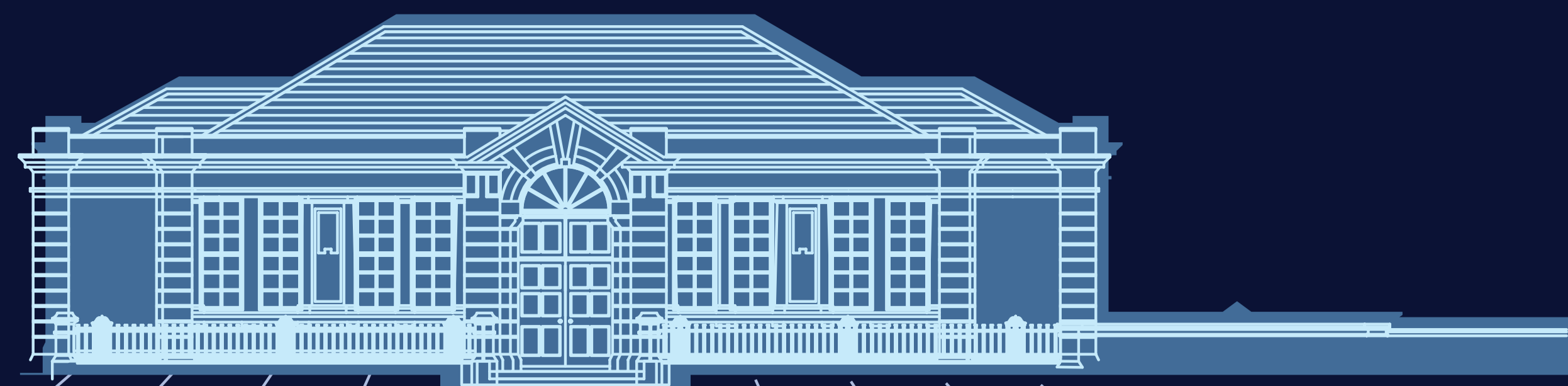


THE DÚN LAOGHAIRE BATHS

1843 · · 2023

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1843

Royal Victorian Baths built by private developer, John Crosthwaite. Situated on a smaller site closer to the East Pier

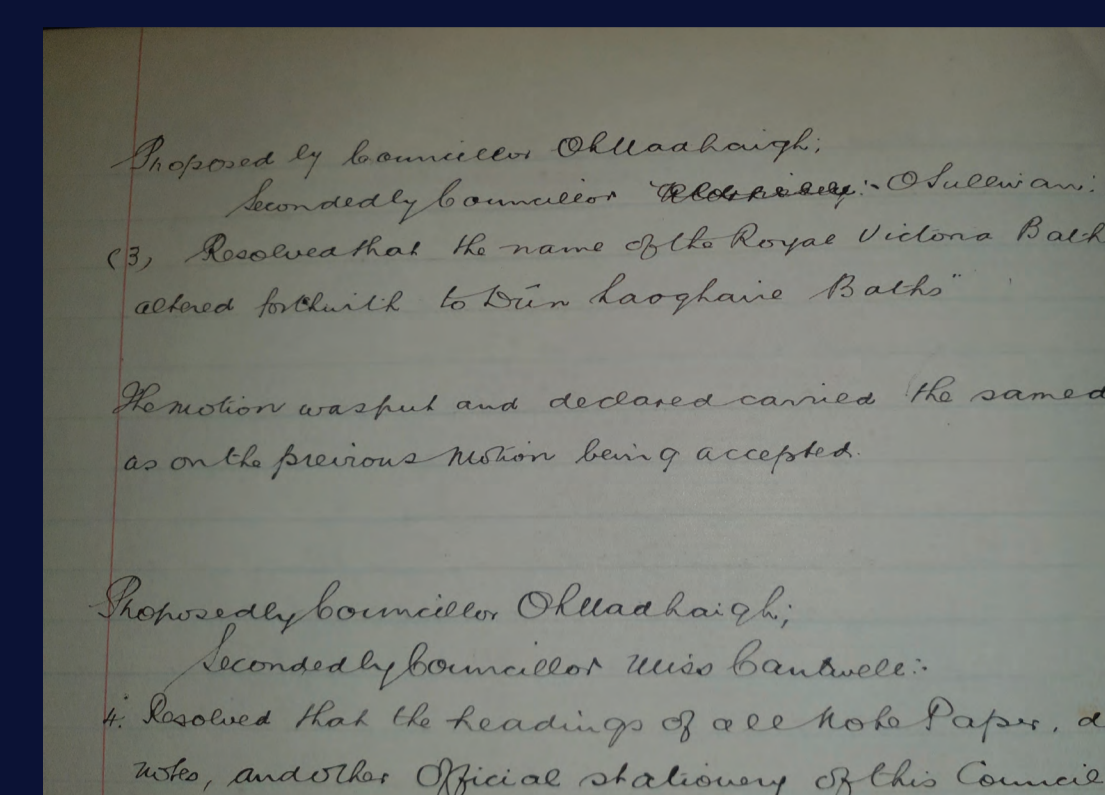


The Royal Victoria Baths

1920

To coincide with the renaming of the town, the Baths are renamed as Dún Laoghaire Baths

Dún Laoghaire Urban District Council Minutes, 6th July 1920.
Courtesy of dlr Archive Services



1892

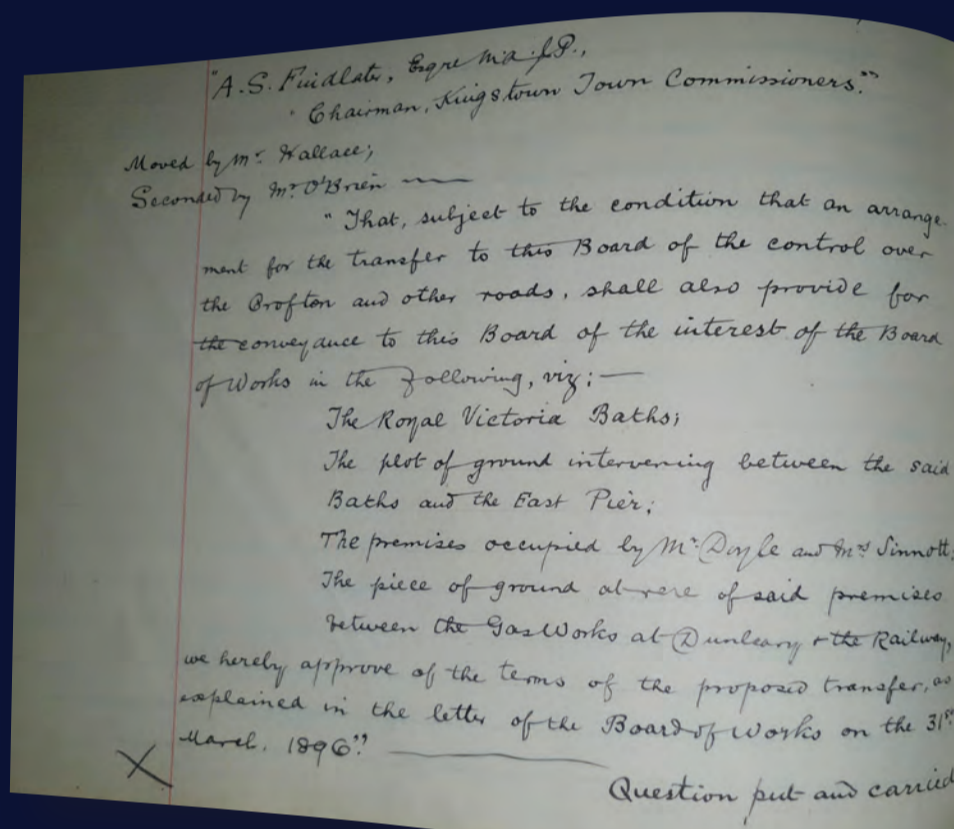
Under private management of Mr. J. Chambly

