The construction and destruction of a colonial landscape: monuments to British monarchs in Dublin before and after independence

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Where cities evolve in contentious political circumstances and make the transition from a colonial to a post-colonial state, aspects of the urban landscape such as public monuments, street nomenclature, buildings, city plans and urban design initiatives take on particular significance. Collectively they demonstrate the fact that the city is the product of a struggle among conflicting interest groups in search of dominion over an environment. As one group seeks dominance over the other the urban landscape often becomes the canvas upon which this power struggle finds expression. Public statues in particular serve as an important source for unravelling the geographies of broader political and cultural shifts. These issues are explored here with reference to Dublin City and the monuments erected to royal monarchs before the achievement of political independence in 1922, namely Kings William I (1701), George I (1722), George II (1758) and Queen Victoria (1908). The fate of such monuments in post-colonial Dublin and the ways in which the fledgling state and particular groups within it sought to express their new found power through both the official and oftentimes wilful destruction of these royal statues is then examined. The paper illuminates the power of public monuments as symbolic sites of meaning and explores their role in the construction of a landscape of colonial power. It also demonstrates how monuments become sites of protest, as symbolic in their removal as in their erection.

Introduction

Symbols are what unite and divide people. Symbols give us our identity, our self-image, our way of explaining ourselves to others. Symbols in turn determine the kinds of stories we tell; and the stories we tell determine the kind of history we make and remake.

Mary Robinson, Inauguration speech as President of Ireland, December 3, 1990

Commemorating an individual or an event, public monuments are not merely ornamental features of the urban landscape but rather highly symbolic signifiers that confer meaning on the city and transform neutral places into ideologically charged sites. While the ancient Greeks used them as a means of conferring honour on esteemed members of society, it was not until the mid-nineteenth century that public statues took on particular significance as a means of celebrating a nation’s past. Until the outbreak of World War I, statues served as a symbolic device of enormous popularity. The intense nationalism of these years gave rise to widespread and sustained attempts across Europe and North America to commemorate national histories through monuments. As Owens has
observed, “Statues sprouted up on the public thoroughfares of London at a rate of one every four months during Victoria’s reign. The streets and public squares of even modest-sized German towns bristled with patriotic sculpture: in a single decade some five hundred memorial towers were raised to Bismarck alone”. The frenzy of monument building that occurred in Europe stemmed largely from the fact that governments recognised their key role as foci for collective participation in the politics and public life of villages, towns and cities. Statues served to strengthen support for established regimes, instilled a sense of political unity and cultivated national identity.

For geographers concerned with understanding the dynamics at work in shaping the historical and the contemporary urban landscape, acts of memorialisation and the statues which give tangible expression to them are of much significance. The objects of a people’s national pilgrimage, monuments are signifiers of memory which commemorate events or individuals but also “mark deeper, more enduring claims upon a national past as part of the present . . . monuments may become both historical symbols of nationhood and fixed points in our contemporary landscapes”. As Sandercock suggests, we erect sculptures to dead leaders, war heroes and revolutionaries because “memory, both individual and collective, is deeply important to us. It locates us as part of something bigger than our individual existences, perhaps makes us seem less insignificant . . . Memory locates us, as part of a family history, as part of a tribe or community, as a part of city-building and nation-making”. If the city is a repository of collective memory, then public statues make an important contribution to its memory bank while focusing attention on specific places and events in highly condensed, fixed and tangible sites.

While public statues are dynamic sites of meaning which transform neutral spaces and help to legitimise authority, equally they can be used to challenge authority. The very qualities that make public statues so valuable in building popular support also make them a useful target for those who wish to demonstrate opposition. Just as public statues served throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a means of cultivating popular support and making power concrete in the landscape, the medium was also used by groups with politics at odds with established regimes. Consequently, monuments have often been erected to challenge the legitimacy of governments and objectify the ideals of revolutionary movements. This is particularly true in the case of post-colonial countries emerging from beneath the shadow of the colonial enterprise or ideological domination. After the fall of communism and the dissolution of the ‘Iron Curtain’ the mass removal of vast numbers of public statues in Eastern Europe dedicated to the monolithic figures of communist rule such as Marx, Stalin and Lenin was set in train.

Developments in the sub-field of cultural geography have paved the way for an approach to the urban landscape as a depository of symbolic space and time with which people engage, re-work, appropriate and contest. Drawing on the art historian’s iconographic method, the symbolic meaning inherent in the urban landscape has come into sharp focus. As Cosgrove suggests, “All landscapes are symbolic . . . reproducing cultural norms and establishing the values of dominant groups across all of a society”. Landscapes on the ground and as represented in various surfaces have come to be regarded as deposits of cultural and symbolic meaning. The iconographic method seeks to explore these meanings through describing the form and composition of landscape in their social and historical contexts. Moreover, geographical iconography accepts that landscape meanings are unstable, contested and highly political.

Spurred on by these developments and the upsurge of interest in the forces at work in the production of landscape, geographers have begun to explore the role of public statuary in articulating the politics of power and expressing national identity in a variety of different contexts. The individuals or events commemorated, the sites in which they
are erected, the choreography of ceremonies centred on them, as well as the orchestration of public participation around them, have all become a focus of study. A range of papers written by geographers has built on a tradition established by historians, ethnographers and anthropologists. Their work highlights the multifaceted nature of the seemingly innocuous public monument, from serving as sites of local protest and contestation,\textsuperscript{[8]} to constituent elements of a national war.\textsuperscript{[9]} Graham’s work has highlighted that even within the Protestant community of Ulster expression of identity in monuments is realised differently,\textsuperscript{[10]} while Johnson has focused on the monumental landscape in an Irish context and in particular on the ways in which national imagined communities are constructed in public statues.\textsuperscript{[11]} Other studies have focused more particularly on specific monuments among them Atkinson and Cosgrove’s analysis of the Vittorio Emanuele II monument in Rome which demonstrates the role of this monument as a vehicle for the official rhetoric of a united and imperial Italy.\textsuperscript{[12]} Osborne’s account of the George Étienne Cartier monument in Montreal illustrates the means by which monuments serve as symbolic devices that encode particular histories and geographies in the landscape.\textsuperscript{[13]} Similarly, Peet has pointed to the meaning vested in the public monument in his exploration of the Daniel Shays memorial in Petersham, Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{[14]}

The focus of this paper rests on the monuments erected to British monarchs in Dublin before and after the achievement of political independence in 1922. It explores the origins of projects to erect monuments to Kings William I (1701), George I (1722), George II (1758) and Queen Victoria (1908) and interprets the significance of the locations in which they were unveiled, the choreography of events surrounding their unveiling and their subsequent fate amid the turbulent political context of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Dublin. The unveiling of these statues contributed to the creation of a landscape of colonial power in a city of contested space. In the post-colonial capital however, that landscape was rewritten when the leaders of the fledgling state sought to express independence through the erection of monuments dedicated to heroes of the nationalist cause. At the same time, various dissident groups sought to destroy many of the royal monuments and carried out sporadic attacks on others with links to the British military and administration. It is argued that Ireland is an important site for understanding the processes of colonisation and de-colonisation and that the public monuments erected in its capital city provide the geographer with an important lens through which to explore these evolving tensions.

