



Twenty years of leisure

Twenty years ago ILAM was formed to represent the professional interests of what was then becoming an increasingly cohesive leisure industry. By bringing together the formerly disparate interests of the arts, entertainments, recreation and open spaces sectors, ILAM offered a voice for leisure and a focus for the development of a profession that was beginning to gain recognition for achievements made in the public service. To mark ILAM members' efforts in the management, development and promotion of leisure services over the years we asked for examples of how the profession of leisure management had evolved and for some of the high (and low) points along the way.

Masters of Leisure

I was one of the twelve folks in the first MSc [leisure and recreation] course at Loughborough in 1969. Its announcement was covered by all the major newspapers but thought you would especially enjoy The Telegraph's lead editorial on the launching of the first degree course in Europe in the leisure field.

The Daily Telegraph Thursday 29 May 1969

"It may well prove difficult to convince some people that the proposal for a "Master of Leisure" degree is serious. A piece of satire surely? Additional information that further study could lead to a PhD (recreational management) will only confirm some in the belief that the whole thing must be a donnish joke. But the gruesome reality is that such courses start at Loughborough University in September. Convinced of an inevitable and sharp increase in leisure time, the university is laying on courses in which graduates can learn the science of administering leisure facilities on a large scale. The implied belief that our leisure needs must be planned and administered like the Health Service is bad enough. But the analysis of the nation's needs

involved is positively bizarre.

...It is all too typical of the current British outlook that some are preparing to deal with idleness during leisure time when the real problem is idleness at work. It is absurd to devote time to the problems of affluence when the British are apparently shirking the work required to produce affluence in the first place. It is thought that the new Master's degree will be unique in Europe. Soon, perhaps, we shall hear that the British leisure training leads the world. As, incidentally, does our indebtedness."

I think it's a good baseline for illustrating "just how far we have come since leisure management emerged blinking into the sunlight". If, today, we were able to say "British leisure training leads the world", I believe even The Telegraph would say it with pride rather than sarcasm. We have progressed.

**Dr John L Crompton FILAM Hon
Texas A&M University**

A Touch of Nostalgia

I joined an East Midlands local authority in 1984 as a trainee recreation officer (one of a long line of us, several of whom are still working in leisure

management). My first day was a Sunday working on a triathlon event, so things started as they have continued ever since. Within three months I was in the thick of running summer play schemes around the district. We didn't worry too much about training, risk assessments, child protection issues, standard operating procedures and staff ratios; if the kids turned up we just got on with it and all had a great time. Thinking back we sailed a bit close to the wind once or twice (including the day they were an hour late back from windsurfing at Holme Pierrepont "because they were having such a good time" and other examples I'm a bit too embarrassed to share!).

Nearly twenty years on I'm glad to observe that our care of children is better planned, managed and delivered and this is very real progress. At the same time I do have a sneaky feeling that somewhere along the way we lost just a little bit of that spontaneity and enthusiasm which can make all the difference to a child's enjoyment of what we have to offer – or am I just being nostalgic?

**Karen Weaver MILAM
Planning and Policy Officer, Harrogate**



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Body of Evidence

Several years ago the authority had complaints about the construction of a sports field that had allegedly undermined a neighbour's garden. The dispute went on for some time and in the end ended up as an ombudsman issue. I sent our engineering unit out to the site and the engineer took over twenty photos of the alleged subsidence. The photos were sent to our legal unit and then on to the ombudsman. It was only when the ombudsman enquiry found in our favour and the photos returned did we find that amongst the photos were three pictures of the young engineer's holiday including his girlfriend lying topless on a beach and one of her riding a camel. I still keep the photos in my pending tray never daring to return them or admit to anyone what had happened. I still wonder what the Ombudsman thought of the photos.

Robert Crabb MILAM

**Sport and Recreation Manager,
North Devon District Council**

Costa del Tipton

Set in the heart of the industrial West Midlands, Tipton Baths was a public swimming pool complex dating back to the early 1930s. The pool proved a popular pre-war and post-war attraction but visitor numbers started to dip with the development of leisure facilities in neighbouring towns and boroughs. By the mid-1980s Tipton was competing with no fewer than eleven other swimming centres within a five-mile radius and gaining 'free' editorial coverage for new and newsworthy activities formed the main thrust of the communications strategy.

The pool's most memorable publicity campaign was the Costa del Tipton – a tongue-in-cheek attempt to establish the landlocked Black Country town as an alternative seaside destination. Sticks of 'Tipton Baths' rock were sold alongside cartoon postcards, souvenir tee shirts and beach balls. Positive exposure by local press, Central Television News and The Daily Mail

prompted the baths to issue a news release in August 1986 bearing the headline: 'Midland town offers taste of seaside.' Coverage of this in The Guardian prompted a radio station in the South West to ask if Tipton's new-found popularity could account for a disappointing start to the tourist season in their part of the world!

Summer 1987 saw the 'Win a Weekend in Tipton' competition, won by a couple from Kendal in the Lake District. Their visit to the 'Venice of the Midlands' included a tour of a pork scratching factory and a trip to the Black Country Living History Museum.

Our approach reflected the competitive climate and entrepreneurial spirit of the 1980s. Boldness, risk-taking and imagination doesn't sit so neatly now with carefully-crafted (and controlled) corporate communications. Interesting to note that many local authorities didn't have dedicated central press and PR officers until quite recently. I'm sure they would throw up their hands in horror at the prospect of running with some of our more memorable publicity stunts!

However, our pioneering approach to press and PR and the obvious successes have influenced many contemporaries, coinciding with the growing importance of communications across all sectors. The ability to communicate effectively with one's audiences, public or 'constituents' in order to establish or maintain competitive advantage is now even more important in a crowded and saturated marketplace.

David Whitehouse MILAM

Marketing Co-ordinator, Groundwork UK

Tales of The Grotto

Built in 1966, the annex building of The Grotto (now known as ILAM House) consisted of a central corridor with cell-like rooms on either side, suffocatingly hot in the summer and freezing in the winter. It is remembered, without affection, by a number of students in senior positions in the industry, especially the one shilling electricity meters.

One student, who went on to become a well-known and respected management consultant, remembered an incident from his time at The Grotto. The weather was cold and the students short of coins for the meters. As they huddled together in one of the rooms, one of their number had the bright idea of starting a small fire in a metal wastepaper bin. There was plenty of paper to feed the flames which were soon leaping towards the ceiling. In what seems to have been panic, the flaming container was hurled from a window. Unfortunately it hit the adjacent bank and rolled under the building where an accumulation of dry twigs and leaves provided excellent kindling. By the time the students had extinguished the fire with buckets of water and the near-disaster averted, they were no longer complaining of the cold. The Richardson Annexe continued to provide inadequate shelter to students until the college was closed.

**From The Grotto, a history of
ILAM House, written by Pam
Pheasant and
published by
ILAM**

