

# Symbolising the State— the iconography of O’Connell Street and environs after Independence (1922)

Yvonne Whelan

*Academy for Irish Cultural Heritages,  
University of Ulster, Magee Campus Derry*

## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the iconography of Dublin’s central thoroughfare, O’Connell Street and its immediate environs in the decades following the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922. It follows an earlier paper which examined the iconography of Sackville Street before Independence and turns the focus towards an analysis of the ways in which the street became a significant site for the cultural inscription of post-colonial national identity. It is argued that the erection of new monuments dedicated to the commemoration of the 1916 Rising, as well as the destruction of older imperial symbols, rendered visible the emergence of the newly independent Irish Free State. The paper charts this process of iconographical inscription but also argues that O’Connell Street as a totality has taken on greater symbolic significance than any of the monuments that line its centre. In conclusion the paper examines the contemporary iconography of the street and addresses the apparent transition from political sculpture to public art which has taken place in recent decades throughout the city.

**Key index words:** O’Connell Street, iconography, national identity, monuments.

## Introduction

*The great thoroughfare which the citizen of Dublin was accustomed to describe proudly “as the finest street in Europe” has been reduced to a smoking reproduction of the ruin wrought at Ypres by the mercilessness of the Hun. Elsewhere throughout the city streets have been devastated, centres of thriving industry have been placed in peril or ruined, a paralysis of work and commerce has been imposed, and the public confidence that is the life of trade and employment has received a staggering blow from which it will take almost a generation to recover”*

*(The Freeman’s Journal, 26<sup>th</sup> April - 5<sup>th</sup> May 1916).*

The Easter Rising began in April 1916, signalling the onset of several years of destruction, death and civic unrest, punctuated by the War of Independence and culminating in the Civil War. Once the fighting had ceased the administration of ‘Independent Ireland’ set about the business of political and economic development. Although the leaders of the first generation after Independence evoked an image of Irish society that was almost exclusively rural, various aspects of the urban landscape did play a significant role in marking the transition from the colonial to the post-colonial. Post-boxes were painted green covering over although not obliterating the Royal insignia of Victoria Regina or Edwardus Rex, while the new State Seal featured an old Irish Harp that was reputed to have belonged to Brian Boru who had been killed at the Battle of Clontarf in 1014. In later years a set of national stamps was issued and the national coinage was launched along with the State passport (see Kennedy, 1994). The Irish language also had an important role to play when, during de Valera’s administration (1932-

1948), Irish titles were used for State agencies in an effort to confront citizens with the visual presence of the language. In the Capital city meanwhile attempts were made to re-name streets, public monuments were erected and destroyed, while new planning initiatives were drawn up which sought to give expression to the city's new found status as Capital of the independent Free State. What were once the linchpins in both the visual expression of imperial rule and part of a strategy of resistance to the colonial other, became instead essential tools in supporting the ideology of the new regime in a manner than has been echoed in many other countries.

### Public statuary in Dublin after 1922

When the Free State came into existence Dublin's monumental landscape embodied the contested heritage of previous generations. The power of Dublin Corporation in the late nineteenth century, then a strongly nationalist body, to sanction the erection of monuments ensured that there was no shortage of nationalist heroes already in place on the streets of the new Capital. Indeed, O'Connell Street was almost entirely lined with such figures who stood in an uneasy juxtaposition with an earlier erected emblem of empire dedicated to Lord Nelson (Whelan, 2001). The Rising of 1916, coupled with the War of Independence and Civil War provided a host of new heroes to stand upon pedestals throughout the city and country. In their geography and iconography these monuments carved out a visible landscape of memory as a testament to the new political situation (Figure 1). Figures like Michael Collins, Arthur Griffith and later Kevin O'Higgins were commemorated in a cenotaph erected at the rear of Leinster House, sculptures of Countess Markievicz and Sean Heuston were unveiled in St Stephen's Green and the Phoenix Park respectively, while those who had been killed in the 1916 Rebellion were commemorated with a bronze statue of Cúchulainn erected in the General Post Office. Plans were also set in motion to honour heroes of earlier struggles like, for example, Thomas Davis, Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa and Theobald Wolfe Tone. While the commemoration of the 1916 rebellion provided much of the monumental impetus in the post-Independence period, these years were also marked by the gradual and *ad hoc* weeding out of the earlier erected statues of the British monarchy and military either by central government or more often via the illegal actions of dissident organisations. Hence, the statues of Kings William III, George I and George II, along with monuments dedicated to Lord Gough, the Earl of Carlisle and the Duke of Eglinton and Winton were removed from the city. In 1948 the statue of Queen Victoria was moved from the grounds of Leinster House in a symbolic gesture that coincided with Ireland's departure from the Commonwealth.

The particular focus of this paper is on the iconography of the city's central thoroughfare, O'Connell Street, which was officially renamed in 1924, and its immediate environs stretching as far north as Parnell Square. As the cradle of the 1916 Rising, it might be expected that the street would play a central role in the symbolic construction of national identity. Initially the authorities were preoccupied with the reconstruction of the large portions of the street that had been destroyed during the years of war. Once the process of reconstruction was set in train O'Connell Street assumed a central role in the annual spectacle that marked the commemoration of the rebellion. Although the thoroughfare was already lined with an array of public statues, three monumental projects marked in different ways Ireland's emergence as an Independent State. In the first of these the authorities turned to the public hall inside the General Post Office as the setting for a monument of the ancient Celtic warrior, Cúchulainn, which was dedicated to all those who had been killed in the rising. The second revolves around the protracted debate that ensued after 1922 regarding Nelson's Pillar. Ever since it had been

