

TRAIL

THE PUBLIC GARDEN OF SAINT-OMER



VILLES
& PAYS
D'ART &
D'HISTOIRE

AN EXTRAORDINARY GARDEN

Since the Middle Ages, the art of creating gardens has fluctuated between enhancing the authenticity and wildness of nature and a more domesticated, designed and considered approach. A late 19th century landscaped park, the Saint-Omer public garden was designed according to these principles, while also taking advantage of the natural terrain.



THE OPPORTUNITIES OF AN ERA

After the 1870 war, the Saint-Omer fortifications, then obsolete, were declassified. It was not until around twenty years later that the town received authorisation to dismantle them.

When this work began in 1892, the local council took the initiative to keep part of the western front of the ramparts, since trees had grown there, to create a garden.

François Ernest Guinoiseau, manager of urban reconstruction project in Saint-Omer after the dismantling, was responsible for creating the garden. He followed the advice requested by the town from Lille's technicians: Mr Mongy (director of works) and Mr Saint-Léger (Head gardener). Begun in 1893, the development of the park continued for around ten years.

From 1932, the garden was protected as a listed site (under the French law of 1931). At this time, it was located between two plots of land retained by the army.

To the north was a military training area, which was handed over to the town after the Second World War, in order to build a new housing scheme. To the south there was a firing range, sold in 1959 to the town, who then built sporting facilities there in the 1960s (outdoor pool and sports trail). At that time, this land was attached to the public garden.

Originally, the garden entrance **1** had a gate, which now opens onto the park's alley. Nearby was the gardener's house, destroyed in 1942 by a bombing raid. After the war, this entrance was replaced by a monumental granite fountain (nicknamed "the giraffe" by the Saint-Omer people), which was demolished in the 1970s when the town wanted to improve access to the garden. This is when an underground passageway was dug under Boulevard Vauban and when the Bastion du Jambon staircase was built from the cathedral's enclosure **2**.

A GARDEN ENCOMPASSING BOTH TRADITION AND INNOVATION

In order to preserve its original character, the public garden was included in Saint-Omer's Remarkable Heritage Sites. The trees are listed and any cutting or felling must be approved by a Bâtiments de France architect. Originally designed to be discovered as you walk through it, it is made up of a wide variety of trees from the region: rowan, blackthorn, birch, whitebeam, ash, etc., as well as other remarkable species from the Far East or America that have acclimatised to northern temperatures. The whole garden constitutes the arboretum, identified by signs placed on the ground. You can observe a European beech tree at the park entrance and a magnificent ginkgo biloba, originating from Asia. Further on, some cedars of Lebanon, a paulownia, giant redwoods...

The development of biodiversity in the garden is a central concern of the management plan currently being drawn up. Based on a public consultation completed in 2020, it will be the tool to effectively address the future of the public garden. It intends to ensure the adaptation of this area to climate change and maintain its remarkable tree heritage. The redevelopment of the animal park is also being considered. The management plan also responds to concerns related to the new expectations of the population. In order to do this, it considers various issues such as the repair of paths and accessibility, the upgrading of entrances and the development of signposting, as well as the upgrading of the built heritage and the development of sports trails.

These actions are essential to maintain the increasingly varied fauna that can be seen in the trees and lawns (jays, woodpeckers, blue tits, rabbits, bats, etc.).



Such a large and diverse space is the result of more than a hundred years of constant work, in which tradition and know-how are passed on from gardener to gardener.

Currently, 4 people are working on the maintenance, mowing, animal care and development of the park. All 30,000 flowers are produced exclusively in the 500m² municipal greenhouses. The green spaces department ensures the sustainability of the garden, but also its development by planting new species. In this way, it contributes to making Saint-Omer's public garden one of the most beautiful and original landscaped parks in the north of France. In addition, in 2021, on the occasion of its 125 year anniversary, the Public Garden is receiving special attention. Not only have the bandstand and the fountain in the French garden been restored, all the street furniture (more than 100 benches and 70 litter bins) has also been renewed.

