

The Rathcoole Playing Fields

(A brief History by Paddy Gavin)

It was 1960 I came to live in Dublin, and it was 1962 before I ever passed through the village of Rathcoole. On the main street then, there were three road junctions, the first as one travelled south westwards lead into Stoney lane. The next was Tay lane junction leading north towards Newcastle and third junction led to Killeel as well as to the National school. Rathcoole then was generally described as a country village, with a population of about 400 some 10 miles from Dublin city, on the Cork road but within County Dublin with its main street over 400 feet above sea level.

In 1965 the first of a number of housing development began that being the Coolamber estate, the developer being John Mulholland. Next were Beechwood lawns houses as well as the first Forest Hills estate built by Healy homes. As was now an updated sewerage system in place several other developments sprang up. During those years also the Naas road dual carriageway was now under construction. The new carriageway would bypass the Rathcoole village on its Northern side but leaving an entrance /exit at both ends of the main street.

In 1967 I came to live in Rathcoole and in the autumn that year the carriageway was open and became known as the Naas dual carriageway. This made such a difference to the village with the removal of heavy traffic from the Rathcoole main street.

Within a few years when many of the new houses were occupied and a young generation of children were growing up, the question of infrastructure, such as schools, shops, play areas and other services became priority. In Rathcoole at this time there was a local Garda Sargent Jim McKeever, who was very conscious of the need to provide recreational amenities for the youth of the area. He invited a group of parishioners to consider electing a Community Council for the immediate area. Until then the only representation of resident's interests was catered for by Saggart and Rathcoole resident's association under the chairmanship of Sean Nolan.

Sean Nolan was a dedicated community activist worker and became the first chairman of the newly formed Saggart & Rathcoole Community Council and served as an excellent chairman for nearly 20 years. Over that time Sean Nolan built up the Community Council to one of the most active in the county. The major two pursuits of the era for our area were a Community Centre and playing fields. But first of course as funding which had to be considered. The Dublin County Council were approached, and they made it clear that they would help by means of grants, but that there would be no full funding for amenity projects at that time. This of course left a major responsibility on the Community Council to fundraise. The initial project was to build a Community Centre. Several means of fund raising began non-stop draws, carnivals, dinner dances, concerts, dog shows, discos, and auctions of household items. Shortly there was sufficient funds for a deposit to qualify for a bank loan to purchase a site and build a Community Centre.

All of the Community Council worked hard during the 1970s and 1980s to pay off the loan and start to accumulate some funding for the provision of the local playing fields. The County Council were now being asked to keep and provide some local lands before it was bought up by builders for future housing. It was now passed the 1980s but the Co Council did respond and ear marked some 70 acres of

agricultural land on the eastern side of the village known as "Stassens Lands". After long negotiations this land was eventually purchased by the County Council. Even then nothing happened on the purchased lands for nearly two years. By then there were several newly formed clubs in the area making demands for pitches and play areas. The County Council too were making demands for monies from the Community Council to help develop the playing fields and the park.

After several meetings with the County Councils senior landscape architect Mr Christy Boylan, agreements were reached on what the layout of the new park was considered most desirable and a substantial sum of money was paid over to the County Council. The agreement was that the following items would be provided.

- (a) Two GAA pitches and a Soccer pitch.
- (b) A playground and a rose garden.
- (c) A network of tarmacadam surface pedestrian pathways.
- (d) A landscape scheme of tree and shrub planting throughout.
- (e) Re-alignment of the stream and some waterfalls.
- (f) Also plant and maintain the 3-corner field that was given by John Mulholland as an open space for Coolamber and Beechwood estates.
- (g) All of these facilities were intended for the residents of both Saggart and Rathcoole areas.

At this time also we were fortunate to have two local Councillors on the Dublin County Council, who in fairness to them pushed hard to provide this Rathcoole park and other local facilities also.

Some time in the early 1990s a portion of about 3 to 4 acres of ground adjoining the N7 was removed from the park to make way for a link road bypass road between the two villages Rathcoole and Saggart. This gave rise to concern as to what might be put into this area of ground. Eventually we heard that Avoca were to build a major store there with large carpark which eventually happened. By 1996 a traffic light system which was operating at the eastern entrance to Rathcoole and Newcastle was about to be removed and replaced by a major bridge over the carriageway. This work also involved lowering the dual carriageway in where millions of tons of earth and rock was removed, much of this was taken into the new Rathcoole park where major earth and mounds formed there and all grassed over. A number of lakes and waterfalls were also formed. All this was in keeping with the promise of Christy Boylan given some time earlier.

In the 1990s there was a scheme where major contractors were obliged to contribute a small percentage of their successful contract's income towards artists. This meant that the contractor if the new bridge made a gift of some finance to a selected artist, to create and agree sculpture to the area of his works. In our case an artist was selected to create a replica of a local lady's hand in bronze and set them at the base of the major waterfall in the park. I wonder how many have noticed these bronze hands or are they aware of their existence. It was also in the 1990s also Rathcoole got several multi-story apartment blocks as well as shops, a bank a church and several other services. Despite the increase of the local population the then Minister for justice Mr Pádraig Flynn in 1992 maintained that Rathcoole did not merit a fulltime Garda station. Over the most recent years we have got seating at several areas about the park and also several exercising machines thanks to the County Council. More recently of course we have got the disruption of a major but necessary water mains being taken across the playing fields.

Thankfully, it is now completed, and we will be back to normal from next summer. It is a pleasure to walk or exercise about the park or playing fields or sit and watch the swans or other wildlife.

While relaxing there we should a thought for the Community Council personnel both passed and present who strived so hard to bring about such a present local immunity.

Paddy Gavin 2020

Beechwood Lawns was built prior to Coolamber estate. While John Mulholland was the main contractor, he sub-letted building of houses in Beechwood Lawns to other contractors, hence the variation of house designs in Beechwood Lawns.