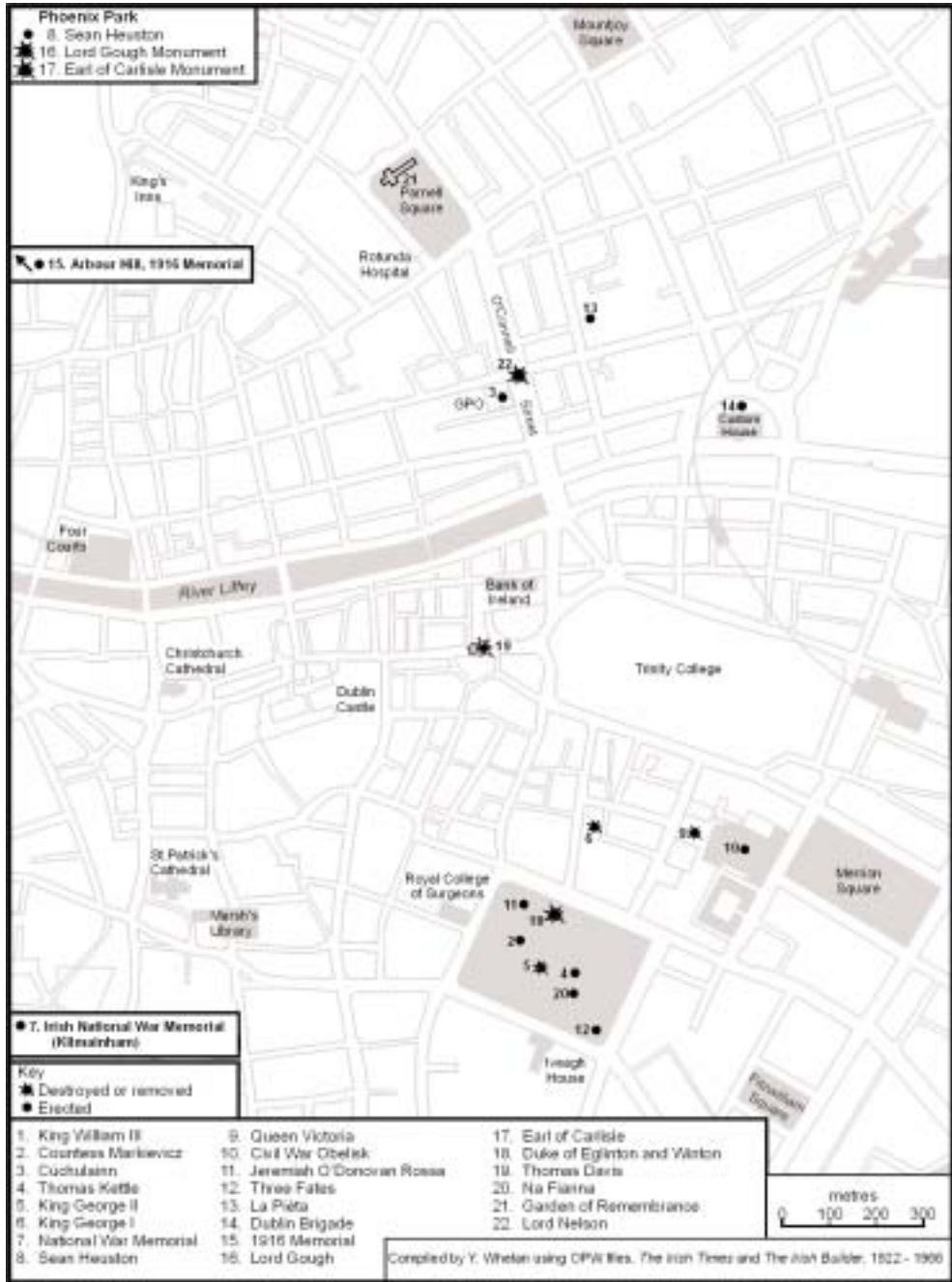
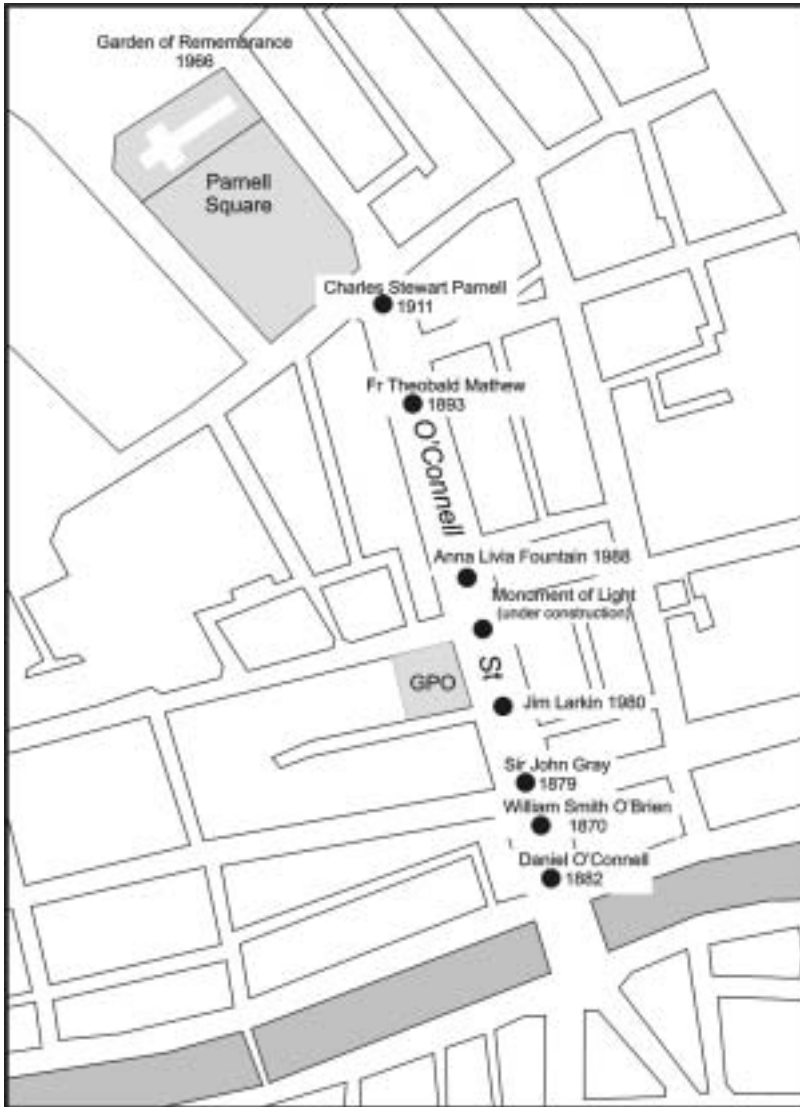


Figure 1: Public monuments erected, destroyed or removed in Dublin, 1922-1966.



*Figure 2: Public monuments on O'Connell Street, 2001.*

unveiled in 1809 the Pillar had courted controversy, which only intensified after the setting up of the Free State when calls for its removal mounted. What proved striking about this monument is that despite official efforts the Government never officially sanctioned its removal, rather, it was destroyed in an illegal explosion in 1966. It was also during that year, which marked the Golden Jubilee of the 1916 Rising, that the third monumental initiative discussed here was formally opened, namely, the Garden of Remembrance at Parnell Square. Each of these developments contributed to the evolving symbolic geography of O'Connell Street and were representative of broader trends that shaped the monumental landscape throughout the city and country. After 1966 the iconography of O'Connell Street began to change and increasingly public monuments came to serve as works of public art rather than as political statements. This trend is perhaps best exemplified in the monument discussed at

the end of this paper, the 'Monument of Light', which will be erected in 2002 in the centre of the street on the site formally occupied by Nelson's Pillar (Figure 2).

### Commemorating rebellion: the 1916 memorial in the GPO

*When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side,  
What stalked through the Post Office? What intellect,  
What calculation, number, measurement, replied?*

(W.B. Yeats, *The Statues*, April 1938 quoted in Martin, 1989: 349-350).

One of the first public monuments erected in commemoration of those who had been killed in the 1916 Rising was unveiled on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1935 in the General Post Office. On that day, which marked the nineteenth anniversary of the Rising, thousands came out onto the streets of the Capital to witness the military parade that accompanied the civil ceremonial and to hear President Eamon de Valera declare in his unveiling address "that only an Ireland free from foreign domination - North, South, East and West - would satisfy the aspirations of the Irish people" (*Irish Times*, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1935: 6). The memorial was modelled by Oliver Sheppard in 1911-1912 and took the form of a bronze sculpture of Cuchulainn, the heroic figure of Irish mythology who was championed by Irish nationalists as an exemplary Celtic hero. The design was lauded by de Valera as an apt representation of the heroism of those who had been killed in the Rising. As Turpin points out: "The legend of Cúchulainn, with its heroic ideals of service to one's people before one's self, and the evocation of an ancient and noble Irish society, appealed greatly to the romantic imaginations of Celtic revivalists ... The saga could be seen as a challenge to Irish political subservience to England and to modern 'materialistic' values' " (Turpin, 1994: 26-27). Moreover, the sculptor made use of the Pietà theme from religious art in order to represent the heroic figure in an almost Christ-like fashion, bravely meeting with death. The use of such imagery in a monument dedicated to those who had died in the rebellion was significant, juxtaposing as it did the ideals of Christianity with those of revolutionary nationalism to create a potent symbol that would contribute to the visible script of national identity. However, the chosen symbol was also an ambiguous one given that Cúchulainn was also championed as a loyal defender of Ulster by those whose ideology was at odds with that of the Free State's leaders. As a columnist in the *Irish Times* observed, it was "somewhat paradoxical that the warrior who had held so long the gap of Ulster against the southern hordes should now be adopted as the symbol by those whose object it is to bend his native province to their will" (quoted in Turpin, 1994: 28). This point was also alluded to in the *United Ireland Journal* where a columnist suggested that "there is nothing told of Cúchulainn that would make a representation of his death a suitable symbol for the struggle and sacrifice of 1916" (20<sup>th</sup> April 1935: 1-2; see also Bhreathnach-Lynch, 1999).

