

STAFFORD ORCHARD PARK OVER 100 YEARS AS A RECREATION GROUND

Stafford Orchard, the Staffy or Quorn Park are all terms that we hear to describe what user surveys continue to rate as Quorn's 'Jewel in the Crown'. The Stafford Orchard section of the Village website tells us that the Orchard is Quorn's main park and occupies a perfect spot in the centre of the village. It provides excellent community facilities and is a park designed and run by the people of Quorn.

As we visit and enjoy the facilities, do we appreciate that its origins go back into the mists of time? We know that in 1350 Sir Richard de Stafford owned an estate in Quorndon and by the 16th century Queen Elizabeth the first leased 140 acres of her own land in the village to Francis Griffin and John Staples, some of which was put aside for common land called Stafford Orchard. The Farnham family acquired Stafford Orchard in 1561 when Matthew Farnham, Quorn's squire, settled the Dower House and 'that one close 'commonlie cauled Stafford Orchard' on his widow for 'dower'. It remained in Farnham ownership as rough grazing land until 1920.

On Friday 26 May 1893, The Nottingham Journal carried an advertisement which must have triggered concern in the village. It was from G.A.Wilkinsons who were offering for sale building land known as 'Stafford Orchard', which was owned by William Farnham who was in severe financial difficulties. This must have come as a shock to the villagers who had been used to treating it as common land and they had used it to graze their animals. Despite this threat the land stayed in the family, and it continued to be used by the community. Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee was celebrated there in 1897.



*Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee
Celebrations on Stafford Orchard in 1897. The old primary school is in the background.*

The village had fought for their rights to common land before, as in 1726 when the Earl of Huntingdon, was lord of the manor and claimed the Swyne Green land and brought a legal action against the Town Trustees and the inhabitants of Quorn for trespass and damage. The claim was resisted, and evidence from the witnesses recalled the villagers' use of the land back to the time of Edward VI (1547- 1553). The village had stood up for its common rights and was successful!



Stafford Orchard Plan 2020

Note: The Swyne Green land was purchased by Quorn Parish Council from the Townlands Trust in 2009 and is now part of Stafford Orchard

After the Orchard was offered for sale in 1893, things moved slowly, admittedly the Great War intervened, and it was not until 1914 that the then Quorndon Urban District Council entered into negotiation with Mr John Farnham the then owner of what had at one time been common land to lease the Stafford Orchard for the village.

In 1912 the council were proposing that the council enter into a lease arrangement with Mr Farnham however, when in 1914 negotiations broke down Messrs J. D. Cradock, E.H. Warner, S. Wright, and C.T. Parker purchased the site for the village, preventing it being sold as freehold building land. The hope was that the wealthy of Quorn would step up to help them with the purchase when this did not materialise, a mortgage had to be arranged.



A copy of the 1920 Indenture that conveyed the Orchard to the Council is held in the Parish Council Archive

It was on 21st April 1920 that the Stafford Orchard was finally conveyed to the Quorndon Urban District Council for the village by the gentlemen, and by the end of June 1920 the Stafford Orchard recreation ground was opened to the village with the conditions:

- 1 - That the Council provide £300 which would make £600 in all. Of this sum, £500 is to pay off the mortgage, and £100 to be spent in fencing etc so as to make the ground a credit to the village.
- 2 - That the ground be kept an open space in perpetuity and used as a playground for the younger inhabitants of the village where such games as cricket, football etc can be played.
- 3 - That no permanent buildings of any sort be erected on the ground.
- 4 - That the small space behind the National Schools be sold to the school managers at a nominal sum of £5 for further extension of their playground.

Further conditions were added by the council:

5. No charges could ever be made for admission to Stafford Orchard.
6. That the local authority shall have right of access.
7. No games on Sunday.
8. No vendors of refreshments without permission.

The Minutes of the Council at that time record that 'They hoped in time to beautify it; to have some trees and to make a miniature park.' Then, as now, things moved slowly and at the June 1939 Parish Council meeting Mr T Dexter was recorded as saying that the orchard was given to the parish as a public recreation ground many years ago, and it was the Parish Council's duty to preserve it as such, but he thought it was a disgrace to the parish. "If the original donors of the land could see it today, I should think they would repent of having given it," he said.



Jubilee celebrations of 1935 (King George V and Queen Mary) The day started at 10.00am with jubilee mugs being presented to children. At 1.30pm they had a Fancy Dress Parade on Stafford Orchard. This was followed by a Service with Mountsorrel Town Band, sports for children and a tea for over 65s. In the evening there was dancing and fireworks.

Although improvements were made with the addition of seating in 1935 and new play equipment in 1948 and in the 1960's it was, not until 2010, that the aspirations were made good, probably beyond the wildest dreams of the original benefactors, with a substantial grant from the National Lottery Fund, under its Parks for People scheme.

This is a park designed by the people of Quorn. Many consultation exercises were carried out with all sectors of the community as the plan developed, and the result is a park with something for everyone.



*Performance area, Grand opening of Stafford Orchard, May 2011.
Photo: Ivan Bexon*

At the time, the Quorn Parish Council and the Park Redevelopment Team gratefully acknowledged the assistance of their consultants, contractors and village volunteers, the financial contributions to the project from the National Lottery and Charnwood Borough Council, and materials donated by Lafarge Aggregates (now Tarmac).

Over the years Stafford Orchard has hosted many notable events including in May 1952 when a dedication ceremony of the avenue of lime trees sponsored by local businessman F.A. Stenson and planted in memory of the American Forces took place. In 1957 history was made when for the first time since the Stafford Orchard came into the hands of the Council, it was used by local organisation 'Friends of Markfield' for their annual Carnival parade and gala. Royal and Mayday Celebrations have continued to be popular gatherings. The Funfair was an annual visitor to the park between 1968 and 2009 and several local football teams played their matches there.



1973/4 Quorn Park Rangers in action!



2007 Cox's Fun Fair – A regular visitor

The community is still involved with the running of this park on several levels. The Stafford Orchard Advisory Group that is made up of village volunteers advises the Parish Council's Grounds and Facilities Committee who report to the full council. The

advisory group manages the Green Flag Award process (This is the benchmark national standard for parks and green spaces), the Park Volunteer Warden scheme and promotes its use by the local community.

Stafford Orchard can be used for casual enjoyment and organised community events such as fun days, horticultural shows, sporting events, concerts, fetes, festivals, performances, shows, etc. If you like to organise an event or get involved in running the park, contact the Parish Office at: parishmanager@quorndon.org . More information can be found at: www.quornparishcouncil.org.uk

We can only imagine just how proud those 1920 benefactors would feel today when during the pandemic the park has been in constant use by all sections of the community for exercise, play, picnicking or simply sitting to watch the world go by.



Relaxing in Stafford Orchard June 2020

**Dennis Marchant - Chair
Stafford Orchard Advisory Group**