

The Health Park of Ciechocinek, or a "Miniature of the South Seas" (1932-2001)

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*We should eagerly take stock
of what is still left,
as times are changing and many a detail
can be lost for ever.*

Marian Raczyński,¹ 1934 r.

Introduction

The history of the balneal resort in Ciechocinek is started by the 1929 initiative of the Spa Physicians' Association (*Stowarzyszenie Lekarzy Zdrojowych*) on the establishing of the Health Park (*Park Zdrowia*), in addition to the already existing three parks: the Spa Park (*Zdrojowy*) of 1875, the Pine Park (*Sosnowy*) of 1889 and the Graduation Tower Park (*Tężniowy*) of 1908.² Its site was a quiet, empty area between the graduation towers, which feed ambient air with ozone-enriched (owing to the sun rays) saline aerosol. This is mostly to what the spa owes its renown – locally obtained evaporated salt, boiling lye and salt sludge are used therapeutically.³ The concept for the Health Park was developed by engineer A. Łęczycki and architect R. Serwaczyński and finalised by Dr Tadeusz Chrapowicki (1903-1984) –

then responsible for exercising at Ciechocinek. The construction of the baths was designed and supervised by architect Romuald Gutt (1888-1974) and engineer Aleksander Szniolis (1891-1934), with structural analysis and detailed technical drawings for the reinforced-concrete structures by engineer H. Wąsowicz.⁴ Construction work started in mid-May 1931 and the facility began its operations in late May 1932.

4. Gutt Romuald, Szniolis Aleksander, *Pływalnia solankowo-termalna w Ciechocinku*, „Architektura i Budownictwo”, No. 3, 1932, pp. 368-378.

1. Front page of a folder advertising the new season; the saline fountain (known as the cascade) towering the pool has been scaled up, so has graduation tower 3, to make them look more attractive. (From A. Nocna's collection).

1. Raczyński Marian, *Materiały do historii Ciechocinka od zapoczątkowania budowy warzelniów soli do wybuchu Wielkiej Wojny*, Warsaw (author's own imprint), 1935, p. VIII. M. Raczyński (1864 - 1942) was director of the Baths from 1896 to 1927; in recognition of his contribution to Ciechocinek, the Town Council conferred honorary citizenship upon him. The Ciechocinek Society has funded a memorial plaque in honour of Bolesław Raczyński and his son Marian in the lobby of Baths III.

2. Iwanowska-Jeske Danuta (ed.), *Uzdrowisko Ciechocinek*, Wydawnictwo „Sport i Turystyka”, Warsaw 1983, p. 32.

3. Detailed discussion of the functioning of the saltworks in Ciechocinek can be found in: Affelt Waldemar, *Salina ciechocińska – unikatowe dzieło inżynierii budowlanej w potrzebie* [in:] 6th REW-INŻ. conference „Inżynierskie Problemy Odnowy Staromiejskich Zespołów Zabytkowych”, vol. 2, Politechnika Krakowska, Cracow 2004, pp. 7-18.





2. President Ignacy Mościcki departs after the inauguration ceremony on 4 June, 1932. Graduation tower 1, and the men's changing-rooms wing in the background. (From A. Nocna's collection).

Total project costs amounted to 900 thousand zloty, 200 thousand of which was spent on fitting work. The designers were awarded a 300-zloty prize for architecture in the National Olympic Art Competition connected with the Berlin 1936 Olympic Games. Thirty years later, Romuald Gutt was honoured with the first-ever Honorary Award of the Polish Association of Architects (SARP) for his lifetime achievement.

Romuald Gutt integrated the structures at Ciechocinek baths with the surroundings and the greens around the *Park Tęźniowy*, designed by Zygmunt Hellwig (1899-1958) – best known for the carpet of flowers laid a few years later along street *Nieszawska*. It was composed of more than a hundred thousand seedlings and has been continued ever since. Two years after the success with the baths, Romuald Gutt (with Józef Janowski) designed the renowned functionalist post office building in Ciechocinek. Other Modernist structures in Ciechocinek include the 30-odd-metre-tall Cubist water tower, designed by Wł. Klimczak (1878-1929) in 1928 and situated in the Pine Park as well as the Constructivist town market hall from 1938. The

3. The central part of the changing-room building approached from the town centre, in the 1930s (Picture postcard from A. Nocna's collection).



four national or municipal projects became the icons of modern times and the newly-revived Polish statehood.

