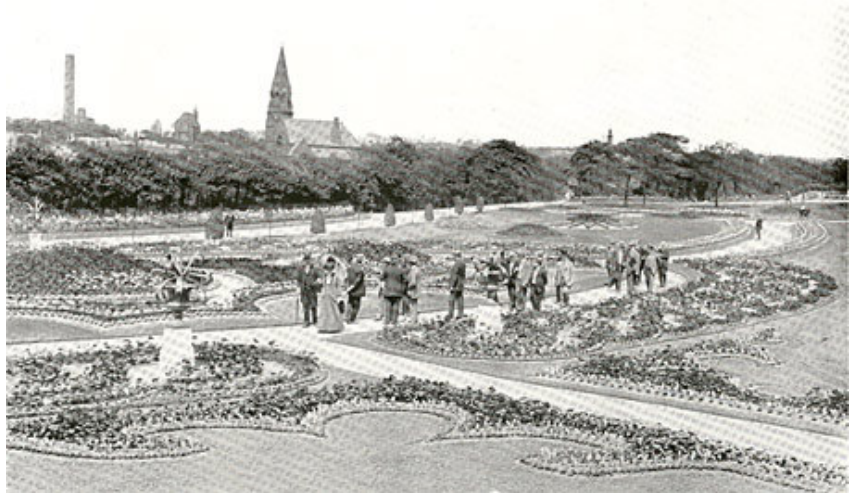


## Philips Park Past & Recent History

Philips Park opened on 22nd August 1846 as one of the world's first municipal parks, intended for free use by the public to encourage "a mixing of the classes". It was established by funds raised by public subscription and purchased from the estate of Lady Houghton, a local landowner, for £6,200 (approximately £400,000 in today's money).



The Summer Bedding, Philips Park 1913

The formation and opening of the park was largely due to the commitment of Mark Philips, a local MP, who lobbied considerably for the creation of parks for the working people of the city. In 1844, following seven years of intense campaigning, the 'Committee for Public Walks, Gardens and Playgrounds' was set up, and the first three parks were opened on the same day in 1846.

Up until this time there had been no formal open space for the working people to relax in. In fact it was only the extremely wealthy who had gardens. The new public parks in the city were designed to be "the clean lungs for the working city of Manchester" - valued for their benefits to public health, just as they are today.

The popularity of the park continued for over a century. Many of its original features remain to this day, including the carriage drive, serpentine paths, plantation and amphitheatre. Archaeological finds include a Roman coin, minted in the reign of Emperor Gallienus, and a halberd (a type of spear) from the 16th Century.

In 2001 Philips Park was given registered status on the National Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England as a Grade II listed site.

Philips Park was awarded Green Flag status in 2005. The Green Flag award scheme was set up by the Civic Trust in 1996 as a means of recognising and rewarding the best green spaces in the country. It is seen as a way of encouraging others to achieve the same high environmental standards, creating a benchmark of excellence in recreational green areas.

## Mark Philips



### ***The founder of the park***

The fact that we can all enjoy Philips Park today is largely thanks to the work of Mark Philips, a local Member of Parliament (MP) who lived in Manchester during the 1800s. At that time, the city was in a state of depression following the recent boom of the Industrial Revolution (1760 to 1830). The success of industry had brought great wealth to Manchester, but not for those who toiled to making a living in its factories and workhouses. For the poor, it was a life of daily struggle, living in overcrowded conditions amongst high levels of crime, pollution and disease.

It was amidst this backdrop that Mark Philips set out to realise his vision for a greener Manchester. Born locally on 4th November 1800, Philips grew up with strong liberal views and was dedicated to bringing about change for the benefit of all. Using his political influence, he lobbied hard for the creation of green spaces for the working people of the city - the "clean lungs" that would provide a place for people's relaxation and enjoyment.

Following seven years of intense campaigning, the Committee for Public Walks, Gardens and Playgrounds was set up. On the same day - 22nd August 1846 - the first public parks opened in Manchester. Mark Philips himself donated £1000 for three estates, one being the land from Lady Houghton that would become known as Philips Park - the name given in his honour.

# Grand Designs



*Joshua Major*

## ***The early plans for the park***

The original plan for the park was laid out by Joshua Major, a landscape gardener from Leeds, who had won a competition to design the site. At the time, the Manchester Guardian described Philips Park, along with Queens Park and Peel Park in Salford, as one of "Manchester's greatest achievements ... a beautiful and attractive place, its undulating ground, riverside walks and opportunities for recreation making it a pleasant place to visit".

The park contained winding pathways and extensive water features (which were prone to flooding in the 1800s). There were a variety of recreation activities on offer, including skittles, quoits, archery, cricket, shuttlecocks (badminton), swings and 'giant strides' - an enormous maypole that spun and was intended to exhaust children! The park also provided several children's play areas, as well



as sports pitches and fields, which included space for hockey and football. Other facilities were later added to cater for the 'new' and fashionable games of the time, such as tennis, bowls and cricket. In 1871, the park became one of the first in Manchester to be provided with a bowling green.



