

## **SLIPPER BATHS**

*By Don McCollam*

The Sutton Arts Theatre in South Parade was once a slipper baths, but except for a few tiles which can be found in the bar area, all trace of the Slipper Baths has been removed from the Theatre. There has also been a rumour for quite a number of years that before the Slipper Baths became the Sutton Arts Theatre, the building was used as a Mortuary during the Second World War. So I decided to find out whether the rumour was true or not.

Slipper Baths were Bathtubs shaped like a slipper. They were provided by local authorities for public use in purpose-built facilities at a time when many houses lacked bathrooms for bathing at home. Tin baths were generally in use and used in front of a fire or in the kitchen.

Slipper Baths were different from Cottage Baths which originally consisted of a cottage in which a boiler and a few washing or private baths for both sexes were either fitted or added, and which could be managed with a minimum of staff at little expense.

### **Extracts from the Minutes of the monthly meetings of Sutton Coldfield Council and Newspaper Reports.**

#### **Report of the General Purposes Committee 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1928**

Your Committee report that they have further considered the subject of Public Baths for the Borough, and have had before them plans prepared by the Borough Surveyor for the erection of Slipper or Cottage Baths. These they have approved with a minimum of eight baths. The question of the site for same is still under consideration, but your Committee hope to report to the Council at an early date. With the view of saving time the Surveyor has been instructed to prepare specification and obtain tenders.

#### **Report of the General Purposes Committee 6<sup>th</sup> June 1928**

Your Committee considered the generous offer made by Mr. James Parsons of Holland House of a site for the proposed Cottage Baths on the South Parade and instructed the Town Clerk to inform Mr. Parsons that they were recommending the Council to accept same.

They also considered the amended plans prepared by the Borough Surveyor, and hope to lay the same before the Council at the next meeting with a recommendation for the building and equipment of the Baths.

The Chairman (The Mayor) to Move:

That the offer of Mr. James Parsons to give a site for the Cottage Baths in the South Parade be accepted and that the Council convey to Mr. Parsons their grateful thanks for his public spirited generosity.

Report of the General Purposes Committee 4<sup>th</sup> July 1928

Your Committee Report that they have fully considered the plan prepared by the Borough Surveyor for Cottage Baths and also the tenders which they received. They recommend that the Tender of Messrs. Streather & Son's be accepted at the sum of £2375.

They recommend that application be made to the Ministry of Health for sanction to borrow the sum of £2500 for provision of Cottage Baths.

They recommend that the Council do adopt the Baths & Washhouse Act 1846-1899

The Chairman (The Mayor) To Move:

That this Council do hereby adopt the Baths & Washhouse acts 1846-1899.

That the Tender of Messrs. Streather & Son's for erection of Baths be accepted at the sum of £2375 and a contract be entered into under the Corporate Seal subject to the approval of the Ministry of Health.

That Application be made to the Ministry of Health for sanction to borrow £2500 for the purpose of erection and equipment of Cottage Baths.

Report of the General Purposes Committee 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1928

Your Committee Report that the Minister of Health has given his sanction to the erection of the Cottage Baths in the South Parade and that it is intended to proceed with the erection of the building as soon as possible.

Report of the General Purposes Committee 6<sup>th</sup> March 1929

The Committee has decided to hand over the management of the Cottage Baths on the completion to the Health & Buildings Committee.

Report of the General Purposes Committee

Streather R & Sons on account of contract for erection of Slipper Baths £750.

**Sutton Coldfield News June 1<sup>st</sup> 1929 No. 1485**

*Advertisement for Borough of Sutton Coldfield Public Baths Attendants*

Man and Wife resident in the Borough. Wanted as Attendants and Caretakers of the Public Baths, South Parade.

Applications to be made in writing addressed to the Borough Surveyor. The Council House Sutton Coldfield, from whom all particulars can be obtained.

W. A. H. Clarry

Borough Surveyor May 1929

## Report of the Health & Buildings Committee June 15<sup>th</sup> 1929

Baths near completion: On the report of the Health and Buildings Committee, the Chairman (Alderman G F Pearson) said the new baths were nearing completion, and were very satisfactory. The sub-committee would meet on Wednesday next to appoint an attendant, and it was hoped that the baths would be opened at the end of next month.

## Sutton Coldfield News July 6<sup>th</sup> 1929

**Cottage Baths opened. Modern heating system first instalment:** The amenities of Sutton Coldfield have been further augmented by the provision of new Cottage Baths, on the South Parade.

It was twelve months ago that the question was mooted in the Town Hall, but it has been a long felt want in the Borough, and on Wednesday the building was formally opened by the Mayor (Councillor T.W.Lawrence).

Alderman G. F. Pearson, Chairman of the Health and Buildings Committee of the Town Council, handed to the Mayor the key to the building, with which Councillor Lawrence unlocked the door.

**Swimming Baths Later.** It was the first instalment, said the Mayor. When opportunity permitted they would only be too pleased to extend and provide swimming baths. Sutton today was growing fast, and was becoming no mean town. It was, they were proud to say, one of the garden towns of the Midland Counties.

