

CALL FOR PAPERS

A History of Public Parks

The PAXTON150 conference at The Department of Landscape, The University of Sheffield, is to commemorate Joseph Paxton (1803-65) and to evaluate the public parks legacy. It is organised in conjunction with the Landscape Institute and supported by the National Trust, English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Over the past twenty years there has been considerable interest in public parks in Great Britain encouraged by lottery funding; as a result there was even talk of a renaissance in public parks. Lottery funding has ensured restoration schemes in large numbers of parks, based on historic research and other survey work. While there have been various efforts to publish material, there is as yet no scholarly work that has emerged from this recent period; there are no popular books. As lottery funding is slowing down and council cuts are beginning to bite, public parks are beginning to suffer from a lack of management and maintenance. It is even more important to record this legacy of public park restorations; the purpose of the present conference is to provide a mechanism for the publication of a critical history of public parks.

This call for papers seeks contributions that address aspects of the history of parks; this may be case studies of one park, or specific trends or movements within parks; rituals in parks; assessments of specific uses of parks; social aspects; security issues; plants and planting; design and conservation issues; funding of public parks. In conjunction with the Landscape Institute we are particularly looking for critical assessments of the work of specific landscape architects, and the influence of the British public park abroad. It is intended that we shall publish a large edited book. For the conference we intend to favour contributions that display some link with Joseph Paxton or his work and that of his followers such as Edward Milner at home, or Frederick Law Olmsted abroad. Please submit an abstract of 300-500 words to Jan Woudstra, j.woudstra@sheffield.ac.uk by 25 February 2015. The conference will be held on 11-12 September 2015, and will be advertised separately.

The conference is dedicated to Joseph Paxton who died 150 years ago. As a trained gardener Paxton became one of the foremost pioneers in the landscape profession, designing parks, gardens, cemeteries and housing developments, while also pioneering techniques that lead him to be a recognized engineer and architect, particularly after the building of the Great Exhibition Hall in Hyde Park in 1851. This building, based on greenhouse technology, was not only an astounding achievement; it also provided him with international recognition. Besides this he was a railway pioneer, a visionary, and financially apt. His abilities ensured him with a considerable public profile and he was elected as a Member of Parliament in 1854. He published horticultural journals and books. All this occurred while being employed as a head gardener by the Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth, which he also transformed. It is therefore not surprising that he pioneered in design of municipal parks, designing the first

such park in Birkenhead in 1843. Other municipal parks followed, such as; People's Park, Halifax; the Slopes, Buxton; South Cliff and Valley Garden in Scarborough; Crystal Palace, London. These and other parks were not only progressive in what they provided and how, but they also inspired parks elsewhere, as did the entire public parks movement in Britain.

The conference also celebrates the renaissance of public parks in Great Britain that was launched in Weston Park, Sheffield twenty years ago, when the Heritage Lottery Fund pledged funding for the restoration of public parks.

PAXTON150: A History of Public Parks

A conference at the Department of Landscape, the University of Sheffield

11-12 September 2015