

TRAVEL SCENE

Blooming Dales: Harrogate is an English Gem

By Neil Bennion

When Agatha Christie went missing in 1926, people must have feared the worst, especially when her car was found abandoned. She was discovered alive and well in Harrogate 10 days later.

The true reason for her flight is still the subject of some discussion, but there's no such mystery about her choice of refuge – Harrogate has long been a choice place to recharge, and it still is.

During Victorian times it gained international renown as an elegant spa town and was a favored retreat for royalty and high society. The waters from its mineral springs, high in iron and sulfur, were prescribed for all manner of ailments, and people would come from far and wide to this corner of the Yorkshire Dales to take them.

In modern times, Harrogate has grown into an important conference town but its charm remains

The history of Harrogate's dalliance with medicinal waters is preserved in the Royal Pump Room Museum on Crown Place. It showcases numerous examples of contraptions designed to marry bodies of people to bodies of water, such as the "massage bath," the "peat bath" and a shower cage that attacked clients from all sides.

Although you no longer have to the option to strap yourself into bizarre contraptions, some traditional therapies are still available to the public. The Turkish Baths on Parliament Street have been refurbished to their Victorian glory, and are resplendent with glazed brickwork and Moorish arches. After passing through a steam room, plunge pool and chambers of varying temperature, you'll be invigorated and ready to face the world, or even the queue at Betty's Café Tearooms.

Sulfurous spa waters may have gone the way of

chocolates wink at you through the window, defying you to forget your health after all.

For those who want something a bit stronger, Hales is a wonderful example of a traditional English pub. Once a coaching inn, it retains its Victorian fittings: a splendid array of gas-lit lamps and bar-mounted gas lighters.

Outside, meanwhile, it's as though someone build Harrogate on a giant bed of steroidal vegetation that bursts through every crevasse. The expanses of The Stray wrap three sides of the centre in a green blanket, whilst the paths of the Valley Gardens wander between acres of trees and flowerbeds. But the true monarch of this floral world is definitely Harlow Carr, one of the Royal Horticultural Society's four UK flagship gardens. It even has its own branch of Betty's for those who can't bear to choose between pointing at flowers and daintily working on tea and cake.



Greenery and scenery: Montpellier Gardens.

WHEN TO GO

June to August is the most colorful time florally, but there is something to see all year round, including flower shows in April and September. July is a good time for events such as the Theakston's Old Peculiar Harrogate Crime Writing Festival and the countryside showpiece of the Great Yorkshire Show.

For more information

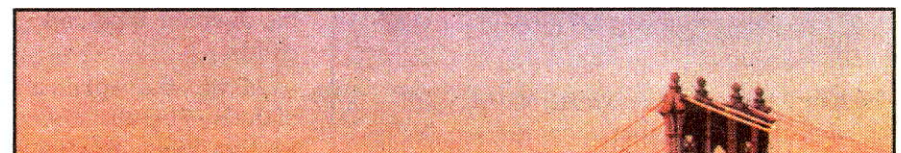
Harrogate: www.harrogate.gov.uk

Yorkshire Dales: www.yorkshiredales.org

Harrogate flower shows: www.flowershow.org.uk

– Neil Bennion

WHERE IS THIS PLACE?



intact. In recent years, it has won prestigious awards for its horticulture, and to stroll around the quaint Montpellier Quarter with its wrought iron facades and plentiful antique shops is to take a step back in time.

the horse and carriage, but if there's one traditional preparation that the English are still obsessed with, it's tea. There are many tearooms in Harrogate, but Betty's is the quintessential choice – Fabulous cream cakes, biscuits and

and cake. For those who prefer their flora a little more wild, Harrogate is on the edge of prime hill-walking country known as the Yorkshire Dales; a world of open moorland and valleys coveting unspoiled villages.

There's no shortage of cultural sites in the area, too: Knaresborough with its precariously positioned castle ruins; the peaceful Pateley Bridge, home of the oldest sweetshop in England; and the Cistercian Abbey at Fountains Abbey, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. And that's without even mentioning York.

And if you're exhausted after all that, tuck yourself into bed at the ivy-clad Old Swan Hotel, just like Agatha did.



The history of Harrogate's dalliance with medicinal waters is preserved in the Royal Pump Room Museum on Crown Place.



John Roebling, in 1855 proposed a suspension bridge after becoming impatient with the ferry. Roebling designed every detail, from its massive granite towers to its four steel cables. He thought his design entitled the bridge "to be ranked as a national monument... a great work of art." Two years later, the City Council and the Army Corps of Engineers approved the design. Later that same month, while examining locations for a tower site, Roebling's foot was crushed on a pier by an incoming ferry. He later died of tetanus as a result of the injuries. Following Roebling's death, his son, Washington, took over as chief engineer of this famous bridge. Where is this place?

Congratulations go to Chas Servotke of Hollis, NH. He was the first to have correctly answered the Where Is This Place? Contest from our March issue. The picture featured the Cliffs of Moher in Ireland. Mr. Servotke won a copy of the new cookbook *Glorious One-Pot Meals*.

Send entries to: Senior Voice of Florida • "Where is this Place?" Contest
8401 Ninth Street North, Suite 1100, St. Petersburg, FL 33702