INTRODUCTION

Dublin is the capital city of the Republic of Ireland and is located in County Dublin on the east coast of the island at the mouth of the River Liffey (Fig.1). With 941 km², Dublin is one of the smallest counties in the country but its population of 1,434,226 persons represents 28.5% of the total population of the Republic.¹ Historically, the Island of Ireland was for 800 years under British rule until a century ago when it was partitioned and land in the north east of the country (16.74%) became Northern Ireland and is still part of the UK. Europe suffered much in the first half of the 20th century because of two world wars and little attention was paid to providing public parks. Ireland was neutral during WWII, and except for a few incidents, Dublin escaped bomb damage. The fastest growth of the city only began from 1950 onwards and especially after joining the European Union in 1973 (Fig. 2).

While information on many parks is available in hard copy and on websites of the various authorities, this book is the first detailed account of a selection of some 200 parks and historic landscapes and buildings, including public parks and gardens. The first chapter is on the history and development of parks principally from the 17th century. It also includes information on the key players who drove the agenda for public parks during a period when other forms of infrastructure were considered more important. The Covid19 pandemic restricted people’s movements, especially travel beyond 5km and this highlighted the importance of public parks for health and recreation. A new awareness of the benefits of parks was realised and that subject is covered in the second chapter. Chapter titles include Historical Parks and Gardens, Dublin’s Squares, Former Demesnes, Commemorative Parks and Gardens and Plant Collections. Rivers and canals in and around Dublin formerly used for water supply, power supply for water mills and navigation now have public parks along the routes and these are discussed in a separate chapter. Dublin is a coastal city and there are several parks that were developed around Dublin Bay; these are discussed in the “Coastal Parks” chapter.

A chapter deals with the 19th century parks developed towards the end of that century and another chapter is on a selection of some 20th century parks. Small parks can have an impact if strategically placed, so a chapter entitled ‘Pocket Parks’ includes almost 20 such favourite parks in the city. The final chapter is entitled 21st Century Parks and Future Trends and deals with some parks developed since 2000 and other projects that are still in the planning stages.

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when the potato crop failed in the mid-1800s because of potato blight (Phytophthora infestans), the Great Famine which followed led to the death of millions of people from hunger and disease (mainly cholera) in most parts of the country. The influx of rural dwellers to urban areas caused a temporary increase in population in these areas but with no available work, many emigrated to Liverpool and the USA. That was the embryonic stage of the Irish Diaspora which can now be found all over the world. By the end of the 19th century, Ireland’s population had halved to 4.4 m. people.¹

As Irish people were emigrating to the USA, Australia and other countries during the nineteenth century for a new way of life, plant specialists were collecting plants from these countries and bringing them back to Europe. Initially, these plant hunters were seeking new plants for their medicinal value, then the commercial interest of tea, coffee and cotton became more important.² The tea plant (Camellia sinensis) and the rubber plant (Hevea brasiliensis) proved very valuable when introduced from other continents. The introdution of plants from other countries protected the tender species. The introduction of plants from other countries led to competition between the landed gentry in the landscape development of their estates and this led to a build-up of unusual and exotic plant collections. This was particularly evident in gardens associated with manor houses and castles where rhododendrons, azaleas and many other colourful plants from Asia and elsewhere provided exciting floral displays.

Many wonderful gardens were developed, several also had important plant collections, and a significant number have survived to the present day, even though the families which owned them have died out. Fortunately, some of these collections are now maintained within public parks, thanks to the far-sighted people who actively sought to acquire them. The Dublin local authorities and the Office of Public Works have some parks and gardens in their care which were formerly private estates and contain important plant collections which now attract thousands of tourists every year. The National Botanic Gardens (Pic.2) was established in 1795 with finance allocated by the British Government for the purposes of growing plants which were introduced from other continents.