From colonial to post-colonial: Dublin’s monumental and political context

The four monuments which form the focus of this paper were erected during a period when Ireland shared an uneasy colonial relationship with Britain. Tangible symbols of this ambivalent relationship they served to appropriate public space, not only in the individuals commemorated but also in the ceremony and ritual that went with their unveiling. Points of physical and ideological orientation, these monuments comprised one dimension of a monumental landscape that was consistently augmented over the course of three centuries. As the political context in Ireland changed, so too did the meaning attached to the statues dedicated to members of the British monarchy. Increasingly they became sites of protest and contestation rather than of loyalty to empire, a trend that became even more pronounced in the post-colonial period.

Successive political discontinuities and tensions have ensured that far from possessing a linear historical narrative of uncritical colonial discourse, Ireland’s status as a colony was ambivalent and significantly different from, for example, Calcutta, its counterpart
capital of the British Indian Empire. A mid-latitude colony of settlement rather than a tropical colony of exploitation, the settler population in Ireland remained small and the colonial experience was different to that experienced elsewhere, especially in the non-western world. Consideration of the developing political context during the centuries which followed is important, for the trajectories of Irish politics and the complicated relationship with London were to place significant demands on the symbolic landscape of Dublin.

While ‘statumania’ gripped many countries in Europe during the late nineteenth century, Dublin found itself caught in something of a monumental conflict. As a city of the British Empire it was perhaps inevitable that monuments dedicated to prominent members of the monarchy would be erected in the capital. The unveiling of statues to Kings William III, George I and George II in the eighteenth century made clear the links between the Kingdom of Ireland and its colonial rulers. During this period authority in Ireland was directed from London via Dublin Castle, while economic expropriation by planters came in various waves. Ireland was in effect a colony of the British Empire, but was characterised by a form of colonial nationalism espoused by a largely Protestant land-owning class that seemed on the verge of defining its own version of Ireland, which was not necessarily British. As Connolly writes, “it was almost exclusively from the Protestant middle and upper classes of the eighteenth century that a claim to Irish political autonomy was first systematically articulated. In doing so they developed political models, rhetoric and imagery that were to continue—right up to 1914—to shape the aspirations of the great majority of Irish nationalists”.

Nevertheless, the Head of State was the British monarch, who was represented in the country by his viceroy, while power rested with the chief secretary for Ireland, upon whose advice the viceroy acted. From his offices in Dublin Castle, the chief secretary supervised the administration of a country that was politically and culturally divided and a city whose population in the early eighteenth century was largely Protestant and English speaking, ethnically different from the rest of the country. Although the Irish legislature became independent in 1782, Westminster retained executive powers and continued to exercise a measure of control over the Dublin parliament.

The Act of Union of 1800, a legislative response to the rebellion of the United Irishmen in 1798, served to yoke the two countries together more closely under the parliament in London and represented the further integration of Ireland into English political life. The emphasis in Irish politics shifted away from the republican ideals of those who had fought in the 1798 rebellion and towards the struggle for Catholic Emancipation and the repeal of the Act of Union by constitutional means. After the Act, and especially following Catholic Emancipation in 1829, the political context shifted once again and Ireland became an integrated periphery of the Imperial State. In many ways, however, it retained colonial status. The viceroy remained and the chief secretary continued to head a cluster of Irish boards and departments centred on Dublin Castle and which worked with a smaller network of departments in Whitehall. As Fitzpatrick argues, “both in form and in practice, the government of Ireland was a bizarre blend of ‘metropolitan’ and ‘colonial’ elements. Ireland could therefore be pictured either as a partner in Britain’s empire or as her colony, interpretations that fostered conflicting revolutionary programmes. While loyalists mustered to defend their metropolitan privileges, republicans inveighed against their colonial oppressors”.

By 1850, the monumental landscape was dominated by monarchical figures which, in their symbolic sub-text, created a cultural landscape that expressed links with the broader British Empire. Statues dedicated to leading figures of the British military establishment, namely Lord Nelson and the Duke of Wellington, the former on Sackville Street, and the
latter on the outskirts of the city in the Phoenix Park, had been erected in the early
decades of the century. Each of these monuments, together with other statues dedicated
to various figures of the British establishment connected with Irish affairs, played an
important role in the tangible construction of imperial power. Located in prominent sites
and unveiled with displays of ritual, pomp and ceremony, these statues contributed to the
creation of a one-sided symbolic landscape from which ‘Irish’ figures were notably
absent. As a reviewer in the *Dublin University Magazine* put it in 1856:

> Dublin is connected with Irish patriotism only by the scaffold and the gallows. Statue and
column do indeed rise there, but not to honour the sons of the soil. The public idols are
foreign potentates and foreign heroes . . . the Irish people are doomed to see in every place
the monument of their subjugation; before the senate house, the statue of their
conqueror—within the walls tapestries with the defeats of their fathers. No public statue
of an illustrious Irishman has ever graced the Irish Capital. No monument exists to which
the gaze of the young Irish children can be directed, while their fathers tell them, “This
was to the glory of your countrymen.” Even the lustre Dublin borrowed from her great
Norman colonists has passed away.[21]

These sentiments were echoed in *The Nation* where it was observed that:

> We now have statues to William the Dutchman, to the four Georges—all either German
by birth or German by feeling—to Nelson, a great admiral but an Englishman, while not a
single statue of any of the many celebrated Irishmen whom their country should honour
adorns a street or square of our beautiful metropolis.[22]

Dublin, however, was not just a city of empire. In the second half of the nineteenth
century, the ‘supremacy in statuary’ which imperial statues enjoyed was challenged both
technologically and numerically by the unveiling of monuments dedicated to figures
drawn from the contrary sphere of Irish culture, literature and nationalist politics. After
the famine, monuments were erected in commemoration of figures drawn from the realm
of Anglo-Irish literature, such as Oliver Goldsmith and Edmund Burke. Increasingly,
however, individuals who had played leading roles in the various and often contentious
strands of Irish nationalist and republican politics were memorialised. Hence, the
erection of monuments dedicated to Daniel O’Connell and C. S. Parnell, both of whom
had been to the fore of constitutional politics during the nineteenth century. Equally,
men who had led sections of the population in violent revolt and sought the creation of an
independent Irish republic were honoured, among them William Smith O’Brien.[23] This
development reached its apogee in 1899 with the laying of the foundation stone at
St Stephen’s Green of a memorial dedicated to Theobald Wolfe Tone, a leading member
of the United Irishmen who had played a key role in the rebellion of 1798. By way of
contrast, statues dedicated to figures of the British administration were erected in
increasingly peripheral locations such as the Phoenix Park and St Stephen’s Green
(see Figure 1).

In the early twentieth century, the struggle to achieve independence from Britain
intensified. While home rule was about to be granted in 1914, the onset of World War I
meant that its operation was suspended until after the war.[24] The war effectively split the
Irish volunteers who had long sought independence. While their leader, John Redmond,
called on his members to join the British war effort, others saw it as the perfect
opportunity to proceed with plans for an armed rebellion in Ireland. The Easter Rising
that took place in April 1916 galvanised a section of the Irish population into
revolutionary action, which, after a bloody War of Independence culminated in the
creation of the Irish Free State in January 1922.[25] By this time, when Ireland stood on
the cusp of independence, the symbolic fabric of the capital had come to embody and
reflect the struggle for superiority, victory and ultimately power, that persisted between Britain and one of its kingdoms.

