CHAPTER 1

Deification in the early century

Public monuments were scarce in Ireland at the beginning of the nineteenth century and were largely confined to Dublin, which boasted several monumental statues of English rulers, modelled in a weighty and pompous late Baroque style. Cork had an equestrian statue of George II, by John van Nost, the younger (fig. 1), positioned originally on Tuckey’s Bridge and subsequently moved to the South Mall in 1798. Somewhat more unusually, Birr, in County Offaly, featured a significant commemoration of Prince William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland (1721–1765) (fig. 2). Otherwise known as the Butcher of Culloden, he was commemorated by a portrait statue surmounting a Doric column, erected in Emmet Square (formerly Cumberland Square) in 1747. The statue was the work of English sculptors Henry Cheere (1703–1781) and his brother John (d.1787). The paucity of such monuments and their isolated and elevated presentation augmented their impact. Impossible to ignore, they became focal points in a variety of ways – artistic, geographical and propagandist. While serving as an artistic feature and adding a stylistic dimension to their individual locations, monumental statuary also had a role in town planning in relation to the movement of both pedestrians and vehicles. The issue of propaganda, however, appears ultimately to have dominated. This is confirmed by the fact that not one of these portrait commemorations is still in place.

Citizens of Dublin and those visiting the city in the year 1800 would have witnessed the emphasis on royal portraits and most particularly equestrian monuments of which there were three. The equestrian statue of William III produced by Grinling Gibbons (1648–1721), the eminent English sculptor of Dutch origin, was the most prominently located, at what would become an important junction in the centre of the city (fig. 3). This was to be the most controversial public monument in the country, serving as a focal point for various propagandist displays. The statue, erected in College Green in 1702, at the expense of Dublin Corporation, was carefully positioned on a high pedestal facing the seat of power in Dublin Castle, and in close proximity, but with its back to the seat of learning in Trinity College. A second equestrian statue, a portrait of George I by John van Nost, the elder (d.1729), was originally placed on Essex Bridge (now Capel Street Bridge) in 1722. It was removed in 1753, and was re-erected at the end of the century, in 1798, in the gardens of the Mansion House, facing out over railings towards Dawson Street. The pedestal carried the inscription: ‘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 illustrious House of Hanover’. A third equestrian statue, commemorating George II, executed by the younger John van Nost (fl.1750–1780, cousin of the elder), and erected in 1758, was to be seen in St Stephen’s Green (fig. 4). While the green was not yet open to the public and the statue was located at its centre, late eighteenth-century engravings reveal that the monument was positioned on such a substantial pedestal that it was clearly visible from outside the park.

All three royal portraits adopted a military presentation in the guise of a Roman emperor. Such equestrian portrait imagery has a lengthy and revered legacy in art history, in its line of descent from the statue of Marcus Aurelius (AD 161–180) on the Capitol in Rome. It witnessed a marked revival and popularity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. With its inherent imperious and military connection, the equestrian format presented a very particular ideology and stood as a representation of power, authority and control. Indestructibility and longevity are also suggested in this monument-type, given that the Marcus Aurelius statue is not only one of the few large-scale Roman bronzes to survive, but is the only surviving equestrian monument from ancient Rome. It was inevitable that such propagandist presence in the centre of Dublin would


4. John van Nost, younger, George II, 1758, bronze, St Stephen’s Green, Dublin. Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.
promote opposition. From the time that they were put in place, and particularly in the aftermath of the Act of Union, these monuments were attacked frequently, with the William III statue singled out for particularly aggressive attention. With annual celebrations activated around the statue to mark the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne and the birthday of the king, this monument was rarely out of the news.\textsuperscript{14} A description of the festive rites that were performed throughout the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century reveals the serious politicising of the undertaking. On these occasions, ‘it was usual for the Lord Lieutenant, attended by the great officers of state, and of his household, to proceed from the castle with drums beating, colours flying, and in all the magnificence of state pomp, to march in grand procession round the statue. . . which was formally decorated . . . and the garrison turned out to fire a feu de joie’.\textsuperscript{15} In time these formalities were dispensed with, under the auspices of subsequent Lord Lieutenants. The Duke of Bedford suspended the state procession in \textsuperscript{1806},\textsuperscript{16} and in \textsuperscript{1823} the Marquis of Wellesley proposed that the dressing of the statue be discontinued, thus putting an end to what was described as ‘a disgraceful and dangerous custom’.\textsuperscript{17} However it was simultaneously recognised that dressing and not dressing the statue were both going to cause rioting in the capital\textsuperscript{18} and the statue remained a controversial presence for a further hundred years.

