

Larkswood Open Air Pool



Like many other people who were not Chingford residents, at one time, my only knowledge of Chingford was of the Larkswood Open Air Pool. It was known throughout London as the best of the open air pools and was a magnet for the many thousands of people who enjoyed a dip followed by sunbathing on the surrounding grassy slopes. Sadly, this has long gone and the following is the story of its rise and fall.

The Rise

It was opened on 28 July 1936 and cost £23,400. It had a cruciform (12-sided cross) shape. The



pool was 165' x 60' + 220' x 90 feet. It had a 10 foot deep diving pit and it took 765,000 gallons to fill the pool. Space was left for heating in a plant room but this was never fitted! The design allowed galas or water polo to take place in roped off areas while still allowing general swimming to take place. Larkswood is a possible candidate for the all time attendance record at a London lido as, in 1959, 290,400 people used the pool. At 7.5 acres it was the largest public pool in the London area.

The Fall

Larkswood was closed after the 1987 season and the council demolished it in the late 1980s. It was reopened a few years later as *FantaSeas*. This was a fun type water park with slides. It was built by the Council but run by a private company. Within 18 months, after a number of serious accidents and debts of £6 million, it closed and lay derelict for 10 years.

Larkswood Leisure Centre

In 2001 Waltham Forest Council built the Larkswood Leisure Centre on the site. This incorporates a fitness centre and an indoor pool. The site is now shared with a private leisure club (Green's), a New York style Italian restaurant (Frankie & Benny) and a Pub restaurant (The Harvester)

Remembering 'Old' Lawkswood

<http://www.francisfrith.com/south-chingford/memories/>

The following memory is from Kathy Dale.

"Summers at Larkswood

I lived in Grove Road as a child, and spent a lot of time at Larkswood Pool - my friend and I used to practically live there in the summer holidays. We would get season tickets, so we could go as often as we liked, and go 3 times a day, only coming home for meals. I remember teaching myself to swim there when I was about 8 or 9, in the shallow end. By the end of that season we were jumping from the diving boards,



and going down the water slide in every position we could think of. It could certainly be cold at the start of the season, but breaking the ice is a new one to me! Coldest I ever went in was 55F. I remember teaching myself to dive, as well - eventually even off the top board, which turns me cold now even to think of it, a wonder I didn't break my neck! They were happy days".

My special thanks go to

Janet Smith for the information in her excellent book '*Liquid Resources.*'

Bill Bayliss, October 2011, Chingford