



From Lake to Lido. Top: The original Bathing Lake 1911, Loobey Collection. Bottom: Tooting Bec Lido today, Sue Cutler

Tooting Bec Lido Heritage Conservation and Interpretation Plan: Summary

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November 2015



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Introduction



View from the deep end, Alex McFadyen

“At 100 yards long and 33 yards wide it contains one million gallons of water.”

Background and purpose of the plan

Wandsworth Council has won initial funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund for a project to explore the cultural and natural heritage of Tooting Common. The project – called the Tooting Common Heritage Project – involves restoring biodiversity and habitats, unravelling hidden history, conserving and restoring heritage features, teaching people about the Common’s rich past and biodiversity and providing volunteering opportunities that will help people gain skills they can use in the future.

Tooting Bec Lido is a notable and popular historic leisure feature on the Common. The bathing lake originated as, and remains, the largest freshwater open-air pool in England and one of the largest in Europe. At 100 yards long and 33 yards wide it contains one million gallons of water. It is believed to be the earliest purpose-built pool in a London green open space and, by virtue of its position and eclectic design, makes an important contribution to the local area.

This Heritage Conservation and Interpretation Plan has been developed by the South London Swimming Club to guide the conservation and interpretation of Tooting Bec Lido and its heritage for the enjoyment of future generations. It outlines how the historical, architectural and social heritage of the Lido will be made more understandable and accessible to visitors of all ages and it will be implemented in tandem with the Lido Improvement Project.



Fountain and café, late 1980s, Jonathan Buckley

Why is Tooting Bec Lido significant?

“The Lido has remained open all year round since it opened in 1906, including during both World Wars.”



Fountain and new entrance, Carl Reynolds and Kate Webb

Historical value

Tooting Bec Lido is one of the oldest lidos still in operation in the United Kingdom. As such, it is an early example of the growing importance of leisure and more informal approaches towards it, and has remained open all year round since it was built in 1906, including during both World Wars.

Aesthetic value

The Lido is an interesting example of the architecture of leisure and reflects social and architectural developments in 20th century Britain. The original Bathing Lake has been developed over the years, reflecting changing styles of lido design.

The 1906 entrance follows the Arts and Crafts design principles of graceful curves and high-quality materials and craftsmanship. The pump house, added in 1931, is in the simple utilitarian style of its time, while the café and fountain, added in 1936, are Art Deco, the style most associated with lidos of the era. The brightly coloured cubicles, reminiscent of beach huts, lend a seaside air to this urban beach, while the curves and rendered form of the new entrance at the shallow end, built in 2002, echo classic lido designs of the previous century.



Diving boards and original entrance, 1910, SLSC collection

“The partnership between the SLSC and the Lido has offered a blue print for creating and sustaining a valuable community facility.”

Technical value

The pump house contains the water filtration, aeration and sterilisation plant, installed in 1931 and still in use today, purifying the one million gallons of lido water. The plant was installed by Royles Engineering Ltd of Irlam, Manchester, whose chairman Oliver Matthews Row had patented the system of swimming pool water purification by aeration and filtration in 1910. His system was used throughout the world for many years after his death in 1926. The aerator or fountain at the Lido's shallow end is a vital element of this system and a distinctive feature of lidos of this era.

Communal value

Tooting Bec Lido is highly valued in the local community as a safe and stimulating environment in which children and adults can play, socialise, keep fit, relax, learn new skills, have fun and gain a sense of physical and emotional well-being.

It evokes fond memories and a sense of belonging to a community and place, whether through occasional visits, attending events or joining the South London Swimming Club or other clubs that have come and gone over the past century.

The Lido has been the headquarters of the South London Swimming Club since it opened in 1906. Club members make use of the pool all year round. There is a tradition of competitive but inclusive swimming, with handicapped races every week of the year. The Club's Christmas Day races and persistence in the face of ice and snow are often publicised, but it is the normality of the members swimming every day in cold water that the South London Swimming Club has fought so persistently over the years to retain.



