

# A History of Graves Park

The 1950s saw Graves Park being used extensively by members of the community.

One of the main early 'movers' were the popular Green Circle Table Tennis Club whose HQ was the Black Bull. Members included well known local names such as Fossitt and Fyson; Thorne and Cowham; Traves, Hardy, Flatters and many more.

Post World War II, with rationing still in place on many items and austerity still a recent memory for some - very much a way of life for others, people still knew the 'secret' of enjoyment gleaned from the simplest of pleasures and pastimes: still knew the value of friendships and good companions.



Legendary "Crazy Dances" were held: Prize Draws and Galas took place at various venues; the Annual Green Circle Table Tennis Tournament attracted players from all over Lincolnshire. Football was always popular, the Kirton Cup competition - the original, opening event - is still fought for to this day. [In fact in 1959 Kirton Town even went on tour to Belgium and France.] A village Football Pool was created - much like a smaller version of today's 'Pools' - which formed a generous proportion of the income. Funds raised all went towards the expansion and improvement of the Park.



**In September 1957 the land was officially taken on by the Trustees and a Committee formed to take the facility onward and upward.** Originally meeting in a tin hut on the field there soon followed a move to the Black Bull(!) The committee laid down their plans.

**November 1959 saw the completion and Grand Opening of the new, £4,000 Sports Pavillion with 'Home' and 'Away' dressing rooms; inside (as well as outside) toilets, a large central Club Room, and Kitchen.**

The opening was a grand event in the Village Social calendar. Thanks were given to the many volunteers who (in some cases, quite literally) did the 'spade work'. The finished pavillion, it was said, was quoted as a model of excellence and enterprise to other sports and playing field associations throughout the County. Things looked set fair for Graves Park; but the rug was soon to be removed.

As early as 1964 cracks had not only appeared, but become a yawning chasm. In April of that year the 'Standard' reported a "Decline in the use of Kirton playing field". The committee which, only five years before were meeting almost once a week, had not met for a full year. There was, simply, "nothing to discuss".

The sports club who rented the facility looked after themselves but some of those were in serious decline. The Kirton and District Cricket Club no longer used the ground. They were, for the '64 season, unable to raise a team, having only 4 players on their books. The youth of Kirton, it was said, would "rather be at the Gliderdrome than on the cricket field". Apathy reigned.

Even the football pool had collapsed; the reason given:- a lack of VOLUNTEERS to act as collectors. Getting the message? NOTHING works without support! Use it, or lose it.

Although Kirton was, even then, considered a large village (almost a town) the temptations of the nightlife and entertainment available so close by; the bright lights of Boston(!) was too much for some. Well used by children (although the "doors were in need of a coat of paint and the grass could do with a crop") it wasn't enough when the young adults and more were not making sufficient use of the venue. This was one thing the committee had little control over.

In the past years a lot of good work had been done. A major offensive was needed to retrieve and re-vitalize Graves Park to make sure that effort hadn't been in vain.

**In 1966**, in the midst of England's celebrations of some minor sporting triumph, the cash ran out. A crisis meeting was called and the Committee officially re-formed. GP's future was in the balance!

**It was decided to form the Graves Park Social Club** and make better (and more economic) use of the building: making wider use of the available space. The centre room was re-carpeted, re-decorated and re-lit to become a "very attractive lounge with modern furniture".

The kitchen was transformed into a "smart Bar with a modern lighting system". A portion of wall was demolished making the snooker room more a part of the main building. **In October 1967 at the official opening**, Mr. John Bateman congratulated all concerned for their efforts and said he was sure the facility would now go from "strength to strength" (this was the first occasion in a much longer association between Graves Park and the local brewing family). Further plans were also declared to extend the pavilion for a table tennis and tea room.

Fast forward one year: **The 'Standard', Friday October 11th, 1968: 'Miss Graves Park' opens new extension'** "There was a full house at the Graves Park Social Club on Saturday when the new extension - which will be used as a table tennis room and a social room - was officially opened by Miss Graves Park, Miss Janet Benton of Kirton. The new building adjoins the snooker room and has been decorated with attractive colours by club members and has a wooden floor suitable for table tennis or dancing.



The Graves Park Committee Chairman, Mr. F. Fossitt, spoke of the work done by the Club during the past year. He stated that the committee decided to go ahead with the plans for a Social Club as a means of raising funds for the upkeep of the entire Park facility - sports and all.

The Green Circle Club have now made the Park their home, with five teams in the Boston League. There will also be two darts' teams and a snooker league team. A social evening followed."

The difference? The Village embraced the facilities on offer. They USED it as THEIR social venue. How many 18ths'; 21sts'; Weddings; Christenings?

"A social evening followed....." The first of many over the coming decades.



**Kirton Town touring France/Belgium 1959.** Back row: Colin Dixon, Ernie Lawson, Reg Port, Gordon Hicks, Alec Hall, Lee Harmston, Jack Baxter. Front row: Pete Loveday, Brian Wilson, Ralph Woods, Colin Cumberworth, Jim Fossitt.

Middle right: October 1968. Miss Graves Park, Janet Benton, cuts the tape watched by club members

Top Left: Opening the new Sports Pavilion in 1959 with ladies of the Kirton British Legion serving refreshments (below)