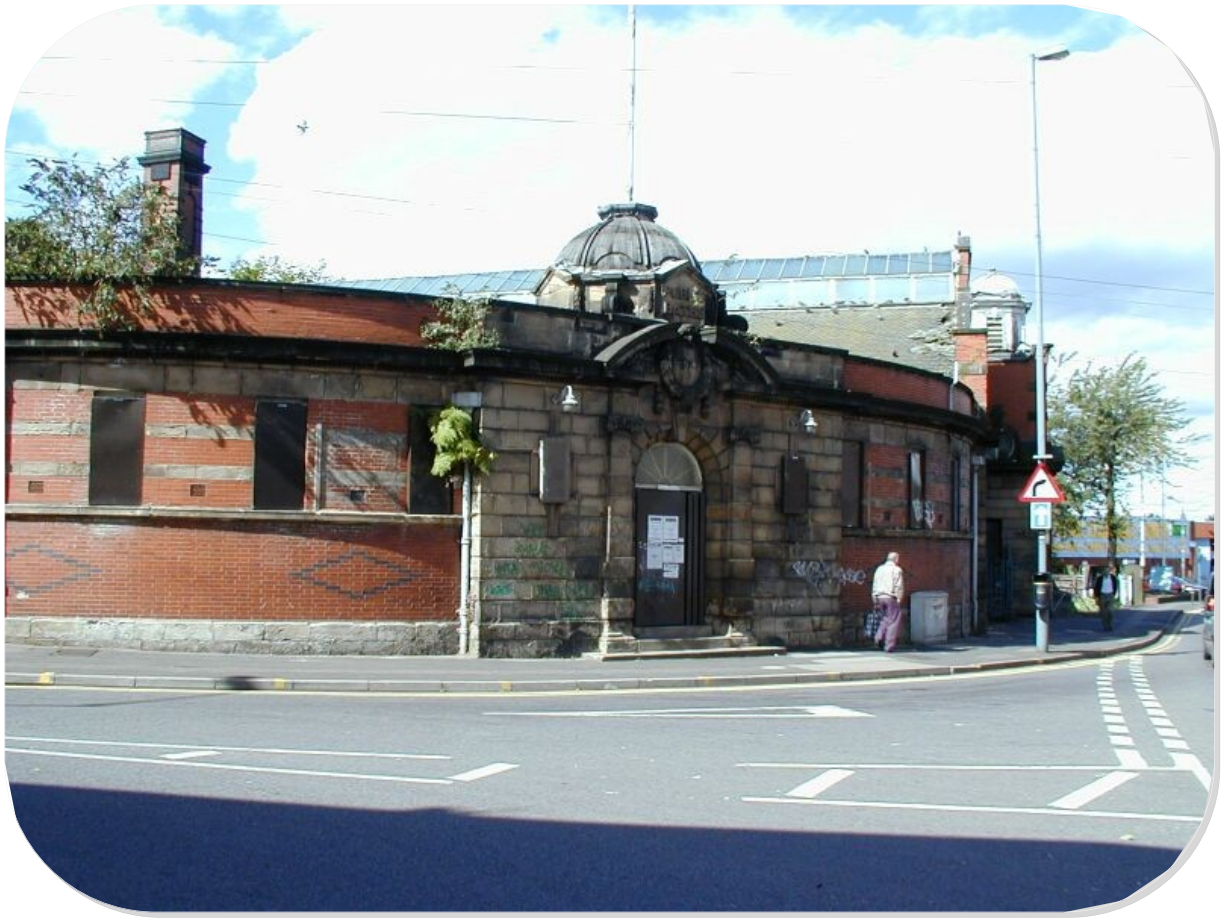


A History of Stirchley Baths



extracted from
**The History of
Bournville Lane Baths**
By
Paul Raymond Jones



Introduction

Stirchley Baths was closed by a Labour council in 1987. At the stroke of an accountant's pen a much loved and well used Stirchley facility disappeared. When it closed, a part of Stirchley died.

The history of Stirchley Baths is a story of all that is best in our society. A philanthropic industrialist and social genius, George Cadbury, gave the land upon which the facility was built and the funding to build it was provided by dedicated and forward thinking councillors whose only concern was to improve the living conditions of the working classes.

Being one of the many people who had lived in Stirchley and had learnt to swim as a child at Stirchley Baths, I had felt a terrible wrong had been done when it was foolishly closed.