It was the generosity of a public spirited citizen, Mr. James Parsons, who gave the land, which had made possible the building of the baths. They owed a great debt of gratitude to those generous men who gave land for such purposes.

**Officials Present** The baths were then inspected by the members of the Council and town officials present, who included Aldermen T. H. Cartwright, W. T. Harrison, and G. F. Pearson; Councillors J. L. Tomey, W. A. Perry, J. Oldbury, Mrs F. N. Lowe, Mrs J Huggins, J. J. Ogley, A. E. R. Brooks, J. P. Britton and W. Moss; Mr. R. A. Reay-Nadin (Town Clerk) Mr. T. Ellison (Deputy Town Clerk) Mr. W. A. H. Clarry (Borough Surveyor), Mr. R. Streater (of Robert Streater and Sons, the builders) Mr. T. Bloore (Borough Electrical Engineer) and Mr. Harvey Freeman (clerk to the Education Committee). The baths which were built at a cost of about £2500, present to the South Parade a Classic Feeling, tempered with the modern spirit.

**Description of Building** As befits its purpose the structure of the building is symmetrical, while the cold Doric Columns and severe entrance with a blocking course suggestive of a pediment and a roof turret, both give a pleasing focal centre.

A soft relief to the solidity of the Bath stone entrance, plinth, and cornice is afforded by the flanking arcaded walls of multi coloured bricks and the roof of rich brown pan tiles.

The portico gives direct access to the square service hall, with office to the left and waiting rooms to the right, while the service apartments face the entrance.

Well appointed bath-rooms lead from the hall by service corridors, each apartment being walled with white glazed brick. Terrazzo floors are laid throughout.

**Electrically-Heated Water** The hot water for the baths is provided from a 1000 gallon tank, electrically heated. The system, devised by Mr. Bloore, is of the most modern type, and it is believed that this is the first attempt to electrically heat water on a large scale in the district. The architect responsible for the design and plan was Mr. John W. Wilson a resident of Four Oaks.

Sutton Coldfield Observer March 14<sup>th</sup> 2014

(Report of recollections of a member of Sutton Arts Theatre)

During the 1930s the Slipper Baths consisted of 6 baths, three for men on one side, and three for women on the other. The cost for their use was tuppence which included the use of a towel and soap.

From the 1<sup>st</sup> of April to the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 1936 a sum of £32.13s was collected from the use of Public Baths.

Report of the Council Minutes of 1932-1933 Page 334  
Health & Buildings Committee

With a view to popularising The Slipper Baths, your Committee have decided that persons resident in the borough be admitted free on Fridays for an experimental period of one month.

Sutton Coldfield in the Forties by John Bassett Page 11

Mr and Mrs Steventon remembered a wooden hut was erected at the rear of the South Parade Slipper Baths as a Mortuary, and the bath facilities themselves to be used for cleaning and rinsing in case of gas attacks.

The local authority was required to make provision during the war. However since Sutton Coldfield was not a prime target for the Germans few bombs landed here. A few stray small bombs landed in the park and one hit the building facing Manor Road at the top of Holland Street (then the Co-op) but little damage and no deaths. Hence the old slipper baths building was not required.

Council Minutes Report on the Slipper Baths South Parade 14<sup>th</sup> November 1945

That enquiries be made and that an advertisement be placed in the press with a view to assessing whether there was a need for the re-opening of the baths as such.

Report of the Health and Housing Committee 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1946  
Borough Surveyor's Report on Slipper Baths

The Town Clerk reported that at the date of the meeting only four replies to the advertisement in the press had been received in favour of the re-opening of the Slipper Baths in South Parade. Resolved: That the Slipper Baths in South Parade be not re-opened as such.

Medical Officer of Health's Report 16<sup>th</sup> February 1946 Page 199

Slipper Baths South Parade minute No. 892 Page 203 further to minute No. 403 that the question of the use of the Slipper Baths be referred to the General Purposes Committee.

General Purposes Committee. 8<sup>th</sup> April 1946

Slipper Baths South Parade minute No. 892

A reference from the Health and Housing Committee and a letter from the British Legion as to the use of the building off South Parade formerly used as Slipper Baths were considered and it was decided that the application be filed and deferred for the time being.

General Purposes Committee. 17<sup>th</sup> June 1946

Oakhurst Clothing Depot

Resolved that permission be given to the removal of the W V S Clothing Exchange Depot from Oakhurst to the hut at the rear of the Slipper Baths South Parade, and that the Borough Surveyor be authorised to carry out any necessary repairs.

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It is quite possible that the Slipper Baths were mothballed until Sutton Arts Theatre took them over.

Records of the theatre show that the Slipper Baths were in a state of dereliction when Sutton Arts Theatre obtained a peppercorn lease of £25 per year for 7 years on the 25<sup>th</sup> September 1951, and the Theatre has been there ever since



*“A soft relief to the solidity of the Bath stone entrance, plinth, and cornice is afforded by the flanking arcaded walls of multi coloured bricks and the roof of rich brown pan tiles.”*