

Copy of hand-written letter received following newspaper appeal

12, Hawthorn Road,
Downham Market.

9.8.'93

Dear Miss Batstone,

Seeing your appeal in the E.D.P. brought back many happy memories of the old Thetford swimming pool. I don't know if they will be of any help, but I have noted a few. I cannot say exactly when the pool was opened, but I seem to recall using it before I went to the Grammar School in 1926.

It was very primitive by today's standards, being shaped from one side of the river - a row of cubicles and a wooden hut fore the caretaker, with diving boards across the deep end. No heating of course! I think it had a solid base but if one dived too deep it stirred up mud. I remember one boy coming up with an eel!

The caretaker was a Mr Drake - he seemed old to us then, but probably middle-aged. he had a wooden pole with a canvas loop at one end, and if anyone wanted to learn to swim, he would walk along the edge leading them up and down.

In reply to our enquires "Can you swim Mr Drake?" he always replied "Like a duck my dears!" but we had our doubts! The only safety provision was a lifebelt hanging on his shed. As far as I can remember we did not pay any admission but you could hire a swimming costume - a real cover up job! for 3d. If it was too big he simply tied knots in the shoulders. He sold chocolate bars, biscuits and hot drinks from his hut fir those affluent enough to afford them. The pool of course closed for the winter.

The river running through the water meadows, clear and unpolluted was our summer playground. In ever remember anyone drowning - I suppose the big ones always looked after the little ones and we all learned to swim at an early age.

All best wishes in your studies

Doris Richardson (nee Kent)

Copy of hand written letter in response to follow up questions

Downham Market,
14.8.'93

Dear Miss Batstone,

I thought you would like an early reply, as you will soon be returning to University.

I have answered what questions I could, but it is a long time since I lived in Thetford, 37 years in fact, and it is hard to remember some things.

4) You asked me how I learned to swim. In fact, I cannot remember, it seems as if I could always swim, but since I loved the water, I rather think my elder brother was ordered by my mother to teach me, for safety's sake.

5) Miss Crowe, the then Games Mistress used to take us for a lesson one afternoon a week in the summer. Looking back, I think she had the right idea, as she taught us to enjoy the water, and feel safe in it, rather than trying to make us expert swimmers.

7) We used to play and picnic not far from Burrell's works, and had worn the river bank away so that it exposed the sandy soil almost into a sandy beach.

13) I think most of the costumes were a cotton knit, very liable to stretch. (At that time I had fair hair in plaits, and my mother was very proud of it, but to swim, I had to bundle it up in a sort of rubber cap. Getting very fed up with it, one day, I asked my Dad for a shilling, which he gave me without question, but when I came home with my plaits in a brown paper bag, we were both in the dog's house!)

My nephew, John Kent, used to spend all his summer holidays with us, and when I mentioned your enquires, he seemed to remember a good deal about the old pool, and I am sure he would help you if he could. His address:

Mr J. Kent
21, Hollow Grove Way,
Carlton Colville,
Lowestoft

Tel 0502 68767

Hoping I have been of some help. Good Luck with your studies.

D. Richardson



Borough of Thetford.

SWIMMING BATH

Open from 31st May to 28th August.

TIME TABLE, Charges, &c.

	Available Hours for Mixed Bathing.	
	FREE.	SUBSCRIBERS.
Monday.	9 to 11 a.m.	2 to 4 p.m. 4.30 p.m. to Closing Time.
Tuesday	9 to 10.30 a.m.	2 to 4 p.m. 4.30 p.m. to Closing Time.
Wednesday	9 to 10.30 a.m. 12.30 to 1 p.m. 2 to 3.30 p.m.	2 to 4 p.m. 4.30 p.m. to Closing Time.
Thursday		9 to 10.30 a.m. 12 noon to 1 p.m. 2 p.m. to Closing Time.
Friday	9 to 11.30 a.m. 4.30 p.m. to Closing Time.	2 to 4 p.m. 4.30 p.m. to Closing Time.
Saturday	9 a.m. to 1 p.m.	2 p.m. to Closing Time.
Sunday	Open to all Subscribers 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. (And others on payment of usual charge.)	

N.B.—Scholars attending the Boys' and Girls' Grammar Schools are allowed the special use of Bath from 10.15 to 12.45 p.m. on Monday and from 10.15 to 11 a.m. on Thursday and from 2.45 to 3.15 p.m. on Friday. 10.45 a.m. to 12.15 p.m. and 3.30 to 4.30 p.m. on Wednesday.

Thetford swimming bath - scale of charges 1943

(And others on payment of usual charge.)

