesday, 9th November, 1937.

HOURS OF OPENING.

WEEK-DAYS: 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. (Mondays to Fridays).

9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (Saturdays).

SUNDAYS: 7 a.m. to 10 a.m.

CHARGES FOR ADMISSION.

Bathers (Adults) -	- 6d.	Spectators -	- - - 2d.
" (under 14) -	- 3d.	Scholars (controlled hours)	1d.

Hire of Bathing Costume (Deposit 1/-) - 2d.

" " Slips - - - - - 1d.

" " Caps (Deposit 1/-) - - - - 1d.

" " Towels - - - - - 1d. and 2d.

CONTRACT TICKETS.

Summer Season, Adults	15/-	Summer Season (under 14)	10/-
Winter Season "	7/6	Winter Season "	5/-

Private Bath, 6d.

*Foam Bath, 2/6.

* NOTE.—Patrons are advised to book in advance.

'Phone the Superintendent, Crewe 2052.

"TRY A FOAM BATH."



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“TRY A FOAM BATH.”

16th March, 1937

Borough Surveyor reported that work was progressing satisfactorily but not as fast as he had hoped because of -

- a) difficulty in getting "key" men
- b) difficulty in obtaining steel
- c) the weather!

(General Purposes Committee)

11th August, 1937

Sub-Committee interview seven applicants for the post of Baths Superintendent. They select Lt. Commander Roy Edwards.

(Sub Committee re: Baths)

Between August and November tenders were gathered, and stocks of fuel, staff uniforms, café provisions, remedial bathing supplies, etcetera, were purchased by the Borough Surveyor and further staff were appointed. Opening hours and charges were also established.
(see 1937 folio, pp. 809, 918, 934/5, 1020)

20th September, 1937

Opening date was provisionally fixed for 6th November.

(Sub Committee re: Baths)

On November 6th the Baths were opened as planned, and on 12th November the newly formed Baths Committee thanked the Borough Surveyor for all his work, and responsibility for the Baths was assumed by a separate Baths department under the control of the Baths Superintendent.

FITTER BRITAIN

As the Council minutes show, initial doubts about the building of the Baths were largely based upon the economics of the project. However, during the thirties the whole question of bathing was surrounded by a certain amount of uncertainty. Towards the end of the 19th century the role of the public baths began to change as the emphasis shifted from keeping the populace clean to keeping them fit, and in 1878 the Baths and Washhouses Act was amended to provide for the erection of covered swimming baths.*

The measuring and weighing of First World War recruits had shown that the health of our young men left much to be desired. Movements, such as the Youth Hostelling Association (begun in 1929), were formed and health campaigns promoted at both national and local level. The extent of Crewe's involvement in the health movement is apparent from the Council minutes of 1937 - minutes for the early part of the year mention the Council's co-operation with the National Federation of Personal Health Associations to set up a branch in Crewe as part of their effort towards the "Fitter Britain Campaign"; plans were made to participate in the Royal Sanitary Institute's "Empire Health Week"; the circular "Physical Training and Recreation Act", published by the Ministry of Health, was received and discussed by Council.*

However, as a comparison of Edwardian and 1930's style bathing dress shows, the idea of getting the air to one's body brought with it much briefer swimwear, which raised fears concerning the modesty of the wearer. The Sub-Committee's decision to allow boys to wear bathing slips rather than costumes was taken with care, as was the decision to allow mixed bathing.* Schoolboy and girl swimmers, however, were kept firmly segregated, as indeed they were for the rest of their lessons. The building even had separate entrances so that they would not chance to meet in the foyer should one class be leaving as another arrived. The children's entrances can be seen on the site plan; note also that both the boys and the girls had their own communal dressing rooms as they were not allowed into the boxes to change their clothes - this allowed them to be closely supervised, an arrangement which protected them from "immorality" whilst depriving them of their privacy. The site of the schoolgirls' entrance can still be seen on the west wall.

Swimming in winter was also viewed with suspicion. The 1878 Act allowed for pools to be covered from November to March and the

Binney,
p.16

1937 folio,
pp. 427,
725, 923

Folio 137,
p.1025

Folio 1934,
p.577

bath hall used for other purposes. Leonard Reeves' comment that the only alternative to this would be "to utilise the swimming pool the whole year round, the popularity of which is, of course, a matter of speculation" expresses this unease.* Eventually it was decided that the Baths should stay open all winter, but this seems to have been a purely economic decision, and contingency plans were made in case winter swimming proved unpopular. Although these purchases were discussed I can find no evidence that temporary flooring, staging or seating was actually bought. The legends "Swim in the Winter" and "Swim Regularly" were used as tail-pieces in the commemorative brochure, so despite their statement that provision had been made for the Baths to be used as a hall in the winter it seems that the Sub-Committee were hoping that the additional expenditure would not be necessary. Meanwhile, care was taken to make sure that school children were offered a hot drink after swimming in cold weather, and that hair dryers were available for their use. Also, at this time, women and girls were expected to wear rubber bathing caps and these did help to keep their hair dry.

George Scott's book, "The Story of Baths and Bathing" which was written in the early 'thirties, is interesting to read as it illustrates society's ambivalent attitude towards swimming and bathing in general. Although Scott recommends both activities as natural and health-giving he punctuates his book with many warnings of their inherent moral and physical dangers, for example, he attributes the falling birthrate - a national phenomenon in the 'thirties - directly to the growing practice of taking warm baths. Daily use of soap, he contends, leaves the female "almost continuously in a contraceptive condition", whilst male virility and fertility is eroded by regular hot, or even warm baths.*

Scott,
p.249/50



The Edwardian bather is dressed for a dabble in the water's edge, but the modern miss, in her streamlined 'thirties bathing costume, is all set for some serious "keep fit"

FROM BASEMENT TO BALCONY

As the plans and sections in the appendix show, the building basically consists of a rectangular central pool hall flanked by two long wings. The outer walls are of loadbearing, sandfaced multi-coloured brick with a cavity, and the pool hall is supported by a system of ten piers which rise to form the semi-circular beams spanning the roof space. In the basement the reinforced concrete has been painted over without being smoothed and the form work can clearly be seen, for example, on the piers and ceiling of the clubroom and in the subway.

