

ST. ANNE'S PARK – LOCATION

St. Anne's Park is situated between the suburbs of Raheny and Clontarf.

The park is surrounded on three sides by mature residential housing, most of which is made up of detached and semi-detached private single family dwellings dating from the mid part of the twentieth century, with some more recent apartment buildings from the late twentieth/early twenty-first centuries.

The fourth side of the park extends along the coast at James Larkin Road, overlooking North Bull Island and Dublin Bay. It is bisected by the course of the Naniken River, which flows eastwards into the sea near the artificial pond at the Herculanean Temple, one of the park's well-known follies.

St. Anne's Park has numerous pedestrian entrances around its perimeter, and parking facilities at the Red Stables entrance on Mount Prospect Avenue, Clontarf Road and All Saint's Road.

Aspects of the wider area include:

- North Bull Island Nature Reserve (part of the UNESCO Dublin Bay Biosphere)
- Dollymount Strand
- S2S coastal greenway (walking & cycle route, section from Sutton to Fairview)
- Raheny and Clontarf village centres
- local businesses, shops, pubs, cafés and restaurants
- various communities and community groups
- schools (numerous primary and second-level)
- religious communities and places of worship
- sports clubs and organisations
- other parks and recreational spaces

ST. ANNE'S PARK – TODAY

St. Anne's Park is a 107 hectare (265 acre) public park located approx. 6.5km (4 miles) north-east of Dublin city centre. It is the second-largest municipal park in Dublin and the largest owned and operated by Dublin City Council.

The west and north-eastern part of the park are used intensively for sporting and recreational activities, with 35 playing pitches (football, rugby, GAA – used by Raheny United, Clontarf GAA, Raheny GAA, North Dublin Softball Club, etc.), 18 hard-surface tennis courts (some managed by Raheny Tennis Club) and par-3 pitch and putt golf course. An all-weather cricket crease is located in the middle of the playing fields. There are four boules (pétanque) courts and a remote-controlled model car racing track. Various tracks and pathways criss-cross the park and these, as well as the rather grand Main Avenue, are popular with dog-walkers and joggers. A 5 km park run takes place through the park on Saturday mornings.

This part of the park also houses the Millennium Arboretum, a 16 acre plot between the Main Avenue and St. Anne's housing estate. It was planted with over 1,000 specimen trees by Dublin City Council in association with the Tree Council of Ireland to commemorate Dublin's Millennium Year in 1988.

The central and eastern parts of the park make up the core of the historic estate's original parkland. The walled Clocktower Gardens located near The Mound (the site of St. Anne's House) include the 19th century clocktower, physic garden and Chinese gardens, while walled public allotments lie between these and the golf course, on the site of St. Anne's former owner, Bishop Plunkett's, fruit garden. A dedicated fenced dog park allows dog-owners to let their pets walk off-lead and there is a well-equipped playground for children.

The City Council's Central Nurseries, behind Clocktower Gardens, produce over 600,000 seasonal bedding plants for planting in other parks owned and maintained by the Council and planters located on city centre streets.

In 1975 the Corporation, with the help of Clontarf Horticultural Society, opened St. Anne's Rose Garden, a 6-acre oval garden that is home to more than 20,000 rose plants including over 200 different varieties and cultivars. Since 1981, the Rose Garden has hosted prestigious annual International Rose Trials, which have evolved to encompass a popular Rose Festival in July. St. Anne's has a long association with heritage rose varieties, dating back to the Ardilaun's gardener, Andrew Campbell's, discovery of 'Souvenir de Malmaison' on the estate. The Rose Gardens were extensively refurbished in recent years.

To the east of the Rose Garden is an elaborate Victorian redbrick stables, built in 1885 and known as The Red Stables. A protected structure, it was used by the City Art Office as artists' studios for several years following its renovation in the early 2000s, and now includes a small exhibition space used by local groups, a workshop room and popular café called Olive's Room. A food market takes place at The Red Stables every Saturday.

ST. ANNE'S PARK – HISTORY

The area between Raheny and Clontarf consists of naturally raised flat lands sitting above sea level. The steep slope between these two levels forms the eastern boundary of St. Anne's Park and was part of the old sea cliff before the development of Bull Island. The raised coastal land was mostly meadow and arable pastureland well into the 1800s, and known for producing "excellent crops of wheat". The northern suburbs of Dublin were slow to develop, with coastline running south to Ballybough and North Strand. Until Annesley Bridge was built in 1797 the only access to the north-east of Dublin Bay was over the Tolka River at Ballybough Bridge, so the area retained its rural character.

In the 18th century the lands of St. Anne's, in the townlands of Blackbush and Heronstown, lay between the fishing sheds at Clontarf and open countryside. They belonged to John Vernon of Clontarf Castle, one of the two main landowners in the area. In 1747 he is recorded as leasing 29 Irish acres to Paul Hale. By 1814 the lease had passed to Hale's grandson, Sergeant-at-Law John Ball, who built the first house, known as Thornhill, on the estate.

