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THE HISTORY OF WALSHAM-LE-WILLOWS SPORTS CLUB

70 YEARS ANNIVERSARY 1952-2022
SPECIAL EXTENDED ARTICLE

by Richard Martineau
& Frances Jenner

THE CRICKET CLUB

The Minute Book of the Walsham-le-Willows and District Cricket club dates from 1897, by which time the club, with its thatched pavilion, was well established on the Summer Road Cricket Ground. However, the Committee Minute book is not complete and ends in about 1927.

We know a little of the history of the Cricket Club prior to this from articles in *The Bury Free Press* (BFP). In June 1860 the paper reports: 'Members of



Above: Umpires walk out, c. 1950, from the old thatched pavilion, originally built towards the end of the 19th century.

the Walsham Cricket Club met upon their ground, part of the beautiful lawn of T. M. Golding Esq (The Grove) and opened the season with a friendly game between themselves. They retired to the Blue Boar where after tea various toasts were drunk and amusing songs sung.’ However, after such a jolly start it was not to be a good season for the Cricket Club with them winning very few games. In August later that season the *Bury Free Press* reports: ‘In a rare victory the Walsham team of Jessups, R. Hunt, W. Nunn, J. Hayward, Z. Sones, G. Catling, J. Elliot, R. Nunn, D. Baker, R. Bullock, W. Youngman and J. Banyard beat the Stanton team scoring 41 and 24 in their two innings. W. Nunn was the star bowler for Walsham and Stanton was dismissed for 27 and 24.’

The fortunes of the Cricket Club revived however, and in 1863 they had a successful year, winning most of their games. The BFP reports: ‘At the winding up of the season Walsham was a scene of gaiety. Mr T Golding’s beautiful lawn was decked with flags and banners and the Brass Band paraded the village streets. A friendly game between two



village sides took place. After the match they sat down to a capital dinner provided by Mr Nice at the Boar Inn. Mr J Francis was presented with a set of cricketing pads and gloves in appreciation of his skilful play throughout the season that has undoubtedly led to the success of the club. During the afternoon a variety of rural sports took place, including donkey and foot races, hurdle races and a jingling match (a game in which blindfolded players try to catch a player who is wearing or



holding a bell). There was also jumping in sacks, wheelbarrow running and climbing a greasy pole for a leg of pork. In the evening many engaged in dancing and kiss-in-the-ring etc. After 'God Save The Queen' the company dispersed.'

A decline in the fortunes of Mr T M Golding which resulted in bankruptcy in 1880 may have led to the Cricket Club having to seek a new ground. Eventually they ended up at the Summer Road site, where a thatched pavilion was built. In 1879 the Team Captain is recorded as being the Revd. A G Lee (vicar of Walsham from 1876) with Spencer Symonds as vice-captain.

At that time there was a committee of nine which included Robert, Tom and Peter Nunn, G Jollye, Bullock Snr. Arnold Clover, W Clamp and Thurston. John Martineau, the Revd C D Gordon (vicar between 1887 and 1901) and Dr Butler were president and vice president. This structure remained unchanged for many years though committee members varied over time.

The clergy were always supportive of the Cricket Club and in 1890 Revd. J Heigham was appointed

treasurer whilst each successive Walsham vicar became vice-president through to Revd. A C Briggs in 1913. Dr Poignard was elected as vice-president in 1903 along with Revd. R Martyn Linnington from another parish. A year later in 1911 Revd. Greene from Hepworth became a playing member whilst Mr O A Kerridge joined the committee in 1907. Two local MPs were also elected and served as a vice-presidents; F Goldsmith in 1914 and Hon W E Guinness in 1919. In the same year Mr Garrod was made captain and elected as a vice-president while W Clamp Jnr. became vice-captain.

Over the years paid groundsmen included J Gill and A Pollard (who was also secretary) while Club Treasurers included S Nunn and Mr Dove (The Headmaster). Other village names that appeared as committee members were J A Clarke, J Kenny, Cyril Hubbard, H Cocksedge, E Clamp Jnr. and B Death.