Despite these reservations the Government went ahead with plans to unveil the monument on the nineteenth anniversary of the Rising when it served as the centrepiece in the elaborate military display that marked the occasion. The roll of honour on the day included 1916 veterans, President de Valera, Vice-President Seán T. O'Kelly and Seán Lemass, along with relatives of the seven signatories. Detachments from every section of the Free State Army and from every district in the country took part. The day began on a bleak note, however, with "rain sodden tricolours that flapped dismally over Dublin's buildings... There was no great display of bunting and a queer empty feeling seemed to be present in us all as we watched the preparations made to commemorate the Easter Week Rising" (*Irish*

*Times*, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1935: 7). While the crowds listened to a voice that recounted the exploits of Easter Week, company after company filed into O'Connell Street. Contemporary newspapers record that, "On they came, marching in military columns of four, some of them wearing the uniforms of the period of the Rising which for years had been hidden against raiding parties of British soldiers. Others had a bandolier or a knap-sack - anything that was "a relic of 1916" - and on their shoulders the men who were to fire the salute bore the old Mauser rifles, landed during the Howth gun-running by the late Erskine Childers" (*Irish Times*, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1935: 7). They were followed by detachments of men who had fought in the GPO, Boland's Mills, Jacob's and other outposts of the rebellion and were accompanied by the women who had acted as nurses.

In his unveiling speech de Valera drew particular attention to the proclamation issued in 1916 and expressed the hope that it would "serve to keep in the minds of the youth of this country the great deeds of those who went before us, and that it will also serve to spur us on to emulate their valour and their sacrifice" (*Irish Times*, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1935: 8). He also remarked upon the suitability of the site, noting that:

*From this place nineteen years ago the Republic of Ireland was proclaimed. This was the scene of an event which will ever be counted an epoch in our history - the beginning of one of Ireland's most glorious and sustained efforts for independence. It has been a reproach to us that the spot has remained so long unmarked. Today we remove the reproach. All who enter this hall henceforth will be reminded of the deed enacted here. A beautiful piece of sculpture, the creation of Irish genius, symbolising the dauntless courage and abiding constancy of our people, will commemorate it modestly, indeed, but fittingly*

(*Irish Times*, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1935: 8).

At the stroke of noon the monument was finally unveiled and the military spectacle continued when the GPO was filled with the sounds of the trumpeters in the gallery and on the roof of the building. Veterans of the Rising also fired a salute which was answered by members of the Free State Army marshalled on O'Connell Bridge. The effect was such that "the whole range of buildings in O'Connell Street resounded with the din. It recalled the noise that accompanied the deadly bullets which in 1916 flashed to and fro across this same street" (*Irish Times*, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1935: 8). While the Army Band struck up 'The Soldier's Song' the military march past got underway and de Valera left the GPO for a rostrum outside where he watched as over 6,000 members of the army, drawn from all parts of the country, marched by in an hour long ceremony. The end of the display was signalled by three Air Corps aircraft who plunged downwards in 'V' formation before rising again.

The spectacle of unveiling did not pass without controversy, however, and the absence of members of the opposition benches as well as of more militant republicans threw into sharp relief the political tensions that prevailed in the Free State, where "Men who had been comrades in arms nineteen years ago now refused to meet together to honour their dead" (*Irish Times*, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1935: 7). De Valera hinted at the contention that surrounded the memorial when he made a point of referring to the modest nature of the monument and stated that "the time to raise a proud national monument to the work that was here begun and to those who inspired and participated in it has not yet come. Such a monument can be raised only when the work is triumphantly completed" (*Irish Times*, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1935: 8). The leader of the opposition and of the Cumann na nGaedheal party, W.T. Cosgrave, argued that what he and others had fought for in 1916 had not yet been achieved and that the unveiling of the



Figure 3: 1916 memorial, General Post Office  
Erected 1935, sculpted by Albert Power  
(Bord Fáilte)

memorial was somewhat premature. As a report in the *Irish Press* put it, “It is not possible to hide these national limitations today or to cover them with a veil lifted from the bronze statue of Cúchulainn” (18<sup>th</sup> April 1935). More militant republicans staged a more overt protest when they paraded through the streets of the Capital in an attempt to rival the official military display. This took place later in the same afternoon when an estimated thousand people marched in formation to the republican plot at Glasnevin Cemetery where the Chief of Staff of the IRA, Mr Maurice Twomey, delivered an oration.

Once in place in the public hall of the GPO the Cúchulainn monument became an important site of national memory in a manner almost akin to a national war memorial. The association of the legendary Celtic warrior from a previous golden age with the ideals of those who had died in the 1916 Rising forged a link between past and present and contributed to the cultivation of a monumental landscape that marked

Ireland’s emergence from beneath the shadow of colonial rule. The erection of the memorial further reinforced the symbolism of the GPO as the focal point of the rebellion and while visitors flocked to see the figure of Cúchulainn, the space around the Post Office was regularly used for commemorative parades and nationalist processions. The memorial was just one of a range of sculptural initiatives launched by the Free State administration in an attempt to forge national identity and demonstrate the distinctive nature of the Irish national character. Another means through which national identity was affirmed was more destructive and involved the eradication of earlier erected symbols of the British Empire, often by dissident elements. One such casualty was to be Nelson’s Pillar.

### Removing a symbol of empire: the destruction of Nelson’s Pillar

Ever since it had been unveiled in 1809 Nelson’s Pillar had exercised the minds of many, evoking an uneasy combination of aesthetic admiration and political disquiet. Following Independence calls mounted for the removal of the column in the interests of the civic improvement of the O’Connell Street area and groups such as the Dublin Citizens’ Association, the Dublin Tenants’ Association and Dublin Corporation threw their weight behind such a proposal. It was suggested that, “the Pillar is most unsuitably placed, a great obstruction to traffic, and forms an objectionable barrier, severing the north from the south side of the city, with very ill results for the trade and commerce and the residential amenities of Dublin” (*Irish Builder*, 11<sup>th</sup> March 1922: 1). In the Senate, W.B. Yeats suggested that “if

another suitable site can be found Nelson's Pillar should not be broken up. It represents the feeling of Protestant Ireland for a man who helped to break the power of Napoleon. The life and work of the people who erected it is a part of our tradition. I think we should accept the whole past of this nation and not pick and choose. However it is not a beautiful object" (quoted in Henchy, 1948: 62). A more novel solution was proposed in a letter to the *Irish Builder* when it was suggested that:

*every statue in the Dublin streets should be taken down and re-erected in Merrion Square, to be hereafter known as 'Monument Park' ... The Pillar could be erected in the centre, with Nelson overlooking the sea and the vast British Empire, and keeping a blind eye on the doings of Leinster House. O'Connell and Smith O'Brien by their proximity might improve the tone of our modern legislators, and Parnell remind them that there are no bounds to the march of a nation*

(*Irish Builder*, 25<sup>th</sup> July 1925: 613).

Elsewhere it was argued that "the pillar should not be removed until ample provision had been made for its re-erection on a suitable open site. To merely pull down the pillar without provision for re-erection and leaving all the worse monuments would be a retrograde movement, and we hope it will not be carried into effect" (*Irish Builder*, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1926: 1). Consequently, a range of more suitable locations were proposed, among them the Phoenix Park, the centre of Merrion Square and the Hill of Howth, where, it was claimed, the monument would serve "as an inspiration to all future lovers of the Empire. Liverpool has already made a claim for the statue and column, and the probabilities are that the highest bidder will get them" (21<sup>st</sup> August 1926: 604).

