COWLING RECREATION GROUND BEGINNINGS

by Catherine Smith/Cowgill in 2006

At the annual parish council meeting on 17th March 1919 the subject of providing a War Memorial was on the agenda.

Councillors wanted it to be a worthy tribute to those who had lost their lives in the recent Great War 1914-18. The sacrifice they had made must be honoured and always remembered.

The proposal was to build a Memorial Shelter and make a recreation ground to provide facilities for healthy outdoor activities, games, sports and a children's play area.

Since 1890 Cowling Cricket Club had rented a field which was used for grazing cattle. Cowling Temperance Band had a hut on the site for their practices too. This field had good access to the main road and was in the centre of the village.

In 1923 Mr. Everett Binns, a local mill owner (John Binns & Co.) purchased a field lower down the village, a certain amount of work had to be done to the ground and it was 1925 when the first cricket match was played there. (The current cricket and football field.)

It was therefore unanimously decided that the old cricket field was the ideal site for the memorial and recreation ground.

The land was now owned by six sisters – Dorothy Pickles, Elizabeth Smith, Hannah Cowgill, Janey Smith, Millicent Brigg and Penninah Smith, all except one having had sons serving in the war. They were anxious to safeguard the value and importance of this land. They agreed to sell, but only if its status and uses were protected forever!

Therefore, a covenant was set up and the deeds clearly state and demand that

"THE LAND SHOULD BE SET APART AND FOR EVER USED AND MAINTAINED AS A RECREATION GROUND FOR THE INHABITANTS OF COWLING, AND A PART THEREOF AS A PERMANENT MEMORIAL TO THE OFFICERS AND MEN OF COWLING WHO FELL IN THE GREAT WAR."

Instructions as to its management are noted in the 1923 Covenant and the limitations to its use. It clearly states that it CAN NEVER BE SOLD NOR ANY PART THEREOF. One could look on it as Cowling's Village Green.

It was agreed that the land be purchased with money raised by public subscription. Over £700 was donated, which more than covered the cost. The building work, landscaping, levelling, walling and other costs would be raised by efforts. A Three Day Bazaar was held in the Methodist Chapel Schoolroom and was expected to raise £1,200. Everyone worked hard to get things moving.

The Memorial was to be in the form of a handsome dressed stone shelter with oak seating, and a glass partition. This was set in a landscaped rose garden looking across to Cowling Hill. The Plaque was placed on the wall of the shelter facing the main road. It had 27 names of men who gave their lives in the Great War 1914-18, later on 8 names were added from the 1939-45 war. Another memorial in the Holy Trinity Church yard lists 54 names from both wars.

Tennis Courts were laid out and a putting green also. Swings, a slide, see saw, and sandpit were in place along the west facing wall and were very popular as it faced the sun and was out of the wind.

In 1937 a former resident Mr. Stephen Hartley made a generous gift of a pavilion for the use of the tennis players and spectators. The tennis courts were very well used for many years. The putting green was turned into allotments during the war, as there was a campaign to "Dig for Victory." it was used until the early 1960's and then grassed over.

John Binns and Sons of Croft Mill gave money to landscape and plant rose beds and borders on the occasion of their centenary in 1952.

The annual gala is always held on the field, and this is always a popular event with all the usual attractions including a fair, Gala Queen, sports, fell race and clay pigeon shoot etc. The proceeds always going to local groups.

Very sadly patterns of behaviour have declined. The tennis pavilion was vandalized in the 1980's and then sadly burned down! The war memorial shelter suffered too, that was taken down as it was unsafe. A simple stone structure was erected in its place, and the former plaque placed on it. The Remembrance Service is held there each alternate year with the parish church memorial.

IT IS VITAL TO MAKE IT KNOWN THAT THIS FIELD CANNOT BE SOLD!

Written by Catherine Smith/Cowgill in Feb. 2006.
Typed up by Joan M. Tindale in 2023.
60 men died in WW1 and 11 in WW2 (extensive research done before 2014 - JMT)