



Heritage Newsletter



Issue40

"ONE OF THE FINEST ROLLER SKATING RINKS IN THE UK"

by Frances Wilson

So said The Belfast and Ulster Towns Directory for 1910 in its description of the sporting facilities available in Portrush for visitors and locals alike.

The enterprise to bring roller skating to Portrush first started with the formation of the Portrush Winter Gardens Committee in 1908 and they subsequently proposed the building of a skating rink in the pleasure gardens adjacent to the railway station. Roller skating was very popular in Great Britain at this time and the project was given the go-ahead. The Rink was built during the early part of the following summer and an advertisement for a General Manager was placed in the Belfast Newsletter of 6 May 1909 with a Mr Ritson duly appointed.

PORTRUSH ROLLER SKATING RINK - General Manager wanted for 4 months from 1st June. Application, endorsed "Manager" stating experience and salary required, to the Secretary, Portrush Winter Gardens Co. Ltd., Portrush

THE PAVILION PORTRUSH

Proprietors
The Portrush Winter Gardens Co. Ltd.

ROLLER SKATING RINK

Three Sessions Daily

Morning	10.30 to 12.30
Afternoon	2.0 to 5.0
Evening	7.30 to 10.30

MUSIC AT ALL SESSIONS

Admission – Morning and Afternoon 6d Evening 1s
Skates at all sessions 1s

For the convenience of families Books of 15 Admission Tickets will be supplied at 7s 6d each and 15 Skate Tickets at 12s 6d each. These Books of Tickets can only be obtained from the Manager at the Pavilion.

GRAND OPENING SESSION

THURSDAY 1ST JULY 1909
At 7.30pm

Admission – 1s Skates – 1s

The Rink, which cost £4352 to erect, had 20,000 square feet of maple wood skating surface and it was estimated that it could accommodate some 2000 skaters. The Company spent £350 on Winslow skates which were to be hired out to patrons. The Rink was scheduled to open on Thursday 1st July and the front page of *The Chronicle* the previous week had carried an impressive advert giving the session times, costings and details of the Grand Opening.

Also in *The Chronicle* that week was an advertisement for any potential lady skaters.

ROLLER SKATING

Ladies who Roller Skate should remember that we have provided a Magnificent Assortment of Select Underskirts, Fancy Coloured Stockings, Cool and Dainty Blouses, and all other sundry requirements for this most fascinating pastime can be had at the

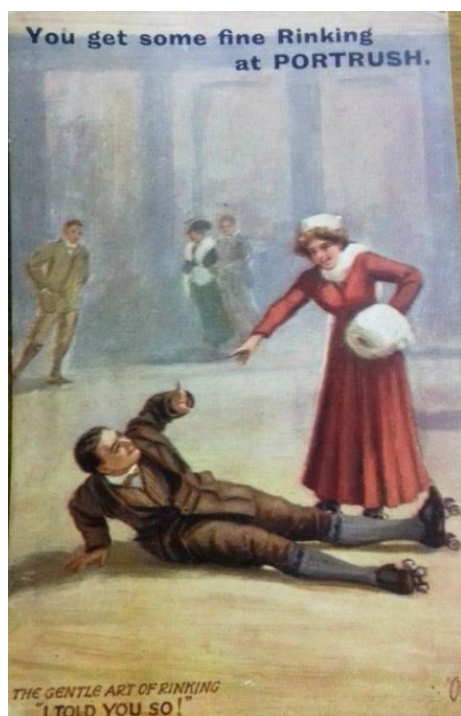
KIOSK, RINK, PORTRUSH

HILL BROS

Coleraine and
Portrush

In *The Chronicle* the following week there was a glowing report on the Grand Opening entitled

RINKERS AND SPECTATORS AT PORTRUSH



"Everybody agreed that there was evidence of the opening of a new era, as well as of a skating rink, at Portrush on Thursday evening, when the very recently formed, but vigorous and enterprising Winter Gardens Company inaugurated their splendid Pavilion in the presence of some thousands who represented all sections of the residential and the visiting new communities. We had heard the sneer that roller skating was out-of-date; that it had been all the rage thirty years ago; but we knew that the ever-changing ideas mortals had a 'way with them' which brought back the ideals of the past - if they were good ones - and we had faith in the attractions of rinking, so that the presence of a great and gay and happy throng in the magnificent Pavilion was just what we expected. For another and we hope an extended 'turn' roller skating has 'come to stay'. There must be something peculiarly safe about the Portrush rink; because falls were both rare and easy on Thursday evening. The stage of the novice is one which generally brings in its train bumps and bruises; but there was no case requiring surgical aid; and we could only conclude that all who did 'come a cropper' did so gently, and made the floor's closer acquaintance as softly decorum dictated. An authority has stated that roller skating is simply 'the art of walking gracefully'. It seemed as if he were right; and that the general acquiescence in the rule of 'making

haste slowly' had generally saved the situation for all who ventured within the barriers during the inaugural display. When the lighting-up arrangement took effect - evidently Mr. Ritson as manager is a great success - the new premises presented a brilliant spectacle, and we left with a twinge of regret to catch our train."



THE SKATING RINK AND PLEASURE GARDENS



The convenience of the Rink to the Railway Station was commented on and also the fact that the Midland Railway was putting on late trains for the convenience of those at the evening sessions. The report also observed that the Rink had already exceeded the highest expectation of the promoters and the attendance was much greater than anticipated. One of the most gratifying features was that the people of Coleraine and Portrush were the best patrons of the Rink and so far there had been nothing but universal appreciation of the efforts of the promoters in providing such a place of amusement. Already there had been visitors from all parts of the United Kingdom who were in agreement that the Portrush Rink was one of the best they had ever patronised.

By the following week a Fancy Dress Carnival had been added to the front page advert.

TUESDAY 27TH JULY

**GRAND FANCY DRESS
SKATING CARNIVAL**

Doors open 7 Skating 7.30
All skaters must appear in Fancy Dress
Admission 1s Skates 2s
Numbered reserved seating for spectators 2s
On this occasion the reduced price Book Tickets
will not be available

CARNIVAL

ON MONDAY, the 27th DECEMBER 1909, a GRAND FANCY DRESS CARNIVAL will be held in The Rink, commencing at 7pm.

Doors open at 6.30pm
Prizes will be given for the best Lady's and Gentleman's Costume
Admission to Carnival 1/-
(Book tickets not available)
Skates 1/-
Judging at 8.45pm

No one will be allowed to skate till 9pm except those in Fancy Dress Costume, but after that hour skaters in ordinary costumes can skate.

The success of the summer season led to a Christmas opening with two sessions a day with a splendid band in attendance from 24th-29th December. A Fancy Dress Carnival was also advertised for 27th December.

For the following two years the Rink opened throughout the season but in 1912 it did not open until July and, when it did, part of the skating area had been converted for dancing - the popularity of skating was diminishing. In 1913 the Rink was rebuilt to accommodate other leisure activities including a cinema, ballroom and theatre - skating was no longer on offer. Within four years the craze of skating had come to and gone from Portrush.

SOURCES

Coleraine Chronicle 26 June, 3 July, 10 July, 17 July and 11 December 1909
McGrattan, H. 2015. *Portrush: the Port on the Promontory*. Impact Printing, Ballycastle.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

History of Portrush Facebook site for allowing use of photographs of the Skating Rink and Skaters.

Our thanks to Frances for this excellent contribution to our Heritage Newsletters.
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