
Reference: XXX
Accession Ref: XXXX
Name: Briony Fox
Address: [Not given]
Date of Birth: [Not given]
Place of Birth: [Not given]
Date of Interview: [Not recorded]
Interviewed by: Roger Kitchen
Duration: 00:29:44

Briony Fox, then Head of Community Engagement at the Parks Trust, became involved in the creation of the MK Rose because public art in the parks fell within her remit. When initial discussions began, the concept was not yet the “Rose” but a proposed public gathering space in Campbell Park. Early conversations centred on creating a cenotaph or commemorative structure where people could gather for remembrance and celebration. At the same time, the existing fountain area in Campbell Park was outdated and due for replacement, making it a logical site.

Working with colleagues including Marie Kerbishaw and Louise Izod, Briony helped explore possible artistic approaches. Several artists were considered, but Gordon Young’s work stood out, particularly his use of materials and language to interpret place and community. After reviewing proposals in response to a brief for the former fountain site, his concept for the MK Rose was selected for development.

The project was delivered as a partnership between the Parks Trust, Milton Keynes Council and the Cenotaph Trust. While the Council and Cenotaph Trust commissioned the structure itself, the Parks Trust provided the site, led landscaping works, supported logistics and construction, assisted with community engagement, and later took on long-term maintenance and event support. The Cenotaph Trust retained responsibility for commissioning future carved pillars.

Community engagement was central. The commemorative pillars were designed to reflect significant events in Milton Keynes’ history, and the Parks Trust helped gather suggestions and facilitate activities to identify what mattered to residents. Briony recalls the technical complexity of construction: pre-made stone pieces assembled like a giant jigsaw, tight deadlines to open by Armistice Day, and challenges including weather and adapting the water feature to meet health and safety requirements.

Despite early scepticism about cost and relevance, the Rose quickly proved its value as a

flexible civic space. Briony remembers feeling relief and pride at its completion after four to five years of development and fundraising. The opening ceremony was emotional, marking both the culmination of extensive work and the beginning of a new chapter. She was particularly struck by the craftsmanship of the central rose carving and by seeing the spiral design from the air.

Over time, the MK Rose has hosted solemn Armistice Day commemorations as well as lighter community events such as children's play days and civic activities, demonstrating its versatility. Briony believes it has gradually embedded itself in Milton Keynes' cultural identity and is now seen as an iconic location.

A key aspect of the design was leaving some pillars blank to allow future generations to commemorate significant events. A panel and fundraising mechanism were established to manage additions thoughtfully and sustainably.

Briony is most proud of the collaborative effort that overcame financial, practical and reputational challenges to create a lasting, meaningful civic landmark for Milton Keynes.