The Baths could not possibly be better or more favourably located than in the position they occupy close to the shore

1896

Kingstown Town Commissioners take over the lease for the Baths. Thomas Kelly appointed as Superintendent, June 1896

Kingstown Town Commission Minutes, 8th June 1896.
Courtesy of dlr Archive Services



1908

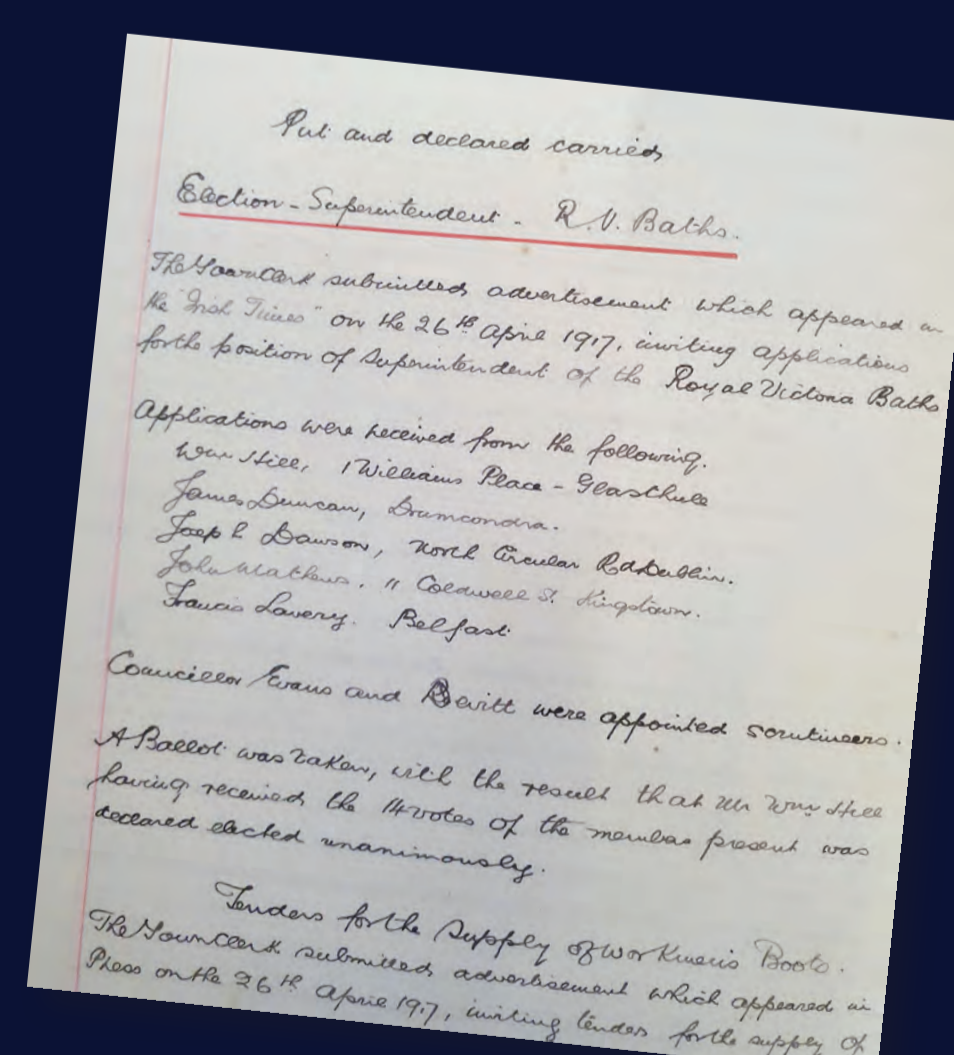
The rebuilt Royal Victorian Baths, Kingstown formally opened on Saturday, 4th July 1908. The new *Hydropathic Establishment* included state-of-the-art facilities for sea bathing, a gentlemen's *swimming pond* and separate ladies' *swimming bath*, both with showers – and for the ladies, furnished dressing boxes. Over £11,000 was invested as the urban District Council believed

that if Kingstown were to compete with other watering places, it was absolutely necessary that it should be provided with a complete and up-to-date system of baths, and this it now possessed

1917

William Hill appointed as Superintendent of the Royal Victorian Baths

Kingstown Urban District Council Minutes, 3rd May 1917.
Courtesy of dlr Archive Services



1933

Following extensive storm damage, extensive repairs and remodelling took place, including installation of a new boiler

1939-1945

The Emergency (World War II) – Council personnel, including Baths staff, were deployed on additional duties

ARP Warden distributing gas masks to Councillors in the Town Hall. Courtesy of dlr Archive Services



1950

Dún Laoghaire Baths advertised as full spa treatment resort, as well as the core swimming attractions. Patrons included jockeys from Leopardstown Racecourse, using the steam rooms on Race Days



1958

William Hill retires as Parks & Baths Superintendent

1974

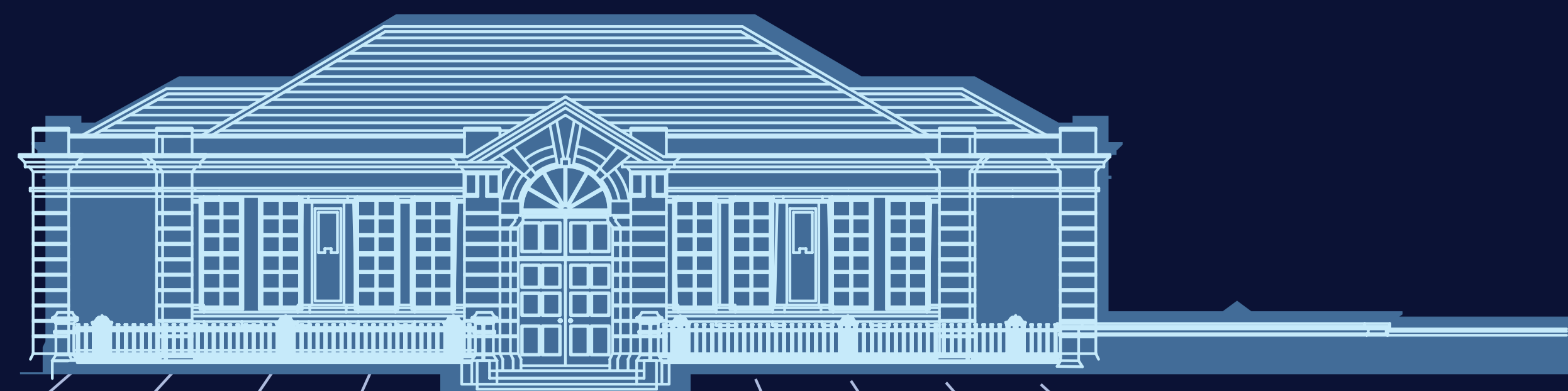
The Blue Pool Monkstown opens – the Council's first indoor heated swimming facilities

An Taoiseach, Liam Cosgrave, turning the sod at The Blue Pool, 13th July 1973.
Courtesy of dlr Archives



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1982

Dún Laoghaire, and Blackrock Baths threatened with Summer closing due to lack of funds – £75,000 needed to keep the Baths going. Opening hours reduced

1980s

Iconic laundry chimney demolished

1985

The Rainbow Rapids open



1997

The Baths close



Courtesy of dlr Architects

2005

Controversial redevelopment plans shelved after unprecedented level of local protest