N.B.—Scholars attending the Boys' and Girls' Grammar Schools are allotted the special use of Bath from 12.15 to 12.45 p.m. on Monday and Tuesday, 10.30 to 11 a.m. on Thursday, and from 2.45 to 3.15 p.m. on Friday, 10.45 a.m. to 12.15 p.m. and 3.30 to 4.30 p.m. on Wednesday and 3.30 to 4.30 p.m. on Friday, and Scholars attending the Boys' and Girls' Council Schools from 11 a.m. to 12 noon on Monday, 11.30 to 12 noon on Tuesday, 11 a.m. to 12 noon on Thursday and 11.30 a.m. to 12 noon on Friday.

Subscriptions for use of Bath for the Season payable in advance at GUILDHALL, THETFORD, as under:—

Children Attending School	2/6 per Season.
Children not Attending School and Juniors under 18	2/6 "
Adults 5/- Per Season.	Family Tickets 10/- "
Single Baths 3d.	Non. Bathers 2d. or 2/6 "

Bath Tickets may be purchased from the Attendant.

Bank Holiday open from 9 a.m. to Closing Time to all Subscribers and others on payment of usual charge.

The use of Regulation Bathing Costumes is compulsory. A Printed Receipt Ticket must be received for each payment made, otherwise further payment may be demanded.

Entrance will not be permitted less than half-an-hour before each change, or after 9.30 p.m. in June and July and 8.45 p.m. in August.

No person is entitled to remain in the Bath or its enclosure for exceeding 30 minutes.

BY ORDER,

Guildhall, Thetford,
May, 1943.

G. R. BLAYDON, Town Clerk.

W. Boughton & Sons, Ltd., Printers, Thetford.



NORFOLK EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Swimming Certificate

This is to Certify that:

..... David Osborne

of Thetford Boys' County Primary..... School

has passed the following Test satisfactorily.

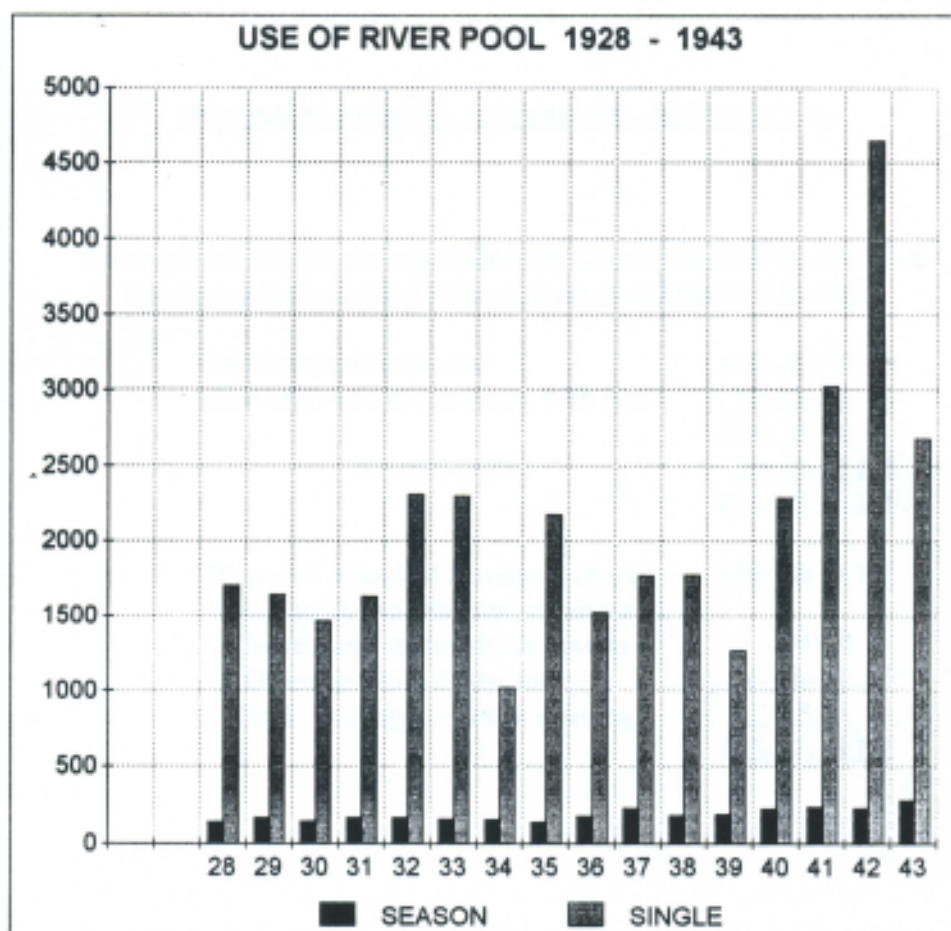
Beginner's Test

Glide forward 3 Yards

Swim free style 10 Yards

..... July, 1960.


