

A History of Grappenhall Village Sports Club 1955 ~ 2007



It cannot be emphasised too strongly that the history of Grappenhall Village Sports Club must be related in terms of people and characters, it is their contribution that matters, for without them and the influence of these people, there would be no history. There has been no greater single contribution to the 'history' of Grappenhall Sports Club than that of Reg James, who sadly died in 2005 after 49 years of unstinting, dedicated service to the club.

Also sadly missed is Ian Lister. Ian was the Chairman of the Action Committee responsible for the purchase of the sports fields. The committee saved the club from the brink of extinction in 1998, and enabled Grappenhall Sports Club and Grappenhall Village Lawn Tennis Club to merge and create what you see today.

These pages are dedicated to Reg and Ian.

Recognition must also be given to John 'Jay' Barnett who was instrumental in the birth of Grappenhall Athletic Club, for without his drive and passion in those early years, over 500 children and adults could not enjoy the fabulous facilities now available at Stockton Lane.

The Creation

The 1952 Olympics in Helsinki saw the mercurial Zatopek win gold medals in the so called 'long distance treble', this unheard of feat inspired a young Jay Barnett to become interested in athletics. He, along with friends Doug and Derek Parr started running around the block of St Annes Ave and Euclid Ave where they lived in Grappenhall. Field events were held in Jay's back yard and on the Meredith Avenue field opposite his house.

Jay writes,

"I used to melt down bits of lead on the kitchen stove from our house flashing, much to the annoyance of my mother (fumes) in order to mold a discuss. If it hit a brick on landing, of which there were many, then out would come the hammer to beat it back into shape! At this stage, it was still not an athletic club. Not very long after this, and due in some respect and understandably so, to irate householders (complaints) as the throwing implements did not always fall within the sector we moved up to Euclid Avenue playing fields, previously, this had been rough land and was used during the 2nd World War as allotments for growing vegetables. At this stage, we had a few more people coming along. Tony Lunn, Anton Burgess, Brian Cain, Reg James, Allan Jones, Ron Burton and a few more".

In 1955 Grappenhall Athletic Club formed, Les Hailey being the first secretary. By kind permission of the Parish Council, the Club was allowed to use the rather spartan Euclid playing field to mow a two-lane 220-yard grass running track and a 100 yard six lane sprint track; three jumping pits and two concrete circles were constructed. A garage was used in St Annes Avenue for winter weight training. The founder committee members of the newly formed club were; Les Hailey, Reg James, Ron Burton, John Barnett, Bill Richards and Stan Gorst. Despite the lack of proper facilities, the club boasted several County Champions and two English Schoolboy Champions, who competed against and beat many teams at club level throughout the North West. A notable achievement came when Grappenhall Athletic Club beat Sale Harriers in a full meeting. Stan Gorst an England 'B' International won the pole vault, Brian Cain an English Schools Champion won the discus, Allan Jones a Cheshire youth champion won the javelin, Peter Nichols won the shot putt, and in the only victory that day in the track events, Bill Richards (Cheshire Senior Champion) won the 100 yards. Grappenhall won all the field events and lost all but the 100 yards in the track events. The club in the same season won the junior Cheshire Cross Country team event.

The following photographs taken in 1955 are all from the newly formed athletic club at Euclid Avenue:



Constructing the 100 yard six lane track, at the entrance to Euclid playing field ~ 1955



Allan Jones a Cheshire youth champion in the javelin



John 'Jay' Barnett in the shot putt



The playing field group....



‘Athlete of the year’ award (made by Reg James, front left)



Manchester Highland Games - 1959

L-R top row –Geof Lomax, Bill Richards, Hugh Porter, Stan Gorst
 L-R bottom row- Allan Jones, Reg James, Mike Woods



Weight training in the St Annes Avenue garage
L-R Allan Jones, John Tomlin, Bill Richards, John 'Jay' Barnett

Grappenhall Athletic Club became affiliated to the Amateur Athletics Association in 1957, and quickly joined the Cheshire AAA and the Northern Counties AAA. By 1958 club members started to compete at youth, and senior level in athletic, track and field events throughout the country.

