

POTTERHANWORTH PLAYING FIELD

AN ACCOUNT OF ITS DEVELOPMENT FROM EARLIEST DAYS TO NOW

IN THE BEGINNING

On the 28th February, 1952 there was a Parish Meeting in the Village Hut, the purpose of which was to elect a Committee to raise and administer the Parish Fund. It would appear that the "Parish Fund" was a sum of money that already been raised by the parishioners of Potterhanworth to provide facilities in the parish. Details of how that money had been raised and how much are not clear. At that very first meeting of the Parish Fund Committee it was resolved to meet the cost of the Bus Shelter that had just been erected as part of the Festival of Britain Celebrations of 1951, less the value of any other donations that had been given towards that project.

In the event the Parish Fund Committee donated £98 towards the Bus Shelter project that had been managed by the Parish Council. This sum exactly cleared the outstanding costs of the shelter, but then a final donation was given by the Salter family amounting to £113 which one year later was repaid by The Bus Shelter Committee to the Parish Fund Committee. That donation directed to The Bus Shelter, and then re-directed to the Parish Fund Committee, would in fact help to pay for the purchase of the playing field a few years later. The final minute of that Parish meeting resolved that the Committee should "carry on with the task of finding a playing field for the Parish".

FINDING A SITE

The newly formed Parish Fund Committee did not waste any time in looking for a site. At their meeting on the 10th March 1952 it was formerly proposed and passed that they should find a site for a playing field. In further discussions at that meeting, Mr. R Brewer, a farmer in Potterhanworth offered to release the two small fields that he rented at The Park from a Mr. W Gillet. The two fields, O.S. No. 250 and O.S. No. 251 were 1.659 acres and 2.463 acres in size respectively. They were situated immediately to the north of The Park about 100 yards to the west of Church Hill. At the same meeting it was agreed to talk to Mr. CA Salter, farmer, to see whether he would be interested in selling his field off Moor Lane. A week later the committee inspected The Park site and decided to approach Mr. Gillet to see if he would sell and at what price. They noted during the inspection that some drainage work would be required.

At the next meeting on the 24th of April 1952 it was reported that Mr. Gillet had agreed to sell the two fields, and that the price would be £65 per acre. It was then decided at that meeting to carry on with the purchase if it was approved by the parish, and that a note be inserted in the deeds that "The Field will always remain a Playing Field". Solicitors Porter & Hipwood were to be asked to act for the purchase and Col. RA Briggs, Secretary of Kesteven Playing Fields Association was to be approached for advice on how to get a grant towards the required drainage work.

During the year it was established that in addition to the purchase price there would be additional costs for drainage, £180, clearing of some willow trees, £50 and landscaping to make the fields suitable for use £680. At the end of 1952 the Committee had the sum of £414 in hand.

At the meeting held on the 29th of January 1953 it was reported that Mr. Battle had purchased the "Seven Lands" from Mr. CA Salter and he was willing to sell it for a sports field. Mr. Battle was the tenant of this field. The "Seven Lands", not to be confused with the house of the same name, was in fact field O.S. 168, the site of the current playing field. This is slightly confusing as when the Conveyance for the field was finalized Mr. CA Salter is clearly named as the vendor. It must be assumed that Mr. Battle, who was tenant of the land, had paid for it but at that stage a conveyance had not been transacted.

At the next meeting on the 26th of February 1953 it was reported that following a meeting with Mr. Battle it appeared that the committee would have to put £300 down and the remainder would have to be paid in one year. The cost would be £70 per acre plus expenses. At that meeting it was then agreed that O.S. 168 be purchased at £70 per acre plus transfer fees and tenant's rights. It was also agreed to rescind the minute dated 24th of April 1952 regarding the purchase of fields O.S. 250 and O.S. 251. A public parish meeting held on the 5th March ratified these decisions. On the 27th of April 1953 The Parish Fund Committee re-named itself as "Potterhanworth Playing Field Committee".