As has been shown, the slope of the land has allowed the south side of the basement to remain above ground level. Mr. Reeves took advantage of this and placed all the baths' and laundry machinery and staff rooms on the south side, where the opening windows allow natural light and ventilation. Although the laundry room was never available for public use (as was the case at some public baths) it was nevertheless a very busy area as it handled all the municipal laundry. In the early years it laundered many swimmers' costumes and towels; within the first three days of opening 42 costumes and 68 towels had been hired. Today few swimmers take advantage of the hire services, but "Big Bertha", the original washing machine, is still kept busy in ways which were unforeseen, such as the laundering of gowns from the sauna suite and of leisure centre curtains.

The Z. D. Berry high pressure steam boilers provided the hot water for the laundry, heated the pools and warmed the rest of the building by steam fed through copper pipes which were mounted at ceiling level. The original boilers were coke fired and converted to use oil in the mid 'sixties. When the system was again changed, this time to use gas-fired low pressure hot water boilers, the copper pipes were retained, with their steam traps removed, and are still in good condition. Other plant was supplied by Ricks, Sutcliffe and Bowden (filtration) and Wallace and Tiernan (chlorination).

The major changes to plant were made in 1975 as the pool temperature of 70° - 75° F, once considered warm, had become unacceptably low. The main problem was the circulation system. Originally the water did not return for reheating and reprocessing until it had flowed through both pools, and this could take up to 14 hours. This made it impossible to maintain higher water temperatures. The difficulty was overcome by segregating the two pools so that the water for each now circulates and is heated and sterilized separately. In this way the turnover time per gallon of water has been reduced to around



The Edwardian bather is dressed for a dabble in the water's edge, but the modern miss, in her streamlined 'thirties bathing costume, is all set for some serious "keep fit"



The steel reinforcing bars and form work (the temporary wooden shuttering built to support and mould the concrete arches) can be seen in this photograph of the pool hall under construction

4 hours (main pool) and 1½ hours (learners' pool) thus allowing an average temperature of 85°F to be maintained.

The latest conversion of the sterilization plant has been dictated by safety issues. As liquid sodium hypochloride is to replace chlorine gas as the sterilizing agent for public swimming pools, changes estimated to cost £20,000 are now necessary.

Also in the basement is the subway. This is an artificially lit corridor with underwater viewing windows which allow the inside of the pools to be inspected. Crewe's long established and thriving Swimming Club also have their home in the basement. The clubroom and an adjoining storage area are beneath the entrance hall.

The ground floor houses the pool hall, changing rooms, slipper and sauna baths, and main circulation areas. The plan is arranged symmetrically about a west/east axis and the stairs to the gallery lead up from either side of the foyer.

There are two pools in the main hall - the larger one is 100' x 35' and has a 9' diving pit at the deep end. Although there has never been a fatal accident at the Baths, the high-diving boards have been removed to ensure greater safety. The learner's pool, which is overhung by the balcony, is 35' x 20'. The walls of the pool hall are lined to a height of 6' with a combination of green, black and red glazed tiles which form a decorative band above self-coloured cream ones. This was a popular motif in the nineteen-thirties.

The entrance hall is spacious and elegant. The pay kiosk, which is built of teak, has glass panes which are frosted with a subtle zig-zag pattern. This motif is used throughout - it can be seen in the doors of the pool hall and foyer and in the arrangement of the coloured tiles on the foyer floor. The wrought iron railings and gates are of the same design. This geometric simplicity complements the stern angles and symmetry of the plan, and combined with the occasional use of curves (in the design of the "fish" windows at each side of the entrance, and the curve of the balcony) demonstrates a graceful, though restrained, application of art deco design.

The roof of the pool hall is tiled with slates and the skylights were originally of wire cast glass set in lead coated, steel frames (replaced in the mid 'seventies by aluminium when slight movement of the building had disturbed the glass). Casement windows and ventilators flank the pitched skylight. Both are electrically operated and provide ventilation for the pool hall thereby helping to control the level of chlorine vapour. The photograph of the bath hall shows the original condition of the ceiling.

However, as the photograph of the balcony shows, the ceiling has been altered. The aluminium slats that can be seen are part of the suspended acoustic ceiling which was added under Mr. McDowall's direction in the early 'seventies when he was the Baths Manager. This ceiling has a dual function. It cuts the reverberation time in the hall from eleven to three seconds which makes the room much quieter,



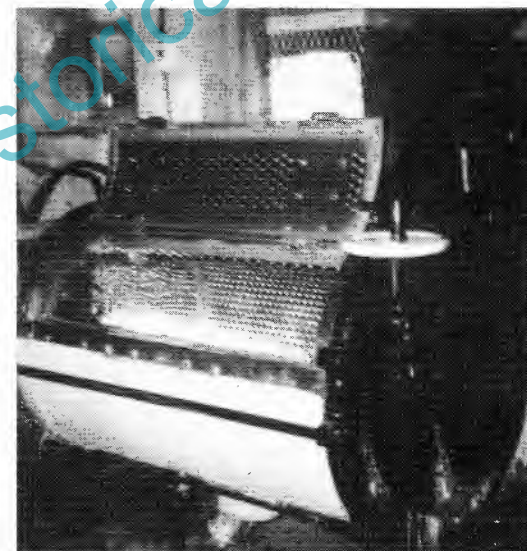
The spectators' gallery which overhangs the learners' pool. This modern photograph shows the new acoustic ceiling; the teak tip-up seats are original

Site of schoolgirls' entrance, now bricked up. Originally this door, which was on the west facade, was used to allow bathers free movement between the pool hall and the sun terrace



and it also has an insulating effect which helps reduce the increased amount of condensation that higher water temperatures generate.

