

The Friends of Flaybrick

Our New York Connection.

This month the Mountain came to Mohammed when Doug Blonsky CEO of New York Central Park came to the Wirral. His visit fulfilled a personal ambition to visit Birkenhead Park and to attend a conference in Liverpool at which he hoped to learn about techniques for improving community involvement in parks. The conference was the North West park Friends Community conference held at the LACE conference centre in Sefton Park. The conference was attended by 120 leaders of Parks groups throughout the North West. J Moffat was present on behalf of the Friends of Flaybrick. Although many delegates had a lot of experience behind them few could match the near 30 years that Doug had put in at Central Park. Yet he appeared to be younger than most of the delegates! The seemingly time defying Doug started work at the park in 1985 so he now has 28 years of parks service under his belt. Yet a slide of him with Mayor Giuliani showed him looking exactly as he does today, clearly parks are good for your health! Doug became administrator in 1998 and then President in 2004.



Conference Delegates



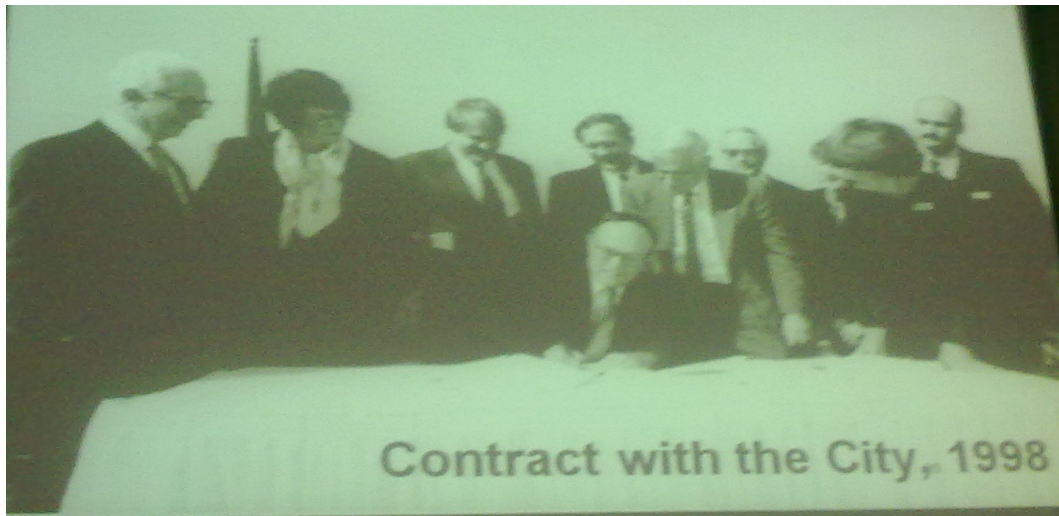
Doug explained that when he first became involved in 1985 the park had less than 4 million visitors per year. Roads were flooded, lakes eroded, graffiti and rubbish everywhere, all lights vandalised and benches gone. There were a total of 1100 category 1 (Murder and serious violence), crimes per year. Just to give you a perspective on the scale of the problem, Central Park is 36 x bigger than Flaybrick.

If it was overlaid on Birkenhead it would stretch from Conway to Canning Street, and from Hamilton Square to B&Q at Bidston. Of course we all know that the park had undergone similar problems to our own parks and cemeteries in the UK, and at roughly the same time. What did surprise us was that Central Park has another similarity to our own, that it was turned around by voluntary efforts. Indeed there was even a driving individual as has often been the case in the UK parks, who ceaselessly pushed the course forward. This individual was Betsy Barbour Rogers, who headed up the Central Park task force in the early dark days of the 70's. In 1980 the Central Park Conservancy was formed from the friends groups and philanthropists.



Left: Doug Blonsky delivers the key note speech

Below: Mayor Giuliani signs off the New York park conservancy agreement. Doug Blonsky visible on the far right.



Doug reports to both the city and the conservancy. His staff consist of 300 conservancy employees, 25 city staff, and up to 1000 transient volunteers each year. The Park is no longer a public entity and is only 15% funded by New York City. His presentation (sadly not videoed), clearly demonstrated the achievements of the Conservancy. A template that works so well, its mirrored by other New York Parks and serves as a model worldwide for parks management. The Park's 20,300 trees are well maintained, lake erosion sorted, and a dust bowl meadow restored. The 58 miles of paths are in good order with 9000 benches lined along them.



Fredrick Law Olmsted

Crime levels are now reduced to less than 100 low level crimes per year. Vaux's wonderful architecture has been restored to its former glory, and if you are one of the 38 million visitors who now enjoy the park each year you will be in no doubt of the truth of park historian Sara Cedar Miller's summation of the Park - "The most important work of American art of the 19th century. In the visual Arts, no single painting, sculptor, or structure can compare with this unique and recognised landscape architecture". It's quite something to think that our own Edward Kemp played a part in this achievement as his work influenced Vaux and Olmstead.



