

Skating in Edwardian Leeds

Of the 1.3 million objects in Leeds Museums and Galleries collections about 1600 are related to sport. We know there's plenty more stories to be told. In 2022 and 2023 we are running a project focussed on collecting Leeds' sporting heritage to enable us to do this.

As part of this work, I've been researching different sports across the City. After our Curator of Social History, Kitty Ross, shared a picture of an Edwardian Roller Rink in Headingley I spent a bit of time researching Edwardian roller skating in Leeds more generally.

"...a skating rink for every town seems to be the aim of the promoters..." reported the Leeds Mercury in 1909, and they weren't exaggerating (too much).

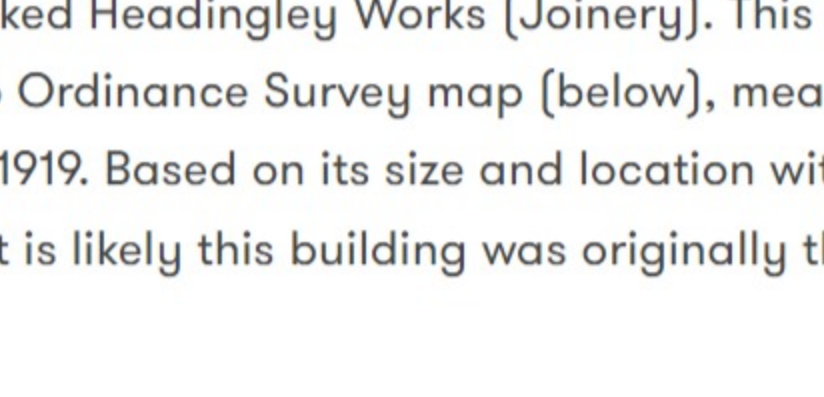
Roller skating had several waves of popularity through the 1800s and early 1900s. The boom the Leeds Mercury are referring to started in Liverpool in 1907. An American rink manager called Chester Park Crawford, in association with Frederic Wilkins, opened a rink at Liverpool's Tournament Hall. By 1909 there were five hundred roller skating rinks open across the UK. Five of these were in Leeds, in Oakwood, Headingley, Kirkstall, Hunslet and Chapeltown.

Using historic maps (mostly Ordnance Survey maps) I have been researching exactly where these rinks were, how long they lasted and what became of the buildings after they closed. In most cases the ordinance survey maps were drawn up outside of the lifetime of the roller rinks (either before they opened or after they closed). This has made the research pretty difficult, but also it has been interesting trying to figure out the most likely scenarios. I'll talk through these below.

Headingley Roller Rink

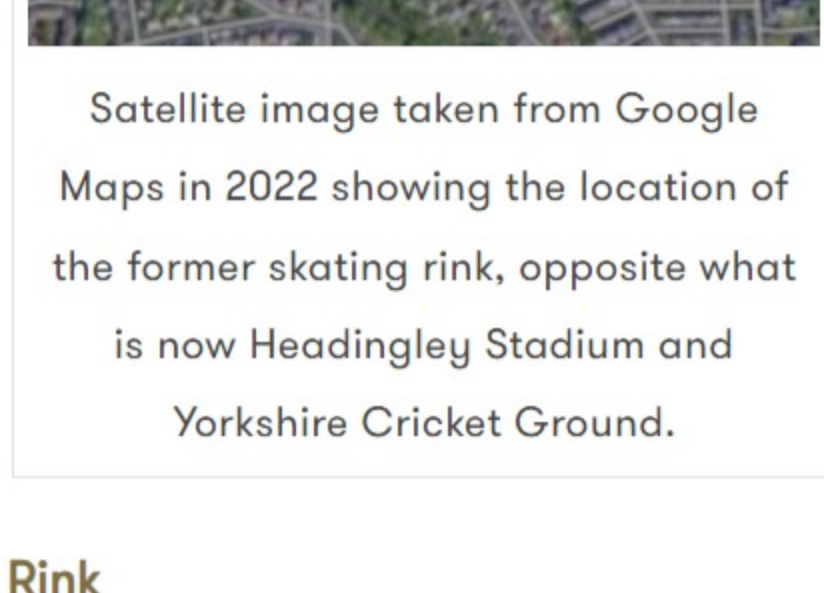
Headingley Roller Rink was owned by The American Rink Co., the company set up by Chester Park Crawford and Frederic Wilkins. It was one of thirteen rinks opened by the company in 1908.

