Dig to shed light on rich past of much loved park

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Parts of Manchester's Whitworth Park will be excavated by university staff and students, local community volunteers and schoolchildren thanks to a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant of £39,700.

The Whitworth Park Community Archaeology Project's work on the old lake, pavilion and bandstand will continue until Friday 16 September - and the public are welcome to visit.

Archaeologist Dr Melanie Giles from The University of Manchester, said: "Whitworth was one of industrial Manchester's most loved Victorian and Edwardian Parks."It was a colourful place, filled with elaborate flowerbeds and walkways, to promote the health and wellbeing of adults and children from all social classes around Oxford Road, Rusholme and Moss Side. "We hope to find remains of these structures and objects that were lost or left behind during days out, picnics and play-times."

Whitworth park opened in 1890, and was soon a popular place to take the air and to be seen promenading, becoming an important part of people's lives and identities.Families, couples and both staff and patients from the local hospitals became frequent visitors.

It has provided a space to commemorate the War dead, aided the Civil Defence of the city during the Second World War and acted as a venue for political marches and civil rights rallies into the twenty-first century. But little of the park's heritage is visible today.

Project Leader, Professor Siân Jones, who specializes in community archaeology, added: "Parks are an important part of the urban social environment informing people's sense of identity, belonging and place."By investigating the history of Whitworth park, we aim to increase everyone's awareness of the value of these wonderful green spaces in the heart of the city, and encourage people to become more involved in their future."So we are delighted the Heritage Lottery Fund has supported this project to explore its past."

The Archaeology Department is working closely with the Friends of Whitworth Park, a voluntary community organization that seeks to regenerate the Park. Other project partners include Manchester Museum, the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Centre and Whitworth Art Gallery – all part of The University of Manchester.

Over the next two years, there will be another excavation, as well as exhibitions, public talks and outreach events, to share the results of the dig and record people's memories to create an oral history of the park.

Sara Hilton, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund North West, said: "We are delighted to support this excavation project that will give local people the chance quite literally to uncover the past history of this park that has stood at the heart of the community for more than 120 years."

Notes to editors

Daily tours will be given at 1.30pm and on Saturday 10 September, Manchester Museum will run an Open Day in the park from 11am to 4pm, with exciting family activities based around its heritage and wildlife.

Siân Jones and Melanie Giles are available for comment about the project and the excavation.

Ken Shone is available for comment about the Friends of Whitworth park and the work they are doing to regenerate the park.

Further information

Mike Addelman, Press Officer, Faculty of Humanities
The University of Manchester
Tele: 0161 275 0790 Mob: 07717 881 567
Michael.addelman@manchester.ac.uk