Stockton Lane

The club now became a victim of its own success, as the Euclid Avenue playing field became inadequate due to its size and was becoming increasingly dangerous to members of the public and the local youth population, with javelins and discus being hurled through the air across the field. Not surprisingly people started to complain. Finally the local council stated that the club had to cease its activities on the field, but suggested they contact Alderman Dewes CBE Chairman of C.C.C. who lived locally, with his help rapid progress was made in acquiring a piece of land on Stockton Lane originally required for a school, and previously used by Stockton Heath AFC who had moved to Loushers Lane, now of course known as Warrington AFC. After many meetings with the authority permission was granted in 1960 by the C.C.C. to lease 6.8 acres at Stockton Lane to create an Athletic Sports Ground.

In 1961 with the voluntary efforts of its members, the club raised money mainly from organising fortnightly dances for the local youth, in the village hall (the large room) and started marking out a six-lane 440-yard running track and levelling the ground, in 1962 the construction of the first clubhouse commenced. A mountaineering & rock-climbing section was formed in 1963, with many expeditions to the Lake District, Snowdonia, Scotland and the Continent. The clubhouse was completed a year later in 1964, just in time to witness a club member break the UK pole vault record of 14ft 4in whilst in training, unfortunately this could not be ratified by the AAA. Also the football section formed in 1964 joining the Warrington District League, with the new pitch constructed within the oval running track and ready for the 1965/1966 season. The canoe section formed in 1966 and within two years had representatives at the 1968 Mexico Olympics. A year later canoe section members win honours at the Junior British Championship, Senior Irish Championship, Junior & Senior Spanish Championship and the British White-water Championships. Preparations were now underway for the 1972 Munich Olympics.



A view of the original clubhouse completed in 1964

Later in 1969, planning approval was granted for a new extension, to include a canoe store, bar & members lounge, toilets & new changing facilities. With the aid of a grant obtained from the Department of Education the club had enough funds to substantially extend the clubhouse. Planning, design and build of Phase 2 as it was called was completed in 1971 by a number of enthusiastic members of the club, by now the clubs popularity was growing enormously and included a large junior section who like the author, spent all of their school summer holidays engaging in the varied activities at the club. The committee now applied to the Warrington Council to acquire the adjoining piece of land of 16 acres, as they envisaged that within the coming years Grappenhall Athletic Club will become one of the finest privately sports clubs in the North West.

With the opening of the extension the club re-named itself Grappenhall Sports Club; it was at this time that Ron Burton who had been secretary since 1957 retired due to business commitments.



Clubhouse 1 Phase 2 extension starts in 1970; this view is of the new canoe stores



Clubhouse 1 Phase 2 extension



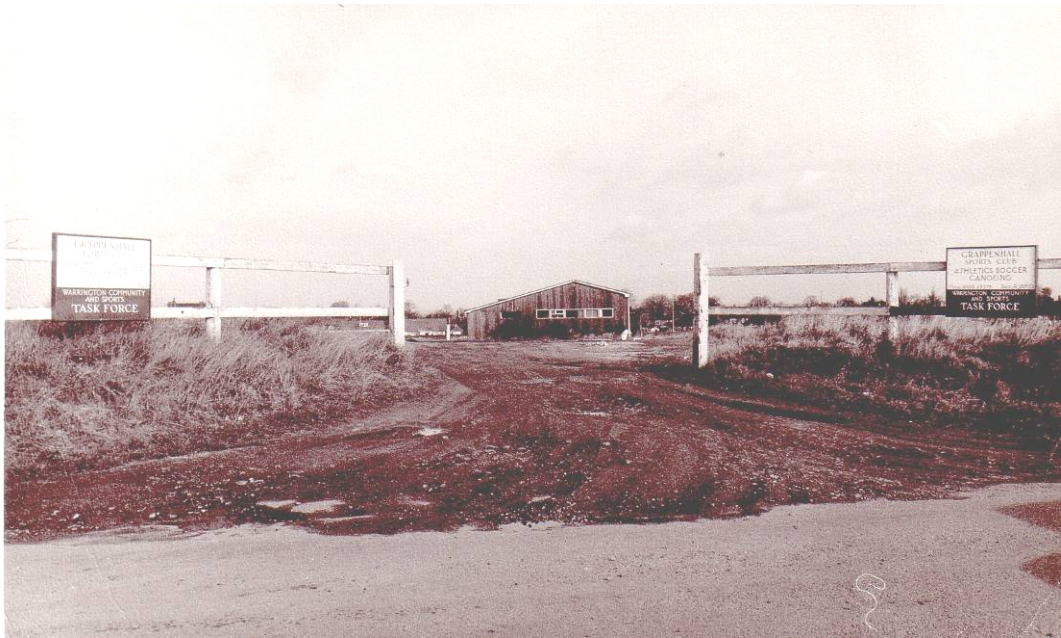
Clubhouse 1 Phase 2 extension almost complete



