

Watford as I write is flooded. Inundated, drowned, most soggy. It's not damp, just plain drenched. Not surprising really. Watford is the place of the wet ford. Remember how the Lower High Street always floods, Water Lane gives the game away with its aquatic moniker. Recall Stephenson College? Raised on stilts to protect the classrooms. The architects of the hotel that now sits opposite that site obviously didn't get that message. Its original handle of the Moathouse, a name that promoted a bucolic country existence was rebranded and colloquially known in our house as the float house. We'd often laugh at all those resident's cars bobbing up and down with the floaters.

Watford has the Gade the Grand Union and the Colne, watery bye-ways that meander through and traverse the Borough - ingrained landmarks. But, have you ever wonder why the canal curves beneath The Grove? The owners wanted it to look like a river and not spoil the view. That's dead straight.

Do you recognise the names places around where we all live, work and play. Otterspool, Five Arches, Colney Butts, Bushey, Grove, Croxley and Silk mills, Benskins and Sedgwicks breweries are all, if not still living, historic proof that Watford does indeed walk on water

Below five Arches there is more intimate bridge across the Colne that once was our go to place for pooh stick heaven. You can watch the trains whizz past on singing rails, throw your sticks or conkers if it is the right time of the year into the current, then race to the other side of the bridge to shout out the winner. Not that I am competitive dad.

Nearby stands an obelisk. Not from ancient Egypt, but it remembers a time when a tax of one shilling and one penny was charged on every ton of coal transported into the Smoke. In the old days I used to count the trucks from my bedroom window and a train of over a hundred was not that uncommon. Imagine how much that would be worth to the revenue. Loads of money - well up until 1890.

The motorway link road now follows the river under the arches too. They were worried during its construction about the brickwork falling from the railway onto the road so I once took our ariel ladder platform ALP down from the fire station, before the road opened to the public, to let the rail and road people look at the masonry and pointing and then argue about how safe it was and then whose responsibility it was to repair things. I still have the picture taken that day.

The road also runs past the site of Watford's original outdoor swimming pool. This was replaced by the electric baths next to the Town Hall; doing away with healthy outside calisthenics, the diving boards and most importantly the cholera and other nasties that you caught whilst bathing.

To come clean, over the years, I have skated the frozen Colne, swum in the Gade and jumped off the bridge into the canal at the bottom of Cassiobury Park and I didn't catch

anything. No voles disease or should that be Weils disease? We couldn't tell. The waterways board engineer bollocking us had the broadest of Brummie accents. Poor bloke, he had to put up with a bunch of spotty teenagers pretending to be rats and voles then launching themselves from the bridge parapet into the cut. All whilst shouting very politically incorrect Jasper Carrot and Black Sabbath rip-offs.

Several friends on various occasions have also tried their luck, pond-diving at the top of town. All suffering various degrees of injuries amongst the terrapins and shopping trolleys.

One of the more respectable places I've swam was at Watford springs, the ill-fated fun pool just off the ring road. Allegedly built as a concession by a local developer so they could get planning permission elsewhere. It soon started to crumble and was redeveloped only a few years later.

I have a confession here about an incident at the springs. I had the right ump. My ex-wife had roped me into doing half of her sponsored swim. BT organised - for children in need or some such charity - so it would have been a tiny bit disingenuous not to have helped. It was just before our divorce and we were not on the best of terms at the time; so, whilst I did the best part of one-hundred laps, she was sitting in the café sipping a latte and chatting to all her buddies from her early morning swim-club. I was doing all the work as usual, feeling proper put upon.

Already in a bad move, I dived in and began to quietly tick off the lengths. Mr Duncan Goodhew had been there at the beginning showing off one of his gold medals; there to promote the event and cheer on all the participants. Total drip if you ask me. Well as I hit halfway, he decided to take a dip too. Now it would have been alright if he'd swum lengths like all the rest of us, but the twat and I use my words here most carefully - swam widths. At first this wasn't an issue, but the longer my stint went on, the more he started getting in the way. He'd swim underneath me in a part of the pool where there wasn't really enough depth to do that and then right across my bow causing me to miss my stroke. Now I did ask him several times to behave and to stop getting in the way. I promise mum - I was so polite.

When this had no effect and the numpty kept on bumping me and generally being a proper nuisance, I had had enough.

Now I am not the best swimmer. One-hundred lengths was not beyond my capabilities, but for me, it was slowly slowly, plod on to the end. I now felt that on my every length of the pool that our Olympic hero was a bothersome unhelpful brother and I'm sure everyone else felt this too. I could hear the chatter. The lanes were divided according to speed. Slow, medium, quick and fast and Duncan was abusing them all. Alone in my little swim world, my thoughts were darkening, like my mood and my blood was

beginning to boil. I'm sure the temperature of the water normally on the chilly side, had spiked by a couple of degrees.

When he did actually bump me right of my stroke – we definitely made contact – I politely stopped – courteously asked him for a second time - to please stop getting in the way – or – and I promise I said it very graciously – there were people in the pool that my mum knew - that if he carried on the way he was going, I would wrap the medal he'd been showing off earlier around his neck and deep six both of them. Scuttled with gold.

This request appeared to work and Mr Goodhew respectfully sat on the side of the pool contemplating life as I crawled through the seventies, paddled the eighties, breast-stroked through nineties and came close to the end of my leg. Lap ninety-nine and the muppet decided to start swimming widths again. Some people. Now I tumble turned at the last end – my first and only time - and sprinted down the last lap, eyes shut because they'd reacted to the ozone in the pool. Nothing would stand in my way - especially some idiot of an Olympic gold medal winner who – and to be completely open and honest here – swam into my fist as we passed – ships in the night. Titanic and the iceberg and I swear, I wasn't the one who sank.

I hauled myself out of the pool, my ex still in the café. I shrugged my shoulders at her held up one finger and made two zeros with my other hand. Ton up, I'm finished. Your turn now and why aren't you here to tag team me, to continue the relay?

There was still a whirlpool of a commotion, all the old ladies in their flowery swim caps, were making a fuss.

They needn't bother. Had it coming. Well, sorry mum I did bend your rule a little, but I was cross. I couldn't help myself. I know that if you can't say anything nice to someone – don't say anything at all, but I didn't say anything just gestured. See those zeros just happened to make another, let's call it a more earthy gesture - towards Mr Goodhew - who was floating - stunned in the middle of the pool. Luckily, he was face up and breathing hard, clutching at his nose.

I left them all too it. I was not going to dive in and put my lifesaving skills to the test – especially for him.

That was more than enough. I got changed and walked out into the pouring rain.

It was raining all those years ago as it is now. Does it ever stop?

These days, I'm more into canoeing and stand-up paddleboarding, so, that was probably the last time I swam distance properly.

I might need to get back in the game, with all of these, if global warming and this deluge continues. Look out.

Here comes the rain again.