When I first became the local councillor for Stirchley, back in 2000, I made a promise to the electorate that I would somehow get the Stirchley Baths building restored. It is now 12 years later but it seems that against the odds, and despite all of the hurdles placed before us, that promise is about to become a reality.

We are beginning the restoration of the Stirchley Baths building. It will not be a swimming baths, despite the need for a local swimming baths, but it will become a community centre for Stirchley. It will cease to be the embarrassing eyesore that it has been for almost 25 years but instead will be facility that the people of Stirchley will be once more be proud of, and when it finally does open again next year, Stirchley will be, once more, whole again!

This booklet contains much of the history of this wonderful facility. It is extracted from a little know booklet written by Paul Raymond Jones in 1981 and whose only copy can be found on the shelves of that other wonderful Stirchley jewel..... the library next door.

Councillor Nigel Dawkins

September 2011.



How it began

Stirchley Baths, also known as Bournville Lane Baths, was built in 1910 when Stirchley was a small village. Most of the houses in Stirchley at this time, did not have bathrooms and people had a tin bath which they placed by the fire and filled with a lot of hot water. When Stirchley Baths was built people came straight from work to the public washhouse.

A lot of the people living in Stirchley were employed by a firm known as Cadbury, which was sited in Bournville. Cadbury was a large and growing cocoa and chocolate manufacturer. They moved from Bridge Street in Birmingham to expand their business which they did by purchasing 141 acres of land lying between the villages of Stirchley, Kings Norton and Selly Oak. The area that they moved to was chiefly sloping meadow land and through this land ran a stream called "The Bourn". Later this area became known as Bournville.

Cadburys built their factory in 1879 and several years later the village of Bournville came into existence. By the late 1800s Cadburys owned various pieces of land in the area.



ews Team International

The donation of the Land

The land that Stirchley Baths is built on was given to The Kings Norton and Northfield Urban District Council by Cadbury Brothers.

In 1903 Cadbury Brothers Limited, wrote a letter to the council offering them a piece of land which was approximately 11,240 square yards, for the erection of a public swimming baths and slipper or spray baths and washhouse.

The letter was as follows;

*To The. Clerk,
Kings Norton and Northfield Urban District Council.*

*Bournville,
Near Birmingham.*

September 18th 1903

Dear Sir,

We have the pleasure of offering to the Kings Norton and Northfield Urban District Council a piece of freehold land containing about 1,240 square yards for the erection of a public swimming baths, slipper or spray baths and washhouse. This building is to be erected at a cost of not less than £5,000 and is to be begun before January 1st 1905 and completed before December 31st 1907. The plans to be submitted to us for approval. This offer will remain in force until December 31st 1903.

Your acknowledgment will oblige.

Yours truly,

Cadbury Brothers Limited.

The Kings Norton and Northfield Urban District Council after many months of discussion finally decided to accept this very generous offer given by Cadbury Brothers providing that Cadbury agreed to the following; that the building would be started by January 1st 1907 and completed by December 31st 1909.

In answer to this Cadbury Brothers put forward a "Deed of Conveyance" which stated that if the building was not completed and ready for use by December 31st 1909 the land would revert back to the donors, unless an extension was granted.

Through this offer of a piece of land by Cadburys and the co-operation of the Kings Norton and Northfield Urban District Council and the finance given by the Local Government Board, the building of Stirchley Baths was made possible.

The sinking of the well

On April 13th 1904 the council commenced boring operations on the proposed site, with a view of supplying water to the swimming baths. The cost of sinking the well was estimated at £430 2s 6d.

The tenders for the sinking of the well were given to Messrs. Barnes and Sharpe of Sleaford, Lincs.

By December 1904 the contractors who were sinking the well, had reached a depth of 280 feet. The surveyor advised that to prevent the sides of the well from falling in the bore-hole should be tubed for the first 300 feet. The cost of this was estimated at being £130.

In the January of 1906 the contractors had reached a depth of 595 feet without finding any water. The committee authorised that the boring of the well should be continued to a depth of 650 feet. A month later the contractors had reached 604 feet and were refusing to continue at the current rate of £2 per foot unless the bore-hole was tubed to the depth that they had already reached. The committee instructed that the boring should continue with no extra tubing and that the contractors were to be given £2 per day.

Several days later the committee decided to call in an expert to see if there was any possibility of finding water. These tests were made by Messrs. Isler and Co. and they were to test the yield of water at a depth of 200 feet from the surface. The cost of this was not to exceed £20.

On March 7th 1906 the committee decided to discontinue the boring operations.