Courtesy of dlr Libraries



2016

Drawings of redevelopment proposal, without swimming baths, unveiled

Courtesy of dlr Architects

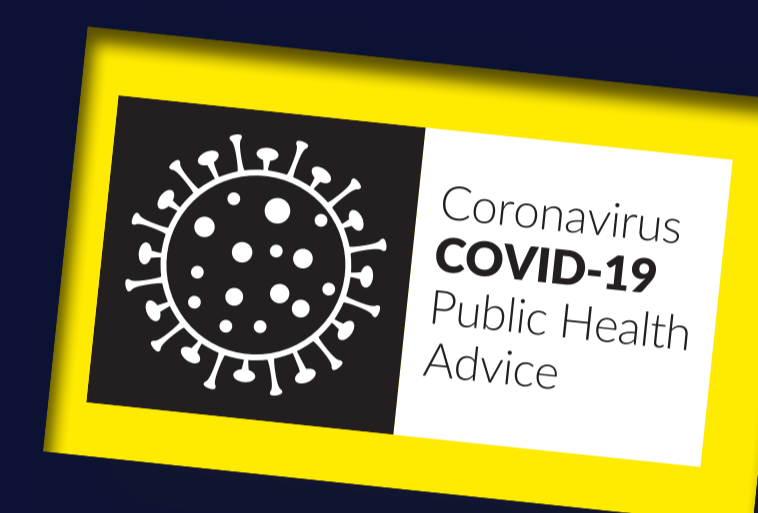


2018

Building contract signed and work on the site begins

2020

COVID lockdown halts progress



2022

Public re-opening – 13th December

Anna Murray (née Hill) who was born in the Dún Laoghaire Baths in 1932, is the first member of the public to visit the redeveloped site in November 2022



Courtesy of dlr County Council



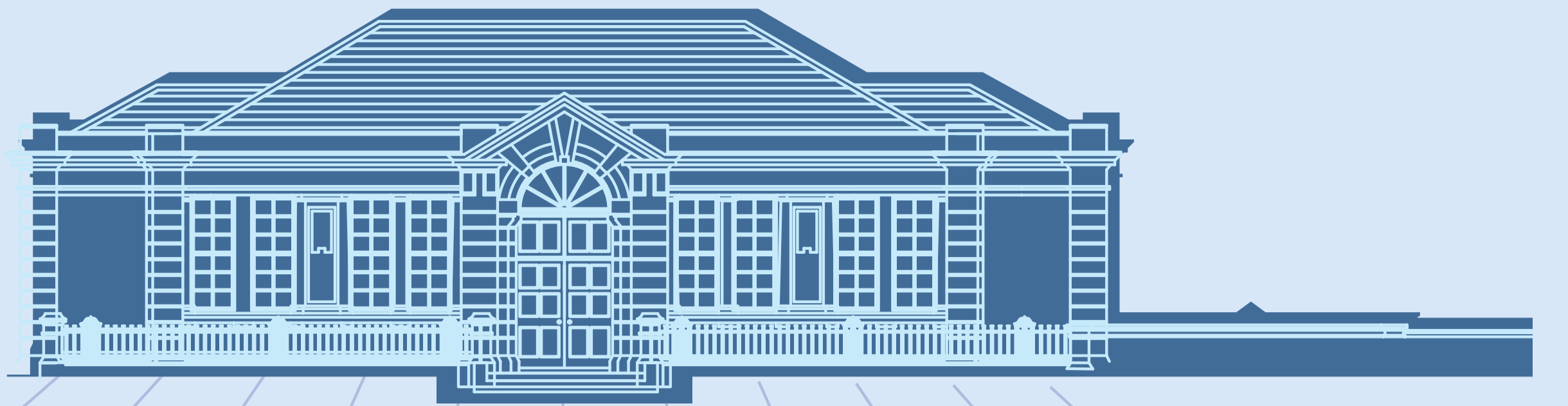
Photo by Ste Murray

THE DÚN LAOGHAIRE BATHS

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ROGER CASEMENT

AND DÚN LAOGHAIRE



Courtesy of dlr Heritage Office

Roger Casement – one of Ireland’s best-known patriots, who was executed in 1916 – was born in Sandycove in September 1864. He spent little time in the area, moving with his family to England and later to Co. Antrim, where he spent much of his boyhood. He initially followed a career in the colonial Africa, where his work informed his total denunciation of imperialist practices against the indigenous populations, particularly in the Congo Free State, and later in Brazil. His humanitarian work was rewarded with a knighthood in 1905.

From the late 1890s, Casement became increasingly involved with Irish nationalism – initially through the Gaelic League, and from the time of their establishment in 1913, as a member of the provisional committee of the Irish Volunteers. In this role he played a key part in the Howth gun-running initiative in July 1914, organizing the purchase of arms and ammunition in Belgium and their importation to Ireland, some of them later being used in the Easter Rising 1916. Following a fund-raising visit to the USA, Casement spent eighteen months in Germany promoting the

cause of Irish nationalism, seeking German support for an “Irish Brigade”. In April 1916, on his return to Ireland by German submarine, he was arrested, charged with high treason, and imprisoned in The Tower of London. Found guilty at trial, he was executed on 3rd August 1916. Casement’s remains were brought back to Ireland and buried in Glasnevin Cemetery in March 1965.

In 2016, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council commissioned Mark Richards to complete a bronze statue of Roger Casement, as part of the redevelopment of the Baths area. The statue is in a prominent position at the edge of Dublin Bay – symbolically facing the GPO. The statue commemorates a complex life, marked by violence, prejudice and injustice yet dedicated to the pursuit of freedom, justice, and humanity.



Courtesy of The National Library of Ireland



Courtesy of The National Library of Ireland

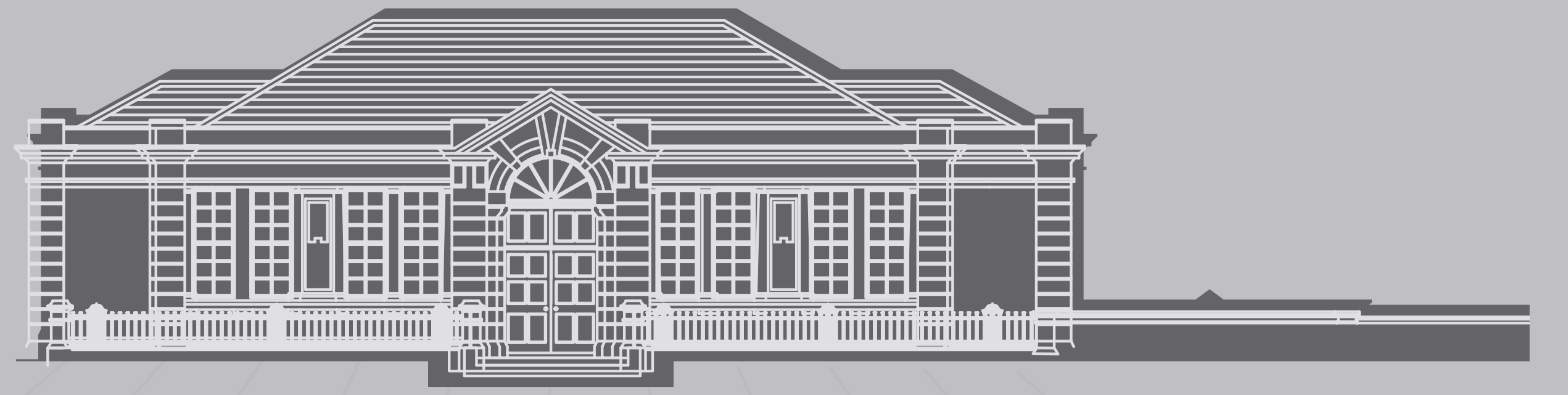
Photo by Ste Murray



THE DÚN LAOGHAIRE BATHS

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LEISURE TIME IN THE BATHS



The Baths' opening to the general public, in 1908, saw the beginning of a very close association with all forms of water sport – swimming, diving and water polo were all popular over the years and local clubs, such as The Otters, were closely associated with these. At the official opening of the Baths in 1908, formal proceedings were followed by an “Aquatic Gala” – the first of many such events of this type. At this first event, George Dockrell (of the politically prominent Dockrell family who are still represented on the Council today) set a new Irish record for 100 yards – completing it in 61 seconds.

