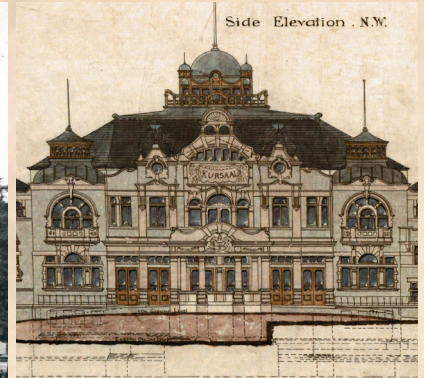


9 The Royal Hall

Walk 1: The Golden Age
of the Victorian Spa Walk



It is perhaps one of the most remarkable facts of Harrogate's history that having opened their new and expensive Royal Baths in July 1897, the council decided within only five months to send a delegation to Europe to examine another kind of spa building – the Kursaal.

The German name for “Cure Hall” was widely in use at the time. It was a facility to provide stress relief through entertainment, and was to be an additional offering to the baths and pump rooms which tried to provide cures for bodily ailments.

Costs rose from the projected £25,000 to £35,000. But when it was opened in May 1903, the “palace of glittering gold” as it was dubbed, impressed all who entered it.

The integration of the Kursaal into Harrogate's spa “ritual” was highly successful, providing a pleasant alternative to the often-rigorous water treatments at the Royal Baths. Concerts, shows and spa treatments were provided throughout the day, and the Kursaal was open to all without charge if they simply wanted to exercise by walking through the ambulatories encircling the building. The artists who appeared here before the Great War included the cream of international performers.

There were several innovations in the Kursaal, including the use of cantilevers to support the balcony rather than site-line obscuring columns; grand hall seating that could be rolled into store to provide space for dancing; a patented ventilation system (which didn't work!) and an experimental concrete in the foundations and floors. This last would produce severe problems in the 1990's, when its unexpected deterioration nearly brought about the building's destruction, which was prevented by public opinion and the dedicated efforts of those who fought to save the much-loved structure.

The Royal Hall's breath-taking interior is a symphony of cream and gold, with colour provided by the rich burgundy drapes and seating covers, stained glass windows, murals and coats of arms that flank the splendid proscenium arch. This stunning interior was restored from 2006, taking 57,000 hours of labour and 112,000 sheets of 23.5 carat gold leaf. It was opened by HRH the Prince of Wales in January 2008.