Chief Education Officer.



NUMBERS USING RIVER POOL		
	SEASON	SINGLE
28	140	1703
29	170	1641
30	146	1464
31	171	1628
32	170	2307
33	162	2295
34	157	1017
35	140	2173
36	180	1523
37	232	1770
38	183	1775
39	192	1265
40	229	2285
41	240	3022
42	233	4644
43	282	2680

SPECIMEN ANNUAL ACCOUNTS - RIVER POOLStatement of receipts and expenditure in connection with the Thetford
Swimming Bath for the Financial Year ended March 31st 1927

Members subscriptions	£21- 5- 0
Hire of towels & costumes, bath fees	<u>12-15- 4</u>
	£34- 0- 4
Balance deficit	<u>21- 7- 2 1/2</u>
	£55- 7- 6 1/2
Wages of attendant & manual labour	£50- 2- 3 1/2
W.G. Drake, washing and repairing towels and costumes for season	14- 0
H. Green, printing & stationary	4- 6- 3
J. Clark, posting notices of opening	<u>5- 0</u>
	£55- 7- 6 1/2

Statement of receipts and expenditure in connection with the Thetford
Swimming Bath for the Financial Year ended March 31st 1941

Members subscriptions	£29-17- 6
Hire of towels & costumes, bath fees	<u>24- 4- 7</u>
	£54- 2- 1
Balance Deficit	<u>18- 4- 5</u>
	£72- 6- 6
Hire of attendant and manual labour	£60- 5- 0
General Rate	15- 0
Boughton, Printing	4-14- 0
Clarke,W, Bill Posting	5- 0
Savage Bros, costumes	3- 9- 6
Income Tax	1-11-11
Washing of costumes	17- 4
Goddards, wood	<u>8- 9</u>
	£72- 6- 6

Interview with Mrs Rosemary Ellis - 8th September, 1993.

Response to broad questions and queries on specific points -recorded on dictaphone.

We moved to Thetford in January 1956, when I was seven, from Larling, which had a very small school, only about 25 to 30 in two classes. I then went to Norwich Road until I was eleven, and then went to the Grammar School. I don't really remember going swimming with the school, yet I can remember being there with my teacher. I might have gone once or twice but certainly not on a regular basis. I was never taught to swim by anybody, as we didn't have swimming lessons when I was at school, that wasn't part of the curriculum, until you were older. I never got down there, because I went to the Grammar school when I was eleven. The Girls Grammar School certainly didn't do swimming lessons at the time I was there, 1961-1966. However, I can remember school kids being bussed in for swimming lessons there, perhaps from villages.

The Common by the Bridges was rough, just like Barnham Common today. The pool was on the left, quite a way down and you might not have noticed it, if you weren't looking for it, with the trees and everything. My husband says it was known as "The Sheds." I think there was boys cubicles, the far end, then long communal changing rooms, then the girls near Mr Singer's shed. Then there was that bridge that used to go over the river. There were rails all down the side where the sheds were, which we used to hang on. Upstream, the diving end was more deep. There was a diving board, but no, I didn't go off that! The bottom was all mud - all sinky mud and little fish! The other side of the river was more sort of sandy, and sloped in, and people used to go across there and have picnics with their toddlers. It was a Sunday afternoon out, for the whole family. You'd sit there with kids all round, just like going to the beach today, but I don't think people used to strip right off, not like they do now. There weren't any refreshments, you took your own, but there used to be benches to sit on.

I think it was six pence or a shilling to go in. We didn't have season tickets, and if you hadn't got the money you just swam up river. It was only the river when all is said and done. My husband was one of those who used to go in at Nuns Bridge and swim under the bridge to avoid paying. We liked to go there as opposed to anywhere else, because you could get changed in the sheds. They were pretty rough, just wooden sheds with a wooden floor and a bench you could put your bits and pieces on. You never had a locker or anything to leave your clothes in. I think you just left them in the cubicle, nobody would have pinched them. Yes, of course we had our own costumes, we weren't that hard up! My husband says there were knot holes the boys used to punch out so they could peep in at the girls. The kids used to be always down there in the summer, that was full of kids, but I don't think many adults used to go, but I can remember my father going in once. People used to take all sorts of stuff down there, great big rubber rings, you know, inner tubes, to float about in.

My boyfriend's grandfather, Mr Singer, used to work there in the summer but I don't know what he did for the rest of the year - I think he was retired then. He's probably still around but his daughter lives at 2 Icknield Way. He was ever such a nice old chap. I suppose he was the lifeguard but I wouldn't have thought he was qualified. I can't remember a lifebuoy there but he used to have a tyre on the end of a long pole and I think that was in case you were drowning, to pull you out with. That was all the safety there was.