The underlying political significance of the removal of Nelson's Pillar came to the fore during a Dublin Corporation debate in 1931 when some councillors pointed to the shame inherent in having "Nelson in the middle of the Capital city, while such Irishmen as Red Hugh O'Neill, Patrick Sarsfield, Brian Boru, and Wolfe Tone had no memorials. The deeds of such heroes should not be concealed from the youth of Ireland!" (*Irish Press*, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1931). Some years later in 1949 the authority passed a resolution "that the statue of Lord Nelson in O'Connell Street should be removed and replaced by that of Patrick Pearse" (Minutes of the Corporation of Dublin, (hereafter Minutes), 1948, no. 219). At the same meeting, however, the Law Agent pointed out that although a public monument, Nelson's Pillar, "is private property, and that if the Corporation desire to acquire it, it can only do so by agreement with the Trustees, or under powers conferred by a Special Act of the Oireachtas" (Minutes, 1948, no. 219). The Trustees remained unwilling to relinquish their power and consequently speculation over the future of Nelson's Pillar persisted. In 1954 a number of letters were addressed to Dublin Corporation from various organisations. The Dublin Brigade of the Old IRA, for example, proposed that, "The Dublin Corporation seek legislation for the removal of the Nelson Pillar" (Minutes, 1954, no. 186). The Port St Anne Society in county Down suggested that:

*If it is ever decided to take down the above monument, then in that event, the Port St Anne Society would be prepared to negotiate for the complete figure of Nelson on top of the Pillar. This figure would be an ideal one for us to have on behalf of our work for the restoration of Killough, Port St Anne, harbour, and each year we would arrange a festive meeting at which the Dublin Corporation and its people would be toasted by a good supply of the best from Guinness's Brewery*

(Minutes, 1954, no. 186).



A year later the 'Australian League for an Undivided Ireland' added its voice to the debate when a letter was submitted to the Corporation outlining the terms of a resolution adopted by its Executive:

*That the Lord Mayor and members of the Corporation of the City of Dublin be requested to give consideration to the removal of the statue of Lord Nelson from the pillar in O'Connell Street and to its replacement by a statue of Theobald Wolfe Tone, originator of the republican movement in Ireland. It would be appreciated if this matter were given consideration, the promoters of the cause for a United Ireland in these far off parts await the result of your deliberations (Minutes, 1955, no. 82).*

The Arts Council of Ireland also wrote to Dublin Corporation suggesting that any changes to the monument should be confined to changing the statue only (Minutes, 1955, no. 82). In 1955 the Corporation eventually proposed that "The Dublin city council request the Trustees of Nelson's Pillar to grant permission to remove the statue of Lord Nelson and that the said statue be placed in the National Museum or other place named by the Trustees" (Minutes, 1955, no. 82). A letter, however, was subsequently received from one of the Trustees of the monument refusing permission to remove the statue. It stated that:

*The Trustees find themselves debarred from granting the Council's request by the terms of their trusteeship of this Monument which impose upon them the duty to embellish and uphold the Monument in perpetuation of the object for which it was subscribed and erected by the citizens of Dublin. They consider that they have no power to vary or depart from the duty thus laid upon them. In these circumstances it is not possible to accede to the City Council's request (Minutes, 1956, no. 73).*

At Government level the question of removing the monument also arose on a number of occasions. During his second term of office the Taoiseach John A. Costello argued that on historical and artistic grounds the monument should be left alone. He invited Dr Thomas Bodkin, former director of the National Gallery and the Director of the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham to give a lecture on the pillar. Bodkin described its architectural merits and instanced cities that retained monuments to individuals who had fallen from favour, including a monument dedicated to Tsar Peter the Great in communist Leningrad. He was scathing in his criticism of the suggestion that Nelson be replaced by a statue of the Blessed Virgin, stating that, "I can't help thinking that she would not like to take charge of a column that was subscribed for and erected to the memory of someone else" (quoted in O'Riain, 1998: 24). When Seán Lemass became Taoiseach he suggested that an appropriate replacement for the figure of Nelson would be that of St Patrick, coinciding with the Patrician Year of 1961.

Despite the various official attempts to have Nelson removed, the fact remained that the trustees of the Pillar were legally bound to safeguard its position. The fate of the monument was eventually taken out of their hands however when it was badly damaged in an explosion one month before the 1916 Golden Jubilee celebrations (Figure 4).

*The top of Nelson Pillar, in O'Connell Street, Dublin, was blown off by a tremendous explosion at 1.32 o'clock this morning and the Nelson statue and tons of rubble poured down into the roadway. By a miracle, nobody was injured, though there were a number of people in the area at the time... Gardaí set up a cordon around the city and checked on the movements of members of the Republican movement, but it appeared that the pillar had been shattered by an explosion which had been set some time previously... The demolition of the pillar was obviously the work of some explo-*

*sives expert. The column was cut through clearly just below the plinth, and the debris fell closely around the base of the monument, with some stone being hurled just as far as the entrances of Henry Street and North Earl Street*

*(Irish Times, 8<sup>th</sup> March 1966: 1).*

The editorial of the *Irish Times* on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1966 observed that:

*Ever since it went up it has been the subject of controversy. It blocked the traffic; interrupted the view of the street, and when we attained our sovereign independence, it was as odd to have Nelson up there as it would be to have had an Austrian general's statue in the principal thoroughfare of Milan (Irish Times, 9<sup>th</sup> March 1966: 4).*

Shortly after the initial explosion, which was widely thought to have been carried out by a splinter group of the Republican movement known as Saor Uladh, the Government, under the direction of Seán Lemass, gave authorisation for the blowing up of the remainder of the pillar by the Army, occasioning in the process considerably more damage to the surrounding area than the initial blast. The Nelson Pillar Act was passed to deal with the inevitable legal aftermath of the demolition. By the terms of the Act the trustees were awarded £21,750 in compensation in respect of both the Pillar's destruction and its removal, while other compensation covered the loss of admission revenue and legal costs. The site on which Nelson once stood was vested in Dublin Corporation and the Nelson Pillar Trust was accordingly declared terminated. Section Four of the Nelson Pillar Act of 1969 conferred on the Pillar's trustees an indemnity to cover any suit that might be brought against them for not restoring the Nelson monument.



Figure 4: Nelson's Pillar after the bomb in 1966. *Irish Times* frontpage 9<sup>th</sup> March 1966.

The debates that accompanied the reading of this Bill in both the Dáil and Seanad make for entertaining reading. During the second stage reading in the Seanad the debate was virtually monopolised by Owen Sheehy-Skeffington. He touched on a feeling shared by many Dubliners in his statement that:

*When in 1966 the pillar was half blown down by a person or persons unknown, I, as a Dubliner, felt a sense of loss, not because of Nelson - one could hardly see Nelson at the top - but because this pillar symbolised for many Dubliners the centre of the city. It had a certain rugged, elegant grace about it... The man who destroyed the pillar made Dublin look more like Birmingham and less like an ancient city on the River Liffey, because the presence of the pillar gave Dublin an internationally known appearance*  
(Seanad Debates, 1969, cols. 915-916).