The pools are made of cast-in-situ concrete. They were dug out manually and the clay taken away by a relay of horses and carts to be dumped on Chimney Fields beyond Pym's Lane. They are lined with ceramic tiles fixed with a mixture of cement and Pudlo - a waterproofing additive. This mixture was also used for grouting to stop water staining the tiles by seeping beneath the glaze. John Blower tells me that there were initial leakage problems and that the fire brigade were eventually called to help ensure a full pool for opening day. However, in the long term, this method of construction and lining has proved very effective and the pools have required very little maintenance.



"Big Bertha", the washing machine, which is still used today.

Between the balcony and ground level there is a small mezzanine floor on either side above the slipper baths. This houses the ladies' and gentlemen's lavatories; lavatory accommodation for bathers is provided in the changing room areas.

The balcony, with its long concave curve, gives spectators a good view of the pools. Its tip-up seats are original and, along with the rest of the woodwork in the building, made from teak which was chosen for its water resistant properties. Like the changing cubicles, they arrived ready to assemble. Nowadays the balcony is little used except for special occasions such as swimming galas.



The spectators' gallery which overhangs the learners' pool. This modern photograph shows the new acoustic ceiling; the teak tip-up seats are original

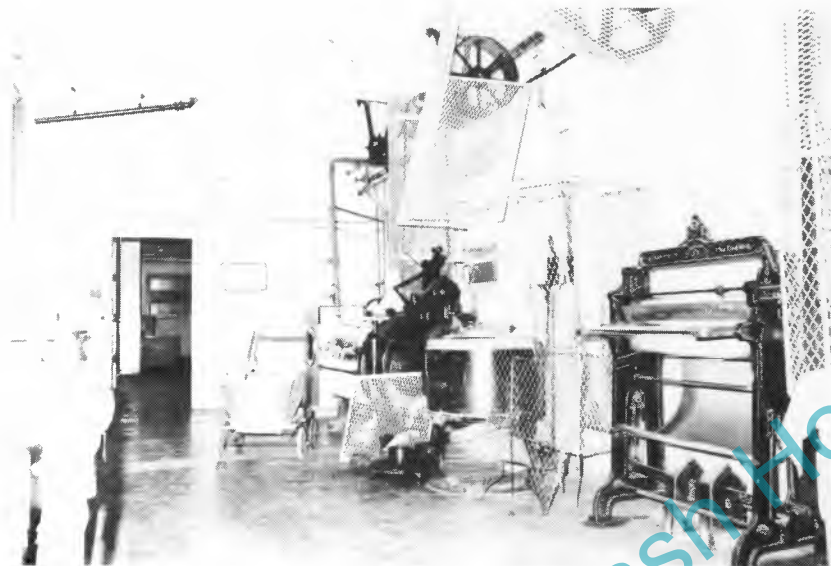
Site of schoolgirls' entrance, now bricked up. Originally this door, which was on the west facade, was used to allow bathers free movement between the pool hall and the sun terrace





"Big Bertha", the washing machine, which is still used today.

Very few changes have been made to the building which was very strongly built and needs little maintenance. Bill Hassall, the Clerk of Works, had a reputation for thoroughness which obviously paid dividends. For example, when he dug down and found that the foundations for the boiler chimney were not of the specified depth, the men concerned were sternly disciplined and the work redone. Current staff tell me that when alterations to the building are necessary (such as when some dressing boxes were removed to allow the manual clothes storage system to be replaced by self-operating lockers) it has proved very difficult to demolish the existing structures.



The laundry room in the basement. All the original equipment remains and is in working order.



FLAG LANE BATHS, CREWE.

THIS use of 'PUDLO' Brand Cement Waterproofing is typical of its employment in the construction of many swimming pools—including that in the Cunard White Star Liner, "Queen Mary." Mortars and concrete made with ordinary Portland Cement with the addition of 5 per cent. by weight of 'PUDLO' Brand Waterproofing are impenetrable by water even under severe pressure. Its use permits the best results from other materials, as in this case, where the bedding and jointing of the faience linings with cement mortar so waterproofed, prevents the soakage of water through the joints into the porous biscuit behind the glaze, which would lead to permanent staining.

'PUDLO'
BRAND
CEMENT WATERPROOFER.

KERNER-GREENWOOD & CO., LTD.
ST. ANN'S STREET Sole Proprietors and Manufacturers. KING'S LYNN

A contemporary advertisement showing pool lining, and waterproofing materials.



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and lose 1 to 3
pounds of superfluous
fat within

ONE HOUR!

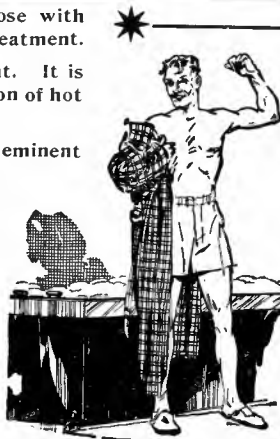
ZOTOFOAM BATHS are installed at the New Swimming Baths, Flag Lane. This is news to every woman who wishes to reduce her figure without diet, quickly and inexpensively. There is no other known method of slimming which is so absolutely certain of success and at the same time so entirely safe that even those with weak hearts derive nothing but benefit from the treatment.

A Zotofoam Bath is an experience of sheer delight. It is taken in complete privacy and there is no inhalation of hot air to cause exhaustion.

This entirely *drugless* treatment has the support of eminent specialists and doctors throughout the country.

BATHE . . and help to eliminate
IN Rheumatism from your
FOAM system in 4 to 6 visits

THE LATEST ADVANCE IN THE MEDICAL TREATMENT
OF RHEUMATISM * ENTIRELY DRUGLESS * ENTIRELY
SAFE—EVEN FOR PATIENTS WHOSE HEARTS ARE WEAK
* NO INHALATION OF HOT AIR * COMPLETE PRIVACY
* A DELIGHTFUL EXPERIENCE * SUCCESS ASSURED



Kindly write, call or 'phone
to the Flag Lane Baths, for
appointments or further
information

Zotofoam

SCIENTIFIC APPLICATION OF AIR TO THE SKIN

Sole Manufacturers & Patentees:
Soapless Foam Limited, 17-18,
Dover Street, London, W.1.