With three eighteenth-century equestrian monuments already in place in Dublin, further such statues were proposed for the capital city in the course of the nineteenth century. The first, in \textsuperscript{1809}, was in the form of a Corporation resolution to celebrate the Jubilee of George III, a proposal that seems not to have proceeded beyond the suggestion that a public subscription be opened for the purpose of erecting such an equestrian statue.\textsuperscript{19} Another proposal was intended to commemorate the Duke of Wellington and formed part of the design of the Wellington Testimonial erected in the Phoenix Park in \textsuperscript{1822} (fig. 5). The equestrian portrait, however, was never carried out.\textsuperscript{20} In \textsuperscript{1862}, the design competition for the widening of Carlisle Bridge (now O’Connell Bridge) in the centre of the city revealed a particular focus on equestrian portraiture. The bridge committee, in their guidelines to submitting artists, had highlighted the importance of incorporating sculptural work.\textsuperscript{21} Proposals ranged from the placing of a single equestrian statue at the centre of the bridge to the positioning of one equestrian statue at each of its four corners. In an elegant and sophisticated design, the joint submission of George Gordon Page of London and Richard Turner of Dublin proposed that Queen Victoria and Prince Albert be depicted at one end of the bridge, with the Duke of Wellington and Lord Gough correspondingly placed at the other end, all four on horse-back (fig. 6). It is evident therefore that, by the end of the century, Dublin might have displayed several additional equestrian monuments. Yet ultimately only Lord Gough, among them, was to be commemorated in this manner, and not in connection with the bridge, but in a separate and individual equestrian portrait commissioned later in the century. Gough, who was Irish born, had served as Field Marshall in the British army and the commemoration was financed by his friends. The commission was offered to John Henry Foley and the statue was unveiled in the Phoenix Park in \textsuperscript{1880} (fig. 7).\textsuperscript{22} In spite of the popularity of such commemorative imagery outside the country, only one equestrian statue was erected in Dublin in the course of the nineteenth century. Outside the capital city there was little interest in the equestrian format. Less than ten
years after the Gough statue was put in place, in 1810, a colossal equestrian portrait of William III was unveiled in Belfast. Commissioned by the Orange Order to be positioned above the Clifton Street Orange Hall, the bronze statue is the work of mason sculptor and wood-carver Harry Hens of Exeter. Pedestrian sculptural portraits of English kings were as numerous in Dublin at the beginning of the nineteenth century as their equestrian counterparts, but much less public and therefore less overt symbols of dominance. A statue of George II by Benjamin Rackstraw (d.1775) was erected on the façade of the Weavers’ Hall in the Coombe in 1776. George III was commemorated by a statue in the Royal Exchange (now the City Hall), a gift of the Earl of Northumberland, then Lord Lieutenant, to the merchants of the city. Depicted in ancient armour, the portrait, which is the work of the younger van Nost, was erected in the 1760s (fig. 8). Further royal portraits were commissioned and executed in the nineteenth century, one of which was another statue of George III for the Bank of Ireland, the work of John Bacon, the younger (1777–1856), to a design of Thomas Kirk, 1813 (fig. 9). The coronation of George IV in 1820 and his visit to Dublin in the following year resulted in several portrait commissions, many of which were simply busts. Kirk was particularly favoured among local sculptors and is noted as having taken a model of the king during his visit. He executed a colossal statue of George IV for the Linen Hall in Dublin and a bust for the Bank of Ireland, both of which were exhibited at the RHA in the mid 1820s. Kirk’s royal statue, commissioned by the linen merchants, passed from the Linen Hall to the Royal Dublin Society in 1849, where it joined yet another monumental portrait of the same monarch. This second statue, instigated by members of the Society, was also commissioned in the aftermath of the royal visit in 1821. English sculptor, William Behnes, who had trained for a period in Dublin, was chosen to execute the work. This appears to be the commission that launched Behnes career, but such was the extent of his eventual success, that he overreached himself financially, ultimately ending up bankrupt. The checked history of the royal portrait saw it transported, in an incomplete state, to Dublin, almost twenty years after the original commission. In 1845, in something of a role reversal, Constantine Panormo, who had been supported by Behnes in his early student years in London, was given the unfinished statue of George IV to complete. Both of these statues, in which the monarch is presented as a Knight of St. Patrick, are recorded as being publicly displayed in Leinster House, which was then the RDS premises, on Kildare Street, in the early years of the new century. In a description of his visit to Ireland in the 1840s, William Thackeray was to comment on the absurd nature of ‘these pompous images . . . of defunct majesties, for whom no breathing soul cares a halfpenny’ and identified a ‘simpler’ quality in the statues of George III and George IV. On the other hand his praise for the commemoration of William III as someone who had ‘done something to merit a statue’ was inauspicious and ultimately much contested, as is evident in the many attacks on the statue in the course of the century.

The nineteenth century was to be identified as a period of statuena in Western countries as a result of the proliferation of monuments in the public spaces. It was even suggested at the time that statuary was ‘exclusively commemorative’ and had as its purpose to ‘eternalize or propagate the memory of the departed’. In this regard Ireland would prove to be as active as any of her European neighbours. The divided loyalties in the country, Unionist and Nationalist, ensured that internal politics was played out on the streets in the public statuary. It was not simply the case that the person who was to be commemorated was a consideration, but scale, location and choice of sculptor would all be important factors throughout the century. If commemorative work of an Irish nature would begin to find its place in the public spaces eventually, imperial commemorations, monumental in scale, dominated the early part of the century. The royal statues already in place in Dublin at the beginning of the century were joined early in the 1800s by further commemorative monuments symbolic of external power. The soldier hero was perhaps the most significant of institution to become evident in the early century. The presentation of victorious military and naval commanders reached virtual deification with Viscount Nelson ‘skied’ on top of a triumphal column in Sackville Street, in the centre of Dublin, in 1808 (fig. 10), and the Duke of Wellington commemorated by a gigantic obelisk close to the entrance of the Phoenix Park at the edge of the city (fig. 11). In both instances the architectural design was by an Englishm man, while the sculptural work was given to Irish artists. It was common in this period for monumental commemorative work to involve collaboration between architects and sculptors, and submissions for design competitions were usually received from members of the two professions, individually and jointly. The rival claims of sculpture and architecture and their use in public monuments were to be widely canvassed in the nineteenth century. Early in the century, the eminent architect James Gandon made his position clear in an essay on testimonials, where he recommended the uniting of architecture and sculpture to create ‘more interesting, dignified, and impressive’ compositions. In due course, sculptors liberated themselves from their dependence on architects and, in 1865, at the height of the O’Connell Monument controversy, the committee considered a proposal that architecture was drummed, while sculpture was eloquent. Certainly, unadorned architectural monuments were considered unsatisfactory and both the Nelson and Wellington monuments in Dublin were to meet with criticism in this regard in the 1800s, the Nelson column for its lack of relief panels and the Wellington Testimonial for being left so long in an incomplete state, minus its intended sculptural work.

