


<p>Address Gate Screen and railings at Colenso Parade Botanic Gardens Belfast BT9 5AN</p>	<p>HB Ref No HB26/27/105 E</p> 
<p>Extent of Listing Gates, pillars and railings</p>	
<p>Date of Construction 1920 - 1939</p>	
<p>Townland Malone Lower</p>	
<p>Current Building Use Gates/ Screens/ Lodges</p>	
<p>Principal Former Use Gates/ Screens/ Lodges</p>	

Conservation Area	Yes	Survey 1	Not_Listed	OS Map No	147/1
Industrial Archaeology	No	HED Evaluation	B2	IG Ref	J3364 7237
Vernacular		Date of Listing	26/03/2024	IHR No	
Thatched	No	Date of Delisting		HGI Ref	AN-101
Monument	No			SMR No	
Area of Townscape Character	No				
Local Landscape Policy Area	Yes				
Historic Gardens Inventory	Yes				
Vacant	N/A				
Derelict	No				

Owner Category

Building Information

Exterior Description and Setting

Located at the northern end of Colenso Parade, the gates afford direct access into Botanic Gardens from the brick terraces of Stranmillis. Orientated on a north south axis and comprising of a pair of wrought iron carriage gates both flanked by tall, square piers with stone quoins and brick infill. The gate pillars have flat topped projecting, moulded cornice and copings. Erected in 1934, having replaced an earlier wooden structure, the gates and adjoining railings are original and considered as a rare survival of decorative pre-war ironwork.

Framed by the pillars the metal gates are composed of elegant vertical metal uprights with pointed tips, interspersed at the lower-level section with intermediate uprights of a matching style. Each gate has two

inset panels of simple scrolled wrought iron work. The top profile of each gate has a reduced central section defined with a horizontal transom bar, on top of which is positioned an upward orientated scroll, terminating in an elevated end section which is mirrored on the other gate creating a harmonious arrangement when the gates are in the closed position.

SETTING: The gate screen stands on a north south axis at the northern end of Colenso Parade with flanked with a short section of open railings to the west and an extensive length of similar railing, at right angles, orientated to the south and defining the eastern border of Colenso Prade.

Interior Description

N/A

Architects

Historical Information

The entrance gate screen to Botanic Gardens at the north end of Colenso Parade was erected in 1934, replacing an earlier wooden structure. The gates and adjoining railings in both directions are original and also date from this period. Although the date of some stretches of railing surrounding the park is uncertain, the Colenso Parade gate screen and railings are most likely an unusual survival of decorative pre-war ironwork within the park.

Belfast Botanic Gardens were laid out in the wake of a late 18th and early 19th century upsurge in interest in botany, horticulture and gardening that led to the establishment of botanic gardens in Britain and Ireland. Botanic gardens had been established in Dublin at Glasnevin (1796) and at Ballsbridge (Trinity College, 1806), with the Royal Cork Institution Botanic Garden opening in 1809. Botanic gardens differed from gardens or arboreturns constructed solely on aesthetic principles, in that they existed to study and provide instruction in the care and classification of plants, and in horticulture and silviculture. They also served as a show piece for specimens brought back by colonial explorers. The gardens at Glasnevin and Belfast are the only botanic gardens in Ireland from this period to have survived in anything like their original form, although some researchers do not classify Belfast as a 'true' botanic garden, as plant collections were not maintained on site.

In February 1827, the Belfast Botanic and Horticultural Society formed under the presidency of the Marquis of Donegall and resolved to lay out a Botanic and Horticultural Garden in Belfast. On 1st May 1829, a lease was signed on a 14-acre site at the junction of Malone and Stranmillis Roads. Funds to establish the gardens were raised through the issuing of shares supplemented by loans and by the end of May 1829, a large number of shrubs and trees had been planted. Admission was charged to the gardens after 1830 for non-members of the Society. For a short period, after 1865, funds were raised in order to allow working people to be admitted free on Saturday afternoons and employers were encouraged to buy free tickets for their employees, but these schemes lapsed when Ormeau opened as a free public park in 1871. Entry to Botanic Gardens was, therefore, generally by ticket until the gardens were taken over by the Corporation in 1895, and the number of access points to the gardens was restricted in order to control revenue.

The first edition OS map of 1832-3 captions the 'Botanic Gardens' within a landscape of fields and country houses, approximately a mile outside the town of Belfast. Tree lined paths are shown, following roughly the same layout as today, and two ponds towards the SE end, the lower of which was drained in the 1930s. The former upper pond is now the location of a Japanese sunken garden. Initially there was only one main entrance to the gardens, although the gardens could also be entered along a pathway adjacent to Friars Bush graveyard. Adjacent to the main entrance driveway a small structure, possibly a lodge, is shown, but this was soon replaced by a larger entrance building. A Pinetum was established in 1838, to the SE of the main entrance and by 1851 displayed over 170 species of conifers. Adjacent to the pinetum a collection of deciduous and evergreen oaks was planted, some trees from both collections remaining in the park to the present day.

