



DIGGING DEEPER SERIES

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Buxton's Pump Room

With the popularity of Buxton steadily growing towards the end of the 19th century, enlarged facilities for visitors and patients were needed. Like all towns across the country, a new structure for public administration was emerging in the form of Local Boards largely as a consequence of the public health legislation to cover the provision of better standards of housing, water supply, drainage, sewers, etc. In Buxton, this replaced an earlier, and less formal, Vestry (a voluntary meeting of key ratepayers) but its role had been modest when compared with the Devonshire Estates Office.

Nevertheless, the new Local Board had managed a Pump Room, a small room set aside within the Natural Baths, for drinking the water since 1865 but this was small and clearly inadequate. So, whereas there was agreement that a new Pump Room was required, there was a debate between the various parties as to where to put it.

The 1894 Pump Room

The new Pump Room clearly needed to be in close proximity to the water source and, as the 7th Duke was the landowner, he had to be satisfied with the design and location of the building. Whereas the Duke had agreed to fund the new building, the Local Board had to promote a bill in Parliament to accept the gift. The Duke was initially unhappy about situating the Pump Room in front of the Crescent given its effect on views. However, his architect, Henry Currey, devised a low-lying building which was considered to be acceptable. It had an open colonnade to its front (reflecting the covered walks around the Crescent), a flat roof which was decorated with trees and plants to soften its impact and two cupolas (domed pavilions) which acted as entrances to the Slopes beyond it.

Work started on the building's construction soon after the Act of Parliament had been approved in 1892. The building was constructed using locally quarried gritstone (Nithen End, Buxton). Its interior was designed as a single room apart from two small closets for the attendants. Its main feature was a long-panelled counter, the whole length of the room, with a marble top and five hand pulled pumps – rather like the type you would find in a

public house. The counter and all of the wooden fittings were in pitch pine and the part of the building which, today, houses the oval pool, was then just a rear room, hidden from view behind an internal wall and which housed the gas engine and pumps. This part of the building was lower than today so that there were five semi-circular windows looking out over the Slopes beyond it.

The building was heated by two gas fires – one at either end of the building. These were an early example of gas heating and the system was chosen to avoid smoke issuing from the building.

Sadly, by the time that the building was completed, the 7th Duke had died and so it was opened (June 13th 1894) by his successor, the 8th Duke. However, the role of the 7th Duke was later commemorated by his bust sculptured by William Day Keyworth Junior and unveiled by Dr W Robertson (Buxton's principal medical practitioner) in 1895. The bust can still be seen positioned on the wall behind the counter.

Personnel and suppliers involved

Main contractor

James Salt, Buxton

Joiner

S Elliitt, Newbury

Mosaic floor

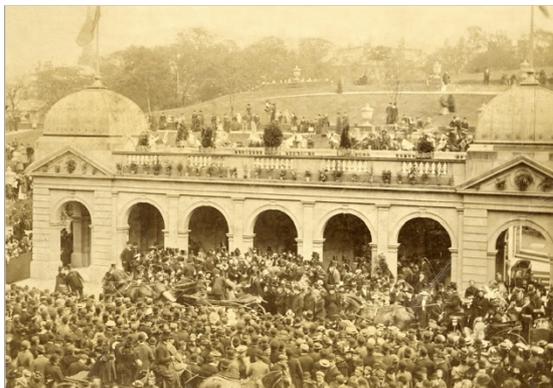
Mssrs De Grelle and Houdret Co, London

Gas engine and pumps,

Messrs Tangye, Birmingham and London

Architect

Henry Currey, London



Opening of the Pump Room 1894



Original 1941 internal layout

The 1912 refurbished Pump Room (St Ann's Well)

Demand for the Pump Room grew and grew so that, within 18 years of the opening of the original building, the Buxton Urban District Council (as successor to the Local Board) was looking at increasing its capacity.

