

# Victorian Walled Garden

## History of Ashtown Demesne

The first record for Ashtown Demesne dates back to the 12th century when the lands were granted to the Hospital of John the Baptist. John Connell, known as John of Ashtown, a distant ancestor of the Liberator, Daniel O'Connell, owned the castle in 1641. At that date the estate consisted of 200 acres and records show that there were also two thatched cottages and a small orchard.

In the 18th century, Ashtown Castle was modernised and incorporated into a new building, called Ashtown Lodge. In 1782 it became the official residence of the Under Secretary for Ireland. From 1922-1929 Ashtown Lodge became the residence of the United States Ambassador and then in the 1930s the Papal Nuncio took residence there until 1978.

The Office of Public Works carried out extensive restoration works in the early 1990s and it now hosts the Phoenix Park Visitor Centre and the renowned Phoenix Park Cafe. The grounds associated with the demesne include the Pleasure Grounds, Victorian Walled Garden, Arboretum and parkland all enclosed by a 'Ha-Ha', i.e. a sunken fence which prevented cattle and deer from gaining entry into the demesne but allowed uninterrupted views of the Phoenix Park.

## The Victorian Walled Garden

The Walled Garden at the Phoenix Park Visitor Centre is a good example of a mid-Victorian Kitchen Garden. It formed part of the Demesne of the Under Secretary for Ireland and can be seen in maps from 1838 onwards. The main purpose of the garden was to provide the adjoining Lodge with fresh fruit, vegetables and flowers and

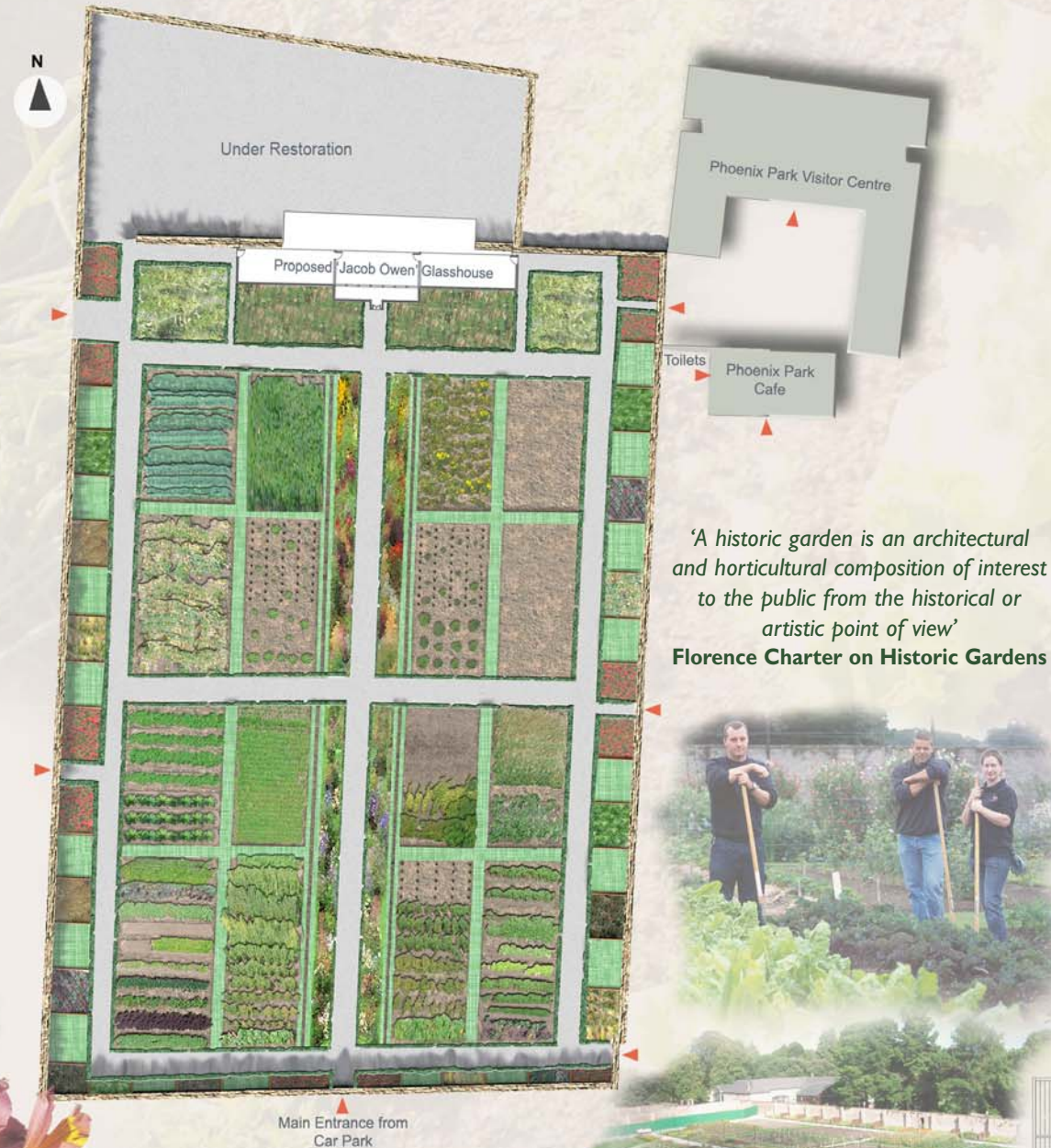
was typical of the period. The walls surrounding the two and a half acre garden were constructed to a height of 16ft. This style of a rectangular garden was developed in the late 18th century with brick walls to aid fruit training, as it retains heat.

