The story of the Hornchurch skatepark that made

Rom Skatepark has had its fair share of ups and downs, from becoming the first listed skatepark in Europe to suffering a devastating fire just after it celebrated its 40th anniversary.

The Hornchurch site holds a very special place in the hearts of skaters and BMX riders across the world. Supported by The National Lottery, they have come together to tell their stories, the story of Rom and now the fight to secure its future.

A little corner of California

Built during a very rainy British summer in 1978, Rom was designed by Adrian Rolt from G-Force and modelled on skateparks in California, such as Skateboard Heaven at Spring Valley.

“Somehow they’ve built a little corner of California in Hornchurch,” said author Warwick Cairns.

G-Force built a number of skateparks in Britain during the 1970s and Rom is considered the complete collectors’ edition with everything in it that they ever built.

Tim Altic advised on the design and against using rough surfaces: “They were really hard on me, a construction crew up against a 20-year-old kid from California. They listened to me though and you can see how the rest of the park is smooth except for the large aggregate in the sand, which makes it a rough surface. It’s a smooth design.”

> “We’ve been here 40 years and we want to be here for another 40.”

Legendary

John Greenwood Senior ran the park from 1978 until his son John Greenwood Junior took over a few years ago. He said: “I think the first day I stood behind that counter I took about £1.40. It was disastrous. But we carried on and it turned out OK!”

Since that day, decades of memories have been made about Rom, with many people sharing them as part of The National Lottery project.

- “Rough and steep and deep and gnarly… but it’s good.” Sage Bolyard, Pro Skater
- “I didn’t want to grow up. I wanted to be Peter Pan and this was Never Never Land and still is.” Ian Stokes, Rom Skatepark staff
- “I don’t know what it is about Romford, I’d have my ashes scattered here probably! It’s one of those places that’s part of who I am really.” Zach Shaw, UK BMX Series Founder
- “I’ve got great memories here. I’d get a train up and ride down here. Brilliant place.” Trever Shanks, Team Ace – the UK’s first BMX Team
- “The reason Rom was special to me was I did a lot of things first here. First 360 and some of the worst crashes I’ve had were at Rom. It’s a very special place, some very special people that still skate here after 40 years. I basically learnt to ride a bike here.” Andy Ruffell, UK Race and Freestyle Champion

'The Pool' at Rom Skatepark

Into the history books

Rom made history in 2014 when it became the first-ever listed skatepark in Europe and thought to be only the second in the world.

When English Heritage was exploring possible skateparks to list, the words "Rom Skatepark" came up repeatedly among skateboarders.

Sports historian Simon Inglis explained why Rom was the top choice: “The key thing was to find examples of a skatepark that were both interesting and well designed and that had survived. Rom Skatepark immediately came to the top of that list.”

Fire and future

Just after celebrating its 40th anniversary, Rom Skatepark suffered a devastating blow when a fire during the July 2018 heatwave destroyed all its indoor facilities.

Now it is trying to raise funding and support to ensure its future for the next generation of skaters and riders.

Owner of Rom, John Greenwood Junior, said: “We’ve been here 40 years and we want to be here for another 40.”

Visit the Rom Skatepark website to find out more about its history, its National Lottery-funded exhibition at Havering Museum and how you can get involved.

Celebrating 110 years of Raphael Park