

Prince Albert statue on Leinster Lawn

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This L&RS Note explores the commissioning of the Prince Albert statue and its erection on Leinster Lawn in 1872. It also describes the work of the Irish sculptor John Henry Foley who made the statue.

There are currently three memorials on Leinster Lawn; the Cenotaph memorial to Arthur Griffith, Michael Collins and Kevin O'Higgins erected in 1950 is in the centre of the lawn, the memorial to Prince Albert erected in 1872 is on the Natural History Museum side, and the memorial to Sir Robert Prescott Stewart¹ (Irish musician) erected in 1898 is beside the National Gallery of Ireland.

A memorial to Queen Victoria, erected by the Royal Dublin Society (RDS) outside Leinster House in 1908, was removed by the government in 1948. It was held in storage until 1986 when it was given to the City of Sydney, Australia.

There are also statues outside buildings originally associated with the RDS - the statue of William Dargan erected in 1853 outside the National Gallery, and the statue of TH Parkes erected in 1896 outside the National History Museum.



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Summary

- Albert, Prince Consort died in 1861. Immediately, committees to erect monuments to him were formed across Ireland and Britain.
- The *Prince Consort Memorial Committee* in Ireland and its supporters comprised members of the Anglo Irish ascendancy. The sculpture was intended as a public commemoration.
- The site of Leinster Lawn was agreed upon in late 1865. It was the third-choice site after St. Stephen's Green and College Green – there was controversy surrounding each of these more public sites.
- Leinster Lawn was considered a suitable site as it was owned by the Royal Dublin Society (RDS) and the Prince was a champion of the arts and sciences in Ireland. It had been the site for the Dublin Exhibition in 1853, which was visited by Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort.
- In November 1863, John Henry Foley accepted the commission to design and create the commemorative statue to Prince Albert.
- Foley has been described as the most 'important sculptor of mid-Victorian Britain.' Born in Dublin and educated first in the Royal Dublin Society, he mainly worked in England but was commissioned for several commemorative statues in Dublin for both imperial and nationalist personages. These included Field Marshall Viscount Gough, Earl of Carlisle (Lord Lieutenant of Ireland), Daniel O'Connell, Oliver Goldsmith, Edmund Burke and Henry Grattan.
- Foley was commissioned to make several memorials to Prince Albert, in Ireland and Britain, the most prestigious being the Albert memorial in Kensington Gardens.
- The Dublin statue of Prince Albert was not unveiled with any ceremony. In 1872 it was shown, unfinished, to his son the Duke of Edinburgh. Within days there was an attempt to blow it up.
- The Prince Albert statue was in the centre of Leinster Lawn until 1950 when it was moved to its current location to make way for a permanent memorial to Arthur Griffith, Michael Collins and Kevin O'Higgin.
- The statue was restored by the OPW in 2004.

Why is there a statue of Prince Albert in Dublin?

Prince Albert, husband and consort of Queen Victoria, was a supporter of the arts and sciences. He was heavily involved in the organisation of the London Exhibition of 1851. The Exhibition was the first industry and culture fair of the type that became popular in 19th century across Europe. Prince Albert was appointed as chairman of the Royal Commission to redecorate the new Palace of Westminster in 1841.²

Together Prince Albert and Queen Victoria visited Ireland in 1849, 1853 and 1861. Victoria's first official visit to Ireland, in 1849, was arranged by Lord Clarendon, the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, to try to both draw attention away from the famine and alert British politicians to the seriousness of the crisis in Ireland. On that first visit, Prince Albert visited the Botanic Gardens and Leinster House, then home to the Royal Dublin Society (RDS). In August 1853, they both visited the Great Industrial Exhibition in Dublin which was held at Leinster Lawn.³ Prince Albert also visited the 'Glasnevin Institution' an agricultural college in Glasnevin during the 1853 visit. The college was re-named 'Albert College' after his visit. The 1861 visit was a private visit to their son, who was then in military training at the Curragh.

Prince Albert died later in 1861 at age of 42. The Queen, in mourning, withdrew from public life and wore black for the rest of her life. Although Prince Albert had asked for no commemorative monuments, there were committees formed across Britain and Ireland to erect commemorative statues, and there were monuments and memorials erected throughout the British Empire, including Dublin. This led one biographer to write, “after the Prince's death there arose a cult of Albert that saw a proliferation of testimonials even greater in number than any erected to Wellington and Nelson.”⁴

In November 1863, the ‘Dublin Prince Consort Memorial Committee’ (the Committee) directly commissioned John Henry Foley to design and create a memorial to Prince Albert in Dublin.⁵ Foley later received several commissions for other Prince Albert memorials, the largest and most prestigious being the Albert Statue in the Albert Memorial in Kensington Gardens, London.⁶

Prince Consort Memorial Committee⁷

In March 1862, the Committee was established to raise funds for the erection of a memorial to the Prince Consort in a suitable location. The statue was to commemorate the Prince as a “great and good man” and for his public services and his devotion to Queen Victoria - see Box 1. The Committee, chaired by the Lord Mayor, and comprised of members of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy (see Appendix 1 for a list of committee members), met weekly in the Mansion House. It was recognised as the official committee by Queen Victoria. Other committees established in Ireland pooled the subscriptions they had gathered with the Dublin City Committee to ensure the erection of a suitable statue.

