

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MASTER PARK

By Ron Bristow

For more detail see "*A History of Master Park*" R G Bristow

The land now known as Master Park has been used for recreation since the late 19th century. Oxted Cricket Club was founded in 1890, Oxted District Football Club in 1894 and Oxted Tennis Club prior to 1923. By 1920 the area had become known as the Recreation Ground because the Hoskins Masters family had allowed local people to use it for that purpose. In 1923 this use was formalised by Charles Hoskins Master, who executed a trust deed establishing that the "said piece or parcel of land should be laid out and reserved for ever hereafter for the healthy recreation and amusement of the inhabitants of the Parish of Oxted and their friends."

Under the terms of the deed, the trustees could enclose and lay out the park in such manner as they thought fit and proper. They could plant trees, provide and fix seats and benches, make shrubberies, borders and beds for plants, pleasure grounds, walks, paths and ways. They could make sports pitches for cricket, football and hockey; lawns and courts of any description for bowls, lawn tennis, badminton, croquet or any other games; and set apart playgrounds for children. They could erect and maintain buildings in connection with the games and amusements and an entrance lodge for the residence of a park keeper. They were permitted to make reasonable charges for the use of any portion of the ground or any buildings thereon for any sport or game. Master Park may be let for the use of travelling shows, circuses, roundabouts, swing-boats, shooting galleries, coconut shies and such like entertainments to assist the funds necessary for maintenance and upkeep of the park. The park may not be used for religious services or for political meetings or any propaganda purposes.

One of the first events on the ground was a stock sale held by Mr Collyer Hamlin. Then an old English Fair was held, with the proceeds going towards the cost of repairing the church bells. In 1923 a cricket club, football club, ladies hockey club, two tennis clubs and an athletics club used the park. There was a pavilion in

rather poor condition. Children were allowed the use of the north west portion of the park as a play area.

It was the practice in the early years for the sports clubs to apply annually for the use of the various pitches and courts and The Southern Railway (Oxted) and the Sevenoaks and District Electric Company's Cricket Clubs both used a pitch in the north west corner of the park during the 1930s. A cricket fête was held on Saturday 18th June 1938 with a ladies cricket match, children's races and games, pony and donkey rides and side-shows with dancing from 8pm

The two teams shared the ground on Master Park. All matches were played at home and a ground collection was made for charity. Permission was given for the pavilion to be used during the evenings by soldiers stationed in the district, but electric lighting was not installed in the pavilion until 1946. At the beginning of the war an air raid shelter had been built on the park and in 1945 the Godstone Rural District Council was asked to remove it. In fact it took several years of negotiation with the Council before the shelter was finally demolished in 1949. On 25th August 1945 a Scout Victory Fete was held on Master Park. There were prizes for decorated cycles and children's races, an ankle competition, a novelty scout display, stalls, side-shows, and music by the First Godstone Scout Band. There was also a pillow fight over water.

Under a further deed in 1947, a piece of land was added on the west side of the park and included in the cricket ground. This involved the diversion of the public footpath on the west side of the park. The names of 50 men and women killed in the 1939 - 1945 war were added to the war memorial and unveiled on Sunday 9th November during the customary British Legion service. Land which had been under cultivation by the War Agricultural Committee was released under an order made by the Ministry of Agriculture and subsequently made into a second football pitch. The last crop was gathered in August 1949.

1951 was the year of the Festival of Britain in which Britain's achievements since the war and prospects for the future were exalted. In connection with this, Oxted Parish Council provided five seats which were placed at various locations on the park. The Oxted Festival of Britain Association was set up with the aim of

raising funds for the improvement and upkeep of Master Park. Members of the public were invited to become Friends of the Association by becoming regular subscribers. A total of £281.6s was subscribed by 88 donors. Festival of Britain week finished with a fête on Master Park on Whit Monday, opened by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field Marshal Sir William Slim, accompanied by Lady Slim. The weather was dry, but a cold wind drove many home early.