Memorialising the British monarchy in Dublin

How absurd these pompous images look, of defunct majesties, for whom no breathing soul cares a halfpenny! It is not so with the effigy of William III, who has done something
to merit a statue. At this minute the Lord Mayor has William’s effigy under a canvas and is painting him of a bright green, picked out with yellow—his lordship’s own livery.\[26\]

Although somewhat scathing in his remarks about Dublin’s statuary and its ‘pompous images’, William Thackeray in his *Irish Sketchbook* touches on one of the salient aspects of the city’s urban landscape, its monuments, and more specifically those dedicated to members of the British monarchy. Three of these had been erected in the early decades of the eighteenth century and served to commemorate members of the British royal family, namely, Kings William III, George I and George II. Each was erected in a prominent location in the city centre and expressed Dublin’s status as a city of the British Empire and a loyal dominion. The first was that dedicated to, “our own King William III, in College Green, with the steed of such wonderful anatomical development”.\[27\]

*King William III, College Green*

Here in just right the equestrian statue stands Of Orange’s great Prince, deliverer of these lands, Whose name reminds us of those troubles great In which the second James involved our state.\[28\]

William of Orange (1650–1702) arrived in Ulster in 1690 and played a key role in securing a Protestant victory over the Catholic King James II at the Battle of the Boyne in July of that year. His intervention ensured that the Protestant population regained control of Dublin.\[29\] It is perhaps not surprising then to discover that the birthday of King William, November 4, a date which coincided with his arrival in England, had been a focus of annual celebration in the capital since 1690.\[30\] At a time when the struggle with the Jacobites was still precariously balanced, “the Lords Justices authorised a major public celebration on November 4 in honour of King William’s fortieth birthday”.\[31\] J. T. Gilbert provides a detailed description of the events that occurred every year in November, when:

In the morning the English flag was displayed on the tower at Dublin Castle; the guns in the Phoenix Park were fired, answered by volleys from the corps in the barracks, and by a regiment drawn up on College Green; all the bells in the town rang out. At noon the Lord Lieutenant held a levee at the Castle, whence, about 3 p.m., a procession was formed, the streets from the Castle being lined with soldiers. The procession, composed of the Viceroy, Lord Mayor, Sheriffs, Aldermen, Lord Chancellor, Judges, Provost of Trinity College, Commissioners of Revenue, and other civil and military officers, together with those who had been present at the Castle, moved through Dame street and College Green to Stephen’s Green, round which they marched, and then returned in the same order to College Green, where they paraded thrice round the statue, over which, after the procession had retired, three volleys of musketry were discharged by the troops.\[32\]

The erection of the statue in July 1701 was intended to provide a more tangible dimension to the annual affirmations of loyalty (Figure 2).\[33\]

The Dutch sculptor, Grinling Gibbons, was commissioned by Dublin Corporation to sculpt the form of the King and in July 1700, it was ordered “by the authority of the said assembly that his majesties statue, when finished, be erected in College Green”.\[34\] By June 1701, the equestrian statue of the King, which represented him in Roman armour, crowned with a laurel wreath and carrying a truncheon astride his horse, was completed and arrangements were made for the unveiling ceremony on July 1, 1701.

The unveiling was marked by a gathering of all of the members of the city assembly at the Tholsel at 4 pm after which a formal procession got underway to the College Green site, led by the city musicians, and by the grenadier companies of the Dublin Militia. After the civic officials had mustered at College Green, the Lords Justices arrived at the
The entire assembly then marched around the statue three times. Gilbert captures the sense of the occasion when he writes:

After the second circuit, the Recorder delivered an eulogy on King William, expressing the attachment of the rulers of Dublin to his person and government; on the conclusion of
which oration a volley was fired by the grenadiers… At the termination of the third
round the statue, the Lords Justices, the Provost and Fellows of Trinity College,
with Williamite noblemen and gentry, were conducted by the Lord Mayor, through a file
of soldiers, to a large new house on College Green prepared for their reception… The
surrounding crowds were regaled with cakes thrown amongst them, and several
hogsheads of claret were placed on stilts and set running. The Lords Justices, attended
by the civic officers, then proceeded to the Lord Mayor’s house, where an entertainment
was prepared for them, the nobility and ladies; after which fireworks were discharged, and
the night concluded with the ringing of bells, illuminations, and bonfires.[35]

Once in place on College Green the statue became a focal point of both the annual
birthday celebration of the King in November, as well as the July anniversary of the
victory at the Battle of the Boyne. The formation of a number of Williamite Associations
in the early decades of the eighteenth century, as well as of the Volunteers and the Orange
Society in the 1770s, gave the statue renewed ceremonial importance. Their annual
musters in its vicinity commenced on November 4, 1779, “when all the bells in the city
were rung at the opening of the day, and the citizens appeared decorated with orange
ribbons”. [36]

While the statue served as a focus of much loyalist celebration, it also became a focal
point for those who wished to see an end to the imperial connection. In the early part of
the century Gilbert records that the spirit of Jacobitism which existed in Dublin:

combined with a love of mischief, and a desire to revenge the insult offered to the college
by the King’s back being turned towards it, provoked repeated indignities upon the
statue. It was frequently found in the mornings decorated with green boughs, bedaubed
with filth, or dressed up with hay; it was also a common practice to set a straw figure
astride behind that of the King.[37]

Throughout the remainder of the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century countless
examples are recorded of the abuses levelled against the statue. One of the earliest was the
work of three students of the nearby Trinity College, who in 1710 “covered the King’s
face with mud, and deprived his Majesty of his truncheon”. [38] The city council made the
unanimous resolution that “all persons concerned in that barbarous act are guilty of the
greatest insolence, baseness, and ingratitude”. [39] They later offered one hundred pounds
from the government and fifty from the city for the discovery of the iconoclasts. [40] The
defacement was discovered to have been the work of three students of Trinity College,
namely Graffon, Vinicome and Harvey. They were expelled from the university and while
Harvey managed to escape, the other two confessed their guilt and were condemned to six
months imprisonment, a fine of £1000, and each was required to go to College Green
and there to stand before the statue for half an hour, with the words, “I stand here for
defacing the statue of our glorious deliverer, the late King William”, [41] inscribed upon
boards around their necks.

While the students attack on the statue may have been more due to the fact that they
“indulged themselves too freely in drinking”, [42] and that the king sat astride his horse
with his back turned to the College, other more politically motivated attacks occurred in
succeeding decades. Many Catholics were angered by the rendering of annual homage to
a King who had in effect been instrumental in their suppression. On July 21 and
November 4 the statue was coloured white, decorated with orange lilies, a flaming cloak
and sash, while the horse was decorated with orange streamers, and a bunch of green and
white ribbons was placed beneath its raised foot in a gesture of some symbolism. The
railings were also painted orange and blue “and every person who passed through
College Green on these occasions was obliged to take off his hat to the statue”. [43]
Such annual displays were controversial and contentious events in the capital and produced much bitterness. In 1805, for example, on the eve of the November 4 procession, the statue was painted black. A year later the inflammatory nature of the annual processions was recognised by the Lord Lieutenant, the Duke of Bedford, when he refused to attend. The practice of firing volleys was discontinued shortly afterwards, although the annual decoration continued. During the mayoralty of Sir Abraham Bradley King (1820–21), an attempt was unsuccessfully made to halt the processions altogether.

