

Queens Club grew up with city

Queens Sports Club was officially granted the piece of land on which the club stands today in mid-1894 by the British South Africa Company.

Zimbabwe's oldest sports club is today still situated on this piece of ground, bordered on the north by Connaught Avenue and on the south by First Avenue, between Robert Mugabe Way and Fife Street.

According to those who know the history of the club well, the land was given to the club by a Deed of Grant dated June 25, 1895. However, 11 years later the club sold the land to the BSA Company for £1 638.11s and the company later sold it to the municipality for more than double that price on condition that the land continued to be used for sporting facilities.

Following much deliberation between the Council and the club management over the years that followed, a series of short five-year leases were negotiated. The last of these was signed in 1936. Due to the uncertainty caused worldwide by the Second World War, the municipality renewed the lease for only one year in 1941. A year later, tragedy struck.

The club house and all the club records were destroyed in a fire caused by a carelessly left cigarette. The double-storey wood and iron building which housed the club went up in smoke. The fire swept through the old dry timber from one end to another, engulfing the whole building and leaving the fire brigade of the day no choice but to watch helplessly. During that year the residents of Bulawayo were going through an acute water shortage and it did not take the fire brigade long to decide that it was better anyway to sacrifice the building and save water.

The municipality refused to pay any insurance. With all debt paid, the club had £1 500 in the bank. It embarked nevertheless, on a course of major expansion. Luckily, the Liquor Licensing Board authorised the club to continue selling liquor to members from an old brick storeroom which did not suffer from the fire.

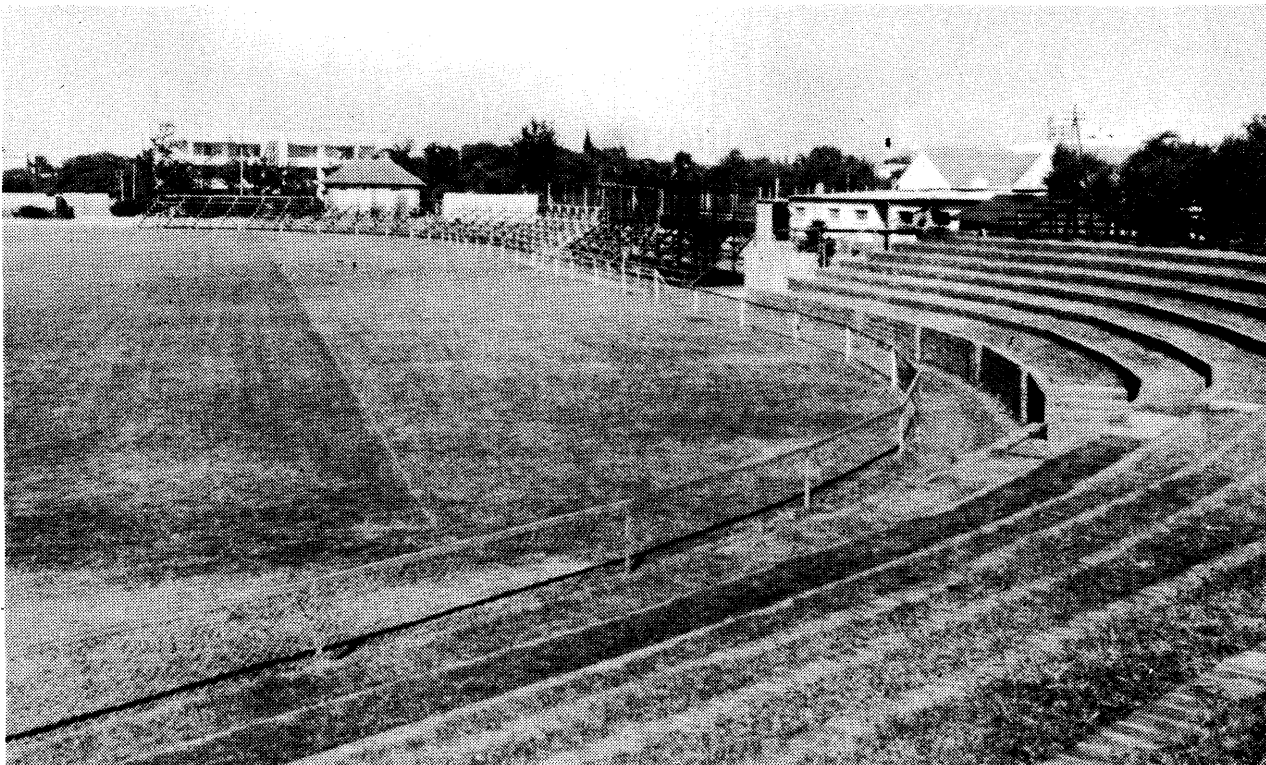
Following further negotiations with the Council, the club was finally granted a 99-year lease in 1953. By then the ground had seen many improvements and new buildings had been built to the

satisfaction of the Council. The lease is due to expire in the year 2051. At the time of the signing of the lease agreement, the rent was one pound per annum.

Over the years, the club ground has been the venue for many major events, from sporting events to pop concerts, wedding receptions, fetes, beerfests and military parades.

In July 1953, the club ground was used for the official opening of the Rhodes Centenary Exhibition, which was attended by a crowd of about 25 000 people. It was the local cricket headquarters for the Currie Cup Inter-Provincial fixtures played between the then Rhodesia and various South African teams. It has also been the venue for hockey test matches which the country played against national teams from various African states, as well as from Germany, Russia, Scotland and Holland, to name but a few.

The club ground will once again add to its list of major events another historic event in September this year, when it will be hosting visitors taking part in a variety of sporting functions to be held to celebrate the club's centenary. ○



*Bulawayo's
oldest
sports club,
the Queens
Sports
Club.*