Ten months later at a council meeting they were still undecided as whether to continue boring operations for water or to obtain the water from the mains supply.

The boring operations lasted for two years and after many drawbacks and tests being made of the water, the Committee decided to discontinue the operations. The amount of money spent on the boring operations was a staggering figure of £919 10s. So after many attempts, they decided to use water from the mains supply, which made Bournville Lane one of the first baths in Birmingham to use the water from the mains.

The structural features

The structural features were carefully planned so that different sections were arranged for better supervision, such as a separate entrance to the swimming pool and also a separate dressing room for the children.

The use of wood and iron for the interior of the building were to be kept to a minimum. White glaze tiles were recommended as they would be easy to clean and would keep the cost of such things as paint at a minimum.

All service pipes were to be laid in the subways.

Russian baths, in which steam was used instead of hot air, were to be provided. Douche baths were also to be provided.

Councillors Shann, Harbun and Shepherd decided, after they had visited various baths that were erected by the Leeds Corporation, that the aeration and filtration system at Stirchley Baths should be the same design as at these baths.

Aeration and filtration of the water;

This system was consistently treated to avoid the necessity of the draining off and the wasting of the water. This was thoroughly efficient as the water was free from discolouration and was far superior to the water which was obtained from the mains.

On February 5th 1908 preliminary plans were submitted to Mr. C.P. Bond who was the Superintendent of the Leeds Corporation. From these plans he then produced sketch plans which were as follows:

The Plans

The basement; Mr. Bonds' plans consisted of the basement being a height of six feet and four feet wide. The filter and the fittings were also to be installed in the basement. Steam pipes, gas mains and the waste pipes could be carried through the subways and the heater for the Russian bath and for the Laundry engine could also be fixed in the subways.

The ground floor;

The swimming pool was to be 75 feet long and 30 feet wide. The Russian bath was to be for six people. The small laundry was to comprise of the following; 1 washer, 1 hydro-extractor with a twenty-six inch cage, 1 mangle, 2 boiler tubes, 1 stepping tank, a drying closet with 6 horses and 1 horizontal engine of eight horse power.

Engineering;

The boiler should be seven feet in diameter and twenty feet long. A Lancaster type boiler was recommended.

Lighting of the building;

In Mr. Bond's opinion incandescent gas lighting was the most satisfactory method of artificial light.

The appointment of a surveyor;

The following month the committee considered to appoint a quantity surveyor who would prepare the quantities in connection with the proposed baths at Stirchley.

During the year of 1907, when these plans were being submitted, Mr. W.A. Cadbury generously offered a piece of land of approximately 65 square yards so that the swimming baths could be more suitably sited. Due to this extension of land the plans for the building were more suitably arranged. Through careful planning and the foresight of the Kings Norton and Northfield Urban District Council with the co-operation of the Leeds Corporation, Stirchley Baths was one of the better designed baths of its day.



Opening of the baths and admission charges

Stirchley swimming baths was the second swimming baths to be erected by the Kings Norton and Northfield Urban District Council and was formally opened by George Cadbury Junior esq. on July 25th 1911 also present were the members of the Baths and Parks and Cemeteries committee of the above council.

1910-1911.

The baths consisted of a gallery for spectators during winter months and suites of private baths for men and women. Also there was a Russian or Vapour bath.

The most interesting feature of Stirchley Baths was the system of aeration and filtration for the swimming baths water, which, contrary to the usual practises of the times, was obtained from the mains supply and not from a well.

The principles of this system were later to be introduced into all of the swimming baths controlled by the Local Authorities, but the Kings Norton and Northfield district council are to be commended as being one of the first authorities in the country to install such a plant.

Admission charges from 1911 in old pennies (i.e. 6d=2.4p):

Swimming baths;	
Mens first class	6d
Mens second class	2d
Boys first class	3d
Boys second class	1d
Womens first class	6d
Womens second class	2d
Girls first class	3d
Girls second class	1d

Private slipper baths;	
Mens first class warm	6d
Mens second class warm	2d
Womens first class warm	6d
Womens second class warm	2d
Russian bath;	
Men	6d
Women	6d

Attendances;

A survey was made of the number people attending Stirchley Baths during the months of July and August 1911.

Swimming baths;	July	August
Mens first class	16	39
Mens second class	1464	3428
Boys first class	4	21
Boys second class	502	1899
Womens first class	22	91
Womens second class	6	410
Girls first class	2	52
Girls second class		108
TOTALS	2016	6408

The total attendances at the swimming baths for July and August 1911 was 8,424 people.