A beautiful dream - but the bubble burst!



BATHE *in* FOAM

and lose 1 to 3
pounds of superfluous
fat within
ONE HOUR!

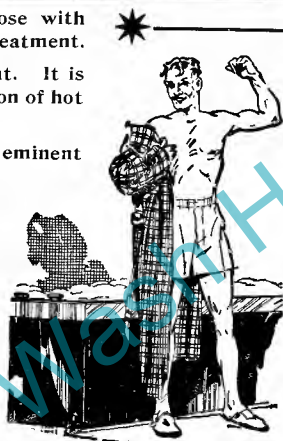
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Zotofoam

SCIENTIFIC APPLICATION OF AIR TO THE SKIN

A beautiful dream - but the bubble burst!

BADGES, FUN AND FROLICS

Apart from its basic function of providing a swimming pool and slipper baths so that users can get fit and clean, the Baths has fulfilled many other roles in the local community.

An important additional service, which is still available, is the provision of swimming and life-saving lessons. On December 10th, 1937, Mr. Edwards and his assistant were granted permission by the sub-committee to give lessons for two shillings per half hour and to keep half of this fee.* Mr. Edwards ensured that his staff were well trained too. He periodically reported their successes in advanced swimming and life-saving to the Sub-Committee who responded by paying their examination fees. Also, many children have received swimming lessons as part of their school curriculum. As we have seen, this function was felt to be so important that it shaped the final plan of the building to some extent. According to Baths' records, school swimmers have accounted for a substantial proportion of attendances every year, except for 1980/81 when school swimming was stopped - an economy measure which resulted in an estimated loss of 25,000 swimmers.

Mrs. Dorothy Rogers, Swimming Teacher to the Schools, has now been teaching the Borough's children to swim for twenty-one years. Mrs. Rogers was a founder member of Crewe Cygnets. The Cygnets, all members of the Crewe Amateur Swimming Club, were trained by Miss A. Butterey. As the Swimming Times reported, they were soon an outstanding success with their performances of "water ballets and rhythmic swimming displays".*

Many swimming groups (like the senior citizens', mothers and babies' and disabled people's clubs) have given local people pleasure and proficiency over the years. The pool hall is also hired by other groups with special interests such as life-saving, sub-aqua diving and water polo, and a particular modern day trend is the hiring of the baths for fund raising "sponsored swims".

Some additional services have now been abandoned. One such is remedial bathing, a speciality of Mr. I. Brodie, the second Baths Superintendent, who was also a masseur. Remedial bathing has an interesting history, too long to recount here, which Binney and Scott both explore in some detail.* At Crewe, the following combinations were available for administration by a trained attendant:- "Zotafoam" or aeration baths, with or without the addition of pine, seaweed or brine at a cost of one and sixpence to three shillings.

Folio 37,
p. 129

The
Swimming
Times,
Nov. 1949

Binney,
p. 11 ff.
Scott,
chp. 10
"Hydrotherapy"

A SERVICE FOR EVERY MAN

Just what he wants . . . **BRYLCREEM**

At the right moment

Just the right amount . . .



A SERVICE FOR EVERY BATH

Bringing in revenue – Costing nothing to instal and maintain

Providing a much appreciated service for bathers

Backed By

A Really Efficient Service System

AUTOMATIC HAIR-CREAM VENDING MACHINES LTD.

HONEYPOT LANE, STANMORE, MIDDLESEX. Tel. WORDsworth 4321

At a penny a pat, pilfering was a perennial problem!

The Zotafoam company promoted their baths as a slimming aid as well as for the relief of such ills as rheumatism. Although it is easy to scoff at the advertisement's claims, the idea of offering hot moist air to the skin (trapped in this instance in bubbles) is very similar in principal to the sauna bath, which has since replaced remedial bathing at Crewe. As the ground plan shows, there were private baths on either side of the foyer but demand for slipper baths decreased and the suite on the south-east corner was converted to a sauna cabin, solarium and rest room in the 'sixties.



This is part of the basement under the foyer which is used as a club room. It leads into a storage area. These two rooms were previously used as a public air-raid shelter

Other recent changes which have extended the facilities offered to the local community are: the introduction of the "Family Ticket" which allows considerable savings to be made by families who swim regularly; the "Playsport" scheme which aids the unemployed by offering reduced rates for the use of the Borough's sports facilities; free swims for patrons taking a sauna bath during public swimming times; "Fun Sessions" during school holidays- featuring Gulliver the inflatable giant! These sessions are much appreciated by local youngsters and are frequently a sell-out.

The Baths Committee has always acknowledged that the building has an important social function to fulfil. Although we know from the Council minutes that the idea of "social areas" such as a sun-terrace, spectator gallery and café, were initially resisted on economic grounds, the Baths were actually built with a gallery and café, and the sun-terrace was added the following year. Snacks and ice-cream were served from the canopied basement door and bathers sat among the flower beds at tables with sun shades. People, such as my parents, who were youngsters in the early days of the Baths remember it chiefly as a social centre. It was an ideal place for courting couples to meet, especially in those days when young ladies were expected to be home much earlier than today. Facilities such as the clothes hangers, hairdryers and Brylcream machines (along with the 160 mirrors provided free by W. H. O. Wills, the cigarette manufacturers) ensured

A SERVICE FOR EVERY MAN

Just what he wants . . . **BRYLCREEM**

At the right moment

Just the right amount . . .



A SERVICE FOR EVERY BATH

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One of Crewe's slipper baths where one can wallow in forty gallons of hot water!



