

Step back in time

By George Hinton

MANY of the town's youngsters have known it as the 'Witch's Hut' but thanks to a very popular 1940s-themed event that is set to change.

Visitors who flocked to the Valley Gardens on Saturday for a nostalgic step back in time to the Second World War era helped raise money to give the Old Magnesia Well Pump Room a much needed facelift.

More than £1,000 was raised, which will go towards completely refurbishing the building in the Valley Gardens and

to turn it into an education and information centre.

Chairman of the Friends of Valley Gardens, Jane Blayney said: "The 1940s day went very well indeed. Everyone who attended seemed to have a very enjoyable day. The event was such a success we intend to hold a 1940s day again next year."

Built in 1858 when Harrogate was developing itself as a spa town tourist destination, the Pump Room currently looks a little unloved and is covered in overgrown vegetation so the group's first job is to fully prune that back.

Jane says all the work will be sympathetically done so it is in keeping with the original look of the building, which is Grade II.

Among the work to be carried out will be replacing all the exterior woodwork, block a door that was added at a later date, create disabled access, move an electricity box currently fitted to an outside wall, put in authentic-looking new panes of glass with cast iron strips and painting inside and out.

The building was originally a museum with pump room but later became home to the

town's gardeners and their equipment before becoming derelict and rundown. The entrance to the well can still be seen.

As well as visitors dressing up in 1940s attire to give an extra air of authenticity, there were a number of vehicles from the era on show.

To add a further touch of 1940s authenticity enthusiasts of Second World War nostalgia gatherings from all over the north of England were invited to attend the Valley Gardens event.

Jane visited the popular 1940s Wartime Weekend in

Pickering last autumn to get some inspiration for the event and to give it extra publicity.

Harrogate's Western and Richard Taylor primary schools provided entertainment by singing 1940s songs, while singer Maria Manchester belted out Vera Lynn hits in the bandstand. Re-enactment group the Northern Forties also performed. Molly dancers, a tumbler and a conjurer also entertained the crowds.

Stalls sold vintage clothing and memorabilia from the period. There was also stands selling jewellery, cards, plants and products from a specialist butcher. St Peter's Boys Brigade and Harrogate 20th Scouts served up refreshments.

The Friends of Valley Gardens was resurrected 18 months ago with the aim of not only bringing the Old Magnesia Well Pump Room back to life, but also to help with the general upkeep of the gardens.

When work on the Pump Room is completed volunteers will conduct tours of the Valley Gardens, promoting the history and spa heritage of the area, and money raised will be used for maintenance of the Old Magnesia Well Pump Room.

The group also held a 1940s tea dance at the Cairn Hotel in Harrogate to raise money for the pump room.

• For more information on the Friends of Valley Gardens or to join the group, visit www.friendsofvalleygardens.co.uk or call chairman Jane Blayney on 01423 505231 or vice chairman Neil Hughes on 01423 504390.



1940s fashion enthusiast Lydia Lovelace catches the attention of some admirers. (1106183AM2)

Pictures by Adrian Murray.





Youngsters from Western Primary School in Harrogate entertain the crowds in Valley Gardens. (1106183AM3)



Above: Visitors enjoying the 1940s day at Valley Gardens. (1106183AM6)
Right: Sally MacKenzie meets Brandon Young. (1106183AM1)
Left: Graham Orton and Angela Webber. (1106183AM8)