The contentious debate about the fate of Nelson's Pillar in post-Independent Ireland offers a number of insights into the powerful role of public statuary. The monument acted as a focus for the divergent views of Dubliners through a period of radical political and social change. While for some the Pillar had become a jarring symbol of colonial rule, for others it constituted an obstruction to the flow of traffic through an ever-expanding city. With the passage of time it became a popular meeting-place and viewing-point, the terminus of the tramway system and a symbol of the city centre that effectively transcended any political connotations. As one commentator put it shortly after the destruction of the monument, "There may have been different views on his presence, but to us he was a landmark. Once we spotted Nelson we knew where we were" (*Evening Press*, 8<sup>th</sup> March 1966). This perhaps explains why the State, despite the intermittent calls that were mounted for its removal on either political or traffic grounds, never formally sanctioned such a course of action. Instead a dissident group seized upon its political symbolism and in an iconoclastic gesture fundamentally altered the iconography of O'Connell Street forever. Support for such actions, however, was not uniform and it is noteworthy that it was not Government policy to remove or destroy statues or to give tacit approval to these actions. In 1938 de Valera expressed concern about the fate of the various imperial relics and went on to state that it was not Government policy to remove sculpture solely because it was associated with the British regime. In fact he argued that: 'There may in some cases be reasons of historical or artistic interest which would make it undesirable to take such action' ('Memorials to Irish patriots: erection on State property', 7<sup>th</sup> March 1939, CAB2/2 2ND gov. cabinet, National Archives).

### **Scripting national memory: the Garden of Remembrance, Parnell Square**

Some weeks after the destruction of Nelson's Pillar the Golden Jubilee of the 1916 Rising took place and once again O'Connell Street played an important role in the annual spectacle of commemoration and celebration. The purpose of the two-week long, countrywide commemorative celebration was to "honour those who took part in it and to emphasise its importance as a decisive event in our history" (Dept of External Affairs, 1966: 11). Newspapers issued special souvenir numbers that recounted details of the Rising, the heroic figures that took part in it and the key events of its course. On Easter Sunday 1966 thousands came out onto the streets of the Capital to witness the parade of six hundred veterans of the Rising, many of whom had been members of the Dublin garrisons (see Dept of External Affairs, 1966). The ceremony continued with a solemn reading of the proclamation of the Republic that rang out from loudspeakers, followed by a 21-gun salute and military march. The route took the participants from O'Connell Street to many of the key places associated with the Rising, among them the

Four Courts, the Mendicity Institute, Jacob's Factory, Boland's Bakery, Mount Street Bridge and the South Dublin Union, before concluding with a rendition of the national anthem by the Army Number One Band. The day closed with the premiere of a film specially commissioned as part of the commemoration, a retrospective look at the events of the Rising which was then released for distribution throughout the country. The rest of the week continued in much the same vein with the Taoiseach and President appearing at several official commemorative functions. Special ceremonies took place at provincial centres all around the country, while a number of significant statues were unveiled in the Capital, along with the formal opening of the Garden of Remembrance, just north of O'Connell Street at Parnell Square on Easter Monday.

The opening of the garden marked the culmination of a project that can be traced back to September 1935 when the Dublin Brigade Council of the Old IRA suggested to Government that a site on the northern part of the Rotunda Gardens be converted into a memorial garden. The location, which held particular symbolic significance as it marked the site where Óglaigh na nÉireann was founded in 1913 and was also where prisoners of 1916 had been held during Easter Week, was acquired from the Governors of the Rotunda Hospital in October 1939 at a cost of £2,000. In March 1940 a design competition was launched but consideration of entries postponed due to the outbreak of World War II. Consequently, the winning entry, submitted by the architect Daithí P. Hanley, was not announced until 20<sup>th</sup> August 1946.

Hanley's design centred around a sunken garden in the form of a cross to symbolise the dead and enclosing a pool. In design, the plan drew heavily on Ireland's Celtic past and made use of much religious iconography. The floor of the pool was given a mosaic pattern of blue-green waves into which was set various Celtic weapons intended to symbolise the ancient custom of throwing weapons into water on the cessation of hostilities. At one end of the pool Hanley left a space for a sculptured monument that was backed by a curved white marble wall upon which the following inscription was placed.

*In the darkness of despair we saw a vision.  
We lit the light of hope and it was not extinguished  
In the desert of discouragement we saw a vision.  
We planted the tree of valour and it blossomed.  
In the winter of bondage we saw a vision.  
We melted the snow of lethargy and the river of resurrection flowed from it.  
We sent our vision aswim like a swan on the river. The vision became a reality.  
Winter became summer. Bondage became freedom and this we left to you as your inheritance. O generations of freedom remember us, the generations of the vision.*

Inserted into the railings at various points around the sunken pool were copies of artefacts held in the National Museum in Dublin, including the Brian Boru harp, the Loughnashade trumpet with the Cross of Cloyne set above it and the Ballinderry sword pointed downwards to symbolise peace. Hanley also provided a striking entrance for the garden, the centrepiece of which was a set of gates, 50 feet (c. 15m) wide, upon which was placed the title 'Gairdín Cuimhneacháin' together with a bronze replica of the processional cross of Clogher.

The architect also incorporated into his design a proposal for a sculpture in bronze representing Éire to be erected on the pedestal at the top of the sunken pool. This figure was:

*guarded by four warriors of the provinces with a background of patriots in bas-relief... The statue is symbolic of the inspiration and idealism for which the patriots*

*lived and died. On the walls of the sunken garden are the names of patriots on sculptured county memorials ... Niches containing busts of patriots could be added later if desired*

(*Irish Builder*, 7<sup>th</sup> September 1946: 558).

The design also provided for seating in the garden, as well as “portable flower-boxes of geraniums and tulips and blossoms of climbing aubretia and rock plants on the retaining wall. This would help to make it a pleasantly sheltered place to walk in contemplation or to sit and rest beside the reflecting pool. Ireland’s youth should be inspired by the names and sagas of the past” (*Irish Builder*, 7<sup>th</sup> September 1946: 558). Hanley based his design on the premise that there should be a degree of intimacy between the memorial garden and passersby:

*Its monumental features should be easily seen and recognised. It should also be ‘insulated’ from its varied architectural surroundings. People sitting in the garden and viewing it should feel secluded. It should inspire people with a feeling of respect for the patriot dead and yet be sufficiently light in treatment to be used as a small quiet garden in which to sit and rest*

(*Irish Builder*, 7<sup>th</sup> September 1946: 558).

He also took into account the contemporary preference for marches on national holidays and stated that:

*On national holidays a march past would pass along the route as at present, passing O’Connell Street and Parnell Square, East, and so pass the gates of the proposed memorial garden. A wreath could be laid on the stone platform at the front of the monument. A guard of honour might stand on the crescent shaped terrace behind the statue, overlooking the garden. A volley could be fired from here. Distinguished visitors might be provided with seats on the lawn*

(*Irish Builder*, 7<sup>th</sup> September 1946: 558).

Almost immediately after the winning design had been announced, however, controversy arose regarding the chosen site on Parnell Square. As a commentator in the *Irish Builder* put it:

*many architects and town planners, including the winner of the competition are not in favour of this proposal to build a memorial in the Rotunda gardens, as they feel that the site is not adequate for a national memorial worthy of those whom it is intended to honour. While it is felt that the memorial would be quite suitable for a period of history such as the 1916 Rising, a national memorial deserves something more inspiring and on a bigger scale than anything that could be achieved in such restricted and secluded surroundings*

(7<sup>th</sup> September 1946: 558).