The gardens of 19.5 hectares were formed in Glasnevin, about 3 km north of the city centre. They have more than two centuries of history in the cultivation of plants, over 20,000 plant species and attract over 850,000 visitors annually.³

It includes very elegant Victorian style glasshouses designed by a Dubliner, Richard Turner who also designed the Great Palm House in Kew Gardens in London. Dublin is very fortunate to have one of the most historic urban parks in the world. With 707 hectares, the Phoenix Park (Pic.3) is the largest urban park in Dublin and is twice the size of the world famous Central Park in New York city. Designated a National Historic Park, this unique urban park is enclosed by a 11.6 km stone wall and is less than 3 km from the city centre.⁴ It’s existence is because of one man’s desire for a private hunting grounds, hence fallow deer were introduced for the King’s secretary to hunt, and their descendants still graze there. Dubliners had the benefit of the magnificent Phoenix Park since the 17th century, although it was only a public park since 1747. The Phoenix Park is home for the President of Ireland, the Ambassador to the United States of America, the headquarters for the Gardaí (Irish Police Force) and Dublin Zoo. Its importance has long been recognized in Ireland and in 2018, the World Urban Parks under the International Large Urban Parks Award scheme presented a Gold Medal to the Office of Public Works “for the preservation of a well-protected and managed large heritance park, with a broad range of activities and events, serving the city of Dublin, in cooperation with its citizens.”⁵

Dublin’s squares

Dublin is noted for its squares constructed mainly during the Georgian period. While these were originally for the private use of residents who lived around the squares, most of them are now under the care of Dublin City Council and are much used by the public.⁶ Trinity College was established in 1592 and the buildings were formed around several squares some of which were paved, and others retained as green spaces and planted with trees. Thus, they are Dublin’s oldest urban squares. The largest and oldest public square is a green space for more than 350 years.⁷ It is unique being the first ‘square’ in Dublin and, at that time, the largest anywhere, including the rest of Britain. For centuries it was privately owned until 1880, when Lord Ardilaun, a member of the Guinness family redesigned the 9 hectares in Victorian style and handed it over for public use. That marked the beginning of interest in providing public parks in Dublin. The second largest square, Merrion Square was acquired by the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin in 1930 as a site for a cathedral. However, as the city expanded, the need to serve the new communities in the suburbs became the priority and so it became a public park in 1974 when it was bought by Dublin City Council. Located in the office district of the city, it is very popular, especially during lunchtimes. On weekends, the park is a popular place to fly kites, play sports and enjoy the sunshine.⁸

Footnotes:


References:


the lord in battle. In later years, paid
when they were also obliged to defend
further to the Latin,
meanings.
meanings.
word demesne is generally consid-
years after the lord had departed. The
REGIONAL PARKS
Several of Dublin’s larger public parks,
termed regional parks were former
country demesnes in the 18th and 19th
centuries and the title remained many
country. These were termed neigh-
neighbourhood parks of which 60 plus were
hundred parks of which 60 plus were
in Dublin County Council in 1971. He
involved in developing a policy
was appointed to head the Parks Department
in Dublin County Council. He
appointed to head the Parks Department
in Dublin County Council. He
definition which opened on 4 May 1907. It was
In 1853, Queen
in the ownership of nobility such as
houses and landscape intact.20 Today,
these are Dublin’s most popular public
developed during the twen-
teenth century by local authorities.
HISTORICAL PARKS
Some of Dublin’s parks were devel-
oped to celebrate part of Ireland’s
history or the beginnings of an event
such as an exhibition.14 In 1865, Queen
Victoria opened an exhibition on Lein-
ster Lawn, which is today part of the
grounds surrounding the Irish Parlia-
ment. The success of that event led to
an even greater one, the 1895 Dublin
International Exhibition on a site
near St Stephen’s Green.15 The exhibi-
tion hall was modified over the years
to a university and later became the
National Concert Hall. The accompa-
nying pleasure grounds were designed
by Ninian Niven (1799-1879) and are
known today as Iveagh Gardens public
park. Herbert Park in Ballsbridge about
3 km south of the city centre was the
site of the Irish International Exhibi-
tion which opened on 4 May 1907. It was
the most popular exhibition ever held in
Ireland and by 9 November 1907 attend-
ance figures were 4,755 million people.16
When the exhibition ended, the site
was cleared, the public park developed
and officially opened on 19 August 1911.
The southern coast of Dublin comprises
a mountain range which extends into
the adjacent County Wicklow. One of
the most interesting peaks is Killiney
Hill which includes an attractive obelisk
constructed in 1742 from where there
are excellent view of the south city and
Dublin Bay. Known as Killiney Hill Park,
it was acquired by a committee estab-
lished to celebrate the 150th anniversary
of Queen Victoria’s reign on 26 June 1887
and was officially opened a week later
by her son, Prince Albert. “The committee
included two brothers of the Guinness
family, Lord Ardilaun and Lord Iveagh,
the former having earlier developed St
Stephen’s Green, devoted his time to
philanthropy and the latter managed
the world famous brewery in Dublin.
Both men were responsible for providing
housing for the poor of Dublin includ-
ing a park beside the 18th century St Patrick’s
Cathedral. This time they removed slum
dwellings and built a one hectare Victo-
rian style park which was opened by
King Edward VII on 24 July 1902.17