It was the practice at the time in Ireland and Britain to raise funds for commemorative statues through public subscriptions. The Albert Memorial in Kensington Gardens (1872) was also funded in this manner, as was the O’Connell monument in Dublin (1874).

Box. 1 Resolutions of the Prince Consort Memorial Committee, March 3 1862

That participating in the universal sorrow with which the death of the late Prince Consort has overshadowed the entire nation, this Meeting desires to express the most sincere condolence with our beloved Sovereign on the great affliction with which it has pleased a gracious Providence to visit her.

...

That, in order to perpetuate in Ireland the memory of that great and good man, the late Prince Consort, his eminent public services, his exemplary private virtues, his earnest cultivation of the arts of civilisation and peace, and his entire devotion to her who reigns in the affections of all her people, a memorial be erected in our metropolis by subscriptions for every part of the country.

Source: Larcom Papers NLI, MS 7,587

Location for the Albert statue

Finding a suitable location was problematic. Several locations were considered, including St. Stephen's Green, College Green and Carlisle Bridge (now O'Connell Bridge) and finally the more discreet setting of Leinster House was selected. Leinster House was the home of the Royal Dublin Society (RDS) at the time. The newly built Carlisle Bridge was considered unsuitable for either a single figure that would look isolated or a group that would look out of place and obstruct the view down the quay. Consideration was also given to purchasing land between Annesley Bridge and Ballybough Bridge on which to develop a new park in which to place the statue of Prince Albert.⁸

In late 1862, St. Stephen's Green, then a private park, was considered a suitable location if the park could be opened to the public and re-named Albert Park with the memorial as the centre piece. In 1863 the idea of opening St. Stephen's Green to the public was abandoned due to opposition to the plan from the Commissioners of the Park and residents. They had been prepared to have the statue within the park, visible to the public from behind railings, but refused opening the park to the public.⁹ When it seemed the statue would be erected in St. Stephen's Green several subscribers increased or offered to increase their subscriptions.

In early February 1864, the Committee wrote to Dublin Corporation to request the College Green site for the memorial. At a meeting of the Corporation on 15 February it was resolved that the site would be made available for the Prince Consort Memorial. Some Corporation members opposed the statue being located on College Green, in particular A.M. Sullivan,¹⁰ who sought the site for a statue to Henry Grattan. Across a series of meetings, Sullivan and other nationalists gained public support for locating a statue of Grattan at College Green.¹¹ They had no objection to a memorial to Prince Albert as long as it was 'raised quietly in Leinster Lawn or some place where people of Dublin would be little inclined to interfere.'¹² Other opponents argued that College Green was too busy and noisy and that the statue of the Prince Consort would not receive the 'due respect' and that its base would serve as a 'lounging place for cabmen, news vendors and people of that class'. By December 1865, the Corporation decision was overturned, after the Duke of Leinster wrote to the Corporation on behalf of the Prince Consort Memorial Committee, seeking the Corporation's approval to change the location for the statue to Leinster Lawn. The Queen had assented to the change of location if the Corporation, that had given the College Green site, would consent to the change.¹³

The Leinster Lawn site was deemed suitable as it was overlooked by the Royal Dublin Society and the newly opened National Gallery, and Prince Albert had promoted both types of institution for the arts and sciences.

Leinster Lawn had been proposed earlier in the project as a suitable site for the statue. According to its archives, the Royal Dublin Society considered offering Leinster Lawn as the location for the statue in early 1862, however, at this time, St. Stephen's Green was the Committee's preferred site.¹⁴ College Green was also the preferred site of others directly involved with the erection of the memorial; Dublin Corporation, the sculptor and the Queen.¹⁵

There was no official unveiling of the statue. In 1872 the Duke of Edinburgh viewed the monument on a visit to Dublin. The statue itself had not yet been cast in bronze at the time. Three days later there was an attempt to blow it up.¹⁶

Photo 1. Prince Albert on Leinster Lawn



This image is reproduced courtesy of the National Library of Ireland [L_CAB_05150].

