

Fountain aims to wean drinkers off (plastic) bottle

Runner pays £30,000 for guilt-free refreshment

Valentine Low

When the first public drinking fountain was unveiled in London 150 years ago, a large crowd gathered at St Sepulchre's Church at Snow Hill to witness an engineering marvel that for the first time would provide the city's poor with cold, clean, fresh water (and, the authorities hoped, would also keep the toiling masses out of the pub).

A rather smaller crowd gathered in Hyde Park yesterday for the opening of the first drinking fountain built in the park for 30 years, and the serving of champagne would suggest that fountains no longer have the same links with the Temperance movement.

Small, but no less significant; for the event marks a growing backlash against the bottled water industry, which is accused by critics of squandering resources as well as creating huge amounts of waste.

"The water in London is fantastic," said David Harber, the sculptor who created the fountain, a 1.2m (4ft) steel sphere on a plinth of hammered granite with four drinking positions. "It is clean, it does not taste too chlorinated. It is about as good as it gets."

"I was in the Middle East recently, and the water came from Fiji. When I was in California, the water came from Scotland. It does not make sense."

The fountain was bankrolled by the developer Michael Freeman, a trustee of the Royal Parks Foundation, who has been running in Hyde Park for the



The Hyde Park fountain attracts a young crowd after its opening yesterday

past 30 years. But if the fountain, with its polished stainless steel studded with bronze petals, and bill of more than £30,000, seems expensive then it is at least observing a tradition. One of the largest in London is the Ready Money fountain in Regent's Park, ten tonnes of Sicilian marble and four of red Aberdeen granite, financed in 1869 by a Bombay philanthropist, Cowasji Jehangir Readymoney.

The philanthropists who in 1859 created what would later become the Metropolitan Drinking Fountain and

Cattle Trough Association were trying to solve the problem of contaminated water, which had led to cholera. The focus today is on ridding the city of plastic water bottles. The association, now the Drinking Fountain Association, is working with the City of London to establish 150 fountains within the Square Mile.

Mr Freeman said that they need not be as elaborate as the one that bears his name. "You could do a drinking fountain that is perfectly adequate for a couple of thousand."

Slurping is fine, in moderation

Will Pavia
Etiquette

How should one drink from a fountain? The question was troubling arbiters of etiquette yesterday as they prepared for a new era of public drinking. The rules that pertain to the table cannot be transferred easily to a nozzle in the street. A degree of slurping is permitted, but gargling is a point of contention. As for spitting: don't.

According to Jo Bryant, of *Debrett*, "You have the etiquette of the queue. When you get to the front you shouldn't take too much time there."

Ten seconds? Twenty seconds? "It's difficult to say precisely how long," she said. "You need to make sure you're not taking much longer than everyone else."

The problem for Ms Bryant is that public fountain drinking, so much a part of life in the Victorian era, has

largely disappeared. Questions of etiquette have duly become a matter for historians.

Stephen Halliday, author of *The Great Filth: The War Against Disease in Victorian England*, said: "There used to be conduits that were only open at certain times. At closing time you would sometimes have a queue and there would be punch-ups."

Free drinking fountains went some way to ending such behaviour.

In 1862 *The Times* reported the opening of a fountain in Islington by Gladstone. He filled a cup and said it was "a great honour to be the first person to drink the water that proceeds from it".

Ms Bryant notes that it may not always be possible to carry a cup. Robert Laughton, whose company, Drinking Water Fountains, supplies fountains to schools and local authorities, says that it was Victorian etiquette "that you should hold your hands underneath and drink from your hands".

Clamping one's mouth around the nozzle is prohibited.