During the 1850s a series of improvements were made to the gardens including a gardener's bothy, fruit stores, cold frames and a heating system were constructed in the slip garden, located behind the north wall of the kitchen garden. In 1854, a Jacob Owen designed glasshouse was added on the northern wall.

The original layout has been restored with a central axis path framed by a double herbaceous border running its entire length. A pathway running east to west divides the garden into four panels or beds, which are used under a rotational cropping system. The Historic Parks and Gardens staff of the Phoenix Park completed the three year kitchen garden restoration in 2009 and it is hoped that the Vinery will be restored by 2011.

The original panels have been planted in the style of a Victorian kitchen garden appropriate to the period, including soft fruit, espaliers, vegetables & cut flowers. Much of the fruit and vegetable crops grown in the kitchen garden are harvested and used for demonstrational and educational purposes. At present, cultivation within the garden is based on organic principals.

It is hoped that the garden will inspire and educate the public on the horticultural skill involved in the growing of fruit, vegetables and flowers in a sustainable manner and will also be used as an opportunity to demonstrate the growing of crops to school children.



## What Can Be Seen in the Garden

The walled garden serves not only to educate on the practice of crop production in an historical and sustainable manner, but also to be a place where the sights, sounds, scents and capabilities of nature can be appreciated and enjoyed.

The contrast between the soft and creeping forms of the planted matter and the rigid straightness of the Victorian layout, establish order and calmness in the garden. Vertical structures in the garden such as the willow panels, rows of apple espaliers and sweet-pea covered wigwams create a sense of volume and proportion, while adding to the adventure of discovery as the visitor orientates through the space.

A rotational system is in place, which is common in a kitchen garden. This is where the crops are divided into different family groups and each group is rotated ideally on a four-year cycle within the garden. This reduces disease and pest problems and helps to improve soil fertility. Perennial plants are an exception to this practice.

## Vegetables

The five main vegetable groups are grown within the garden. These include the following:-

- **Legume Family** - Beans & peas, produce a nitrogen rich soil after harvest at the end of the season.
- **Brassica Family** - This includes cabbage, cauliflower, calabrese, rocket, radish & lettuce.
- **Onion Family** - This includes leeks, shallots, garlic & onions.
- **Root Crops** - Carrots, celeriac, parsnips & beetroot.
- **Heavy Feeders** - A variety of potato cultivars such as Rooster, Charlotte, Nadine & Sante are grown.

## Fruits

Fruits are classified into two different groups.