Cyril Wood wins the Burton Cup, Christmas Day 1951, SLSC collection



The SLSC UK Cold Water Swimming Championships 2013, Kieran Doherty. Dive-in Movies poster, 2006, Susan Rentoul

The history of Tooting Bec Lido

“Nearly 400 men were paid 7d an hour.”

Tooting Bec Open Air Bathing Lake opened on 28 July 1906. The brainchild of the Reverend John Hendry Anderson, Rector of Tooting and Chairman of the Works Committee of the Central Unemployment Body for London, and former Mayor of Wandsworth, it was an early example of a work creation scheme.

Nearly 400 men were paid 7d an hour, a penny more than London County Council's standard rate because the work was considered more physically demanding than usual.

The work took four months from March to July 1906. The Lake was dug by hand using picks and shovels and the soil was shifted by wheelbarrow to the surrounding embankment, which hid the Lake from the Common. To seal the Lake's floor, Portland cement was laid on bitumous sheeting, while the sides were concreted using timber form work. Stone flagging was then used for the Lake's surround.



The opening ceremony, 28 July 1906,
London Metropolitan Archives



Building Tooting Bathing Lake, spring 1906, Wandsworth Heritage Service



Paddling pool, Alex McFadyen

“In 1931, the filtration system was installed to keep the water clean – it is still in use today.”

Initially a rudimentary bathing lake, with simple changing shelters on the eastern (railway) side, it became a lido in the 1930s, the golden era of lidos. In 1931, the filtration system was installed to keep the water clean – it is still in use today. In 1936 the café opened and, with the advent of mixed bathing, changing cubicles with doors were added. Toilets and shower blocks were also installed.

Originally painted green, the cubicle doors acquired their current bright colour scheme in 1981. Since then, the brightly painted doors have become the most recognisable feature of the Lido.

A paddling pool was built in 1999, and in 2002 a new entrance and shower and toilet blocks were added at the shallow end of the pool, the opposite end to the original entrance, in part to conform with health and safety regulations. Moving the entrance from the deep end and siting the paddling pool away from the main pool have made the Lido a more attractive and safer place for children and families.

In 2007 an extensive refurbishment scheme included the relining of the pool tank, renewal of the water filtration drainage system and a complete facelift for the pool surrounds.



Opening of the new shallow-end entrance, May 2002, Wandsworth Council



The Burton Cup, 1960s, SLSC collection

“The oldest prize is the Christmas Day trophy, the Burton Cup, donated to the Club in 1908.”

The South London Swimming Club

The history of Tooting Bec Lido is shared by the South London Swimming Club, which was formed within weeks of the Bathing Lake's opening. In August 1906 the Club sought permission from the London County Council to use the new Lake as its headquarters and it has played an active role in the life of the Lido ever since.

The Club's formal objectives were “to provide tuition in swimming and diving, to promote classes for teaching lifesaving and diving and to encourage healthy exercise and social intercourse”. The Club organised weekly races from the start. The oldest prize is the Christmas Day trophy, the Burton Cup, donated to the Club in 1908 and hotly competed for to this day.

During the 1980s, when most of the lidos in London closed, Tooting Bec Lido survived, thanks to the determination of the South London Swimming Club. The Club went on to take over the running of the pool through the winter months in the 1990s.

The mid-1990s saw a noticeable increase in the popularity of open-water swimming and triathlons. With far fewer lidos to meet demand, the South London Swimming Club began to explore ways to encourage these trends. Proposals for the first significant development since the 1930s resulted in the construction of the paddling pool in 1999, followed three years later by the new entrance that opens onto the wide shallow-end terrace.

In 2006 the SLSC celebrated its centenary – and the Lido's – with a series of events aimed at promoting the pool as a perfect venue for community recreation. Over the years, the partnership between the SLSC and the Lido has offered a blue print for creating and sustaining a valuable community facility.



The Burton Cup and Jenny Kinnaird Trophy, 2011, SLSC collection

Consultation

Key findings of the Tooting Common Household Survey, 2015.