This was echoed shortly after in the Dáil where the issue was discussed in 1946. Many deputies argued that the small area of ground available made the site inadequate (Dáil Debates, 1946, cols 425-6). By March 1949 the issue had not been resolved and was complicated by the fact that plans for a neo-natal unit adjacent to the Rotunda Hospital in the grounds of Parnell Square also found support in the Dáil. In the heated exchanges that followed Seán McEntee TD made clear his feelings on the matter, declaring: “So that is the way the republicans are going to deal with the Garden of Remembrance?” (Dáil Debates, 1949, cols 2054-5). In reply, the Minister responsible stated that, “The Garden of Remembrance, according to my file, was first thought of in the year 1935. It took all that time

for the last Government to think of the matter... The site is not suitable at all” (Dáil Debates, 1949, cols 2054-5). The debate continued to rage in the Dáil, where in July of 1949 Mr C. Lehane TD asked the Minister for Health, Noel Browne, whether he was aware that the plot of ground intended for use in connection with a neo-natal clinic, was already earmarked as “the site for a national memorial to all those who laid down their lives in the fight to establish an Irish Republic” (Dáil Debates, 1949, cols 181-2). He went on ask the Minister, “if he will state whether he has taken over this site permanently or merely as a temporary expedient” (Dáil Debates, 1949, cols 181-2). In reply, Browne stated his awareness of the position and that:

*it was only in consideration of the urgency of taking action to reduce infant mortality in Dublin that I agreed to recommend that the memorial plot should be made available as a site for a temporary infant welfare unit at the Rotunda Hospital. This is a purely temporary arrangement and intended to meet the position only while the hospital authorities are developing proposals for a permanent unit which will not entail encroachment on the memorial site... So far as I am aware there is no question of abandoning the proposed scheme for the provision of a memorial park in that area*

(Dáil Debates, 1949, cols. 181-2).

It was not until 1957 that the issue was finally resolved when the infant unit was transferred to the grounds of the Rotunda Hospital and the way was paved for the creation of the memorial garden. Work began in 1964 and it was completed in time for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration of the Rising.

The Garden of Remembrance was finally opened to the public in a carefully choreographed ceremony that brought together the forces of Church and State. At the outset the architect presented the President with the key to the garden, a three-times enlarged copy of the oldest known Irish key that had been found at an excavation near the Hill of Tara. De Valera then opened the gates to the sound of a fanfare from the army trumpeters gathered closeby. Both the President and the Taoiseach, Seán Lemass, then took up their positions in the centre of the sculpture platform. To their right were gathered members of the Government, ex-Ministers, the Lord Mayor and high-ranking army officers, while the Archbishop of Dublin, members of the judiciary, various public representatives and members of the Labour Party were clustered to the left, with members of the diplomatic corps situated just below them. The ceremony got underway with a blessing by the Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid, after which de Valera delivered the opening address. He began by thanking assembled Church leaders for leading prayers and then went on to draw particular attention to the appropriate nature of the site chosen for the national memorial, one that was so closely associated with the independence struggle:

*The site was beside the old rink in which the Irish volunteers were founded on November 25th, 1913. Not far away was the General Post Office where Pádraig Pearse proclaimed the Republic in 1916. At the southeast corner of the Square were the Rotunda buildings, where many memorable meetings were held. It was there the first Oireachtas of the Gaelic League was held. It was also the scene of the meetings of the Land Leaguers and of the Irish Parliamentary Party ... On the north side of the square were the old headquarters of the Gaelic League ... On the west side of the square were the houses where the Irish Volunteers executive met and also the headquarters staff of the Irish Citizen Army ... the site was in every way eminently suitable*

(*Irish Times*, 12<sup>th</sup> April, 1966: 1).

De Valera also alluded to the purpose of the garden and expressed the hope that it would remind people of the sacrifices, struggle and suffering endured over the centuries to secure independence. He concluded by expressing the hope that visitors to the garden would remember “not only the leaders of the Rising but also the nameless ones, the unknown soldiers, the men and women in the ranks who bear the burden of every battle” (Department of External Affairs, 1966: 46). He spoke in Irish when formally declaring the garden open, at which point the National flag was hoisted to full mast. Towards the end of the ceremony the *The Last Post* was sounded and de Valera laid a wreath on behalf of the people of Ireland.

A key element of Hanley’s plan for the Garden of Remembrance was for central sculpture which would symbolise the national struggle and occupy the circular plinth at the western end of the garden. Although he had incorporated plans for this into his original design, the space was left vacant until 1971 when the Dublin sculptor, Oisín Kelly was approached and requested to write a report on the proposed sculpture. In this report Kelly stated his opinion that “I cannot over-emphasise, that the sculpture is not an ornament in the modern and incorrect sense of the word as something added to increase the beauty of an object... the sculpture signifies the purpose, the serious and unique purpose of this garden and deserves a site worthy of that purpose” (Report on the sculpture for the proposed garden of Remembrance, OPW files: Garden of Remembrance). He went on to lament the choice of site, arguing that:

*I doubt if any architectural device can ever cloak the fact that what was once a pleasure garden of a residential square will be variously allotted to a maternity hospital, a nurses’ home, a theatre, a dance hall and a garden of remembrance to a nation’s heroes. In this site, the Garden of Remembrance can never be more than a part of a whole... we must have a site where it does not compete with so many discordant voices.*

He suggested instead a site in the Phoenix Park “where the necessary scale and space are available. Another site might be, for example, Fairview Park, or further along the new coast road to Howth”. Despite these reservations about the Parnell Square site, which was out of his hands anyway, Kelly proceeded to design a memorial sculpture. He rejected Hanley’s initial proposal for the figure of Éire and her four warriors, arguing that such a proposal constituted, “an insoluble historical, psychological and sculptural problem, and should be abandoned”. He believed that a national iconography did not exist in Ireland, rather, “most memorials are a conglomeration of foreign elements, Irish in nomenclature and detail but alien in spirit, elements from Norman heraldry and elements from English Victorian sentimentality such as the Albert memorial. The most successful national memorial has been the death of Cúchulainn in the GPO, although its scale is too small for its position”. He eventually put forward a design that drew its inspiration from both the legendary Irish saga of the Children of Lir and the poem *Easter 1916* by W.B. Yeats with its central idea that men at certain moments in history are “transformed utterly”. In order to illustrate this theme, Kelly made use of the Children of Lir story and sought to represent the agony of transformation in his sculpture. The use of the swan motif meanwhile, a “generally accepted image of resurgence, triumph and perfection, with undertones of regal sadness and isolation”, more than adequately served his purpose of creating a memorial, “which does not attempt to bully my countrymen into having splendid thoughts and noble feelings, but rather one whose message was implicit, a hint rather than a shout”.

The 'Children of Lir' sculptural group was eventually unveiled on 11<sup>th</sup> July 1971 on the day that marked the fiftieth anniversary of the 1921 truce between British and Irish forces. It was formally dedicated by President de Valera to the memory of all those who gave their lives in the cause of Irish freedom. The occasion was marked by a controversial speech delivered by the Taoiseach, Jack Lynch, in which he stated that his belief that: "We have justified the struggle for our freedom and fulfilled many of the hopes and aims of those who fought for our freedom" (*Irish Times*, 12<sup>th</sup> July 1971: 11). He went on to urge the British Government to declare its interest in encouraging the unity of Ireland by agreement. Such an "historic step" he argued, "would forward the work begun fifty years ago, when Britain and the Irish nation agreed to a truce".

The well-choreographed spectacle that accompanied the formal opening of both the memorial garden in 1966 and the sculptural focal point in 1971 marked the culmination of a lengthy gestation. The garden provided a very public platform for the commemoration of those who had been killed in the Independence struggle and as such contributed to the symbolic expression of nationhood. The emphasis on religious iconography and ancient Celtic motifs in Hanley's design, coupled with Kelly's bronze sculpture served not only to effectively commemorate the dead but also to draw a parallel between them and the ancient warriors of the heroic, Celtic and, significantly, pre-colonial past. This was reinforced during the theatre of the unveiling ceremony and in the speeches that were delivered not only at the Garden of Remembrance but also during the unveiling of many other monuments in the years leading up to 1966 and especially during the commemorative events associated with the Golden Jubilee celebrations. In the aftermath of the flurry of activity that accompanied the Jubilee Dublin's monumental landscape gradually began to change. Thereafter, while public thoroughfares continued to act as sites for public monuments, these became increasingly apolitical sites of public art as an exploration of contemporary O'Connell Street reveals.

