

Lost Moseley - Moseley Skating Rink Company

The city centre celebrated the recent festive season with the annual Frankfurt Christmas Market and the return of the Big Wheel and Ice Skate Birmingham in Centenary Square, but did you know that Moseley once had its own skating rink? Built in 1875, the large rink backed the Trafalgar Hotel, now the Patrick Kavanagh pub on Woodbridge Road, and was owned by the wealthy landowner W. Dyke Wilkinson.

Skating was a popular pastime in the late-nineteenth century and the rink took advantage of Moseley Station (opened in 1867) to bring leisure customers from further afield. Moseley Hall also accommodated ice skating on its frozen pool, as did Coldbath Pool, Swanshurst Park and Cannon Hill Park, but the venture at the Trafalgar Hotel was a purpose-built rink for roller skating that could be used throughout the year. Built by architect J. Fairbank, it featured separate gentlemen's and ladies cloakrooms, and a "skate lobby" and "skate room". The Moseley Skating Rink Company Limited charged 6d admission (equivalent to around two and a half pence) and a further 6d for Plimpton's Skates and, according to a boast in a newspaper report dated 8th November, 1977, it had "the best floor in England". Plimpton's Skates were considered to be a safer and dynamic brand for varied and daring manoeuvres.

Music was a prominent feature of the rink, with the Bells Military Band playing on a regular basis, and a programme for a 'Grand Promenade Concert', kept in the archives at the Moseley Society Local History Group, reveals the value of culture in our villages and how we used to live. The celebration took place on the 11th January, 1878 and included "intervals for skating" between music and readings; the concert began with a piece by German composer Mendelsson, before moving onto a Polka performance (a dance that originated in Bohemia and was performed by folk artists before it arrived in the ballrooms of England in the 1840s. The Times of London described it as having the "intimacy of the waltz combined with the vivacity of the Irish jig") and ended in patriotic style with God Save the Queen. The programme also promised "the rink will be beautifully decorated and illuminated on this occasion" and post-concert "omnibuses for town at ten o'clock".

Wilkinson, known as "the man who bought up Moseley", lost much of his fortune to gambling and the rink was later demolished. The building plans are held in the Central Library Archive and reveal the basic outline of this lost Moseley attraction for Victorian pleasure seekers.

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