In November 1822, the Lord Mayor issued a proclamation prohibiting the decoration of the statue. Since then the processions were largely abandoned, although the monument continued to be subject to attack on numerous occasions. Later in the century in 1882, just days after the unveiling of the O’Connell monument at the head of Sackville (now O’Connell) Street, a crowd of several hundred people gathered around the statue of William III in College Green yelling and throwing stones. The rioting which ensued, along with the damage to the monument, led to a number of arrests.

King George I, Essex Bridge

The accession of George I (1660–1727) to the throne generated much celebration in the capital as Protestant Dublin sought to demonstrate its allegiance to the newly instituted ruling family, the Hanoverians. The King was styled as the second deliverer of the city given that his government had suppressed a Jacobite movement early in 1716. While the anniversary of his birth was celebrated in the city and his portrait was presented to the Tholsel, the fact remained that he too, like King William III was a contentious figure.

Nevertheless, a committee comprising members of Dublin Corporation was formed in 1717 to institute proceedings to erect a monument “in grateful acknowledgement of the many favours conferred on this city by his present majestie King George”. The Dutch sculptor John Van Nost was commissioned to sculpt an equestrian statue of the king which was to be erected on Essex Bridge, one of the major route-ways between the north and south inner city. It was eventually unveiled on a pier on the west side of Essex Bridge on August 1, 1722 (Figure 3).

It is significant that the city assembly chose to erect the monument on Essex Bridge, a focal point and chief artery in the eighteenth century city. The king was represented, like William III, in the guise of a Roman Emperor astride his horse, and wearing contemporary battle dress with high boots and spurs, and a sheathed sword at his side. The monument effectively ensured that the largely Protestant population of the capital could feel that they had justly honoured their new monarch.

The rebuilding of Essex Bridge in the mid-eighteenth century, however, necessitated the removal of the statue. On January 19, 1753 it was removed and placed in storage in Lord Longford’s house on Aungier Street. It was relocated once again in 1782 to the grounds of the Mansion House in Dawson Street. While suggestions were put forward in the city assembly that the statue be re-erected in Fitzwilliam Square, this never came to pass. The 1798 rebellion, however, brought the statue renewed attention. In a measure, which can be interpreted as an act of defiance it was brought from the rear garden to the side of the Mansion House overlooking Dawson Street and an inscription was placed on the pedestal which went:

Be it remembered that at the time when Rebellion and Disloyalty were the characteristics of the day, The Loyal Corporation of the city of Dublin re-elevated this statue of the First Monarch of the illustrious House of Hanover. Thomas Fleming, Lord Mayor, Jonas Paisley and William Henry Archer, Sheriffs Anno Domino 1798.
It remained in this demoted position away from the public gaze throughout the nineteenth century.

**King George II, St Stephen’s Green**

The monuments to Kings William III and George I were joined in the city centre in 1758 by a statue dedicated to King George II (1683–1760). It was the first statue to be erected in the then private St Stephen’s Green and was sculpted by John Van Nost the Younger (Figure 4). In 1752, a motion was put before the city assembly, that in gratitude “for the many and great benefits they daily enjoy under His Majesty’s most gracious administration and protection . . . a statue . . . be erected . . . and placed in such conspicuous part of this city”. The committee, which was made up of members of the Dublin Assembly, opted for a site in St Stephen’s Green. The equestrian statue of the king was placed on a tall pedestal which ensured visibility from as far away as Nassau Street to the north and from Aungier Street to the west. It was completed in 1756 and the statue was unveiled with a procession through the streets led by the Lord Mayor, the recorder, the aldermen, sheriffs and commons and attended by the city musicians, on January 2, 1758. Like its monumental predecessors, the statue of King George II became the subject of some abuse. As Wright’s *Dublin* of 1818 notes:

> For a number of years it appeared to be destined to fall like that of Sejanus by the hands of ruffians; from its remote situation, mid-night depredators were induced to make a trial of their skill in sawing off a leg or an arm for the value of the material. One leg of the horse was cut off and a saw had nearly penetrated his neck when the watchmen were alarmed by the noise and routed the depredators.

A protracted dispute arose in 1818 when a monument dedicated to the Duke of Wellington was about to be erected. The committee for the Wellington monument requested that the statue of George II be removed to another site, such as Fitzwilliam...
Queen Victoria, Leinster House

After Queen Victoria’s visit to Ireland in 1900 a committee of the Royal Dublin Society was set up to explore the possibility of erecting a statue in her honour. It proposed that “the public at large should be invited to subscribe for the erection of the statue”.

A public meeting was held in the lecture theatre of Leinster House on May 8, 1900:

The proceedings throughout were of the most unanimous and enthusiastic character . . . it was proposed that the new subscription list should not be limited to any particular sum, and that the public at large should be invited to contribute (Cheers).

The space between the National Library and the National Museum, in front of Leinster House was considered the most suitable site given its proximity to the statue of the Prince Consort which had been erected in Leinster Lawn by public subscription in 1872. The meeting concluded with the adoption of the resolution that:

This meeting heartily approves of the project to erect in Dublin a statue of the Queen . . . that there was no statue of the Queen in Dublin, and that the citizens of the capital of Ireland felt that this state of affairs could not any longer be permitted to exist. It was the Queen and her personality, and not the throne and its splendour that went home straight to the heart. They should have amongst them a statue of the Queen surrounded by her Irish soldiers.
Following the death of the Queen, the monument project gained renewed energy and work progressed swiftly. The Dublin sculptor John Hughes was commissioned to sculpt the monument and he undertook to have it completed within five years. The firm Vienne of Paris was contracted to carry out the work, a firm which enjoyed “a reputation second to none in France, and, of course, in that home of art there were enormous advantages at hand which should not be commanded here in Ireland.” The committee also had protracted discussion regarding the choice of material to be used in the monument. It had originally been intended that the figure of the Queen would be cast in marble. However, Hughes ascertained from his contacts in France that marble would not withstand the Irish climate. As the Weekly Irish Times put it, “if it is unsuitable for standing the weather conditions of the sunny land of France, it would be ruinous to expose such a work to the elements of this rainy country.” It was decided, therefore, to cast the figure and the minor sculptures that would adorn the monument in bronze.

In August 1907 work began on preparing the site to receive the monument and the laying of foundations got underway. It was dominated by the bronze figure of Queen Victoria in a seated position, with full regalia, surmounting a large pedestal and accompanied by a figure of Erin, who was depicted presenting a laurel wreath to a wounded Irish soldier (Figure 5). On the other side of the monument, two bronze figures representing peace were incorporated and at the rear, facing Leinster House, a bronze figure of fame was positioned.