In the early years the gardens were surrounded with a nine-foot wooden fence, the breaking of which was a continual problem. The construction of a wall between the gardens and Friar's Bush was agreed with the trustees of the burial ground in 1829. Today the park is bounded by metal railings along most of its perimeter.

The distinctive early-Victorian Palm House, also initially known as the conservatory, was designed by Sir Charles Lanyon and partially executed by Richard Turner of Dublin, a pioneer in the use of curved iron ribs and curved glass. The Palm House is one of the earliest surviving examples of curvilinear cast and wrought ironwork, pre-dating Glasnevin and Kew. Turner was engaged as contractor between 1839 and 1840, constructing only the wings of Lanyon's design, the west wing opening as a cool house and the east wing as a tropical house. In 1840, the Society and Gardens received the title of Royal from Queen Victoria, at the instigation of the Marquis of Donegall.

As Turner subsequently became heavily involved in other projects, Charles Denoon Young (1822-1887), ironworker of Edinburgh, also responsible for the Dublin Exhibition Building (1853) and the Kensington Gore Museum of Science and Art (1856), was engaged to complete Lanyon's original design for the centre house, with the addition of a dome, some years after the wings were built. The dome, constructed between 1852 and 1853, shows the influence of Turner's Palm House at Kew which had been completed five years earlier and was glazed by Messrs. H McKendry & Co of Waring Street using Hartley's patent rolled plate glass.

The second edition map of 1858 captions the 'Royal Botanic Gardens' now adjacent to the 'Queen's College' (completed 1849). The College was constructed on grounds adjoining the northern boundary of the gardens and was one of several public buildings to fill the surrounding area in the mid-1800s, the gardens gradually becoming surrounded by the rapid outward expansion of the town. The then newly completed conservatory was accessed from the main entrance at University Road, where patrons entered the gardens through an entrance building constructed between 1832 and 1858. A second subsidiary entrance to the SW gave access to the curator's house and a promenade at the SE corner led to the tidal banks of the Lagan. As the area to the NE of the gardens (formerly known as the 'Plains') began to be developed for housing, a second lodge (built 1865 and extended to the rear before 1902) and gate screen were built at a new Botanic Avenue entrance to the park at a cost of £200. Gates costing £75 were put up as a gift of Robert Corry, who was the main developer of housing in the Plains area.

In 1877, the then garden foreman, Charles McKimm, was appointed curator, remaining in the post until his death in 1907. Already projected at the time of McKimm's appointment was a new gate lodge to the gardens, replacing the earlier entrance building. The architect was William Batt (d.1910), who conducted a 'vigorous practice in the High Victorian style' (Brett) and designed numerous Belfast churches and villas, as well as Ballynafeigh and Clifton Street Orange Halls, was Construction was completed in April 1878, the lodge containing public toilets and 'commodious' living accommodation for the gatekeeper. Carving on the lodge and gate piers was by Alexander Stevens, sculptor of Chichester Street, who was active in the 1870s and is also known to have executed carving on the Theatre Royal and on Fitzroy Presbyterian church. The contractors for the lodge and gate screen were Messrs. Dixon & Co and the cost was £1,300 including the gates.

McKimm's next major building project was to oversee the construction of a Fernery (now known as the Tropical Ravine and also formerly known as the 'Intermediate House' or the Glen) on the site of a former Orchid House and propagating house. Construction took place between 1887 and 1889, largely carried out by McKimm and his gardeners. The fernery, a building of stone walls and a glazed roof enclosing a sunken ravine, was initially roughly half its present length.

Raising money to maintain the gardens was a continual problem which the Society addressed with regular garden fetes and other events, featuring numerous balloon ascents (to facilitate which, a gas pipeline was installed in the main lawn), archery, boats on the Lagan, dancing and band music, fireworks displays, military tournaments, flower shows and on at least one occasion a 'submarine explosion' in one of the ponds. Notable events included a tightrope display by Mr Blondin, the first man to walk across the Niagara Falls on a tightrope and Herr Holtum the 'Cannon King' who could catch a cannon ball fired towards him. Political meetings were another regular occurrence, the largest being the Ulster Unionist Convention in 1892 which attracted a crowd estimated at 300,000. Entry and/or hire fees were charged for these events which helped to raise money to maintain the gardens and for new buildings.