### **From political symbols to public art: the contemporary iconography of O'Connell Street**

Between the 1970s and the 1990s a number of monumental projects were proposed for O'Connell Street. Some of these made the transition from plan to concrete form, for example, the statue of James (Jim) Larkin which was unveiled in 1980. Its origins can be traced to 1974 when the Workers Union of Ireland announced their wish to erect a monument to the Trade Union leader Jim Larkin as part of the fiftieth anniversary of the union. Oisín Kelly was eventually commissioned to sculpt the monument and although it was planned to unveil it in 1976 to mark the centenary of Larkin's birth, it was not erected until four years later. The figure of Larkin with arms outstretched was unveiled on O'Connell Street Lower, opposite Clery's, the site of the former Imperial Hotel, from where Larkin addressed the assembly of striking workers in 1913. During this time the former Nelson Pillar site also continued to attract much attention with a range of proposals put forward for a possible replacement, among them a suggestion that a statue of Patrick Pearse be erected to commemorate the centenary of Pearse's birth. This aroused lively debate when it was considered by Dublin City Council's planning committee. During the meeting one councillor suggested that the plan proceed, afterall: "Pearse was the Messiah of Irish independence. He was a cultured man and not a man of violence. This man deserves an honour of some sort" (*Irish Times*, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1978). Although the sculptor Gary Trimble sculpted a model which would have seen a 35-foot (c. 11m) pillar, topped with the figure of Pearse depicted teaching a group of





*Figure 5: The Children of Lir Sculpture in the Garden of Remembrance, Parnell Square. Unveiled in 1971, sculpted by Oisín Kelly.*

children, the plan was rejected in 1979 on the grounds that it was out of scale with the streetscape.

The Corporation also rejected another proposal which had been submitted by the Christian Community Centre for a religious statue to serve as a permanent memorial to the then forthcoming visit of Pope John Paul II. On behalf of the ‘Concerned members of the Christian Community’, Mr T.C.G. O’Mahony suggested the site should be given over to a monument depicting Christ the King, the Queen of Peace, Joseph the Worker and the Holy Spirit, because, he argued, “the Irish people— at present at a very low economic, social, moral and spiritual ebb— are frantically searching for the answer to pervading dechristianisation and demoralisation, and the visit of this great universal and spiritual leader could mark the advent of a new era of hope for them” (*Irish Times*, 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1979). Faced with the prospect of “innumerable *ad hoc* ideas from all sorts of pressure groups”, the committee adopted a motion tabled by Carmencita Hedderman that a national competition be organised to design a

monument to the birth of the Irish nation (*Irish Independent*, 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1979). Discussions came to an abrupt end in November 1979, however, when Dublin City Council's general purposes committee unanimously decided that the area should be paved over (*Irish Times*, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1979). The decision was made on the recommendation of the Corporation's chief planning officer, Charles Kelly, who said that, "It appeared to us that the development of a simple paved area down the centre of O'Connell Street, aligned with trees and retaining the existing statutory figures but seeking to eliminate all other 'clutter', would result in the development of the street as a really noble thoroughfare" (*Irish Times*, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1979).

In 1988 a new monument was unveiled on O'Connell Street, the Smurfit Millennium Fountain or the Anna Livia, designed by Eamon O'Doherty. Sponsored by Michael Smurfit and erected as a memorial to his father, Jefferson Smurfit, just north of the former Pillar site, it heralded the arrival of a new era in the form and content of Dublin's sculptural fabric and more specifically the iconography of O'Connell Street. Made of Wicklow granite and with a female representation of the River Liffey in bronze as its centre point, the monument measured 3 metres in height and 25 metres in length. It was unveiled on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1988 to mixed reviews, not least because the public had not been given an opportunity to express any view on the monument, while it had also been exempt from planning control. The Fine Gael TD John Kelly described the water feature as "a hideous, illuminated fountain fit to recall the era of the Bowl of Light and the 'Tomb of the Unknown Gurrrier' on O'Connell Bridge which public opinion, after 20 years, succeeded in having removed" (*Irish Times*, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1988). The fountain nevertheless stood as a symbol of the transformation that had taken place in Dublin's monumental landscape. The controversy that it created stemmed largely from aesthetic rather than political objections. It was unveiled in a more discrete fashion than its predecessors on O'Connell Street and occupied only a small number of column inches in newspapers. It is somewhat ironic therefore that the erection of a new millennium monument in the centre of Dublin, at the location formerly occupied by Nelson's Pillar, has spelt the end for a fountain that marked the passing of a different millennium. In November 2001 the Anna Livia fountain was removed from O'Connell Street to the Croppies' Memorial Park on the Liffey's North quay where it will be re-erected in a still- water setting. The site formerly occupied by the fountain is instead set to become a works compound for the new 'Spire of Dublin', a monument which will demonstrate in an even more striking manner the largely apolitical nature of the sculpture which is preferred in the capital for the new millennium.

### **From Nelson's Pillar to the Monument of Light (Spire of Dublin): a monument for a new millennium**

Since 1966 the site of Nelson's Pillar had been left vacant. In 1987, however, the short-lived Metropolitan Streets Commission suggested that the pillar should be re-built. Their advice was not well received however and the commission itself was disbanded shortly after. A year later as part of the celebration of the Capital's millennium, a competition was launched for the design of a monument to replace Nelson's Pillar. The 'Pillar Project' as it became known, was promoted by the Architectural Association of Ireland, the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland and the Sculptor's Society of Ireland. It brought together 50 architects and sculptors each of whom were requested to make proposals for a new symbol for the city, one which would, "stimulate and contribute to an informed public debate regarding the upgrading of O'Connell Street and establish networks for the future by providing a unique opportunity for architects and artists to work together on the conceptual development of an

urban project of significant scale” (Murray, 1988: 20-21; O’Regan 1998). The project yielded seventeen entries, which were then exhibited in the General Post Office, and the public were invited to vote on their favourite design. The entry that attracted most votes was the ‘Millennium Arch’ (Figure 6). Designed by Michael Kinsella and Daniel McCarthy, the triumphal arch was twice the height of the GPO, and incorporated an observation tower and millennium symbol. It was intended to span the centre of the street, and incorporated lifts and spiral staircases in a manner echoing the Arc-de-Triomphe in Paris.

The 1988 competition however was planned only as a generator of ideas and it was never planned to erect the winning design. It was not until 1998 that Dublin Corporation launched a competition as part of the redevelopment of O’Connell Street for a new monument. In July 1998 an international design competition was launched with the aim of finding a suitable replacement for the pillar, “something which would become a new symbol of Dublin for the twenty-first century, just like the Eiffel Tower is to Paris” (*Irish Times*, 30<sup>th</sup> July 1998: 7). In the brief for the competition Dublin Corporation set out the objectives of the competition in design terms, namely, to reinstate a monument which would occupy a pivotal role in the composition of the street and called for a monument with a vertical emphasis. A budget of four million was set aside and a clause was inserted that the winning entry would not necessarily be built. The



*Figure 6: ‘Millennium Arch’, winning design in the Pillar project, 1988. Designed by Michael Kinsella and Daniel McCarthy. From O’Regan, J. (1998).*



Figure 7: Winning design in the millennium monument competition, 1998.

By Ian Ritchie. Illustration: Dublin Corporation.

winner was announced in December 1998 (Figure 7). Picked from 205 entries, the design submitted by the London architect, Ian Ritchie is for a three million-pound structure of stainless steel which tapers to a light at its pinnacle. The jury argued that the design “fulfilled the requirements of the competition brief by providing an elegant structure of twenty-first century design. It was also a brave and uncompromising beacon, which reaffirms the status of O’Connell Street” *Irish Times*, 26<sup>th</sup> November 1998: 3). Ritchie suggested that the “high and elegant structure” would symbolise “growth, search, release, thrust - and Ireland’s future”. It would be a monument for the new millennium by day and by night, “a pure symbol of optimism for the future” (*Irish Times*, 26<sup>th</sup> November 1998: 3). It is designed to be 120 metres high, three times the height of the former Nelson’s Pillar and twice the height of Dublin’s tallest building, Liberty Hall.

