

5 Valley Gardens

Walk 1: The Golden Age
of the Victorian Spa Walk



The Valley Gardens grew around an eighteenth century foot path that connected the Old Sulphur Well (beneath what is now the Royal Pump Room), with the other wells that arose on the so-called “Bogs Field”.

Visitors frequented the area as there were so many important mineral wells, and in 1858 the Improvement Commissioners, who ran the town, ordered the construction of a Pump Room next to the popular Magnesia Well. This increased visitor numbers further, and within a short time, the Commissioners began to embellish the footpath with shrubs and trees.

Valley Gardens received one of its most attractive buildings in 1895, when the New Magnesia Well Pump Room was opened to better serve the vast crowds of water drinkers who could no longer be accommodated at the 1858 Pump Room.

A circular iron bandstand, also built in 1895, stood near to the present bandstand. This was the scene of many an animated concert by musicians who came mostly from Harrogate's wind or brass bands, as well as from the Municipal Orchestra.

During World War One, Valley Gardens was often full of military patients from the Furness Military Hospital that occupied the Grand Hotel. After the war, Harrogate Corporation embarked on a major

series of improvements, which included laying out tennis courts, a bowling green and crazy golf course in 1924.

The same year saw the beautification of Bogs Field, when a series of flower beds were laid out around circular footpaths, and all the mineral wells provided with new brick-lined shafts and protective caps. The construction of a boating pool in 1926 provided a further and much-loved amenity, which was soon followed by a Japanese Garden.

In 1933, the gorgeous art deco Sun Pavilion was opened to replace the older tea house. Flanked by a glazed sun walk, and enriched with two Sun Parlours, or “Solaria”, the new improvement rapidly became a highly popular attraction, especially for concerts and dances.

Perhaps the greatest crisis was in the 1980s, when a neglected Sun Pavilion was threatened with demolition, until it was saved thanks to a heroic effort by the newly formed “Friends of Valley Gardens”. In 1998, Queen Elizabeth opened the restored Sun Pavilion in front of rejoicing crowds.