The programme, the architecture, the design

The programme for the Health Park was presented as follows: *The name covers a vast, 26-hectare area between the graduation towers, where a large centre of natural medicine is emerging: properly wooded, fitted with an outdoor brine swimming pool, beaches, playgrounds and yards for exercising and outdoor games, children's playgrounds and a sports stadium. There, in direct contact with nature and in ideal climate owed to the vicinity of the graduation towers, scores of patients and persons accompanying them will find healthy leisure and exercise – planned and supervised by doctors. Host of frail children, prone to scrofula and diatheses, will in properly-arranged playgrounds be given the right preventive care.* The document further discusses the so-called divisions: I – for adults (sports fields, sand and grass beaches for sunbathing); II – for children (with a dairy and a kefir plant); and III – brine swimming pool (with technical and leisure infrastructure). Also planned, was a *centre promoting sports and physical exercise* comprising a small stadium with a multi-lane track, sports fields, a tennis court, a shooting range, an archery field and a golf course. *Wide alleys with a total distance of 3 kilometres and with separate lanes for walks and bicycle rides⁵* were to be built around the graduation towers.

Only division III of this ambitious plan was actually completed before WWII – the salt baths – a project requiring very high standards of cleanliness.⁶ The project received a lot of attention in an extensive Ministry of Defence publication.⁷ Design guidelines in chapter "Outdoor Pools and Swimming Stadiums" were supported by four figures and four photos, showing the Ciechocinek project as a model to follow. "It was then said that" *all outdoor baths should contain: (1) pools for adults and for children, with the necessary changing rooms and showers; (2) sand or grass beaches; (3) grounds for exercising and outdoor games; (4) facilities for air-bathing and, if possible, leisure,⁸*

5. (no author) Ciechocinek 1932. *Informator na nowy sezon leczniczy*. Wydawnictwo Komisarza Rządowego w Ciechocinku (from the author's collection).

6. Szmurło Jan, *Klimatyczne i lecznicze walory Ciechocinka – Cieplicy*, Wydawnictwo Państwowego Zakładu Zdrojowego w Ciechocinku – Cieplicy, Włocławek 1934, p. 18: *Admittance to the swimming pool is granted after a medical check and a thorough wash under a warm and then cool shower.*

7. Król Aleksander (ed.), *Budownictwo wojskowe 1918-1935*, vol. II, Ministerstwo Spraw Wojskowych, Warsaw 1936.

8. *Ibidem*, p. 643

In Ciechocinek, this was more than accomplished, as the following facilities were provided:⁹

- a three-storey main building, 104 metres in length, 54 in width and 5.5 thousand cubic metres in cubature, housing a boiler room, a kitchen and support premises in the basement; booking offices and changing rooms with showers and toilets at ground level; a coffee bar and a restaurant in the ground floor; and offices and musicians' gallery in the first floor;

- terraces of the coffee bar (between the building and the swimming pool) with concrete slab and clinker brick flooring and a terracotta dance floor;

- the pool divided into sections: for children (32 x 20 m, with a depth of 0.15-0.9 metres; for adult bathers (40 x 60 m, with a depth of 0,9-1.5 metres) and for adult swimmers and divers (40 x 20 m, with a depth of 1.5-3.5 metres);

- a filter and deironing house, hidden from the pool behind a terraced rock garden crowned with the cascade structure and a brine fountain at the top;

- sand beaches, 35 metres wide, on both sides of the pool, as well as lawns, grounds for sports and games and a southerly sunbathing slope;

- a playground with a veranda building to the right of the main entrance approach.

The baths ended behind the filter house, where the pump station could be seen across the fence – a historical structure dating back to the inauguration of the graduation towers, still in operation.¹⁰ At present, the area of the

9. Gutt R., Szniolis A. op. cit. p. 373.

10. According to the description from the entry record of monuments, the pump station dates from the 1830s. It is more likely,



4. The cascade – saline aeration fountain for deironing, with the sand beach terrace below (Picture postcard from A. Nocna's collection).

former baths is adjacent to CKS "Zdrój" football grounds on the left and unattended green areas on the right.

The spatial layout of the main building of the baths surprises us with lack of symmetry between the wings which house the changing rooms. The reasons for this are explained in the technical specifications of the design. The cabin capacity in terms of the time needed to change has been determined at "4 persons per hour in men's changing rooms and 3 persons per hour in women's"¹¹ So assuming equal numbers of men and women (gender equality – sic!), the number of women's cabins had to be proportionally greater. The total capacity of the baths was

however, to have been erected together with graduation tower 3, which means not before 1860.

11. Król Aleksander (ed.), *Budownictwo wojskowe 1918-1935*, vol. II, Ministerstwo Spraw Wojskowych, Warsaw 1936, p. 664.