- The area where the Lido is situated is the most frequently used area of the Common.
- A third of the 749 respondents use the Lido.
- The Lido is the highest rated heritage feature on Tooting Common.

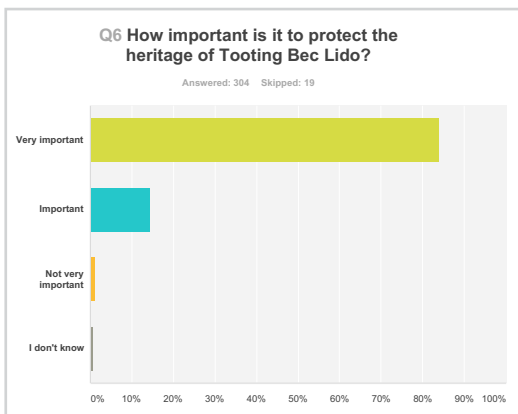
The centenary celebrations of 2006 prompted the South London Swimming Club to consider the next 100 years and what the Lido might mean to future generations. Part of the process was an Open Forum in May 2011, followed by a survey and a Paint the Future event, when Club members painted, drew or wrote down their visions of how the Lido might look in one, ten and 100 years' time.

Many members suggested improving the Lido's facilities, so the South London Swimming Club instigated the Lido Improvement Project to redevelop the run-down original entrance at the deep end of the pool and build a Lido Pavilion.

The Club's Paint the Future event also highlighted the value that members place on the continuity of the Lido's heritage – in particular, the way that the history of the people who use the Lido is helping to shape its future.

As part of an ongoing commitment to ensure that Lido stakeholders are involved in the development of the Lido Improvement Project and can contribute to the restoration and conservation of heritage features, the South London Swimming Club consulted its members, the wider Lido community, Tooting Common Management Advisory Committee and Friends of Tooting Common through surveys, public presentations, exhibition boards and communications.

These consultations have informed the proposals for the Heritage Project and the continuing consultation and evaluation will inform the delivery of the Heritage Conservation and Interpretation Plan.



Vision of the future Lido, Miranda Payne



"The Lido is the highest rated heritage feature on Tooting Common."

The Lido Improvement Project and Heritage Project



View of the proposed new pavilion from the pool, David Gibson Architects

“Improve long-term sustainability of the Lido while promoting its seaside charm.”



View of the proposed new pavilion from the Common, David Gibson Architects

The Lido Improvement Project

Aims and objectives

- Improve long-term sustainability of the Lido while promoting its seaside charm.
- Provide an indoor space for Lido users and enhance opportunities for events.
- Provide much needed facilities for Lido staff.
- Increase the potential for out-of-season and off-peak activity at the Lido.
- Increase capacity to maximise revenue in summer.

The South London Swimming Club has initiated the Lido Improvement Project, of which the Heritage Project is an integral part. Funds have been secured in the form of a grant from Sport England for a new Lido Pavilion to be constructed at the southern end of the site.

The Lido Pavilion's sports hall will allow for better provision of a variety of sporting activities at the Lido for Club members and the wider community. As well as being a venue for fitness and sports classes, it will serve as a meeting hall for organisations based around Tooting Bec Common and as a headquarters for the South London Swimming Club, where it can hold events, meetings and activities. The building will also include much needed facilities for lifeguards and other site staff.

This will help ensure the future of Tooting Bec Lido, making it even more attractive, both for swimmers and the wider community, and will strengthen the South London Swimming Club's position at the heart of Lido life.



Jack Snelling creating a plunge hole in the ice, 1970s, SLSC collection

The Heritage Project

Aims and objectives

- Conservation of the historical records of Tooting Bec Lido and its users, with improved accessibility.
- Repair and conservation of poolside buildings and their interpretation.

To complement the Lido Improvement Project, the Heritage Project will ensure that the Lido's structures and landscaped areas are conserved to an equally high standard as the new Lido Pavilion, so that the history of the Lido's development and the historical context within which the new facility will operate, are fully understood by Lido and Common users, and the wider local community.

