The PAXTON150 conference is to commemorate Joseph Paxton (1803-65) and to evaluate the public parks legacy. Over the past twenty years there has been considerable interest in public parks in Great Britain encouraged by Heritage Lottery Funding; as a result there was even talk of a renaissance in public parks. Lottery funding has ensured restoration schemes in large numbers of parks, based on historic research and other survey work. While there have been various efforts to publish material, there is as yet no scholarly work that has emerged from this recent period; there are no popular books. As lottery funding is slowing down and council cuts are beginning to bite, public parks are beginning to suffer from a lack of management and maintenance. It is even more important to record this legacy of public park restorations; the purpose of the present conference is to provide a mechanism for the publication of a critical history of public parks.
Paxton was one of the main pioneers in public parks, designing the first British one at Birkenhead in 1843, and thereby creating a prototype for such places that was used throughout the world. The marking of 150 years since Paxton’s death provides an opportune occasion to re-assess the legacy of public parks. This is being done by means of a series of events, with the conference in Sheffield being the main public event that draws together national and international specialists who present aspects of their latest research. While focussing on Paxton’s heritage the conference highlights overarching themes that have wider implications for public parks internationally; they involve issues such as heritage and modern uses; social requirements and health and safety issues; historic fabric and the desire to modernise and leave a mark; increasing maintenance costs and reduction of public funding; privatisation of public space and community engagement, etc.

The conference is organised by the Department of Landscape at the University of Sheffield and is sponsored by Historic England, the Landscape Institute and the National Trust. The conference also celebrates the renaissance of public parks in Great Britain that was launched in Weston Park, Sheffield twenty years ago, when the Heritage Lottery Fund pledged funding for the restoration of public parks.

PAXTON150 welcomes anyone with a professional, personal or academic interest in the past and future of public parks. A variety of packages are available on the online shop booking system so you can choose between booking for the whole event, attending for just the one day, and we have also priced a special student rate which is open to anyone studying at a further education institution.

Link to online shop: [http://onlineshop.shef.ac.uk/browse/extra_info.asp?compid=1&modid=2&deptid=9&catid=51&prodid=413](http://onlineshop.shef.ac.uk/browse/extra_info.asp?compid=1&modid=2&deptid=9&catid=51&prodid=413)

**PROVISIONAL PROGRAMME**

**Friday 11 September 2015**

**Histories of Public Parks**

8:45  Registration and coffee
9:15  Jan Woudstra, Welcome, introduction and aims
9:30  Paul Elliott, ‘George Chadwick and beyond: The historiography of the public park’

**Paxton’s main public parks**

9:45  Clare Hickman, ‘Healthy Climates’: Paxton, winter gardens and parks’
10:15 David Bawden, “An ever-expanding universe of information’: Paxton and his followers in the communications revolution’
10:45  Coffee
11:15  Robert Lee, ‘Paxton’s Masterpiece, Birkenhead Park: the first People’s Park?’
11:45  Robert Holden, ‘Crystal Palace, Sydenham and Paxton’s influence on British park design’

**Paxton: foreign influences**


12:45  Lunch

14:00  Stéphanie de Courtois, ‘Paxton’s influence on French public parks’

14:30  Luca Csepely-Knorr, ‘Following the example of the British’: Joseph Paxton’s influence in Budapest, Hungary’

15:00  Sandra den Dulk, ‘From Sydenham Hill to marshy Meppel: Paxton’s influence on a Dutch public park’

15:30  Tea

16:00  Carol Grove, ‘Drawing on Paxton in the American Midwest: Shaw’s garden and Tower Grove Park’

16:30-17:15  Discussion

19:00  optional evening meal at INOX

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**Saturday 12 September 2015  
Futures of public parks**

8:45  Introductory comments by Adrian Wikeley

9:00  Brent Elliott, ‘Prologue to the recent conservation movement; park policy 1939-1990’


10:00  Drew Bennelick, ‘Public parks - From renaissance to risk?: Contributions from the Heritage Lottery Fund

10:30  Coffee

11:00  Katy Layton-Jones, ‘Paying for Parks’

11:30  Tom Seaward, Victoria Bradford-Keegan, Bob Bailey, Roo Angell, ‘Conserving public parks in the 21st century: Can today’s conservation movement learn from our Victorian forbears?’

12:00  Discussion chaired by Nicola Dempsey

12:30  John Greatrex’s play, ‘Joseph and his amazing Crystal Palace’

13:00  Picnic in Weston Park

14:00  Walking tour: Weston Park, General Cemetery, Kenwood, Botanical Gardens, all designed by Paxton’s competitor Robert Marnock

**NOTE:**
The conference is dedicated to Joseph Paxton who died 150 years ago. As a trained gardener Paxton became one of the foremost pioneers in the landscape profession, designing parks, gardens, cemeteries and housing developments, while also pioneering techniques that lead him to be a recognized engineer and architect, particularly after the building of the Great Exhibition Hall in Hyde Park in 1851. This
building, based on greenhouse technology, was not only an astounding achievement; it also provided him with international recognition. Besides this he was a railway pioneer, a visionary, and financially apt. His abilities ensured him with a considerable public profile and he was elected as a Member of Parliament in 1854. He published horticultural journals and books. All this occurred while being employed as a head gardener by the Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth, which he also transformed. It is therefore not surprising that he pioneered in design of municipal parks, designing the first such park in Birkenhead in 1843. Other municipal parks followed, such as; People’s Park, Halifax; the Slopes, Buxton; South Cliff and Valley Garden in Scarborough; Crystal Palace, London. These and other parks were not only progressive in what they provided and how, but they also inspired parks elsewhere, as did the entire public parks movement in Britain.

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The University of Sheffield Campus Map: