



Evoking the wartime spirit

Writer and photographer Roy Hampson on how nostalgia is helping to restore an important part of Harrogate's heritage

Built in 1858, the Old Magnesium Well Pump Room, situated in Harrogate's stunning Valley Gardens, has fallen into neglect over the years. Until recently it was barely visible, as it became surrounded by thick undergrowth, remaining largely unnoticed and could quite easily have been mistaken for a public toilet or even a garden shed. But thanks to a fundraising drive by the Friends of the Valley Gardens the historic Grade 2 listed building will shortly be back to its former glory.

This small attractive building should really rank with the same importance

as the town's other landmarks such as the Royal Hall or Spa Baths. For the gothic style structure along with its pointed roof, is the very reason the valley gardens exist today, as they were originally created to surround the pump room. Along with its waterside walks, among flowers and trees, the gardens soon developed into a beautiful place for Victorians to promenade and take exercise. For visitors to Harrogate in those days, this was all part of their health regime along with drinking the mineral spring waters.

Originally the pump room stood on open ground in an area known as Bog



This year's 1940's
day will take place on
Sunday 16th June



Top left: Nikkie Cuthbert poses with a vintage car **Top right:** Land Army girl Charlotte Smith
Above left: French Resistance members **Above right:** Sir Winston Churchill



Fields. It rapidly became a favourite with Victorians with people queuing for hours to sample its spring waters and healing powers, which were claimed to cure everything from gout to lumbago. The rich and fashionable would pay regular visits to sample the 'cure' although the water itself smelled of rotten eggs. Nevertheless it left its patrons clamouring for more, and there was soon an established routine to drink one or more glasses of water between 7 and 9 each morning.

This was a good excuse for a little early morning socialising, then afterwards some of the visitors would head for the nearby spa baths for further treatment. Photographs of the gardens dating from the early part of the 20th century testify to their enormous popularity showing crowds of people around the tea room, boating lake and bandstand. In fact, 36 of Harrogate's 88 mineral springs are within the gardens and surprisingly no two are alike.

As part of their fundraising efforts, the Friends of the Valley Gardens hold an annual 1940s themed day to raise funds for restoration of the pump room. They plan to transform the building into an education and information centre, which will describe the history of the gardens and the town's spa heritage, landscape the surrounding area and provide enough money to ensure its future upkeep.

Last year's event attracted 12,000 visitors and raised £3,200. The committee involved researched and visited other similar 1940's style events staged around Yorkshire and concluded that Harrogate's version should be a less specialised, family fun day occasion with plenty of children's activities.

Locals and visitors alike make a special effort to capture the wartime spirit by dressing up in 1940's garb. Singers, dancers, bands, and local schoolchildren entertain throughout the day, evoking the music and songs of war weary Britain. Army vehicles, old cars, wartime re-enactors, in numerous military and civilian dress, add to the atmosphere.

There will be guided tours on the pump room on the day. Entry to the Harrogate Valley Gardens and 1940's day is free.

• This year's event will take place on Sunday 16th June.

Further information and updates:

www.friendsofvalleygardens.co.uk



Top: Evacuees Above: Applauding a performance



The valley gardens were created to surround the pump room



Top: Old Magnesium Well Pump Room before its restoration **Centre right:** Neil Hughes handing out the pump room's health 'cure' **Above left:** Jeeps. **Above right:** Hats, 1940s style