In addition, the natural environment surrounding the pool is to be maintained. A full biodiversity survey and ecological assessment have been undertaken to ensure the natural environment is preserved.

Carrying out the heritage construction work as a continuation of the Lido Pavilion project presents opportunities for cost savings. At the same time, the momentum created by the Lido Improvement Project will build enthusiasm among volunteers and contributors to the Heritage Project.

“Conservation of the historical records of Tooting Bec Lido and its users, with improved accessibility.”



Bob Fitch, Don Roshar, Jack Coppin, Bill Goodfellow, Bill Bedwell and Harold Judd in front of the fountain, 1946, Doreen Fitch Collection

Heritage conservation and interpretation – visions and plans



The old entrance today, Susan Rentoul

The original entrance arches

Background

The original entrance at the deep end, built at the same time as the Lake, consisted of a triple arch with curved retaining walls that allowed the entrance to pass through the mound separating the Lido from the Common. In the 1930s this structure was badly compromised by the addition of toilet blocks on both sides, which were insensitively sliced into the outer piers of the arches and the retaining walls.

The building of the new entrance at the opposite end of the pool in 2002, which includes toilet and shower blocks, means that these old entrance buildings, which are cramped and not suitable for modern use, are now in a sad state of repair. They are due to be demolished to make way for the new Lido



Original entrance viewed from the Common © Ron Elam, tel: 020 8874 8544



First dive, opening ceremony, 28 July 1906
© Ron Elam, tel: 020 8874 8544

*“A fitting location
to commemorate
the Reverend John
Hendry Anderson.”*



Reverend JH Anderson, Wandsworth Museum

Pavilion. However, consultation with stakeholders showed an interest in preserving the arches, and the design and conservation officer recommended reconstructing them in a new location. This suggestion was included in the planning application and is a condition of planning approval.

Consultation with stakeholders has also shown that there is an interest in the origins of the Lido and its evolution over the years and that access to information about this is desirable.

Vision

To reconstruct the entrance arches on the central axis of the pool. The three arches will then form the outer wall of the new deep-end sunbathing terrace. The infill panels of the reconstructed arches will make a fitting location to commemorate the Reverend John Hendry Anderson, who proposed the building of the pool in 1906. Interpretation panels about how the Bathing Lake was built will also be placed on the panels.

Plan

The demolition of the general brickwork of the arches and the adjacent toilet blocks will be carried out in such a way that enough original bricks are salvaged to rebuild the arches in a new location. The reconstructed arches will be in-filled with contrasting brick or render. The interpretation panels will occupy both sides of the in-filled arches so that the public can see them on the Common side without having to enter the Lido.



The proposed new pavilion and arches viewed from the Common,
David Gibson Architects



The SLSC logo is based on the distinctive coloured doors and the stunning blue pool

The changing cubicles

Background

The eastern and western sides of the pool are lined with wooden changing cubicles, whose brightly painted doors perhaps define most clearly the ambience of the Lido. The cubicles remain in full and enthusiastic use by swimmers and are the iconic symbol of Tooting Bec Lido.

In 2006 the South London Swimming Club redesigned its logo to celebrate its joint centenary with the Lido. The new design incorporated the four colours of the iconic doors, symbolising the inextricable link between the Club and the Lido.

As a result of interventions over the years, the changing cubicles lack continuity and symmetry. Some have been removed and the remainder are interspersed with old shower and toilet blocks, now used as stores or cramped shelters for lifeguards. The western line of cubicles is broken by an open paved area and the eastern side by a covered area that offers a place to sit in inclement weather and is the site of panels illustrating the history of the Lido.



Cubicle doors, Lauren Sheer



Disused enclosures, Susan Rentoul

Vision

To improve the visual impact and symmetry of the changing cubicles as a way of increasing the facilities available to Lido users.

Plan

By demolishing disused enclosures and rationalising the rows of cubicles, it will be possible to have more changing accommodation, including family and disabled facilities, without losing any sunbathing space. With the restoration of the existing cubicles and new additions, the visual impact of the cubicles will be significantly improved.