The Guinness family's association with St. Anne's dates from 1835, when Arthur Lee Guinness and Benjamin Lee Guinness (grandsons of Arthur Guinness, founder of the Guinness brewery) bought Thornhill estate. The deed map shows a walled garden to the east and north-east of Thornhill House, and the parkland surrounding it began its transformation into a naturalistic English landscape garden in the fashion of the time.

Soon after the brothers acquired the estate they changed the name of both it and the main house to St. Anne's, after the holy well located near the Naniken River near the northern boundary of the estate. St. Anne's well is one of two associated with the Christian foundation of Raheny, and it may be the same well previously associated with Anu, the hypothetical mother goddess of the Tuatha Dé Danann.

In late 1836/early 1837 the Guinneses carried out work on the original house, enlarging and transforming it into an "odd-shaped Italian style house with an unusual observation tower on the roof". In 1838, Arthur Lee sold his share of the estate to Benjamin Lee on the occasion of the latter's marriage, and the landscaping of the grounds began in earnest around this time. Terraced walkways were installed along the edge of the sea cliffs and Benjamin Lee acquired adjacent lands to the north, west and south throughout the 1840s and 50s. Romantic naturalistic walks were created through the river glen, connecting with a series of bridges and ten follies which have survived to the present day.

A former MP and antiquary with an interest in the ancient monuments of Ireland and classical Rome, Benjamin Lee was keen to embellish his estate and its view of Dublin Bay, reminiscent of that at Naples, with appropriate Italianate features.

He ordered the construction of a number of rustic and Italian-influenced follies to complement St. Anne's medieval well. These include several grottoes, caves and archways; a rockwork feature; bridge with mock-hermitage; a Herculanean Temple; a sham ruin (the Annie Lee Tower & Bridge); a shell house; yew circle with fountain; and a Roman Tower ("The Tomb of the Julii", which was relocated from the roof of the main house in the 1870s). At one time the jaw bones of a whale were installed as a feature archway spanning the river. Benjamin Lee also created a yew walk featuring castellated hedging, a nymphaeum with Italian statuary, and an enclosed formal garden next to the house, in Dutch or Italianate style. The clock tower was built in 1850 and a very large

conservatory was built as an extension to the house, constructed between 1843 and 1867. At this time the surrounding parklands were characterised by flat, open grass grounds planted with scattered mature trees.

Around 1854 the commission site was acquired by the Guinnesses and became part of the estate. Prior to this a small village, Blackbush, had been located there. It is shown on the Ordnance Survey Map of 1837 and the accompanying OS Name Book describes it as "a small village of about 15 mud huts", likely very primitive. In 1845 there were 21 houses on the site, but three years later all but one were gone, likely cleared away by John Vernon, who had previously removed the Clontarf Sheds.

Sir Edward Arthur Guinness, later Lord Ardilaun, inherited St. Anne's Estate in 1868. He married Lady Olivia Hedges-White of Bantry House, Co. Cork in 1871. During his lifetime the Ardilauns vastly increased the size of the estate, transforming it a just reflection of the couple's status and wealth; it was just one-fifth of its ultimate size when Ardilaun inherited it. He also owned several estates in the west of Ireland, one being Ashford Castle.

In the early 1870s Lord Ardilaun acquired vast tracts of land to the north and west of the house, with St. Anne's stretching as far as Raheny village. Intense redesign and reconstruction work took place. The house was completely remodelled to the Italian Renaissance design of the architect J.F. Fuller and the walled flower gardens replanted in a formal French chateau style popular in the 17th century and favoured by the Francophile Ardilauns, who were also keen plants-people. They worked closely with their Scottish head gardener, Andrew Campbell, and in addition to various eclectic Victorian garden projects laid out some of the park's best-known features, among them the Main Avenue leading from the site of the house to Sybil Hill Road and the *grand allées* that radiated from the house. These were flanked with belts of evergreen Holm oak and Austrian pine to provide shelter from coastal winds.

Lady Ardilaun had never been overly fond of St. Anne's House, and following Lord Ardilaun's death in 1915 spent less and less time there. The couple had no children, so upon her death in 1925 the estate was inherited by Bishop Plunkett, Lord Ardilaun's nephew and grandson of Benjamin Lee Guinness. By 1932 he had decided that he could no longer maintain such a large estate, and in 1939 Dublin Corporation bought the house and 445 acres for £55,000 under a compulsory Purchase Order. An auction of Lady Ardilaun's period furniture, paintings, books and silver was held and the contents of the house sold off. Bishop Plunkett retained the adjacent Sybil Hill house with 30 acres; this later became the site of St. Paul's College, Raheny.

During World War II and The Emergency, the Corporation grew food crops on the estate in an attempt to relieve the food crisis in the city, and encouraged local residents to grow vegetables in allotment gardens there. In 1943, following years of neglect, the main residence of St. Anne's, known as "The Mansion", was destroyed by fire while being used as a store by the Local Defence Force. The burnt-out ruins of the once-grand house remained until 1968, when the site was cleared by the Corporation. Its location is still visible in the form of The Mound, an earthen bank that lies at the end of the Main Avenue. Of the land purchased from Bishop Plunkett over 80 hectares (200 acres) was developed for public housing in the mid-20th century around Harmonstown, Killester and Raheny, with the central historic portion retained as public parkland and playing fields.