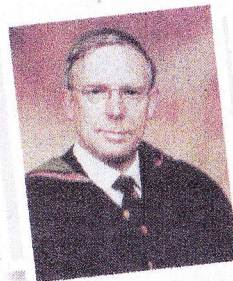


Our Heritage

A look at yesteryear of a spa town

The debate about trees - and open spaces...

Malcolm Neesam has long been a campaigner for more trees in our town, but argues that some areas should be opened up for public viewing, in keeping with the historic nature of the Stray.



With

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Old Harrogate—through humorous eyes



The Magnesia Well on Harlow Carr

It is only a very few years ago that I formed the completely wrong opinion that the Friends of Valley Gardens would never succeed in their plan to restore one of Valley Gardens most important features, the Old Magnesia Well Pump Room.

As anyone who has visited the gardens within the past year will know, the plan of restoration has proceeded splendidly, with results that are a credit to all the team involved with this worthy project. Some readers may know that the little "gothic" pump room stands on land that long had the name Bogs Field, a somewhat utilitarian description resulting from the effect of the over-flowing mineral wells on the surrounding soil.

Some 18th century writers termed it the Stinking Marsh or the Black Bog, and it was only when the Victorians constructed brick shafts between the bedrock from which the wells arose, and the surface of the soil, that the bog disappeared.

The Victorian improvements occurred because the Bogs Field contained more important mineral wells than any other place on earth, there being no less than 36 unique wells within a very small area. Their importance was recognized when the commissioners responsible for laying out the Stray designated Bogs Field as part of the two hundred acres.

Because the present Valley Gardens footpath was in private hands, the commissioners ensured the public would always have free access to the

wells by designing sections of Cornwall Road as part of the Stray.

It was only when Harrogate Council acquired lands from the Vicar of Pannal that it was possible to lay down a wide footpath between the Old Sulphur Well and Bogs Field, the footpath later being the reason why Valley Gardens developed.

One of Bogs Field's many mineral waters was the Magnesia Well, which enjoyed great public popularity, especially because of its diuretic nature. In 1858, the Improvement Commissioners built a neat little pump room in the "gothic" style, for the greater convenience of visitors, and to contain the attendant, who, for a fee, served the magnesia water in a glass.

By 1895, so many people were frequenting the Magnesia Well Pump Room, that a larger one had to be built.

Today, the New Magnesia Well Pump Room is a delightful cafe that attracts visitors throughout the year, although magnesia water is not on the menu. The opening of the new pump room led to the old one being closed and abandoned for such random use as a store for gardening tools, and, for some years, as a museum.

This week's illustration was drawn in the 1890s, by Herbert Templar, for the Illustrated London News, and reproduced in a 1954 edition of *the Advertiser*. It should be noted that the Bogs Field still retained its traditional open nature, so that it could be seen, and also because the Stray Acts required the Stray to be open.

It was only in the later 20th century that Bogs Field became infested with a riot of shrubs, undergrowth and wholly inappropriate trees, which hid the old Pump Room from view, the surrounding dense vegetation making a haven for druggies.

Now although I always respect readers' opinions and try to respond politely to all correspondence, over 40 years campaigning for more trees in Harrogate means that I will not be lectured by anyone on the importance of trees in our town.

I have fought, with varying success, long campaigns for trees to be restored to Cheltenham Parade, Kings Road, Station Parade and sections of Victoria Avenue. So when I urge that the area of land around the Old Magnesia Well be opened up for public viewing, in keeping with the historic nature of the Stray, I hope that no one will accuse me of being against trees.

Certainly there is one fine specimen which could be kept, but all the gloomy dark shrubs that hide the splendidly restored building should go as soon as possible.

I also suggest that the impressive new rockery which I hear is being planned for the top of the Magnesia Well's reservoir will need light if it is to thrive, as rockeries hidden under scratty old shrubs will never thrive. Good luck to the wonderful volunteers that comprise the Friends of Valley Gardens.

What's your view? Email ackrill.news@ypn.co.uk or write to the Letters page at 1 Cardale Park, HG3 1RZ.