

ULSTER-SCOTS HERITAGE

BROOKE PARK

A LEGACY OF PRESBYTERIANS WHO CARED FOR THE CHILDREN OF OUR CITY

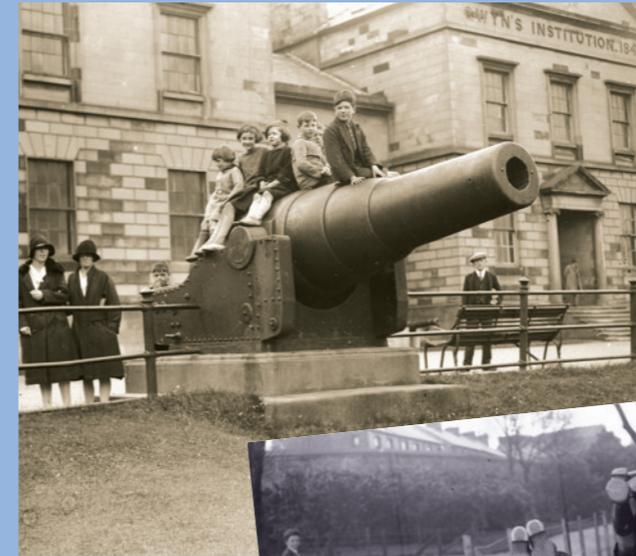
When James Hood Brooke of Brookhill drew up his will in April 1865 he included in it provision for the purchase of lands 'for a public park ... for the use, enjoyment and recreation of the citizens of Londonderry forever'. It was his particular wish that the park should be a place of relaxation for the working man on Sundays.

His sister Margaret shared his vision and when she died in 1884 the residue of her estate was bequeathed to the Brooke trustees in furtherance of a 'Peoples Park in or near Londonderry'. In their concern to provide a recreational space for the city's workers the actions of the Brookes were characteristic of Victorian philanthropy.

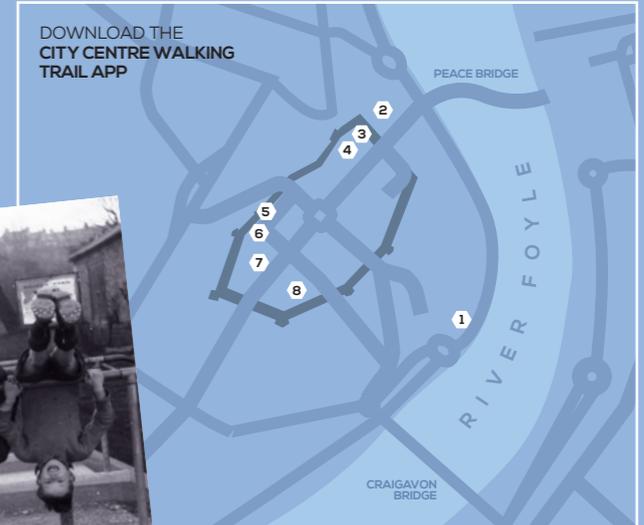
Eventually, the site settled upon by the Brooke trustees as a suitable location for the park was the grounds of Gwyn's Charitable Institute. It had been opened as an orphanage for boys in 1840 as a result of a generous bequest by John Gwyn, a wealthy merchant in Derry. The leading Scottish landscape gardener Charles H.J. Smith, a leading member of the Horticultural Society of Edinburgh, had been responsible for the layout of the grounds of the Institute, creating, as he put it himself, a 'miniature Botanic garden' of around 12 acres.

These grounds were purchased by the Brooke trustees for £13,000 with the Honourable the Irish Society donating £6,000. The park, named after the Brookes, officially opened in 1901. From the start, the municipal authorities – initially Londonderry Corporation and now Derry City Council – have been responsible for its maintenance. One of the most prominent features of the park is the statue of Sir Robert Ferguson, who died in 1860 having been MP for the city for the previous three decades. The statue was moved here from the Diamond in 1927.

The new refurbishment of Brooke Park includes an area on the site of Gwyn's orphanage, named 'Gwyn's Terrace and Gardens' as a memorial to the Presbyterian philanthropist who did so much for the children of our city.



This Project is supported by the Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) Ulster-Scots Academy
 Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
www.dcalni.gov.uk



Illustrations from top

Three photographs of Brooke Park showing Gwyn's Institution, circa 1900
 Bigger & McDonald collection. Courtesy of LibrariesNI

The distinctive plane tree which was provided for Brooke Park by the Botanic Gardens of Edinburgh in 1851
 Photograph courtesy of Robert Campbell

John Gwyn's grave at Muff Parish Church
 Photograph courtesy of Robert Campbell

JOHN GWYN (1755-1829)

Born at Drumskillen near Muff, County Donegal, John Gwyn was raised as a member of the Church of Ireland but later became Presbyterian. The inscription on his gravestone includes this statement: '... Gwyn's Institution is the best monument of its benevolent founder. As long as it stands to diffuse the light of education his name will be honoured and his memory blessed ...'

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