Thousands of children learned to swim in the Baths with affectionate memories of their teachers – among them Mr. Gillespie and Miss Kennedy. While the Baths aren't mentioned in Joyce's *Ulysses*, swimming lessons there are referred to in Maeve Binchy's *Echoes*. Many local schools also used the Baths for their lessons. As far back as the 1920s, the girls and mistresses from Hillcourt School walked from Upper Glenageary Road for their lessons, as did the girls from Glengara Park. Throughout the decades photos show generations of children and adults enjoying all of the



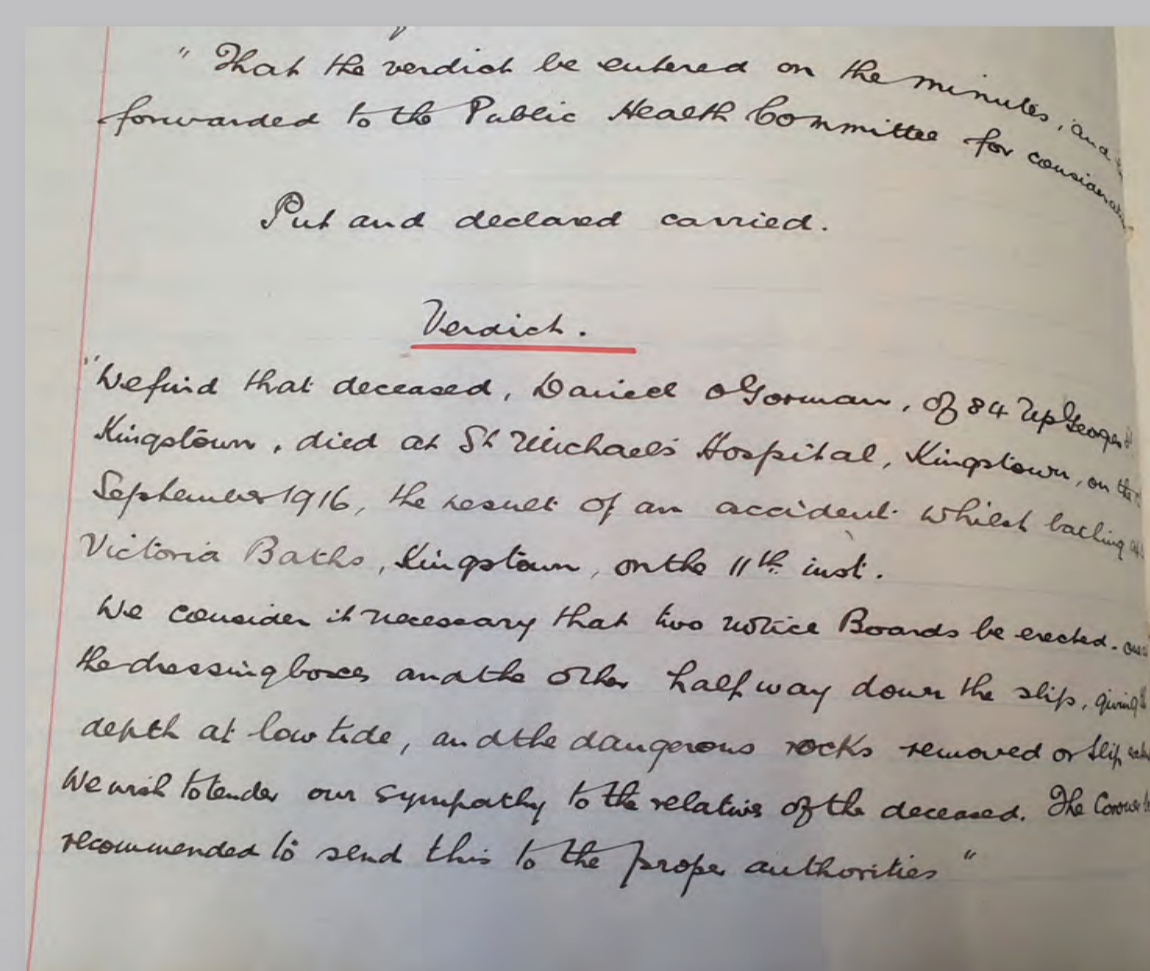
Courtesy of Siobhán Brennan

facilities.

In the 1980s, The Rainbow Rapids were added to the Baths to attract the younger generation of Dún Laoghaire swimmers. Similar to water parks in the UK and USA, the plastic slides were 300 feet long, completing a circle before dropping into a heated plunge pool. Each ride lasted about 30 seconds and speeds of up to 15mph were possible. While hugely popular initially, the length of the season and the cost of the upkeep proved too much to keep the Rapids going and they closed after the 1994 season.



As well as happy times in the Baths, sadly accidents were recorded from the earliest days – some of them fatal. Council Minutes record many of these, but also stories of bravery with certificates and sometimes financial awards being made to rescuers.