1: The western front of the fortifications before they were dismantled.
Artistic and historical album of the dismantling of the Saint-Omer fortifications, 1892-1893,
© BAPSO, inv. 49992

2: The entrance in the early 20th century and the troop of the 8th Infantry Regiment
© BAPSO, 43 Fi (Fonds Desceliers),
digitisation Carl Peterloff

3: The entrance around 1950: "The Giraffe"
© BAPSO, 40 Fi 1249

4: French formal Garden
© AUD

A SPACE SHAPED BY A WAY OF LIFE

THE SITE OF THE FORTIFICATIONS



In the 19th century, the proliferation of public gardens reflected a new bourgeois practice, seeking to reproduce the aristocratic model of the Ancien Régime. Designed as a real landscape park, from its creation the garden of Saint-Omer became a place for the inhabitants to stroll and enjoy their leisure time. It still has this function today.

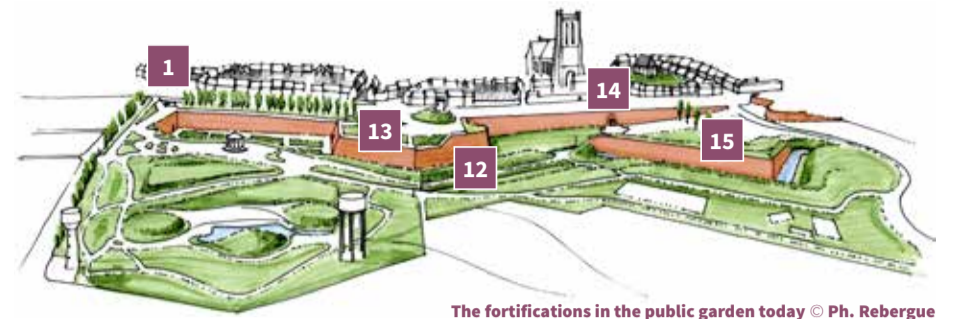
A French-style formal garden is laid out in the moat between the former Egmont Bastion (Count Lamoral d'Egmont was the Captain General of the army of Philip II of Spain) and that of Saint-Venant. It has the traditional layout of a "boulangerin" (from the English "bowling green", referring to the lawn), with lines of pruned shrubs, and a fountain in its centre **2**.

The staircase installed on the counterscarp leads to the esplanade laid out around the bandstand for festivities **6**. The bandstand was designed in 1896, with a cast iron roof on a stone base, some of which came from the old ramparts. It bears witness to the development of the art of urban street furniture, which flourished at the end of the 19th century. The National School of Music and Dance regularly gives concerts here.

Further on, are the colourful beds of the mosaiculture **5** (floral mosaics designed by the gardeners). It is also here that local personalities are celebrated. Busts of Louis Martel **3** (1813-1892) and Charles Jonnart **4** (1857-1927), politicians and statesmen from Saint-Omer, ministers, elected to the Departmental Council, French National Assembly and Senate, were inaugurated in the presence of politicians of the time.

Beyond, one enters the "English-style" garden, punctuated by a waterfall **7** and a pond dotted with little "turqueries" (duck shelters) with a rustic little reinforced concrete bridge crossing it. This area was created in 1898 by Etienne Peulabeuf d'Arras, who specialised in this type of work. Taking the bridge, you can access the animal park **9** and the bird house which enhances the walk through the arboretum.

5: Concert and walk in the public garden in the early 20th century.
© BAPSO, 43 Fi (Fonds Desceliers), digitisation Carl Peterolf



The fortifications in the public garden today © Ph. Rebergue

Under the vegetation and in the landscaping, the fortifications, or their footprints, are still visible...

