

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS 1841 - 2007



### Opening Ceremony 1847

- 1841 Isaac Holmes has idea for a park
- 1843 Act of Parliament authorising purchase of land for a park; Joseph Paxton hired to design it
- 1844 First sale of housing plots on the perimeter of the Park
- 1846 Birkenhead Park Cricket Club founded
- 1847 Lord Morpeth opens the Park and the Docks on Easter Monday. Edward Kemp was the Park Superintendent. Newspaper adverts to rent Upper Park for sheep grazing
- 1848 Refreshment saloon opened  
3 sculptures put in the Park - Mazzeppa, the Blind Fiddler and the Two Sisters



Crimean War Cannons

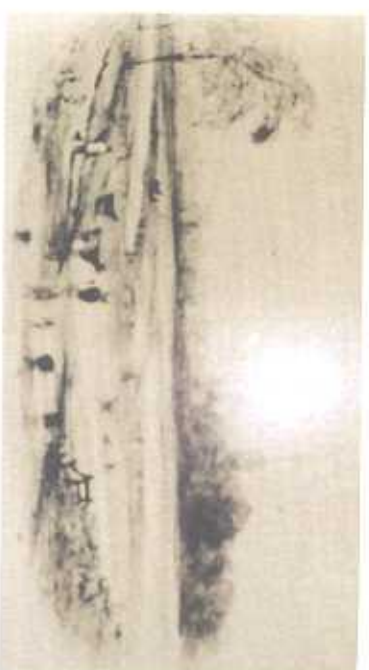


### Welsh National Eisteddfod 1917

- 1902 Samuel Franklin Cody brings giant man-lifting kites to the Park
- 1902 & 1911 Coronation celebrations and commemorative oaks planted
- 1903 Boothby Ground added to the Park
- 1917 Welsh National Eisteddfod held in the Park. Prime Minister Lloyd George attends
- 1920s Labour Day demonstrations  
Sandy Irvine of Mount Everest fame lived in 56, Park Road South
- 1921 Palm House erected
- 1924 New Zealand's "All Blacks" rugby team play Cheshire in the Park

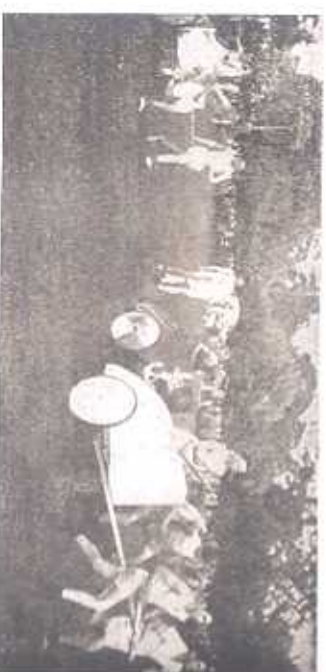


Bandstand Built 1929



### A Park from the Marshes

- 1976 Friends of Birkenhead Park formed by Lord Griff Evans
- 1977 Park becomes a Conservation Area
- 1980s Major TV series, Treasure Hunt and Z-Cars pass through the Park
- 1984 Park Ranger service started
- 1993 Major extensions to Park CC's clubhouse
- mid1990s 6th Form College carries out major work with their students in the derelict 3rd Lake area.
- 1997 Series of events to celebrate the Park's 150th anniversary
- 2004 Work starts on the £11 million restoration of the Park financed by the Heritage Lottery Fund
- 2006 New Park Pavilion opened by the Duke of Gloucester
- 2007 Green Flag Award for the Park



Celebrating Coronation of the Queen in 1953

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## II. CENTRAL PARK, NEW YORK CONNECTION

In 1850 the American park architect, Frederick Olmsted toured Britain looking at parks and visited Birkenhead Park. He incorporated some of the features he saw in the Park in his creations in America - notably Central Park, New York

## III. THE PARK AS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF BIRKENHEAD

At its inception, the Park was on the very outskirts of Birkenhead, in a rural setting, but was close enough to the majority of the population that they could easily walk to it. It was thus an integral part of the town's activities with leisure, sport and music as well as celebration and protest.