Crewe Cygnets as featured on the cover of *The Swimming Times*

that the bathers were able to leave the changing rooms feeling as sleek and smart as when they had arrived. Passers-by used to call in to sit in the balcony to take refreshments and watch the swimming, demonstrations or water-polo. This would have been particularly pleasant on autumn evenings when the main lights were often turned off, leaving just the safety lighting and the underwater floodlights to illuminate the pool.

Today, as transport is generally easier and the attitude to exercise more relaxed, people feel less need to be quite so dry and rested after their swim and most leave the building quite quickly. However, despite this trend, the Borough's swimmers still manage to consume 100,000 packets of crisps and 50,000 or so drinks per year - though the cost effective vending machines are a somewhat functional substitute for the balcony café which, in its heyday, served such treats as ice-cream sundaes, salmon sandwiches, fruit salads and fresh cream cakes!



One of Crewe's slipper baths where one can wallow in forty gallons of hot water!



Crewe Cygnets as featured on the cover of *The Swimming Times*

The "HYG-GARD-ALL" CLOTHES HANGER

System offers the following advantages

BATHERS' REQUIREMENTS :

1. Security against pilfering.
2. Absolute Hygiene.
3. Neat Preservation of all garments.
4. Easy and speedy changing.
5. Facility for drying and airing clothes.

AUTHORITIES DEMAND :

6. Low initial cost.
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These efficient hairdryers gave many years of reliable service.

LOOKING AHEAD

There can be no doubt that Crewe Baths has functioned well, both as a building and as a place of exercise and recreation. Throughout its history it has fulfilled a need in the Borough, especially in the early days when there was no alternative local provision for swimming. Attendance increased steadily until 1975 when, according to Alec McDowall, it reached such a pitch that "one could walk across the pool on people's heads."

Although the number of swimmers is still increasing, there is now alternative provision for them in and around the Borough. Consequently, the numbers using the Crewe pool have settled to a more comfortable level and stand, as they did in the mid 'sixties, at around 160,000 attendances per annum.

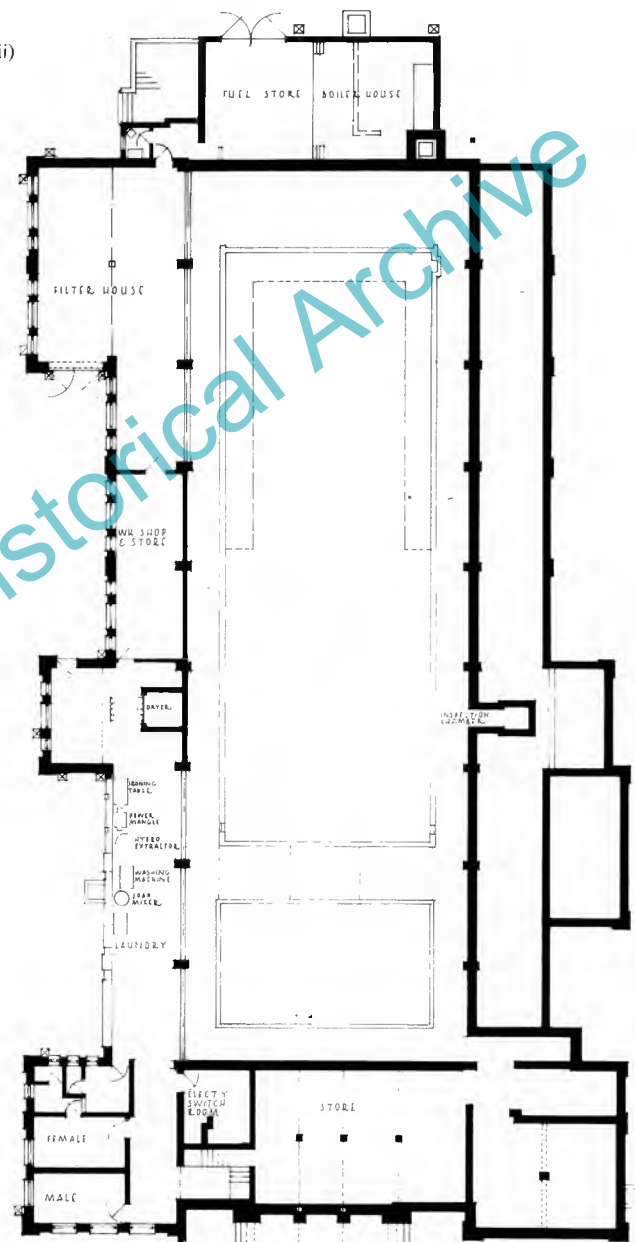
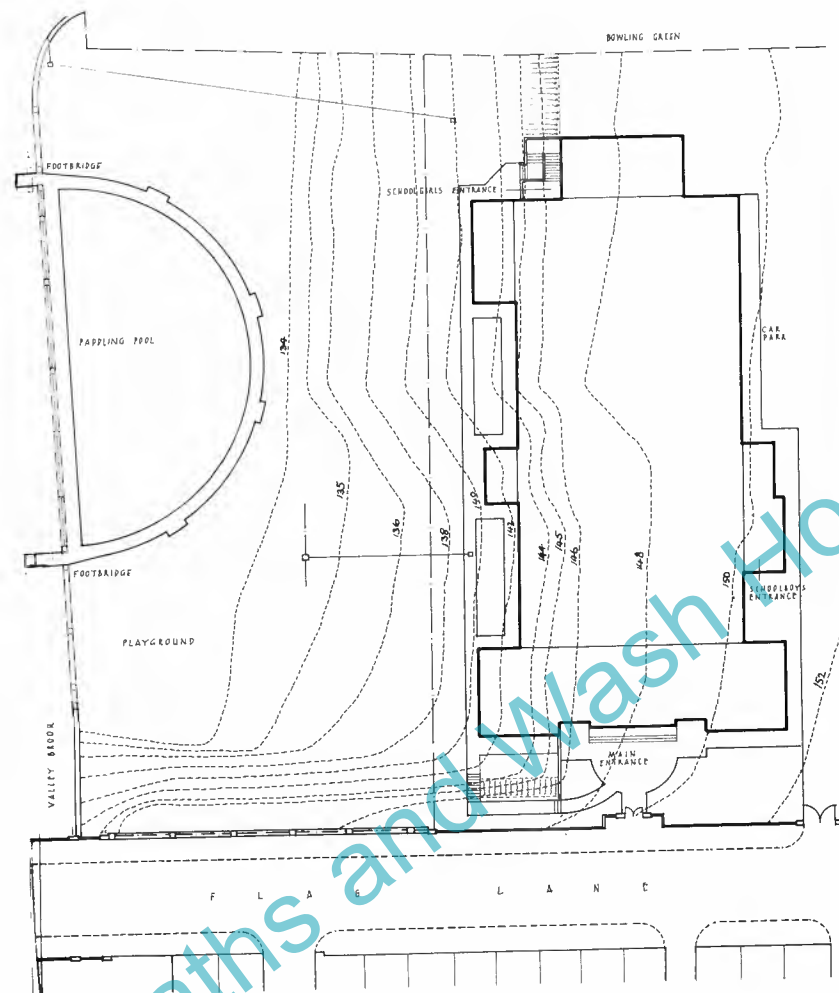
In his opening day speech, Alderman Foulkes, Chairman of the General Purposes Committee, pointed out that many houses in the Borough still did not have a bathroom and that the provision of private bathing facilities was an important function of the new building.* This situation still prevails, and many people who live in old or shared accommodation still find it convenient to use the six remaining slipper baths. In 1980, for example, over 2,000 slipper baths were taken, and another 3,885 bathers used the new sauna suite which formerly housed the ladies' slipper baths.

