

The Swyne Green

Quorn Parish Council welcomes you to Stafford Orchard

The year is 1631 and the land behind you including the car park is known as the 'Swyne Green'. The brook is open at the village end, is not well-defined and often floods. The ground is so swampy that it is only fit for the village folk to turn their pigs out to root and wallow amongst the thick willow trees. The right to crop off the young sprouts of the willows is let to parishioners who carry on the trade of skuttle or basket making.

The Reverend Foord-Kelcey, the local vicar tells us in 1908 that: "People who remember the old course tell that the water-way was much less clearly defined than the new one, the banks were lower and the water would often run over the adjacent ground, while sometimes it was so shallow that children could cross the brook by a few stepping stones".

Fast forward to 1923. It is September and the Quorn Wakes, an ancient festival and fair, is taking place on The Green. The caravans of the fair folk stretch right up The Green to School Lane. There is a charaplane swinging high above The Elms (The Dower House) and attracting huge crowds; roundabouts for the children; a 'wild and untamed forest lion' called Brutus, a pelican named Jim and according to a newspaper report of the time, every other person carried a shaving mirror or a glass dish which they had won at a sideshow.



The gathering of willows or osiers for basket making was carried out on the Swyne Green in the time of Queen Elizabeth 1st.

To improve the use of the willows, in about 1665 the owners of the land, the Trustees of the Town Lands Charity allowed their tenant, Robert Locker, to part off by fence and ditch about a quarter of the Green at the School Lane bridge end, and to cultivate it as a regular osier or willow bed. New willow planting is being established in this area.

The Trustees were determined to clear the Green (except the osier bed) and it must have been thick with trees and undergrowth, if as alleged, 80 willow trees were cut down and 15 loads of wood, brush and timber were carried off.

In 1726 the Earl of Huntingdon, as lord of the manor, claimed the 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 IV (1547-1553). The village had stood up for its common rights and was successful.

The course of the brook was changed in the late 1800s and the level of the Green raised above the water level except during times of flood.



The Wakes Fair on the Green in the 1920s.

It is now wartime, May 1940, and an evacuation practice is in full swing. Wright's factory has eleven air raid shelters, seven of which are just behind you on the Green and four are in the factory yard. It took three minutes to walk from the factory to the Green and within five minutes, five hundred and fifty people were safely sheltered. Each shelter held fifty people, with a warden in charge of each.

Some families were evacuated to Quorn during the war and lived in caravans on The Green whilst the men worked in the factory. This was not totally satisfactory however due to the frequent flooding.

In the 1950s the Council granted permission for Quorn Cycle Speedway to hold meetings on The Green. They practised on a cinder track - ample cinders were available from Wright's factory. Crowds gathered by the shops, leaning on the railings to watch.

During the 1973 national tree planting scheme, local schoolchildren planted some of the magnificent willows which still occupy the bank of the brook.

The Green, owned by Town Lands Charity for well over 400 years, passed into the ownership of Quorn Parish Council in 2009 and became part of the overall plans to enlarge and enhance Stafford Orchard with a National Lottery Grant in 2009.

Find out more about Quorn's history at www.quornmuseum.com



An early photograph of Swyne Green in flood. Note the Lock Up in the distance and The Dower House to the right.