Situated on St Michaels Lane, it was built as part of the Chapel Lane Estate.



1919 Ordnance Survey Map (published 1934)

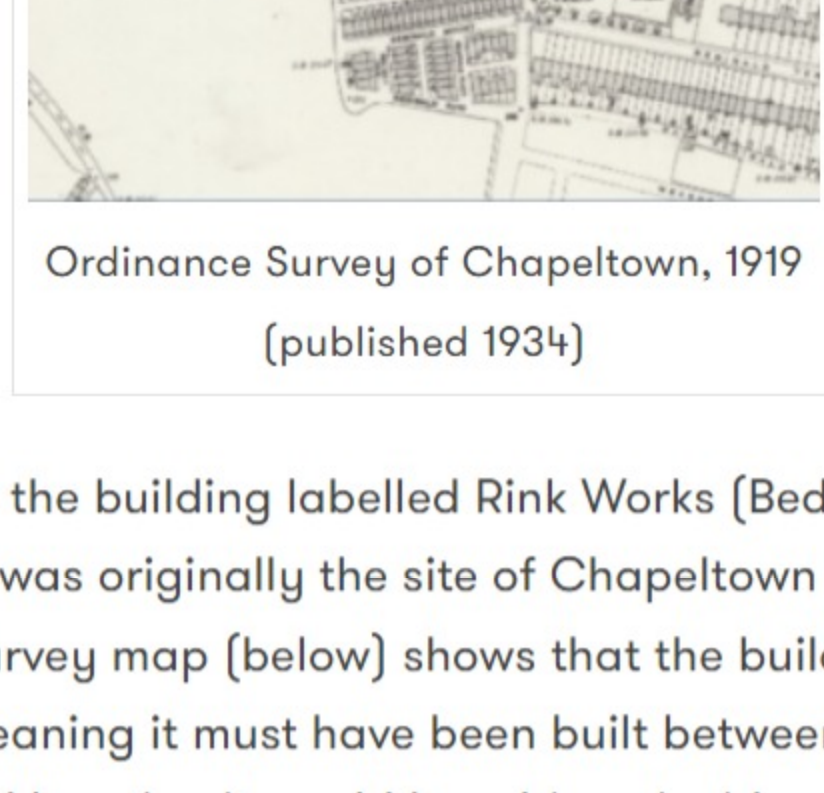
We know that in 1913 the building was converted to an industrial works. In the 1919 Ordnance Survey map above there is a building to the right of St Michaels Lane marked Headingley Works (Joinery). This building was not present in the 1906 Ordnance Survey map (below), meaning it was built between 1907 and 1919. Based on its size and location within the Chapel Lane estate area, it is likely this building was originally the Headingley Roller Rink.



Satellite image taken from Google Maps in 2022 showing the location of the former skating rink, opposite what is now Headingley Stadium and Yorkshire Cricket Ground.