As for the future, the building is still in excellent condition and felt to be well worth including in the Council's long-term development plans. One improvement under consideration is an integral heating/ventilation system which will allow different air change rates in individual areas of the building. This should enhance the comfort of both bathers and spectators. A larger gallery and increased car parking facilities are also planned for when funds become available. Car-parking is an acute problem at Crewe Baths: the long cycle sheds in the north yard now stand empty and remind us how quickly bathers' requirements have changed.

If all goes well the Department of the Environment's Urban Aid Support scheme will help finance the building of two all-weather, floodlit pitches on the site of the disused Valley Park boating pool. This will allow sports such as volleyball and netball to be played, with the slope down from the rose garden possibly terraced with concrete steps to seat spectators. This area may also be used for roller-skating or outdoor performances.

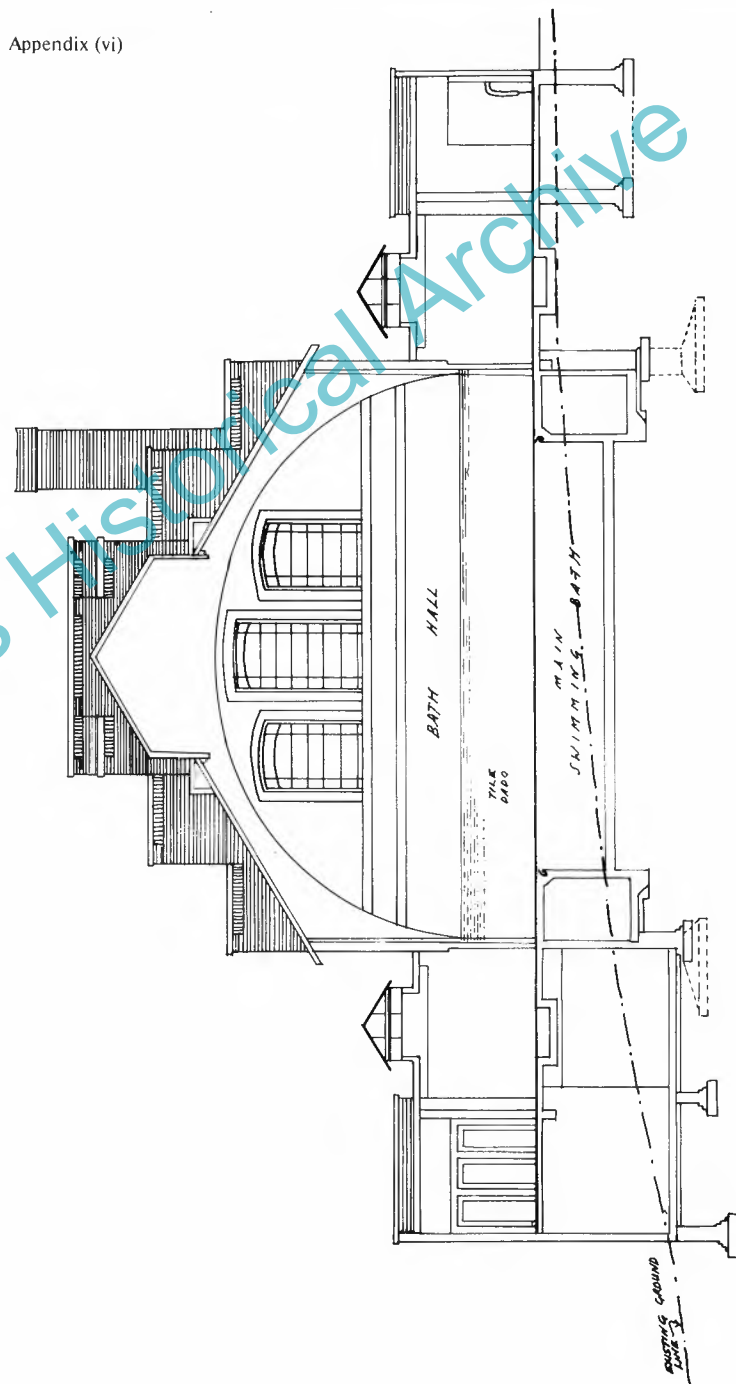
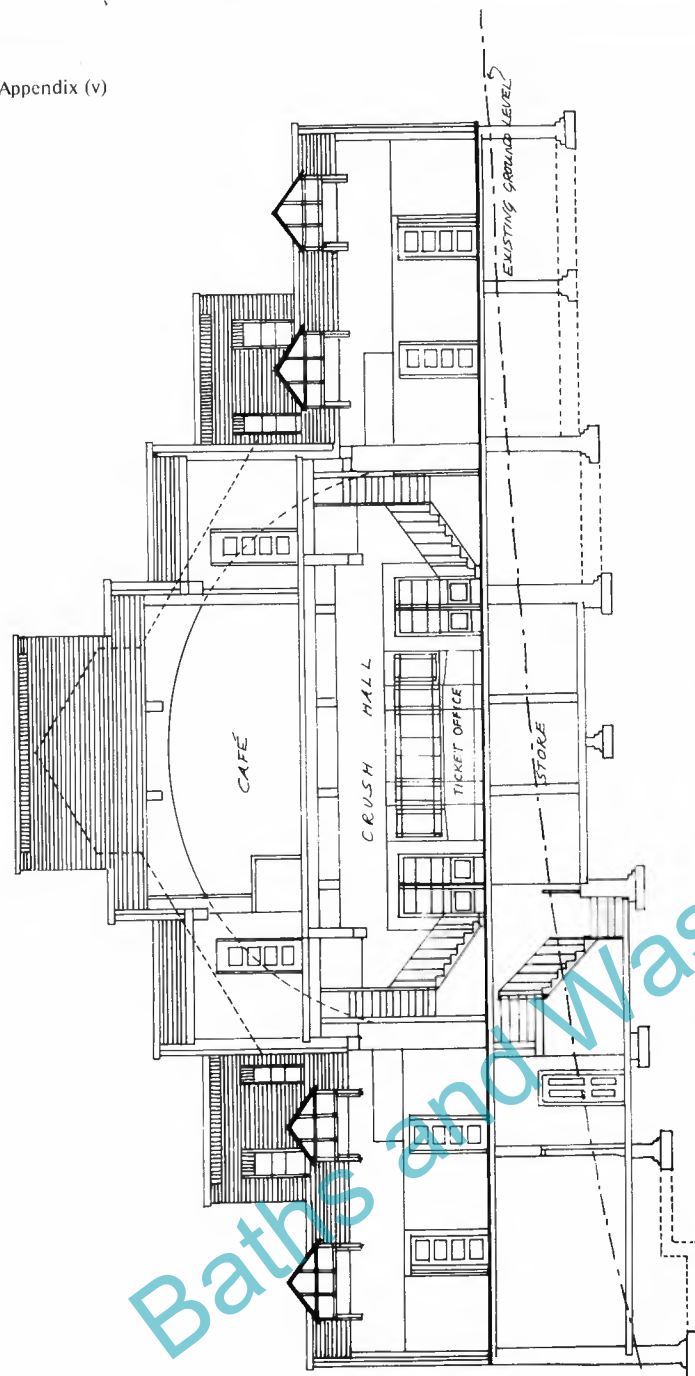
As Crewe Swimming Baths nears its Golden Jubilee celebrations it continues to adapt to the changing needs of the townspeople. However, even though they were anxious to live up to Crewe's motto "Never Behind", I think that the 1937 Sub-Committee would have been somewhat surprised to witness the recent debate on the thoroughly modern question of mixed sauna bathing!

