

## The History of the People's Park

The People's Park is near Dun Laoghaire town centre, between Glasthule and the Seafront. It is approximately 2 hectares in extent. It was developed by the then Kingstown Town Commissioners towards the end of the 19th century in the formal Victorian style. It was enclosed by wrought iron railings and gates with the most prominent entrances off George's Street and Queen's Road.

It was laid out with a system of pedestrian pathways, seats, bandstand, viewing shelter and two very fine cast iron fountains manufactured by the Sun Foundry, Glasgow.

The Park was officially opened to the public on September 29th 1890 by its designer Mr. J.L. Robinson C.E. A.R.H.A., Chairman of the Kingstown Town Commissioners. It appears that the development works were carried out mainly within that year. The Kingstown Town Commissioners acquired the property, which was a Board of Works quarry, in 1889 and obtained a Local Government Board loan of £4,000 to develop the park.

Mr. J.L. Robinson, a prominent architect, became Chairman of the Town Commissioners in 1889. He also designed the Dun Laoghaire Post Office (now part of the County Hall), completed by 1879, St. Michael's Hospital (1874), the spire of St. Michael's Church (1892), and the Town Hall, completed in 1885.

There was a Martello tower on the site, built in 1805 as part of defences against a possible Napoleonic invasion. This is shown on plans for the proposed pier in 1817 and is featured on the cover of William Duncan's survey of the County of Dublin 1821. The original layout of the park shows a pedestrian path system somewhat more formal and cruciform than the current one. The latter, more complex path layout appeared by 1937.

The fountain nearest the railway was fully restored to working order and illuminated in 1985. In 1986 the Council decided to dedicate the fountain to mark the 70th anniversary of the 1916 Rising, and an inscribed stone paving slab was laid beside it. The second fountain was similarly restored in 1988 as part of the Borough Council's contribution to mark Dublin's Millennium. An inscribed stone slab was also placed in the surrounding paved area.

Early maps show a "Gymnasium" in the eastern side of the park. This is taken to be a synonym for "playground". By the 1930's this area appears to have been converted to a small plant nursery. A hard surfaced playground with swings and a slide was subsequently erected in the north eastern corner of the park probably in the 1950's. A "Garden for the Blind" feature was added in co-operation with the local Rotary Club. It features a selection of plants, which, by virtue of their texture and fragrance may be appreciated and indentified through senses other than the visual.

The old 1950's playground was dismantled in 1988. It was replaced by a modern playground constructed for greater safety and versatility in the same year, on the original "Gymnasium" site.

The Victorian shelter was repaired and the bandstand was fully restored in 1990 to mark the park's centenary.

The event was celebrated on 29th September 1990 when the Park was formally re-dedicated. In 1997 the Victorian shelter was converted to the Park Tea Rooms which is now a very popular local restaurant/coffee shop. This has contributed greatly to the use and enjoyment of the park.

The park was conceived as a formal recreation area in Victorian times. Despite fairly radical alteration to the pathway system, it still retains that ambience. It is enclosed on two sides by formal stonewalls and piers with ornate wrought iron railings and gates. Its eastern side adjoins private properties and is composed mostly of rock outcrop, which serves as a reminder of its original use as a quarry. Its final boundary with "The Metals" consists of a more recent railing.

The main structures within the park are:

- Park Lodge, an attractive Victorian Gate Lodge formerly a Gardener's residence and now used as offices
- The Victorian Shelter (now the Park Tea Rooms)
- Two Cast Iron Fountains
- A Bandstand with original gaslight standards
- A Garden for the Blind
- Playground
- Ancillary Service Buildings and Public Toilet.

Landscape features include several trees and hedges of a variety of species. The mature trees, mainly of sycamore and horse chestnut have suffered from habitual and formerly fashionable pollarding or lopping.

This practice has been discontinued for a number of years and the trees have now developed a shape and freedom more akin to that which nature intended. Early photographs show a predominance of elm trees. They would have been chosen because of their tolerance to sea exposure. All however have fallen victim to Dutch Elm Disease. A practice of local commemorative tree planting has been implemented in the park in recent years. Voluntary groups with the Council's co-operation have carried out various plantings.

The annual spring and summer bedding displays are one of the park's main attractions. These, together with the very popular new playground and Tea Rooms contribute significantly to the popularity of the park.