

To & WHIPPS CROSS From LIDO

The term *Lido* is an Italian word for a *beach*. In the United Kingdom and some other countries, it refers to a public outdoor swimming pool and surrounding facilities or part of a beach where people can swim, lie in the sun or participate in water sports.

In the first half of the 19th century there were many Lidos created in the London area and in Waltham Forest there were two. The *Whipps Cross Lido* that was off Snaresbrook Road, E11, near the Hollow Pond at the Southern end of Epping Forest and the *Larkshall Lido* in New Road, Chingford.

The Whipps Cross Lido was the first and it evolved from the *Hollow Ponds Bathing Pool* that was fed by natural springs. It was first dug out by hand in 1905 (As was the adjacent *Hollow Ponds*) by local unemployed men who were on outdoor winter 'Parish Relief.'

Parish Relief



Excavations by hand for Whipps Cross Lido in 1907 as a winter unemployment relief scheme.

In the winters, at the beginning of the 19th century, the number of unemployed men rose sharply. The 'Poor Law' Act of 1834, allowed local Parishes to 'relieve' the destitution of unemployed men by paying them a small weekly amount. In return the unemployed men were required to carry out work as directed by the 'Overseers of the a Poor'. This system was known as 'outdoor relief'.

The picture left; shows unemployed men in receipt of 'outdoor relief' digging out Whipps Cross Lido

The pool was renowned for its mud and over the next two decades there were many attempts to line the bathing pond with concrete but, unfortunately, this didn't resolve the problem and in 1923, with the forest conservators' consent, Leyton and Walthamstow councils agreed on improvements to a swimming pool.



In 1932, at a cost of £6,000, the two Borough Councils jointly carried out substantial improvements to the pool. Four large dressing rooms were provided and works were carried out to level and cleanse the pool which resulted in a great deal of mud being removed from the bottom of the pool.

The picture above - is at the opening of the upgraded Lido on 7th March 1932.



The pool was still described as irregularly oval at this stage, but had a straight 100 yard section for racing. The pool was still fed by the natural springs, however, and during a hot summer in 1933 become so unhygienic that it was forced to close early for the season.

Further work was undertaken in 1937 to convert the pool into a modern chemically treated and filtered Lido. It was a the largest pool in London and measured 300 ft by 130 ft. It was 3'6" - 5'6" deep and had a capacity 1.3 million gallons. There was also a unique 63 ft diameter and 10 feet deep circular diving basin, connected to the main pool.

Ralph Edmunds <http://www.myheadismyshed.co.uk/Lido.html> tells us:

'In the early 60's families would gather on hot days and endeavour not to lose one another or get hypothermia in the water. Water temperature was always posted at the entrance usually about 62f (this sounds reasonably warm but when you consider the freezing point of water is 32f and body temperature is 98.6f : it's bloody cold when you get in it.) We always vowed to get there early and bag a prime position (we never did) we assembled everything needed for this major expedition, sandwiches, orange juice, etc. etc. When we arrived, the whole world and his wife were in the queue in front of us. Slowly, we got closer and closer to the entrance and entered the world of outdoor bathing. At this point the males and females separated to go to the salubrious changing facilities (unchanged since the early 1900's). Inside one picked up a wire cage affair (those of you old enough to remember these need no more description – those too young to remember are probably better off not knowing). Once you had put all your clothes into this wonderful arrangement you took it to the attendant who took it away, hung it up and gave you a small round disc attached to a safety pin with your number on. You then walked around the whole day with your number pinned to your swimming costume (I know Health and Safety would not allow this but as I remember there were no fatal accidents with people spearing themselves with safety pins).

We were simple folk in those days, we would lay in a confined area on a hard concrete floor with only a towel and dab ourselves with very dubious oils and potions and fry in the Sun. Every so often you would venture to the pool trying to avoid other people, and soggy sandwiches, sometimes the shallow end was so crowded with people and inflatables you had to be careful when you dived in that you did not bounce back out again....'

People would congregate around the refreshment area. This meant it was always crowded and there was always a queue – very useful for dads who would say to their kids who wanted an ice cream "there is a terrible long queue, why don't you wait awhile until it goes down a bit". Funnily enough it never did. The amount of people consuming sticky food meant that the place was a great fly and wasp meeting ground.....'



The picture above left is from: http://www.enaip.org.uk/uploads/calendar_2010.pdf and is Giannina Ferguson at Whipps Cross Lido in 1952

The picture above right is from: <http://www.walthamstowmemories.net/html/postbag10.html> and is Michael Buckmaster at Whipps Cross Lido in 1960

An ex pupil of Churchfields School in South Woodford, comments on the Friends Reunited site:

I am still a non-swimmer, a fact I attribute entirely to the school swimming trips to Whipps Cross Lido. I can remember the ice cold water and the leaves floating on the water to this day. The Lido has long since gone which later pupils should be very pleased about!!

Somewhere In The Forest.

The pool was closed for 2 summers in 1970 and 1971, but was reopened after a £29,000 refurbishment. It was reported that the pool suffered from extensive vandalism during 1970-71 and 24-hour security was introduced when the pool was re-opened to combat this problem. The pool was closed for good in September 1982 and was demolished in 1983.

It was in direct competition with the *Larkwood Lido* that was a much nicer pool. It closed because it wasn't economically viable. Due to the need to heat the pool it had high operating costs. At the same time, it had a low income because its clientele was principally restricted to just a few months in summer when it might be warm enough to tempt bathers. Some fifteen years later, Larkwood Lido closed for the same reasons.

If you want to scabble about in the forest, you can still find odd lumps of concrete etc that are all that is left of Whipps Cross Lido.

Bill Bayliss
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