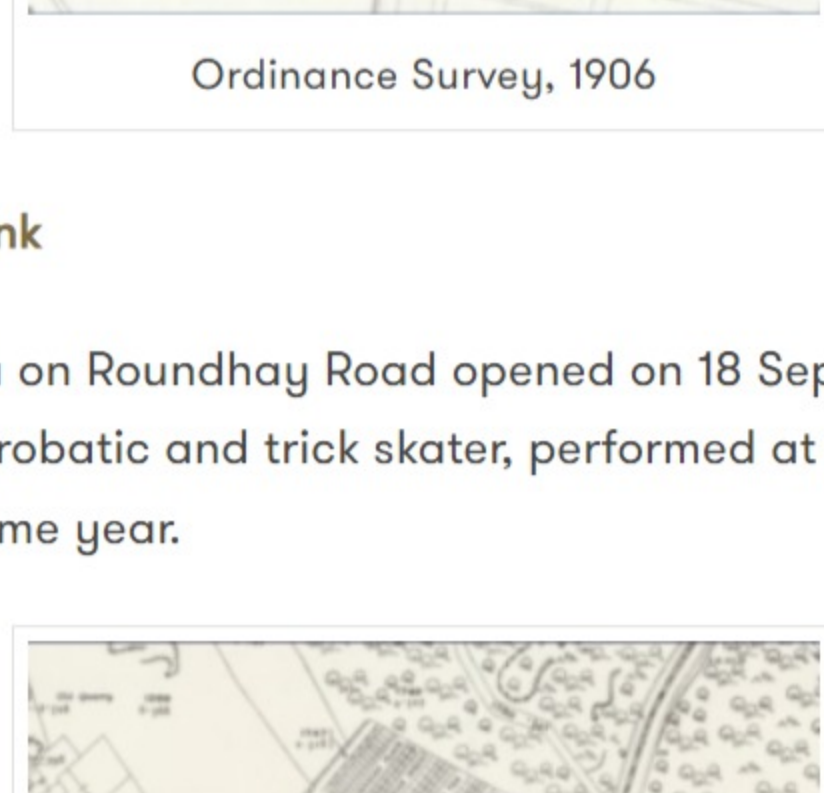
Chapeltown Roller Rink

Chapeltown Roller Rink opened to the public on 22 October 1909. It was located on Reginald Terrace and owned by Yorkshire County Rink Company.



Ordnance Survey of Chapeltown, 1919 (published 1934)

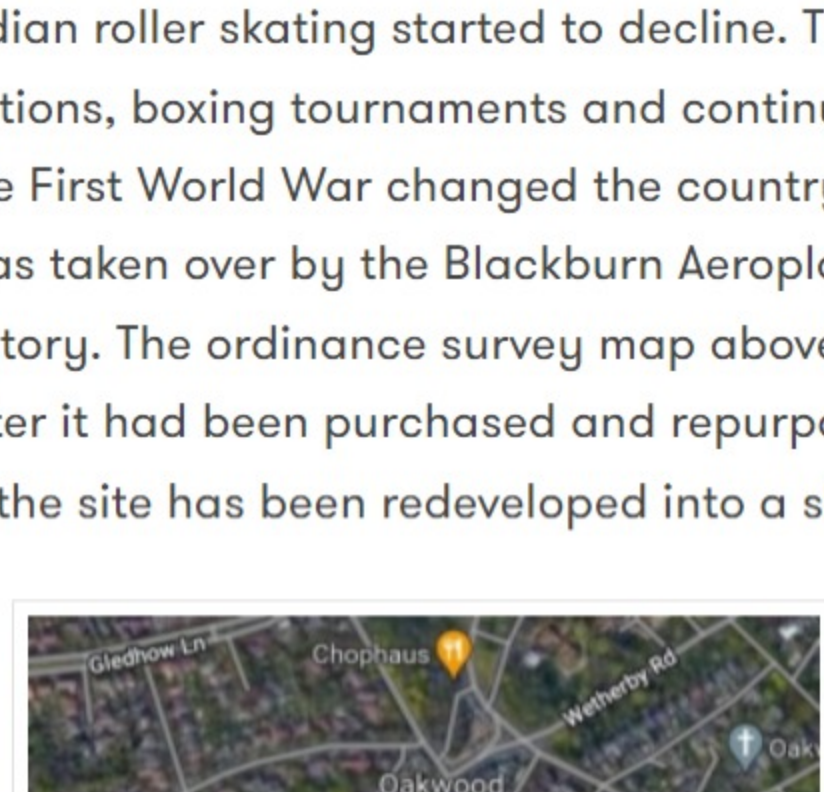
It seems likely that the building labelled Rink Works (Bedstands & Bedding) on the map above was originally the site of Chapeltown Roller Rink. The 1906 Ordnance Survey map (below) shows that the building was not present in 1906, meaning it must have been built between 1907 and 1919. Given its name and location it would be a big coincidence if the 1919 Rink Works building was not once the Chapeltown Roller Rink.



