

## **Jesmond Pool – A Brief History**

### **Does Jesmond need Baths?**

The Newcastle Council Minutes of November 1930 record a lively debate. Four new public baths, amongst them the swimming baths for both Jesmond and Fenham, had been put forward as part of a package of Works for the Relief of Unemployment. But some Councillors doubted the need for baths in Jesmond.

Mr Wallace argued that “a number of Councillors lived in Jesmond, and they could testify that Jesmond did not need baths.” (Laughter, records the minutes; a Member shouted “They need them.”) Mr Lax said he had lived in Jesmond for a long time, and when he went from Jesmond into Scotswood, part of which he represented, he thought he was going from Heaven to Hell. (Laughter.)

Mr Appleby said that he had found that nobody took any trouble about Jesmond. They could not even get the roads in Jesmond attended to – (Laughter) - and they could not get policemen. But (referring to the proposed baths in Jesmond) “this was one of the very few questions which had roused the people of Jesmond to enthusiasm. ”

Alderman Sir Arthur Lambert finally tipped the balance: “Swimming is much more than a luxury,” he said, it is “the finest thing for keeping a person fit, it is health giving, and it is useful in saving life also.” Confirmation of the report was agreed to, and the construction of Jesmond Pool was confirmed, at an estimated cost of £18,000. (By the time the tender was accepted, in 1936, the price had gone up to £20,391.) The pool opened in 1938.

### **Closure**

By 1990 times had changed. There was a financial crisis at the Council. The Leisure Services Committee was considering budget reductions. Jesmond Pool was relatively well used and cost effective, and enthusiastically supported by the Friends of Jesmond Pool (formed in 1989), but the Council took the view that the pool’s users could readily transfer to other pools such as the City Pool and Gosforth. In February 1991 the Council’s intention to close Jesmond Pool was announced, to vociferous protest and intense media interest.

A public meeting at St George’s Church on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1991 attracted 700 people and led to the formation of Jesmond Swimming Project (JSP). The pool closed on March 28<sup>th</sup>, despite an all-night protest,

but two days later JSP published an interim report, proposing its re-opening.

For the rest of the year intense planning, preparation and fund-raising continued. A key moment came in December, when the Foundation for Sports and the Arts awarded a grant of £50,000. And in April 1992 the pool reopened, under community management.

### **Stability**

At first the Council, who still owned the building, clearly thought we could only last a matter of months, until the money run out. But almost at once income began to exceed expenditure. Opening hours were much longer than before, while running costs were tightly controlled. New activities were developed, to meet customer requirements, and the pool opened at bank holidays, when competitors were closed.

Excellent, friendly staff had been recruited, who proved the pool's greatest asset. It became clear that we could plan for the longer term.

An option would have been to continue a programme of minor repairs indefinitely, but after a series of strategic planning events, the trustees decided on a bolder approach.

### **The Lottery Scheme**

The idea of a major bid to the National Lottery was born. The process of extending the lease, fundraising, planning for and obtaining the lottery grant took much longer than anyone could have guessed. It wasn't until June 2002 that a final lottery approval was received, after over six years work. The pool closed on 5 June, and reopened on 14 February 2003, after a major refurbishment and partial rebuild costing around £1.5 million.

The reopened Jesmond Pool hall had been re-tiled, had new windows and lights, and a brand new sauna and steam room. Major improvements were made at the entrance to the pool, where the changing rooms and foyer were re-built, a new fitness suite was constructed in the basement, and a brand new activity room added at first floor level. There is also a new lift, disabled toilets, and a splendid new version of the pool logo, in brick and stainless steel, on the front wall.



During the time Jesmond Pool was closed we were very grateful to the Royal Grammar School and Fenham Pool, who both accommodated some of our swimming activities, and to the Methodist Church in St George's Terrace, who provided a temporary home for our office. Needless to say, we would also like to thank the Council and those many people, trusts and companies who helped with our fundraising, especially of course the Sports Lottery, but also those many others who "bought a brick", or attended one of our fundraising events.

### **Awards and Recognition**

Over the years, the pool has attracted national and regional attention, picking up a runner's up prize in the national Social Enterprise Awards in 2002, and being quoted by One NorthEast as an exemplar at the launch of the North East Social Enterprise Action Plan.

The May 2003 edition of the national magazine "Economic Development Today" described "the inspiring story of a community's takeover of its local swimming pool in Jesmond, a suburb of Newcastle", before launching into a two page case study for the benefit of other community projects all over the country. In 2007 we were finalists in the Tyne and Wear section of the North East Business Awards.

We have given advice and support to numerous community projects and swimming pools. Close to home, we are particularly pleased that Fenham Pool has re-opened under similar arrangements to those pioneered in Jesmond. Our Social Accounts have proved an excellent way of documenting the community benefits provided by the pool. We have even received a fact-finding mission from a group of businesses based in Slovenia, keen to hear about examples of Corporate Social Responsibility.

Chris Clarke

Company Secretary  
Jesmond Swimming Project