

Herringthorpe Playing Fields

Originally the playing field was in a multiplicity of ownerships, and leased to local farmers as agricultural land with horse race meetings periodically being held on a strip of the land. In 1893 the northern half of what is now the playing field was acquired from the various owners by the New Sheffield and Rotherham Racecourse Co Ltd as part of its plans to invest in an upgrading and extension of the existing racecourse.

When these plans failed an area of 106 acres, extending nearly as far as Wickersley Road, and eastwards to include part of the current Herringthorpe Council Estate, was sold to the Badsley Moor Lane Land Co Ltd.

No more is known of this company until in 1903 it sold the entire 106 acres to Arthur John Joshua Boswell of Norwich. Mr A.J.J. Boswell then proceeded to lay out Boswell Street and sell off plots of land for housing. In 1904, all the house plots on the Broom Road frontage, extending nearly as far as the Rotherham Hospice, were sold off to individuals and to house builders like William Mullett.

In 1926 Mr Boswell appointed the Public Trustee, of Kingsway in London, to be the executor of his Will. (n.b. the Public Trustee was the head of a Government office established in 1908. Through him the State acted as executor or trustee under a will or settlement).

Mr A.J.J. Boswell died in 1927 and in June 1928 the Public Trustee sold 95 acres of land to the Rotherham Corporation. At the time of the sale Arthur Gilberthorpe, farmer, had a tenancy of 54 acres which had to be given up and he was awarded compensation by an arbitrator. The land was sold to the Rotherham Corporation at market value and there were no covenants restricting its use. At the time it was intended that the Badsley Moor Lane frontage be developed for housing with the new playing field being laid out to the south and being configured in an east – west direction to include Bakers Field and extending further towards the present Herringthorpe Valley Road..

Of the 95 acres acquired probably around 65 – 70 acres is within the present playing fields with the rest being part of the Herringthorpe Council Estate.

The area around the sports arena was purchased by Rotherham Corporation in 1930 from the executors of Henry Powell Gough's Herringthorpe Hall Estate. Again the land was purchased at market value with no restrictive covenants.

Finally the area, until recently occupied by the Herringthorpe Leisure Centre, was acquired in 1929 from Mrs Elizabeth Emily Edith Leedham. I think this was compulsorily acquired and full tenant right compensation had to be paid to the vendors as occupiers of the land. Again the land was free of restrictive covenants. I have seen absolutely no evidence that this land was 'gifted' by the Leedhams for use by the children of Rotherham as claimed in some newspaper reports.

Herringthorpe Playing Fields and Pavilion: Official Opening.

(R/A 26/7/1930)

Rt Hon George Lansbury, M.P., HM First Commissioner of Works

Ald G.E.Caine, Chairman of the Herringthorpe Lands Committee.

Ald Caine stated:

"The scheme would have to be paid for by the ratepayers. Rotherham had no generous soul to come along, as they had in Sheffield, and give them parks as Ald Graves had done there. It would take them several years before they were able to make the playing fields in the state they would like to see them."

"They had for some years, pursued the policy of getting hold of the land. They could not spend a lot of money because times were hard."

The Mayor stated:

".....the progressive policy of the Council was to get hold of the land so that they could develop it in the best interests of the community.....The cost of the scheme was something like £22,000 and he was sure it would be money well spent."

M r Lansbury, in declaring the fields open for ever, paid tribute to the Council for bringing to the services of the community all the amenities that a community needs.....'Those fields were devoted to the service of all, and he had great pleasure in declaring them open for ever."

Nowhere is there any suggestion that any of the land had been donated.