artists display their work on the rail-
ings surrounding the park attracting
visitors from all around the city. Fitzwil-
liam Square was the last of the Geor-
gian squares to be developed and it is
still privately owned as are a few other
smaller squares a few kilometres from
the city centre. Mountjoy Square on
the north inner city is the only perfect
square, all others are rectangles.19

Dublin City Council. (2006). The Geor-
gian Squares of Dublin. An Architectu-
real History. Foreword by Jim Barrett, City
Architect.
Kilmainham (Pic. 5) it continued to be a
in 1684. Known as the Royal Hospital
its first occupants took up residence
in Dublin for them in the 17
the British Army and a hospital was built
men comprised about 150,000 soldiers of

The unique Blessington Street
plants. The unique Blessington Street
acentifolia) is associated with the Hungry
Tree, a vigorous
due and a hospital was built
in Dalkey which is generally hidden
acquired by Dublin City Council and
horticulture research grounds were
College Dublin established a new
of agricultural education (including

Albert College, Glasnevin, was part
of agricultural education (including
the horticulture and forestry) since the 19th
century until 1978 when University
College Dublin established a new


Inn Park is more than two centuries old,
anniversary, it was restored by the

Pict. 5: View of the Royal Hospital from

Fig. 4: Regional parks in County Dublin.

Pic. 9: View of the Royal Hospital from the
garden. (Photo: Christy Boylan)

COMMEMORATIVE PARKS

Some parks are designed and
constructed to be commemorative
parks for events or people while ceme-
teries are provided as places where the
dead are buried, usually over a period
of several generations. In the former
case, special attention is usually given
to ensure that the park is functional
and aesthetically pleasing, whereas, in
general, cemeteries often lack sufficient
attention to aesthetics. War cemeteries
can be an exception, especially those
I have visited on continental Europe,
managed by the American Battle Monu-
ments Commission and the Common-
wealth War Graves Commission of the
UK. In military cemeteries, grave plots
are part of an overall landscape plan
which includes memorials, headstones,
pathways, trees, shrubs, flowers etc.,
and the entire cemetery is maintained to
a very high standard. Although visiting
them can inspire very sad emotions,
they are delightful parks to experience
from a cultural and landscape design
perspective. The chapter on Commem-
orative Parks includes Grangegeorge
Military Cemetery, near the Phoenix
Park where the soldiers from the two
world wars in Europe and some battles
in other countries are buried. 23
Dublin’s largest cemetery, Glasnevin Cemetery
is also included because of its signif-
icance in historical terms. It adjoins
and is linked to the National Botanic Gardens
with a combined area of more than 60 hectares of parkland. The ceme-
tery includes a very interesting museum
and guided tours are available. The
Irish National War Memorial Gardens
Pic. 6) in Islandbridge about a kms west
of the city centre was designed by Sir
Joseph Lutyens to commemorate 49,000
Irishmen who lost their lives in WWI. It
is one of his finest designs and includes
symbolism that relates to Ireland and
the soldiers who were killed. It is main-
tained by the OPW in accordance with
a Conservation Management Plan.