In 1953 Oxted Cricket Club celebrated its diamond jubilee. Cricket Week opened on Coronation Day with a match against Barclays Bank. At the same time the Oxted, Limpsfield and Titsey Joint Coronation Committee used Master Park for the Oxted celebrations. Unfortunately, heavy showers and a cold blustery wind hampered the smooth running of events on the day and considerably reduced the number of people participating. A gymnastic display by scholars of Oxted County Grammar School was abandoned altogether. In 1955 the Park was used for the annual parade of the Surrey Special Constabulary on 22nd May and on 26th June members of the London New Zealand Cricket Club were welcomed as visitors to Master Park. Luncheon was held at the Hoskins Arms at which Captain C E Hoskins Master presided. In 1957 a cricket score box was erected next to the pavilion in memory of Mr Harold Smith who had been a member of the Committee of Management since its inception in 1923 and Vice-Chairman since 1945.

In May 1969 Mr Gent, who had been Secretary to the Management Committee since its inception in 1923, tendered his resignation, his place being taken by Mr William Powell, like Mr Gent, an original committee member.

A "Happening" organised by the Oxted Youth Project on the Park on 10th July 1971 set the seal on Oxted & District Round Table's annual carnival. It featured an "It's a Knockout" competition and a sponsored wheelchair event with handicapped participants from all parts of the country. Fête attractions of the more traditional kind were provided by local youth and other organisations such as the scouts, guides, cubs, brownies, air training corps, youth clubs and ladies and church organisations. A pyramid 25 hours marathon took place on Master Park between Friday 9th and Saturday 10th July when a team of young people ran ten separate events for 25 hours non-stop in aid of the Cheshire Home at Godalming and

nearly 1,000 children attended a successful play scheme held on the park daily throughout August. It was run by the Oxted & Limpsfield Youth Project. The Oxted Brass Band played on the park during the summer of 1974. The British Legion celebrated its 50th anniversary on 2nd October 1976 with a tug-o-war on the park.

Fouling of the park by dogs was a serious problem, with owners bringing dogs from far afield. It was established that bye-laws were not applicable unless the area was enclosed so five notices were placed around the park, although four of the notices were stolen within 48 hours of being put up. Gales in the early days of 1984 removed strips of felt from the pavilion roof. Immediate repairs were carried out but estimates were obtained for the complete replacement of the felt as it had probably reached the end of its life. The work was carried out towards the end of the year. Dogs of all shapes and sizes took over Master Park on Saturday 9th June 1984 for the Scruffs Show. On 31st August 1985 there was a fireworks display to commemorate St Mary's Church 900th anniversary. In May 1988 members of Rotary and their children took to the swings and roundabouts in Master Park on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the opening of the children's playground and in October the Royal Air Force Association held its 40th anniversary dinner in the pavilion.

Amusement fairs have been held on the park since at least 1922 and circuses have visited on numerous occasions. The Scouts held a fete regularly from 1945 until 1975, when the Donkey Derby took its place. The Oxted and District Horticultural Society held an annual flower show in a large marquee on the Park from 1952 and the Oxted and District Round Table has held a carnival every year since 1966.

Domesday

In 1986, 900 years after William the Conqueror's original Domesday Book, the BBC published the Domesday Project. The project was probably the most ambitious attempt ever to capture the essence of life in the United Kingdom. Over a million people contributed to this digital snapshot of the country.

People were asked to record what they thought would be of interest in another 1000 years.

In Oxted a record was made and this is what was said about Master Park

Master Park was given to Oxted by Charles Hoskins Master in 1923. In the S.E. there is a War Memorial that commemorates the 2 World Wars. On Remembrance Day Brownies, Guides, Cubs, Scouts & Venture Scouts gather round the memorial & march to St.Mary's Church.

During the year there are many entertainments including Fairs, Carnivals, Circuses and Donkey Derbies. There are 3 tennis courts, 2 football pitches, 1 cricket pitch & a small children's playground. It has a sandpit, slide & a climbing frame.

To the North there is a New Estate, an old Church, & the North Downs. To the South there is a police station. Around the edge there are lime trees and benches for old people. People go there to walk dogs & to go jogging. Near the tennis courts there is a small car park.