Money obviously changed hands at this point as work immediately began on seeding the field. North Kesteven District Council had requested a site for a sewerage works to serve the soon to be build Queensway estate. At the committee meeting on the 26th of June 1953 it was agreed to offer North Kesteven a strip of land 75 feet in width along the north end of the field, about half an acre, for £50, with them providing fencing for the site. The area is now the site of the Queensway Court housing development.

Matters concerning the purchase of the playing field were finalized before the end of 1953. At their meeting on the 17th of September it was agreed to pay over the balance of £50 outstanding for the purchase to Mr. Hipwood, solicitor, and that Mr. Hipwood should also pay the account for Mr. Battle's tenant rights and lime. It was also agreed that Mr. Hipwood should transfer half an acre to the Rural District Council. At the next meeting on 16th of October it was agreed that Mr. Hipwood should transfer the land to the District Council direct from Mr. CA Salter. This seems to confirm that no conveyance had been signed between Mr. Battle and Mr. Salter at this point. At this same meeting it was agreed to ask the Parish Council to accept Trusteeship of the Sports field.

Although the land for the playing field had now been secured and paid for it was not until February 1956 that the Conveyance was signed, along with the Trust Deed of management. The conveyance named Potterhanworth Parish Council as the purchasers as a voluntary committee cannot effect a legal transaction to buy land.

LEGALITIES

A history of the Playing Field would not be complete without recording the legal processes that took place after the decision to purchase was made. These are quite complex and take some understanding.

Proceedings got under way in March 1953 when Porter & Hipwood Solicitors were commissioned by the Committee to carry out land searches with both North Kesteven Rural District Council and Kesteven County Council. These searches did not show up any problems

regarding the field. Later that year on the 16th of December the newly named Potterhanworth Playing Field Committee wrote to the Parish Council to ask if it would accept the trusteeship of the playing field which would “ensure that the land would belong to the Parish for all time”. The letter went on to say that “management of the field would, of course, rest with the Potterhanworth Playing Field Committee until such time as it would go out of existence”.

Almost a year later on 29th November 1954 Porter & Hipwood wrote to the Ministry of Education on behalf of the Playing Field Committee to advise that The Parish Council “wished to be prescribed as a Trust Corporation for the purpose of having the said playing field vested in them”. As the Lord Chancellor required the support of the Charity Commissioners or the Minister of Education before he would grant such powers, the Minister’s approval was requested.

A draft trust deed was submitted to the Ministry of Education and Porter & Hipwood were advised on 31st December 1954 that once executed it would “be effective to set up a charitable foundation under the Minister’s jurisdiction”. Finally on 23rd of August 1955 The Lord High Chancellor prescribed The Parish Council of Potterhanworth as a Trust Corporation in respect of **“The Charitable Trust known as the Potterhanworth Playing Field in the Parish of Potterhanworth in the County of Lincoln”**.

The dictionary states that a “Trust Corporation is appointed to allow for uninterrupted administration of a Trust in the event of a trustee’s resignation, death, bankruptcy or incapacity.” In other words a Trust Corporation is a backstop in case a management trust fails. This is relevant as that is exactly what occurred 22 years after the Trust Deed was signed.

The way was now clear for the Trust Deed to be executed along with The Conveyance and this was carried out on the 16th of February 1956. The Conveyance acknowledges prior receipt of £440 pounds in payment for 6.538 acres of land, part of Close No. 168, half an acre having been separately conveyed to The Rural District Council.

One or two points should be noted at this point. The conveyance did not include the short length of road between Queensway and the entrance to the field. Although The Playing Field Committee had access rights it seems that the legal owner of that short length of road is North Kesteven District Council who bought the whole field where the Queensway estate has been built.

The Charitable Trust known as Potterhanworth Playing Field came under the jurisdiction of The Ministry of Education until 1964 when it was transferred to The Charity Commissioners. Reference to the charity on The Charity Commissioners website quite clearly states that the charity owns land. There can be no doubt that the charity known as Potterhanworth Playing Field does in fact own the land and not the Parish Council.

