

Swimming Through History. The Cleveland Pools, Bath

Linda Watts for the Cleveland Pools Trust

It is entirely fitting that as the Cleveland Pools Restoration is completed, a book should be produced covering the history of the site and development of the pools.

Watts covers the whole lifetime of the pools, and bathing in Bath from the early nineteenth century to the present day and celebrates its ups and downs with a well researched and referenced history, coupled with some excellent aural social history of the pools in modern times which is important to preserve.

Watts covers the history of the baths in broadly chronological terms including how the pools were originally financed and by whom, how the ownership and management of the pools changed over time and how they fell into disuse and were then reborn for us to enjoy today. It also covers the medical benefits of swimming as perceived in the 19th and 20th centuries and how the sensibilities of bathing for males and females, and even eventually males and females bathing together, were addressed.

There is also useful contextual background to the development of bathing in England as an activity and later as a sport. It is particularly interesting to understand how the venue provided an important entertainment space to show off swimming and diving feats by daredevils of the past. Today no doubt the health and safety experts would have something to say about those performances.

Editorially the book leaves something to be desired. Relatively early on there is a section of text that is misplaced making the flow hard to follow. In addition, there are some glaring errors such as temperatures that are clearly supposed to be Fahrenheit shown as Centigrade.

This book is a high quality production with many excellent illustrations and maps which bring the storyline to life in an effective way making it attractive and suitable either as a continual read or to dip into from the coffee table.

Swimming Through History is available at Toppings, Mr B's Emporium and the Oldfield Park bookshop at Moorland Rd.

Alternatively you can order if directly from Linda Watts
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