At this time about 12 matches were played annually against teams from Garboldsham, Stowmarket, Barningham, Mellis, Diss, Bury Grammar School, Drinkstone Park, Diss and Ixworth. Sadly, there are few records of the matches themselves apart from one match played against Mellis in June 1891



Walsham SC v. Van den Plas CC, 1979. Back Row: Martin Underwood, Hilly Armstrong, Ian Toulson, Ian Campbell, David Piperno, Peter Middleditch, Richard Land, Teddie Hubbard, Keith Crabbe, Hub Frost, John Atkinson, Colin Timms, Bryan Garrard, Peter White. Front Row: Dave Richbell, Alf Goodenough, Billy Moffit, Bob Hingerton, ?, Peter Jones, Alan Moffit, ?, ?, ?.



*Walsham-le-Willows, 1975. Back Row: R. Land, N. Baker, B. Garrard, J. Wright, R. Cross, H. Armstrong.
Front Row: I. Campbell, R. Smart, J. Folkard, G. Bennington, R. Mortlock.*

when Mr H Banks Ashton, a solicitor, who lived at 'The Rosary' Four Ashes scored 82 of Walsham's winning total of 133 runs. The team fielded for this match was as follows: H.B. Ashton, S. Symonds, W. Saunders, C. Statham, P. Jollye, W. Brothers, P. Nunn, C. Pyke, J. Baker and W and H. Mapleton. In 1893 the BFP reports that 'a cricket match was arranged between the ladies and the gentleman of Walsham. The match ended in a win for the ladies by 57 runs to 37 runs. Mrs Bullock arranged the ladies team. Miss Hayward scored 25 runs and Miss Gypsy Bullock was an efficient bowler. The gentlemen as usual played with a stick instead of a bat and bowled left-handed' to give the ladies an advantage, of which they appear to have made good use.

Income came from subscriptions ranged from 10/- to 5/- and 2/6 for 'lads' and usually totalled to about £10-0-0. Expenditure varied but usually

included costs for Ground Maintenance, Minute and Score books, stamps and stationery, balls and repairs to bats. The printing of fixture cards and advertisements in the East Anglian also feature, along with expenditure for transport to matches, the cost of which was a constant source of debate at committee meetings. Horse boots (stout leather boots worn over the horses hooves to prevent damage to fine turf when cutting mowing or rolling) and carriage were bought in 1896 and, from time to time, hurdles to protect the pitch. In 1899 it is minuted that the club paid 2/6 to the Fire Brigade for watering the pitch. A 14" Ransomes mower was purchased for £6 in 1909.

The club occasionally organised fund-raising dinners or concerts. Mr Randall provided a dinner for 30 at the Blue Boar in 1902 and the Miss Fullers organised a concert party the following year. In 1908 there was a concert in the Priory Room

with the proceeds equally divided between the Football and Cricket Club and on Whit Monday in 1909 a lunch was provided for 2/- a head. While the minutes make all the meetings sound very formal, the committee did occasionally enjoy themselves. Following the 1902 AGM they had a supper after which 'a short time was spent in the enjoyment of several songs and recitations by members of the company present. The singing of the National Anthem brought a pleasant meeting to a close.'

By 1907 the cricket pitch was in a bad state, some of the damage due to moles and Mr J Hubbard was paid 6/- a year to catch the culprits, while Mr Lee was asked if boys from the home at Walsham Manor could fill the ruts in the outfield. A few years later the urinals were repaired and the pavilion re-thatched. However, the pitch continued to worsen and in 1910 Mr Symonds was asked to approach the highway authority about replacing the pitch with turf from the roadside. Eventually, in 1920, after the war Mr Garrod offered the meadow in front of his house for matches while Captain Shelly provided a practice pitch.

The club had hoped to move back to the old pitch in 1923 but had difficulty in raising a team. Subscriptions were reduced to 3/6 for adults in the hopes of increasing membership but in 1925 the committee decided to close the club. £7-0-4 was left in the bank to be paid to any other club members who might join. The roller was also available.

Subsequently, the Walsham Ramblers Cricket club was formed in 1926 with W Clamp as chairman. Committee members were J Holden, F Hubbard, G Hubbard, W Frost, P Byam and A Pollard. However, it must have failed, for there was another meeting of the Walsham and District Cricket Club in January 1927 with most of the old Vice Presidents and members back again. S Symonds was once again Captain, though he resigned the following year when the vice-captain F Hubbard became captain and W Frost vice-captain. The club moved back to its old ground on Summer Road.