Saturday, February 15, 1908 was the day selected for the unveiling of the memorial and contemporary newspapers carry extensive coverage of the unveiling ceremony. It was

![Figure 5. The unveiling of the Queen Victoria Monument, 1908. From The Capuchin Annual, 1975.](image)
formally handed over by Mr Justice Boyd on behalf of the memorial committee to Sir George Holmes, Chairman of the Board of Works, amid a display of considerable pomp and ceremony. As *The Irish Times* reporter went on to note:

> Around the [Leinster] lawn were drawn up the Essex, the Warwick, the Royal Berkshire Regiments, and on the steps in front of Leinster House were the massed bands of those battalions... The whole scene, framed within the line of steel-tipped scarlet, with its magnificently proportioned architectural background, presented an exceedingly effective spectacle, and its beauty was enhanced by the generous sunshine, which agreeably tempered a sharp easterly wind.\[63\]

The vice-chairman of the subscription committee, Mr. Justice Boyd, made a short speech in which he extolled the virtues of the late Queen to successive rounds of applause and cheering, before the Lord Lieutenant pulled the cord and unveiled “amidst an impressive roll of drums and the loud cheers of the spectators the figure of the Queen”.\[64\] This was followed by the playing of the national anthem, after which the drapery was removed from the other figures around the base of the monument.

It was not long, however, before criticism of the monument emerged. While a commentator in *The Irish Builder and Engineer* echoed some of the sentiments expressed in *The Irish Times*, stating that, as a tribute of her Irish people and as a work of art, the monument was “eminently satisfactory... the bronze figure of the Queen is dignified and imposing, while the character of the excellent base has a fine architectural appearance that accords satisfactorily with the surroundings and adequately fills in the centre of the fine square”,\[65\] it went on to comment on the fact that:

> the work was entirely executed in France. Possibly for this there may be justification, because we all know, and must admit, that sculpture, alas! is not in a flourishing state in this country. The pedestal or base of the statue, is, however, the design of a French architect, and the work has been quarried, wrought, and carved in Vienne in France; for this we can see no justification. Ireland has some of the finest building stones in the world, and it is not conceivable that a good design could have been procured and worked in some native material of proved durability. The history of foreign stone for outdoor work in this country is one of unqualified disaster... We cannot help fancying that this, being ‘the tribute of her Irish people’, that a work, the conception of Irish brains, and the work of Irish hands, would afford His Majesty the King more gratification than a work imported readymade into this country”.\[66\]

The Queen Victoria monument, together with those dedicated to Kings William III, George I and George II functioned not just as works of art but as constant reminders of Ireland’s colonial connection with Britain. Together with other monuments dedicated to Prince Albert, Lord Nelson and the Duke of Wellington, Lord Gough, the Duke of Eglinton and Winton and the Earl of Carlisle, they contributed to the construction of a landscape of colonial power. While a large number of statues were erected to Irish nationalist heroes, especially in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, creating in the process a landscape of contested space, royal monuments loomed large. Celebrated by some and castigated by others, their fate hung in the balance amid the new political and cultural context of post-colonial Dublin.

**Dublin after 1922: eradicating the iconography of the colonial regime**

Nelson, Queen Victoria and other British statues are ancient monuments, trophies left behind by a civilisation which has lost the eight centuries battle. The hand that touches one of them is the hand of an ignoramus and a vandal.\[67\]
In the decades after independence, public statues were used by the Irish Free State administration as a means of making tangible the republican and nationalist ideology which had played a key role in the birth of the nation. The 1916 Rising and the subsequent War of Independence and Civil War provided a pantheon of new Republican heroes who would come to occupy the plinths of memorials not only in Dublin, but all around the country. In their geography and iconography, these monuments underlined the independence of the state and set out to carve a visible memorial landscape as a testament to the new political set-up. Afforded prominent geographical positions, these monuments stood in contrast to the somewhat anachronistic monarchical figures erected some decades before. While the urban cultural landscape became imbued with figures drawn from the sphere of Irish nationalist politics, elements of the older monumental landscape of colonial control were unceremoniously bombed from their pedestals or sold by the state to foreign interests.

*Removing the statues of King William III, King George I and King George II*

Shortly after the foundation of the state an obelisk at Oldbridge in county Meath, dedicated to King William III, was bombed by a freelance party of the Irish Army who destroyed it with landmines. The incident led *The Irish Times*, a newspaper noted at the time for its Unionist leanings, to remark:

> Is history to be for Irishmen nothing save perpetual irritant? Can it not teach them something of the process by which they have become what they are now, of the quarrels they have survived, of the slow blendings and absorptions that have united Celt and Norman, Ironside and Hessian, of time’s transformations and severances? All these things are written in many books, but they are written most vividly on the monuments of our land, and these monuments, whether the things that they recall are gracious or painful, ought to be held among our most cherished possessions. That is the civilised practice of other lands.

The outrage at Oldbridge was merely a signal of things to come. The sentiments expressed in *The Irish Times* were to be repeated on a number of occasions throughout succeeding decades, not least following the bombing of the statue of King William III on College Green in 1928.

The much-maligned statue of King William III, which had been attacked and defaced on numerous occasions throughout the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was dealt the ultimate blow in 1928. During the annual Armistice Day commemoration on November 11, the statue was badly damaged in an explosion, and an attempt was also made to destroy the George II monument in St Stephen’s Green.

Although *The Irish Times* stated that “the efforts appear to have been made simultaneously, and without any great success, for although some masonry of the pedestals was displaced, the statues themselves remain proudly erect”, the damage was in fact, much more acute. A later report commented that:

> a large gang of Corporation workmen are busy at work erecting props around King William’s statue. It appears that, following the explosion of Sunday morning, there is some slight risk, owing to the damage done to the pedestal that His Majesty and his charger may topple onto the street. The authorities are taking no chances, and the monument is to be firmly held in position by the props until such time as repairs can be made.
On November 30, 1928 the statue was removed from College Green under orders of Dublin Corporation and rather than being returned to its plinth on College Green, it remained in a Dublin Corporation lumber depot. The site remained empty until 1945 when, interestingly, it was reserved for an intended statue to the Irish patriot and leading participant in the Young Ireland Movement, Thomas Davis.

In the same year that the statue of William III was bombed, the figure of George I was sold off by the Irish government. As the Irish correspondent for The Sunday Times reported on viewing it through a key-hole in the gate of the Mansion House yard, it stood “facing the entrance as if ready to move out when the gate was opened”. The fate of the statue was taken up by Thomas Bodkin the Director of the Barber Institute of Fine Art at the University of Birmingham. Bodkin, together with an architect of the Barber Institute, Robert Atkinson, had been searching for an appropriate monument to erect outside the building. He recognised the merits of Van Nost’s statue and seeing it as a work of art rather than a project in imperialism set about securing it for the Institute.

In 1937 Bodkin contacted the former Irish President, W. T. Cosgrave, and requested that he intervene on his behalf. Cosgrave contacted the city manager informing him of Bodkin’s plan, and the latter sought the advice of the law agent who saw no legal difficulty in selling the statue, provided a basis could be agreed on the price to be paid. The Lord Mayor and councillors were also to be consulted on the issue and it was brought to their attention that the loyalist inscription on the statue (dating from 1798), might prove a point of difficulty. Consequently, it was agreed that “steps should be taken to efface it, as the sentiments expressed therein might not truly represent the feelings of the present Corporation”.