Clubhouse 1 Phase 2 extension with Phil Maskall looking on



Clubhouse 1 Phase 2 extension completed in 1971



View from the Stockton Lane entrance



Clubhouse 1 Phase 2 extension completed



Clubhouse 1 Phase 2 extension completed

The Second Clubhouse

Whilst well under way with the Phase 2 extension, the club first discovered that the proposed North South Expressway would take the land on which the club stood, and the new clubhouse would have to be abandoned. Long talks and endless meetings took place regarding the re-location and compensation. At the time, the value of the clubhouse was £35,000; unfortunately, the Warrington New Town Development were only prepared to compensate the club with £14,500, this figure being the estimated cost of physically moving the clubhouse, unfortunately the clubhouse was constructed such that it was not moveable. The Sports Council provided a £10,000 grant, and 16 acres of land further down Stockton Lane was allocated for the a new clubhouse site.

By the late 1970's work had started on the construction of the second home, but £24,500 would only provide the shell of the building and a flat roof, the members had to kit out and furnish the interior themselves, this included wiring, plumbing, internal decoration, and the installation of an Aluminium main feeder cable from the east end of the site. Various volunteers busied themselves to complete the works for the grand opening due in the summer of 1981.



Construction of the second Clubhouse – 1980



The second Clubhouse – 1980

Finally, by late spring 1981 the new clubhouse and sports field were completed. The official opening was on the 11th July 1981, the Mayor of Warrington was the guest of honour at the ceremony with the late Peter Robinson, B.A. acting as M.C.

OFFICIAL GUEST

GRAPPENHALL
SPORTS
CLUB

STOCKTON LANE
GRAPPENHALL

**OFFICIAL
OPENING**

of the **NEW CLUBHOUSE & SPORTSFIELDS** on
SATURDAY 11th JULY 1981

OPENING CEREMONY
by
HIS WORSHIP THE MAYOR
at 2-00p.m.

—

SPORTS EVENTS — SIDESTALLS
M.C. — PETER ROBINSON, B.A.

—

Admission by Programme . 20p.

Over the next decade the club fortunes fluctuated, but thanks to many hardworking members and parents, junior rugby league, ladies hockey, junior and senior football sections were all thriving.

Grappenhall Festival Rallies were being held in the late 1980's and early 1990's, The 1991 festival attracted over 100 narrow boats, dozens of caravans, a national circus hired the field and more than 1000 people flocked to enjoy the entertainment provided over the weekend. Other events and competitions held at Stockton lane were: Fur & Feather fishing tournament for the Warrington Anglers at Christmas, with Reg and Jane Murawski cooking breakfast. National male and female fishing matches, NSPCC events, Scout canoe races, Brownie sports days, car boot sales, and numerous cup finals from the Warrington & District Football League; the pitch was regarded as one of the finest in the area. The club committee who helped organise these festivals and events included; Tony Partington, Gill Partington, Danny Abbott, Phil Maskall, Reg James, Jane Murawski, Pam Thomas and John Ward. During the late 1980's when the club was starting to get into financial difficulty, Ena Nelson from the Parish Council, joined the Sports Club committee to give advice and assistance, Ted Lafferty and the late Barbara Mawer also offered their assistance.

