

RESTORING CLEVELAND POOLS

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After nearly 20 years of local campaigning, Bath's lido will return to its former glory when it re-opens in 2022 providing an unique swimming facility with a fascinating history: perhaps it is no surprise that Bath isn't just home to the world-renowned Roman Baths but also to the UK's oldest outdoor swimming pool.

Bath has been a popular wellbeing destination for hundreds of years. Visitors frequently came to the city to take the waters at the Roman Baths for their purported health benefits and in Georgian times the city was one of a handful of fashionable spa towns in England. Today the city's modern Thermae Bath Spa is one of the only natural thermal hot springs in Britain that you can bathe in.

In the 18th century, public bathing was not limited to the Roman Baths and some people enjoyed bathing in the River Avon. Around that time it was not uncommon to bathe in rivers, lakes or in the sea, and in some coastal towns, bathing machines had emerged, enabling bathers some privacy when taking a dip.

The 1801 Bathwick Water Act put a halt to nude bathing in the River Avon and in response to this new legislation, a subscription scheme was established to raise funds for a pool. Cleveland Pools were built in 1815 in a peaceful and picturesque setting alongside the river, whose waters initially fed the pool. Today they are the UK's oldest public outdoor swimming pool.

The Pools have a colourful history through the Victorian era to their heyday in the 1970s when they provided a popular swimming spot for the local community. Following the opening of the city's new indoor leisure facilities the Pools went into decline, with a short period as a trout farm in the 1980s, and at one point they were even threatened with demolition. In 2004, Cleveland Pools Trust was established to save the Pools and in 2006 the Pools' listed status was upgraded to Grade II*. A long journey of local campaigning to have the Pools restored and returned to their former glory followed.



With funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Historic England and many other supporters, the Pools' restoration is now underway and they are due to re-open to the public in 2022.

Saving this hidden gem of a site, which benefits from the tranquillity of the river and its wildlife, has been a labour of love for many. The project has garnered support from far and wide, and local volunteers have been vital in helping deliver this exciting restoration project through activities such as fundraising, events and a variety of public engagement exercises. When the Pools open it is hoped that they will become an important addition to the local landscape, to be enjoyed by people from the local Bath community and beyond.

