



Media Release

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*photo opportunities – see below

RIPON SPA BATHS CENTENARY CELEBRATION

VISITORS to Ripon Spa Baths are going to be transported back to the beginning of the 20TH century as part of plans for a centenary celebration on Thursday, 19 August 2004. The foundation stone for Ripon Spa Baths was laid in 1904.

Harrogate may claim to be the district's premier Spa but it should be remembered that the Ripon Spa was just as famous in the late eighteen hundreds.

In June 1889, Dean Fremantle conceived the idea of constructing baths for the residents of Ripon City. But finding the expense considerably more than he anticipated, he offered £400 to the Corporation if they would themselves provide and maintain a swimming baths. Accordingly, the Chief Engineer was instructed to prepare plans and estimates for establishing baths in Park Street. But the Corporation of the day concluded that the scheme was too costly and as an alternative, a bathing place on the West Bank of the River Ure was constructed at a cost of £440 to which Dean Fremantle generously contributed £400. This was publicly opened on 16 June 1890 and provided cubicle accommodation for 20 bathers and a small room for the use of the caretaker.

The idea of erecting baths in Park Street was never really lost sight of and in 1901, the Corporation obtained a sanction for the exploitation of the Aldfield Sulphur Waters. These activities culminated in the passing of the Ripon Corporation Act 1901 which enacted that 'that upon any lands which they may acquire, the Corporation may erect, provide, maintain, carry on pump rooms and do other things for the advantage, entertainment and amusement of persons resorting thereto and may erect, provide, maintain and carry on public baths with Turkish, medical and any other baths'.

Swimming was still taking place in the River Ure when the foundation stone for the new Spa Baths was laid in 1904 and were officially opened the following year by Her Royal Highness Princess Henry of Battenburg. From time to time, there was ever-increasing demand for swimming facilities as the River Ure was a considerable distance from housing developments and constant changes in the bed of the river had proved extremely dangerous. The idea for a swimming pool at the Spa Baths was mooted in 1934 when the Dean of Ripon presented a petition urging the provision of a suitable swimming bath.

Councillor Pat Jones, Cabinet Member for Leisure and Amenity Services for Harrogate Borough Council, said: "The Corporation initially borrowed £10,000 and a further £1600 in 1927 repayable in 60 years. I hope the debt was paid long before then. I can empathise with the council of the day as we are still struggling with similar problems over never having enough money. But I can hardly imagine making arrangements for swimmers to use the river in today's leisure dominated world."

The literature from the opening event in 1936 stated that the Spa Baths had been thoroughly reorganised under new management, the equipment overhauled and brought up to date, new treatments instituted and with the new Swimming Bath in operation (constructed as an annexe at the rear of the original Spa) there was every indication that the undertaking would become increasingly popular.

"And popular they have remained," added Councillor Jones. "Ripon Spa Baths are synonymous with leisure in the City. We had hoped that the Duke of Edinburgh would be able to squeeze in a visit when he visited the City recently with The Queen as, of course, Princess Henry was his relative. Sadly, they couldn't manage this but we have written to the Queen and the Duke and sent them some details of a further historic connection with our district. We hope that many users of the Baths, both past and present, will come along to join in the celebrations."

Always ready to display Ripon's historic beginnings, the Mayor of the City, Councillor Stuart Martin, is getting into the spirit of the celebrations of the Spa and he and his Deputy (Councillor Sidney Hawke) and their Mayoresses, will be donning day wear of the day on their visit to the Baths on Thursday, 19 August to start the celebrations, which will include reduced entry fees, fun sessions, scuba diving and general swimming. ENDS

PHOTO OPPORTUNITY : Ripon Town Hall, 9.15 am, Thursday, 19 August. There were no Mayoral limousines in 1904 and the City's Mayor and Deputy dressed in the frock coats of the day, will walk from Ripon Town Hall to the Ripon Spa Baths where they will formally start the centenary celebrations at 9.30 am. They will be accompanied by staff from Harrogate Borough Council's Department of Leisure and Amenity Services also dressed in period costume and the procession will be led by bagpiper and regular swimmer Don Singleton.

FURTHER INFORMATION: Councillor Pat Jones is available for comment on 01423 872466. Further technical information is available from Mr Kevin Douglas, Director of Leisure and Amenity Services on 01423 556717.