The project started by a survey of the existing springs, tanks and pipework associated with the Natural Baths. In undertaking this work, the Town Surveyor, Mr F Langley, discovered a new source of water under the road between the Pump Room and the baths. With the

1894 building, the water was pumped from the main spring under the Natural Baths (hence the building's name) whereas, with the new building, the new spring would allow a gravitational feed to the building. Officially, therefore, the new building was renamed "The St Ann's Well" although the old Pump Room name has stuck, not least as there are already two other St Ann's Wells in the town.

The new source produced water at 82°F. Mr Langley constructed a white glazed chamber and laid the pipes to his new building having first had his plans approved both by the Buxton Urban District Council and the Devonshire Estate Office.

Tenders for the reconstruction work were obtained and the contract let in March 1911 for a scheme which:

- Enclosed the front colonnade to form windows and removed its inner wall so as to extend the main room forwards
- Raised the rear of the building and took down the previous rear wall to the main room so that the part of the original building previously walled off from public view (and which contained gas engine pumps, etc) was opened up into the main room
- Formed a new well chamber complete with a feature well in white marble set at a lower floor level and separated from the main floor by a white marble balustrade to allow the public to be served with water ladled out of the well by attendants. All of this, of course, removed any need for a counter.

The finishes to the new Pump Room were far more sumptuous than the previous building with Carrara white and Swedish green marbles being used decoratively throughout the interior and all joinery using mahogany rather than the previous pitch pine. The previous plain windows were replaced with the current coloured glazing including the feature windows behind the well chamber.

On each side of the well were two rooms – one for a chalybeate (iron rich) spring and the other for the attendants. These were separated from the main room by mahogany partitions with bevelled plate glazing. As before, the building was heated by gas fires and radiators but was now lit by electricity.

The new design also introduced the stained glass windows around the building that were installed by A Seward and Company of Lancaster. The main window behind the oval pool shows St Ann with the water springing from the rocks in the background. On either side of this, the window shows the Buxton heraldic seal (a motif adopted by the Buxton UDC).

Opened 1st July 1912.

Personnel and suppliers involved

Mason and bricklayer
Joiner
Plumber
Plasterer

Robinson Bros, Buxton
Edward Brown, Buxton
E Broomhead and Son, Buxton
J Brocklehurst, Buxton

Decorator
Wrought iron balustrade, etc
Marble work, tiling and terrazzo paving
Mahogany fittings and furniture
Fibrous plaster and Carton Pierre
Leaded lights
Gas stoves and radiators
Electric fittings and lighting
Architect and supervisor

J Newsome, Buxton
B Simpson, Buxton
J&H Patteson, Manchester
Goodhalls Ltd, Manchester
Geo. Jackson and Son and Bankhart, London
A Seward and Co, Lancaster
Buxton Gas Department
Buxton Electricity Department
Mr F Langley, Town Surveyor, Buxton Urban
District Council



The well-publicised photographs of the two “well-women” serving the water from the oval pool – Emma and Beatrice (“Emm and Bee”) - were publish in the 1930s.

More recent history

As the popularity of Buxton as a spa town started to diminish, the two cupolas (domes) were removed in 1958 due to the cost of maintaining them. By the 1970s, the Pump Room had been internally refitted as the town’s Tourist Information Centre although water could still be drawn from the pool on request.

In 1981, the Tourist Information Centre was moved to the Natural Baths and the Pump Room was used as a “Micrarium” - a collection of microscopic exhibits (“museum of small things”). The Micrarium remained there until 1995 at which point the building became empty apart from some temporary summer arts exhibitions.

In 2003, plans for the building are drawn up as part of the Buxton Crescent and Thermal Spa project. The Pump Room was originally planned to be refurbished as a tearoom, but this was changed in 2014 when it was decided that it would be used, once more, as a Tourist Information Centre and a hub for the visitor centre to be managed by the Buxton Crescent Heritage Trust.

The refurbishment work for this was carried out in 2016-17 and the building was formally opened as a Tourist Information Centre on 24th June 2019.

Richard Tuffrey

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