The Decline

By 1993, the condition of the clubs flat roof was becoming a concern to the committee, leaks were starting to appear and with little funds for repair, the condition of the roof was to get progressively worse. The membership dwindled in the following few years. The function room, which had held many football presentation evenings, wedding receptions and birthday parties, had to close to the public. Money was owed to the landlord and to the bank; by the late 1990s the situation was desperate. Increasing vandalism and the continuing deterioration of the building left the committee no alternative but to close the clubhouse for safety reasons. The lack of clubhouse facilities led to the departure of the Senior Footballers and the Rugby League section.

Effectively the Junior Football Section was now the only active section of the club and its only source of income.



The second Clubhouse 2005



The second Clubhouse 1st January 2006



A sad end to the second Sports Club ~ January 2006

The new beginning

In 1998, English Partnerships, the landowners, sought to sell the land currently used by the club, Steve Reece a junior football team manager organised a meeting in September of 1998 inviting all the parents of the juniors to form an action committee to decide the future of Grappenhall Sports Club. This action committee headed by Ian Lister and Norman Bird, ably helped by John Pownall, Neil Ward, Sue Henbury, Wendy Allison, John Mather, John Bramhall and Steve Clubley concluded that their only option was to purchase the land. With a host of volunteers giving up massive amounts of their time and money, began the slow and arduous task of raising the required £59,000, a lottery grant of £38,000 contributed immensely. Many fund raising events were organised including £7000 raised from door-to-door collections, and £1300 raised at a Summer Garden Party at John Pownall's home. In all it took four years to raise the money.

After completion of the land acquisition in May 2002, a meeting called for all concerned parties to discuss the way forward for the Club, and to invite people with ideas and enthusiasm to come forward and join the Committee. Despite a few new Committee members joining, it soon became clear that there was little prospect of the existing membership (the vast majority of whom were children) of raising funds to renovate the clubhouse, or, equally important, generating the future income necessary to sustain it.

The Committee therefore concluded that the only realistic prospect of renovating or replacing the clubhouse would be to seek an outside partner or partners with funds available to join with the Club in some way, failing which, the club would effectively become a playing field rather than a sports club. Various possibilities presented themselves and discussions held with a number of parties. Finally, a merger was agreed with Grappenhall Village Lawn Tennis Club, based in Bradshaw Lane.

November 2005 saw the start of the construction of clubhouse number three, the demolition of the second clubhouse occurred in January 2006, and the farmers' field separating the first clubhouse and the second clubhouse purchased.

Today the GVSC has ten junior football teams; three seniors' teams, and a Vets team, and once again looks set for a successful future.



The Third Sports Club ~ January 2007



The Third Sports Club ~ January 2007



The Third Sports Club ~ January 2007



History of the Football Section

Before the start of the Second World War, young members of the Stockton Heath Air Training Corps and Herbert 'Bertie' Dewes, CO of the ATC, sought to start a football team, Bertie arranged for the County Council to allow them to use a farmer's field at Stockton Lane. He and Bernard Jerams marked out the very first pitch with sawdust in October 1939. Stockton Heath ATC then formed a football team for the 1940/41 season and played in the Warrington Football League. In 1942, most of the original team were called up to forces and were replaced by younger members of the ATC. Their pinnacle coming when Stockton Heath ATC played in the final of the District ATC Cup at Goodison Park. Bernard Jerams and Ernie Berry went on to play for Chester and Lancashire Steel Irlam playing against the likes of Man Utd 'A' and Man City 'A'. Johnny Stokes went on to play for Oldham Athletic, and Denis Johnston played in the German League. After the end of the WW2 in 1947, the team finally wound up.



The first team to play at Stockton Lane
Stockton Heath ATC Football Team 1940/1941

Left to Right back row

A Aston, B Jerams, K Muckley, A Pickering, S Ellison, S Musson

Left to Right front row

D Johnson, J Stokes, E Berry, E Dooley, J Briers

On Saturday 27th August 1949, Stockton Heath FC played their first game at Stockton lane, losing 4-1 to Widnes team Fairfield in the Warrington & District League. The committee of that first team included Harry Atherton (Chairman), Jimmy Drinkwater (Secretary), and Harry Brazendale (Treasurer), and at the end of their very first season, they gained promotion to Division One. Stockton Heath FC played their last season at Stockton Lane in 1951/52 before they moved to London Road. For the 1953/54 season Stockton Heath FC first team moved to the Police Ground at Loushers Lane and in 1955/56 season, they moved back to Stockton Lane, a young local centre-forward from Leigh Grammar school by the name of Roger Hunt making his debut in this season. They finally moved to their present ground at Lousers Lane for the start of the 1956/57 season. The last game played by Stockton Heath FC was in 1960/61 before they changed their name to Warrington Town.

