


<p>Address Gate Screen at University Road / Stranmillis Road Botanic Gardens Belfast BT7 1LP</p>	<p>HB Ref No HB26/27/105 F</p> 
<p>Extent of Listing gates and screen</p>	
<p>Date of Construction 1860 - 1879</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	J3346 7251
Vernacular	No	Date of Listing	26/03/2024	IHR No	
Thatched	No	Date of Delisting		HGI Ref	
Monument	No			SMR No	
Area of Townscape Character	No				
Local Landscape Policy Area	Yes				
Historic Gardens Inventory	No				
Vacant	N/A				
Derelict	No				

Owner Category

Building Information

Exterior Description and Setting

Located at the northwest approach into Botanic Gardens from University Road at the junction with Stranmillis Road. Orientated on an east west axis, the gateway comprises a central set of vehicular gates with pedestrian gates either side and flanked with low brick walls with stone copings on which is fixed wrought iron railings. Constructed in 1878 the original gates and railings were removed as a contribution to the war effort in WW2 and the present, sympathetically remodelled gates were installed c1989.

Facing West, the entrance is comprised of a pair of vehicular gates, with a single pedestrian gate to either side and flanked, either side with low level brick walling with heavy stone coping and surmounted

with railings matching those on the gateways. Natural cut stone piers with chamfered corners on a base plinth and surmounted with heavy pyramidal coping having sculptured finials to outer piers with central piers with exposed wiring for missing light fittings. Framed by pillars the metal gates are composed of elegant vertical metal uprights with gilded arrow pointed tips, interspersed at the lower-level section with intermediate uprights of a matching style. Top profile of each gate has an arc profile sweeping up to adjoining pier culminating in an elevated end section which is mirrored on the other gate and creates a balanced composition when the gates are in the closed position. Central gateway crowned with overthrow bearing the name 'Botanic Gardens' in art nouveau gilded style lettering.

SETTING: Located at the northwest corner of Botanic Gardens, the gate screen is flanked, either side with extensive open railings which enhance the setting. This defines the gate screen as a prominent entry point to Botanic Gardens.

Interior Description

N/A

Architects

Batt, William

Historical Information

The University Road entrance gate screen to Belfast Botanic Gardens was constructed in 1878 to designs by William Batt, carving to the capitals and finials being the work of noted local sculptor Alexander Stevens. The original gates and railings were removed as a contribution to the war effort in WW2 and the present, sympathetically remodelled, gates were installed c1989. The gate piers have been moved back three times (1887, c1925 and 1965) since they were originally built and are currently located approximately 30 feet E of their original position.

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 arboreta 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 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 of the conservatory, 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 initial design, by 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 exhibited at Belfast Industrial Exhibition in 1876. This original design shows a lodge which may have borne a passing resemblance to the existing lodge as it comprised a building with central entrance arches through which patrons passed to enter the gardens. However, the Society was forced, most likely for financial reasons, to curtail its ambitions and instructed Batt to prepare fresh plans on a reduced scale. Batt's amended design for a Venetian gothic lodge was realised and featured a clock tower (a clock was added to the tower c1881) finished with vane and finial of gilt wrought iron. Ornamental carving on the gate lodge took the forms of birds, flowers and plants such as passion flowers, grape vines, and water lilies. Construction was completed in April 1878, the lodge containing public toilets and 'commodious' living accommodation for the gatekeeper. The Society felt that the lodge and gates would form a 'most attractive feature of the gardens'. They were seen as a 'credit to the company and an ornament to the town' and it was hoped, would induce a much larger number of visitors 'to frequent these grounds and enjoy their beauties'.

The original ornamental wrought-iron gates 'of very superior design' were hung on 'heavy cut-stone piers' fitted with gilt iron gas standards and glass globes. The wrought iron work at the lodge including the gates was supplied by Messrs. Riddell & Co and the cut stone was 'of the best description from Dungannon quarries' – difficulties in getting the stone from the Dungannon quarries had delayed the construction of the lodge. Carving on the capitals of the gate piers is of anemones, primroses, lilies of the valley, pansies and hop blossom. The finials on the two outer piers were intended to resemble the Nile lily and convolvulus. 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.

The gate screen, which originally attached to the SW corner of the clock tower, was moved back several times after its initial construction. In 1887 a new front wall was added to the gardens, which was set back ten feet from the original line in order to allow for the widening of Stranmillis Road. The gate screen was also moved back about eight feet to the SE corner of the clock tower, 'so that the wall might finish with an easy curve at the gate pillar'. The main gate screen was moved back once again c1925, to a position adjoining the SE corner of the lodge.

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, firework 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 connecting 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.

As the area around the gardens became developed with housing, and the park was extended westwards and southwards, further entrances were opened up. At Agincourt Avenue (now Botanic Court), a wooden gate of c1910 was replaced with the present-day gate screen in 1925. Two entrances were opened along the newly built Stranmillis Embankment in 1932 and a gate screen was installed at Colenso Parade in 1934, replacing an earlier wooden structure.

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 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 wrought iron gates to the gate lodge archways, which replicated the design of the original main entrance gates).

Although the lodge itself was demolished in 1965, as it had become costly to maintain and no longer appealed to a mid-1960s aesthetic, the stone piers designed by Batt and erected in 1878 survive within the present-day gate screen. The only other survival within the park is a stone, carved with the name 'Royal Botanic Gardens' which has been incorporated into a modern brick wall at the Botanic Avenue entrance. The stone was originally built into the wall of the old gate lodge and is shown in images of the building above the right-hand entrance archway. Other parts of the lodge, namely the weathervane and the clock were distributed to members of the public, while the Ulster Museum recovered some of the stonework including a gargoyle and some of the bird and plant sculptures.

When the gate lodge was demolished, the gates and railings were 're-aligned' a third time to their present-day position, being moved back to give greater visibility for increasing vehicular traffic. They are now located approximately 30 feet E of their original position.

After being threatened with demolition, 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 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 original spherical lamps atop the inner piers were replaced, most likely at the same time as the gates, with lanterns in a traditional four-sided style. However, these lanterns have recently been removed (2024).

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 main entrance gate screen is among its earliest and most recognisable features.

References:

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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	Historical Interest
A. Style B. Proportion C. Ornamentation H-. Alterations detracting from building J. Setting	R. Age S. Authenticity V. Authorship X. Local Interest

Evaluation

The University Road entrance gate screen to Belfast Botanic Gardens was constructed in 1878 to designs by William Batt with carving to the capitals and finials being the work of noted local sculptor Alexander Stevens. The original gates and railings were removed as a contribution to the war effort in WW2 and the present, sympathetically remodelled, gates were installed c1989. The gate piers have

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The gate screen, despite not being on the original footprint as designed by Batt is an important remnant of his design and is among the most recognisable feature of the public park and is now heavily used for leisure and as a pedestrian thoroughfare. The high quality work of the Parks Department and the remodelling of the gates in the 1980s with the overthrow are statements of civic pride outlining the value of retention of the Batt ensemble with embellishments of overthrow etc following the remodelling of the Queen Mary Gardens at The Waterworks in the North of the City. The recent replacement and renewal of the cast metal lights complete the ensemble.

Replacements and Alterations

Appropriate

If inappropriate, Why?

Overthrow etc is a positive intervention by the Parks Department.

General Comments

Monitoring Notes – since Date of Survey

Date of Survey 12/01/2024