World Winter Swimming Championships 2008, Viv Yankeh

“It will be possible to have more changing accommodation, including family and disabled facilities, without losing any sunbathing space.”



Lido benches, SLSC collection

“... a tangible way to remember fellow Lido users and their stories.”

Extension of the western terrace and the commemoration wall

Background

The long association between the South London Swimming Club and Tooting Bec Lido gains vivid expression through the longevity of many of its members.

The Club holds races throughout the year and has many trophies donated by past and present members. There are now nearly 100 trophies that are competed for at the weekly races when stories of their provenance are told, giving younger members a chance to learn about the history of the South London Swimming Club and Tooting Bec Lido. The stories provide a connection between the past and the present through association with people and events.

The open area on the western side of the Lido gives the most shelter from cold easterly or northerly winds, a feature of bright days in winter. This is already a popular place to congregate on sunny mornings. A number of benches dedicated to the memory of past Lido enthusiasts have been placed here.

Members have donated other items, such as the sundial on the café, the outside shower and the pump room clock.



Commemorative wall, Postman's Park, City of London



Tiles, Postman's Park, City of London



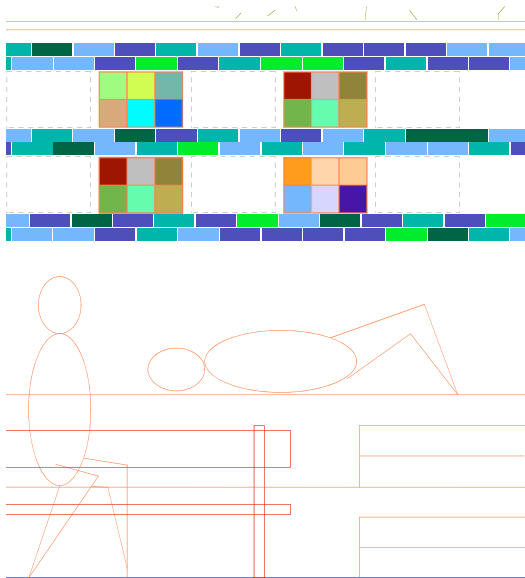
Hand painted tiles

Vision

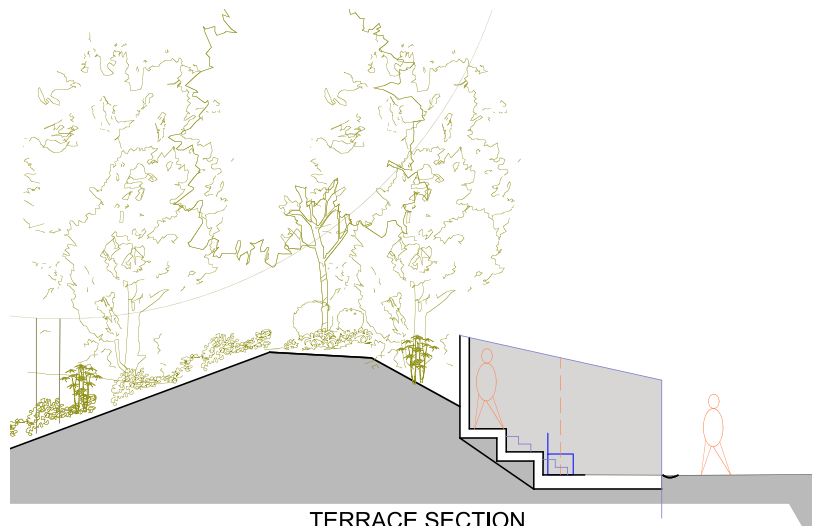
To honour the increasing numbers of past members in a sustainable way. A commemoration wall, on which plaques could be placed, would provide a tangible way to remember fellow lido users and their stories. The plaques would create a collective memory or experience for those who value the Lido.