It was not long after the Athletics Club moved to Stockton Lane in 1961, that the Grappenhall Sports Club Football Team started, and continues to this day.



Grappenhall Athletic Club Football Team 1966~67



Grappenhall Sports Club First Team circa 1978
(The name changed from athletic club to sports club in 1972)



Grappenhall Sports Club FC
Warrington & District Football League Div 2 Champions & Rylands Cup Double
Winners
1982 ~ 1983

Left to right back row

Peter Turco, Ian Bamber, Paul Roberts, Gary Percival, Harold Hickling (League President), Paul Hoarty, Ron Birchall (Captain), Mike Thompson, Chris Ward, Franz Boydon (manager).

Left to right front row

John Forde, Alan Rose, Rob Kinder, Kevin Darkes, Steve Waldron, Brian Robinson

The lack of clubhouse facilities led to the departure in the late 1990s of Grappenhall Sports Club football team to play at Morley Common in Walton. Following this, a merger with Lymm Rangers led to the name changing to Stockton Lane FC, but always with the hope, they would one day return to their home in Grappenhall.

Stockton Lane FC reached what is perhaps the pinnacle of amateur football in the Warrington & District Football League, when they won the prestigious Guardian Cup on Easter Monday 2006.



Dave Coyne holds aloft the Guardian Cup



Guardian Cup Winners 2005~2006



Guardian Cup Winning Squad 2005~2006

Now, with the new clubhouse in place and its superb new changing facilities, Stockton Lane FC have returned to their roots for the 2006 ~ 2007 season. Once again reaching the final of the Guardian Cup, only to be beaten on penalties by Warrington Town reserves.

Grappenhall Juniors

The Grappenhall Juniors or GYCA FC as it was then known started around 1970/1971 when the GYCA Bell House Farm was renovated and transformed into a community centre; they played in the Warrington Hilden Friendly League and used pitches where the houses on Barnswood Close now stand, New Lane Appleton and Euclid Avenue playing field were also used. Ted Lafferty expertly led the boys training at Euclid Avenue, with the Radio Amateur Group room at the Community Centre used for changing on match days.



The Three Faces of Ted....

What do a clown, a patrolman and a football coach have in common? At Warrington the answer is Ted Lafferty. Patrolman on F shift during his working hours, Ted spends his spare time running a football team at Grappenhall Community Centre for a group of local lads.

The boys who make up Ted's

Under-13 team come from an area with very few facilities, least of all playing fields. They have to travel 3 miles for their home games in the Hilden Friendly League, and Ted raises money for travel, strip and trophies by holding dances. When the teams in the league play at home, the team coach is also the

referee, so Ted is often out with his whistle on Sunday mornings.

At Christmas, Ted is one of the clowns for the Children's party at the clubhouse, and he usually visits the local Whitecross Hospital for spastic children in order to brighten their Boxing Day.

Left to right – Brian Robinson, Tony Clare, John Wilkinson, Paul Green, Stuart Catterson and Ted Lafferty

Following the housing development of the fields adjacent to the GYCA, circa 1980, Grappenhall Rovers played all their games at Euclid Avenue. Around 1992 the Rovers moved up to Grappenhall Athletic Club and joined the juniors there playing as 'Grappenhall Sports', so forming Grappenhall Juniors. Grappenhall Juniors then moved away from playing in the Hilden League and joined the Mid Cheshire Youth Football League, using pitches at Stockton Lane, Euclid Avenue and the Little Manor in Thelwall.