The Prince Albert statue was in the centre of Leinster Lawn until 1950 (see Photo 1) when it was moved to its current location to make way for a permanent memorial to Arthur Griffith, Michael Collins and Kevin O'Higgin which was erected in 1950. A temporary cenotaph memorial to Griffith and Collins had been erected on Leinster Lawn in 1923 and positioned in front of the Albert Statue. There was a restoration project on the Albert statue completed in 2004.¹⁷

John Henry Foley - sculptor of the Albert Statue Dublin

John Henry Foley was born in Dublin, on Montgomery Street which has since been renamed Foley Street, and began his studies at the Royal Dublin Society before moving to the Royal Academy in London.¹⁸ He is described in the *Grove Dictionary of Art* as the most 'important sculptor of mid-Victorian Britain'. He was admired for his technical excellence, the humanity in his portraits and his attention to accuracy in costume. His main expertise was in the area of commemorative portrait statuary.¹⁹ Reflecting his position in British art history there is a statue of Foley by James Gamble among the Pantheon of British Art on the façade of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.²⁰

A measure of Foley's reputation is the number of commissions for commemorative statues in his career, particularly in the 1860s. He had commissions in Ireland, England and India. His most significant Irish work is the Daniel O'Connell Statue on O'Connell St., Dublin. He made two major sculptures in the Albert Memorial Kensington Gardens, London. Foley made several statues of Prince Albert, including the ones in Dublin and London, he also made one each in Cambridge (1866) and Birmingham (1867).

He may have taken on too many commissions. Several of his statues were completed after his death, including the O'Connell and Grattan monuments. Work on the O'Connell Monument,

commissioned in 1866, was delayed in part because of Foleys work on commissions for statues of Prince Albert. The O'Connell monument was not completed until 1874.²¹

The Daniel O'Connell statue was a significant commission as it was the first commemorative statue in Ireland that was not commemorating either members of the Dublin Castle administration or the British Royal Family. The selection of Foley as the sculptor by the monument committee was controversial as he was not resident in Ireland and there was strong feeling that the commission should have gone to an Irish sculptor resident in Ireland in recognition of the nationalist subject of the statue.²²

Table 1. Foley's Commemorative full-length figures - Ireland

Dublin

- Oliver Goldsmith, Trinity College (1861)
- Daniel O'Connell Statue, Dublin (1866-74)
- Sir Henry Marsh, Royal College of Physicians, Dublin (1866)
- Prince Albert, Leinster Lawn (1868)
- Edmund Burke, Trinity College (1868)
- Earl of Carlisle, formerly People's Gardens in Phoenix Park (1869)
- Henry Grattan, College Green (1873)
- Sir Benjamin Guinness, outside St Patricks Cathedral (1873)
- Lord Gough, formerly Phoenix Park (1874)
- William Stokes, Royal College of Physicians, Dublin (1874)

Cork

- Fr Matthew, Patrick St (1864)

Galway

- John McHale, Archbishop of Tuam (1867)
- Lord Dunkellen, formerly Eyre Square (1873)

Offaly

- Third Earl of Rosse (1874)

Public monuments late 19th and 20th century Dublin

The first public monuments in Dublin, erected in the early eighteenth century, celebrated British kings. In the early nineteenth century British commanders, including Nelson and Wellington, were commemorated.²³ There was an increase in the erection of public monuments in Ireland from the mid-nineteenth century, with an emphasis on Irish cultural and political figures. There were several statues erected to Daniel O'Connell paid for by public subscriptions, including one in Limerick and another in Ennis, before the Dublin monument was commissioned. Carpenter and Murphy (2015) describe a 'parade of broadly nationalist monuments on the central spine of Sackville St to College Green,' by the end of century.²⁴ The 'parade' included cultural figures Thomas Moore (1857), Oliver Goldsmith²⁵ (1864) and Edmund Burke (1868), the eighteenth-century patriot MP Henry Grattan (1873), the MP John Gray who brought a water supply to Dublin (1879), and the Young Irelander William Smith O'Brien (1870).

In this later period statues representative of British administration interests were placed in more peripheral locations associated with their activities²⁶ – Prince Albert (1872) and Queen Victoria (1908) in grounds of the RDS at Leinster House, Viceroy Lord Carlisle (1870) and Field-Marshal Lord Gough (1878) both erected in the Phoenix Park, and Sir Arthur Edward Guinness (Lord Ardilaun) erected in St. Stephen's Green (1892) in recognition of his role in opening the park to the public in 1880.

Appendix 2 contains a map of the public monuments in Dublin, 1922 compiled by Yvonne Whelen (2002).

