

ROCKCLIFFE REMEMBERS

Issue One



Lower Promenade Paddling Pool, 1929.

Welcome to the first edition of our **Rockcliffe Remembers** newsletter!

In 2013, Rockcliffe First School approached the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) with a proposal to create an online resource about the School and Rockcliffe area. HLF liked the idea and awarded the School a grant of £9,700 to gather the memories of anyone who had attended the school or had lived, or live, in the area, digitise the school archive of logbooks and photographs, and create a website to showcase the findings. Local graphic design company, Black Dog Design, assisted with the HLF bid and are undertaking the work.

This is the first newsletter of three, aiming to keep you informed of progress in the Rockcliffe Remembers project. We'll update you about the digitisation and web programme, publish articles about interesting parts of Rockcliffe, and report on exciting findings. In this issue, we are pleased to include a piece from our project partners, Rockcliffe Community Association.

The success of the project depends on contributions from anyone who has some connection – in the past or the present – with Rockcliffe. If you'd like to contribute to the project, you can leave your memories in our postbox in the School reception, or get in touch by emailing: info@rockclifferemembers.co.uk

IN THIS ISSUE:

1. Welcome
2. Local History



The South Lower Promenade

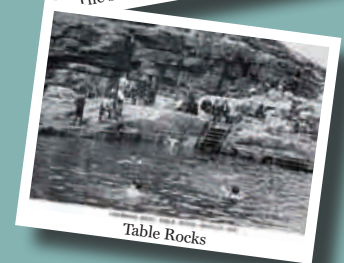


Table Rocks

3. Rockcliffe Community Association



4. The logbooks



SOUTHERN LOWER PROMENADE



In 1893, the local Board of Health began to convert the narrow cliff-top path into a promenade, in keeping with Whitley Bay's emergence as a modern resort.

In 1926, a children's paddling pool and massive sea wall was built. The project was undertaken by council surveyor, Mr A. J. Rousell and was finished in 1928. The cost of the scheme was £70,000. The scheme provided much-needed work for unemployed men from the shipyards and engineering works. The sea wall was strengthened with pit refuse from Backworth Colliery.

Part of the promenade was transformed into Victoria Gardens, providing grasses areas, paths, staircases and raised seating to enable people to enjoy the view and railings to ensure their safety. By the 1950s, the paddling pool had been further developed to include shelters and a sand-pit, and by the 1970s, a play area with slides and a pirate ship climbing frame had been added. It remained very popular, but in the 1980s, the council filled it in, due to concerns that it may be unhygienic.



Rockcliffe Community Association are proud to present their first live music event on:

12th July 1-4pm on Grafton Road.

Come, hear and join in with some local musicians. Big Noise Samba Drumming, Bay Brass, Bay Uke, Glee Choir and Folk Band, Clockwork Elephant. Bring a picnic, bring a brolly!

In April 2012 a campaign was initiated to have the refurbishment of our local playground completed. Many of the parents who had joined the park campaign helped me to host a public meeting which was held at the local scout hut. Over 60 people attended this meeting, showing that there was a real interest among the local residents to improve the area. The residents were given the opportunities to talk about what they like about the area, what needs improving and what they'd like to see in five years' time in the area. What a buzz! Some great ideas were shared. Everyone was enjoying the chance to meet and chat.

The Rockcliffe Community Association became a formally constituted group in May 2012 and continues to work to improve the environment but also to create a sense of community for the residents. We meet once a month and have a plan for the coming two years to work on improving the "triangle community garden", to support Rockcliffe First School with their Heritage project and we have been awarded funding to host "OUR BIG GIG" on 12th July on the triangle.

We are keen to welcome more members of the community to join us. We are all volunteers with families and work, so the more people we have, the more ideas we have and the more we can do to make Rockcliffe an even better place to live! Check out our website:

www.rockcliffecommunityassociation.org.uk or visit our Facebook page.



TABLE ROCKS

With the rise of Whitley Bay and Cullercoats as seaside resorts, the popularity of sea-swimming grew. There were however, a number of fatalities and the need for a safe swimming pool was clear. Table Rocks was a natural (20 x 11 feet) tidal pool. On 27th July 1894, W. Scott applied to the Council for permission to make a swimming pool at Table Rocks and the *Whitley Seaside Chronicle* noted that it was to be ready in 12 months. Charles Henry Megson Robson, a solicitor, of Edwards Road, later claimed to have been behind the scheme. He had paid £200 of his own money and raised £28 by public subscription. The Council was asked to extend the pool in 1896, but refused on the grounds of cost. In 1909 however, the Council did decide to include the project in the Rockcliffe promenade improvements and the pool was extended to 70 feet (its current size), by blasting. In 1912, a hut was built to provide changing facilities, but was lost four years later in gales. Steps were cut down to the pool and a rope 'rail' was fastened to the sides with metal rings that can still be seen today.

Formed in 1910, The Whitley and Monkseaton Bathing Club made good use of the pool. They had a winkle motif adorning their official red and black swimming costumes. It is believed that later in the club's history, each member was given a gold-plated winkle shell and that the custom of local ladies and gentlemen showing each other their winkles came from this!

The school also formed a bathing club for boys in 1913.

At its peak the pool had separate changing facilities installed for the ladies and gents which are believed to have existed until the 1950s. The building of Tynemouth Lido was largely responsible for its demise, although it was still in use until 1971. The pool is still visible today at low tide, although it is no longer in use.

In the next newsletter, we'll have a look at the histories of some of the streets in the Rockcliffe area.



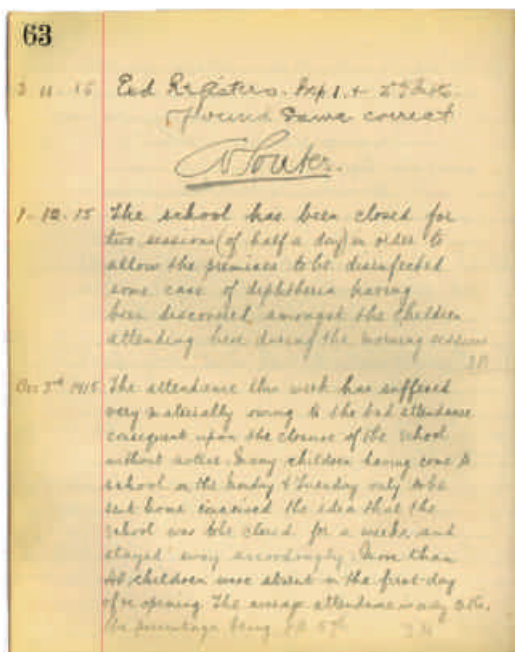
ROCKCLIFFE FIRST SCHOOL LOG BOOKS

We are very lucky to have three school logbooks which record the day-to-day life of Rockcliffe First School, or Whitley South Council Schools, as it was originally known.

The two earlier logbooks, covering the period 1906–1954 at the Infants School and Senior School, both contain about 500 pages which record everything from illness and absence (pupils and staff!); the condition of the school boiler; scholarship

awards; school life during both World Wars; gas and electricity readings, and the comings-and-goings of staff and children.

The first logbook is in particularly poor condition, but Black Dog Design has now digitised both books for digital preservation. These will be available to view on our new Rockcliffe Remembers website when it is launched. Here are some pages from the logbooks:



Far left: the cover of Logbook 1, which dates from 1906. This diary is in bad condition but has been digitally preserved. The original will be stored in an archival box.

Left: entries for November and December 1915. Diphtheria necessitated the disinfecting of the school and then its closure.