THE NEW COMMITTEE

The new Playing Field Committee as constituted by the new Trust Deed first met on 17th May 1956. Eleven village organizations were represented on the Committee which was responsible for the management of the Playing Field. Whilst the Parish Council had completed the conveyance on behalf of the Committee, and had accepted the trusteeship of the field, it is clear from the Trust Deed that the Committee had full responsibility for

managing the property. Whilst the trust deed stipulates in great detail what must be done regarding the management of the field, there is no guidance in the document as to what should happen if the Committee were unable to function. At this time however the question was not relevant and the Committee worked well to develop the playing field.

Prior to the Conveyance and Trust Deed being signed in 1956, the Playing Field Committee had been quite active. During the first year after securing the field a cricket square had been laid out, and moves were made to level the rest of the field. By the time the Trust Deed was signed in 1956 a cricket club and a football club were established, and children's play equipment had been procured.

Plans were then drawn up to extend the facilities to include a bowling green and tennis courts, and in 1962 a water supply was installed to the field. In 1966 the work of the Committee culminated in the opening of the tennis courts and the bowling green for which a loan of £400 had been obtained from the National Playing Fields Association. The loan was guaranteed by ten prominent parishioners who stood surety in the sum of £40 each. In effect the loan was repaid by Parish Council Grants to the Committee over a period of ten years. Also in 1966 a pavilion was acquired and erected on the field. The Pavilion was actually a First World War wooden army hut that had seen better days. Nonetheless it was fitted out by voluntary labour and had changing rooms, a kitchenette and a reasonable sized meeting room. It served its purpose and was to stand for the next 35 years but came increasingly difficult to maintain as its fabric rotted away.

During the next nine years after 1966 things were fairly static with no major development, but the work of the Committee declined to the point where it became almost ineffectual.

CHANGE OF MANAGEMENT

In July 1975 the Committee informed the Parish Council that it could no longer function as it could not find people willing to serve as officers, and it invited the Parish Council to take over the running of the Playing Field. In November 1975 a special meeting of the Playing Field Committee was called in an attempt to restart effective management of the field. At that meeting I took on the Secretaryship of the Committee and a new chairman was found. The Committee actually then functioned until December 1977 when the same problems arose and the Committee finally ceased to function.

From that time the Parish Council has managed the Playing Field.

THE LATTER YEARS UPTO 2000

Throughout the 1980s the Playing Field was administered by the Parish Council with no major development work being carried out. At the end of that decade it was realized that the Children's Play Area was becoming dangerous and it had eventually to be demolished. For a year or two there were no children's facilities at all. In 1994 the Parish Council were successful in obtaining a grant of more than £6000 from the Foundation for Sport and the Arts and a new play area was constructed in that year. It was sited at the northern end of the field between the end of the football pitch and the boundary fence. In the same year the Council also obtained a grant from the Foundation for Sport and the Arts in the sum of £2000 to resurface the tennis courts and this work was also carried out in 1994.

By the middle of the 1990s the wooden pavilion was deteriorating rapidly. It was apparent that if sporting activities were to continue in Potterhanworth it would need to be replaced. The most likely source of funds was seen as the Lottery Sports Council. It was felt however that any application by the Parish Council for funds would likely founder because they would not be able to convince the Sports Council that they were the legal owners of the playing field.

In 1999 the Parish Council was at loggerheads with the Charity Commissioners over the submission of accounts for the Playing Field, which is registered as a charity. The Commissioners took the view that the Parish Council should not even be administering the field and advised that the Parish Council should re-start the Playing Field Committee and hand over management to them. They totally failed to grasp that this was no longer possible. They also seemed to lose sight of the fact that the Parish Council had been appointed as a Trust Corporation of the Playing Field. I refer back to the definition of a Trust Corporation's purpose that reads: - "A Trust Corporation is appointed to allow for uninterrupted administration of a trust in the event of a trustee's resignation, death, bankruptcy or incapacity". It seems to me that this was exactly what the Parish Council was doing at that time.