Grappenhall Athletic Club Football Team under 15s c1970



Grappenhall Sports c1968



Billy Green (far left) and his Grappenhall Rovers team of the early 1990's that joined Grappenhall Sports from Euclid Avenue



GSFC Under 11s 1988 ~1989

Standing L-R

Chris Cummings David Howard Neil Birchall Jeffrey Maskall Ian Boydon Mark
Gwillam Paul Stockton Michael Stockton

Sitting L-R

Andrew Howard Neil Hunter Neil Connor Simon Grainger Praf Patel



GSFC Under 15s 1993 ~1994

Standing L-R

Dave Connor (coach) Chris Gould Ian Boydon Neil Birchall Oliver Monks Ben Bray
David Stott Jeffrey Maskall Matthew Bannon Bob Ellison (manager)

Sitting L-R

Matthew Gerrard Daniel Gerrard ? Elizabeth Bannon Neil Connor David Coyne

In 1998 the FA introduced small-sided soccer, designed to meet the needs of children aged between five and eleven years. These games are the preferred method of training by professional players and are the most appropriate way of acquiring skills and developing young players. Too often, the focus within children's football has been the result of the game and winning the tournament, cup or medal.

An ethos that promotes fun and learning and measures success in terms of enjoyment as well as the fostering of skills development, is more likely to interest and motivate a young player and enhance his/her progress. Small-sided games, offer children an exciting challenge, enhance development and help promote our national game.

Grappenhall Juniors entered two teams in that first year, under 8s and under 9s. The following season a further age group was added, and by 2000/2001 Grappenhall Juniors had a full compliment in the MCYFL.



The first small sided soccer team ~ u8s 1998/1999

Standing L-R

Ryan Boden Sam Mullarkey Josh Bramhall Matt Harding
Mike Bird Dan Clarke James Boaden Elliot Johnston Joe Mullarkey

Kneeling L-R

Ben Foster Dan Watson David Callaghan Andy Schofield
George McIntyre Jonathan Kelly Tom Homan



U13s 2000~2001 season



The same team as above now U17s 2005~2006 and their manager Steve Clubley



The U10s 2003~2004 season

Manager Roger Pritchard (centre) with Dave Watson and Steve Ball

Ladies Hockey

Anne Alcock recalls some memories of Grappenhall Sports Club Ladies Hockey:

Lymm Ladies Hockey Club joined Grappenhall Sports Club in 1983, the following season Lymm Old Girls joined, and formed the GSC Ladies.

When Anne started up the team, she was teaching at Lymm High School and several young players came from there as juniors. The club organised successful seven-a-side annual tournaments at Stockton Lane and GSC Ladies was one of the top clubs in the country, with three players in the Cheshire County and England National teams. The club also had the Welsh International keeper Marita Rowlands. Anne continued playing for GSC Ladies at Stockton Lane into her fifties and retired as captain in the early 1990's. She inaugurated the Cheshire Hockey League in 1985 after a rebellion of the Cheshire clubs players against the views of the County Hockey Committee. GSC Ladies fared very well in the new league, reaching the North Championship Final in 1990 when they had a full team of county players, and then narrowly failing to reach the National Final. After a further five successful seasons, there was some disharmony within the squad, and not long after in 1985, GSC Ladies folded. The league Anne formed has gone from strength to strength and now boasts eight divisions.

Upon retiring from hockey, Anne started training dogs to do flyball as a hobby, and in 2000, she approached the Sports Club to form a new section. Within eighteen months, tournaments were being held at Stockton lane with teams coming from the Midlands, Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cheshire. After three years, the Flyball club were becoming more and more successful with three teams competing in national events. Sadly, with the deterioration of the clubhouse the Flyball club were forced to find a new home near Sutton Weaver. Now they have five teams with over forty members, Anne is on the National Committee and their top team rated in the top dozen in the country.

The Grappenhall Village Sports Club Committee must now turn its attentions to their next task; English Partnerships are to sell the land upon which the first clubhouse once stood and where the first football team played over sixty-five years ago.

It is essential that the club continue its long tradition to provide good sporting facilities for its youngsters and the youth of tomorrow.



John 'Jay' Barnett ~ founder of the Grappenhall Village Sports Club

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