

**Reference:** XXX  
**Accession Ref:** XXXX  
**Name:** Marie Kirbyshaw  
**Address:** [Not given]  
**Date of Birth:** [Not given]  
**Place of Birth:** [Not given]  
**Date of Interview:** [Not recorded]  
**Interviewed by:** [Not recorded]  
**Duration:** [Not recorded]

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Marie Kirbyshaw worked for Milton Keynes Council from 2005 to 2015 as Senior Public Arts Officer, where her role was to ensure public art aligned with strategic goals by connecting place, people and artists. She became involved with the Cenotaph Group, which initially sought to create a cenotaph in Central Milton Keynes for 11/11/11. From the outset, the group wanted something broader than a traditional memorial: a shared civic space for commemoration, celebration and community gathering.

Public art strategy in Central Milton Keynes had earlier been shaped by Thomas Heatherwick, who identified “the spine” along Midsummer Boulevard as a focus for major interventions. While early location ideas included Station Square and the Plinth near the shopping centre, a pivotal moment came when Marie brokered a partnership with The Parks Trust to redesign a disused pond at Campbell Park. The site, budget and artistic ambition aligned, allowing the cenotaph vision to evolve into a major public artwork.

Marie recommended artist Gordon Young, with whom she had previously worked. The group selected him for his ambitious, text-based public works and strong community engagement. Young developed the concept of a rose based on geometric form rather than literal symbolism, reflecting spirituality, unity and growth. This became the MK Rose: a circular arrangement of pillars of varying heights, laid out in a rose geometry.

Originally inspired by Armistice Day, the concept expanded into a calendar of locally and globally significant days. Through extensive public workshops, community members proposed and “owned” specific dates, animating the pillars annually with events and ceremonies. The vertical text on the pillars was designed to encourage movement and interaction, revealing patterns and meanings from different viewpoints.

A single pillar was installed on 11/11/11 as a statement of intent; the full artwork launched in November 2013 after intense preparation. Marie recalls the rain-soaked unveiling as transformative, with the wet granite enhancing the visual impact.

She believes the Rose has exceeded expectations, becoming a spiritual and communal gathering place during celebrations and times of tragedy. Proud of having connected artist, site and funding, she sees the project as a lasting legacy and a model for ambitious, community-driven public art that continues to inspire Milton Keynes.