Both monument types drew their inspiration from antiquity and were erected at the height of the Greek revival in Britain. Columns, obelisks and triumphal arches proved to be the most popular designs generally in Europe for heroic work commemorating victory. John Wilson Croker, who, as deputy chief secretary in Ireland in 1808 and friend of the Duke of Wellington, was involved in both the Nelson and Wellington commemorations in Dublin, advocated the importance of height for this type of work, identifying it as ‘the cheapest way and one of the most certain of obtaining
Deification in the early century

Nineteenth-century Irish Sculpture


sublimity.18 Such a positive opinion of tall monuments was not universal. The view was also held that the statuary column did no more than ‘put out of sight the very object it would hold up to public gaze’,19 a point of view that was substantiated in the case of the columnar commemoration of Daniel O’Connell in Ennis later in the century (fig. 39). It was proposed, for the Ennis monument, that ‘a rough-cut statue’ would suffice on the column, as it ‘would be folly to expend money on a finely chiseled statue placed at such an elevation’.20

Increased knowledge of ancient art and architecture in this period, resulting from the intense interest in antiquarianism in the eighteenth century, promoted monumental commemorations of this nature. Trajan’s column, 106-113 AD, in Rome, commemorating the Emperor’s successful military campaigns, served as the inspiration for similar monumental commemorations in the modern period in Europe and beyond. Contemporaneous with the initiative to memorialise Nelson in this manner in Dublin early in the nineteenth century, the Vendôme column was being erected in Paris to commemorate Napoleon’s victory at Austerlitz and was inaugurated in 1808. Directly inspired by the ancient Roman work, this monument includes a spiraling frieze of relief sculpture depicting the Napoleonic campaign. However most of the imitations were simple fluted columns, considerably less ornate and with reduced sculptural input, resulting in a significantly more austere presence. Hawksmoor and Herbert’s monument to John Churchill, the first Duke of Marlborough, completed in 1733 and erected in the grounds of Blenheim Palace, was the first fluted Doric column surmounted by a portrait statue erected in the British Isles. This monument engendered many similar works, almost replicas, with one notable development. Where Churchill is depicted in the guise of a Roman general, conforming to the standards of heroic presentation, the nineteenth-century figures are portrayed in contemporary costume, as a result of which the classical requirement of timelessness in the portrait element of the work is somewhat diminished, if not entirely lost. One might ask, ‘why Dublin for a Nelson commemoration?’, as he appears to have had no connection with Ireland in the course of his life.21 Yet there seems to have been little that was considered unusual about the decision in its day. At the beginning of the century, Dublin was the second largest city22 in what had become the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in 1801, and, as the second citizens in the British Empire, Dubliners were noted as holding considerable ‘affection for the memory of the departed hero’, and his victory at Trafalgar was greeted in the city with much celebration.23 It is noteworthy that, in a design for a national monument to commemorate Nelson in London, the Italian sculptor Antonio Canova included a representation of Ireland. His proposed monument, which was never taken beyond the model stage, includes a panel depicting the death of Nelson, which shows three mourning figures, England, Scotland and Ireland, positioned to receive his body.24

