



▲ This puddled patch of tarmac in a secluded corner of **Victoria Park** may not immediately catch the eye, but it is in fact the only Cairnie-style artificial curling rink known to have survived in Glasgow.

Created in 1902 by the **Partick Curling Club**, whose clubhouse is at the far end, this was originally one of two rinks. A larger one, facing the pavilion, is now part of a car park used by the Council's Land and Environmental Services division. Partick rent the site from the Council at a peppercorn rent.

As can be seen, the rink's design is simple enough, a sunken tarmac

bed with concentric rings at the pavilion end (*right*) forming what is called the 'house', with the 'button' in the centre.

Such rinks are not easy to maintain, especially when there are so few opportunities to play on them. One issue is leakage, caused by cracks in the tarmac.

Since the last time an organised match took place on this rink in the 1980s, the nearest Partick have come to a repeat was in January 2010 (*top right*). Frustratingly, however, by the time club members had made all the necessary preparations, a thaw set in.



▲ Being hidden away from the public eye, on the Balshagray Avenue side of **Victoria Park**, may well have been the saving grace for **Partick Curling Club's** charming pavilion, which dates from 1900.

For not only is the curling house unique in Glasgow, it is also one of only five historic examples known in Scotland as a whole.

As such, in late 2009 it was put forward to Historic Scotland as a candidate for listing.

Victoria Park is the club's third home. Formed as the Partick Union Curling Society in 1842, as noted earlier the club was originally based at the Drovers Inn, at a time when the Byres Road, as its name suggests, was a rural byway with barely a building on it. Partick was then an independent burgh.

In 1857 the club moved to a new pond on Peel Street (where Dyce Lane is now), just north of where a few years later the West of Scotland cricket ground was laid out (*see page 176*). For £6 they had erected a wooden pavilion, which a Mr Anderson then offered to paint with imitation bricks.

Their final move to Victoria Park, which had opened in 1887, came in 1894, courtesy of a 20 year lease at £7 per annum, negotiated with the Town Council. Next door to the site was Partick Tennis Club.

Fortunately for the curlers, if not the tennis players, their first eight years in the park coincided with a series of exceptionally cold winters, so they were quite content to curl on a conventional pond. (Down in London during the same period

curlers reported enjoying around fifteen days of ice per year).

Partick were also fortunate to have wealthy patrons. The pavilion, its architect unknown, was endowed by Bailie William Kennedy, while the two artificial rinks, opened two years later in 1902, were gifted by M Hunter Kennedy (himself a prominent player) and John G Kennedy.

Ironically, the opening in 1907 of the new indoor ice rink at Crossmyloof meant that members would spend less and less time at Victoria Park as the century wore on. But on the plus side, this has resulted in the pavilion remaining virtually untouched.

A hidden gem it may be therefore, but it is a wonderfully unspoilt one too.



▲ One further benefit of **Partick Curling Club's** secluded location is the survival of eight original lamp posts, installed by the side of the rinks in 1911 in order to ensure that whenever there was ice, bad light would not stop play.

No doubt hoping to attract new members, the club noticed to this effect in the *Evening Citizen*.

But then curlers have always had to seize the moment. Kilmarnock had a club which played at dawn, before the players started work, while elsewhere it was common to play by lantern light. Bingham's Pond had electric lighting as early as 1882, barely three years after incandescent bulbs were invented.

One of Partick's hardier members was 'Long' John Anderson, 6' 5" tall, who in 1842 apparently played non-stop for 36 hours, much of that time by candlelight. Anderson was still playing at the age of 86, proof that cold air and plenty of liquid nourishment may be just what the doctor ordered.