THE PARKS AND GARDENS OF DUBLIN, IRELAND

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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 921 km², Dublin is one of the smallest counties in the country but its population of 1.42 m 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).

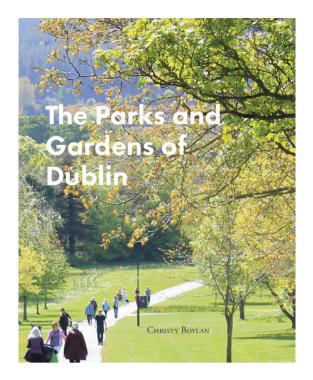
The greatest expansion is due mainly to an influx of people from the rural communities, returned emigrants and immigrants from other countries. Dublin has a heritage of public parks dating from the early 17th century, but the golden era of developing new parks was from the second half of the 20th century, in line with urban expansion. Today, the total area of public parks exceeds 7,100 hectares representing 50 square metres of managed public open space per capita,

a high proportion generally compared with other cities. If private spaces around buildings and private gardens are included, the amount of green space is doubled. The National forests which are accessible to the public and managed by Coillte, would add even more green space.

Dublin is administered by four local authorities (Fig. 3); Dublin City Council the old city authority, Fingal County Council which manages the northern part of the county, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council which manages the south-eastern part of the county and South Dublin County Council which manages the south-western part of the county. All of these councils have active parks departments which plan, develop and manage public parks and other elements of green infrastructure. A national agency called the Office of Public Works (OPW) is responsible for historic landscapes and buildings, including public parks and gardens.

While information on many parks is available in hard copy and on websites for the various authorities, this book is the first detailed account of a selection of important parks in Dublin city and county which are managed by these five authorities. Over 140 parks and gardens, each with an interesting story, are discussed in detail with illustrations under 14 thematic chapter titles. They range from Dublin's most famous and largest park, the Phoenix Park, to the smallest pocket park around the statue of Anne Devlin in Rathfarnham Village. The

1 Central Statistics Office (Ireland), CSO. (2020). Population and Migration Estimates April 2020. https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/ pressreleases/2020pressreleases/pressstatementpopulationandmigrationestimatesapril2020/> Accessed 23 June 2021. 2 Clarke, Desmond. (1977). Dublin. B.T. Batsford Ltd., London



Pict. 1: First draft of book cover. (PHOTO: CHRISTY BOYLAN)

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

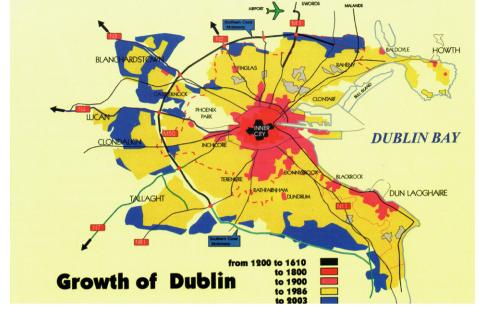
subject is covered in the second chapter. Chapter titles include Historical Parks and Gardens, Dublin's Squares, Former Demesnes, Commemorative Parks and Gardens and Plant Collections. Rivers and canals in and around Dublin formerly used for water supply, power supply for water mills and navigation now 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 which are at the planning stage.

BRIEF HISTORY

About 50,000 years ago, the island of Ireland separated from the land mass of Britain and in 6,000 B.C. it was occupied by Mesolithic man. The earliest villages probably evolved from the Christian monasteries which were built along the rivers during the 5th and 6th centuries. Dublin city began with the arrival of the Vikings in 841 A.D. Over the next three centuries they made it their base and despite many battles, maintained control until the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in 1170. It was in the 12th century that Dublin's urban character was initially formed. The population of Dublin was then 8,000 and by 1682 increased to 60,000. During the 18th century, trade flourished, the great Georgian streetscapes were developed, and Dublin became one of the largest cities in Europe with a population of 150,000 people.³ In 1800, it was regarded as being the second city of the then British Empire, but when Ireland's parliament was abolished by the Act of Union to form the United Kingdom, many things changed. Parliamentarians, supporters and lobby groups moved to Westminster in London, reducing the demand for houses in Dublin. Elsewhere in the UK, cities were expanding because of the industrial revolution. Ireland was very much an agricultural country supporting a population in excess of 8 million people which made it the second most densely populated country in Europe. However,