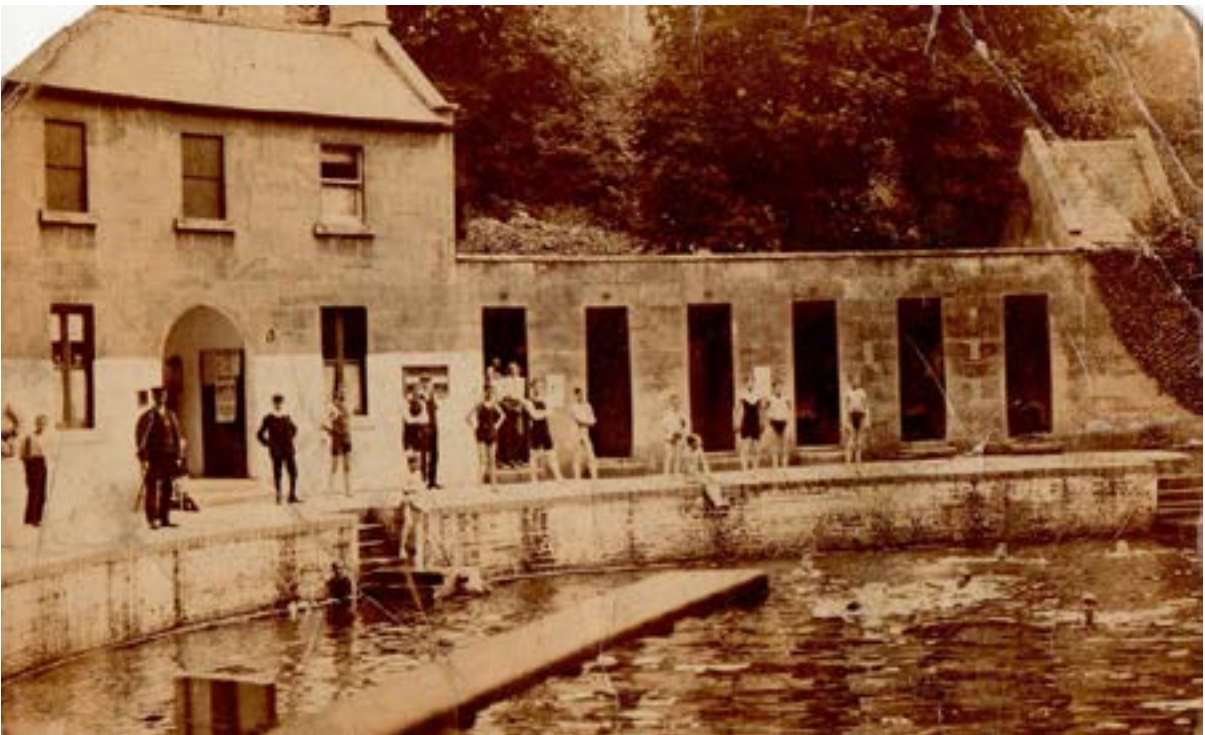
Cleveland Pools' tale of revival is not unique. The growing popularity of outdoor swimming in recent years has led to a renaissance of the lido, with the restoration of a number historic pools across the UK, as well as the creation of some new high-tech outdoor swimming facilities. Campaigning by the local community has played a vital role in the preservation of many of these historic pools, also ensuring that they have a sustainable future. Sadly there are many that have not survived: at one point, there were over 300 outdoor pools across the UK and now there are estimated to be just over 100.

Cleveland Pools, and later Victorian and 20th century swimming pools, offer a rich source of social history. A new public health drive and enthusiasm for communal outdoor exercise in the 1930s heralded the golden age of lidos, when many opened across the UK, including several in coastal towns where they offered a safer alternative to sea swimming, often with stylish art-deco architectural features. Lidos not only offered a place to swim, but also a space to socialise as well as a place of sanctuary away from daily life. After the Second World War, many fell into decline as a result of under-investment; the establishment of new leisure centres; and a fall in popularity with the advent of cheap foreign travel and package holidays.

The Cleveland Pools' site is currently closed to the public as restoration work is now underway, though you can follow the progress of the restoration through the [time-lapse](#) on Cleveland Pools' website. If you're walking along the River Avon, keep an eye out for the barge travelling between Bath Rugby Club and the site of the Pools: all building supplies need to travel to the site along the river due to the limited access to the site.



Aerial view of Cleveland Pools © Casey Ryder



Cleveland Pools in 1910



The Bath Dolphins Swimming Club was founded at the Cleveland Pools (then known as the Cleveland Baths) in 1899. The Club had a base at the Pools for many years, using the pool for practice and in the 1920s, for water polo which was popular in that era. The Club is still a successful competitive swimming club. ©Bath & North East Somerset Council.



People around the poolside, 1960. © Museum of Bath at Work

A 3.4 kilometre circular self-guided walking trail, which takes in Cleveland Pools along with some of Bath's better known sites, can be downloaded from Cleveland Pools' [website](#). Part of this walk takes you down the Kennet and Avon Canal tow path, though you can also see the Pools' buildings from across the river at Kensington Meadows.

Please visit Cleveland Pools' [website](#) for further details and find out how you too can support this unique local project, or [sign up to their newsletter](#) for project updates so that you can enjoy a dip in these historic pools when they re-open in 2022.

Information sources

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kate started volunteering with Cleveland Pools after completing her placement with the charity as part of her Heritage Management MA course at Bath Spa University. Currently not local to Bath, she enjoys swimming at Tooting Bec Lido, which is another of the UK's oldest open-air swimming pools dating back to 1906.