

Claydon with Clattercote Newsletter

Village History Supplement

May 2012

THE PLAYING FIELDS OF CLAYDON

Continuing the recollections of long standing villagers on life in the village in the recent past.

The Playing Field that we know today was not bought by the village until 1976. Prior to that date it was just a field that had belonged to Hillside Farm. It was used by the village cricket team in the 1930s and also for an event to celebrate the Coronation of King George VI in 1937. The village children had a great time and enough space to take part in novelty races, including a slow bicycle race. The bicycle race was won by Wallace Charles, a butcher's assistant on his shop bike, with a large basket and small wheel at the front. A very young Eric Bates was first across the line in the egg and spoon race, but he was promptly disqualified for holding the egg down with his thumb.

Even without an 'official' playing field the village boasted a soccer team in addition to the cricket team. In the late 1940s and 1950s the teams also had a good following of supporters who would hire a 'bus to take them to any away fixtures. There were some very good village cricketers. Les Gilkes and Ron Wyatt were both excellent batsmen. On one occasion the opposing team gained an advantage due to force of circumstance. Ron Wyatt was batting a superb innings when a messenger arrived to inform him that his wife had given birth to twins. The information put Ron completely off his stride and he was bowled by the next ball. Before his move to Chipping Warden, Arthur Bloomfield was the star bowler and a very useful batsman.

The teams played in two locations during this period, both courtesy of Tom Gardner of Manor Farm. The original site was the first field on the right after passing under the railway bridge when leaving the village via the Mollington Road. The second was the first field on the left after crossing the railway line at the end of Crossing Lane. The teams themselves organised the mowing and, in the case of the soccer team, the erection of the goal posts. With no other facilities the players would arrive dressed for action either in their football shirts or their cricket white shirts and (sometimes grey) flannels.

Between innings the cricket team and their visitors would walk to the Church Room for their refreshments. At this time, years before the

building of Manor Park and the short cut from Crossing Lane, the route took the teams up Crossing Lane, then via a long disappeared right of way adjacent to Rose Cottage and through the garden and yard of the Sunrising to the centre of the village.



**Early 1950s. The team back row from the left: John Gardner, Les Hickson, Martin Hickson, Les Gilkes, Alf Dyer, Ron Wyatt
front row: Vic Bradley, Sid Bradley, Basil Prew, John Stokes, Jack Devonshire
The Officials: Eric Gilkes, Sid Bloomfield and Daisy Bradley**

The village green provided a good place for the children to play as it was much more open without the present trees. They would also play cricket on the road as there was very little traffic to interrupt the game. The major hazard was irate neighbours when the balls entered gardens or came close to windows. There was also the temptation of playing non ball games in the churchyard, but they were duly reprimanded if discovered. School sports were played in either the first field on the left (i.e. Well Field) of the Mollington Road or the one on the right. The 1953 Queen's Coronation Celebration was held in Well Field. In addition to games and races, there was a Lucky Dip and a skittle competition to win a pig.

The football team finally played in Clattercote on the field next to Brookside. Village matches ceased in the 1960s when the players joined teams in other villages. Arthur Bloomfield was so popular in Chipping Warden that a bench was erected in his honour.

In the 1970s, the building of Bignolds Close and Manor Park brought an influx of new families to the village and new interest in forming village

teams. For a time Andrew Fox allowed the children to use the field immediately behind Butlin Farm as a playground when it was not in use by livestock. There is a memory of a Hereford bull, on release into the field, rushing to confront a snowman that had been built by a group of children. There was a great deal of snorting and stamping but no actual charge.

In 1975 initial discussions were held regarding the purchase of the present playing field land for use as a village amenity. Villagers voted (by 145 to 23) in favour of an increase in the rates (forerunner of Council Tax) to fund the purchase. The field was duly purchased by the Parish Council in 1976 for £3000. In 1978 it was leased to the Trustees of the Claydon Playing Field at a rent of £5 per annum. Representatives from all of the village organisations formed the Playing Field Management Committee (PFMC), which was responsible for funding the upkeep of the field and the purchase of equipment.

For a time the Claydon Cricket Team played on the field, with John Bradley as the outstanding batsman. Work was done to create a cricket square but it was never entirely satisfactory, so after only a few seasons the team moved to Fenny Compton but continued to play under the Claydon banner.

In 1997 the lease was terminated and the present structure with the Parish Council as the Trustee of the Claydon Playing Field was agreed.



Councillor Rosemarie Higham holding the flowers with PFMC members from the left: Tracy Neale, Colin Marchington, John Bryer and Jenny Jones

Photograph by Dick Blenkinsop

Over the years the Playing Field has provided the venue for many events – bonfires, festivals, fetes, fun days, dog shows, the Silver Jubilee Celebration, the VJ 50th Anniversary Celebration and various private parties. The children have enjoyed various items of play equipment, the latest being the Multiplay purchased in 2006 and officially opened by District Councillor Mrs Rosemarie Higham.

Today the age profile of the village children is such that the main body of the field is more popular with dog walkers than with children, but this is likely to change over time. Meantime the Play Area remains very popular and regular events continue to be held. The turnout of volunteers at the recent working party day demonstrated that many people feel that the Playing Field is worth maintaining.



Chris Hardy painting the see-saw at the recent working party day

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