

The Development of the Phoenix Park

Located 2.5km West of Dublin city, the Phoenix Park is usually described as Europe's largest public park. It extends about 5km along the Liffey's north bank and comprises 707ha, bounded by a stone wall 11km in length. The park contains 32km of roads with a landscape dominated by broad expanses of turf interspersed with woods, clumps and lakes. Within its bounds there are a number of important residences and institutions, as well as a series of monuments and historic buildings.

Medieval Origin

The area of the present park originally formed a portion of the demesne lands of the Knights Hospitallers of Kilmainham. The land, together with adjacent lands on the south side of the river, had been granted to the Priory of St John of Jerusalem at Kilmainham in 1177 by Hugh Tyrrell, first baron of Castleknock. During the suppression of the monasteries (1537) these lands were seized by the Crown and for the remainder of the 16th century the Priory at Kilmainham was apparently used as a 'country residence' of the Lord Deputy of Ireland.

Phoenix House

In 1611 James I granted the Kilmainham demesne lands north of the river (much the present park) to Sir Richard Sutton. In the same year Sutton assigned 400 acres of these lands to Sir Edward Fisher, who subsequently built a residence called Phoenix House, sited where the Magazine Fort now stands. It is not known why Fisher chose the name Phoenix, but the word is an Irish rendering of the Irish for 'clear water' (*Fionn Uisce*) and may refer to a clear water spa that is believed to have been located somewhere on the lands, perhaps near the present Zoological Gardens.

In 1617 the Fisher lands together with Phoenix House were surrendered back to the Crown for £2500 and afterwards assigned to the monarch's representatives in Ireland. The Phoenix House henceforth became the 'country residence' of the Lord Deputies – firstly Lord Grandison, then Viscount Falkland (1622-27) and later the Viscount Wentworth (1633-40) – the latter spoke of the place as 'a country seat where a partridge was unknown' though it did in his view offer 'excellent sport' in the flying of hawks and blackbirds. During the Commonwealth, Sir Charles Fleetwood, who was appointed Commander-in-Chief of Ireland in July 1652, took up residence in Phoenix House in the Winter of 1652. He remained until November 1656 when Henry Cromwell became a resident in the house after being made Lord Deputy. As a great entertainer, Cromwell added a new wing to the house, several stores high. Another corresponding wing was added in the early 1660s by the Duke of Ormonde after he was appointed Lord Lieutenant. This contained a hall and chapel, while £1,600 was spent on an associated stable complex at this time.

Ormonde's Deer Park

The Phoenix Park was effectively first established in 1662 by James Butler, Duke of Ormonde, on behalf of Charles II. It was conceived as a Royal Deer Park, and was intended to include lands at Chapelizod south of the river, while property belonging to Lord Ashtown was also acquired (in 1664). A contract to build a surrounding wall was given to one William Dodson and the building of this wall began in late 1663, but this work was so poor that after only a year many sections of his wall had started to collapse. Despite all this blatantly dodgy workmanship, Dodson was given a further contract of £100 a year to keep the wall – a contract that he then sublet to his workmen for £30 a year!

Once enclosed, the park was stocked with fallow deer from England, partridges from North Wales and pheasants from Arklow. Roads were built and in 1668 a ranger and two keepers were appointed, though despite their efforts, poaching apparently took place on a big scale. Marcus Trevor, Viscount Dungannon was the first ranger and the keepers were appointed for the 'Kilmainham Walk' and the 'Ashtown Walk' respectively. According to Ball, when the Duke of Ormonde surrendered his post as Lord Lieutenant the park had cost him £31,000 – a sum later to increase to £40,000.

Sir John Temple's Park

While the Duke of Ormonde can be credited with creating the first 'Phoenix Park' in the 1660s, the present boundaries of the park were actually created in the 1680s after the establishment of the Royal Hospital at Kilmainham (1680). Ormonde was again Lord Lieutenant at the time, but it was the Solicitor-General of Ireland, Sir John Temple, who footed the bill for a new boundary wall of the park, which was now reduced in size with the Chapelizod Road as the southern boundary (apparently when this road passed through the park too many deer were being killed so it was decided to exclude the road from the park). Temple undertook the work in return for the strip of land between the Chapelizod road and the river. The wall was eight feet high and 52 perches long and the estimated cost was 3/9p per perch totalling less than £100 (Ball).