Death in 1916



Courtesy of dlr Archive Services



Childrens pool

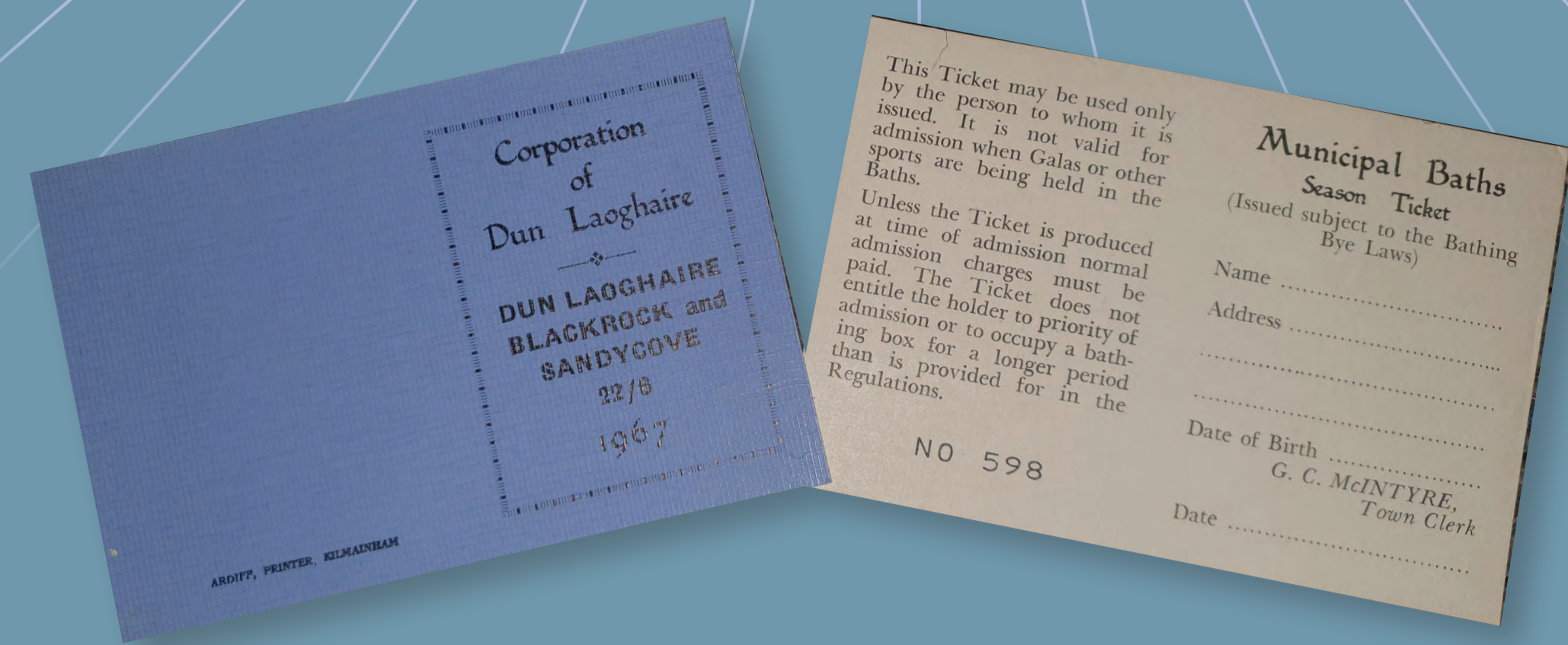
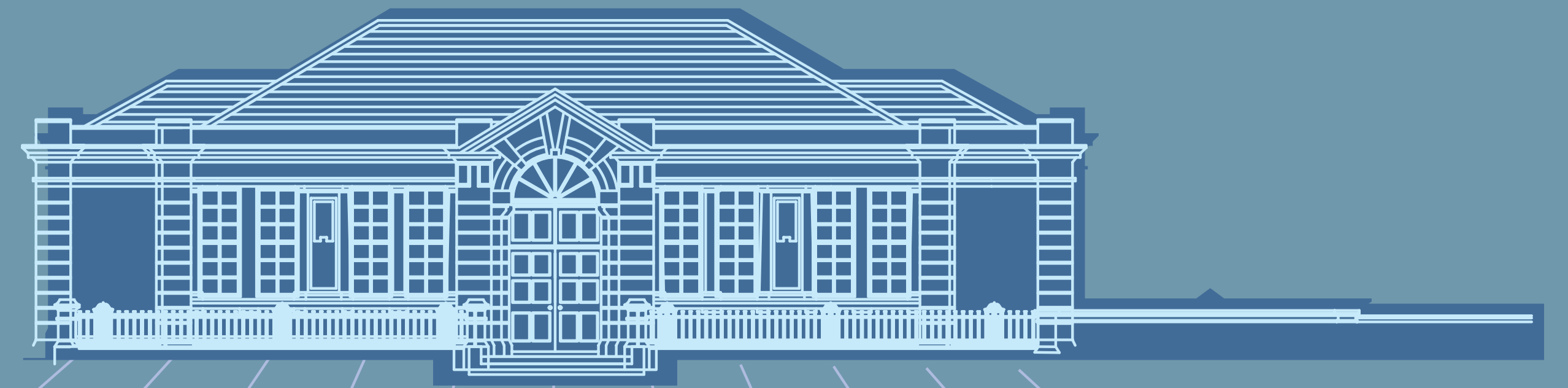


Ladies Baths

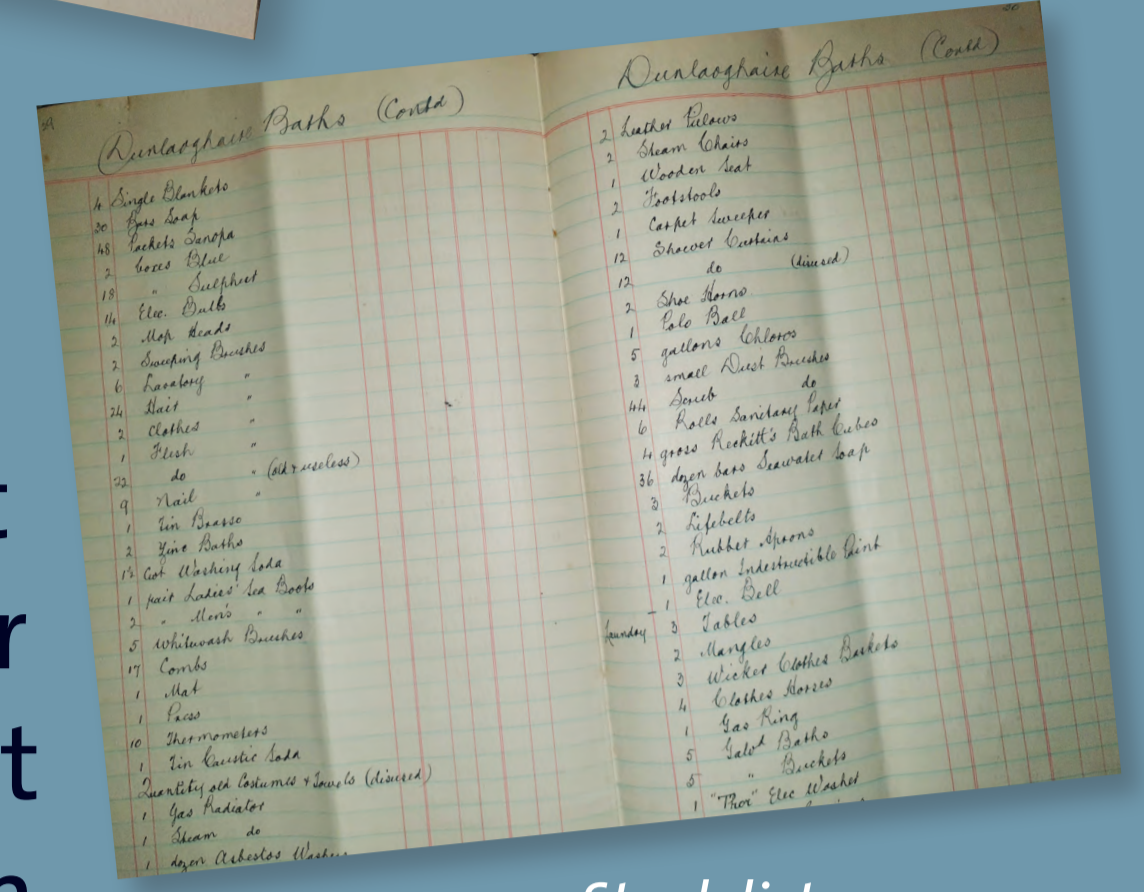


Courtesy of Tom Conlon

BEHIND THE SCENES



Season Tickets.
Courtesy of dlr Archive Services



Stock list 1930

Providing a Baths service to the people of Dún Laoghaire was always a very labour-intensive initiative. From the time they came into public ownership in 1896, the intention was that the Baths were both recreational and very practical – in an era when bathrooms were not the norm in housing. This was especially true in Dún Laoghaire in the 1900s where obvious affluence hid great poverty. The Baths were run by the Public Health Committee and the provision of bathing facilities for sanitary purposes was an important part of the role of Edwardian Local Government. In addition to the swimming facilities, the Baths had washing facilities and specialty offerings, including seaweed baths. A laundry was integral to the operation, marked out by the tall red-brick chimney at street level. From the early days, surviving stock lists include soap, washing powder, mens' and ladies' bathing costumes, towels, even combs!

The Baths' working year was short – opening annually from the Whit weekend until the 29th September – and this changed little throughout the twentieth century. From March, a small army of carpenters, plasterers, electricians, and painters arrived to prepare for the Summer, most of them Council employees deployed from other duties. Before any maintenance could take place, the pools had to be emptied of winter debris, which could be anything that had been thrown up by the sea – a messy and unsavoury job. The boilermen were key to the operations – from Mr. Fox in the Thirties and Forties to Paddy Mehigan in the Seventies. While a lot of the staff were seasonally employed, the same teams returned year on year creating a great sense of community and continuity. The shop was always run on a concession basis – popularly by Teddy's Ice Cream until 1971. The team also included the lifeguards and the swimming teachers, as well as staff running the ticket office and the clothes stores.