There are no records of any activity in the war years and the pitch was probably ploughed up. After the war, in 1949 T Linton-Clowes, the Secretary of the Football Club, wrote to the Vicar Revd Briggs saying he hoped to form a Cricket Club after encouragement from J E Martineau in offering them the Summer Road ground. It was also hoped the club would also include girls and young women and help to break down the 'could not care less attitude of the young so prevalent nowadays'.

However, the move back to Summer Road Ground was delayed, and in 1949 matches were played on the meadow by Brook Farm. In 1951 the club moved once again to a meadow at the corner of the Wattisfield Road, where Millers Close bungalows now stand, so it wasn't until 1952 that the club finally moved back to Summer Road when a new cricket square had been laid and where it has remained since.

THE FOOTBALL CLUB

It was on the 22nd November 1945 that a meeting was called to discuss the re-forming of the Football Club in Walsham after the war. There is no indication of the venue for this meeting in the minutes but as subsequent meetings were held at the Institute, we must presume that this would have been the only venue large enough in the village to hold all the meeting attendees. The meeting was chaired by R. Clarke, and Jack Martineau was proposed and seconded as President. Amazingly, there were 27 nominations for Vice-Presidents. The names of the nominees read like a roll call of the village: A S Gooding, W F Johnston, Major Whatman V J Dove, F Clarke, Rev A C Briggs, W J Nunn, W Watts, W Kerridge, Kirkpatrick, Col Clifton Brown, L Waspe, M Moore, B Death, E Rolfe, C Robinson, P J Rolfe, S Kerridge, E Granger, C Clamp, A Hastie, W Frett, Mr Chilstone, M Styles Mr Howard, N Debenham, A F Clarke, L Waspe and W Kenny.

Mr P Bryan was approached to take on the role of Treasurer and the following committee members were elected: J Hawes, R Clarke, J S Manning, J Pollard, F Woods, J Goodson, B Pollard and R Farrow.

At a Committee meeting the following week (28th November 1945) Mr J S Manning was asked to be temporary Secretary and the annual membership fee was agreed at 2/6d for club members, who were:-

P. Boby, J Britten, R Clarke, A Collons, D Farrow, R Farrow, W Fenn, J Goodson, G Hawes, A Hubbard, F Jarrold, J Kenny, D Manning, J Manning, D L Manning, F Moore, R Newman, J Parsons, B Pollard, J Pollard, L Rayson, B Robinson, L Robinson, R Rudderham, F Waspe and F Woods.

In order to fund the club Vice Presidents gave the club between £1 and 10/- each, totalling £19-2-0. The twenty-six members paid 2/6 each. Total expenses for the first year were £13-3-0 about half of which was for transport to matches by Mulley's Coaches. Income from subscriptions, Whist Drives and collection at games totalled £55-9-6. These monies were paid into a Post Office Savings Bank Account



opened by the treasurer Mr P Bryan on behalf of the club.

In December of that year Mr W Kerridge made an offer of his meadow as a ground and this was gratefully accepted. J Woods, J Pollard and B Pollard offered to erect the posts and lay out the pitch and so Walsham Football Club was reformed. A practice match against Badwell Ash was organised and a Mulley's coach booked to take players to play at Bradfield St George. Unfortunately, there is no record in the minutes of the outcomes of these matches. The following year (the 1948/49 season) the club moved to a meadow that is now part of a larger field just south of Gallants Meadow by kind permission of Mr J Martineau, where a small hut and urinal were erected for the use of the players.

By 1948 the Club was well established and at the AGM the following committee members were elected: R Clarke, G Hawes, J Manning, P Byam, F Watd, B Pollard, N Blake, F Moore, J Pollard, F Waspe, J Ruddy, E Britten, T Clawes, and W Clarke. The captain and vice-captain were C Boggis and F Waspe and T Clawes and W Clarke were respectively secretary and treasurer. It was decided that the club should enter the following competitions: The Bury & District League Div II, the Fass Charity Shield, the Primary Cup and the Gratrix Cup. Following triumph in the Fass Charity Shield match it was agreed that the shield and a photograph should hang in the now established Club Room at the Blue Boar. New amber and green football shirts were purchased at 19/5 each and a trip to Clacton was planned in celebration.



