

GAS COMES TO THE DUCHY

BY RICHARD THOMAS

‘Affordable housing’ was not a phrase which would have had any credence or interest in Harrogate as it moved from the 19th to the 20th Century.

Once the Central Railway Station was opened on 1st August 1862, on the still open ground between High and Low Harrogate, it was truly claimed that it was the ‘the railway coming to Harrogate that made Harrogate, not Harrogate coming to the railway’. We were no longer solely a Spa but had commercial importance, Private Schools were established and it increasingly become attractive to residents in the West Riding. New houses on the Duchy Estate in 1899 were said to be a good class of house occupied primarily by Leeds/Bradford businessmen.

The origin of Harrogate Ladies’ College was as a boys’ school in Ripon Road about 1890, set up by a Mr G F Savery in a substantial stone building with a tower and battlements, near to the present Cairn Hotel. Behind the school was a playing field of considerable size, stretching to what is now Clarence Drive. In 1893 he decided to open a small school for girls in a building known as Dirlton Lodge on Ripon Road. He built the present Ladies’ College in 1904 and the school moved there on 17th May. It was said at the time to have ‘a very handsome exterior, surrounded by 8 acres of grounds, beautifully laid out’. Mr Savery died in 1905 and the boys’ school ceased to exist.

The site of the Cairn was a large Victorian house set in beautiful gardens - sold on Tuesday 3rd June 1890 at 3.00 pm precisely, along with tennis courts, stables and a coach house. Only 16 months after the sale, disaster struck as the whole of the east wing was destroyed, when a servant ignited a curtain with a lighted candle.

It survived in full magnificence with the addition of the splendid entrance hall, or Winter Gardens, added on to the front of the house and with a full bathing suite of Aix

and Vichy douche, Newhiem, Turkish, Russian, Needle, Droitwich Brine, Pine Plunge and Shower; prices ranged from 6d to 3.6d. Customers were ferried from the railway station in a motor bus in far less time than the usual horse and carriage.

The housing on the new Duchy estate was provided with full services of gas, water and electricity. Gas supply was fully available 150 years ago, which may account for the on-going repair works at the present time. It was established At Rattle Cragg (New Park) in 1845. Electricity came in 1897 and in 1900 the Corporation borrowed £10,000 for extensions at the Oakdale Electricity Station.

The Chief Engineer, speaking to the select committee of the Harrogate Water Bill in 1901 in the House of Lords, said 'we have uses for water which very few other towns possess, the smallest cottage has its WC and a house of £17 or £18 rateable value has its bath. We have 2,867 baths, so that we are, what I might call, an exceptionally clean town.

The Bill secured Roundhill Reservoir above Masham, holding 60 million gallons drawn by an 18 mile pipe to Harlow Hill. It crosses Oak Beck on the bridge with iron railings upstream from Oakdale Bridge.

All the original hotels were extended but a new class of really splendid hotel was required, to cope with the increasing international importance of the town and its aristocratic, royal and imperial visitors.

Queen Alexandra and her sister the Dowager Empress of Russia both stayed in Harrogate and the future and last Czarina. The Faberge Egg depicted in the last issue was the Czarevich Egg, presented to the last Czarina at Easter 1912 to celebrate the birth of her son. It was made of lapis-lazuli and was delivered on the 13th March to the Czar at the Palace of Livadia in the Crimea. It was confiscated by Kerensky's provisional government and sold for 8,000 roubles in 1930

Harrogate's building vigour was impressive when you recognise the achievements before 1914. The Royal Baths complex was opened by the Duke of Cambridge on 23rd July 1897 and in August 1898, 52,85 glasses of Spa Water were served.

The Hotel Majestic opened in 1900 and the Grand Hotel (now Windsor House) in 1903, at the same time as The Kursaal (now the Royal Hall).

St Wilfrid's Church commenced on the site of a tin Tabernacle in 1904 and was almost complete by 1914.

Its 'calm dignified interior of restrained splendour' inspired John Betjeman to write 'Perp Revival 'i the North'

O, I wad gang tae Harogate
Tae a kirk by Temple Moore,
W'i a tall choir and a lang nave

All these majestic buildings were well balanced by the quiet residences being built along-side them on the adjacent countryside.