The pool was full of weeds and muck, although they used to clear it out once a year, at the beginning of the season. It was a bit grubby in there, but we never thought anything of it. The cows all used to go in upstream at Barnham Common, you know, where the cars go down, and stir all the mud up and mess in it, and that all used to float down the river. I remember the polio scare and everyone saying that was because of the cows, I think that put them off using the pool for a bit. I can remember having polio drops on jam or whatever, and Barbara Roberts talking about how people used to be queued up halfway round the town for their injections, the adults. I used to work with her at the Health Office. She's retired and in her sixties now - 26 Williamson Crescent, she'll be in the phone book. People didn't throw things in then like they do now, but I think we used to wear little rubber shoes just in case. Mind you, you wouldn't let your kids go swimming in there now, you'd think they'd contract something, its a filthy hole really.

Our pool was just somewhere to go because there was nothing g else to do, and most people didn't have transport. I remember going on Sunday school outings, once a year, to the seaside - three bus loads. I remember going to Pakefield as clear as day. In the summer you'd have a Red Rover ticket, when your Dad had his week's holiday, and you'd go somewhere everyday for a week. You used to go to Norwich and change to go to Yarmouth, or on what we used to call, "The Crab and Winkle Line," which went to Watton and on from there, but that was closed down as part of the Beeching. I can also remember going to Sheringham on the train, and Hunstanton, and by the end of the week you were pleading to be allowed to stay at home. Another place to go was Two Mile Bottom. You'd go over the railway bridge and in the water there. It was fed by springs and someone used to clean it out. Incidentally the second Stauch is the one right down in the forest, halfway to Two Mile Bottom.

When I was a kid, we used to go down Water Meadows a lot, that's the bit from Town Bridge to Abbey Farm, and the first Stauch. We had nothing to do so, we would walk down there and chuck stones in the river, that was the highlight of our evenings you know, to go down there and meet the boys. We didn't use to swim at Abbey Farm, even though I was brought up in St Nicholas Street. We only had to go down what is now Water Lane, and round the back of the canning factory to get down to the river. It was in Minstergate, where Food Giant is now. We didn't swim there because the Smedley's canning factory used to discharge their drains into the river. I suppose that was just what was left over from their processing, because there was always a lot of baked beans floating around. There was also 2 or 3 swans nests

down there. They were vicious swans, and we used to be frightened of them. Of course Blaydon's Bridge wasn't there then, just a steep river bank so you couldn't get there anywhere, in any case it was full of weeds. The steps at Abbey Farm are new, they were put in when the estate was built. I'll tell you what else was down Water Meadows, just to digress - Jo Stoud's family used to live next door to us, and his son had a boat in which we used to go up and down the river. Down Water Meadows there used to be a lot of sunken barges, just below the water, that were presumably left over from when they used to carry things up and down the river. We certainly couldn't go down Water Meadows because that was all sunken barges, processed peas, baked beans and vicious swans

Barnham Common was nice but that was a long way to go up there from St Nicholas Street, when you had to walk. We used to go in at Melford Bridge, looking for tiddlers. It's very shallow there, but you couldn't what I'd call swim. I used to take my kids down there. They used to like it in the Summer, spending many a happy hour diving about in all that mud, with their rubber boots and nets and jam jars.

Looking back, the river was pretty cold and horrible really, and when you came out your legs used to be blue and goose pimply. You used to get these little leech things on your legs - I'm glad I didn't know they sucked blood. However, we had to make our own entertainments, we didn't have the money, and it was an afternoon out to go down to the river on your bike. You didn't need to lock it up because nobody would have pinched it. The Londoners didn't go in there though, did they - they thought we were a load of hillbillies!

The first overspill were very nice people, skilled workers who came down here with their families as key workers, and moved into the first of the new houses, Fulmerston Road. But after a while they sent more of the Eastend down, those they wanted to give a new start in Thetford. St Martin's Way was put up overnight virtually, great slabs of concrete just bolted together. As we got more and more people things just generally went down hill, as more and more were shovelled out of the inner city.

Just about everybody in town used to pay a shilling a week into Tom Smith's pool draw. Tom Smith, him who died recently. Someone used to come round, like a pools collector, and write it down in a book. There was a draw every week and you could win ten shillings or a pound or something. The whole town went in this and paid all these shillings. It was locally done but I am sure the money all went to Breckland, you know, towards the new pool. We gathered a lot of money, the town did, that was a big effort. The town wouldn't raise that kind of money now. The new pool's all right, if you want to go in there and be blasted by heating and knocked sideways by the chlorine, but it's not what I would call a leisure pool. My kids used to go there but as they get older it loses its appeal. They'd rather go to Bury with then water shoots there - ten goes for a pound! Much more fun than Thetford, all you can do there is go up and down.