Calvert Vaux

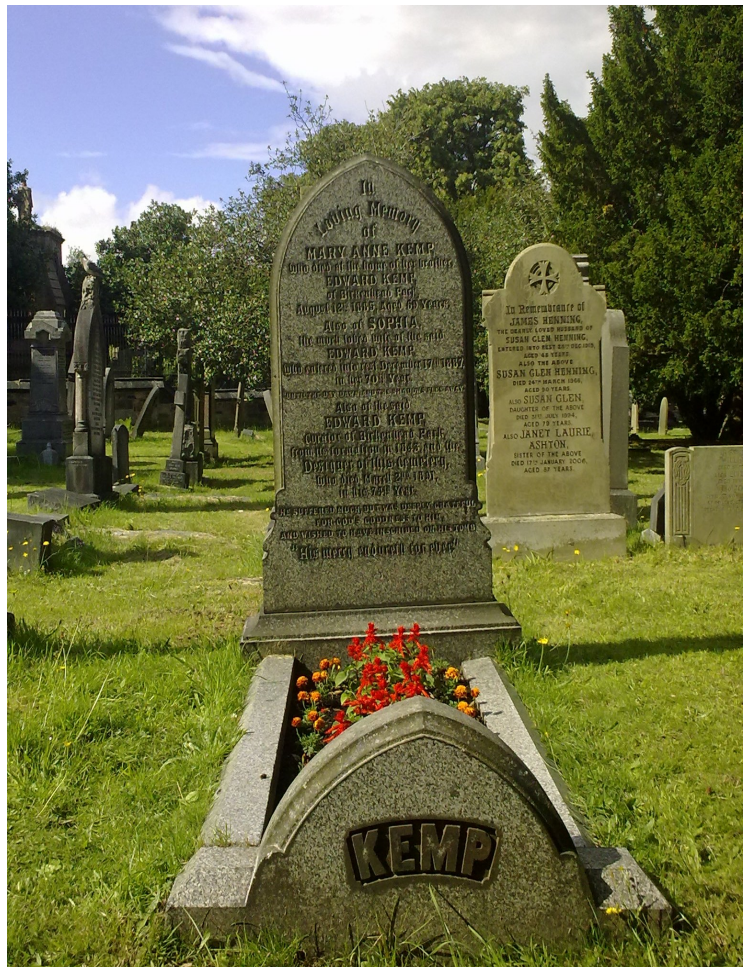
I had a few moments alone with Doug and although he knew of Kemp he didn't know that his epitaph states, "designer of this Cemetery and superintendent of Birkenhead Park from its inception in 1847". Doug said in response, "what more could you want". Hopefully this truly dedicated man will return to the Wirral and we can show him the gravestone set amidst Kemp's most intact surviving landscape.

So just why did the mountain come to Mohammed? It began with Birkenhead Park ranger Paul Davis, taking the initiative and developing a Skype contact. Doug was also interested in the innovative work that our ranger Nick Harding has been involved with, such as Forest School, Nick also arranged for Doug to get a copy of our DVD.

It's a small world.

When Harry Harvey of Sydney Australia decided that he would like a copy of our dvd, he did think that it might be a little bit complicated getting it delivered from the UK.
Not So!

He was amazed to find that our office is adjacent to Diane Flemmings house. A dear friend of his, who was coming to stay with him the following week. So Diane took the dvd to Australia, and Harry Harvey said he was well pleased with it.



Edward Kemps Grave in Flaybrick



Tam O' Shanter Cottage, Birkenhead. The above postcard sent to us by Brian Sinton and probably dates from about 1920.

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Guided Walks 2013.

Come and find out all about the fascinating history of Birkenhead and stories of the personalities that helped make it the way it is. You will all be very welcome.

2013's Guided walks run by the Friends of Flaybrick Memorial Gardens will take place on the following Saturdays:

13th April - Walk 1

11th May - Walk 2

8th June - Walk 3

13th July - Walk 4

10th August - Walk 5

14th September - Walk 6 (Military Walk)

Meet at Tam 'O' Shanter Farm at 11am.

Flat shoes recommended and an umbrella or raincoat just incase it rains. Ring Tam 'O' Shanter Farm on 0151 653 9332 to book a place Or just turn up on the day.

25th May - Tree Walk available for groups of 10 or more

For further details please contact Friends of Flaybrick. Tel no. 01515123676 or email Flaybrick.m.garden@ntlworld.com

Walks £2 Per Head.

This newsletter has been produced by the Friends of Flaybrick. We would welcome contributions for future newsletters. The deadline for submission for the next newsletter is 1st July 2013