Ordnance Survey, 1906

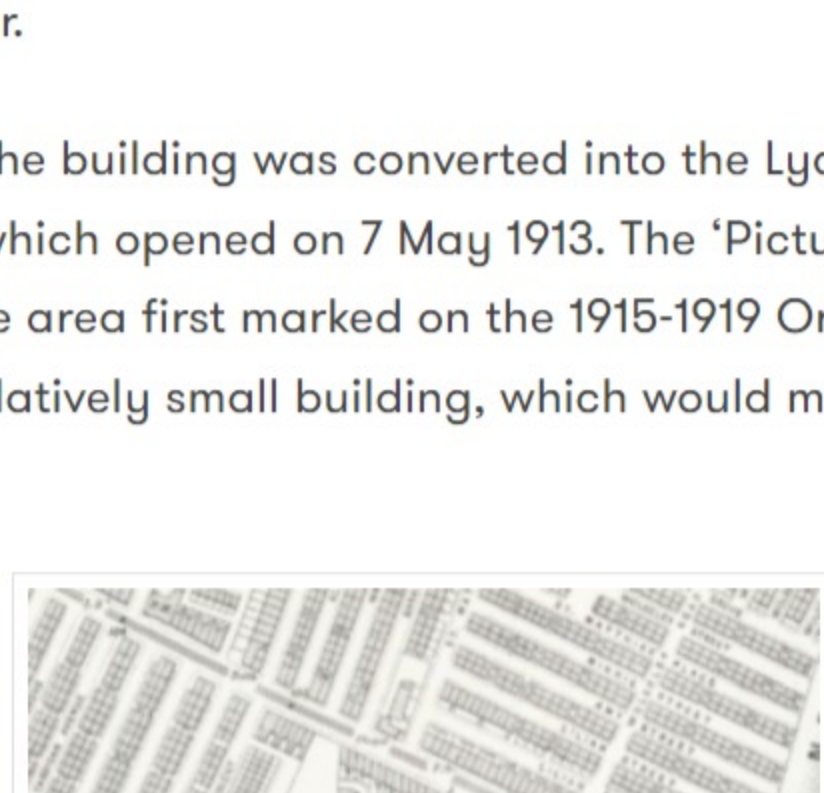
Oakwood Roller Rink

The Leeds Olympia on Roundhay Road opened on 18 September 1909. John F. Davidson, an acrobatic and trick skater, performed at the venue on 30 September that same year.



1919 Ordnance Survey map (published 1934)

Olympia Works did continue as a social and sports venue for a number of years after Edwardian roller skating started to decline. They experimented with hosting exhibitions, boxing tournaments and continued with some skate events. As the First World War changed the country's priorities, though, the rink was taken over by the Blackburn Aeroplane & Motor Company as a factory. The ordinance survey map above shows the Olympia Works after it had been purchased and repurposed by the Company. Today, the site has been redeveloped into a shopping complex.