5. The reinforced-concrete, three-metre diving platform, with graduation tower 2 in the background (Photo by Czesław Olszewski, source: www.fotopolis.pl).





6. *The saline cascade in October, 2007. Photo by A. Nocna*

determined on the basis of *ca. 4 m² of water area per person in the adult bathers' pool, 8 m² per person in the swimming and diving pool, 2.5 m² per person in the children's pool; 1 square metre of beach space per adults and children alike; 20 m² per adult in the sports grounds and 10 m² per child in the playground.* Consequently, the capacity of changing rooms was established at 676 for women and 394 for men, respectively¹².

The large number of users caused coat hangers to capture the attention of designers: *"universal coat hangers introduced at the baths in Ciechocinek are made of wire and have the shoulder part, hooks for the footwear and netted bags for small objects. They can easily be disinfected and are hung in batches in well-aired metal lockers"*¹³. This solution was found to be recommendable by the authors of the report for the Ministry of Defence.

Structures, materials and fittings

Reinforced concrete was used for the pool basin and the building; the elevations of the main building were made of clinker brick in various shades of red, while sand-lime brick was used for the elevations of the changing-room wings. The windows were given quasi-industrial look owing to the iron sections in which panes were fitted. Sorel cement¹⁴ was used for changing-room flooring, while partition walls were made of white, salt-glazed stoneware with rounded edges. The roof of the central building is a brilliant display of architecture and structural engineering; with its elevated eaves and the shelter-like structure resting on slender,

round pillars, it seems to be hovering above the building itself. Some elegance has also been given to the reinforced-concrete slides – the existent two-metre one for the children and the non-existent five-metre one for the adults – as well as to the three-metre tall diving platform, with *Streamline*-shaped steel-tube handrails. The structures were so picturesque that they would appear on many of the photographs taken at the baths, even though there were some formal reservations to the structure of the diving platform.¹⁵ The platform barriers have recently "vanished," together with other metal objects.

The pool bottom is of 15-centimetre reinforced-concrete slabs, while the wall section is a reversed T-beam of unequal arms and oblique corners on both sides. The top part around the whole pool is an overflow weir, over which water from the pool can get to the wading pool.

It was engineer Szniolis who designed the water system. The brine first went to the fountain (known as the cascade), where it squirted into a picturesque crest of radially-jetted streams dropping onto the pool and getting aerated in the process. Iron salts then precipitated, successively captured in the settling tank, contact beds and the filters. The de-ironed salt water was fed from the filter house to the shallow part of the pool, where it mixed with mains water in equal proportions. The pumps also secured the filtration of the pool water. The cascade frequently appeared in photographs, as the five-metre saline shower was a good massage for the backs and shoulders of the people below.

Events, people, memories

The official inauguration of the Ciechocinek baths was covered in detail by the local paper "Głos Nieszawski" No. 15 of 11 June, 1932. Polish president Ignacy Mościcki (1867-1946) had come for holiday and treatment on 3 June, 1932. After being welcomed by municipal and county officials, he sojourned at the Spa House (now the head office of *Przedsiębiorstwo Uzdrawiskowe Ciechocinek S.A.*). The ceremony began at 3.30 p.m. the following day: the graduation towers were decorated with Polish national colours and the event was attended by officials and delegations with colour parties. The President arrived in a limousine and a military band played the national anthem. The honourable guest was welcomed by the head of the Department of Health, Dr Eugeniusz Piestrzyński, who said the Polish State Spa of Ciechocinek (*Państwowe Zdrojow-*

12. Gutt R., Szniolis A., op.cit. p. 371.

13. Król Aleksander, op. cit., p. 664.

14. Sorel cement is a mixture of magnesia cement with organic (sawdust) or mineral (crushed stone, talc) fillers and dyes, used for floor tiles or cast floors. Its waterproofing is low, but it is called „a warm floor” owing to the sensation perceived when one steps on it barefooted.

15. Król Aleksander, op. cit., p. 450, reading: *The rigid three-metre diving platform is beautiful in outline, yet irregular.* This „irregularity” means the absence of the required springboard. The same author says in p. 451 that *springboards should be slightly flexible, at least 4 metres in length and 0.5 metres in width.*

isko Ciechocinek) had two occasions to celebrate – it had the honour of hosting the President, who by choosing Ciechocinek for a longer stay clearly indicated that it was possible and desirable, particularly in the present situation, to seek health and rest in our motherland – so amply endowed by Nature with all kinds of medicinal waters.