*Walsham Football Team, c.1950. Back row: G. Stiff, B. Harris, C. Boggis, E Britton, B. Pollard, F. Woods, P. Foulger, F. Waspe, Harry Cockcroft (coach).
Front row: J. Fordham, J. Hayward, J. Pollard, J. Ruddy, J. Manning*

By now the club was thriving and competition to play on the team was fierce so it was agreed that Service Personnel stationed locally and wishing to play should be limited to two, and only with the permission of their Commanding Officer. The coaches to away matches were also over-subscribed so B Pollard was given the difficult task of deciding who should travel in them. The behaviour of home supporters at away matches, however, became the subject of a severe caution for Walsham. This was delivered in a memorandum from the Suffolk County FA following a report from the referee Mr R Rogers at the match against Horringer on the 18th September 1948 regarding the bad behaviour of Walsham supporters during the match.

At the start of the following season, 1949/50, new groundsmen were required for Walsham, and Hubby Frost, then aged 14 and Bryan Garrard,

aged 13, were given the responsibility of joint groundsmen.

Although the Football Club at this time was all male membership, women, mainly wives, played their part in supporting the club by organising fundraising at matches. At the AGM in April 1949 this support was recognised and a special thank you was minuted to three ladies 'who had done so well for us in organising raffles at home matches.' It was proposed that the Club make a gift of 'nylons or silk stockings' (still hard to come by in post-war Britain and a gift much coveted by most women at the time) in way of thanks. Mr J Sturgeon also promised that he would heel and sole a pair of shoes for each of these ladies free of charge. But it wasn't until the AGM in July 1951 that it was agreed to approach Mrs Dryden and ask her to officially form a Ladies Committee to take on the duties of making the teas and running the

raffle draws. It was agreed that the ladies would meet once a fortnight and report back to the full committee once a month.

Fundraising had become an essential part of the club's activities, being necessary if the club were to remain financially viable. The minutes give us a good insight into activities organised to raise money and show that they were regularly and well-discussed at length during meetings. The most popular events were raffles and Whist Drives. At the meeting held on the 4th October 1949 the forthcoming Gymkana Whist Drive to be held on the 22nd December at the Priory Room was much debated with the following prizes being offered by members: Messrs Clarkes: a wheelbarrow, Mr Berry: a bottle of wine, J. Waspe: one chicken, Mr Buck: one pheasant, Mr Stiff: 40 cigarettes, L. Waspe: a couple of rabbits (deceased), J. Cockcroft: one pair of nylons, Mr Bobby: two live tame rabbits, Mr J Hargeon: one pair of slippers, Mr R Sharpe: £1.00, Mr R E Rolfe: 10/- and Mr N Baker a pair of photograph frames. It was also agreed to purchase if necessary, a bottle of whisky, a pair of ducks and a goose. The poultry prizes would have been very well received, when post war rationing was still operational and food remaining in short supply. The wheelbarrow appears to have been a popular prize at the Whist Drives as another wheelbarrow features once again as first prize for the highest score at the Annual Whist Drive held just one month later on the 26th January 1950 in the Priory Rooms. Unfortunately, there are no records of how much money was raised from these two events. However, the receipts and expenses for the 1947-48 season show the income from Whist Drives as being £24.3.2d, with an overall end balance in the club's fund of £37.8.6d. This doesn't sound like very much by today's monetary standards, but we need to consider that in 1950 the average full-time weekly wage was just £7.08, which is equivalent to about £440.00 today, although many living in the village and surrounding area would not have earned as much as this, agricultural wages being low.

Each year amateur football clubs were allocated two FA Cup final tickets. At the meeting held on

the 7th March 1950 the draw to decide who would attend the 69th FA Cup Final took place. Four names were drawn from the hat: 1st N. Baker, 2nd J. Kenny, 3rd F. Waspe and 4th C.G. Pallant. The rules were that the first and second names received the tickets but if they were unable to make use of them they were to be returned and given to the next person. There is no record of who actually attended the Cup Final from Walsham Football Club however, we do know that it was played on the 29th April 1950 between Arsenal and Liverpool with Arsenal winning 2-0.