Private slipper baths	July	August
Mens first class	74	122
Mens second class	211	447
Womens first class	13	16
Womens second class	109	340
TOTALS	407	925

The total attendances to the private slipper baths for July and August 1911 was 1,332 people.

Russian bath;

Russian bath	July	August
Men	6	11
Women		1
TOTALS	6	12

The total attendances for the Russian bath for July and August 1911 was only 18 people.

Receipts;

From the attendances shown in July and August the money taken in July was £23 11s 5d, and in August the money taken was £62 6s 3d.

A wage increase;

On October 4th 1911 the wages of the Assistant Engineer were increase from 36s per week to 37s per week. Also the Laundress was Paid a weekly wage of 15s instead of a daily wage of 2/6.

On November 9th 1911 the Parish of Birmingham was enlarged. Aston, Kings Norton, West Bromwich and Handsworth were emerged. The Kings Norton and Northfield Urban District Council was in an area that was added by this "Birmingham Extension Order of 1911". Birmingham was extended to 43,600 acres and had a population of 315,000. Stirchley Baths was now known as Bournville Lane Baths

The Erection of the Building

The appointment of an Architect;

In December 1908, and after many architectural drawings had been submitted, Mr. J. P. Osborne, F.R.I.B.A., was appointed as Architect. The estimated cost of the erection of the building was £11,900. The committee hoped that they could borrow this money from the Local Government Board.

Extension of the completion date;

In October 1909 an extension of the completion date for the erection of the building was applied for to Cadbury brothers. This extension was granted until December 31st 1910.

The wooden floor;

On November 3rd 1909 the committee considered the question of what kind of wooden floor was to be laid over the pool during the winter months. Councillors Shann and Shepherd and also the surveyor were to visit other swimming baths and inspect the floors that had been laid down. The tender for the wooden floor was given to Mr. F. E. Wallis of 45, Vicarage road, Kings Heath at a cost of £158 17s.

The appointment of a Clerk of Works;

During April 1910 the appointment of a Clerk of Works was made. He was a Mr. F. Masters of Heath Lodge, Nailsea, near Bristol, and he was appointed to supervise the erection of the building at a salary of £3 3s per week. Mr. Masters commenced work on April 18th 1910.

The laying of the foundation stone;

On July 19th 1910 Mr. William Cadbury J.P. laid the foundation stone. This ceremony took place at 4.00pm.

Tenders for the building;

The tenders for the building were advertised and the following were selected;

(a) The building; Mr. E. Crowder, 153, Farm Street, Birmingham, at a cost of £6,977.

(b) Steam and water; Mr. W. Cowen, High Street, Kings Heath, Birmingham, at a cost of £1,023.

(c) The boiler; H & T Danks Limited, Netherton, Dudley, at a cost of £315 10s.

(d) Laundry machinery; W. Summerscales and Sons limited, Phoenix foundry, Keighley, at a cost of £229 10s.

(e) Aeration and filtration plant; Riley's Limited, Irlam, near Manchester. This was the only firm who could supply this plant and the cost was £700.

The borrowing of the money;

On February 2nd 1910 the Local Government Board agreed to the borrowing by the council of the sums of £8,450 and £2,550 for the erection of the baths. The sum of £8,450 being the amount for the actual building and this was to be repaid, with interest, within thirty years. The sum of £2,550 was for the engineering work and this was to be repaid within fourteen years. The Local Government Board also refused to finance any further work on the sinking of the well.

The erection of the dressing cubicles;

During April 1911 the committee gave consideration to the dressing boxes. These boxes would be assembled in portions and hinged so that they could be swung against the walls and could be removed and stored during winter months when not required by bathers. This would give a much larger floor space for public use during the winter to house such events as boxing and dances. The amount for the construction of these dressing boxes was estimated by Mr. J.P. Osborne at the sum of £41 18s.

The clock;

The following month the committee considered the possibility of a clock to be erected outside the main entrance. This would be supported by iron brackets and would cost approximately £49 5s.

Preservation of the woodwork;

The woodwork had to be specially treated with a preservative solution to stop the action of the steam and moisture to the woodwork. After the preservative solution had been applied the painting of the woodwork could not be commenced for several weeks. The cost of preserving the woodwork was estimated at £28 9s 6d.

The shed to house the wooden floor; A shed was built on the site of the baths with the permission of Stirchley library. The tender for the shed was given to Mr. A. Curson, Heathfield road, Kings Heath at the sum of £158 17s.