CHANGE OF LEGAL STATUS

It was quite clear from the foregoing that the Parish Council faced three major problems in respect of the Playing Field at the beginning of the year 2000. These were:-

1. A very dangerous structure on the field that whilst it was insured nevertheless represented a major risk to the general public and potentially faced the Parish Council and individual Councillors with the threat of legal action for negligence and compensation should anyone get hurt.
2. The problem of the Charity Commissioners who were totally unrealistic in advising the Parish Council to restart the Playing Field Committee and hand over management to them. They totally failed to grasp that the voluntary management system had long since collapsed and there was no hope of restarting it.
3. The provision of new pavilion/changing facilities so that sporting activities could be re-started. There was no hope of re-establishing the Football and Cricket teams or starting new sporting activities without decent premises.

These three matters were all closely linked and the way forward seemed to be firstly to regularize the Parish Council's management of the playing field. Legal advice was taken and the local MP was at one stage involved in finding a solution. Eventually agreement was reached with the Charity Commissioners that the Parish Council should act as the sole trustee of the playing field instead of the defunct Playing Field Committee.

THE NEW PAVILION

This action cleared the log jam regarding the pavilion. At long last the highly dangerous old structure was demolished and a new building erected by the Parish Council taking out a loan. A band of volunteer helpers began to fit the new building out with changing rooms and showers. A fairly small meeting room was provided at the northern end of the building with limited catering facilities.

Ironically, as the new pavilion was completed, the sporting clubs began to disappear. The Bowls Club demised fairly early in the 2000s followed by the Cricket Club and Football Club. Only the tennis courts continued to see limited use. The end of the Bowls Club presented an opportunity to relocate the children's play area from the north end of the field to where it is now. It was sad to see the bowling green go as in its hay day it was considered to be one of the finest greens in the county.

With the demise of the sports clubs the pavilion was little used over the next few years. It served as a meeting room for the Parish Council and other village organizations such as Potterhanworth over 60s, but quite obviously was not being used to its full potential. In 2014 the parish was consulted as to its further use, and following this it was decided to convert it into a community centre with full kitchen facilities and new toilets

FROM PAVILION TO COMMUNITY CENTRE.

Work began in 2015 and over the next two and half years a small group of volunteers undertook the mammoth task of completely stripping out all of the existing internal walls, building a new kitchen, a set of three toilet suites and, the laying of a new floor. Major alterations and additions were needed to the plumbing and drainage structure and extensive electrical re-wiring was carried out. All of this work was completed by voluntary labour including the painting and decorating as the building was completed.

The finished community centre has proved to be a great success. It is a very popular venue and is now extensively hired for meetings, parties and other events by both local parishioners and people from outside of the parish. It is an essential facility for the large field events such as the Beer Festival and The Autumn Festival. More recently North Kesteven District Council has adopted this venue as their electoral voting centre.

UPGRADING OF THE CHILDREN'S PLAY PARK

In 2023 the Parish Council managed to get a grant of £90,000 to enhance the children's play park with much needed additional equipment. Until 2023 the available equipment was somewhat sparse comprising two sets of swings and a climbing frame/sliding chute that had been re-located from the old play area. These items were left in place and were supplemented by a mass of new equipment that now almost fills the old bowling green area. In addition to the new equipment for the children there are a number of exercise machines located outside of the enclosed area for adults to use and enjoy.

Potterhanworth now enjoys a great facility in the playing field with its open spaces, Pavilion/community centre and children's play park that are second to none. We should not forget however that we owe it to the foresight, determination and hard work of the Potterhanworth Fund Raising Committee in the early 1950s that made it all possible.

RE WILFORD

Former Parish Councillor and Clerk to the Parish Council of Potterhanworth.

December 2023



This extract from a very old map shows the two sites which were considered by The Parish Fund Committee when they were planning to provide a playing field for Potterhanworth.



This is a copy of the site plan taken from the Conveyance document. Note that this shows the area of the Playing Field before 1956 when The Queensway Estate had not been started. The area that was purchased is edged round in red. The half of an acre that was sold off to North Kesteven Rural District Council can be seen at the top end of the field. Note also that the access road down the southern edge of the Queensway site was not purchased. The Playing Field has access rights as defined in the Conveyance.