Many of the park's original features remain to this day, including the carriage drive, serpentine paths, plantation and amphitheatre.

# Jeremiah Harrison



## ***The park's first Warden***

Jeremiah Harrison was appointed Head Keeper of Philips Park on the day of its opening in 1846. His duties would have been much the same as those of our modern day Wardens - caring for and maintaining the park and its facilities, as well as offering help and advice to local communities and visitors.

Jeremiah kept a daily record of his work, which involved long hours from 5am to 9.30pm throughout the summer months when the park was at its busiest. As a reward for his efforts, he received free accommodation at The Lodge and payment of 25 shillings per week (approximately £80 in today's money).

Little is known about Jeremiah's life outside of the park, but it seems clear that he grew to love and value the place dearly. During his time as Head Keeper, he help to make Philips Park one of Manchester's most popular local attractions - an achievement that lives on today. Although he retired from the position of Head Keeper in 1886, he continued to work at Philips Park until his death in 1891.

# Tulip Valley

Located towards the back of the park near the cemetery Tulip Valley got its name in the early twentieth century from the spectacular floral displays that filled its ornamental flower beds. These were a celebrated annual feature that attracted thousands of visitors to the park, particularly during the weekend of 'Tulip Sunday' (usually the first or second Sunday in May) when the display was at its most vibrant, with over 50,000 individual flowers in full bloom.



Today Tulip Valley contains an array of ornamental flowerbeds, and two 'Tulip Trees' that have been planted in honour of the valley's history and the flower that made it famous. In spring and summer, when the flowers are in bloom, the sheltered valley offers an oasis of bright colours in which to relax, unwind and escape the bustle of city life.



"People flocked from all parts of the city and surrounding areas in their Sunday best clothes to parade around the flower beds. There would be parents with their children, playing on the grass, feeding the ducks or licking an ice cream cornet as they came through the gates."

*Pritchard, F (1986) My Manchester. Neil Richardson.*

# Visitor Centre



Located near the Stuart Street entrance, the Visitor Centre (or 'Lodge' as it is also known) is an historic building, which today provides a range of information and services relating to the park. The design for the lodge was commissioned in 1868 from the architect Alfred Derbyshire, who was also responsible for Manchester's famous Palace Theatre. It was built for the sum of £529 - approximately £35,000 in today's money.

The Lodge was completely refurbished in 2002, when it was officially opened to the public as a Visitor Centre. Despite the refurbishment, the building remains virtually unaltered inside and out, retaining all of its original character. Since then, it has enjoyed regular use by the local community and visitors alike.

## Philips Park Cemetery Lodges

There are also three lodges in the adjacent cemetery. Although these are not part of Philips Park itself, they contribute to the heritage of the local area.



# Recent History of Philips Park

## From the 1980s to the present day

Many of the nation's parks have suffered a downturn in fortunes since the 1980s, partly due to reduced investment in green spaces. At the local level, Philips Park had been in a state of decline since the 1960s, with concerns over personal safety acting as a major deterrent to use of the space.

The park sits in one of the most challenging and exciting regeneration areas in England. The momentum for change and improvement is obvious, and the area is now seen as priority for action at local, regional and national level. The aim is to make sure that regeneration is sustainable in the long-term and provides economic, social and environmental benefits.



## 2000 to 2005

As the primary green space in East Manchester, Philips Park was treated to a range of improvements as part of the 2002 Commonwealth Games. This included new sports and play facilities, path improvements, refurbishment of the Lodge, the creation of a new garden area next to the bowling green, new park furniture, new signage and many other developments. The work carried out so far has proved very popular with the local community, as shown by the success of the annual Party in the Park festival and other events. The Friends of Philips Park have also secured small pockets of funding to improve the space and host a range of activities for local people.

Most recently, £2 million of funding for the Medlock Valley has been approved by the North West Development Agency, European Regional Development Fund and New Deal for Communities. Over the next two years, this will support significant improvements to boundaries, entrances, footpaths, bridges and signs, as well as developing education and visitor services.

Councilor Mark Hackett, Manchester City Council's Executive Member for Culture and Leisure said: "We are proud of the progress made across the city on the various river valley projects and the Medlock Valley open space is an important link to the city centre, Philips Park and Clayton Vale. It is our aim over the coming years to increase the number of sites in the city with Nature Reserve status, and

the Medlock Valley Initiative will present further opportunities in this regard". A new chapter in the life of Philips Park has just begun. The challenge now is to encourage new uses for this historic green space, while protecting and enhancing its special character for generations to come.