Belfast Corporation took over the gardens in 1895, renaming it the Belfast Botanic Gardens Park and opening it free to the public from 1st January of that year. Following a programme of restoration to the palm house, the Corporation extended the Ravine, under McKimm's supervision, providing a heated lily pond and separating the house into tropical and temperate areas. The new fernery, double the length of

the original structure and brick-built with a lantern ridge, was opened in 1902. No architect for the new building is revealed in contemporary sources, but Larmour speculates that the Dutch gable at the E elevation may be the design of William Batt.

A site for the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery within the garden was reserved in 1912 and the new museum was opened in 1929 with an extension added (completed 1972) that required the former curator's house (built 1844) to be demolished. Images of the museum shortly after opening show a low wall and railings that had been built between the museum and the main entrance to the park, replacing the wall of 1887. The museum appears to have retained to the present day its original pre-war gates and railings at the Stranmillis Road entrance.

Once the park passed into the ownership of the Corporation and became a free public amenity and as the area around the gardens became developed with housing and the park was extended westwards and southwards, several new entrances were opened up. The area to the SW of the gardens remained relatively free of development until c1900 when a 'ladder' of streets was set out to the E of Stranmillis Road, shown on the large-scale map of 1902. At this stage, building had commenced at the western side of the ladder but no development had yet commenced in Colenso 'Street', which formed a boundary to the ladder at the NE. By 1920 (large-scale map) all the houses presently facing onto Colenso Parade were in place, and an entrance had been provided into Botanic Gardens in the location of the present gate-screen. This was a wooden structure, most likely similar to one that was provided at the Agincourt Avenue entrance to the gardens (now Botanic Court) and perhaps constructed at the same time (wooden gates were built at the Agincourt Avenue entrance c1910 and replaced by stone piers and iron gates in 1925). The area of park between Colenso Parade and the former boundary of the Gardens was acquired after a resolution by Belfast Council in November 1903 to lease an additional c3 acres 'for the use and enjoyment of the persons inhabiting the city of Belfast'. This area was laid out in parallel walkways (this layout survives), initially planted with roses and known as a 'rosary', and in the early 1930s replanted as wide herbaceous borders.

The present gate screen was completed in January 1934, replacing the 'old wooden structure' and an image of the new piers and gates appears in the Belfast Newsletter of 23rd January. This provides confirmatory evidence that the gates and railings present at the site today are not replacements and are original to the 1934 structure. They are therefore most likely unusual survivals of pre-war ironwork, the gates and railings at the other three main entrances to the park having fallen foul of the drive to strip out metal as a contribution to the war effort. An advertisement in the Northern Whig of April 1933 invites tenders for 'the supply and erection of about 385 linear yards of Iron Railing 6ft 9in high, together with Ornamental Gates and Gate Piers &c for Botanic Gardens Park' and most likely refers to the gates and railings at Colenso Parade. The plans and specifications were to be viewed in the Engineering Section of the City Surveyor's Department which may indicate that the design for the piers was produced by a Civil Engineer in the employment of Belfast Corporation.

The Colenso Parade entrance was one of three new entrances from this period, two at least of which used identical designs for gates and piers (no information survives regarding the third entrance). In the 1920s and 30s further land was acquired to the south of the park, including 12 acres alongside the River Lagan, formerly laid out in allotments. A road, Stranmillis Embankment, was constructed in the early 1930s along the W bank of the Lagan, bordering these new parklands. In February 1932, the Belfast Newsletter reported that 'tall iron railings' were being erected to enclose the area 'from the high ground at the Stranmillis roadside to the footpath along the embankment roadway which is nearing completion'. Two new entrances to the park along Stranmillis Embankment were created around the time of these works, one opposite King's Bridge and the other at the location of the present-day children's playground. Neither of these two gate screens has survived but an image of the King's Bridge entrance gate screen shortly after completion and prior to the putting up of adjacent railings, was published in the Northern Whig in May 1932. This image shows identical piers and gates to those that would be constructed 18 months later at Colenso Parade.

An image held by the NMNI, dated 1947, shows that the railings between the University Road entrance and the museum had been removed by that date, as had the original gates to the park, and these had been replaced with plain wooden gates. The original gates had most likely been removed as a contribution to the war effort, a similar fate probably befalling the original gates at the Botanic Avenue and Botanic Court entrances. The drive to collect ironwork had been of great propaganda value during WW2 but it is now thought that only about a quarter of iron collected in the UK was used for munitions

and the majority was dumped. As late as June 1954, the gates and railings had still not been replaced, and complaints were made in the newspapers about young people accessing the park out of hours and causing damage.

