

Memories of Pittville - Bol Stallard

One of the earliest photographs in the family album is of rather a bad tempered looking small boy standing on a seat next to his mother at Pittville Gates. I would, I suppose, have been about three years old. I can clearly remember a little later, in 1925 at the same place, being told that the few trams that were running were driven by inspectors as everybody else was on strike. My father, P Morley Stallard, was a dentist and we lived above his surgery in that impressive building with a clock on the corner of Cambray Place and the High Street. On the ground floor was Howe the grocer so, without a garden, the choice for my afternoon outing was either to go to what was then called the Winter Gardens or to take the rather longer trip to Pittville Gardens. My mother, or perhaps the maid, would set off up Winchcombe Street past the shops and the horse repository until we got to Pittville Gates

Pittville Gardens were not free. The half-timbered ticket office on Central Cross Drive also sold Stone Ginger Beer and something called American Cream Soda which came in bottles with glass marbles as stoppers. The attraction was the lake with ducks and moorhens and the occasional swan. Beyond was the great lawn going up to the Pump Room. There was a bandstand but, unlike the Winter Gardens, I do not recall any band concerts. In the thirties one of my school friends was Peter Leopold, his father, baker and pastry cook, had a shop in the High Street on the corner of Grosvenor Terrace, and one summer he acquired a model steam launch with a boiler heated by a methylated spirit burner. We got on our bikes and made for Pittville Gardens and the Lake. All went well until the engine stopped out in the middle and we settled down to wait for the launch to drift to the side. Unfortunately a seagull chose that moment to land on it, thinking perhaps it was a large fish, and the boat disappeared to the bottom of the lake. Consternation! All, however, was not lost. Mr Leopold arranged for a park keeper to take us out in a rowing boat the next day and, with the aid of a rake, we retrieved the waterlogged steam launch

To get to the boating lake proper you went through the giant turnstile into the tunnel under the Evesham Road. Entry to the boating lake was free and the turnstile was there to stop you sneaking into Pittville Gardens without paying. One year, I think it was 1934 or 35, the lake froze over and soon the ice was thick enough to support skaters. Someone installed a sound system and coloured lights and those who were lucky enough to own ice skates displayed their skills accompanied by the hit song of the day, 'Oh Play To Me Gypsy'.

The Agg Gardiner Recreation Ground, below the lake, was the site of the annual fun fair. Great showman's engines, with dynamos and barley sugar columns, pulling two or three trailers would take up their positions and roundabouts, steam yachts and other rides would quickly appear.

Inevitably the development of Sandford Park, almost on our doorstep, meant fewer excursions to Pittville Gardens but really there was no comparison. It is good to know that Pittville has robust defenders.

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