

Christ Church

Bernard Seymour Landscape Architects

After the cathedral refurbishment of the 1870's which coincided with a re-ordering of the surrounding streets, there was a considerable increase in the size of the cathedral grounds due to the removal of buildings on the southern side. The Open Spaces act of 1887 allowed the corporation to levy rates for the purchase and maintenance of public parks and secular and religious came together at Christchurch, co-operating in the renovation of the grounds. In 2017 they came together again as Dublin City Council and Christ Church Cathedral to upgrade the western portion of the grounds and reflect the sites new additional role as a prominent tourist destination and business.

Over time the grounds had more questionable "improvements" with Calpstone setts and plantings for low maintenance as well as a serious drainage issue in the cloister garth which flooded periodically. The carriage gates to the west had long been set into concrete and an opportunity to re -open and repair them became evident with the potential to gather a tour group more safely off the narrow pavement at Christchurch Place for orientation before visiting the cathedral. A cantilevered platform was designed provide a new point of entry that is four-square on to the Cloister Garth and offers a full view of the south façade of the cathedral and Synod Hall. Composed of a Weathering Steel floor, it introduces a strong contrasting entrance threshold, while the expression of its glazed balustrade is distinct yet unobtrusive. This connects obliquely to an existing series of steps and terraces to the west which were widened, repaved and planted leading down to the newly paved cloister garth.

To deal with the ancient damaged drainage, we engaged with engineers to repair the system and then set about paving with strict archaeological constraints, the site being a National Monument.

Cut Irish limestone slabs used in the cloister area with a labyrinth derived from Chartres incised into the slabs, not merely as decoration but as a meditative walk of preparation before entering the cathedral (or an entertaining trot for children). Victorian tile motifs from inside the cathedral inform the drainage channels, partnered with a suite of patinated details for handrails, bollards and trims. The seats are designed by us to be one quarter larger than usual, to respond to their edge context and these are cantilevered in places from within the flowerbeds (free of gravity like Natalia Osipova) and to permit planting underneath.

The planting contains many plants that are used by the floral guild for church decoration and some tender and exotic species that benefit from a degree of benevolent microclimatic conditions. Ancient China roses, Sciadopitys, Trochodendron and old varieties of Paeony and garden pinks are used alongside plants chosen for year round nectar production. A new lighting system flatters the planting and throws the channels of the labyrinth into relief and can be enjoyed by the passer by as well as the visitor.

This phase of the works completed in November 2019.



Christ Church Grounds 2016



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