As early as the 9th century, to resist Norman attacks, the first Audomarois dug a ditch and erected a wooden palisade to protect the Notre-Dame church. In the 10th century, the Count of Flanders had a motte built onto this first fortification. Following the rapid expansion of the town, several enclosure walls followed one after the another. Those built in the 13th century, which fossilised the urban settlement until the 19th century, were regularly remodelled and adapted to military developments. Thus, from the 15th century onwards, in response to the development of the use of the cannon, the semicircular towers were demolished to serve as artillery terraces. In the following century, Charles Quint had them replaced by pentagonal bastions which allowed for greater coverage of blind spots (for shooting) and also withstood the impact of cannonballs.

In the 17th century, as cannons had a greater range, the engineers increased the structures that extend out from the outer wall and bastions, separated by ditches. Beyond this were the glacis, a vast area of land that slopes gently outwards and on which the attackers are in the open.

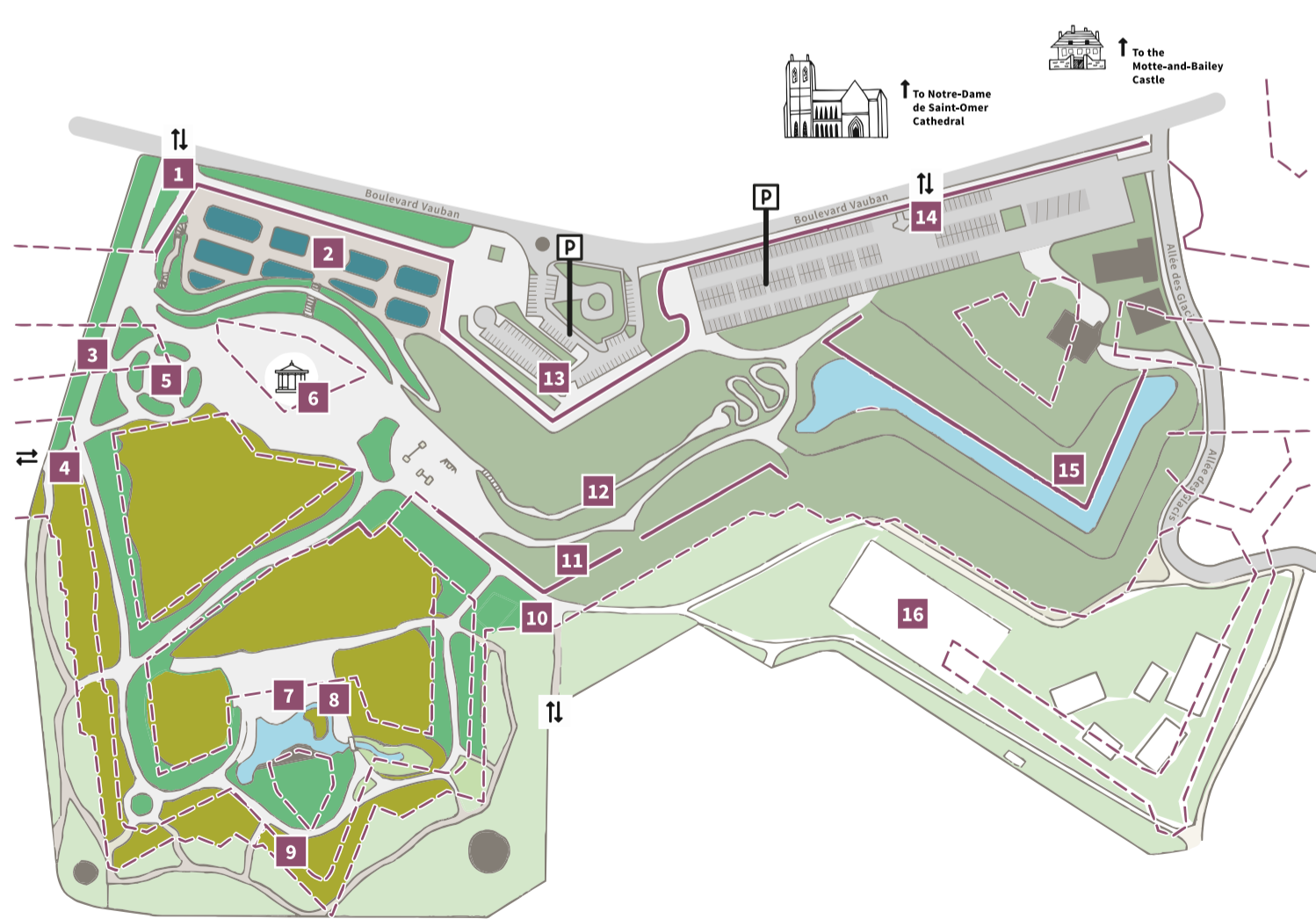
When the town was attached to France in 1678, Vauban made just a few adjustments to the architecture.