By 1951 the need for a permanent playing field with facilities was being discussed and it is minuted that the secretary should write a letter to the Memorial Hall Committee (at this point a fundraising committee as the hall had yet to be built) asking them to call a General Meeting with one item on the agenda as follows: 'Is it the feeling of the members and subscribers to go all out for a playing field on which to build a Memorial Hall later, or if not what financial help could a separate committee expect?' A similar letter was also sent from the Cricket Club. There is no indication in the minutes of what happened next, but the ultimate position of the Memorial Village Hall and the Sports Club suggests that for some reason this idea could not be pursued further.

As in the history of any Club there are times of celebration but also of sadness. In the minutes of the Committee Meeting held on the 1st January 1952 it was recorded that the secretary should send a greetings telegram to E. Britton, a player and committee member on the occasion of his wedding. Sadly, just two years later, in the minutes dated 2nd February 1954, the following was recorded. 'It was moved and seconded that we purchase a wreath in the name of the Sports Club and offer our condolences to Mrs Britton on her sad bereavement.' Evan Britton was a talented footballer, who played at right-back, he was also a fine athlete who died from cancer aged just twenty-seven years. A benefit match was arranged with the proceeds to go to his young widow. All the players were asked to wear black armbands in memory of Evan Britton, their late captain. The proceeds from this match realised £14.12.6d

(the equivalent of nearly £900 today). This was gratefully acknowledged by his widow. Evan Britton is buried in St Mary's Cemetery.

At the start of the 1951/52 season the goalposts were moved from Gallants Meadow to Summer Road and the Club played its first game at the Summer Road ground. Members were asked to help prepare the ground. A horse mower was bought from Mr Waspe and the loan of a gang mower from the airfield was requested. Mr Clarke of Church farm was asked to cut the pitch.

1952 was to be a momentous year in the history of the Football Club and the Cricket Club. At the AGM in June, it was agreed that the membership fee remain at 2/6d, also that Mr H Cockcroft be made a Life Member and should travel free on all match coaches. There were, however, far more exciting proposals on the horizon. It was proposed and seconded that the Football Club contact the Cricket Club with a view to amalgamation to form Walsham Spots Club. After some discussion, the two clubs joined forces to form Walsham Sports Club, with each contributing £60 to support the amalgamation. In July a Walsham Sport Club controlling committee was appointed made up of five representatives from each club. The Football Club voted in L Waspe, G Fordham, J Pollard, J Manning, G Stiff as its representatives but decided that their headquarters should remain at the Blue Boar along with the photo of the Cup Winning team.

It was also at this meeting that it was decided to approach Mr Martineau, with regard to building an extension to the pavilion. In September of the same year a second football pitch was made in front of the pavilion and it was decided to fence in the pitch.

In January 1953 Walsham Football Club supporters were once again in trouble. A special Committee Meeting was called and apart from appointing Hubby Frost as Second Team Captain, the main item on the agenda was the behaviour of the Walsham fans. It was decided that in view of previous behaviour a notice should be placed on the field asking spectators to show a little sportsmanship and not to incite players to play dangerously!

In February, the decision of the landlord to leave the Blue Boar, where the Club had its headquarters, forced a move to the Six Bells. In 1954, however, the Six Bells also gained a new landlord, R. Austin, who took on the role of Committee Secretary, although he had only been in the village a few weeks.

In 1955 lengthy discussions took place over the inclusion of non-village men in the teams and after much debate the motion was carried. However, preference was to be given to Walsham men over outsiders when choosing teams.

The 1961 AGM minutes record that the 1960/61 season had proved to be something of a mixed bag for the club. The playing side had been quite successful with the 'first eleven doing very well by reaching the semi-finals of the Junior Cup and the finals of the League, Gatrix and Hillstone competitions only to be defeated in all. They had also finished runner-up in the Bury and District League.' The second team did not do so well due to injury and the absence of key players in the first half of the season, however due to the efforts of H Frost and J Largent they had turned things around and once again were awarded the Bury Village League Sportsmanship Cup. On the financial side things were looking black for the club as they finished the season in the red! The deficit of £40 was put down to the cost of transporting players to matches and the extravagant purchase of a typewriter for the secretary and an effort by all was called for in the next twelve months to put matters right.