3 Liddy, Pat. (1987). Dublin Be Proud. Chadworth Limited Dublin. 4 Craig, Maurice, (1980), Dublin 1660 -1860. Allen Figgis Ltd Dublin





when the potato crop failed in the mid-1800s because of potato blight (*Phytophtora 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.⁵

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. The tea plant (Camellia sinensis) and the rubber plant (Hevea brasiliensis) proved very valuable when the British acquired them from China and Brazil respectively and after propagating them in Kew Gardens, London, they exported them to India where commercial plantations were established. The mild climate of Ireland and the UK suited plants from many parts of the world and glasshouses 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 Irish Parliament for the purposes of growing plants which were introduced from other continents.

The gardens of 19.5 hectares were formed in Glasnevin, about 3 kms 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 650,000 visitors annually.⁷

- **5** Tacitus.Nu (2011). Population of the British Isles (tacitus.nu). Accessed; 20 Dec
- **6** Laws, Bill. (2018). Fifty plants that changed the course of History. David and Charles, UK
- **7** Nelson, E. Charles, and Eileen McCracken. (1987). The Brightest Jewel. Boethius Press, Kilkenny, Ireland.



Fig. 1: County
Dublin shown darker
on the green of
Ireland
with Northern

(SOURCE: HTTPS://
EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/
WIKI/
COUNTY_DUBLIN)
Fig. 2: The Growth

Ireland in pink.

Fig. 2: The Growth of Dublin from 1200

to 2003. (Corcoran, 1987)

Fig. 3: Dublin is administered by four local authorities. (SOURCE: HTTP:// WWW.URBAN-AGRI-CULTURE-EUROPE. ORG/MEDIAWIKI/ INDEX.PHP/ DUBLIN,_IRELAND)

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 kms from the centre city.8 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 Gardai (Irish Police Force) and Dublin Zoo. Its importance has long been recognised 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 preservation of a well-protected and managed large heritage park, with a broad range of activities and events, serving the city of Dublin, in cooperation with its citizens."

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 (Pic 4). 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. 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 redeveloped 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 lunchtime. On weekends,

8 McCullen, John. (2009). An Illustrated History of the Phoenix Park Landscape and Management to 1880. Government Publications, Office of Public Works. 9 McCabe, Desmond. (2011). St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 1660 – 1875. Government Publications.





artists display their work on the railings surrounding the park attracting visitors from all around the city. Fitzwilliam Square was the last of the Georgian 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.¹⁰

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 years after the lord had departed. The word demesne is generally considered to be a private estate, usually in the ownership of nobility such as a lord. Origins of the word are Old French demeine, but it goes back even further to the Latin, dominus which means "Lord, master of the household". It is a variant of *domaine* which reflects how the word is pronounced. The land was worked by serfs or villeins without rights of tenure in feudal times when they were also obliged to defend the lord in battle. In later years, paid

labourers replaced the serfs, and, in some cases, the lands were leased to tenants. Ireland's maritime climate combined with its history of demesnes has provided important gardens which are rich in artistic heritage as well as plant collections from around the world.

The value of these lands was recognised by Michael Lynch who was appointed to head the Parks Department in Dublin County Council in 1971. He was involved in developing a policy which was adopted by the Council and included the provision of parks with a range of facilities around the entire county. These were termed neighbourhood parks of which 60 plus were provided as well as public open spaces.