After the new boundaries had been fixed, the keeper-ship for the 'Kilmainham Walk' was abolished and replaced with the Castleknock keeper-ship. The park now had assumed its present size, being 7 miles in circumference and 1750 acres in extent. In 1675 Sir John Temple (later Lord Palmerstown) was granted all the lands in Chapelizod belonging to the Crown, except those in the Park and those included in a lease to Col. Richard Lawrence (owner of a factory enterprise at Chapelizod). Palmerstown later retired to England where he died in 1705, but his family retained their interest in the area for many years afterwards.

In the early 1660s the Phoenix House was considered not large or suitable enough for the Duke of Ormonde and his staff. Consequently, the Viceregal residence was moved to Chapelizod House and it was here that Ormonde and

his sons, Lord Arran and Lord Ossory lived. The Earl of Essex who came as Viceroy in 1672 also lived in Chapelizod House. It was later occupied by William III and his court when in Ireland (thus became known as 'The King's House'), by which time it was surrounded by a grand formal gardens.

The Early 18th Century Park

Once the boundaries of the park had been established in the 1660s and 1680s it is likely that at least some of the old farm boundaries were removed to facilitate the deer, while some woodland (which is essential for deer) must have been planted. Unfortunately, there seems to be no reasonably detailed maps of the park area until John Rocque's 1750s map. On Rocque's map the only sizeable woodland blocks are at the Castleknock gate and in the park centre - the Wilderness Wood. It is likely that elements of both woodland blocks belong to the late 17th century.

Aside from old field boundaries, roads and woodland blocks, the park at the beginning of the 18th century is known to have contained a number of official residences, while later in the century two additional residences were added, namely Nathaniel Clement's house (1751-2) and de Blaquiére's house (1776). Those residences present at the start of the 18th century included the Phoenix House, Ashtown Castle, Newtown House and the Castleknock Lodge:

1. Phoenix House, which was still used by members of the Viceregal household, but was to be demolished in the mid 1730s to make way for Magazine Fort. This fort was partly the work of the Duke of Wharton when LL and said to have been initially conceived as a retreat from civil disturbances 'Wharton's Folly', but when eventually completed in 1801 comprised a barracks for troops with magazines for powder and ammunition, all surrounded by a dry ditch with draw bridge, protected by 10 twenty-five pounders.
2. Ashtown Castle. A four storey 16th century tower house that had been purchased with the lands of Lord Ashtown in 1664. It became the residence of one of the park keepers (Keeper of the Ashtown Walk), being first occupied by Sir William Flower. In the opening of the 18th century Sir Charles Fielding lived here and he was succeeded on his death in 1722 by the Rt. Hon. Benjamin Parry. By the time the building is shown on Rocque's map in the 1750s it had clearly been enlarged and given extensive formal gardens – by the 1772 map the grounds had been transformed into informal parkland as they were remain in the 19th century. This transformation had been undertaken by Rt. Hon. Robert Cunningham, afterwards Lord Rossmore. He had been granted use of the place by Lord George Sackville, the holder of the post of Keeper of the Ashtown Walk. Later the place became the Under Secretaries Lodge and in the 20th century the Apostolic Nunciature. Today the yards are used as the Phoenix Park Visitor Centre, but in a disgraceful act of state vandalism the pretty 18th and

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- 19th century house has been demolished, leaving only the old tower house standing.
3. Newtown House. Home of another park keeper, this house is believed to have occupied a site near the park gates on the south side. Home at start of 18th century of Sir Thomas Smith. An English baronet.
 4. Lodge for 'Keeper of the Castleknock Walk' at north end of park. At start of the 18th century occupied by Sir Alexander Cairnes, a baronet and London banker. When Luke Gardiner succeeded as Keeper of the Castleknock Walk in 1725 he rebuilt for himself a new house here at the north end of the park – this house later became the Ordnance Survey Office and still stands. Luke Gardiner's son Charles succeeded him in 1755 and he in turn was succeeded by his son Luke, later Baron Mountjoy, killed in the Waterford rising of 1798. It was the later individual, Baron Mountjoy, who added a theatre to his residence in the 1780s – this still survives in the present complex.

The Wilderness Wood

Claims are often made that the Earl of Chesterfield, when LL in 1747, opened up the park to the public for the first time. It is difficult to know what the evidence these claims are based upon, but we can say that when Mrs Delany visited the park in 1731 it was already very much a place of public recreation. She was full of praise of the park, remarking upon its 'fine turf' and 'agreeable prospects', but was particularly taken by the Wilderness Wood, which she though was delightful, commenting that it had become 'the resort of the beaux and belles in fair weather'.

