

Park It!
celebrating people in parks

Park It! North West



The Friends' Fair

Norfolk Heritage Park, 30.07.05



The park

St James' Garden was until very recently, known as St James' Cemetery. It lies at the bottom of Liverpool Cathedral that towers above the garden. The cemetery was in use throughout the nineteenth century. It was finally closed in 1936 after 58,000 people were buried there.

In recent times the garden had been frequented by drug users and prostitutes. As a result the park was used less by the public. The Friends group helped turn this around over the last few years.

The event

As the garden had previously been shunned by local residents for being unsafe, the Friends wanted an event that would attract the surrounding residents, especially young children. They wanted people to visit the garden again and feel safe and to re-establish the gardens as an urban oasis.



All the events were free and gave people the chance to explore this fascinating site. One of the most popular activities was the circus workshop. Children were taught how to juggle, ride a unicycle and walk a tightrope. Tours of the garden were given by the Friends and a park ranger. The day was started when Liverpool's Lord Mayor planted an oak tree with the help of some children.

It was a chance to learn about the horticulture, architecture and renovation of the former cemetery, as well as finding out about the prominent people buried there. In the Cathedral, plans for a spectacular glass bridge, spanning the garden were laid out local people to discuss.

The community group

The Friends group have been in existence since 2001 and have been instrumental in turning the fortunes of the garden around. They meet at least every Saturday to work in the gardens, clearing and pruning, and creating a rose garden and wild flower area. Robin Riley and Tony Bradshaw work in the garden most days. They are both extremely knowledgeable about horticulture, architecture and the history of the garden, and they have used this knowledge to aid the garden. The Friends group have a strong and friendly relationship with the council parks dept.



It's been a great day. The event attracted many of the local community who joined in the fun of the Friends fair. The unpromising weather forecast did not dampen the event. It was lovely to see so many people here having fun and enjoying everything that this fantastic park has to offer

Erica Fidment,
Friends of Norfolk
Heritage Park

Feedback

Given that St James' Garden is a small site, the Friends were originally worried that 300 might be too many in the garden; they now realise that they could comfortably fit 500 in the garden for an event. Everyone felt that the day went really well, despite the downpour causing the cancellation of the Jazz Band at the end of the day.

The benefits

The Friends feel that the event stimulated positive things to be done to the park and that the Friends achieved their objective of getting more people into the park.

Being involved in Park It has improved the Friends event organisational skills. There was already some expertise from varying fields within the group and they learnt how to apply their knowledge for the benefit of the event and the Friends group.

The Friends' relationship with the council was further strengthened. The Cathedral originally didn't want to play any part in the event, but in the end provided tables and chairs and a room for the glass bridge proposal, fully supporting the work of the Friends. As a consequence, an improved relationship with the Cathedral is now enjoyed.

Publicity was successful as the Friends were able to raise awareness through the press and local BBC Radio. Robin has also been asked about future events by the Liverpool Post.

The Circus Workshop was a great success. It was highly successful in attracting the very people the Friends wanted to see in the park – families.

The positive effects of the event amongst people who attended has been seen long after the event. A member of the Friends recently confronted some children who were causing damage to some marigolds in the garden. Rather than acting aggressively in an accusative manner he simply asked them if they enjoyed the circus workshop at the event, which placated them and developed a relationship.

The future

The Friends are planning an event in conjunction with the Cathedral for the autumn. Ideally they will organise a similar event next year, but this would be dependent on funding. In the future they would like to do some specific children's events in the park.

As a result of an improved relationship with the council, the Friends are heading up a conference regarding a newly formed network of city Friends groups across Liverpool.



Lessons learnt

- When you are running guided tours, make sure they start on time and the time and location is well advertised. Consider having a printed itinerary for tours.
- When you design posters advertising the event, make sure that the text is not excessive and too small. Shops are more likely to take smaller posters
- When organising certain activities, be aware of the need to include all sections of the local community and any possible offence activities could risk. The Friends originally wanted to open the event with the unveiling of a plaque presented by the American Civil War Association. The plaque commemorated a Confederate officer who was buried in the Cemetery. Belatedly they realised that this may offend and consequently exclude ethnic minorities in the neighbourhood, so they dropped the idea.
- Be prepared for bad weather to impinge on the event and possible result in the cancellation of certain activities.
- Make sure that comprehensive planning is carried out with time plans set out, especially if people working on the organisation of the event are involved in other tasks at the same time, for example the general work of the Friends.

Further information

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Links

Park It! – www.park-it.org.uk
GreenSpace – www.green-space.org.uk
Heritage Lottery Fund – www.hlf.org.uk
Liverpool City Council – www.liverpool.gov.uk