The attraction for others in the monument is its overtly apolitical nature. It does not appear to have any obvious message political or otherwise. As Pearson has suggested, “Perhaps that says something about Ireland and ourselves. Unlike the other monuments around, it’s not religious, it’s not military, it’s not political - which is not to say that it should be any of these things, of course. But it does say something about wealth. I wonder whether in the future people might look back on it and view it as the product of

a pointless society” (*Irish Times*, 26<sup>th</sup> November 1998). Never-theless it is a strongly visual monument, which can be interpreted, as its designer suggests, as a forward looking, contemporary statement, a “sensational structure which will redefine the city centre and people’s perceptions of where that is, quite apart from providing Dublin with a new icon” (*Irish Times*, 26<sup>th</sup> November 1998). On 21<sup>st</sup> December 2000 the Irish Government finally granted approval to Dublin Corporation for the erection of the ‘Monument of Light’ for which preparatory construction has now begun and which is now set to be in place by early 2002. There, “it where it will occupy a pivotal role in the composition of the street, fixing the central points of the street beside the General Post Office and closing the vistas from north, south, east and west” (Dublin Corporation, 1998: 3).

### **Conclusions**

O’Connell Street has always occupied a position of prime importance and symbolic significance in the life of Dublin and of Ireland, it is after all the main street of the nation, and its “scale, symmetry, history, architecture and central location bestow a sense of place and civic importance which is embodied in the memory of the people” (Dublin Corporation, 1998: 3). After Independence it became an important site of civic ritual and annual spectacle, most especially associated with the commemoration of the 1916 Rising. The monuments erected on the street and in its immediate environs after 1922, together with the removal of Nelson’s Pillar, created another layer of symbolic significance that contributed to the visual expression of post-colonial national identity in a manner that was echoed throughout the city. These monumental initiatives, although limited in number played an important role in embodying the dominant ideology of the newly established Free State. In their carefully designed iconography, in the displays of military might and national pride that went with their unveiling, they connected the dead of 1916 with a more ancient and heroic Celtic past that pre-dated the colonisation of Ireland.

Since the 1960s however, there has been a tangible shift in the symbolic significance of the street, a product of the growing distance from the Independence struggle, the inevitable cultural maturing of the State and perhaps influenced also by the political situation that developed in Northern Ireland. The much more low-key commemoration of the 1916 Rising and the absence of any displays of nationalistic military might, stands in marked contrast to the earlier State-sponsored ‘celebrations’ that characterised previous ceremonies. Meanwhile, those monuments that were once erected with such ceremony as symbols of a nationalist ideology would seem to have lost much of their symbolic potency. Many of Dublin’s citizens would be hard-pressed to name the statues that line O’Connell Street, figures which might now be considered anachronistic features of the cityscape. Amidst this changing political, cultural and social context, O’Connell Street as a totality, however, has retained its status as a central thoroughfare and symbolic heart of the Capital, taking on iconographic significance to a greater degree than anything in it. This was recently underscored in the contentious debate surrounding the Dublin Corporation proposal to restrict the right of public protest on O’Connell Street. The proposed bylaws aimed to impose a range of conditions on protests and marches on O’Connell Street, including a 31-day notice period and £2000 deposits on groups over 50. A range of interest groups protested against the motion, arguing that “O’Connell Street, in which the 1916 uprising’s most famous scenes were played out, has epitomised the free and vocal nature of protest in the State, a right enshrined in the Constitution” (*Irish Times*, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2001).

The symbolic potency of O'Connell Street was reiterated in the context of the State funerals that took place in October 2001 for the ten IRA volunteers executed during the War of Independence. In a ceremony that echoed the military displays of a previous era, thousands of people lined the streets of the Capital to pay tribute. The processional route took mourners to O'Connell Street where members of the FCA formed a guard of honour. The cortege stopped in front of the GPO where a lone piper played a lament before the hearses moved on to the Pro-Cathedral for Requiem Mass. The procession also paused at the Garden of Remembrance where a minute of silence was observed before the procession proceeded to Glasnevin Cemetery (*Irish Times*, 13<sup>th</sup> October 2001). A week earlier the street had also been a focal point for the commemoration of a more militant form of republicanism when the 20th anniversary of the 1981 Hunger Strike was marked in the city. Led by a silent row of people who held portraits of the dead hunger-strikers, the procession took participants from the Garden of Remembrance to O'Connell Street carrying on to Leinster House and then back to the GPO where traditional musicians played laments before an address was read to the assembled crowd (*Irish Times*, 8<sup>th</sup> October, 2001). These events demonstrate that the symbolic significance of O'Connell Street remains high, even if many of the monuments that line its centre no longer occupy such a central position in the collective memory of Dublin's citizens.

### Bibliography

- BELL, J. (1999) Redefining national identity in Uzbekistan: symbolic tensions in Tashkent's official public landscape, *Ecumene*, 6(2), 183-213.
- BHREATHNACH-LYNCH, S. (1999) Commemorating the hero in newly Independent Ireland: expressions of nationhood in bronze and stone, In: McBride, L. (ed.) *Images, icons and the Irish nationalist imagination*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 148-165.
- DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (1966) *Cuimhneachán 1916-1966: A record of Ireland's commemoration of the 1916 Rising*. Dublin: Stationery Office.
- DUBLIN CORPORATION (1998) *A new monument for O'Connell Street*. International Competition. Dublin Corporation.
- GRUFFUDD, P. (1995) Remaking Wales: nation-building and the geographical imagination, 1925-50, *Political Geography*, 14, 219-239.
- HENCHY, P. (1948-49) Nelson's Pillar, *Dublin Historical Record*, 10, 53-63.
- MARTIN, A. (ed.) (1989) *W.B. Yeats, Collected Poems*. London: Arena.
- MURRAY, H. (1988) The Pillar project, *Irish Architect*, November/December, 20-21.
- KENNEDY, B.P. (1994) The Irish Free State 1922-1949: A visual perspective, In: Kennedy, B.P. and Gillespie, R. (eds) *Ireland: Art into History*. Dublin: Town House and Country House, 132-154.
- LEITNER, H. and KANG, P. (1999) Contested urban landscapes of nationalism: the case of Taipei, *Ecumene*, 6(2), 214-233.
- LEWANDOWSKI, S.J. (1984) The built environment and cultural symbolism in post-colonial Madras, In: Agnew, J.A., Mercer, J. and Sopher, D.E. (eds) *The city in cultural context*. Boston: Allen and Unwin, 237-54.
- O'REGAN, J. (ed.) (1998) *A monument in the city*. Cork: Gandon Editions.
- O'RIAIN, M. (1998) Nelson's Pillar: a controversy that ran and ran, *History Ireland*, 6(4), 21-25.
- O'TOOLE, S. (1988) *The pillar project*. Cork: Gandon Editions.
- TURPIN, J. (1994) Cúchulainn lives on, *Circa*, 69, 25-29.
- VALE, L.J. (1992) *Architecture, power and national identity*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- WHELAN, Y. (2000) Monuments, power and contested space: the iconography of Sackville Street (O'Connell Street) before Independence (1922), *Irish Geography*, 34(1), 11-33.
- YEOH, B.S.A. (1996) *Contesting space: power relations and the urban built environment in colonial Singapore*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- YEOH, B.S.A. (2001) Postcolonial Cities, *Progress in Human geography*, 25(3), 456-468.