Archive Fact Sheet: St. Stephen's Green, Iveagh House, Iveagh Gardens

St. Stephen's Green

St. Stephens Green developed in the 17th century, as part of the development of Dublin city centre beyond its medieval boundaries. Initial plans were laid out in 1664 and completion of the sides of the square was completed in the mid 1700s.

Although initially designed as a public space, by the turn of the 19th century, the space had become a private park, accessible only to keyholders, or residents of St. Stephen's Green itself.

In the 1860s, a campaign began in *The Dublin Builder* Ireland's leading architectural journal, to convert the park into a public facility worthy of a capital city. Arthur

Edward Guinness (later Lord Ardilaun) purchased the park in 1876 and in 1877, the 'St. Stephens' Green (Dublin) Act' was passed at Westminster to facilitate the reopening.

Sir Arthur Edward began remodelling the park and was personally responsible for much of the redesign. St. Stephen's Green was opened to the public, without ceremony, on 27th July 1880. A statue of Sir Arthur Edward by Thomas Farrell was erected in 1892 in his honour.

St. Stephen's Green is now managed by the Office of Public Works on behalf of the Irish State.

Iveagh House

GDB/GU08/0070

Iveagh House, located on the south side of St. Stephen's Green in Dublin, dates back to 1736. The earliest part of the structure was built as the 18th century town mansion of Bishop Clayton, designed in the newly fashionable Italian manner by Richard Castle, the leading architect of the era.

The original Richard Castle house was free-standing, three storeys high, with a basement, and three bays wide. To the left of the house, a carriageway led to the stables and coach-house at the rear, and to the right was a two-storeyed projection containing the end portions of the rooms overlooking the garden. The exterior four columned entrance portico was inspired by St. Paul's Church in London.

On the death of the Claytons, the house was purchased in turn by the Earl of Mountcashel; the Rt. Hon. John Philpot Curran; the Rt. Hon. Sir William McMahon; Charles Burton; Robert Beatty West, who sold the house to Sir Benjamin Lee Guinness in May 1856.

Sir Benjamin Lee Guinness extended the original Castle house, with the purchase of the next-door house, 81 St. Stephen's Green. The current façade of Portland stone was created at this time. On Sir Benjamin Lee's death, his son Edward Cecil Guinness (later Lord Iveagh) inherited the house and further extended the property. Edward Cecil engaged the architect, J.F. Fuller, who the Guinness family also engaged to carry out extensions and alterations to Farmleigh, Ashford Castle and St. Anne's in Clontarf.

Edward Cecil Guinness used Iveagh House as his principal town residence and used the house for entertaining. He commissioned a lavish ballroom, designed in the classical style by the Glasgow-born architect William Young, in 1896.

Rupert Guinness, the 2nd Lord Iveagh, continued to use the house on St. Stephen's Green until the 1930s, when he offered the house to the Irish State. Following its presentation to the State, the house was officially re-named Iveagh House.

Today, Iveagh House is occupied by the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Iveagh Gardens

The Iveagh Gardens lie on the south of St. Stephen's Green, between Earlsfort Terrace and Harcourt Street, surrounded on all four sides by houses.

The Gardens were initially created by Jack Scott, first Earl of Clonmel, as gardens to his newly built house of 1778 on Harcourt Street. In 1817, the gardens were leased and re-named Coburg Gardens and opened to the public.

In 1862, Sir Benjamin Lee Guinness co-founded the Dublin Exhibition Palace and Winter Garden Company, with the intention of 'providing a permanent exhibition of Irish arts and manufactures and also reading rooms, flower gardens, and a gas-lit winter garden, for public enjoyment'[1]. The Exhibition Palace was constructed on the site of the former Coburg Gardens, behind St. Stephen's Green south, which had been purchased by Sir Benjamin Lee. The Exhibition Palace was designed by Alfred G Jones. The Prince of Wales opened an International Exhibition of Arts and Industries in May 1865.

The Gardens were designed by Ninian Niven as an intermediate design between the 'French Formal' and the 'English Landscape' styles. They demonstrated the artistic skills of the landscape Architect of the mid 19th century and display a unique collection of landscape features which include Rustic Grotto's and Cascade, sunken formal panels of lawn with Fountain Centre Pieces, Wilderness, Woodlands, Maze, Rosarium, American Garden, Archery Grounds, Rockeries and Rooteries.

In 1870, Sir Benjamin Lee's sons, Edward Cecil Guinness (later Lord Iveagh) and Arthur Edward Guinness (later Lord Ardliaun) re-acquired the buildings and grounds from the Dublin Exhibition Palace Company. In 1872, the site was used for an Exhibition of Irish arts and manufactures, however, this was not a success and the gardens reverted to private ownership.

In 1883, Edward Cecil Guinness sold the exhibition buildings to the Commissioners of Public Works to be adapted to house the new Royal University, and the gardens remained the property of the Guinness family. The buildings were further adapted after the creation of University College, Dublin in 1908 and in 1918, the present façade to Earlsfort Terrace was erected to the designs of R.M. Butler.

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[1] Sheaff Nicholas, *Iveagh House*, 1978

Rupert Guinness, the 2nd Earl of Iveagh, presented the Iveagh Gardens to University College, Dublin in 1939, and in 1941, the Gardens were re-united with the college buildings of Earlsfort Terrace.

The Iveagh Gardens are now owned and maintained by the Office of Public Works on behalf of the Irish State. The conservation and restoration of the Gardens commenced in 1995 and to date most of the features have been restored.

Ref: 'Iveagh House' by Nicholas Sheaff, 1976