

Transcript of Reprint from the National Playing Fields Association Journal "Playing Fields" of April 1958.

The "Do It Yourself" Village

The following account of the activities of the village of Borough Green, in Kent, instances what can be achieved by a really "live" village, largely from local resources.

The NPFA hopes that those who read this article will consider seriously what could be done in their own locality, and endeavour to arouse local public opinion to consider a scheme on the same lines.

The Borough Green achievements cater for the welfare of all, from a bowling green to a children's corner, and set a magnificent example of local initiative.

No matter how beautiful, every garden must have some ugly spots hidden away. In Kent, the Garden of England, Borough Green, some feel, must be the unloveliest spot of all. Its 1400 people live in uninteresting Victorian working type cottages, amidst a series of pits and craters made by the removal of the sand and gravel which abound in the neighbourhood. The village streets are in keeping with this ugliness, leading to equally ugly stations, railway and bus, or to noisome industrial plants and premises.

Yet, Borough Green has done things which are really remarkable and which it is suggested, are unequalled elsewhere in the country.

How it has come about remains a mystery. The facts are solid enough. Borough Green has somehow produced a spirit within its people that has made a pattern for all to follow.

This little village formed a Parish Council some 23 years ago when the old Wrotham RDC dissolved, and about a year later they bought a field to provide a place where children could play in safety with the aid of a loan from the Public Works Loan Board. It took 20 years to repay the loan.

Nothing much happened until some 9 years ago when it was suddenly decided to make the field more in keeping with the name Recreation Ground. People agreed it would be good to have hard tennis courts, cricket and football pitches and a childrens playground.

And that is where Borough Green's story really begins, because from that suggestion arose a spirit which eventually confounded and astonished the nearby villages and towns.

The bill for this conversion came to more than £2,200 and after a benign Ministry provided a grant, somebody had to find the rest – a sum of £800.

Perhaps it was the criticism which did it, nobody can tell, but the people of Borough Green rolled up their sleeves; they held dances, raffles, jumble sales, fetes, carnivals and even house to house collections until everybody should have been spent out. But not only did they get their £800, but over £550 in addition.

This was enough to provide tennis courts, level the cricket and football pitches, and to complete a children's playground, for the equipment of which the NPFA kindly added £100 in the form of a grant.

The result was so good that it was decided to build a real pavilion on the Recreation Ground. But a new pavilion costs a lot of money, and the Parish Council realised it. Then the Women's Institute reminded them that they had collected £550 after the War for the purpose of building a memorial pavilion, and suggested making this the nucleus of a new fund. The idea spread and a sub-committee was selected to investigate possibilities. Within a matter of weeks there were 64 volunteers who said they would build the place themselves.

Action...

While other people were saying it was foolhardy and impossible, these men and women borrowed tools and got busy. They worked in snow and every other kind of weather. Sometimes they worked in the dark with lamps, but gradually the critics began to see that it wasn't all a pipedream.

Once convinced of the good faith of the project, business people offered equipment and materials. Buaked up with a final £200 from the Playing Fields Association the Pavilion was completed and equipped in a very short time. The Memorial was formally dedicated on **July 17th 1955** . The ceremony was conducted by General Norman, Deputy Sheriff of Kent, and Vice Chairman of the Kent Playing Fields Association.

A Worthy Effort.

It is very well built, a handsome building complete with clocktower, and it was completed within the £750 donated, and is now insured for £2,400.

That was merely the start which gave Borough Green the nickname in the local and national press of "The Do It Yourself Village".

Borough Green people felt that they would like to repay the PFA for its generosity, and they set about a program of events for the purpose of raising funds. They put on a cricket match against the old County and England players and sent £100 between the National and Kent Associations as a result.

Last year HRH the Duke of Edinburgh made his appeal for the Playing Fields Week, and a silver cup was offered to the cinema that collected the most per seat. Borough Green decided to compete with their little cinema of 250 seats. Another surprise for the neighbours resulted : not only did they win the cup, but they collecte nearly twice as much as their nearest rival.

Nothing seemed to tough for the spirit which held everybody in Borough Green together. They never forgot what they owed to the Playing Field Association and at every turn they did their best to return it by raising funds.

They organised a snooker competition for the surrounding villages and Joe Davis agreed to come down and present the cup to the winner. With his help another £50 was collected for the fund.

Help for Others

During the last two years, the ordinary people of Borough Green have raised some £600 for the Kent PFA by cricket and football games and snooker matches, and to show it's not all for "home charity", they sent £118 to the Lynton Relief Fund, and nearly £160 to the Lord Mayor's Hungarian Relief Fund, as well as large quantities of clothing.

Their latest decision was to build a six-rink bowling green. An alarming estimate amounting to £2,700 was received from a contractor, so they decided to build it themselves. Dismal failure and a waste of good money was predicted. But with a grant of £450 from the Ministry, and a loan from the Kent PFA of £250 the work was started. Although the idea was first mooted only a year ago, they, and the people of neighbouring villages have already played one season on the rinks, and pronounced them the best for miles around. The loan has also been repaid.

The playing field is now so fine that it was worthy of a proper approach. A pair of wrought iron gates set in Kentish ragstone walling was suggested and it was not long before volunteers were coming forward again. A large concern with local connections offered a derelict stone flourmill if the people of the village demolished it themselves. Before anyone had time to reconsider it, the building was razed to the ground, and the stone was being used to for the new entrance. It seemed only right that providence should come forward with a fine pair of wrought iron gates, just the right size, and soon all two tons of them will be in place.

It would appear that Borough Green is living well up to the name of "The Do It Yourself Village"