In the 1970s the Baths were open from 9am to 7.30pm daily, reduced in later years to 12-6pm. They were closed every second Friday for essential maintenance. The Main Pool was half-emptied every night, and the small Pool every night. Fresh water was pumped from the beach and there was a system of valves between the pools to top up the levels with fresh water. Families frequently availed of season tickets and generations of Dún Laoghaire children remember spending whole days at the Baths during the Summer.



Postcard of the Baths showing chimney
Courtesy of The Seamus Kearns Collection, dlr Local Studies

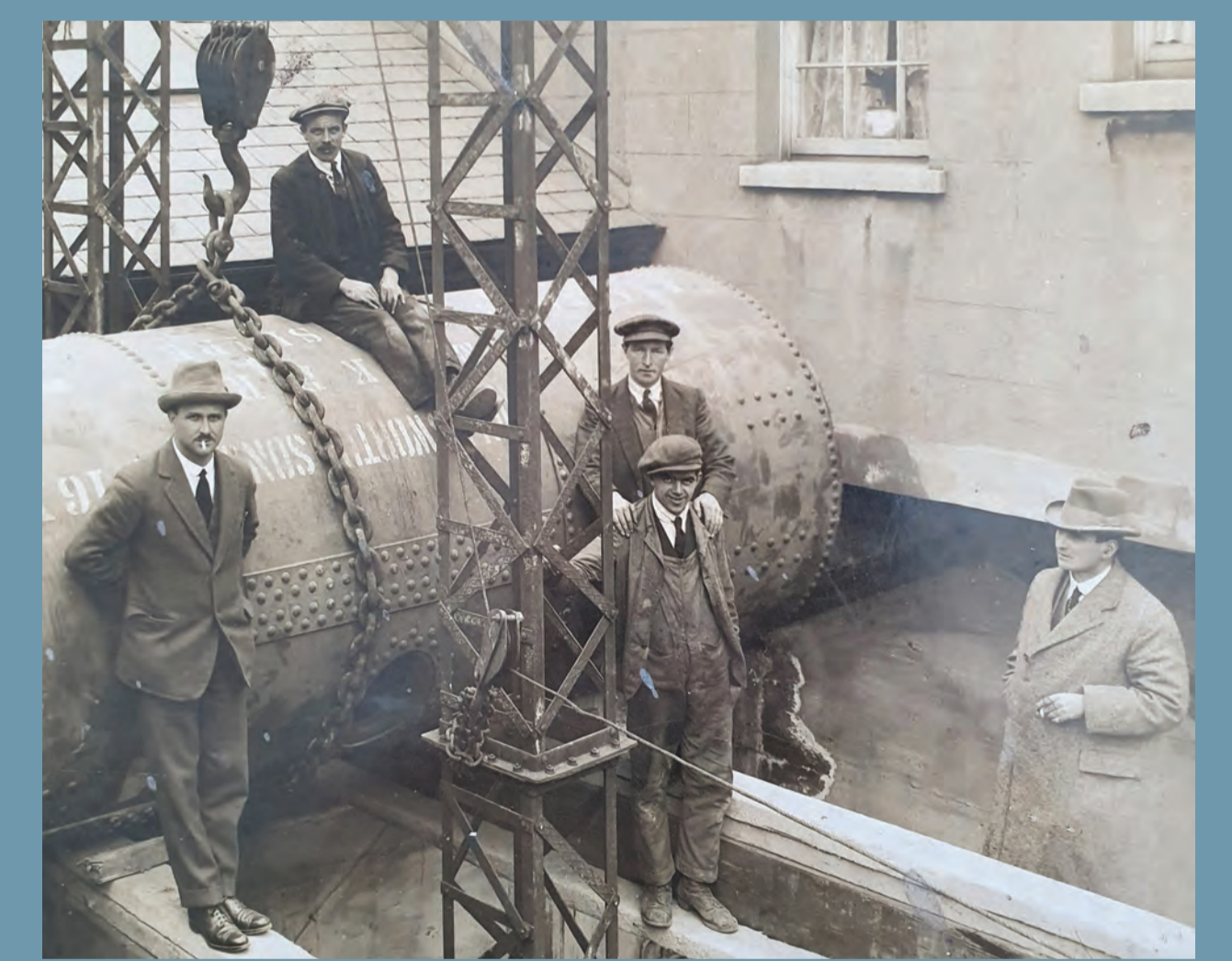


Photo of installation of the new boiler in 1933
J.M. Devitt (Chairman of the Council), C.N. Cook (Chairman of the Bath's Committee), W.J. Hill (Baths Superintendent) and 2 x Boiler Fitters from Holdsworth & Sons, England



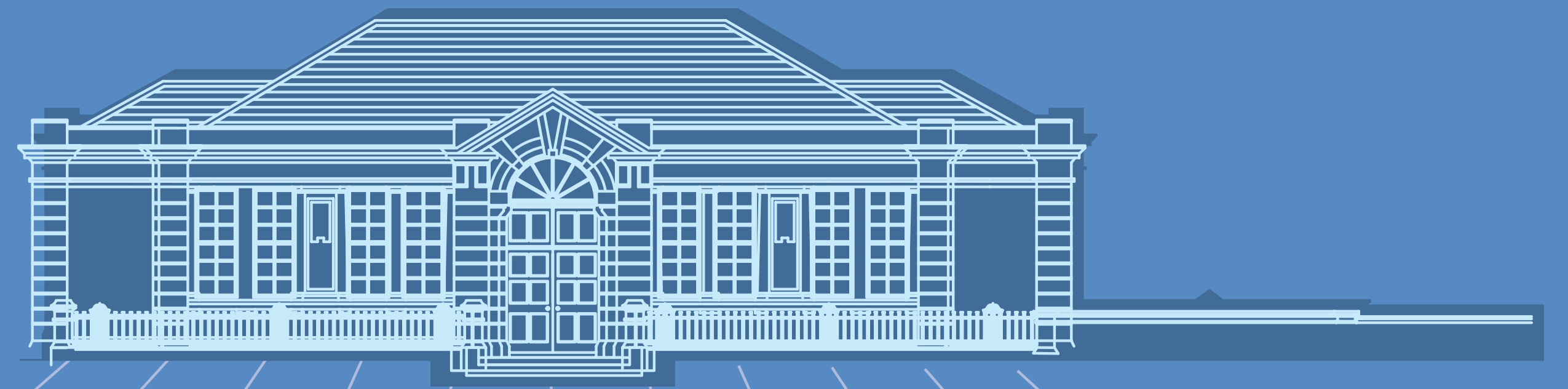
Enthusiastic helpers fighting a losing battle against the storm, August 1994. Courtesy of Michael Dunne



Refilling the pool
Courtesy of Michael Dunne

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THE BATHS FROM THE AIR



Following the First World War, aerial photography was more regularly used and from 1919 on it was used extensively commercially – especially for survey and mapping services. The results are sometimes spectacular and these images of the baths at different times, show the development and the changes at the site.



This 1933 photo shows the Baths in their heyday, with Lido style architecture, and indeed the 1930s is considered to be the Golden Age of Lido-style facilities. A contemporary account describes the Baths as:

“... perfectly situated on the centre of the seafront, contain three pools, the principal pool being 146 feet by 30 feet; the children’s pool 90 feet by 50 feet, and a babies’ pool, of elliptical shape, 31 feet by 28 feet. There are 48 men’s boxes, 127 ladies boxes, a tea room, lounge, laundry and offices. Provision for medical baths include hot sea water, shower, slipper, needle, seaweed, sulphur, alkaline, and Russian (steam) baths.”



