

# A brief history of Dartmouth Square

*Ranelagh, Dublin 6*



Comhairle Cathrach  
Bhaile Atha Cliath  
Dublin City Council

## General Description

Dartmouth Square Park is a significant historical park dating from the late Victorian/early Edwardian period. It lies midway between Upper Leeson St. and Ranelagh Road.

The park boundary is still defined by its original wrought iron railings and gates and is the focal point of an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) for the square. Its built features and veteran trees are part of a significant historical urban designed landscape and most worthy of continued conservation.

The park, though simple in layout, is elegant in design and has a number of significant features which, taken as a whole, gives it a distinctive character. The original park railings are bedded in a low granite plinth wall and the wrought iron gates with their box piers are beautiful. The dominant built feature is the pergola and its walkway. The trees that enclose and frame the space are a huge asset to the park environment and form a significant part of the park's attraction for visitors and wildlife.



## History of Dartmouth Square

Dartmouth Square Park is on a 2 acre (0.8 hectare) rectangular site which was originally part of the Darley Estate, and was developed as a central feature of Dartmouth Square. The Square was the last in a series of squares laid out and built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Dublin as speculative developments, and its architectural history and development is well documented.

The ground area of Dartmouth Square and its park is low-lying in relation to the nearby Grand Canal on which construction began in 1756. All the surrounding ground levels along its route were corrected to facilitate the even flow between the locks.

The park was developed as part of the terraces surrounding it and intended for the sole use of residents on the square. However within a short number of years it was already a financial burden on residents for its up-keep. It was leased and used by Loreto Hockey Club in 1926 as a hockey pitch for past pupils only and then later for current pupils of Loreto College, St. Stephens Green. Hockey continued to be played there until the 1950's when it increasingly became a burden to maintain and for many years the park became overgrown and began slipping into a semi-derelict state.

### Timeline of Events

1865

Development of the square begins.

1866

OS map shows the site as a field.

1882

OS map shows outlines of proposed square and park with houses on east side.

1888

OS map shows corrected outline of the park, now with a gate entrance on the north side.

1895/6

Development starts with house Nos. 1-17 on the western side ready for occupation in 1897.

1897

The period for development is from 1895, to shortly before 1907/08 when the survey for the 1909 OS map was carried out, which records the full layout.

In 1987 The Residents Association approached the Lord Mayor, Mrs Carmencita Hederman (Lord Mayor 1987-1988), and thanks to her intervention, this led to the City Manager, Mr Frank Feely, and his office becoming involved with the local community in solving the issue. After discussions and meetings, imaginative new plans were devised by Dublin Corporation Parks Dept., and with the blessing of the Lord Mayor, the City Manager and residents agreed the plans and it was decided it would be a Dublin Millennium Year project, one of many in 1988.



Staff from the Parks Department set about cleaning out the park and preparing the soil for planting. Then the new designs and planting schemes were implemented. An impressive new pergola was erected as the architectural centre piece, its pillars modelled on the granite and brick detailing of the adjoining house terraces. The flower beds around it were filled with low perennials and climbing roses, wisteria and honeysuckle planted onto its pillars. The paths were realigned, widened and edged with fireclay tiles in rope effect pattern.

All of these works were designed to restore the park to a formal Victorian layout and the re-vitalised park became a much used local amenity for residents and the entire community.

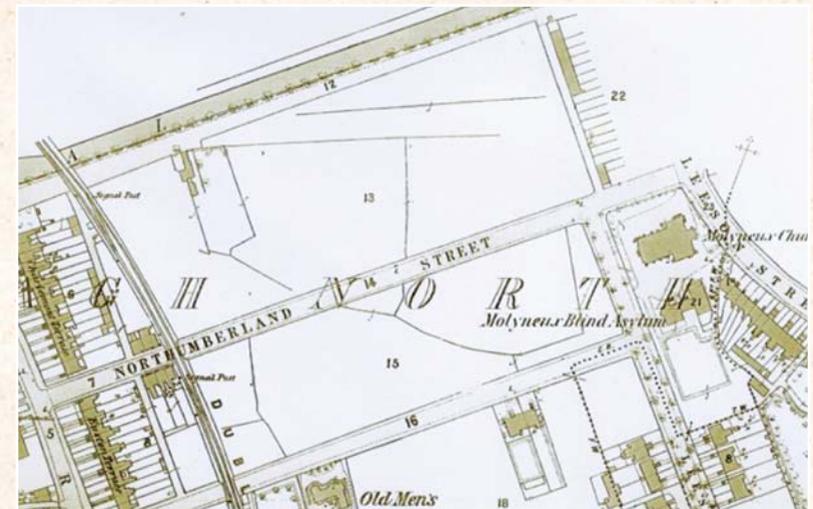
## Analysis of the Historical Ordnance Survey Maps

Critical to an understanding of the square is the analysis of the historical ordnance survey maps. These date from 1836/41 onwards and are valuable resources for chronicling the evolution of the square, showing with every subsequent survey or revision subtle or significant changes.

Later editions of OS maps show the gradual development of Dartmouth Square and its Park. The second edition, surveyed in 1865 and published in 1866 is the first one to show the proposed location of what was to become the square with the park at its centre.