In turn, the Lord Mayor, Alfie Byrne, was consulted and in his reply to Bodkin he expressed his unwillingness to sell the statue for cash, arguing that such a transaction might be ‘intrinsically objectionable’. Instead he proposed that an offer be made to the Corporation to exchange the statue for a “suitable picture or pictures of approximately equivalent value for the purposes of exhibition in the Municipal Gallery”. The Lord Mayor wrote to Bodkin and suggested that the best approach would be to write to Dublin Corporation informing them:

that you have a nice piece of art, which is not in possession of our Corporation, and which you could present... in return for the statue of George II which is now at the rear of the Mansion House.

Bodkin proposed the artistic exchange or alternatively the lodgement of a sum representing the value of the statue to be expended in the purchase of a work or works of art for the Municipal Gallery which was at the time without funds for the purchase of modern pictures for the city. When the matter came up for consideration by the General Purposes Committee of the Corporation in September 1937 its members agreed to sell the statue. A sum of £500 was agreed between the parties as an appropriate price and the monument was removed to the Barber Institute in Birmingham where it now stands.

1937 was also the year which witnessed the demise of the monument dedicated to King George II in the centre of St Stephen’s Green. On May 13, 1937, the day after the coronation of King George VI, the monument was destroyed in an explosion (Figure 6).
alarm among residents and passers-by. The bronze equestrian statue of King George the Second which had stood in the centre of the Green since 1758, was blown to pieces, and fragments of the granite were hurled thirty yards away.\[87\]

The site was later considered for a statue to Thomas Davis, although this was eventually erected on College Green in 1966.

*From Dublin to Sydney: the fate of the Queen Victoria monument*

We have certain symbols to which people object, such as oaths and privy councils, and other things, and I think that the most prominent symbol, which it would be most advisable to remove, is the one which is in the power of the parliamentary secretary to remove. In this year, particularly, it is very unsuitable that this oriental potentate, First empress of India should be displayed in front of our legislative assembly.\[88\]

After 1922 when Leinster House became the permanent location of the Irish Parliament or *Dáil Éireann*, the suitability of having a foreign monarch displayed in such a location was called into question.\[89\] In August 1929, *The Star* published an article calling for the removal of ‘An ugly monument’ and was unrelenting in its criticism that:

The monument…is a particularly ugly piece of statuary. Architecturally it is out of keeping with its surroundings, and its monstrous massiveness obscures the view of Leinster House from Kildare Street. Visitors, Irish and Foreign, to the beautiful building in which the Oireachtais meets, are unanimous in condemnation of the hideous pile…The monument is, in addition, … repugnant to national feelings. It was erected, not so much
While the monument was subject to much discussion in the newspapers, it eventually reached the Dáil when the issue was raised by Tomás Ó Maoláin to the Minster for Finance, Ernest Blythe. He asked, “whether it is intended to remove the Queen Victoria statue from the front of Leinster House”. Mr Blythe replied, “The statue in question is not regarded as a valuable or attractive work of art; nevertheless, it is not thought that its effect on popular taste is so debasing as to necessitate the expenditure of public funds on its removal”.[91] The voices calling for the removal of the monument gathered volume and in a lengthy article in The Irish Press, Norbert Johnson observed:

nothing recommends the retention of that statue. There are not three members of the Dáil whom it does not offend in their national or democratic instincts. There is not one member of the Dáil whose artistic sense it does not outrage. There are at least eight-five members of the Dáil to whom that presence outside the legislative chamber of Irish nationalism is an affront to their conscience and to the people whose ideals they are elected to cherish. Take it away! Ye who have so sorely won the power against the forces it commemorates.[92]

The issue lingered on and in 1937 The Irish Builder remarked:

it is perhaps not too much to hope that some day a fountain will replace the present statue of Queen Victoria in the courtyard of Leinster House. As a work of art the statue leaves much to be desired and its size and detail are entirely out of keeping with the west façade of Leinster House, a good example of the Georgian architecture for which the city is so widely noted.[93]

A year later in 1938 the Dublin Evening Herald reported that “Vancouver wants to erect a statue to Queen Victoria, and arrangements are being made to start a fund for the purpose...we might save Vancouver a good deal of unnecessary expense...by presenting to that city the statue of Queen Victoria which is outside Leinster House”.[94] In 1943, Dublin Corporation also added its voice to the calls for the removal of the monument. It passed a resolution unanimously calling for the removal of the statue of Queen Victoria from Leinster House and to have a fitting memorial to Lord Edward Fitzgerald erected instead in front of his family home.[95] While county councils from around the country offered support to the calls by Dublin Corporation for the removal of the figure, with some suggesting that it be removed to Belfast where it could occupy a space in the grounds of Stormont, the issue was eventually resolved in June of 1948 when a scheme was approved “for the provision of parking accommodation for motor-cars at Leinster House”.[96] On July 22, 1948 the statue was finally removed to the grounds of the Royal Hospital in Kilmainham, a fitting gesture as many saw it, to mark the year in which Ireland left the Commonwealth to become a Republic. The Irish Times cover photograph of the day showed the statue being winched from its pedestal by a crane and removed to Kilmainham in west Dublin. Ministers, Deputies and others watched as the statue of the Queen was “removed on her back as she, the figure, was too tall to pass through the gates of Leinster House” (Figure 7).[97]

Following the removal of the statue a number of requests were received by the OPW from foreign interests who wished to purchase it. Interest from Canada was particularly strong, with requests from the city councils of London, Ontario and Victoria, British
Neither, however, could raise the funds necessary to ship the statue to Canada and the file on the matter was subsequently closed.

In 1983, a worldwide search began in Sydney for a suitable statue to be erected in a position adjacent to the Queen Victoria Building (QVB) in the Australian city. The QVB had been built in 1898 as a monument to the British monarch. Having investigated the options in a number of countries, Neil Glasser, the Director of Promotions at the QVB, travelled to Ireland to view the statue of Queen Victoria, then located in the museum overflow store at Daingean, Co. Offaly. He found the statue:

behind a brick wall belonging to a derelict reformatory school seated on damp ground, exposed to the inclement weather of Ireland. For forty years she had served as a favourite perch and nesting place for the local birds. Bush and brambles had sprung up all around and although undamaged, her time outside had left her discoloured with the bronze well hidden under a coat of black and greens.

Glasser wrote in a letter to the then Taoiseach, Garrett Fitzgerald, that:

I have just today returned from viewing [statue of Queen Victoria]. I am overwhelmed and excited by its sheer majesty and magnitude. It is in my opinion perfect for the city of
Sydney’s restored Queen Victoria building, which will be opened later in the year . . . The statue would be in pride of place in the main area in front of the QVB, directly facing our town hall. I would be recommending the area be named the Irish enclave.[101]

The transfer of the statue did not proceed without some opposition, however. The Minister for Finance, Mr Alan Dukes, argued that it should remain in Ireland. In a memo from his secretary to the OPW it was observed that:

It may be fashionable at present times to regard late nineteenth and early twentieth century Anglo-Irish artefacts as skeletons in the National cupboard. My suggestion would be to leave the cupboard closed rather than toss the contents out to anyone who happens to ask for them.[102]

Later, in another memo, the minister’s private secretary echoed these sentiments:

My own view is that this statue should be displayed in Ireland perhaps indoors in a Museum. The Queen did receive a warm welcome in Dublin and Dan O’Connell proposed many a loyal toast to her. In the context of the Anglo-Irish agreement, ‘two traditions’ and so forth, I see danger in publicly jettisoning a symbol of the second tradition. If the matter goes to cabinet the advice should be that we do not dispose of it.[103]

