

# 4 Royal Pump Room

Walk 1: The Golden Age  
of the Victorian Spa Walk



The site of the Royal Pump Room represents the beginning of Harrogate's Spa development. It has 4 sulphur wells and was known to have had visitors since the 1620s.

The Royal Pump Room, built in 1842, was the first enclosed building where people drank the waters in comfort. It had been given royal permission to use the Royal title.

As it was Stray Land (and still is) the sulphurous water was free to drink thanks to the 1778 gift of George III who gifted the Stray and its waters to the public.

There was only one earlier pump room built in 1808 – which now covers the Tewit Well some distance from here on the south side of the Stray – but that was open on all sides.

At first, the Royal Pump Room accommodated the visitors comfortably, but as the century progressed, and visitor numbers increased, crowding developed, which resulted in calls for a bigger building.

By 1890, the crowding reached crisis levels, but as opinion as to the solution was divided, the remedy was continuously postponed. Eventually, after a decade of heated argument, the Council accepted a plan to build an annex of iron and glass in Crown Place, which would accommodate the masses of water drinkers. This was opened in 1913 by the Lord

Mayor of London, amidst scenes of much pomp and pageantry.

Visitor numbers increased throughout the Great War and on into the 1920's, but following the Wall Street crash of 1929 and the subsequent depression, they began to decline. During the Second World War, the building closed before re-opening as a municipal cafe whose seediness drew unwelcome attention from the national press.

After the war, with the birth of the new National Health Service and the increasing popularity of pills, Spa attendance declined, and attention turned to the future of the Royal Pump Room. A catalyst for a new use came in 1950, when dry rot was discovered in the wooden truss for the dome, which had to be entirely replaced. The Borough Librarian and Art Gallery Curator John Stuffins and his supporters suggested the use of the Royal Pump Room as a home for Harrogate's Museum – which was opened in 1953.

Thirty years on, the Council arranged a major refurbishment which included the installation of a street of Harrogate in the Victorian age, and a glass topped viewing platform over the original basement sulphur wells.