



Smethwick Baths, as it was previously known, was Britain's first genuinely modern baths (following the popular art deco style of the time). Designed by Chester Button and Borough Engineer Roland Fletcher, the building perfectly captures the spirit of the age. With its tall parabolic arches the design of the baths was clearly based on the Royal Horticultural hall in London, which opened three years earlier in 1930. The Building set the trend for other baths to follow, such as Seymour Place (Marylebone), Northampton and Lancaster baths.

The main pool (left)

The building itself has enjoyed a long and varied history. Originally it opened as a two season facility, with swimming in the spring/summer months and concerts during the winter. The summer season saw all the usual activities take place such as public swimming and galas. Not forgetting the hosting of swimming competitions, the most notable of which was the BBC live televised swimming competition between West Germany and Great Britain, along with other galas against France and Sweden. In Addition to the pool activities there were separate ladies and gentlemen's slipper baths (domestic baths as most houses didn't have bathing facilities) which were very popular up until the late 60's.

The first week in October saw the large pool drained. Once the water was gone, the mammoth task of putting in the sprung maple dance floor began. On average, this took two weeks to do. Once transformed, the centre was ready for the busy winter season of concerts, dances, boxing and wrestling matches and all manner of exhibitions.

So successful was the concert space that it began to attract big stars such as; the Beatles, The Who, The Kinks, Tommy Cooper and many more famous faces of the time. The large upstairs café was turned into the VIP suite and the slipper baths became dressing rooms and bars.

In 1965 the borough council took the step to provide year-round swimming in Smethwick by adding on a small pool to the building. This enabled the winter concerts and dance to continue whilst also providing swimming for the local community throughout the year. In addition to the new pool a new bar and function room was added.

In the darker period of WWII the baths took on a very different role. The reinforced concrete structure was ideal for the building to serve as a civil defence base. While the basement subways became a community air raid shelter. The dance and concerts continued to boost the morale of the local people and it is rumoured that Glen Miller and his orchestra played at the baths during the war years.

As the 1970s approached the boarding over of the pool stopped and a new era of community activities started to take place. As both pools were now accessible all year round, swimming clubs and swimming lessons became common place. The function room began to be used by the first wave of fitness classes, a practice which continues today.

A Brief History...continued



The slipper baths were removed and in its place a sauna and health suite was installed. The changing rooms also received an upgrade. The café continued to flourish and for a while was even used as a makeshift library during the refurbishment of the local one.

The early 70s gave the baths the range of new activities that continue to be successful today. The café and the original ladies changing rooms have become state of the art gym and fitness facilities that are proving popular with the ever changing local community. The pools offer a wide range of activities to cater for any age and ability. The function room has been transformed into a dance studio with the latest kit and classes, in addition to community groups and martial arts classes hiring out the space. Even the subway system below the pool has been used as a filming location and holds monthly paranormal events for keen ghost hunters (the only baths in the world to do so).

Smethwick Baths or as it is now known: Smethwick Swimming Centre also has one more claim to fame. The first ever pool rules sign was used at Smethwick first. The famous sign that bathers have seen for years up and down the country was displayed here back in the early 30's. BBC's 'The One Show' even visited and made a programme about the subject, which was aired to over 7 million viewers in 2009. The BBC then returned in 2014 and filmed two episodes of the daytime soap 'Doctors' in the main pool and subways.

In fact, Smethwick has never been too far away from the glitzy and glamorous world of showbiz. From many a famous face during its dance hall hay days to secret visits from the infamous Reggie and Ronnie Kray to watch and bet on boxing matches, there was always a tale to tell of the goings on at the baths.

Generations of families have used the many and varied activities based at the centre and continue to train and swim together. The building may be 82 years old but this celebrated structure more than competes with newer facilities in neighbouring boroughs. Smethwick Swimming Centre represents 1930s civic architecture at its best along with the excellent customer focus and facilities that any modern centre can provide.



The subways of Smethwick Swimming Centre (above)



The art deco facade (above)



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