Nelson died on 21 October 1805, and in November of the same year it was already being suggested in Dublin that the erection of a statue, funded by public subscription, would be a fitting commemoration and a ‘permanent proof of respect’.25 Public monuments were similarly being suggested for Birmingham26 and Liverpool,27 and a monument (1807-18) by John Flaxman (1755-1826) was also erected in St Paul’s Cathedral in London, which had been designated the repository of national monuments at the beginning of the century. These were to be a public celebration of the life of a national hero and national commemorative monuments of this nature would proliferate in the course of the century. It must have seemed perfectly logical to many, therefore, that the second city of the empire would commemorate the man who defeated Napoleon and saved Britain from invasion by the French, and, of more local concern, who attempted to protect trade by securing the Irish sea. Nonetheless, it is not insignificant that the Dublin column was the first such commemoration of the naval hero. The Birmingham and Liverpool monuments are more strictly sculptural works than architectural presentations and less heroic than the triumphal column erected in Sackville Street. The proposal in 1805 for a national monument to be positioned in a public location in London foundered initially28 and it was not until 1819 that a Nelson monument was commissioned for Trafalgar Square and completed in 1843.29 Dublin, therefore, received its Nelson Column several decades before London, and it was the only Irish city to commemorate...
residential, commercial, and leisure premises. The selected site for the monument marked the point where upper and lower Sackville Street met and crossed with the narrower Henry and Earl Street. There was some opposition from local residents to the siting of the monument in their midst. The massy block-like base of the structure must have seemed like a colossal imposition to those residing on the street, concerned, as they must have been, about circulation in the area and vista. The fact that it was possible to climb by way of a spiral staircase to the top of the monument, permitting a form of active participation and thus rendering the work even more public, would not have made the monument any more acceptable, as this only encouraged visitors to the site. In spite of such local unease, the crossing of Sackville Street was without doubt a focal point for the giant column, which stood at well over 100 feet and, although absorbed into the street over time, it maintained a substantial and significant presence in the city for a century and a half. The Nelson column was funded by public subscription. But on the very day of the ceremony to inaugurate the work, the public was informed that not enough money had been raised to carry out the design as originally intended. Such lack of cash was to prove a continuing problem throughout the century, as so many monuments were funded by public subscription. Despite initial enthusiasm and acknowledging that different members of the public supported different commemorations, the success of a work was dependent on the funds available and the money subscribed often proprio vigore. It is worth considering as to which the Nelson commemoration and its management could actually be considered public. Sculptural commissions of this nature at the beginning of the century were controlled by the Corporation, but administered by a committee, that comprised members of the Corporation, of Parliament, of the aristocracy and of the banking and business communities. Money and status were the most important criteria, and, inevitably in the period in question, gender was not a concern on these all male committees. The public at large, ‘the person on the street’, had no input, beyond being expected to contribute money. In this instance, the designs for the monument were not even exhibited publicly, which denied the possibility of popular comment and public debate. The issue of public involvement in such commemorative work was to become increasingly controversial as the century progressed, leading to an aggressive campaign in the 1860s with the national commemoration of Daniel O’Connell. The competition to select a design for the Nelson monument was advertised early in 1806, with a short submission date, ultimately prolonged by two months until the beginning of May that year. It is regrettable that no detailed account of the submitted work appears to be extant but it is possible to identify a number of the competition entrants, several of whom exhibited their designs at subsequent exhibitions in Dublin and London. Certainly four London and four Dublin based architects participated. The seeming absence of independent sculptural submissions suggests that it was understood the successful design would be an architectural feature. The lack of any form of contemporary display of the submissions means that there is little record of public opinion about the work. No comparison is possible between the rejected designs and the finished monument. The English architect, William Wilkins (1778–1853) won the competition at the close of 1807 for his design of a Greek Doric column raised on a plinth and surmounted by a capital and abacus supporting a Roman galley. The abacus incorporated a viewing platform. However lack of sufficient funds, as noted at the laying of the foundation stone, necessitated a reduced plan and the Irish architect, Francis Johnston, who was also a participant in the competition, was invited to adapt Wilkins’s design. The Doric column was retained and the most significant alteration was the rejection of the galley in favour of a portrait statue. This sculptural element, confined as it was to the top of the giant column, must have appeared almost incidental. Yet, the statue of Nelson, the work of Thomas Kirk, was an important commission for a local sculptor and would establish Kirk as the leading sculptor in Dublin at the beginning of the century. Standing 15 feet tall and leaning on a ship’s capstan, the figure of Nelson was executed in Portland stone and, positioned on a circular pedestal, was more than 120 feet from the ground (fig. 13). According to a contemporary source, the statue presented a strong resemblance to Nelson. In spite of its remote location, the outline of the figure...
was marked and the monument as a whole made an impact. So much so that when John Hughes was teaching modelling at the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin at the end of the century, he advised students to look at the statue and to notice the elegance and dignity of the work and the beauty of the silhouette.\(^6\) The absence of relief panels at the base of the monument confirmed its architectural emphasis. This was an instance of text displacing image, with the names and dates of four of Nelson’s key victories inscribed with utmost clarity, rather than illustrated, on the squared panels at the base.

Comparison with the London column is revealing. Positioned in the open space of Trafalgar Square and both incorporating and surrounded by sculptural work, this represents a less brutal display. The work of William Railton and E.H. Baily, the slim column reads as a coherent area than College Green at this stage in the nineteenth century and, in any case, the lofty position of the statue made it widely visible. Engravings of the city in the first half of the century (fig. 14) reveal the dominating nature of the structure, which was reinforced by the absence of any accompanying ornaments in the vicinity for some sixty years. However, it was this isolation and dominance that also encouraged opposition and there were those who immediately considered the column ill-placed and the commemoration inappropriate.\(^5\) It is evident that, from the standpoint of the colonised, this was a form of triumphalism and the Irish Magazine noted a display of indifference on the part of the Irish public to the opening of the monument.\(^6\) Therefore, depending on the individual observer, the monument was either a success or an imposition. As a manifestation of ‘the feeling of Protestant Ireland’,\(^6\) it was certainly a success, and within a short space of time those members of the population who were active in promoting the Nelson commemoration addressed the issue of recognising the achievements of the Duke of Wellington in a similar fashion.