The minutes of meeting held between 1966 and 1967 reveal much discussion on the subject of football kits. Mrs Garrard and Mrs Smart were paid 1/6 a shirt for laundering and ironing. The scuffy state of the kits also gave cause for concern necessitating the purchase of twelve pairs of red socks and shorts to be resold to the players. An offer from Messrs Clarke's of Walsham to fund a set of shirts was gratefully accepted so the teams turned out looking clean and tidy although it is highly unlikely that they finished looking the same way!

Football training sessions at this time took place at Ixworth School and it was minuted that every

effort should be made to encourage regular attendance at these training sessions.

The use of coaches to transport players to away matches had always been a constant drain on the club's finances. With more players and supporters now owning cars, it seemed sensible to car share in order to get the players to away matches, providing coaches only when necessary and so cutting down on expenditure. This left the club with a healthy balance of about £100 profit at the end of the season.

In 1969 Walsham celebrated the winning of the Fass Shield in a 3–2 victory over Fornham St Martin in extra time; by holding a dinner on the 28th June 1970, which was to be organised by Mr E Moore.

The 1968/69 AGM records familiar names as the elected officers of the club: Chairman: Mr E Hubbard, Secretary: Mr B Garrard, Sunday Secretary: Mr H Frost, indicating the growth of the club, as teams were now playing matches on Saturday and Sunday. 1971 saw enough players joining the club to form a Saturday Reserve Team, which gave opportunities to younger players to gain experience and establish themselves. During this season the club played a total of 103 matches, including league, cup and friendly games.

At the AGM on the 10th June 1971 it was recorded that Roger Mason had approached the Chairman Eric Hubbard with the idea of resurrecting the Walsham Cup Competition, however, nobody knew the whereabouts of the cup. Eventually the cup was located as being held by Finningham FC but on being returned was found to be somewhat dented and damaged requiring some repairs by a jeweller in Bury St Edmunds. The 1972/73 season saw the Walsham Cup affiliated with the Suffolk County FA and with Finningham FC, Barningham, Elmswell and Walsham signed to play in the competition. The cup that year was won by Elmswell who defeated Finningham 4–0. During this time a Minor Team for boys under 17 was also started, under the captaincy of Neil Waspe, with the intention of nurturing younger players from the village who would then move on to play in the First and Reserves Teams. This

proved to be successful and ten years later in 1981 there were two Minor Teams managed by Eric and Carol Hubbard.

The 1977/78 season was an excellent year for the Football Club with the teams bringing home four trophies to Walsham. The First Team won the First Division Knock Out Cup and the Tuddenham Cup with the Reserves winning the League and the George Rice Cup. These victories were followed by much celebration.

The last handwritten entry in the Football Club Minutes Book is that of the AGM held in the Sports Pavilion on Thursday 12th July 1984.

A few further points of interest:

1974: A new pavilion was built on the Summer Road Ground.

1980s: The Bowls Club amalgamates with the Sports Club and the pavilion is built at the side of the bowls green.

2005: New changing rooms built onto the Clubhouse, a new 100-seater stand erected with floodlights.

2010–12: Lease granted for three new football pitches to the east of Summer Road plus an all-weather floodlit grass pitch, a floodlit tennis court and a new car park at a total cost of £430,000.

2016: New pavilion for additional changing rooms built plus biodigester at a cost of £230,000.

A HISTORY OF THE WALSHAM RECREATION GROUND TRUST

by Richard Martineau

At last, the Sports Club is a registered charity and owns its own grounds—but it has been a long and tortuous journey to reach this stage.

I don't know how long the original ground has been used for sport. The Ordnance Survey map

of 1904 shows the old thatched pavilion and names the field The Cricket Ground, and there are earlier group photographs of teams. It must also have been used for village events, and certainly in 1911 there was a battle at the Foresters Gala there, when members of the Dark Steam Circus armed with guns from the shooting booth came to blows with Walsham men somewhat the worse for wear from visits to the beer tent. Seven Walsham men were shot, including a postman and a policeman, and one Samuel Davey, who kept the Crown & Anchor at Blo' Norton, subsequently died from his wounds.