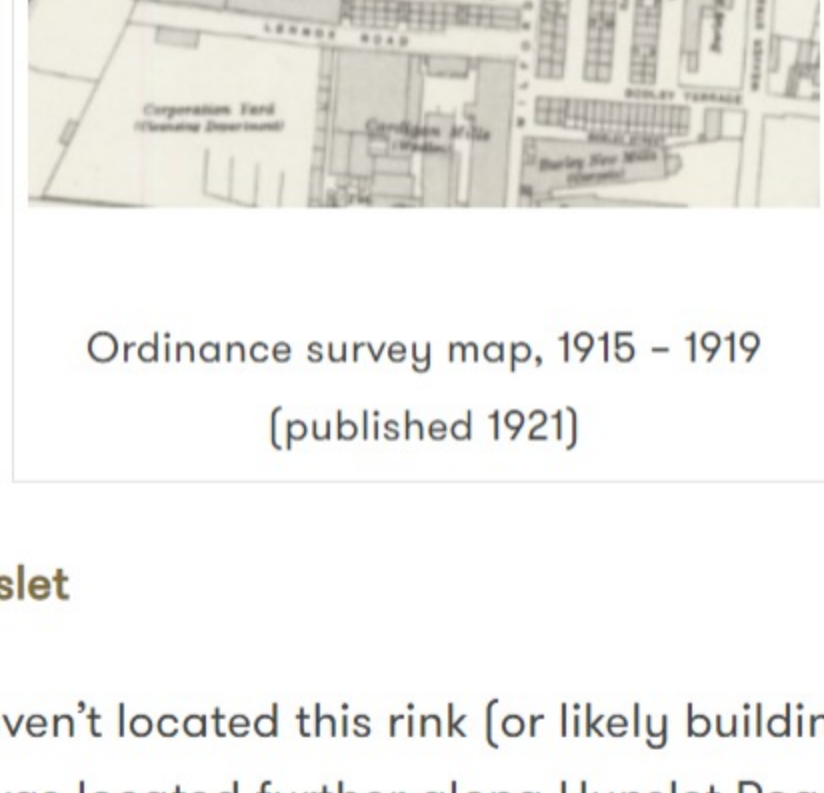


2021 satellite view from Google Maps

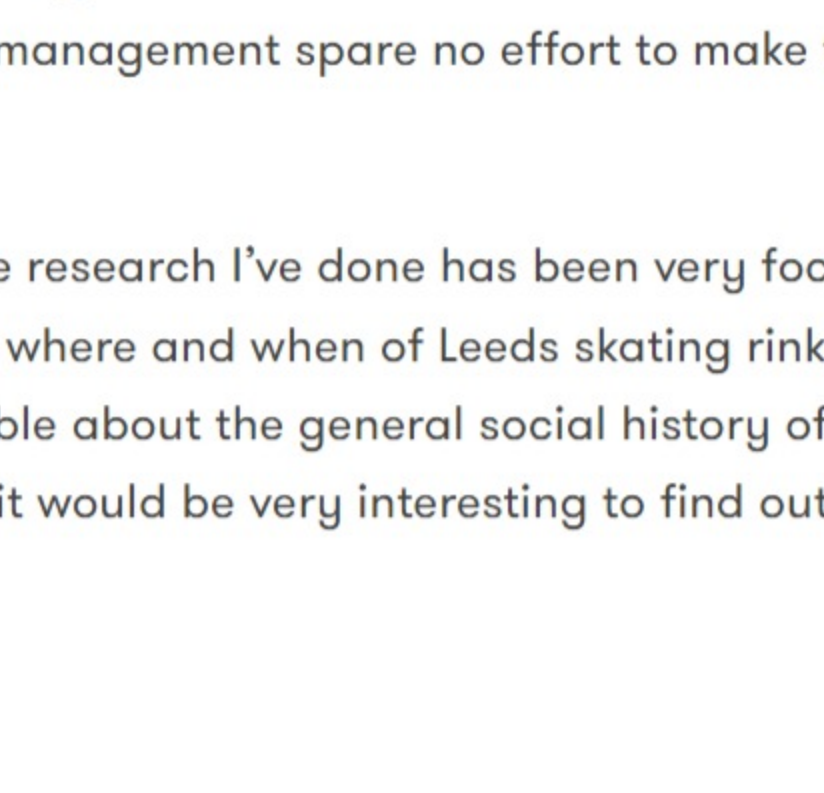
The Cosy Rink, Kirkstall

Reported by newspapers to have been on Milford Place off Kirkstall Road, I have struggled to find clear details about this rink. Based on the dates of newspaper articles it looks like the rink opened in early 1909 and closed later the same year.

It is possible that the building was converted into the Lyceum Picture House on Kirkstall Road which opened on 7 May 1913. The 'Picture Theatre' is the only building in the area first marked on the 1915-1919 Ordnance Survey map. It is also a relatively small building, which would make sense with the rinks name.



1906 Ordnance survey map (published 1908)



Ordnance survey map, 1915 - 1919 (published 1921)

Pavillion Rink, Hunslet

Unfortunately, I haven't located this rink (or likely building) on any map. It is possible that it was located further along Hunslet Road than was captured in the Ordnance Survey maps. The rink was praised by the Leeds Mercury in 1909, though, who said "The floor is maintained in a first-rate condition and the management spare no effort to make the visitors stay enjoyable."

As I said above, the research I've done has been very focussed on understanding the where and when of Leeds skating rinks. There is lots of information available about the general social history of the early 1900s skating craze, but it would be very interesting to find out more about this in Leeds.

By Catherine Robins, Projects Curator

More has been written about the Oakwood Roller Rink in a [blog on the Oakwood Church website](#).

Do you have stories of sports in Leeds that you'd like to share? Or maybe objects you'd be interested in donating? Contact Catherine at Catherine.robins@leeds.gov.uk.

18 May 2022

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