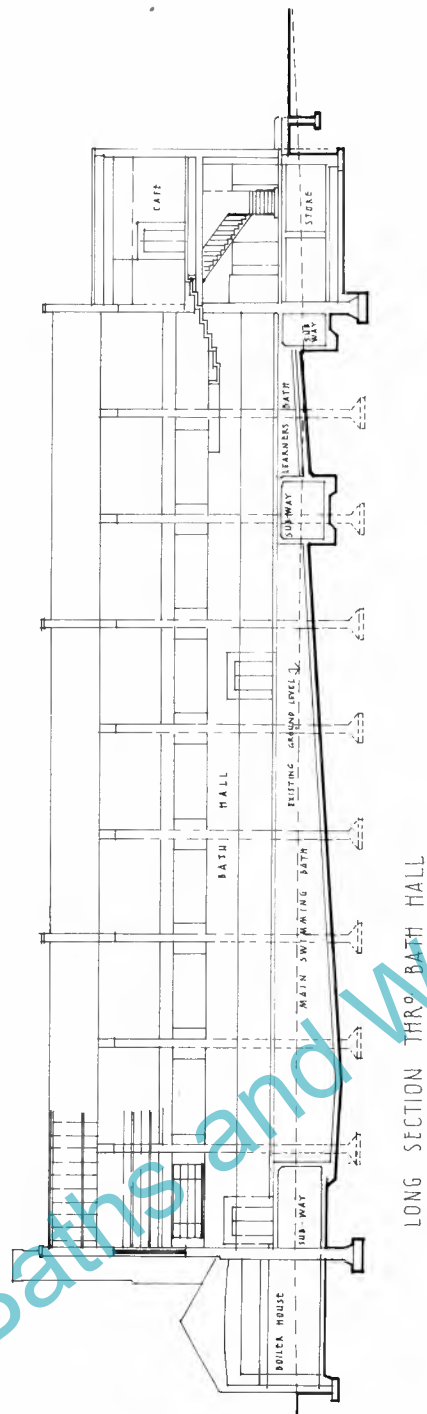
BOROUGH OF CREWE
PROPOSED SWIMMING BATHS-FLAG LANE
SITE PLAN



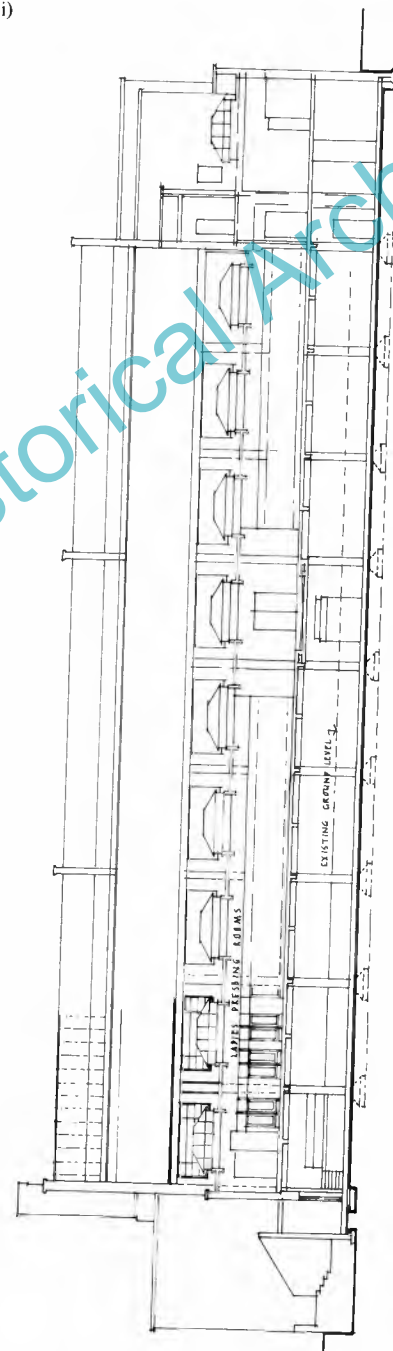
BASEMENT PLAN

FROM
LONDON REVISED 1911 A.D.
CHARLES EDWARD LINDLEY & CO.
BOROUGH ARCHITECTS
MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS CREWE





LONG SECTION THRU BATH HALL



LONG SECTION THRU LADIES DRESSING ROOM

LEONARD REEVES' REPORT TO SUB-COMMITTEE 15th APRIL, 1934

PROPOSED SWIMMING BATH

I submit herewith several tentative schemes and beg to report as follows:

CONDITIONS TO BE COMPLIED WITH

Definite instructions have never been given, but I was instructed to make provision for a swimming pool, slipper baths, and a probable adaptation of the latter for foam baths. and the adaptation and utilisation of the building in winter time as a hall. I was also further instructed to report as to whether it was feasible to so design the building as to make it easily adaptable for sunbathing.

The length of the swimming bath has never been decided and the plans submitted herewith show two alternative sizes, in the one case 75ft. x 30ft. and in the other 100ft. x 35ft., and I must ask you to particularly remember this in considering the approximate estimates given herewith.

SCHEME A. PROVISION FOR SUNBATHING

The plan shows the building so designed that a series of partitions in the south wall, when open, give access to a sunbathing balcony about 9ft. wide, surrounded by a glass screen. As a consequence of making such a provision, the dressing boxes have had to be grouped round the main entrance and the slipper baths planned on the first floor. The design provides for a balcony and the building could be adapted in winter as a hall.

To make provision for sunbathing undoubtedly increases what may be called the basic price of a swimming bath and it should be carefully considered whether such a provision warrants the cost.

It is probable in practice that many objections would arise, such as:-

1. Excepting on very hot days and calm days, a draught would be created in the swimming pool.
2. It is undesirable for swimmers to leave the pool for a period and then re-enter the water with their costumes probably contaminated through the outside atmosphere and grime collected from the sunbathing balcony.

It should also be seriously considered whether bathing in town's water and sunbathing can be related. It is, of course, generally appreciated that there is a great deal of difference between bathing in fresh water and either sea water or brine with sunbathing intermittently.

The dimensions of the swimming bath shown on this plan are 75ft. x 30ft., and I estimate that the scheme would cost approximately £31,000. The details of the proposals can be seen from the plan.

SCHEME B. NO PROVISION FOR SUNBATHING

