A Brief History of Cannock Park

Football Match 1893

Miners Rally circa 1960

Coronation 1937

Band and crowds marching to Flower Show 1909

Cannock Cricket team – Cannock Park

Park Entrance Gates 1930’s

Miners Pavilion circa 1960

Wartime activities 1940’s

Golf Course 1930’s

Children’s Playground 1980’s (P Gibson)

Park entrance 1947

Patriotic Fete 1915
MANOR OF CANNOCK - POST MEDIEVAL
The land that is now Cannock Park was part of the ‘open fields’ and ‘wastelands’ of the Manor of Cannock. Many of the field boundaries, ancient hedgerows and Feasty Lane which are associated with the field systems survive. Following enclosure and enfranchisement most of the land eventually came into the ownership of George John Stubbs and became part of the ‘Old Fallow Farm’. In the 1870’s the estate was divided and sold to William Bishton/William Cotton. William Bishton later purchased the land belonging to William Cotton following his death in 1876.

RECREATION 1880’S
Gradually by the 1880’s parts of the land began to be used for recreation and became the home ground of Cannock Town and Cannock White Cross football clubs which were located at the Simm Lane Athletics Ground and the ‘Fields off Stafford Road’. The fields were also used for ‘Gala’s, Agricultural Shows and Sporting activities.

FLOWER SHOW GROUNDS- 1909
In 1909, Cannock Horticultural Association rented two fields to hold their Annual Flower Show, it was a significant move because from the outset they declared that they wished to eventually provide a public park on the site. The Flower Shows were huge events in the town, the Horticultural Society members were local traders, miners, farmers and mine owners. Choir competitions, military bands such as the Coldstream Guards, Flower Displays, Horse Leaping, Fruit, Vegetables, Honey, best Horse and Cart, Country Dancing and many other activities were held over two days. When the land was put up for auction in 1914, faced with losing their grounds and their dream of providing a park for the town they made a momentous decision to buy the land. Despite the war they obtained a loan and purchased the grounds, forming a co-operative of local people who purchased shilling shares and paid a yearly subscription of half a crown.

FLOWER SHOW GROUNDS DURING WW1-1914-18
When war was declared in 1914 the show which had been arranged for the following year was cancelled. But in 1915/16 the grounds played a significant role in raising funds for the Red Cross and boosting morale of the local population by holding shows. The Horticultural Association also played an important role in educating the public on growing food and bee-keeping. Fields were also used for growing crops at this time. In 1918 a one day show was held with the New Zealand Rifle Brigade from the nearby camps providing the band.

POST WW1 1919 -1929
Following the war, the society provided ‘Horticultural Hall’ a wooden building located in what is now the rose garden, this became their headquarters and was also used by the local community for events. The grounds were used for a huge carnival to raise funds for Cannock War Memorial, with over sixty floats participating. In 1928 further land was purchased, (it is believed this land was already being utilised as a small golf course) this was solely to further their intention of proving the finest park in the district for the people of Cannock.

HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY/MINERS WELFARE COMMITTEE/CANNOCK URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL 1929
In 1929 discussions began with the local Miners Welfare Committee who had been appointed by the government to distribute funds from the Miners Welfare Fund. The fund was established by the government by placing a levy of old penny for every ton of coal mined (until 1934 when it was reduced to ½ penny) the money raised was to improve the social wellbeing of miners and their families. Many recreational facilities in the district were
provided by the fund, but Cannock Park was exceptional because the miners also purchased the land. Cannock Urban District Council also recognising the importance and suitability of the Flower Show Grounds for a park agreed to contribute a grant of £950 towards the purchase of the land. Having decided that this was the best way to ensure their ambition of providing a public park, the Horticultural Society agreed to sell the land (only asking for enough money to pay off their outstanding debts), all the land was then placed in a Charitable Trust which was called ‘The Cannock Recreation and Pleasure Ground Charity’ The ‘Miners Welfare Committee’ also purchased additional land and placed it into the trust. Cannock Urban District Council agreed to always maintain the park and was appointed as Trustee this agreement remains to this day.

CANNOCK PARK OPENS 1932-PRESENT DAY
Opened in 1932 Cannock Park, soon became established as the centre of recreational activity. Cannock Cricket Club was based in the park from the opening until 1955 when they moved to their own grounds in Hatherton Road (Morris Grounds, now based at Hatherton). Veteran miners used the main pavilion as their ‘club’ where they held events and religious services. Cricket, Tennis, Rugby, Football, Hockey, Bowling, Netball, and a nine hole golf course (the first golf facility to be provided by a Miners scheme in the district) were part of the facilities. A rose garden (children not allowed!) a large children’s recreation ground, Tennis Courts, Cricket Pitch and bowling green were provided. A wooden temporary bandstand was located in the Rose Garden with regular concerts held. Over the years other land was purchased and added to the park.

CANNOCK PARK - WW2
During WW2 once again the grounds came into their own, by playing a significant role in fund raising and morale boosting activity. A huge marquee accommodating seven hundred people was erected on a concrete base in front of the pavilion to facilitate events for the ‘Holidays at Home’ programme. Hundreds of Deck chairs were bought from the Worthing Corporation to facilitate open air band concerts. Fund raising events and entertainments sometimes lasting for a week at a time for such causes as ‘The Merchant Navy Comforts Fund’ Salute the Soldier’ and ‘War Weapons Week’, to name a few were held in the park. To help the ‘Dig for Victory’ campaign a demonstration plot was established with further allotments provided by the stream, although slightly disrupted by the provision of allotments the golf course continued to operate throughout until 1945

CANNOCK PARK POST WW2
Following the war the recreational and sporting activities continued. After nearly ten years of fundraising and with a substantial grant from the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation (CISWO) the provision of a purpose built ‘clubhouse’ for the Veteran Miners was opened in 1959 and located in the Rose Garden. The delay in the building of this facility was attributed to the agreement of the ‘Charity Commission’ before it could be built. Events continued with the introduction of ‘Grass Track Racing’ held at bank holiday weekends initially to raise money for the British Legion who held many events in the park. Local political parties also held gala’s and fetes, but it is the ‘Labour Gala’ often referred to as the Miners Gala that people remember the most. Many eminent labour politicians of the day opened the gala, which was always preceded by a procession of numerous floats which paraded through the district. Miners would also hold rallies in the park, particularly significant during the miners’ strike in the 70/80’s
In the 1970/80’s a ‘Pitch and Put’ was provided and a Miniature Railway built and operated by the Model Engineering Society. In 1983 Cannock Council finally purchased the land on the upper golf course, previous attempts to obtain this land for the park had failed because it was good agricultural land. It was intended to use part of this land for a cemetery, however this was not possible because of the presence of ‘fissures’ which made it unsuitable. For a while the land was used for football, rugby, and open spaces. In 1986 it was decided to provide a full size golf course initially a nine hole course on the lower lands which the extended on to the upper fields creating a full 18 hole course in Cannock Park.

PRESENT TIME
Cannock Park continues to be a much loved and appreciated facility, providing facilities for formal and informal recreation for all ages. A large children’s play area, quiet areas in the Rose Garden and around the bowling green. Football, Tennis, Casual Bowls and Golf are still played in the park with many walks through the park to Shoal Hill Common enabling local people to tread in the footsteps of their ancestors.