Mrs Delany described the Wilderness Wood as being intersected with glades with a ring in the centre. This wood, which lay in the centre of the park, is depicted on the 1750s John Rocque map where it is shown to have occupied an area of at least forty acres and was dissected by a grid-like pattern of straight geometric allées. The rond at the centre, which is clearly shown on the Rocque map, was the site of the Phoenix Column erected here in 1747. Both this column and the rond were depicted in a pencil sketch by Thomas Wright in 1747 during his travels about Ireland. The sketch shows the formal arrangement of trees in the rond and from the size of these trees it would appear that the Wilderness must have been planted at least twenty or twenty-five years previously (c.1720-25).

The term 'Wilderness' refers to a very specific form of ornamental wood or grove that formed a fashionable component of formal garden layouts in Ireland during the period 1660 to 1740. The trees in these groves were usually geometrically planted, while straight paths or allées typically dissected the wood, often radiating from *ronds* or ponds and aligned upon statues, temples or other decorative features. The allées themselves were either lined with clipped hedges or alternatively, the trees were clipped alongside the paths. Sometimes these Wildernesses had innumerable allées and could be quite complex – just

how elaborate was the one in the Phoenix Park is difficult to determine as Rocque's map only shows the main allées and vistas.

As stated above, Thomas Wright's sketch would indicate that the Phoenix Park Wilderness was planted around 1720. This also happens to have been the time when these features were at their most popular in Ireland and few large formal ornamental layouts would have been without one. The Phoenix park is different however, in that it was not the grounds of a private country house and the Wilderness here does not relate to any building. Clearly the Wilderness in the park was created for public recreation some 20 or 30 years before Chesterfield was LL in Ireland.

Wilderness Woods began to become unfashionable from the mid 18th century onwards when formal gardens started to be replaced by informal 'naturalistic' layouts. In this respect it should be noted that the 1772 map of the park shows that by this time the Wilderness had been softened and deformed – the road routes through remained straight for obvious reason, but beyond this the Wilderness had assumed the appearance of a 'natural' wood.

Lord Chesterfield and the Park 1745-6

It is often stated in guide books that Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield, was responsible for extensive replanting in the park, laying out new roads and opening it up to the public for the first time. In fact there is precious little evidence for any of this and besides, Chesterfield was only Lord Lieutenant for eight months (August 1745-April 1746), hardly enough time to make any serious impact.

One feature in the park, however, that is correctly associated with Chesterfield is the Phoenix column, commonly known among Dubliners today as 'The Eagle Monument'. This thirty foot high pillar with a fluted Corinthian style column of Portland stone is embellished with crest of the Earl of Chesterfield and is surmounted with the image of a Phoenix rising from its ashes. The exact date of erection is not recorded, but Wright's sketch of 1747 shows it was in place then and so it was most probably erected in 1746. The fact that the crest and arms of the Stanhopes appear in relief on the column pedestal does not necessarily mean that he commissioned this work. It is perhaps more likely that it was completed during his tenure as Lord Lieutenant and this dedicated to him. Besides, the commissioning and execution of such a fine work of imported Portland stone, is rather likely to have taken more than eight months.

The column was placed in the middle of the centre rond of the Wilderness though which passed the main road from the Castleknock gate in the north to the Park Gates on the south. This road, shown on both the 1750s Rocque map and the 1772 map, had a rather angular route – not the magnificent straight avenue through the park lined with elms that was created in the 1840s and is

misleadingly called 'The Chesterfield Straight'. Chesterfield had of course nothing to do with this splendid 1840s route, not for that matter can it be shown that he had anything to do with the original pre-1840s route, which logically had to be created prior to the creation of the Wilderness around 1720.

Clement's Lodge (Viceregal Lodge) 1751

Built in 1751-2 as the private residence of Nathaniel Clements, who had been appointed as chief ranger and master of the game of the park in 1750. He was also at the time Deputy Vice Treasurer of Ireland. In addition to building the house, he also created a sweeping landscape park with clumps and a serpentine 'naturalistic' lake. The new landscape was designed by James Donnell, a landscape gardener who is known to have worked at Strokestown, Co. Roscommon in the 1780s and Leixlip Castle for the Dowager Lady Massereene. He also landscaped the grounds of Ashtown House for Mr Eden, the Chief Secretary to the then Viceroy, the Earl of Carlisle (1781-2).

Clements remained in occupation of his house until his death in 1777 and we are told annually celebrated the birthday of George III with a great display of fireworks and illuminations, whilst also distributing whole carcasses of beef to his poorer neighbours.