Plan

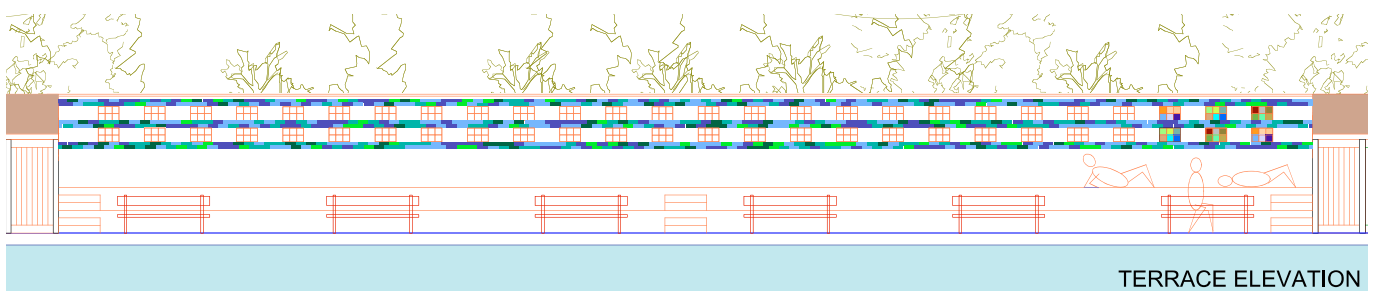
To the rear of the western cubicles, there is a wooded mound that screens the Lido from the Common. By cutting into part of this mound and creating stepped decks, the sheltered sunbathing space will be extended. At the same time, the unattractive breeze block wall will be replaced with a new rendered wall where ceramic plaques commemorating past, present and future SLSC members and Lido enthusiasts can be placed to honour the memory of those who have been important in the Lido community.



TERRACE DETAIL ELEVATION



TERRACE SECTION



TERRACE ELEVATION



The pump room

In the 1930s the water treatment building was erected at the south end of the pool. This is a utilitarian rectangular block and, at approximately five metres high, it remains the tallest building on the site. The foundations of the plant house have recently been repaired to help secure the structure.

The pump house contains the original water filter equipment, installed in 1931, which still works well and is rapidly becoming historic. It is possibly one of the oldest pool water purification plants in full-time operation.