The Garden of Remembrance in Dublin
City Centre commemorates “all those
who gave their lives in the cause of Irish
Freedom”, in particular those who died
in the Easter Rising of 1916, when Irish
Volunteers fought the British Army in
Dublin.24 A more recent memorial park is
the Stardust Memorial Park in Coolock
north Dublin to commemorate young
people who died in a tragic fire in a
disco club on 14 February 1981.25 Dublin
has several old cemeteries which are
no longer used for burial and where:
many graves are no longer taken care of by relatives of the deceased. Sometimes the families have moved from the district or are unaware or disinterested in their relative’s graves. Therefore, it is a common occurrence for city authorities to convert old graveyards and cemeteries to parks. Old Dublin cemeteries converted to parks include Wolfe Tone Park, St. Kevin’s Park, The Cabbage Garden and St. Catherine’s Park. The former two parks were developed in the 1960s and the latter two in the 1980s.

**COASTAL PARKS**

A series of parks were developed around Dublin Bay including the North Bull Island, Clontarf Promenade and Sandymount Promenade. The unique North Bull Island (Pic. 7) resulted from engineering works designed to prevent Dublin Bay from silting and preventing access by ships. In the early 1800s a study of the bay by the port authority at the time recommended the construction of a wall from the north shore to form a restricted mouth of the harbour.

When the wall was completed in 1825, the silt piled up outside the wall forming an island 5 km long and 1 km wide comprising over 700 hectares which is 200 years old and still growing. This public park with a beach on the eastern side is a wonderful resource for recreation for thousands of Dubliners in summertime.

The centre of the island is formed with dune ridges which have formed over the years as the island grew towards the sea. The western side includes a salt marsh and mudflats which provide important feeding grounds for migratory birds from the Arctic region, most notably about 1,000 Brent Geese which visit from November to February.

On a good winter’s day up to 40,000 waders ducks and geese roost on the Island. The island has several national and international designations including UNESCO Biosphere Reserve from 1981 and it is the only one in the world which is situated within a capital city.25

**RIVERS AND CANALS**

Rivers such as the Liffey, Dodder and Tolka were important in past history for navigation, to power water mills and as a water supply. While some of these uses still apply, they are also habitats for a range of flora and fauna and are outlets for recreational pursuits such as fishing, boating and greenways.26 The Grand Canal and the Royal Canal were built about two centuries ago as navigation channels because roads were inadequate. Today they have a new life as environmental corridors and recreational uses for walking and cycling as greenways.27 All of these parks are a valuable resource for exercise and recreation for improvement of public health; in addition to sports grounds, many parks now include outdoor gym equipment for adults and exciting playground equipment for children.

**CONCLUSION**

From 1963 Irish Planning Acts require local authorities to create development plans, in which parks and open spaces are a requirement in new residential schemes. It was that stimulus which gave rise to setting up a Parks Department in Dublin County Council in 1970. From 1970 a great interest in parks and green spaces developed for their amenity and the use of parks as alternative transport routes for cyclists and pedestrians. To reinforce that idea, the National Transport Authority has spent many millions of Euro on upgrading pathways through parks and across rivers to facilitate their use by cyclists. These routes have public lighting for night time usage and CCTV for public safety reasons. Strategies being developed for green space have moved beyond provision of parks to serve catchment areas to planning for integration of blue and green infrastructure and the public have warmly welcomed the change.28

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24 Fraser, A. M. 1979. The Cabbage Garden, Dublin Historical Record. Volume XIV, No. 3.