Taking the Waters
The lighter side of the Harrogate Cure
through the humorous postcards of the 1900s

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Introduction

Since the early 17th century the waters of Harrogate had been taken by locals and visitors to the area. The chalybeate springs of High Harrogate were originally the more popular, but by the middle of the 18th century doctors had discovered a satisfactory method of using the sulphur wells of Low Harrogate for internal treatments and extended their use in baths. A separate chalybeate spring was found, where the Royal Hall now stands, which effectively made it independent of High Harrogate. The Pump Room was opened, a Promenade Room was built and the Valley Gardens were laid out. In total 87 springs arose within the town’s boundaries.

The first honorary secretary of the Harrogate Bath Hospital, Pickersgill Palliser, was a man of many talents who in 1834 started to produce a list of “The Company at Harrogate” - a list of visitors to the town and where they were staying. As time went on he added information about events, church services and advertisements, and by 1836 he realised that a newspaper had evolved from the “List of Visitors” and he adopted the name The Harrogate Advertiser. Entertainments for the visitors were soon brought into the town, and musical concerts in the various grounds and bandstands became a daily feature, lasting through until WW2.
Visitors to the town who arrived for curative purposes were encouraged to take part in various activities, in addition to any prescribed treatments, which ranged from gentle walks in the gardens, to more exhausting tramps through the woods and nearby “moors”, on return they could relax to entertainments provided by the town or the various spa organisations, consisting of concerts from the local orchestra and bands, and others e.g. pierrots and singing groups.

The Daily Routine

The basic recommended length for the "cure" was for a period of not less than three weeks for "permanent benefit to be gained" and to be followed, in some instances, by a further visit to the seaside. Visitors were also encouraged to take the waters and bathing treatments under prescription.

7.00-8.00am Rise and visit Pump Room for first tumbler of water
7.00-8.15am Walk about, listening to the band
8.15am Take second tumbler of water
8.15-9.00am Listen to the band and if prescribed take third glass of water
9.00am Breakfast
   For some people it is advisable that they drive; either by omnibus, carriage, or bath chair but the walk home can be advantageous if it can be accomplished without undue fatigue. Care should be taken to avoid exertion.
10.00-11.00am Morning paper or letter writing
11.00am Shopping/Walk/Listen to band/or Bath
11.30am Second visit to Pump Room
1.00pm Rest for half an hour
1.30pm Lunch to be followed by one hour of rest
Afternoon Driving, Walking, Cycling, Golfing or third visit to Pump Room. Afternoon tea in Gardens listening to the band
7.00pm Dinner
Concert room
10.00pm Bed

*For some patients, massage is better than exercise*
Promotion of the town and its “cure”

Harrogate had to compete with similar spa towns in the UK and Europe, and used various advertising methods to draw patients and more casual visitors to it. One advantage it had was that Knaresborough was nearby, with a range of additional attractions for visitors to the area.

As well as the newspaper and leaflet advertisements, the town also supported the production and sale of picture postcards for visitors to send to friends and family, or keep as souvenirs. These only became common in the late 1890s and thereafter, the “golden age” being from 1895 to 1910.

Aside from the photographic or “landscape” style of postcard, which showed views of the town and countryside, or scenes of buildings and streets, there were a large number of more humorous cards which illustrated the “delights”, or otherwise, of the Harrogate experience. Many of these featured aspects of “taking the waters” – mainly because of the unpleasant taste and smell of the sulphurous springs – which in some cases were so bad they had to be doing you some good!

One card even had the following poem on it, extolling the benefits of the well:

**Harrogate – the Old Sulphur Well**

Ye gracious gods defend us,
And never again send us,
Though dear friends tickets lend us,
For the Old Sulphur Well

“Take the bitter with the sweet”.
“Get it down”. “Enjoy the treat”
Greet each other as we meet
At the Old Sulphur Well

Youth and beauty here appear
When the morning sun shines clear,
Darby and his Joan dear
Grace the Old Sulphur Well

Stroll around while music charms
All our direst first alarms,
Read the news of towns and farms
Far from Old Sulphur Well

Kind spirits – all preserve us
From maidens who observe us
While “hot and strong” they serve us
From the Old Sulphur Well

But, ye gods, the half hour’s bye,
Must we have another “try”?
Ten ounces more!! – then – Goodbye
To you Old Sulphur Well

Here following are a selection of the cards and images which show the lighter side of Harrogate’s cure culture, which sadly is no more, though you can still experience the waters at the town’s Pump Museum – if you dare!
Welcome to the town

Post from Harrogate

SOUVENIR from Harrogate

Why Don't You Write to HARROGATE?