By 1954, a few changes are obvious – the tide is in and the bathing boxes seem to have gone, but structurally the site is the same. The shot was taken in September, possibly accounting for the fact that the baths aren’t as busy! Certainly at this time, the facilities were used extensively by local swimming clubs and many local children – even still – remember learning to swim in the Baths.

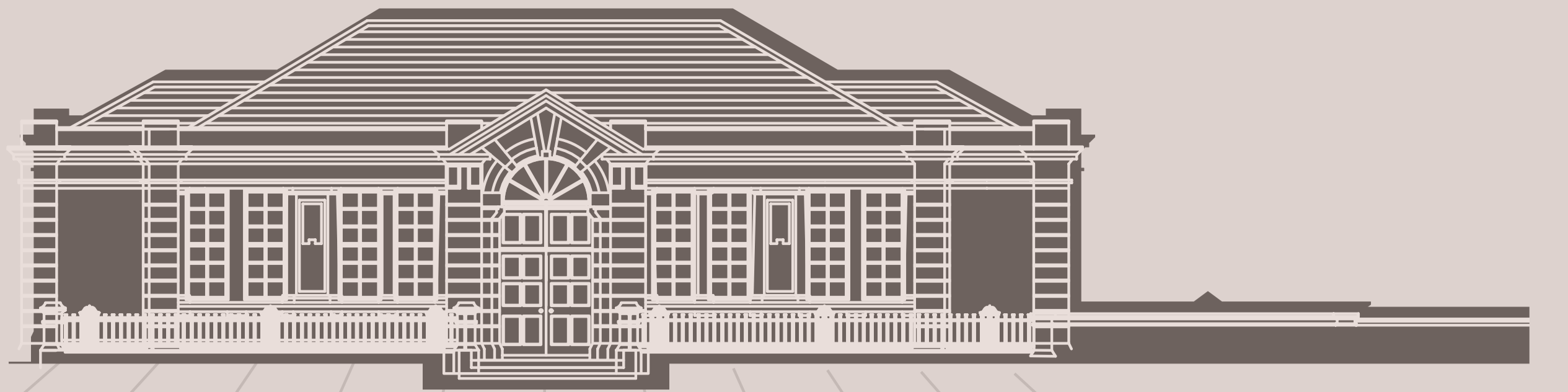


In 1984, a year before the Rainbow Rapids opened, the chimney is still in place but by this time the popularity of open-air Baths was declining – frequently attributed to the provision of indoor swimming facilities by the local authorities. The first of these in this county was The Blue Pool in Monkstown, which opened in 1974. From the 1970s on, the increased availability of foreign holidays at affordable prices is another factor given to account for the reduced use of Bath and Lido facilities throughout the UK and Ireland.

THE DÚN LAOGHAIRE BATHS

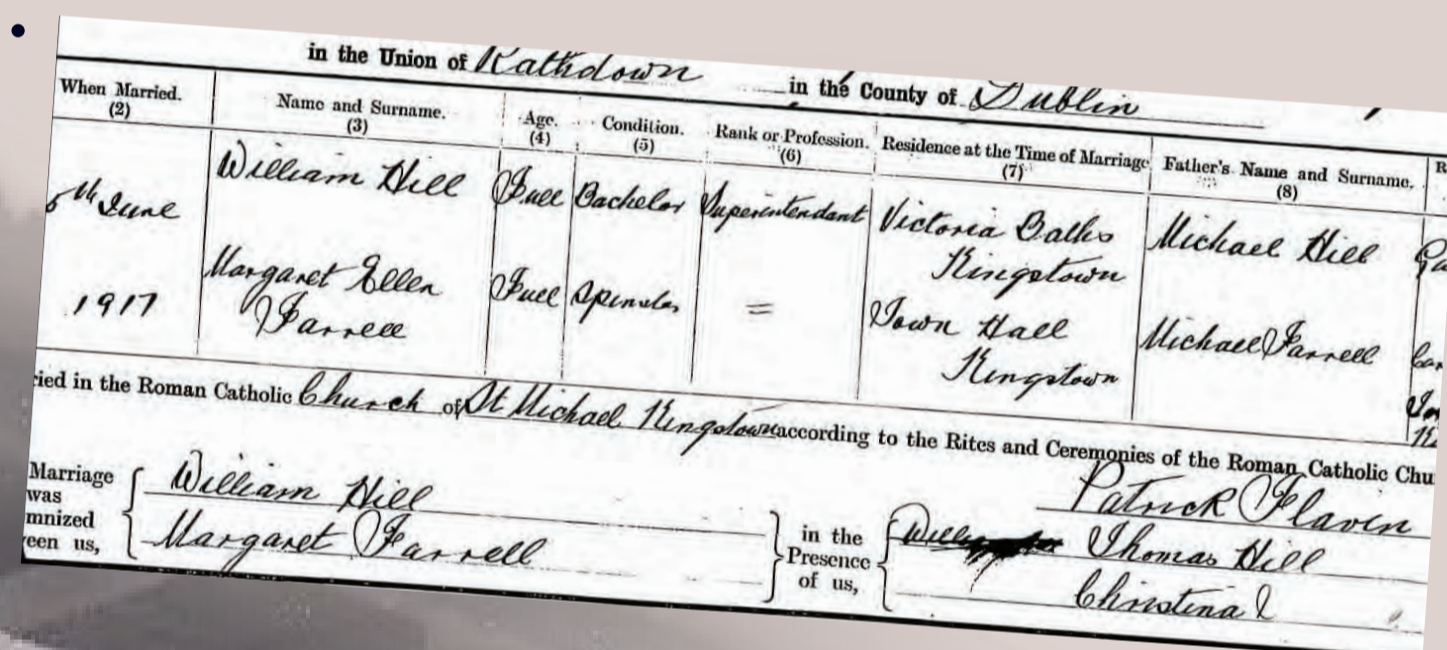
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A FABULOUS PLACE TO LIVE!



In later years most people, even those working in the Baths, were unaware that for much of the 20th century, the building was also a family home. The Council had added living quarters to the building by 1911 and the Superintendent lived onsite. This was home to the Hill family for 41 years.

William Hill, a Glasthule man, was promoted from the position of Water Inspector to Superintendent in May 1917. At the time of his appointment, his salary was £350 per annum. Just a month later he married Margaret Farrell, whose mother was the caretaker of the Town Hall. Their five children, four of whom survived to adulthood, were all born in the Baths and it remained the family home until William's retirement. Anna, William's daughter, remembers the living quarters as being comfortable but cramped. William oversaw the division of the Sitting Room, to provide a second bedroom. In fact, in 1948, William suggested that the Council purchase a property which had become available on Windsor Terrace to provide additional accommodation for his active young family, but his request was turned down.



Marriage Certificate

Anna remembers a very happy childhood in the Baths. In spite of its size, the home was comfortable with no shortage of scalding hot water. All of the children learned to swim before they were ten and took the opportunity to fit in bathing as part of their day – later, as a young woman working in Glenageary, Anna cycled home at lunchtime for a quick dip, grabbing a sandwich on the bike ride back to work. Although Mr. Gillespie came out from Dublin to teach swimming, Anna and her siblings were self-taught, and their father was strict with them when it came to learning about water safety.

The children regarded their father's staff in the Baths as a second family and Anna remembers the staff feeling the same way about them. During the season, they enjoyed helping the maintenance staff hosing down the pools and surrounding areas, probably playing more than helping. Even on wet days, the office staff helped to look after them – they learned knitting in the Superintendent's office. People like Fran, Tom Jennings and Christy Carroll returned to Baths every season, as did Mr. Fox – always referred to as Mister – who was in charge of the boiler. The staff were also on hand to help the children at times of trouble. Anna remembers her brother, Michael, falling when swinging on the railings close to the pier and being picked up and brought home by the man who was putting up the flags along Crofton Road. At times, being the Superintendent's children had its downside – “busybodies” reported Anna and her younger sister Carrie to their father for squabbling on their way to school!