In the spirit of the age, and celebrating his victorious campaigns against the French, it was proposed that a ‘public national testimonial’ erected to the Duke of Wellington in Ireland would prompt ‘the imitation of his example’ among the people.\(^6\) That Wellington was born in Ireland and had served as Chief Secretary there suggests the probability of more local interest than was the reality with the Nelson commemoration. One of the managers of the Wellington testimonial proposed, in a published letter, that the monument was to ‘become the most characteristic of the ornaments of our Capital, commemorating to all future ages the victories which have accomplished the deliverance of Europe, and displaying the just pride of Ireland in having produced the Hero by whom they have been won’.\(^6\) Several Wellington commemorative monuments were also being proposed in England in the aftermath of the somewhat temporary peace of 1814. Praising the classical aspect of the Nelson monument, the committee established to administer the Irish Wellington commemoration initially proposed a Corinthian column.\(^6\) Croker, who was actively involved in the Dublin commemoration, supported the idea of a column, and advocated that, whatever the design, it be at least ‘impressively high’.\(^6\) That there was already a column in the Park, the thirteenth Corinthian Phoenix Column erected there in 1747, seemed not to concern him. The Wellington committee certainly favoured emphasis on the architectural aspect, indicating that they would be ‘very sorry to exclude the art of sculpture altogether from the testimonial, but it appears to us very unadvisable to trust principally to its resources for the character of the trophy’.\(^5\) Ultimately a competition for the Wellington commission was held in 1815 and submissions were received from architects in Ireland, England and Scotland, six of which were short-listed (fig. 15) and exhibited in the RDS premises. These included two obelisks, three columns and a temple housing a statue of the Duke of Wellington. The obelisk designs of Glasgow architect David Hamilton and London architect Robert Smirke emerged as the favourites, to such an extent that they were even considered to outdo those of antiquity.\(^5\) William Wilkins was an unsuccessful competition entrant on this occasion. He came third with his design for a column crowned with a circle of caryatids, which was to support a seated statue of either the Duke or a
representation of Victory.¹₁ The commission was offered to Robert Smirke (1781–1867), whose obelisk design incorporated an equestrian portrait of the Duke accompanied by guardian lions placed on individual pedestals (fig. 16). Several obelisk commemorations were already to be seen in Ireland, most of them purely architectural monuments, without any accompanying sculptural features. The obelisk at Oldbridge in 1796, on the site of the battle of the Boyne, was erected by the ‘protestants of Great Britain and Ireland’ to commemorate the events of 1690.¹² The erection of these seemingly simple monumental architectural commemorations continued throughout the nineteenth century. Bulky or slight, their soaring height or high location often afforded them a commanding presence wherever they were positioned. This can be witnessed in early illustrations of the ‘slender and graceful’ obelisk to commemorate General Ross (1756–1814) erected at Roscrea, Co. Down in 1817.¹³ A further example, the Brindley Testimonial at Ashbourne, Co. Meath, 1816, was erected to commemorate a local huntsman. This is an instance of heroic grandeur being afforded a local domestic commemoration. Sculptural panels at the base of the monument include an image of Charles Brindley on horseback and related elements of the hunt. On a smaller scale, a stone obelisk, mounted on a small and supporting a crown, was erected in Dun Laoghaire, on the outskirts of Dublin, in 1825 (fig. 17). More roadside decoration than prominent monumental structure, the diminutive obelisk specifically commemorates the visit of George IV ‘to this part of his dominions’ in 1820.¹⁴ However the monument may also be identified with the construction of Dun Laoghaire harbour, which was begun in 1817 and whose naming by the king is recorded in the inscription. As this was the entry point into Ireland for most visitors in the course of the century, the ‘honorific’ or ‘heroic’ monument raised by the loyal Irish,¹⁵ served to indicate not simply the ruling power in the country, but also the guiding hand in matters of taste and aesthetics. Small-scale obelisks, with and without sculptural decoration, were also popularly employed for tomb monuments. These can be found in several cemeteries, as for example Joseph Kirk’s monument to Alderman Samuel Warren (died 1850) in Mount Jerome, Dublin, with carved figures at the four corners of the base of the obelisk and sculpted heads above them; and the Mathew Jones monument in Glasnevin, under which Jones’s brother-in-law, sculptor Thomas Farrell is buried, which is a largely unadorned obelisk.

Any monument commemorating the Duke of Wellington required a prominent site, for which various green spaces in the city were suggested. In 1813, some swapping around of statues in Dublin was being proposed, particularly with regard to the equestrian George II in St. Stephen’s Green, which was considered to be in a poor state of preservation, aggravated by an attempt to steal portions of the metal. It was suggested that the royal portrait be removed initially for repair and subsequently be re-erected in Merrion Square, thus leaving the site in St Stephen’s Green vacant to accommodate the Wellington commemoration. Failing the successful location of the obelisk in the Green, Merrion Square was proposed as a more than acceptable alternative.¹⁶ But happily the folly of such confined locations for the bulky obelisk was recognised, and in 1816 a more appropriate site was selected in the Phoenix Park.¹⁷ James Gandon considered the entrance to the Park the most appropriate location for the Wellington commemoration, but favoured a Triumphal Arch, the design for which he was working on in 1816, in spite of being in poor health and, seemingly, ignoring the fact that the commission had already been offered.¹⁸ The chosen site for Smirke’s obelisk, inside the Park yet close to the entrance and therefore retaining some proximity with the city, was assured by the laying of the foundation stone on 17 June 1817. As the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Whithorn, was to oversee the ceremony, and the Vice-Regal Lodge, home of the king’s representative in Ireland, was also located in the Phoenix Park, the necessity for any procession through the city was dispensed with on this occasion. The event consisted of a contained, yet ‘warlike’ ceremonial enacted by lancers, for an audience that was acknowledged to display considerable enthusiasm.¹⁹ The erection of the obelisk, constructed out of Wicklow granite, was completed. Simultaneously with the commission, Smirke had begun writing a treatise on architecture in which he discussed the importance of archaeological accuracy in Greek revival work, while adapting it to modern needs. Advocating simplicity, he stated that ‘An excess of ornament is . . . the symptom of a vulgar and degenerate taste’.²⁰ His Wellington obelisk is certainly an exercise in simplicity. The starkness of the form was initially compounded by the absence of any sculptural adornment. In fact, the committee’s original desire to favour architecture over sculpture was to prove ominous, as the monument fund was insufficient to commission the sculptural features, notably the equestrian statue for which the great pedestal was already in place, but also the bronze panels which were intended to represent important military and political events in the Duke’s career. The Wellington Testimonial stood in its unfinished state until the mid-century and was soon described as ‘one of the most unsightly, ill disposed works of art’ in the city.²¹ The absence of sculptural finish was not only to be seen on a visit to the Phoenix Park. A view of the testimonial in 1826 by George Petrie, even accounting for artistic license, illustrates what was at that stage its extraordinary presence overlooking the city.²²