The site is shown before the park and the sites for houses were apportioned and set out. Buildings and trees are shown within an enclosed gated area of ground in the north-west of the site; for its access this property opens onto the south bank of the canal.

There is reference to the two streams in the ACA, however the 1865 OS map does not show either of these streams. Perhaps by this time they were already underground, covered over by dumping activities or diverted into box drains and therefore no longer visible over-ground for the OS survey of 1865.



OS Map Published 1866 (Surveyed 1865).

### 1909

OS map shows the plan with four gates, trees, a perimeter border and path on all sides.

### 1926

The park is leased from the Darley Estate for use as the Loreto Schools hockey pitch.

### 1936

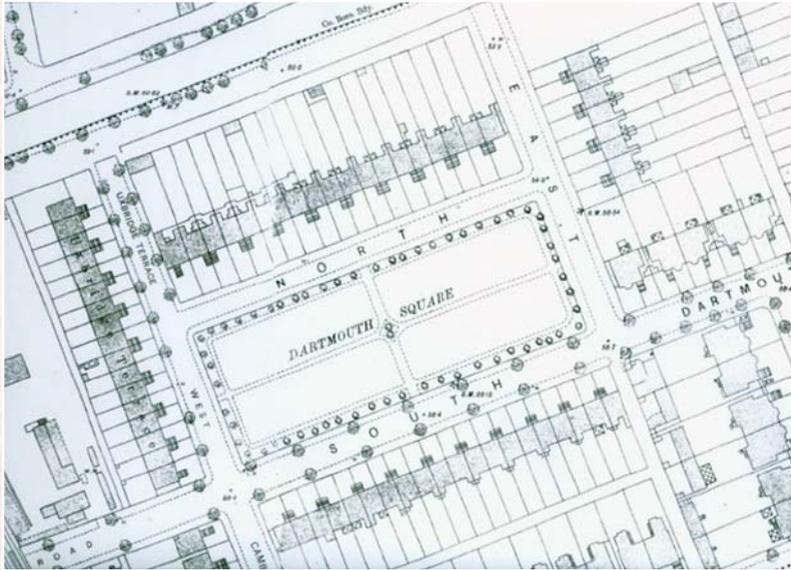
OS map shows the park without its central bed and cruciform path, most likely due to its use for hockey.

### 1930's – 1950's

There is a gap in the information. Differing accounts say that hockey ceased in the 1930's and other accounts say it continued until the 1950's.

### 1950's-1980's

The condition of the park deteriorates.



OS Map 1909 (Surv. 1907/08).

The 1909 O.S. map (surv. 1907/'08) has the most useful information for the site and depicts Dartmouth Square Park as a long rectangular plot of land with plots for the proposed terraces of houses shown as long narrow rectangular strips of land with generous spaces now set out for front and back gardens.

This OS map also shows the completed original path layout, a perimeter shrubbery border sectioned to facilitate the four entrances, trees planted both inside the park and older ones planted outside the park on the south side, four central grass plots, the four entrances are now shown and at the centre a 'diamond' shaped bed with two deciduous trees planted close together on a north to south axis to avail of maximum sunlight.



## Some noteworthy figures who have lived on Dartmouth Square

No. 7, Luke Kelly, of The Dubliners traditional ballad group.

No. 23, 1923-1930. Alfred (Alfie) Byrne. Lord Mayor of Dublin from 1930-1939 and 1954-1955.

No. 51, 1921-1927. Frank Duff, founder of the Legion of Mary.

No. 55, Joseph Michael O'Byrne SC, 1916 veteran, Bolands Mills and Registrar of Deeds, Land Registry Office, Dublin.

No. 57, 1944. Paul Durcan, the poet, was born in this house.

No. 61, 1930's. Micheal MacLiammoir & Hilton Edwards, Theatre duo.

No. 62, Thomas Lopdell O'Shaughnessy, Recorder for Dublin.

In the 1950's Power O'Mara, Globe Theatre Company and eldest son of opera singer Joseph O'Mara lived here.

Barry Fitzgerald (William Joseph Shields), Actor, Abbey Theatre from 1916-1920 and an Oscar winning actor.

Donagh MacDonagh (1912-1968). Son of Thomas MacDonagh, Irish Patriot 1916. A poet, playwright and short story writer lived here for a time.

Professor Kevin B. Nowlan. Conservation Supremo. Veteran of many battles to save Dublin's historic fabric and historical places.

**1987**

Dublin City Council enters into a ten year lease and begins its landscape renewal scheme and opens it as a public park.

**1988**

Dublin's Millenium Year sees the completion of the works.

**1997**

When the lease expires inconclusive talks take place between DCC and the Darley Estate. Dublin City Council continues to maintain the park.

**2005**

The freehold was purchased, reputedly for €10,000 from P.J. Darley, a descendant of the square's builder, by a businessman.

**2006**

Businessman locks the gates and begins to operate it as a car park.

**2012**

The Park is sold at auction and is jointly purchased for €142,000 by DCC and local residents.

**Contact:**

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