I imagine the ground was ploughed and farmed during the war, as I remember cricket being played on the meadow beside Brook Farm and football on a meadow near the Causeway that is now part of a large arable field (the Gymkhana was also held there in the summer).

But it must have been used again by the Sports Club by 1968 when my father gave the field to a Charitable Trust and helped with the building of a new brick pavilion, which was completed in 1974 and then further extended in the 80s/90s. At that time sport was not considered 'charitable', so the field had to be for the benefit of the people of Walsham as a whole and was let rent free to a Management Committee that was separate from the Sports Club. The new Pavilion and any subsequent buildings the Sports Club might erect remained the property of the Charitable Trust as landlord.

That arrangement worked well for about thirty years, until in the early 2000s when new grant making bodies such as the National Lottery and the Football Foundation offered grants for the development of sport. The Sports Club applied for such grants but was turned down each time because they did not have a secure long-term lease on the Ground. But the Charity Commissioners would only allow the Trust to grant a pepper-corn lease of longer than one year to another charity, otherwise full commercial rent would have to be paid for the land and the buildings. Sport was still not counted as 'charitable' and the Sports Club could not afford the full commercial rent. It seemed as if the Sports club could never expand.



In 2002 a new scheme was introduced to support grass roots sports organisations called Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASC) which allowed them to benefit from tax reliefs that had previously only been available to charities. The Sports Club set about registering as a CASC. It was not an easy transition—the legal fees were expensive. It took time, and involved changing many of the Club and Trust rules, but finally in 2005, after being approved by a full village meeting, Walsham CASC was born. The Charity Commission approved the extension of the lease and the Club became eligible for grants.

The availability of funding made it possible for the Sports Club to develop part of a newly donated field across the road. The expansion included an all-weather pitch, a tennis court and three new football pitches along with a car park. This was opened in 2012.

However, by law, all the development on the Trust's land still belonged to the Recreation Ground Trust, even though it was paid for by the Sports Club. Thus, the value of the club house and the changing rooms etc could not be included in the Sports Club's balance sheet. An obvious answer seemed to be to merge the Trust and the Sports Club CASC into one charity. But the Charity Commission would not allow this as the two organisations' objectives differed slightly. Even an idea that the two organisations might share trustees was rejected as it would involve 'a conflict of interests'.

Then, in 2016, a revised Charities Act became law. This brought together a number of recent changes in charity law. Amongst its provision was one that enabled Amateur Sports Clubs to become fully

fledged charities, subject to certain conditions. A new form of charity, a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) was introduced, which limited the previous unlimited liability of trustees.

Bury solicitors Greene and Greene suggested that it might be possible to convert the Recreation Ground Trust into a CIO, with slightly revised objectives that more closely matched those of the Sports Club, and most importantly a new name 'The Walsham Sports Club'. Subsequently the Sports Club CASC might be merged into the CIO and then the two organisations could become one.

But the Charities Commission continued to raise objections, such as the fact that the Sports Club owned two snooker tables and ran darts competitions which were not classified as charitable activities, thus barring the sports Club becoming a charity. And as for housing a profitable bar—forget it!

However, one by one these issues were all addressed, and now, finally, three years later, the Walsham Sports Club CIO at last exists—and it owns its own grounds.

Please note: Whilst every effort has been made to ensure names and facts in this article are correct, it needs to be taken into consideration that the minute books from which much of the above is taken are handwritten, old and in some instances faded and difficult to read. Please forgive any errors.

It is also appreciated that over the long period of the history of Walsham Sports Club many people have contributed to its growth and success. There is sadly not enough room in this article to acknowledge them all, although their contribution is none the less greatly valued.

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For general enquiries please email walshamhistorygroup@gmail.com.

For membership enquiries please contact Shirley Luscombe: 01359 259506, shirley65801@outlook.com.

To submit material for the review, and for other suggestions, please contact:

Frances Jenner: 01359 259242 frances.jenner@hotmail.com