The house was purchased from Clement's son, Robert, afterwards 1st Earl of Leitrim, in 1782 as a residence of the Viceroys for £10,000. Initially, during the remainder of the 18th century, it had only intermittent popularity as a Viceregal residence and at one stage was offered to Grattan as a gift from the people of Ireland, but this offer was refused. The death of the Duke of Rutland in the house in 1787 did not help its popularity either, but eventually Philip Yorke, the Earl of Hardwicke as LL decided to carry out substantial works and added the wings in 1802 to make it more suitable as a Lord Lieutenant's residence. Charles Lennox, the Duke of Richmond then added the north portico and gate lodges in 1808 (Francis Johnson design) and the Viscount Whitworth the north front in 1813 (Johnson design). In 1848 a dining room was added to the east wing and extra accommodation added to the west wing. The gardens laid out in the 1840s by Niven and Burton. Electric light was installed in 1908 and in 1911 small Edwardian block added to west wing for the visit of George V.

Chief Secretary's Lodge 1776

During the Viceroyalty of Simon, the Earl of Harcourt (1772-1777) it was claimed that the park was being neglected and looking more and more like a common. This may have been true, but Harcourt's desire to create a new post of park bailiff had much more to do with a round-about-means of providing an official residence with living for the Chief Secretary of Ireland, his friend John de Blaquiere (the Chief Secretary at that time was the leader of the government in the Commons). The new post of bailiff included the liberty to enclose part of the park for a residence and so in 1776 Lt Col. John Blaquiere built the house

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that was later in 1782 purchased by the government as Chief Secretary's residence (the man behind this acquisition was Eden, Chief Secretary to the Viceroy, the Earl of Carlisle, 1781-2. Eden was determined to remove all 'private' residence from the park and acquire them as official government residences).

The Chief Secretaries Lodge became the American Embassy to Ireland in 1927. The whole property consists of 70 acres of lawns, orchards and gardens, with three cottage and two gate lodges.

Note: The 1772 map shows this residence with the label 'Sir John Blaquiere'. This indicates that this map must have been altered subsequently as the residence was not built until 1776. Besides, John de Blaquiere (1732-1812) was not created a baronet until 1784.

Later 18th Century Developments

In 1766 near the Chapelizod Gate the foundation stone of the Hibernian Military School was laid by the Lord Justices. In 1769 it was granted a Royal Charter by George III and was thus eligible for government grants. The school was established for the maintenance education and apprenticing of the orphans and children of Irish soldiers. The main block is 300ft long with detached dining hall, infirmary and chapel. A farm of 19 acres was attached to the school

The Royal Infirmary or Soldier's Hospital, also near Chapelizod gates, was founded in 1786 and completed 1788. Cost £9000. It contained 13 wards and a hall-chapel. The complex had a walled in plot used by convalescents. There was also a laundry, prison ward for sick deserters, lunatic cells, medical stores and a charnel. It was an attractive building with centre surmounted by cupola and two returning wings - all located on the summit of a hill with commanding views. Nearby was the home of the Surgeon General of the Army in Ireland. After 1922 the building became St Mary's Hospital and was once well known for the treatment of tuberculosis.

The Park in the 19th Century

The building of the obelisk in honour of Wellington, erected on the site of Whatton's salute battery, was begun in 1817 to a design of Robert Smirke. Its local height is 205 feet. The Zoological Gardens, noted for their picturesque layout, were established on five acres in 1831 - in later years this was expanded to 30 acres - the original five acres had been granted by then Viceroy, the Duke of Northumberland. Nearby in 1839 land for a Police Depot was acquired in the park and a tender to erect new building for £8,197 was accepted. This was completed in 1842 and the building remains the same today, save for the railings added in 1861. It provided recruits for officer cadets and is now the Garda Headquarters.

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The park was substantially remodelled in the 1840s and it was at this time that the splendid 'Chesterfield Straight' was laid out with its fine elms. The man principally involved in all these changes was Decimus Burton (1800-1881) – an English architect who enjoyed success both as a designer of small country houses and villas and as a town planner, specializing in the kind of picturesque layout of which Regent's park was a prototype. Burton's work on the park was intermittent from 1834 to 1849. Drawings by Burton are held in the National Library of Ireland (Portfolio 26). [Other works by Burton in Ireland included improvements to the sea wall at Queenstown, Co. Cork for the 5th Viscount Midleton (1843-50); an unexecuted project for building for the 3rd Earl of Howth (1845-6); he advised TCD on site of new Museum building].