On 18 June, marshal Józef Piłsudski paid a short visit to Ciechocinek, to discuss current international affairs with the President, after which he returned to Warsaw by car.¹⁶ This event was the reason why a special stately building was erected the following year, today referred to as the *Presidential Manor*. It was meant to host the head of State when in Ciechocinek, however the next guest of such eminence was Polish president Aleksander Kwaśniewski in 2002; sadly enough, it was the first year when, after seventy great years, the baths were closed down.

The coffee bar at the baths was the venue of morning and afternoon concerts. The Szymon Kataszek and Zygmunt Karasiński jazz band played a foxtrot for which they had written both the music and the lyric.¹⁷ Also the Artur Gold and Jerzy Petersburski band performed here, and in

16. Different sources quote different dates of Józef Piłsudski's visit; 18 June is mentioned by „Dziennik Kujawski” and *Pamiętnik adiutanta marszałka Piłsudskiego* Mieczysława Lepeckiego, Warsaw 1988, while *Kalendarium życia Józefa Piłsudskiego* by Waclaw Jędrzejewicz mentions 19 June.

17. Cichowicz Cezary (ed.), *Tygodnik Komisji Zdrojowej, „Ciechocinek – Zdrój”, 1933, No. 2*. The lyric praised the baths, where everyone feels ten years younger and all the ladies are like beautiful flowers.

1933 *Lucyna Messal* – a Polish film and operetta star known as Messalka – appeared here in a variety show.

The salt spring baths of Ciechocinek were also put on screen – in a 1938 Yiddish musical comedy “Mamele” directed by J. Gren, with Molly Picon starring. In the 1970s, the pools and the walking alley around the graduation towers were used for a Polish TV series; also a novel by Polish writer Bogusław Fac, published in 1982, is set at the Ciechocinek pool.

Conclusion

During World War II, Ciechocinek was renamed *Hermannsbad* and the baths were accessible to Germans only. The pictorial documentation that has survived illustrates the excellent state of repair of the facility at the time.¹⁸ After the war, the baths became popular with patients and residents as well as with weekend tourists from the cities of Toruń, Bydgoszcz, Łódź and Poznań. In 1976, they were modernised and on 29 October 1993 – listed.¹⁹ On 12 June, 2002, the Ciechocinek Society had a memorial granite plaque unveiled in the baths building (no longer in operation then), to commemorate its 70th anniversary,²⁰ but it

18. Nocna Aldona, *Basen solankowy, „Zdrój Ciechociński”, 2001, No. 3*.

19. The region of Kujawsko-Pomorskie, entry 322A, including the pools with the changing room building, the adjacent *Park Tężniowy* dating from 1875-1930 and the pump station building.

20. Nocna Aldona, *70 lat basenu, „Zdrój Ciechociński”, 2002, No. 6*.

7. The central part of the changing-room building approached from the town centre, in October, 2007. Photo by A. Nocna.





8. Motive of stylized graduation wall on paper warpping of therapeutic peat compress, Ciechocinek, late therities. Photo W. Affelt.

was stolen soon afterwards and the perpetrators have remained undetected. A picture story on "Zdrój Ciechociński" front page from October 2003 shows photos of the facility in ruins²¹.

21. Nocna Aldona, *Letnia atrakcja Ciechocinka*, „Zdrój Ciechociński”, 2003, No. 10.

In January 2005, an exhibition of Czesław Olszewski's photography was opened at the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław. The title was "The Swing Decade. Modern Architecture of the 1930s in Poland" and its logo was the picture of the Ciechocinek saline cascade. Eight other pictures show the Health Park. The inland miniature of the South Seas²² was the pride of the Polish 2nd Republic. It not only embodied the Modern Movement aesthetics, but also national identity and a lofty objective – health, becoming a document of our social and economic history.

Today, only traces of former greatness remain. In spite of this, technical and architectural revitalisation are still possible. So there may be hope that the cultural, social and economic values of this unique historical facility will be restored.

22. A folder from the 1930s „Ciechocinek. Cieplica. Sezon kuracyjny od 1. V. – 31. X.” designed by Z. Gardzielewski, photos by A. Czarnecki (author's collection) says: *The largest pool in Europe with 20 thousand square metres of beach, surrounded by a large, modern health park, between three graduation towers gives a picturesque view and a mild climate. Owing to constant temperature of 22° Centigrade and the 1.5% concentration of saline we have a miniature of the Sout Seas, which apart from the sport and recreational aspects, has precious therapeutcal values in the treatment of neurasthenia, nervous and physical exhaustion, rickets. scrofulosis and other conditions.*

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