Send along the latest news.
Meanwhile I send some lovely views.

You can't beat HARROGATE

Am picking up a lot at Harrogate

Expressing my views of HARROGATE

Three for luck!

FROM HARROGATE
Various images of a colourful nature
A selection of cards of a general nature extolling the virtues or otherwise of Harrogate
Various images of a monochrome nature
A few hand-drawn cards

- Cartoon of two men, one saying "Before taking the Waters!", the other saying "After taking the Waters!!"

- Cartoon of a devil in a hat and a woman, with text: "A certain use for congenial (this is meaning).

- Cartoon of a woman in a dress and a man in a hat, with text: "Come away, Och, you'll be ill!

- Cartoon of a crowd of people outside a building, with text: "She: 'Pardon me! but do they drink it cold or hot?'

- Cartoon of a man and woman in a garden, with text: "He: 'It don't matter which way, mom, as it always touches the spot.'"
Drinking the waters at Harrogate

A series of six images of two men deciding whether to sample the Pump Room’s offering
Harrogate Waters series

A series of six images of a toddler finding out just what the water tastes like

Will you sulphur with me?

Two tickets for sulphur please

Oh phew, what a smell!

Well, good health!

I don’t see what there is to laugh about

No second glass for me!
Lance Thackeray – split images

Thackeray (1869-1916) featured aspects of life at the Harrogate Spa. Each card has a small panel with an associated image, usually following on in some respect to the main picture.

- **Drink it Daddy,**
  *I like to see your face*

- **Three of Scotch**

- **It’s high time to start taking the waters**

- **For better or for worse**

- **A ticket for a friend**

- **My first glass**
Some of the visitors
The first glass
A case for the S.P.C.A.

By the Doctor’s orders
I hope no one’s looking
What devilish stuff is this?

The early bird
A first attempt
Take it away
Three of Irish
Comparing notes
Resigned
All sorts and conditions
7.45 a.m.
A good suggestion how to take the waters
An early constitutional
Turtle Dovedale

A back view

Taking the waters

Far from the Sulphur Well
Cats – by Violet Roberts & others

Violet Roberts was an Edwardian postcard artist who lived in Hull, and later Beverley. Her charming illustrations presented an array of quirky creatures that adopted personalities from all walks of life. Cats seemed to feature on her Harrogate illustrations, a subject which was also used by others, also shown here, including Clarice Firth. Another lover of feline images was Louis Wain (see the next section)

![I came to Harrogate like this](image1)

![All there is for dinner](image2)

![Joys of Harrogate – drinking sulphur water](image3)

![I do enjoy my Sulphur Baths](image4)

![Oh the taste!](image5)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I’m afraid it isn’t nice</th>
<th>Br-r-r beastliness isn’t the word for it!</th>
<th>There’s nothing like Harrogate waters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Back from the Sulphur Well</td>
<td>Back from the Sulphur Well</td>
<td>We are busy... at Harrogate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sulphur water will never tempt me again... never!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What have I done to deserve this?

No nearer my dear, I can smell it from here

It is dangerous to tease a Sulphur patient

Great Scott! What a smell!

Dear me! Sulphur water again

Off to the Sulphur Well
Great Scott! What a smell!

It wasn’t Sulphur Water!

Cured!

Sulphur again!
Cats – by Louis Wain

Louis Wain was an artist best known for his drawings, which consistently featured anthropomorphised large-eyed cats and kittens. A number of his works were used to illustrate aspects of the “taking of the waters” at Harrogate and other spas.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1" alt="I don't think!" /></td>
<td>I don't think!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image2" alt="They'll take the smell away, Sir!" /></td>
<td>They'll take the smell away, Sir!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Getting ready for the Sulphurers" /></td>
<td>Getting ready for the Sulphurers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image4" alt="How long am I expected to stand this?" /></td>
<td>How long am I expected to stand this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image5" alt="I say! Stop it!!" /></td>
<td>I say! Stop it!!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image6" alt="Perhaps if I hold my nose it will go down easier!" /></td>
<td>Perhaps if I hold my nose it will go down easier!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image7" alt="Keep it down that’s the thing" /></td>
<td>Keep it down that’s the thing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image8" alt="I’m afraid it won’t keep down!" /></td>
<td>I’m afraid it won’t keep down!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image9" alt="Come and try!" /></td>
<td>Come and try!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Oh that this too, too solid flesh would melt.

A Sermon on Sulphur

Between drinks

A line of Sulphurers

No more sulphur today!
I say, I didn’t ask for an Irish Stew!

I think I’ve had enough!
THE HARROGATE CURE.
The musical stage of the cure.