- **Soft Fruits** - These are strawberries, currants & cane fruits (raspberries & blackberries), all those cultivated in the walled kitchen garden are old varieties.
- **Top Fruits** - These include stone fruits (peaches, plums, nectarines, apricots, cherries) and tree fruits (apples, pears, quinces & grape vines). They are planted separately from vegetable crops in beds along the pathways or against the garden walls.

## Espaliers

This practice of training fruit trees was very popular in the 18th and 19th century. Up until the middle of the 19th century pieces of cloth or willow branches were tied to a nail in the wall to secure the branches. This was later replaced with the use of horizontal wires. The most common forms of tree training are:

- **Espalier** - Apple and pear trees are trained into a form of long horizontal arms which helps control cropping and tree size.
- **Cordon** - Has an oblique or vertical form with either one or a number of vertical stems in a candelabra form.
- **Fan** - Have a short central stem with several branches radiating from the crown. This form is most suitable for stone fruits.

## Herbs

There are a wide variety of herbs including feathery-leaved fennel, purple-leaved sage, decorative chives and sweet-scented lemon balm, growing in the beds along the perimeter of the garden, where they are sheltered by the willow panels.



The Vineries Glasshouse, based on the original design by Jacob Owen in 1854.

Dogs (except Guide Dogs), ball games and bicycles are not permitted within the gardens.  
Opening Hours: 10.00am – 4.00pm



## Phoenix Park Visitor Centre

## Victorian Walled Garden

### Herbaceous Border

The double herbaceous border, with its vibrant colour scheme of cool white, blues and purples at the garden entrance transforming and fusing into hot reds, yellows and oranges by the far end of the vista, is a beautiful feature but also a vital component of the garden. It brings life and sound to the garden with its bright and scented flowers attracting important pollinating insects such as bees and butterflies. The lavender variety, Munstead, another deeply scented and attractive flowering plant, and the box plant *Buxus suffruticosa* are used for hedging in the garden.

### Seasons in the Garden

Check out the gardens to see some of the following seasonal activities:-

**SPRING** – The seeds are selected, soils are prepared and crops such as broad beans, parsnips, radish, peas and spinach are sown while shallots, artichokes, rhubarb, onion and spring cabbage varieties are planted.

**SUMMER** – A wide range of crops flourish such as sweet corn, peas, beetroot, lettuce, endives, strawberries, blackcurrants, rhubarb and cabbage. Fantastic displays of colour can be seen such as the flower displays of sweet pea, bellflowers and sunflowers.

**AUTUMN** - The pumpkins that have been growing on raised mounds with the protection of a scarecrow are ready to harvest. Autumn Bliss raspberries, blackberries, and redcurrants have ripened. Green manures such as rye grasses, winter vetch and crimson clover are also sown in autumn and left there until mid-spring to improve the soil structure.

**WINTER** – While most plant matter may look dead at this time of year, beneath the ground root crops such as carrots, parsnips, beetroot or salsify are ready to be harvested. Also in the garden are varieties of Swede 'Magres' and Turnip 'Snowball', which are not harvested until December as the cold temperature improves the vegetables taste.

### Education & Interpretation

A lively and entertaining exhibition on the history and the wildlife of the Phoenix Park is on display in the Visitor Centre. Here the visitor can enjoy a historical interpretation of the Park from 3,500 B.C. to the present day and also an audio-visual on the Phoenix Park through the ages or on the history of Áras an Uachtaráin. The staff at the Visitor Centre provide an extensive programme of events throughout the year. A number of publications are on sale including 'An illustrated history of the Phoenix Park, Landscape and Management to 1880' by Dr J McCullen. The new children's playground beside the walled garden is a must for all parents and kids alike.

### Meet the Gardeners

The Kitchen Gardens are managed by the Historic Parks & Gardens Staff of the Office of Public Works. Gardening workshops and talks take place on a regular basis. Meet the gardeners on the second Saturday of each month at 10.30 a.m. at our 'Green Fingers' Workshop and learn about growing your own fruits, vegetables and flowers.

Check out [www.phoenixpark.ie](http://www.phoenixpark.ie) for further details



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