

1 New Victoria Baths

Walk 1: The Golden Age
of the Victorian Spa Walk



The building in front of you began life as treatment rooms built and run by the local authority in 1871 who were fed up with visitors spending at the privately owned baths of the time.

The original design was Italian renaissance – the long frontage of which contained the treatment rooms and baths at either end. Men's was at the west side, women's was at the east side. The earliest treatments were simply bathing in the sulphur water which was thought to be good for skin conditions. As we hear later the treatments became more sophisticated and sometimes, bizarre.

This building was known as the New Victoria Baths- the old Victoria Baths of 1834 was on a different site and privately owned. The New Victoria Baths was so successful it quickly became over-crowded, and within the decade it became clear that if the town was to advance, it would require an even bigger and more luxurious bathing establishment which led to the construction of the Royal Baths across the square.

Back in 1871 Harrogate was run by a group called the Improvement Commissioners who used this building for meetings in the space over the entrance. It was later to become Harrogate Borough Council in 1884.

By 1910, treatments available included sulphur baths, massage douche baths, vichy baths, needle baths- all of which were available at the Royal Baths, but at higher prices. Throughout the dark years of the Great War of 1914-1918, when the spa boomed,

high numbers of military casualties were treated in the New Victoria Baths.

By the late 1920s there were signs that the British Spa industry in general was not in good health, and the Council's single meeting room above the entrance to the New Victoria Baths was becoming increasingly inadequate. Councillors decided that the best way forward would be to rebuild the New Victoria Baths as council offices and concentrate all Spa activity in the larger Royal Baths.

For 80 years, the Crescent Gardens Council Offices provided Harrogate Borough Council with a spacious and impressive seat for the working of local democracy, with the adjoining Mayoral Parlour as a dignified reception area. The distinguished visitors book contained entries from 1949 from Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip, as well as their entries after the Princess became Queen. Other names included Winston Churchill, Field Marshall Montgomery, every Prime Minister from Harold MacMillan onwards, great names from the arts, sport, popular media, and many more.

In recent years the council sold the building and moved to new premises. This building remains a grand reminder of the beginning of the Victorian Spa boom.