In this scheme a swimming pool of 75ft. x 30ft. is provided for and the building can be adapted and utilised as a hall in the winter time. A balcony is provided and the slipper baths are grouped in a separate block at the side of the main building, whilst on the first floor a restaurant is provided.

In this plan it will be seen that the dressing boxes are provided on either side of the swimming pool and I estimate that the scheme will cost approximately £29,000.

SCHEME C. NO PROVISION FOR SUNBATHING

In this scheme a swimming pool 100ft. x 35ft. is provided for with dressing cubicles on either side of the pool. A cafe is provided for on the first floor, and so designed that the patrons in the cafe can watch through windows the bathing in the swimming pool.

Slipper baths are grouped at the front of the building on either side thereof, and have been so designed so that access can be obtained direct from the street through a waiting room in the winter time when the main building is utilised for other purposes than swimming. At the same time the waiting room can be utilised as a cloakroom, access being gained off the crush hall when the building is used as a hall, and assuming the slipper baths are not in use, which would generally be the case.

A balcony is shown on three sides of the building and the building is capable of being adapted and utilised as a hall in the winter time, a stage is provided for with dressing rooms on either side.

Again the flexibility in design provides for the dressing rooms being utilised (as dressing rooms in connection with swimming) by school children when the swimming pool is in operation. Thus the scholars can be kept under constant and proper supervision. They would gain access direct to the dressing rooms without entering the main buildings and consequently would have no need whatsoever to enter any of the dressing boxes, which, from experience, is very desirable.

A small hoist is shown to be provided to feed the cafe.

This scheme, I estimate, will cost approximately upwards of £48,000.

SCHEME D. NO PROVISION FOR SUNBATHING

This scheme is identical with Scheme C, excepting that the area occupied by the stage has been increased and a learners' pool provided for. This could be covered over with a temporary floor at such times as the building is used as a hall and would form the stage for the building.

It will be noticed that the deep end is at the reverse end of the swimming pool as compared with Scheme C. This has been done so that the learners' pool is near to the shallow end of the swimming pool, which is the general practice.

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Mr. L. Reeves (Architect for the Baths)

Mrs. D. Rogers (Swimming Teacher to the Schools)

Mr. K. Smallwood (present Borough Baths Manager)

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