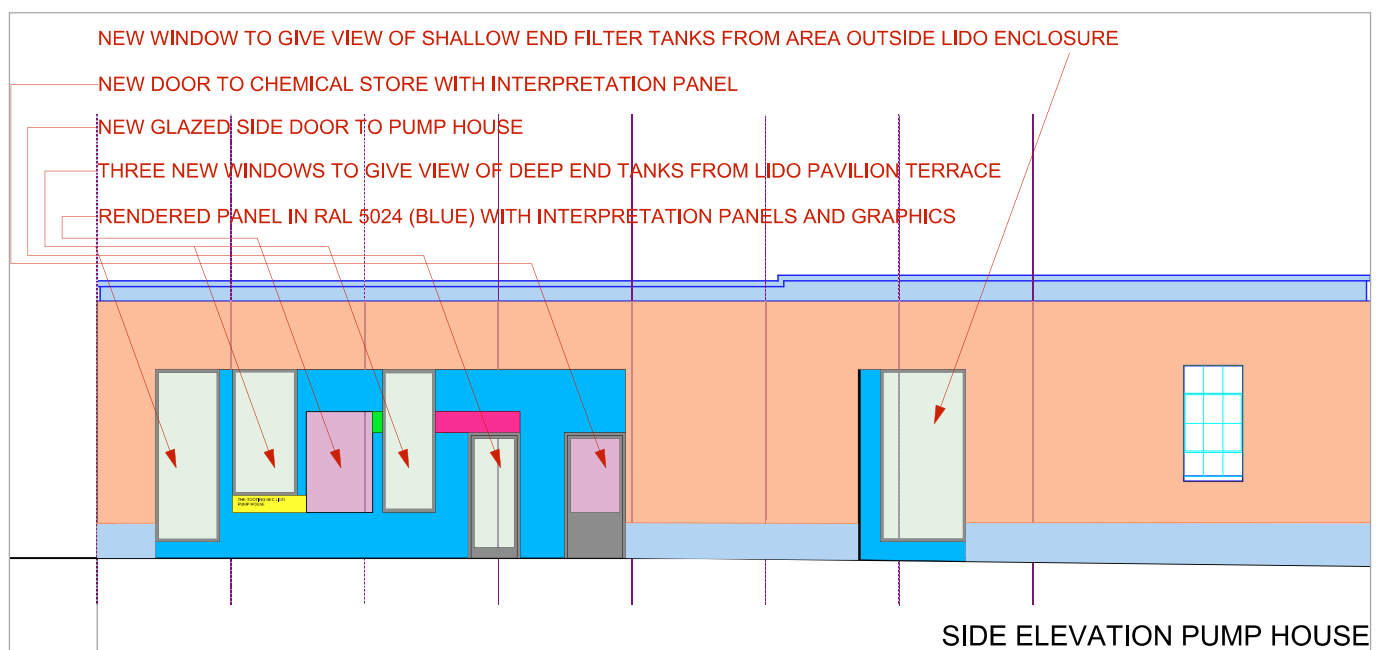


Original pumps and filters, Margy Sullivan

Vision

To create views into the plant room, allowing the machinery that provides clean water to be seen and appreciated, with an explanation of the science and history of water filtration.

“The pump house contains the original water filter equipment, installed in 1931, which still works well and is rapidly becoming historic.”





Royles Limited advertisement, gracesguide.co.uk



Royles Limited advertisement, gracesguide.co.uk

Plan

To cut glazed viewing panels into the pump room wall facing the new southern sunbathing terrace, exposing views of the magnificent pumps.

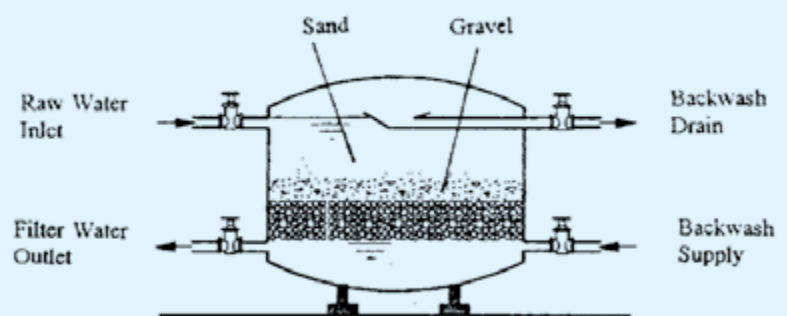
Interpretation panels explaining the science of the water purification process and the history of the pressure sand filters will help Lido users understand how the water in the pool stays sparkling and clean.

Text for interpretation panels on pump room

How the Lido water stays clean

Text and graphics will explain:

- The water purification process.
- How filtration and aeration work.
- The function of the rapid sand filters, the pumps and the fountain.
- The history of water filtration and purification.
- The history of Royles Ltd, the Row Patent and Permutit Ltd.



Improved cycle parking

Large numbers of Lido users arrive by bike, so further public cycle parking is planned at the main entrance, along with a new cycle parking area near the deep-end entrance used by SLSC members in the winter.



Building works, local paper, 22 September 1933



Swimming lesson, local paper, 28 April 1933

Archiving

Background

Many lidos have been closed down, filled in and demolished over the past 25 years. They are rarely replaced. The survival of Tooting Bec Lido is largely due to the energetic efforts and commitment of South London Swimming Club members. The SLSC has a rich oral history, which is at critical risk of being lost as Club members become older. Historical material is scattered among past and present members, stored in attics and forgotten.

Vision

To establish a heritage archive celebrating the 100-year-plus history of the Club, the Lido and the associated communities. This will help to create a sustainable base for the continued existence of the SLSC, which is the best guarantee for the future survival of the Lido.

The aim is to:

- Value and protect the cultural assets of Tooting Bec Lido and the South London Swimming Club and be a steward of the future as well as the past.
- Acknowledge the legacy of previous generations and give future Lido users a treasured inheritance of collections, information and knowledge.
- Manage collections well, so that they will be an asset that is valued by future generations, not a burden.
- Focus on quality and not be seduced by quantity.