The total cost of all of these tenders amounted to £9,245. The amount that the committee borrowed from the Local Government Board was £10,000. By 1911 Stirchley Baths had been completed and was officially opened on July 25th 1911 by Mr. George Cadbury Jrn. After almost seven years of hard work and intensive research, Stirchley Baths had finally opened.

Appointment of staff

The next item that the committee considered was the appointment of the staff. The positions were as follows:

Assistant Engineer and Stoker;

The Assistant Engineer and Stoker would be responsible for the opening and closing and locking up of the baths. Also to take charge of the swimming baths and to be a good swimmer. The person appointed for this position was Mr. Thomas Dugmore, aged 31 of 80, Grosvenor Street, West Ladywood. The salary that he received was 36 s per week.

Male bath attendant;

The male bath attendant was required to be a good swimmer and must be prepared to teach school children to swim. The person appointed for this position was Mr. C.B. Hall, aged 27, of 186, Berners Street, Aston. The salary that he received was 25 s per week.

Female bath attendant;

The female bath attendant had the same qualifications as the male attendant. The person appointed was Miss. Blanche Christian, aged 23 of 60, Aston Road, Birmingham. The salary that she received was 15s per week.

Female money-taker;

The money taker appointed was a Miss. Annie Gardner, aged 20, and her salary was 15s per week. Miss. Annie Gardner was still working at Stirchley Baths until she retired.

Laundress;

The laundress appointed was Miss. Rose Cox of The Forhill, Kings Norton. The salary that she received was 2/6 per day.



The war years

The first world war;

During the first world war, which took place from 1914 to 1918, Bournville lane baths was kept open, but through loss of staff due to enlisting, there was a reduction in the opening hours of the baths from a staggering figure of 89 hours per week to 53 hours per week. During these years soldiers and refugees could use the baths free of charge. Figures from this time show us that from August 1914 until March 1915, the soldiers and refugees using the public baths in Birmingham, amounted to 45,948.

The coal dispute;

In 1922 Bournville Lane baths was closed down for more than seven weeks because at this particular time a national crisis due to a coal dispute was taking place-Soon after this coal dispute ended Bournville Lane was back to normal to the relief of everyone.

Mixed bathing;

In August 1927 mixed bathing was introduced at Bournville Lane. Due to this the regulations had to be changed. The womens lockers were on one side of the pool and the mens were on the other side The men were not allowed to climb out of the pool on the womens side and visa versa. Bye laws for bathing were amended in 1927 for the wearing of proper bathing costumes. The costumes had to be thick enough to prevent indecent exposure.

An assembly room for the unemployed;

During 1933 Bournville Lane started to use its assembly room as a rest room for the unemployed during the winter months.

Changes in the summer opening hours; The summer time-table changed in 1937 and instead of opening for swimming on May 1st it opened on April 1st.

The second world war;

From 1939 until 1940 Bournville Lane baths was closed as a swimming baths and was used as a first aid post. Sometime in 1941 some of the baths were opened for swimming, Bournville Lane was one of these baths. People rendered homeless by enemy action were allowed to use the baths free of charge.

Due to the increasing number of people using the washing baths during the second world war, two hot shower baths were installed. After the war repairs and maintenance needed doing to the building such as structural repairs and electrical circuits, the cost of this was £660. During the first world war, although the working hours were reduced. The baths was still kept open and even during the second world war the baths still remained open. In fact it took a coal dispute to close it.

Post war improvements

A new record of attendances at the baths;

The number of people using the Birmingham swimming baths during March 31st 1949 and March 31st 1950 established a new record for the fourth year in succession. The total attendances for this year was 3,186,811, an increase from the previous year which had a total of 300,000. This was the highest increase in the history of the baths department,

The introduction of chlorination;

When the baths were first opened the water was continuously being filtered to maintain the highest possible standard. Due to the increase in attendances this was getting more and more difficult to do. So, in 1955, chlorination was introduced, which was administered by gas. This was kept in cylinders known as chlorine gas cylinders. The monthly report of the Medical Officer was very satisfactory. Chlorination had increased the hygiene at the baths to the most highest standard yet achieved.

The Clean Air act of 1956

Due to the clean air act of 1956 and the increasing number of people who were complaining about the thick black smoke that the hand fired boiler produced, new oil burning appliances were installed. Bournville Lane was one of the first baths to have these installed because the smoke that the old boiler produced was the worst in Birmingham.

These improvements made the water more hygienic to swim in and made the air much more cleaner, In 1956 all baths were opened during the winter season.