In the aftermath of the death of the Duke of Wellington in 1852, it was considered both insulting and lacking in aesthetic sensitivity that the monument had been allowed to remain incomplete. In the same year, with a view to adding the sculptural details, Patrick MacDowell (1790–1870), a leading Irish sculptor based in London, was approached and declared interest in the execution of the statue but not the bronze panels, offering the opinion that such bas-reliefs were not effective out of doors and that a single statue would be much less costly.²³ MacDowell was keen to get the commission and likely saw this as his opportunity to work not just on a heroic portrait, but to concentrate on an equestrian statue. Such commissions were considered challenging at the time and were much sought after by sculptors as a means of displaying their skill, and MacDowell had not had such an opportunity thus far in his career. As MacDowell’s proposal was not acceptable, Terence Farrell (1798–1876) was subsequently invited to submit a design. His elaborate presentation included a fifteen-foot statue of the Duke flanked by two figures of Victory and Peace, four colossal military trophies, and the bronze narrative relief panels. However Farrell wished to work in Portland Stone, which was considered unsatisfactory by the monument committee as it weathered badly and, in time, precision and detail would be sacrificed.²⁴ The extent of the challenge in carrying out such work and the difficulties in selecting a sculptor are evident in the suggestion in 1853 that, instead of commissioning an original design, a cast of Marochetti’s equestrian statue of Wellington in Glasgow be placed on the Dublin pedestal. This too was rejected.
Continuing shortage of funds eventually resulted in alterations to Smirke’s original design and, what was the most attractive feature for a sculptor, the proposed equestrian monument was ultimately abandoned, its pedestal was removed, and only the three bronze panels were commissioned. John Hogan (1800–1858), Joseph Kirk (1821–1894) and Terence Farrell’s son, Thomas (1827–1900) were selected to execute the representations of the Duke’s achievements in the domestic and military fields. The choice of subject matter was agreed between the sculptors and the Lord Lieutenant, the Earl of Carlisle, who ultimately approved the designs. Let Kirk have Asia; I should think Seringapatam would be best but he might choose’, said Carlisle, whose suggestion prevailed.64 Wellington’s greatest victory in India is depicted, showing him (then Colonel Wellesley) directing his 33rd regiment in the trenches during the siege of Seringapatam (fig. 18). Although three military scenes were originally suggested and Farrell was even working on a scene illustrating the Indian campaigns of the Duke, Carlisle was adamant that there would be only two military panels, Asia and Europe.65 Farrell was in the end to depict Wellington’s greatest triumph the battle of Waterloo (fig. 19), while Hogan, with his significant if declining reputation, received the domestic subject, ‘Civil and Religious Liberty’, in which he portrays the Duke positioned between Hibernia and Britannia (fig. 20). Yet again there is evidence that the sculptors, along with the Lord Lieutenant, favoured the use of marble for the execution of the relief panels.66 However, this proposal appears to have been dictated by their inexperience in working with bronze rather than any serious belief that marble was more suitable for the location. In the end, bronze was the chosen material and the panels were cast outside the country.67 These panels, colossal in size, some thirty-five feet in length, reveal considerable stylistic differences. If the Hogan work is classical and ordered in its composition, displaying a reasoned calm, the Farrell relief, occupying the prime location on the obelisk, facing the main road through the Park, is a vigorous depiction of the chaos and the very physical nature of battle. Farrell’s panel depicts the final moments at Waterloo when the Earl of Uxbridge falls wounded and the cavalry rushes to avenge him.68 The bold nature of the modelling well describes the disarray of fierce battle, and makes an interesting comparison with Matthew Noble’s Waterloo relief on the Wellington Monument in Manchester, 1856. While Noble’s panel is tiny by comparison with the colossal work in the Phoenix Park, it is also a more controlled composition, making use, somewhat obviously, of the serried ranks of battle. Farrell sacrificed clarity in favour of energy, which, in spite of its size, does not facilitate a clear reading of the panel from a distance. Contrary to all the horses and men in Farrell’s Waterloo scene, Kirk chose in his depiction of the Indian campaign to create a sense of location, incorporating the implements and the environment of war. With a view to accuracy, Kirk sought information from a senior officer.69 No less vigorous than the Farrell image, he depicts organization, preparedness and leadership in an orchestrated composition that develops across the panel. The Hogan work removes the viewer from the battlefield, to focus on the Duke’s political career. However, with the death of the sculptor in 1859 in the early stages of the commission, his teenage son, John Edward Carew, Battle of Trafalgar, 1843, bronze, Nelson Column, Trafalgar Square, London.

With the cancellation of the accompanying equestrian statue and the removal of the supporting pedestal, the absence of any significant portrait image of Wellington on the testimonial, beyond his inclusion in the bronze relief panels, has resulted in comment being focussed on the architectural feature. The Dublin monument (fig. 12) is in marked contrast to commemorations of the Duke in England and Scotland, where equestrian or pedestal portraits are numerous. Smirke’s Wellington Testimonial was described as ‘a magnificent obelisk’ in 1914,70 nearly 100 years after it was erected, but within a year of being completed, in 1862, the Dubh Buidhe described it as ‘an overgrown milestone’.71 However, it was the absence of any monumental portrait image of Wellington that would save the Testimonial from destruction when public statuary was being targeted across the country, and most particularly in Dublin, in the course of the twentieth century.72 In fact, the obelisk has considerable presence at the edge of the Phoenix Park and its position and scale ensure that it is visible from a distance and in different parts of the city. The


Duke of Wellington is further commemorated in Ireland by a monument in Trim, County Meath, the Duke having lived as a boy at Dangan Castle, three miles away. Erected in 1817 in Emmet Street, the monument, comprising a portrait statue by Thomas Kirk surmounting a Corinthian column (fig. 22), was completed long before the Phoenix Park commemoration.