## IV. SPORT IN THE PARK



### CENTENARY OF PARK RUGBY CLUB

The Rugby Club and two cricket clubs had permanent premises in the Park but initially there was also great competition between smaller clubs, especially cricket clubs, to get permission to play there too. Other sports allowed in the Park included archery, angling, bowls, football, putting, quoits, tennis - all of which could involve the local population. Cricket and rugby could attract crowds as large as ten thousand on occasion. In the 19th century both Park Cricket Club and the Rugby Club had genuinely national status. **International** matches were played on the rugby ground for both rugby (Wales v Ireland in 1887 and Wales v England in 1894) and junior soccer. Park Cricket Club played against Oxford and Cambridge Universities and

## VI. MUSIC IN THE PARK

Musical performances were part of the Park's function right from the start though they had greatly diminished by the latter part of the 20th Century. The Boathouse was said to have been Paxton's idea of a bandstand but in 1885 a circular cast iron bandstand was erected in Lower Park with regular weekly evening brass band performances in summer. It was replaced in 1929 by a more ambitious one which was demolished in the post War period.

Music in the Park gave Birkenhead one of its greatest days - in 1917 the Welsh National Eisteddfod was held in the Park and was attended by the Prime Minister himself, David Lloyd George. He is said to have even chosen some of the hymns to be sung.

## VII. GOD IN THE PARK - THE LARGEST CROWD

In the 19th century Birkenhead experienced serious conflicts between the Protestant and Catholic sections of its community. The Garibaldi Riots of 1862 were mainly in the town itself but over the years there were Orange marches to the Grand Entrance and at least one occasion when the Town Council refused permission for preaching in the Park on the grounds that it might lead to bad behaviour.

However, possibly the largest crowd for a meeting in the Park, reported to be 30,000, gathered in the Rugby Ground in 1953 to hear the American evangelist Father Patrick Peyton preach. More recently there have been religious meetings entitled "God in the Park".

## VIII. WORLD WARS IN THE PARK

The Park has shared in the sacrifices made by the Town in the World Wars, especially in 1939-45. In the First World War there were allotments on Plot 6 in Lower Park to help with food production. There was a concert in the Park to help with fund raising and the Cavalry used the pitch of the Rugby Ground to graze their horses.



Supported by the  
**Heritage Lottery Fund**

appeal to the senses of blind people. There was also a sinuous circular path to walk on with a rail that would help the disabled find their way round it. These features are now regrettably lost but it is hoped that the gardens round the new Pavilion will go some way to restoring a colourful flowering area in the Park.

## X. THE FUTURE

In recent years the state of the Park did not reflect either the enduring local pride in it or its genuinely international reputation. The great days of the sports clubs were gone, not least because of the modest ground size. The public facilities such as bandstands, hot houses and flower beds were also gone, as well as most of the staff who looked after them. The grass was always well mown, but there was a sense of barely adequate maintenance and little renewal. However, in 2004 the Park secured a grant for over £11 million for restoration projects of an extremely high standard - **and work started!** The Heritage Lottery Fund which provided the majority of the money, built in the need for the Local Authority, whose responsibility the Park is, to make a commitment for staffing it well into the future. The impact of the grant is visible with a new pavilion whose glassy design reflects a style that Joseph Paxton himself pioneered. It was opened in April 2006 by the Duke of Gloucester. There is clearly hope for the future, but the necessity for local commitment cannot be overstated.