The wooden gates to the main entrance were eventually replaced with relatively plain iron gates, visible in television footage of 1965, and possibly re-used as the basis of the present-day gates (BBC Rewind – this footage also shows detail of the original wrought iron gates to the gate lodge archways).

In the early 1960s, Queen's University reached an agreement with the Council to exchange their athletic fields in the south of Belfast, Cherryvale, for part of Botanic Gardens. Queens used the new acquisition to build a PE centre which was initially used as part of the 'Ulster '71' exhibition to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Stormont parliament. Road widening measures were also undertaken around this time and King's bridge was rebuilt (originally built in 1911, substructure re-built 1973 when the Governor's Bridge was added as an additional crossing to the Lagan to form a one-way system). As a consequence of these events, new fencing and gates were erected along the embankment, which is most likely when the two gate screens along Stranmillis embankment were demolished, leaving the Colenso Parade entrance as the only remaining gate screen that dates from the park's expansion in the early decades of the 20th century.

After being threatened with demolition at around this time, the Palm House benefitted from a major restoration programme in the late 1970s including ironwork cleaning, preservation and replacement where necessary. The Tropical Ravine was soon included in the programme, both buildings being completed simultaneously in May 1983. The Tropical Ravine underwent a further £3.8 million renovation project between 2016 and 2018.

In the late 1980s, a Dept of Environment scheme was launched to upgrade the streetscape within the Queen's Conservation Area. Work on the entrance to Botanic Gardens was ongoing in June 1989 and it appears likely that the remodelled gates at the University Road entrance were installed at this time. The new gates with overthrow bearing the name 'Botanic Gardens' in art nouveau style lettering are visible in a photo dating from 1990/1 (NLI collection).

The gardens have gained additional acreage several times as outlined above, however the layout of the original site acquired in 1829 has remained largely unaltered from the 1840s. Although various features have come and gone, elements such as the flower beds shown in the front of the Palm House on the large-scale map of 1873, the open lawn at the centre of the park and some original trees remain in place today. The park remains heavily used for leisure and as a thoroughfare, and the Colenso Parade entrance continues to provide an important access point for residents of the Stranmillis 'ladder' while signifying the increasing permeability of the park as it changed from private to public space.

References:

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7. Northern Whig, 23rd May 1840
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50. Register of Parks, Gardens and Demesnes of Special Historic Interest in Northern Ireland (2022) Historic Environment Division Publication
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Criteria for Listing

NB: In March 2011, revised criteria were published as Annex C of Planning Policy Statement 6. These added extra criteria with the aim of improving clarity in regard to the Department's explanation of historic interest. For records evaluated in advance of this, therefore, not all of these criteria would have been considered. The criteria used prior to 2011 are published on the Department's website under 'listing criteria'.

Architectural Interest

- A. Style
- B. Proportion
- C. Ornamentation
- J. Setting

Historical Interest

- R. Age
- S. Authenticity
- Y. Social, Cultural or Economic Importance
- X. Local Interest

Evaluation

Located at the northern end of Colenso Parade, the gates afford direct access into Botanic Gardens from the brick terraces of Stranmillis.

The area of park between Colenso Parade and the former boundary of the Gardens was acquired after a resolution by Belfast Council in November 1903 to lease an additional c3 acres 'for the use and enjoyment of the persons inhabiting the city of Belfast'. This area was laid out in parallel walkways (this

layout survives), initially planted with roses and in the early 1930s replanted as wide herbaceous borders.

The Colenso Parade entrance was one of three new entrances from this period, two at least of which used identical designs for gates and piers. The gate screen is well proportioned comprising a set of stone pillars with original gates which form an integral part of Botanic Gardens parkland. Although the date of some stretches of railing surrounding the park is uncertain, the Colenso Parade gate screen and railings are most likely an unusual survival of decorative pre-war ironwork within the park. Orientated on a north south axis and comprising of a pair of wrought iron carriage gates both flanked by tall, square piers with stone quoins and brick infill, the gate pillars have flat topped projecting, moulded cornice and copings. Erected in 1934, having replaced an earlier wooden structure, the gates and adjoining railings are original and considered as a rare survival of decorative pre-war ironwork.

Framed by the pillars the metal gates are composed of elegant vertical metal uprights with pointed tips, interspersed at the lower-level section with intermediate uprights of a matching style. Each gate has two inset panels of simple scrolled wrought iron work. Top profile of each gate has a reduced central section defined with a horizontal transom bar, on top of which is positioned an upward orientated scroll, terminating in an elevated end section which is mirrored on the other gate creating a harmonious arrangement when the gates are in the closed position.

Replacements and Alterations

If inappropriate, Why?

General Comments

Monitoring Notes – since Date of Survey

Date of Survey 12/01/2024