It is noteworthy that shortly after the mid-nineteenth century, with the Nelson monument long in place and the Wellington Testimonial recently completed in Dublin, London had still not completed a substantially heroic monument to either man. The Nelson column in Trafalgar Square was already in train and two equestrian portraits of Wellington were in place: the Chantrey/Weekes statue, 1843, outside the Royal Exchange and Matthew Cotes Wyatt's colossal bronze representation, 1846, on Decimus Burton's Arch at Hyde Park Corner. However, commemoration of a more significant type instigated considerable debate over the nature of such tributes. Elaborate architectural schemes and various monumental forms were considered, agreed and rejected. There was also confusion with regard to the dedication in each case. It was unclear whether simply the individuals and their victories should be commemorated or, more inclusively, the navy and the army. The response in Ireland seems to have been more pragmatic and the monuments were expedited with considerably more deliberation. Any delays encountered, as is so often the case with public monuments, were usually the result of insufficient funds. Lack of money often resulted in alterations to the selected design, frequently to the detriment of the intended sculptural work.

Designs for the Nelson Monument in London were invited in two open competitions in 1839, and with the experience of the Dublin commemoration long behind them, one might have expected some input from Irish architects and, perhaps, even sculptors. However, this was not the case and it was not until the 1840s that Irish sculptors would begin to assert themselves in competitions there. Only John Edward Carew, who, by this time, had already established himself in London, is notable as an Irish entrant and only to the first competition. With no previous experience of monumental sculpture, Carew had recently been invited to participate in a closed submission, along with such eminent sculptors as J.H. Baily, Francis Chantrey, John Gibson and Richard Westmacott, among others, when designs were invited for a monument to commemorate the Duke of York in Carlton House Square in London. Although Carew's submission to the competition was not successful at the time, the fact of being included in such lofty company may have been the stimulus he required to encourage him to submit a design for the most significant Nelson monument. On this occasion he was selected for participation in what became a collaborative exercise, when he was commissioned to model Nelson's death at the Battle of Trafalgar, the most important and the most strategically positioned relief for the base of the monument (fig. 21).

Monumental architectural forms were not reserved exclusively in Ireland for the commemoration of such heroic figures as Nelson and Wellington, but continued to be employed for public commemorative work through the first half of the nineteenth century, with a proliferation of them in the 1840s. A significant number of columns and obelisks were erected across the country in this period, with a concentration of them evident in the northern counties. The people who were singled out for representation in this manner were mostly contemporary military and political figures, the majority of whom were Anglo-Irish and all but one Protestant. While such work is replete with imperial connotations, and some of those commemorated spent little time in Ireland in spite of owning estates there, it is also the case that others undertook active participation in local politics with a view to improving the lot of the Irish Catholics.

Monuments erected in the North include:

Walker column in the Royal Bastion in Derry (1866/8, fig. 23), commemorating Protestant clergyman Rev. George Walker (1788–1850), an active participant in the Siege of Derry and killed in the Battle of the Boyne; statue by John Smyth (fig. 22)

Caledon monument on the family estate in Caledon, Co. Tyrone (early 1840s), commemorating Du Pré Alexander, 2nd Earl of Caledon (1777–1839), a politician and colonial administrator; statue by Thomas Kirk (fig. 23)

Downshire column in Hillsborough, Co. Down (1848), commemorating Arthur Trumbull Hill (1788–1845), 3rd Marquis of Downshire, lieutenant of Co. Down; statue by Joseph Robinson Kirk (fig. 24)

Gillespie monument, in Comber, Co. Down (1843), commemorating Comber born army officer Sir Robert Rollo Gillespie (1766–1841), who fell in action at Kabunga; the sculptor has not been identified (fig. 25)

Cole monument on Fort Hill in Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh (1859), commemorating army officer Sir Galbraith Lowry Cole (1772–1842), son of the first Earl of Enniskillen; statue by Terence Farrell (fig. 26)

These are all columnar presentations except for the Comber work, where more unusually Gillespie is portrayed at the top of an obelisk. Less imposing in the town square, the monument design and scale address the location more successfully in this instance than is usual. Taking into account the controversial and propagandist nature of public statuary, it was a remarkably trouble-free unveiling ceremony. Gillespie was honoured by approximately 30,000 people ‘of various shades of religious and political opinion’, who came together for the occasion ‘without the slightest disturbance’. Not far away in Hillsborough, the
Doric column supporting the Marquis of Downshire is considerably more imposing at 84 feet tall. Positioned on a hill overlooking the town, the statue has a grand vista, looking out towards Lough Neagh, which, on a good day, is visible in the distance.

Examples of such work are more dispersed in the South and, along with the already mentioned Wellington column in Trim, include:

Spring Rice monument, commemorating Thomas Spring Rice (1734–1866), Unionist politician and 1st Baron Monteagle, erected in the New Square (now Pery Square) in Limerick in 1829, statue by Thomas Kirk (fig. 27)

O’Malley monument (1840) in Castlebar, Co. Mayo, commemorating General George O’Malley (1780–1843), who helped defeat the French and Irish rebels in Mayo in 1798; statue by Thomas Kirk (fig. 56).

Glendenning monument (1840s) in Westport, Co. Mayo, commemorating local banker and philanthropist, George, Lord Glendenning (1770–1843); the sculptor has not been identified (fig 28).

Browne-Clayton column (1841) in Co. Wexford, erected by General Robert Browne-Clayton to commemorate his commanding officer in Egypt, Sir Ralph Abercrombie. The monument was designed by Thomas Cobden and is a replica of Pompey’s column at Alexandria. This monument is simply an architectural feature with no accompanying portrait image.

O’Connell monument (1865) in Ennis, Co. Clare, commemorating nationalist leader Daniel O’Connell (1745–1829); statue by James Cahill (fig. 29).