Walking through the French formal garden at the foot of the rampart that separates the garden from the town, the visitor discovers the bastion of Saint-Venant **13**, still fully preserved. Opposite stands the counterscarp, on land covered with vegetation. After walking along it, you can see, on the ground and in the wall of the rampart, the traces of the Jambon moineau **14** (whose staircase provides access to the cathedral). In front, a half-moon **15**, a structure extending out in the shape of a circumflex accent protected the wall and still has its brick corset and its ditch with water. Beyond, on the former glacis, sports facilities **16** have been built.

Returning to the English-style garden, the levels of a horned structure **8**, called the Fort des Croates, are still visible. The duck pond **7** lies between its two horns, and a small defensive structure supports the waterfall.

Thus, part of the arboretum is located in the former old ditch embankments and covered paths.

SAINT-OMER PUBLIC GARDEN



- 1** Main entrance
- 2** Fountain in the French formal Garden
- 3** Statue of Louis Martel
- 4** Statue of Charles Jonnart
- 5** Mosaïcures
- 6** Bandstand
- 7** Waterfall and duck pond
- 8** Horned structure
- 9** Animal park
- 10** Entrance gate
- 11** Covered path
- 12** Counterscarp
- 13** Saint-Venant Bastion
- 14** Passage du Jambon
- 15** Half-moon
- 16** Sports facilities

French formal Garden
 English-style Garden
 Arboretum
 Glacis

Remains of old fortifications
 Fortifications no longer standing
 Entrance/Exit
 Car park

Trail - The public garden of Saint-Omer

This "Trail" collection invites the visitor to stroll through a building, a neighbourhood, a city or an entire territory of the "Pays d'art et d'histoire", in order to uncover its historical, architectural, landscaped or archaeological heritage. Based on a plan or a map, this walk is marked out by historical, technical or artistic elements enabling the public to understand the interest of this unique heritage site.

Discover the public garden of Saint-Omer and the remains of the town's fortifications. As you stroll along the paths, you will learn more about the remarkable species planted in the garden and gain a better understanding of the different landscape environments that make up this green space.

Since 2014, the Pays de Saint-Omer Urban Planning and Development Agency has held the national designation "Pays d'Art et d'Histoire de Saint-Omer" awarded by the state, represented by the regional prefect. This designation qualifies territories, municipalities or groups of municipalities which, aware of the issues involved in the ownership of their architecture and heritage by the inhabitants, undertake an active approach to disseminate knowledge, and undertake mediation, cultural action and enhancement.

All year round, the Agency organises various events to encourage the exploration of the architectural and heritage riches of the local area by inhabitants, young and old, and by visitors, with the support of professional guide-lecturers.

Nearby, Beauvais, Boulogne-sur-Mer, Calais, Cambrai, Chantilly, Laon, Lille, Noyon, Roubaix, Saint-Quentin, Soissons and Tourcoing, which benefit from the Ville d'Art et d'Histoire designation; Amiens Métropole, Lens-Liévin, Pays de Senlis in Ermenonville and Santerre Haute-Somme benefit from the Pays d'Art et d'Histoire designation.

Find all our publications and our cultural programme:

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Bandstand © AUD