In September 1986, despite these objections, the government decided to give the monument to the people of Sydney on the occasion of the bicentenary celebrations.[104] The statue was subsequently removed to Sydney (Figure 8) and it now stands in the Bicentennial Plaza, facing Sydney’s Town Hall, with the inscription:

At the request of the city of Sydney this statue of Queen Victoria was presented by the people of Ireland in a spirit of good will and friendship Until 1949 it stood in front of

![Figure 8. Queen Victoria monument, Sydney.](image-url)
While the statue of Queen Victoria was removed under the direction of the Irish government in 1948, a gesture which symbolised the political transition that was to take place a year later, other monuments that honoured figures drawn from the realm of the British monarchy and military were removed by force of bomb. The vulnerable position in which such statues stood was underlined in a report in *The Irish Times* in 1956:

> Dublin statues are being gradually weeded out. In July 1948, the statue of Queen Victoria which had stood outside Leinster House was removed and is now in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham. The following year a statue of King William III had to be removed from College Green by Dublin Corporation and is stored somewhere in the Mansion House grounds. Lord Gough after three attempts was eventually blown up in the Phoenix Park in July last year; and the Carlisle memorial in the Phoenix Park suffered a similar fate in July this year, and a 1914–18 war memorial in Limerick was blown up in August last year. [106]

**Conclusions**

Statue and column, mausoleum and shrine are trophies of a nation’s triumphs or its tragedies. [107]

In the latter half of the nineteenth and first two decades of the twentieth century, Dublin City came to embody a symbolic geography which reflected its contested political status within an ambivalent colonial framework. The discontinuities and tensions of Irish political history had particular implications for the demands placed upon the symbolic landscape. Monuments, such as those dedicated to royal monarchs, were used throughout the period under examination to legitimise the authority of the British Empire and they became focal points around which choreographed celebrations took place. However, while they may have focused attention on specific individuals and created in the process a memory system in carved in stone, the space colonised by the erection of monuments was not static. Even before the achievement of political independence in Ireland these monuments were used as rallying points to express opposition to the established political regime. As efforts to build and consolidate nationhood began in earnest after 1922, statues were used as badges of cultural and political identity. Those which did not conform to a notion of the Irish Free State as a Catholic and nationalist nation were wilfully destroyed or officially removed, a testimony to their symbolic potency. The people and the events which these monuments focused attention had become part of what Osborne refers to as “the ideological bric-a-brac” of a former era. [108]

With increasing distance from the independence struggle, however, a new notion of culture has begun to prevail which transcends the narrow ethnic boundaries that had earlier characterised Ireland. This is a concept which recognises that Ireland, and its capital Dublin, is a product of the various strands of Irish identity which crosses over the boundaries of Catholic and Protestant traditions and takes into account Celtic, Viking, Norman and English influences. It also means that many Irish people now look back with a degree of embarrassment at the blowing up, or selling off, of public monuments, and the triumphalist displays of nationalism, of previous years.
This paper, in focusing upon a case study of Dublin, has confirmed that cities are indeed constructed landscapes, shaped by sets of agents that are caught up in a web of social, cultural and political circumstances. The argument that every landscape is ‘a synthesis of charisma and context, a text which may be read to reveal the force of dominant ideas and prevailing practices, as well as the idiosyncrasies of a particular author’, is particularly true in the context of Dublin before and after 1922. We have seen that public monuments to royal monarchs erected in the Irish capital acted as important focal points around which political and cultural positions were articulated. This study contributes to a broader literature, as yet under-represented in the Republic of Ireland, which recognises that public monuments are an important lens through which to explore the symbolic meaning of the urban landscape, especially those shaped amid the turbulent political transition from the colonial to the post-colonial.

Notes

[5] These actions echoed those of decades earlier when the public statues dedicated to members of the Tsars’ family were also summarily removed. Aman writes at length of the monuments erected in the cold war era and their symbolic meaning and significance both when erected and how this meaning has evolved through time, see A. Aman, Architecture and Ideology in Eastern Europe During the Stalin era (London 1992).
[15] There are those who have questioned whether Ireland can be considered a colony at all, see for example T. Bartlett, What is my nation?: themes in Irish history, 1550–1850 in T. Bartlett et al. (Eds), Irish Studies: A General Introduction (Dublin 1988), 44–59, L. Kennedy, Colonialism, Religion and Nationalism in Ireland (Belfast 1996). For a general discussion of this issue see D. Lloyd, Ireland After History (Cork 1999).
See P. Fagan, The population of Dublin in the eighteenth century with particular reference to the proportions of Protestants and Catholics, *Eighteenth Century Ireland* 6 (1991) 121–156. Fagan’s analysis suggests that in 1710 the population of the capital was split ca. 65% Protestant and ca. 35% Catholic, in 1750 the split was almost even at 50% each, and by 1800 the percentage of Protestants had declined to 35% leaving the Catholic population in a majority with 65%.

On January 1, 1801 the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland came into being and Ireland ceased to have a parliament. Instead it was to elect 100 members of parliament to the House of Commons in Westminster and contribute a number of peers and bishops to the House of Lords.

Although Robert Emmet’s rebellion of 1803 may have dented government complacency it amounted to little more than a set of skirmishes on the streets of the capital which were easily put down.


*The Nation*, May 27, 1843, 523. The Duke of Wellington was Irish-born, although he was engaged in organising military operations against Irish rebels and famously rejected his Irish heritage reminding people that to be born in a stable did not make one a horse. The monument dedicated to him was not completed until 1861.

It is important to recognise, therefore, that the contested nature of Dublin’s urban landscape in the late nineteenth century stemmed from both a broad-based ‘British-Irish’ opposition, as well as from the various internal discourses of Irish nationalism. This was demonstrated most especially at the close of the century in the debate which surrounded the erection of a monument to Parnell in 1899, before the monument dedicated to Wolfe Tone had been completed.

The Home Rule Act was passed on September 18, 1914.

The Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed in London in December 1921. The terms of the Treaty provoked a deep split in Irish politics and led in turn to the Irish Civil War of 1922–23.

Further evidence of Protestant Dublin’s ‘deification’ of King William can be seen in the fact that when the Houses of Parliament were opened in 1735, the chamber of the House of Lords was decorated with a specially commissioned tapestry depicting the Battle of the Boyne. On a sculptural level an obelisk was erected in 1736 on the banks of the Boyne at Oldbridge in Co. Meath, opposite the scene of some of the fiercest fighting of the battle. The monument was given an inscription that pointed to the ‘glorious memory of King William III, who crossed the Boyne near this place to attack James II at the head of a Popish army advantageously placed on the south side of it, and did on that day, by a successful battle secure to us and our posterity, our liberty, laws and religion.’ A further memorial was erected in Boyle, Co. Roscommon. The icon of King William also became popular with Orange clubs formed in the eighteenth century, see B. Loftus, *Mirrors: William III and Modern Ireland* (Down, 1990).


Ibid., 35.

Ibid., 30. As Craig notes, “it was subjected to repeated defacement and abuse, daubed with filth, tarred, robbed of its sceptre, even beheaded,” M. Craig, *Dublin*, 1660–1860 (Dublin, 1982), 76.