Many of the columnar commemorations had a military impetus. In Enniskillen, for example, General Cole, who commanded the 27th Regiment in the Peninsular War, is shown leaning on his sword and the inscription indicates that the monument, erected by his friends, commemorates his participation in numerous battles. However, George Glendenning was commemorated in Westport for his support of the local community during the early stages of the Famine. If the Kirk family name appears to dominate among the sculptors who were commissioned to execute these works, there are several reasons for this. Thomas Kirk was recognised, in the

early century, as the leading local (i.e. Irish and working in Ireland) sculptor. In the early 1840s, he headed a family workshop in which his son Joseph (J.R. Kirk) worked initially alongside him and, over time, assumed the leading role in the studio. The Farrell family of sculptors, with whom the Kirks would experience some rivalry later in the century, was considerably younger. The fact that Thomas Kirk was a Protestant will also have been a significant factor in the commissioning process. It is not surprising therefore that five of these largely imperial monumental statues, including Wellington at Trim, can be identified as having been carved in the Kirk family workshop.

The very active taste for lofty heroic presentations of a columnar nature met with artistic disapproval in some
quarters, most particularly from those who identified the isolated column variously as an erroneous use of what was in fact an architectural support, as evidence of declining imaginative powers, as a misinterpretation of what instigates the sublime and as detrimental to the art of statuary. All the sensations, which can be excited by an isolated column, surmounted by a statue or emblem, standing in a crowded city, must be not by an isolated column, variously as an erroneous use of

the local commercial outlets that surround its base. If both of these statues are visible at some distance and the grandeur of the monuments can be appreciated from afar, this is not sustained on making a closer approach to them. Both monuments appear to have been positioned without due consideration for presentation or display. In spite of the fact that the O’Connell column is located evocatively on the site of the old Court House in Ennis, there is no visual evidence of this fact in the environs. If, as Pliny noted in the first century, ‘the use of the columns was to raise the statues above ordinary men’, tall columns and obelisks positioned in cityscapes no longer have the effect that was originally intended. After the advent of high-rise building in the modern period, such monumental structures have considerably less impact today. In the second half of the century, when monuments to men of peace – poets, philosophers and philanthropists and, indeed, some nationalist heroes – became a more popular form of public commemoration, the portrait statues are seen to descend closer to the people, placed more often on simple pedestals. Towards the close of the century Oscar Wilde, whose father served on several monument committees and actively engaged in the issue of public sculpture, was to comment on monumental sculptural work in the light of a visit to Washington in 1882 and his experience of commemorative work in that city. Reared in Dublin and witness to the change in sculptural commemoration and presentation in the course of the century, he noted that quite enough motives had been taken from war, and warned in particular against the putting in place of more equestrian monuments, suggesting that it was time to ‘try the motives that peace will give you’.

Just one year earlier, in 1871, a statue of Erin was placed on a column in Ennis to commemorate the Manchester Martyrs, Allan, Larkin and O’Brien, who were hanged in Manchester in 1867 (fig. 31). Instigated by the local Trades Association and the Nationalists of Clare, the monument was the joint effort of architect T.S. Cleary and stone-cutter James Sullivan. The prime mover behind this commemoration, M.S. Considine of the Ennis Trades, was also the driving force behind the local monument to Daniel O’Connell. The nationalist monuments that were erected in the 1880s and 1890s employ the same classical form as the imperial commemorations, however they are more delicate in design and are less pompous and imposing than their imperial counterparts. Slender and relatively short at 23 feet, the Tuscan column at Ennis affords the supported statue clear visibility. In this instance the architectural support projects rather than dominates the image. To ensure identification of the female figure, Celtic symbols accompany Erin on her support, which in turn is encircled with shamrocks. The 1798 memorial at Bandon and county Cork, erected in 1901, is equally slight in form, if more militant in its representation (fig. 32). These monuments appropriate the classical imperial column to communicate, rather than to dominate. Positioning familiar symbols in such a way that they can be clearly read facilitates engagement with the viewer. This popular imagery, which was to proliferate in the latter part of the century, was a concentrated visual manifestation of Irish cultural identity. The hangings in Manchester ushered in ‘a new era of nationalist mass agitation’, and the monuments that were erected to commemorate the event became the focus of annual nationalist celebrations not unlike those enacted around the William III statue in Dublin. Late in November torchlight processions were organised, winding their way through the streets to end at the monument where speeches were made. For the occasion, the statue of Erin was ‘draped from the neck down in mourning garb, her waist encircled by a broad band of green silk.’

As a result of their source in antiquity, monuments in the form of obelisks and columns suggest permanence and timelessness. In the case of the work created earlier in the century, the lofty bulk of their form serves to reinforce their visibility. However, the volatile character of the Irish ensured that several of the monuments would be the focus of targeting over decades and well into the twentieth century. Imperial monuments, in whatever shape or form they took, were subject to various types of attack often from the moment they were put in place, and many would meet their inevitable fate in the course of the twentieth century. Pliny was also to point out that the raising of statues to honour individuals in this way to communicate, rather than to dominate. Positioning familiar symbols in such a way that they can be more militant in its representation (fig. 32). These monuments appropriate the classical imperial column to communicate, rather than to dominate. Positioning familiar symbols in such a way that they can be clearly read facilitates engagement with the viewer. This popular imagery, which was to proliferate in the latter part of the century, was a concentrated visual manifestation of Irish cultural identity. The hangings in Manchester ushered in ‘a new era of nationalist mass agitation’, and the monuments that were erected to commemorate the event became the focus of annual nationalist celebrations not unlike those enacted around the William III statue in Dublin. Late in November torchlight processions were organised, winding their way through the streets to end at the monument where speeches were made. For the occasion, the statue of Erin was ‘draped from the neck down in mourning garb, her waist encircled by a broad band of green silk.’

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