Gymnastic display at Tooting Bec Lido on the cover of *Health and Strength* magazine, November 1949, SLSC collection



SLSC member Maurice Connor covers his modesty for a photo shoot for an insurance company, 1970s, SLSC collection

“The aim is to deposit the archive with Wandsworth Heritage Service for safe-keeping and to make it accessible to more people.”

Plan

To sort and catalogue the current SLSC archive, digitising the material and depositing it with the Wandsworth Heritage Service for safe-keeping and to make it accessible to more people.

To do this we have set up a voluntary history group and aim to offer training and guidance in archive methods, the appraisal process (cataloguing) and the digitising of material in preparation for uploading to a dedicated history website.

The existing archive covers the Club's history from the beginning and includes photographs, scrap books, minute books, newspaper and magazine articles, and audio and video recordings, as well as artefacts such as trophies and medals. It is not, however, continuous, and to fill the many gaps in our knowledge of Tooting Bec Lido and the SLSC, we aim to continue adding to the archive through public appeals and promotion and to research for missing information.

In collecting archive material we would be mindful of our target audiences: club members, past and present; local residents; local, architectural, social, family and leisure historians; lido enthusiasts; students of history and urban space; and journalists interested in swimming and the history of leisure.



Derek Eames emerges from a hole cut into the ice on the frozen pool, 1970s, SLSC collection



The Burton Cup and medal winners, 1930s, SLSC collection

“To create a single online repository of all of the digital assets related to the history of Tooting Bec Lido and the South London Swimming Club.”

Website

Background

The South London Swimming Club’s website has a little information about the history of the Club and the Lido. However, there is a wealth of other historical material scattered among books, displays and archives that are difficult for most people to explore.

Vision

To create an attractive, well designed, easy-to-navigate website that makes archive material accessible to the wider community and helps the public to appreciate the significance of Tooting Bec Lido and the South London Swimming Club’s place in its history. This, in turn, will develop a better understanding of the need for the Lido’s conservation.

Plan

To create a single online repository of digital assets related to the history of Tooting Bec Lido and the South London Swimming Club.

The heritage website would have its own address with links to the websites of the South London Swimming Club, Wandsworth Council and the leisure provider.



Snowball fight, 1960s, SLSC collection



Tooting Bec Lido exhibition at Wandsworth Museum, 2006

Events and activities

Background

The South London Swimming Club has a tradition of holding swimming and community events at Tooting Bec Lido throughout the year. In 2006 the Club organised a series of swimming, community, art and cultural events to celebrate the centenary of both the Club and the Lido. These included a fascinating history talk by local historian and SLSC member Janet Smith. Janet illustrated her talk with original photographs, letters and other documents that also formed part of a centenary exhibition at Wandsworth Museum. The publicity for these and other centenary events prompted people to disclose and share personal memories and photos of the Lido.



Floating 100 candles for the centenary of Tooting Bec Lido, 2006, SLSC collection



Annual free painting event coinciding with Open House London, 2009, Elizabeth Furth

Vision

To celebrate the long and rich history of the Lido and the South London Swimming Club through publicity, promotion and events, encouraging more people to reveal their historic treasures and memories.

Plan

The SLSC plans to gather historical material by:

- Recruiting volunteers to its history group to research and archive heritage assets.
- Marking the completion of the Tooting Bec Lido Improvement Project with an event celebrating the past, the present and the future.
- Continuing to be active at the Open House London weekend, with fun activities to encourage visitors.
- Holding a Scanning the Past event at the annual Wandsworth Heritage Festival – members of the public will be invited to bring photos and other memorabilia of the Lido to be scanned so they can be added to the digital archive.
- Including information about Tooting Bec Lido in the planned Tooting Common Heritage Trail.
- Promoting the Heritage Project through newsletters, leaflets, posters and social media.



"Join in" event with Daley Thompson, Jonathan Edwards, John Inverdale and Sharon Davies, 2012, © Join in