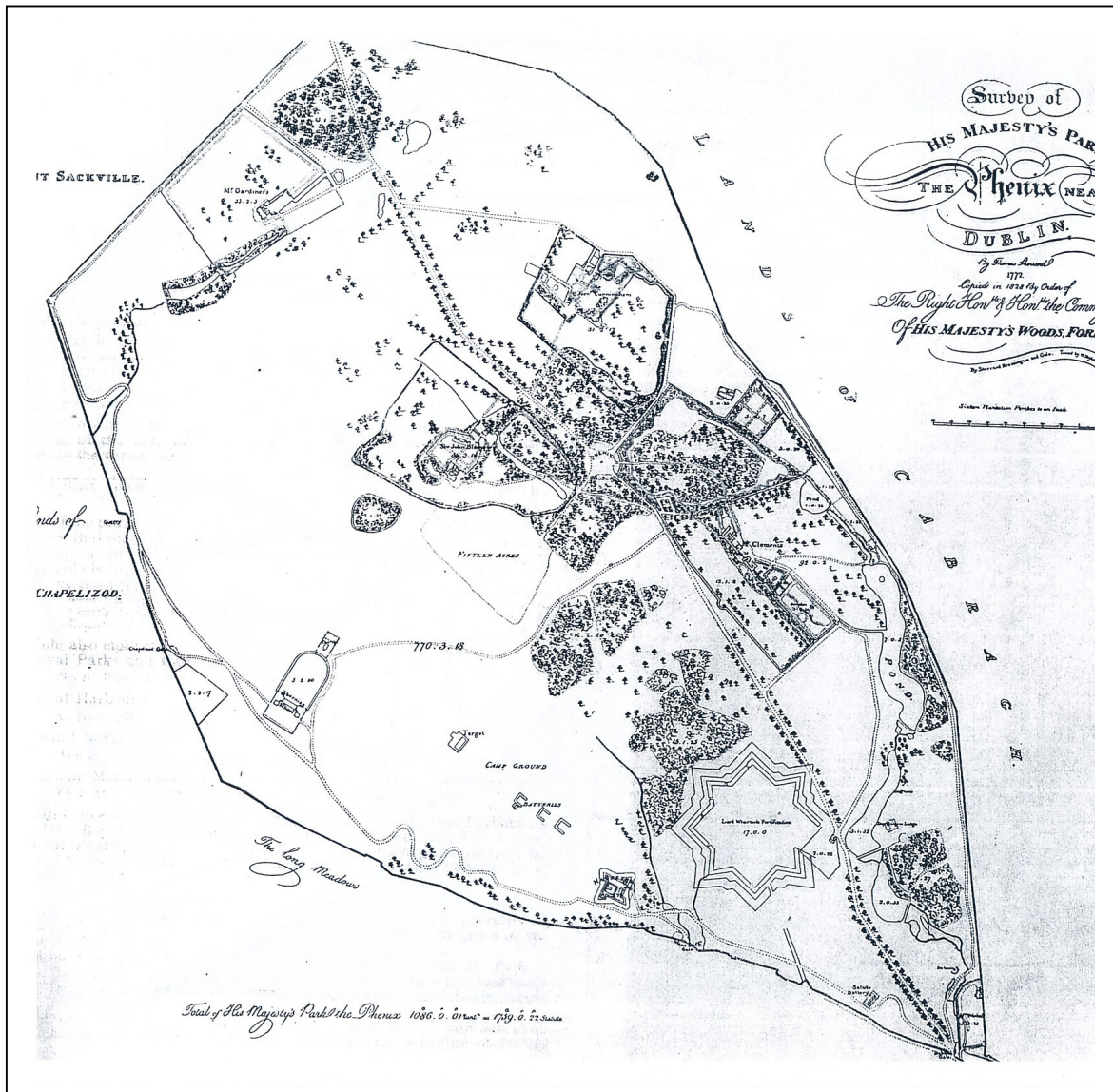
It was during Burton's remodelling of the park that it was given its present eight large gates and lodges (several of which are designed by Burton himself), these being those of the City, Circular Road, Cabra, Ashtown, Castleknock, Knockmaroon, Chapelizod, Island Bridge (here is also White's Avenue gate and private entrances to Farmleigh and Mount Sackville Convent). Mid 19th century landscaping work gave a coherence to the park, which it previously lacked, providing it with new roads and new plantings.

Some later additions to the park include the People's Flower Gardens, made in 1864 and comprising about 20 acres about a central lake laid out for Dublin citizens. A statue to memory of the 7th Earl of Carlisle erected in gardens in 1870 was blown up in 1958, as was nearby statue of Lord Gough placed on the Chesterfield Straight.

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This account has been compiled from notes, mostly derived from secondary sources, that were cobbled together over quite a number of years.

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