CONSTRUCTION AND DESTRUCTION OF COLONIAL LANDSCAPE

[39] Ibid., 31.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., 32. The latter part of the sentence was later revoked and their fines reduced to five shillings.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 44.
[44] On July 12, 1822 a group of Orangemen marched in procession to the statue and later that evening the four lamps surrounding the monument were demolished, the orange insignia was torn from the statue and an Orangeman was attacked. They managed to regain control aided by a detachment of police and Yeomanry and forced all passers by to take off their hats to the statue. Ibid., 46–47.
[45] For example, ‘On the night of Thursday, the 7th of April 1836, at a few minutes past twelve o’clock, a light appeared suddenly on the northern side of the statue, and immediately afterwards the figure of the king was blown several feet into the air with a deafening explosion, extinguishing the lamps on College Green and its vicinity . . . its legs and arms were broken, and its head completely defaced by the fall; the horse was also injured and shattered in several places,’ Ibid., 48–49.
[48] This was demonstrated in 1719 when on June 29 “the Guildhall of the Tholsel of this city was broke into by some person or persons disaffected to his most sacred majestie, King George, and his government; who in the night time . . . broke into the said hall and defaced and cut in pieces his said majesties picture”, CARD, Vol. vii, 64.
[49] Ibid., 49.
[52] Ibid. This idea was again put forward in 1806, see CARD, Vol. xv, 1806, p. 489.
[54] CARD, Vol. x, 22.
[56] Ibid.
[57] The Irish Times, April 30, 1900, 11.
[58] Ibid., May 9, 1900, 12.
[59] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid. In addition three small figures representing science, literature and art were included, reflecting some of the interests of Queen Victoria.
[64] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] The Evening Herald, December 12, 1931.
[68] Hence the erection of a cenotaph dedicated to Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith, which took the form of a Celtic cross and was later replaced by an obelisk, an open-air bust of Countess Markievicz, the figures of Cuchulainn and Sean Heuston. There were also plans for a monument to Thomas Davis.
[70] It is noteworthy that during the 1916 Rising there was a failed attempt to destroy Nelson’s Pillar on O’Connell Street.
[71] See The Irish Times, November 12, 1928, and various references in ‘The Irishman’s Diary’ section of the paper on November 14, 15 and 16, 1928. Not only were the statues of George II and William III the target of attack, but also ‘a third explosion took place in Herbert Park, Ballsbridge, where an ornamental fountain, erected to commemorate the visit of King Edward VII to the international exhibition in 1907 was also blown up’, see The Irish Times, November 12, 1928, 9.
[72] The Irish Times, November 12, 9.
Although the explosion had been quite ineffective the Corporation decided to remove it as it was considered a traffic hazard. Some months later, the one other monument to William III in the Irish Free State, located at Boyle county Roscommon, was also destroyed in an explosion. In an interesting postscript the statue provoked further discussion long after it had been removed from the streets of the capital when the question of its re-erection arose during discussions about the commemoration of the 1798 rebellion in 1997. The Orange Order wrote to Dublin Corporation in March asking it to erect a new statue to King William III, see The Irish Times, March 6, 1997.

See 'Vagaries of Dublin,' in The Sunday Times, June 6, 1937.

Bodkin was Director of the National Gallery from 1927–1934.


Ibid.

Ibid. Alfred Byrne to Thomas Bodkin, August 27, 1927.

Ibid.

Ibid., Thomas Bodkin to J. J. Rowe, August 31, 1937.

Minutes of the General Purposes Committee, Dublin Corporation, September 28, 1937.

Public art in Birmingham, Information Sheet, no. 17.

Two requests for the statue were made by the Royal Dublin Society, which had received its charter from George II the 1930s, but both were refused. Some indication that the statue might come under attack was evident in the disturbances in the city a few nights earlier when: ‘the windows of two Dublin shops were smashed. One was the window of the Dublin Antique Galleries . . . where a small statue of Queen Victoria . . . [was] on display . . . The other window was . . . in Johnston’s Court off Grafton Street where British records and Coronation albums were displayed . . . The Dublin Antique Galleries, formerly the Royal Antique Galleries of Middle Abbey Street in pre-treaty days supplied furnishings for Dublin Castle, the Viceregal Lodge and the RHK [Royal Hospital Kilmainham] for Royal visits to Ireland,’ The Irish Times, May 14, 1937, 7.

Da‘il Debates, 1932 col. 239.

See OPW files: Disposal of Queen Victoria’s statue, A 25/16/4/2, A 25/16/5, A 25/16/2/1.

The Star, August 17, 1929, 4.

Da‘il Debates, 1930, col. 1223, see also further calls for its removal, 1932, col. 239.

The Irish Press, February 8, 1933.

Ir. B., December 25, 1937, 1118.

Dublin Evening Herald, October 24, 1938, 5.

Minutes of the Corporation of Dublin, 1943, no. 195, no. 246. Lord Edward Fitzgerald was one of the leaders of the revolutionary United Irishmen in 1798. He was arrested and mortally wounded on the eve of the Rising.


The Irish Times, July 23, 1948, 3. It was later moved to museum storage in Daingean, Co. Offaly.

See Da‘il Debates, 1949, cols 544–546 and T. Bodkin Report on the Arts in Ireland (Dublin 1949). He notes that, “No one could dispute the propriety of removing Queen Victoria’s monument from the front of Leinster House, nor regret the transfer of the ugly statue of Her Britannic majesty to London, Ontario, or Peterborough in Canada; but many will wish that at least the beautiful figure of Fame which adorned the back of that monument should be put on view somewhere in the native country of its sculptor, John Hughes,” 52.

OPW file: Queen Victoria statue, A/25/16/4, Vol. 1, no. 137. A US business man later showed an interest in purchasing the monument, while in 1966 as part of the fiftieth anniversary commemoration of the 1916 Rising it was suggested that ‘it would be an opportune time for the department to dispose of all these old relics of the past.’ Further requests were received throughout the 1980s from Thunder Bay, Ontario, and Halifax, Nova Scotia.

QVB promotional literature, n.d.g.

The QVB authorities did not receive the entire monument however. They only requested and only received the figure of the Queen. The other parts, namely the statue of Ceres representing Hibernia at peace, the statue of a dying soldier representing Ireland at war, and an angel figure referred to as ‘fame’, remained in storage at Daingean, Co. Offaly. Not all, however, were content with the erection of the monument in Sydney’s city centre. The Sun-Herald commented on St Patrick’s Day 1996 that, “This ugly relic of British colonial rule in Ireland was dispatched down-under because nobody in the Emerald Isle wanted it. Its presence in Sydney is an offence to Irish Australians and an insult to Australian Australians”, The Sun-Herald, March 17, 1996, 22.

Among these stood the statue of Viscount Gough in the Phoenix Park which had been erected in 1880 and destroyed in 1957. Almost exactly a year later on July 28, 1958, the statue dedicated to the Earl of Carlisle was also bombed. A month later the monument dedicated to the Earl of Eglinton and Winton in St Stephen’s Green was also shattered.


B. Osborne, op. cit., 434.

D. Ley and J. Duncan, Epilogue, in J. Duncan and D. Ley (Eds), Place/culture/representation (London 1993), 329–334.