DUKE OF GLOUCESTER OPENING PAVILION

## I. THE FIRST PARK CREATED BY ACT OF PARLIAMENT AT PUBLIC EXPENSE, DESIGNED BY JOSEPH PAXTON

The Mersey Ferry was introduced in 1820 and Birkenhead then started to grow. By the 1841 census it had a population of 8,223 and was run by the Birkenhead Improvement Commission. Isaac Holmes is credited with the idea of a public park for the people of Birkenhead, and William Jackson with the determination to bring into existence a park of great quality that recognised the optimism of the times and was a worthy expression of civic pride.

An act of parliament in 1843 allowed the purchase of land for a public park created at public expense.

The famous architect, Joseph Paxton was commissioned to design it and on Easter Monday, 1847, a park of international standing was opened by Lord Morpeth on the same day as the nearby docks and warehouses. There were great celebrations including "dejeuner" (i.e. lunch) in the warehouses for the invited guests and events in the Park such as rural sports (sack race, foot race, chase the pig with the soapy tail, blindfold wheelbarrow race, grinning match through six horse collars - the ugliest to receive five shillings). Finally there was a fireworks display at the Docks. Even the Prime Minister was invited (but refused) and tens of thousands of people attended.



POSTCARD OF PARK CRICKET CLUB

The event was so important that it was reviewed in the Illustrated London News with sketches of crowds at the Grand Entrance and Boathouse. From the start, the Park was expected to earn money - with the sale of plots of land for houses and the rental of Upper Park for grazing sheep.

counties such as Surrey and Middlesex. An All England XI visited Birkenhead between 1866 and 1873 with Park being allowed 18 players - once winning by 13 wickets.

## V. CELEBRATION AND PROTEST IN THE PARK

The Park expected to host major outdoor celebrations with speeches and displays. An oak tree was planted in 1864 to celebrate the 300th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth. Celebrations of coronations of new monarchs (Edward VII, George V, and Elizabeth II), jubilees (e.g. Queen Victoria's and the that of Birkenhead itself) and other local events could also involved large numbers of people both participating and watching.

The town also had a willingness to protest and express its opinions. Here the Grand Entrance established a role as the prime location for public meetings. In the 1895 election campaign the Liberal candidate, W.H. Lever, addressed crowds there and then led a parade of 3,000 people to gain more publicity. In the 1920s and 30s communists, fascists and Blackshirts addressed crowds.

Oswald Mosley wanted to speak there but was refused permission. Some of the troubles of the Birkenhead Means Test Riots in 1932 started with gatherings there - followed by much violence in the town and many arrests. Even some of the spikes from the park railings were broken off and thrown at the police.

There were "No More War" processions from the centre of town to the Grand Entrance in the 1930s and Lower Park was also the location for May Day celebrations and Labour Day Protests in that period.



PALM HOUSE ERECTED IN 1921

The Second World War was a much more terrifying affair. Both the Town and the Park were bombed. A Spitfire crashed in Lower Park. Park Cricket Club was evicted from their clubhouse by the Army who wished to use the premises. There was a search light and barrage balloon anchored near the present children's play ground and 14.9 acres of allotments in Upper Park. Some of the Park railings were taken away for scrap metal. Wood was stolen for the basic necessity of heating houses. Many of the Park staff left for jobs more relevant to the war effort and the Park went into a decline that would take more than a decade to reverse.

## IX. GREENHOUSES AND FLOWERS IN THE PARK

Originally the Park comprised prestige buildings, an extensive variety of trees, imaginative landscaping, lakes and extensive flat open spaces. In 1921 a new initiative was made with the construction of the Palm House in Upper Park which had a full sized palm tree at its centre, statues and exotic species of plants for the public to view. It lasted until about 1950 when it was replaced by a conservatory with a collection of giant cacti at its centre and less exotic but more colourful flowering plants as its attraction. In the 1950s another imaginative attempt was made to add colour to the Park with the introduction of



BLIND GARDEN

a "Blind Garden" in the site of Paxton's 3rd Lake. The area had never functioned well as a lake as the water tended to drain out of it, but it worked well as a sunken garden with a cherry tree and plants whose flowers were well perfumed to