

Reference: XXX
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Name: Phil Gerrella
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Date of Birth: [Not given]
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Phil Gerrella became involved with The Rose project while serving as Cabinet Member for Resources at Milton Keynes Council around 2009. As a former Mayor, he had attended numerous Remembrance services across the city and felt Milton Keynes lacked a central focal point for commemoration. Initially, a steering group—comprising council representatives, faith groups, the British Legion, and others—was formed to explore building a traditional cenotaph, possibly similar to the one in Westminster. Early discussions focused on central locations such as Midsummer Square, and the working title was the Cenotaph Steering Group. At that stage, the idea of The Rose did not exist.

Over time, the concept evolved. Stakeholders began to question whether a conventional war memorial was appropriate for a relatively new city with no direct World War casualties of its own. Conversations with artists and community groups shifted the focus from a purely military memorial to a broader monument honouring lives lost while also reflecting Milton Keynes' identity. The project gradually transformed into a piece of public art that could function as a memorial but also represent the city's character and achievements.

Securing funding proved extremely difficult and delayed the project for years. Despite strong will and commitment from supporters, including council members and successive mayors, financial backing was hard to obtain. Applications were made to bodies such as the Lottery and Arts Council, but progress was slow. From early discussions around 2007 to its opening in 2013, the journey was long and uncertain.

When The Rose finally opened, many—including Phil—were surprised by the finished design of pillars arranged in a circular formation. Some residents and veterans' groups had opposed the departure from a traditional war memorial. However, Phil believes the finished monument better represents Milton Keynes. The pillars commemorate a wide range of people, organizations, and milestones significant to the city, while the central rose remains the focal point for Armistice Day on November 11th.

He sees The Rose as embodying the “Milton Keynes way”—innovative, inclusive, and shaped by people from diverse backgrounds who came together to build a new city. Importantly, it was not purely a council project but a community-led initiative, which he believes helped it succeed beyond political constraints.

The inclusion of 106 pillars, with many left undesignated, allows for “future-proofing,” enabling future generations to add new commemorations. Over time, The Rose has also become a gathering place for vigils, memorials, and civic moments beyond Remembrance Day, reinforcing its role as the city’s central space for reflection and celebration.

Phil hopes The Rose remains respected, relevant, and unique—continuing to serve both as a memorial and as a symbol of Milton Keynes. He is most proud of helping guide the project from an initial vague idea to a distinctive, iconic space that could only have been created in Milton Keynes.