The policy also recognised the need for extensive areas for active and passive recreation outside the urban areas on un-serviced land (which was not zoned for residential use). These parks, about 100-150 hectares in size, were intended to serve a wider catchment of communities and became known as regional parks. The first regional park in County Dublin, Marlay Park in Rathfarnham on the south side of the city, was formerly a demesne as was Malahide Castle and Demesne, the second such park to be established. By 1993, Michael had

10 Dublin City Council. (2006). The Georgian Squares of Dublin, An Architectural History. Foreword by Jim Barrett, City Architect.



Pict. 2: Turner
Curvilinear Range of
glasshouses at the
National Botanic
Gardens, Dublin.
(PHOTO: CHRISTY
BOYLAN)
Pict. 3: The Phoenix

Park is well used for pedestrians and cyclists. (PHOTO: CHRISTY BOYLAN)

Pict. 4: Aerial view
of Dublin's Squares.
e (COURTESY MARGARET
GORMLEY, OPW)

assembled 14 regional parks around Dublin city (Fig. 4) and most of these were former demesnes with the manor house and landscape intact. ¹¹ Today, these are Dublin's most popular public parks, developed during the twentieth century by local authorities.

HISTORICAL PARKS

Some of Dublin's parks were developed to celebrate part of Ireland's history or the beginnings of an event such as an exhibition. 12 In 1853, Queen Victoria opened an exhibition on Leinster Lawn, which is today part of the grounds surrounding the Irish Parliament. The success of that event led to an even greater one, the 1865 Dublin International Exhibition on a site near St Stephen's Green.¹³ The exhibition hall was modified over the years to a university and later became the National Concert Hall. The accompanying 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 Exhibition which opened on 4 May 1907. It was the most popular exhibition ever held in Ireland and by 9 November 1907 attendance figures were 2.75 million people. 14 When the exhibition ended, the site was cleared, the public park developed and officially opened on 19 August 1911. The south eastern 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 established to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Queen Victoria's reign on 26 June 1887 and was officially opened a week later by her son, Prince Albert. ¹⁵ 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 including a park beside the 12th century St Patrick's Cathedral. This time they removed slum dwellings and built a one hectare Victorian style park which was opened by King Edward VII on 24 July 1902.16

11 Lynch, Michael, (1993), The Parks of County Dublin. Dublin County Council, Parks Department Booklet.

12 Dixon, F. (1973). Dublin Exhibitions: Part II. Dublin Historical Record, 26@, 137-146. http://www.jstor.org/stable/30104064 Accessed; 23 June

13 O'Cleirigh, Nellie. (1994). Dublin International Exhibition, 1865. Dublin Historical Record. Vol. 47, No. 2 (Autumn, 1994), pp. 169-182 (14 pages).

14 Siggins, Brian. (2007). The 1907 Exhibition in Herbert Park. Dublin Historical Record, Volume LXI, No. 1

15 Brück, J. and Tierney, A. (2009) Killiney Hill Park. UCD School of Archaeology / Heritage Council Archaeology Grant Report, Dublin.

16 National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH). (2013). Saint Patrick's Park, Patrick Street, Bull Alley Street, Dublin 8, Dublin. https://www.buildingsofireland.ie/buildings-search/building/50080682/saint-patricks-park-dublin-city Accessed 22 June 2021.



Fig. 4: Regional parks in County Pict. 5: View of the Royal Hospital from the garden. (PHOTO: CHRISTY

BOYLAN)

Albert College, Glasnevin, was part of agricultural education (including horticulture and forestry) since the 19th century until 1978 when University College Dublin established a new campus about 8 km south of the city. The horticulture research grounds were acquired by Dublin City Council and developed as Albert College Park. Dublin was at one time a walled city and part of the old city wall which dates back to 1240 AD was restored in 1975 and the adjacent grounds which includes two old churches were developed as St. Audoen's Park. Other parks include Sorrento Park in Dalkey which is generally hidden from passing commuters and indeed was lost for a period through overgrowth of plants. The unique Blessington Street Basin was not developed as a park but supplied the city with water from 1810 to the middle of the nineteenth century and Irish distilleries up to 1976. Tt has become a very treasured little park, the heritage value of which is much appreciated by the local community.¹⁸ Irish men comprised about 150,000 soldiers of the British Army and a hospital was built in Dublin for them in the 17th century; its first occupants took up residence in 1684. Known as the Royal Hospital Kilmainham (Pic. 5) it continued to be a

