

History of Bristol Lido

The Bristol Lido is an example of a Victorian swimming bath built and was built in 1849-1850 after legislation changes enabled local authorities to provide municipal swimming baths.

This architecturally ambitious building, reflecting Egyptian design influences, served as a community leisure facility for more than 100 years before falling into disrepair and being closed in 1990.

English Heritage believe that the pool was almost certainly designed by the architectural firm of Pope, Bindon and Clark. RS Pope was an important local figure responsible for many buildings in Clifton, including Brunel House, Vyvyan Terrace, and Buckingham Place.

On 29 August 1849, the Bristol Mirror wrote:

BATHS. We hear that a company is to be formed for the purpose of erecting Baths on the ground immediately behind the Victoria Rooms, Clifton. The plans of the proposed building have already been drawn, and it is said that a very elegant structure will be erected, thus combining the useful and ornamental. The lavatories are to consist of private baths for the convenience of ladies and gentlemen, a medicated bath for the use of invalids, and a spacious plunging and swimming bath.

Nearly a year later, the Bristol Mirror announced that the Clifton Victoria Baths would be opened for the use of the public on Monday 29 July 1850 at 6 o'clock a.m. Single admission from 6 o'clock a.m. to 3 o'clock p.m. including two towels would be one shilling. After 4 o'clock p.m. the price of admission dropped to 4d., including one towel. Children under fourteen years of age, half price

At some point, part of the building became a Public House, certainly before 15 December 1879 when it was sold by Henry Sidney Wasbrough and George Burges to Henry Wright.

On 31 December 1880, the pool was bought by the Clifton Victoria Swimming Baths Limited for £2200, the company having obtained a mortgage of £160 from the 4th Permanent Building Society.

On 12 August 1897 the pool was purchased by the Corporation of Bristol for £3,025 and once again became a municipal pool.

In the 1930s it became the first electrically heated pool in the UK and for many generations the Lido was a place for social gathering and courtship, as well as exercise.

The years took their toll however, and the Lido closed around 1990 after allegedly springing a leak. On 8 April 1998 the pool and site was sold to Sovereign Housing Association for an undisclosed sum (rumoured to be £81,500).

The threat of demolition hung over the Lido for 13 years as its owners Sovereign Housing tried to get consent to develop the site into flats. Local people campaigned to save the Lido against development and in 1998 the Grade II listing was awarded, elevating the Lido's status to the top 6% of listed buildings in the country.

In 2006 the Glass Boat Company, a well-established restaurant group in Bristol, was granted full planning permission for the restoration of the pool and associated buildings. Work started on an ambitious project to re-open the Lido as a subscription pool with associated spa facilities, a 75-seat restaurant and a poolside bar.

December 2008 – the Lido re-opens.