

# CELEBRATING THE 125th ANNIVERSARY OF WESTBURY POOL

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**A NEWSPAPER report on the opening of Westbury Baths in 1888 commented on the "scene of enthusiasm scarcely if ever equalled in the annals of... Westbury."**

And ever since, the people of Westbury have continued to be passionate about their pool, appreciating its significance as one of the oldest working public pools in Britain.

The pool was built by W.H. Laverton, who owned the adjacent Angel Mill. The foundation stone was laid on 11 May 1887, in the year of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. It opened on 24th May 1888.

Today, the pool is still appreciated as a valuable facility for the town. Open seven days a week, it is popular with residents thanks to its friendly feel and town centre location. It is also the home of Westbury Amateur Swimming Club, a thriving club which welcomes children aged four and over, which has a 'real tie with our own pool and all its history'.

**As the pool celebrates its 125th anniversary this year, explore its fascinating history with our special pull-out feature, and join in the celebratory events and exhibition on the 7th-8th September. Or, better still, take a trip to the pool, and dive in!**

## Join in the celebrations

Continued from front page on offer to members of the public visiting the exhibition at Laverton Hall.

Visitors to the town will also be able to park for free in all Westbury car parks during the weekend (Warminster Road, High Street and opposite the Laverton Hall).

Westbury Council's cabinet member for leisure, Cllr Jonathan Seed said, "We are delighted to be commemorating the 125 years of Westbury Swimming Pool by offering a penny a dip sessions. People will be able to park for free over the celebration weekend and visit the pool and the exhibition at Laverton Hall to enjoy this wonderful and historic community facility."

A photo shoot and cake cutting ceremony will take place on the Saturday afternoon with invited guests.

The celebrations are being organised by Westbury Council, DC Leisure, Westbury Town Council and the Westbury Amateur Swimming Club. Some swim activities require booking and there is limited availability. Contact Westbury Swimming Pool for more information on 01373 822891 or visit www.westburypool.co.uk

**Pictured: the pool today.**

## Swim sessions on celebration weekend

SWIM at Westbury Pool over the celebratory weekend, with sessions costing just one penny each - the sun swimmers paid when the pool opened in 1888.

Some activities have limited availability, and require booking; for more information on swim sessions contact the pool on 01373 822 891.

**SATURDAY 7 SEPTEMBER**  
 9am-12noon: Swimming Academy  
 12noon - 1pm: Aqua Fit (free taster session)  
 1.05pm - 2pm: Adult swimming  
 2pm - 5pm: All welcome

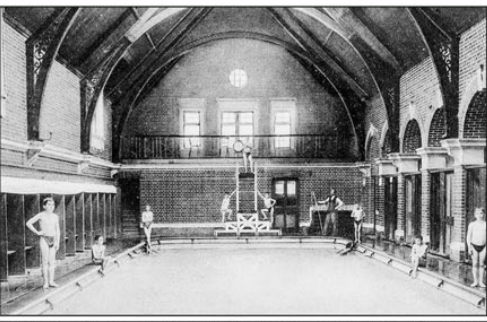
**SUNDAY 8 SEPTEMBER**  
 8:30am to 10am: Adult swimming  
 10am - 11:55am: Family swim  
 12noon - 3pm: All welcome  
 3pm - 5pm: Fun session

## WESTBURY POOL OVER 125 YEARS

• The swimming baths used to be the public used for the air raid wardens.  
 • The centenary of the pool was celebrated in 1988 with a contest of competitors in Victorian costume, including swimming outfits. A cheese and wine party was held, which was attended by Mr George Laverton, grandson of W.H. Laverton.

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• The foundation stone was laid in 1887 with the opening on 24th May 1888. According to a local newspaper report, Mrs Laverton "graciously performed the opening ceremony amid a scene of enthusiasm scarcely if ever equalled in the annals of the ancient borough of Westbury."  
 • The pool was supplied with water from local Bitham Springs. It was open for swimming between April and September. In the winter the pool was drained and covered and used for athletics and dancing. When first opened it cost 1d for



## EVENTS TO CELEBRATE THE ANNIVERSARY

• A public exhibition to commemorate the history of the swimming pool will be held in Laverton Hall from 2nd September to 8th September from 9.30am to 4.30pm.

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## 'Every visit was full of fun' - the pool in the 40s & 50s

The introduction of mixed bathing at Westbury Pool created quite a stir, as local swimmer Tony Hamford recalls. Tony has been using the pool regularly for 60 years, and shares his memories of a young person using the pool in the 1940s and 1950s.

"I was playing water polo for Westbury 1st and 2nd teams and also for the senior polo team before leaving school. The morning after my first game for Westbury the Headmaster called for myself and another pupil (Pat Ford) who had also played that evening to come up in front of the whole school where he congratulated us on our achievement. That was one of the proudest moments of my life."

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W.H. Laverton



Above: the commemorative stone is installed

## Gas lighting and an unlimited supply of hot and cold water

WHAT would the first swimmers to Westbury Pool have seen, when the baths were opened in 1888?

The *Wiltshire Times* report describes the "handsome" buildings of Mr Laverton's "magnificent gift".

The report states, "Dealing with the details of construction, we may say that the walls are of Westbury red brick with Bath stone dressings. The roofs are covered with Westbury red tiles, the top of the facade appear the words carved on stone 'Victoria Regina' and a medallion bust of Her Majesty, beneath being the inscription 'Public Baths, 1887'."

"Shields to the right and left of the first floor windows bear the Westbury Arms, and the Laverton Arms. On the ground floor there is a ticket office placed in the centre of the building with the main entrance to men's private baths and the swimming bath on the one side, and the entrance to women's

department on the other. The chief feature of the internal arrangements is of course the swimming bath. In addition to this bath, which is 68 feet long by 23 feet wide, there are two first class and four second class, private slipper baths for men and four for women, with waiting rooms, etc., all of which are also fitted with gas lighting in the evenings. "An unlimited supply of hot and cold water is available, the arrangements in this respect being most complete. The heating of the corridor and waiting rooms is by hot water, and the building contains all necessary accommodation, including laundry and drying chamber and several rooms for the use of the superintendant."

"Electric bells are fitted throughout, and the lighting is by gas jets."



Pictured above: Westbury water polo team, 1989

## The Angel

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## Did you know?

• Queen Victoria's portrait in Bas-relief sits above the date of her jubilee on the front of the building in Church Street.  
 • The pool is 20 metres long, with the depth ranging from 0.9 to 1.7 metres.  
 • The pool is a grade II listed building, which means it is one deemed to be "nationally important and of special interest."  
 • The pool has a resident ghost nicknamed George!

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**Congratulations to Westbury Swimming Pool on reaching 125 years old!**  
**Here's hoping for another 125 years!**