William Hill

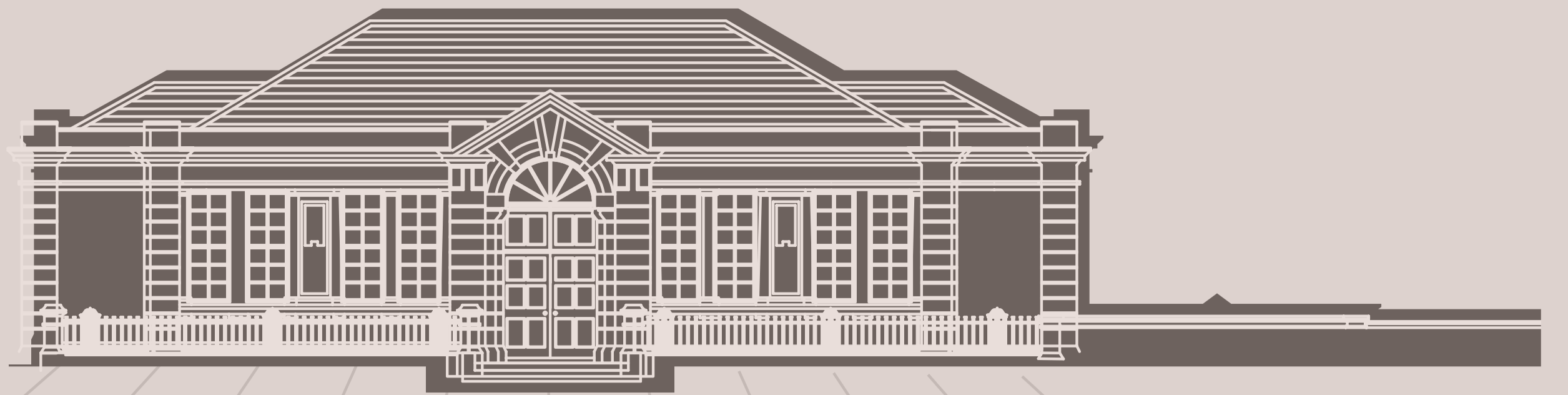


Anna and Carrie Hill with a life ring



Anna Hill

A FABULOUS PLACE TO LIVE!



William Hill, according to his daughter, “lived Dún Laoghaire” and was actively involved with local people and the life in the town. In addition to managing the three Baths (Dún Laoghaire, Blackrock and Sandycove), his duties expanded to being responsible for the People’s Parks in Dún Laoghaire and Blackrock and open spaces such as Killiney Hill. His daughter remembers the fountain in Dún Laoghaire being his pride and joy. He had his own van and used it to keep in touch with additional members of staff such as the seasonal Lifeguards on Killiney Beach. During World War II, William was responsible for his own Fire Troop, The Decontamination Squad – known in the family as *The Moppers Up* – who met weekly in the Waiting Room in the Baths. At that time, the Tea Rooms in the People’s Park was used as an Air Raid shelter, appropriately close to the site of the bombing in Sandycove on 20th December 1940. Anna is sure that Walter Hill would have stayed in the Baths

all his life, but he was eventually persuaded by friends to take time to enjoy his pension, and retired in 1958, at the age of 72. He continued to live locally until his death in June 1968.

dlr County Council is very grateful to Anna, Louise and Sarah Murray, and David O’Hanrahan, for sharing their memories and images of their Father and Grandfather – William Hill (1886-1968).



Anna Murray in back yard of Baths



*Courtesy the Hill family,
Restoration by Joe St. Leger*

THE DÚN LAOGHAIRE BATHS

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PLANS AND PROTESTS



The Baths were very popular with locals, even though they were expensive to operate. While never intended as a profitable venture, records going back as far as 1908 show that they rarely, if ever, broke even. However, from the 1970s on the Baths' fortunes were in decline. The rise of indoor heated swimming facilities, combined with the increased availability of affordable sun holidays, led to an inevitable fall of numbers. Dún Laoghaire was no exception – this was common to coastal bathing sites throughout Ireland and further afield. Monkstown's Blue Pool opened in 1974, and from then, staff resources were shared between the Baths and the swimming pool. That year, the costs of operating the baths and bathing places were £113,000 while income was only £13,000.

In 1982, TV news covered the threat of summer closure in the face of public opposition and while operations continued, the finances were unsustainable. The opening of The Rainbow Rapids in the mid-1980s saw a resurgence in the popularity of the Baths but this wasn't enough to keep them open. There was opposition at the time, but the Baths finally closed to the public in 1997.

Following the closure and over intervening years numerous plans were put forward for their redevelopment in various forms, including private/public partnerships. From the outset, local feelings ran high and by 2001, a heritage and renewal group formed with the aim of restoring the Baths and keeping the site in public ownership. This group grew into SOS – Save Our Seafront, still active today.

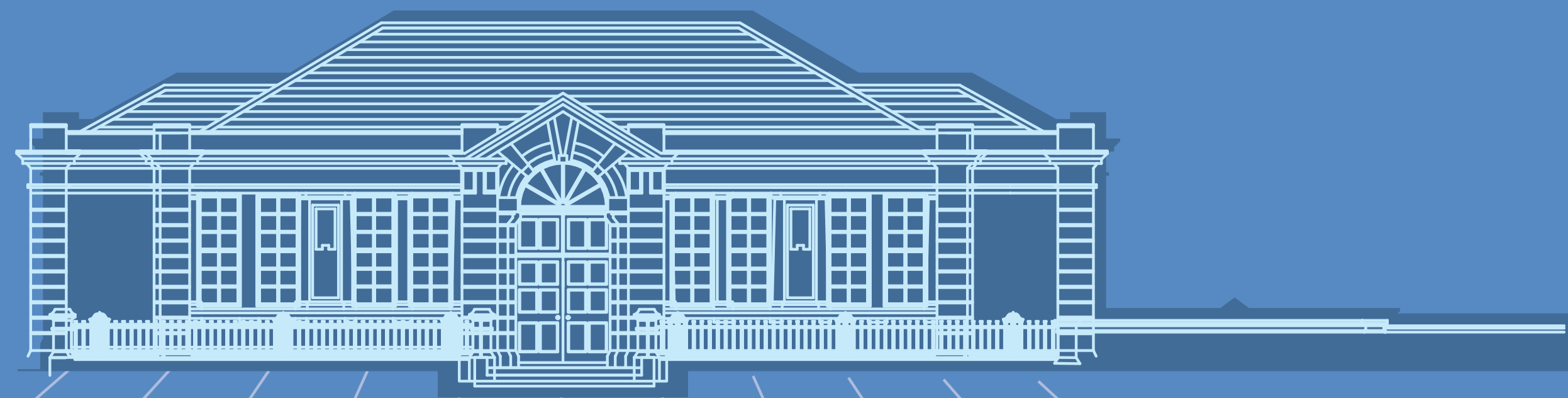


In 2005, the Council introduced a controversial €140 million proposal, involving part-privatisation with an over eight-storey complex comprising residential, with shops, restaurants and maritime leisure facilities. This spurred various interested focus groups into action with a number of protests arranged that summer. These culminated, on 18th September in an exceptionally large protest – with up to 4,000 attending. Local residents were joined by larger groups and speakers included representatives from SOS, An Taisce and political parties. A march past the Baths, was followed by a concert in Newtownsmith with musicians including Christy Moore, Ronnie Drew and Mike Hanrahan. In the face of overwhelming popular pressure, the proposal dropped, until the current redevelopment plans were unveiled in 2016.



Photo Bryan O'Bryan. Courtesy of The Irish Times

Photo Peter Cavanagh Photography



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