home for old soldiers up to 1927 when the remaining pensioners were transferred to Chelsea in London, thus ending a period of 243 years of caring. 19 For its 300th anniversary, it was restored by the Office of Public Works and since 1991 has been home to the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA). The grounds changed much over the centuries from informal to formal layouts and the layout chosen for its restoration represents a compromise between the several different designs it had over the centuries and what can be maintained with contemporary resources.

Ranelagh Gardens was the site for the first manned hot air balloon flight by Irishman Richard Crosbie in 1785. King's Inn Park is more than two centuries old, but its heritage is more recently associated with the Hungry Tree, a vigorous specimen of London plane (Platanus acerifolia) which for the past five decades has been consuming a cast iron bench into its stem.²⁰ The rebellion of 1916 was led by Padraig Pearse who owned and managed a private school in Rathfarnham, about 7 kms south of the city centre. The emphasis of their education was the environment and Irish culture. The school building and grounds are now the very popular St. Enda's Park.

17 Corcoran, Michael (2005). Our Good Health - A History of Dublin's Water and Drainage. Dublin City Council. 18 Brück, J. and Tierney, A. (2009) Blessington Street Basin. UCD School of Archaeology / Heritage Council Archaeo-

logy Grant Report, Dublin. 19 McParland, Edward. (1985). The Royal Hospital Kilmainham. Country Life. 9th and 16th May 1985.

20 Mossreid. (2017). The Hungry Tree in the King's Inns. http://mossreid.blogs- pot.com/2017/03/hungry-tree-kings-inns. html>. (Accessed 28 October 2020).



COMMEMORATIVE PARKS

Some parks are designed and constructed to be commemorative parks for events or people while cemeteries 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 Monuments Commission and the Commonwealth 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 Commemorative Parks includes Grangegorman Military Cemetery, near the Phoenix Park where the soldiers from the two world wars in Europe and some battles

in other countries are buried.²¹ Dublin's largest cemetery, Glasnevin Cemetery is also included because of its significance 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 cemetery includes a very interesting museum and guided tours are available. The Irish National War Memorial Gardens (Pic. 6) in Islandbridge about 2 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 maintained 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.²² 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 1961.²³ Dublin has several old cemeteries which are no longer used for burials and where

21 Campbell, Myles, Derham, William and Heffernan, Maru. (2018). Livina Legacies, Ireland's National Historic Properties in the care of the OPW. Office of Public Works, Dublin. 22 Linehan, Hugh. (1966). Remembering the Rising: how they did it in 1966. The Irish Times. 26 March 2016. 23 Boylan, Christy. (1993). Stardust Memorial Park. In Local Authority News. Vol 9, No. 5.



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 Garden²⁴ 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 **24** Fraser, A. M. 1979. The Cabbage Garden. Dublin Historical Record. Volume XIV, No. 3.

25 Jeffrey, D.W., Goodwillie, R.N., Healy, B., Holland, C.H., Jackson, J.S. & Moore, J.J. (1977). North Bull Island Dublin Bay a modern coastal natural history. Royal Dublin Society, Dublin.



Pict. 6: Aerial view of the Irish National War Memorial Gardens.

PAUL FRANCIS)

Pict. 7: Aerial view of North Bull Island (COURTESY DUBLIN CITY COUNCIL)

outlets for recreational pursuits such as fishing, boating and greenways. 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. 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. In the last few decades, there is a greater emphasis on caring for our environment and parks are now seen as important area for conservation of our natural environment and protection of our architectural and archaeological heritage. There

is also an emphasis on health and recreation 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. •

26 Sweeney, Clair L. (1991). The Rivers of Dublin. Dublin Corporation. **27** Moriarty, Christopher. (2002). On Dublin's Doorstep. Wolfhound Press, Dublin.