Post-Independence, many imperial monuments were either removed or blown up, the most famous being Nelson's Pillar, erected in 1809 and blown up in 1966. The statue to Queen Victoria, erected by the RDS outside Leinster House (Kildare St. side) in 1908, remained in place long after Leinster House became the permanent location for the Irish Parliament. The statue was removed by the Government in 1948, it was held in storage until 1986 when it was given to the City of Sydney.²⁷ Prior to independence several Foley statues had been damaged, including that of Lord Carlisle (Phoenix Park) and Lord Gough (Phoenix Park) which were subsequently removed to private collections in the UK, and that of Lord Dunkellin (Galway).²⁸

There are many examples of the removal and destruction of memorials and statues from earlier political regimes throughout history. For example, Carpenter & Murphy (2015) describe the destruction of public statues in ancient Greece and the destruction of royal statues in France after the French Revolution. Independent India removed imperial statues to neutral spaces like gardens.²⁹ More recently, statues in the UK and US and have been defaced or removed during Black Lives Matter protests.³⁰

References

- ¹ Andrew Johnstone (2009) [Stewart, Sir Robert Prescott | Dictionary of Irish Biography \(dib.ie\)](#) Dictionary of Irish Biography online
- ² The original Palace was destroyed by fire in 1834.
- ³ Queen Victoria and Prince Albert did not open the exhibition. The exhibition was opened by the Lord Chancellor Maziere Brady on 12 May.
- ⁴ The Prince Consort and his Legacy: A Review of Albert: A Life, by Jules Stewart <http://www.victorianweb.org/history/victoria/stewart.html>
- ⁵ Larcom papers
- ⁶ Foley reportedly died from respiratory illness contracted while working on the Albert statue in London in poor weather.
- ⁷ See Appendix 2 for list of Committee Members from Larcom Papers.
- ⁸ Judith Hill, (1998) Irish public sculpture. Dublin Four Courts Press, pp, 100-101, Paula Murphy (2010) Nineteenth century Irish sculpture. Yale University Press, p.123
- ⁹ Sir Richard Griffith, member of the Committee, geologist, mining engineer and chairman of the Board of Works of Ireland, and author of Griffith's Valuation had first suggested St. Stephen's Green as location for the statue. The Committee had not envisaged the opposition to their proposal which had included an attempt to initiate a Bill to open the Park to the public. There had been a campaign from 1859 to open St. Stephen's Green to the public to improve the general health of the poor who were living cramped conditions in cities. It was opened to the public in 1880.
- ¹⁰ Alexander Martin Sullivan (1830-1884), nationalist, supporter of Young Irelanders, lawyer and journalist, editor of The Nation and MP and author of "The Story of Ireland, etc"
- ¹¹ Foley was commissioned to make the Grattan statue which was unveiled in 1873. See National Inventory of Architectural Heritage website [Henry Grattan Monument, College Green, Dublin 2, DUBLIN - Buildings of Ireland](#)
- ¹² Hill (1998)
- ¹³ The archives of Dublin City Council, Sir Thomas Larcom and the RDS for this time outline the diplomatic efforts involved in settling on the Leinster Lawn location for the statue as nationalist opposition to the College Green site grew on the Corporation.
- ¹⁴ Larcom Papers
- ¹⁵ Murphy (2010)
- ¹⁶ Illustrated Police News, June 1872, 'Attempt to blow up the Albert Statue, Dublin'
- ¹⁷ Jacque Moore (2004) 'Prince Albert sculpture, Leinster Lawn', Obair Issue 11
- ¹⁸ Foley bequeathed all the original models of his work to the Royal Dublin Society in recognition of his native city and the place he began his art education in his will Foley left the original models of his work to the RDS. Murphy (2010)
- ¹⁹ Murphy (2010) p123
- ²⁰ ["John Henry Foley" by James Gamble \(victorianweb.org\)](#)
- ²¹ Murphy (2010) p202
- ²² Deirdre Conroy, (2003) [History of Monuments O'Connell Street Area](#). Commissioned by Dublin City Council.
- ²³ Andrew Carpenter and Paula Murphy (eds.), (2015) Art and Architecture of Ireland Vol. III Sculpture 1600-2000, Royal Irish Academy, p502-504

²⁴ Carpenter & Murphy (2015), p503

²⁵ The Goldsmith statue was one of Foley's earliest public statues in Ireland, it was commissioned by the Lord Lieutenant the Earl of Carlisle, and Foley would later be commissioned to make the statue of Lord Carlisle

²⁶ Yvonne Whelan, (2002) "[The construction and destruction of a colonial landscape: monuments to British monarchs in Dublin before and after independence](#)". Journal of Historical Geography 28, 4

²⁷ Whelan (2002)

²⁸ Murphy (2010)

²⁹ McGarr, P.M. (2015). 'The viceroys are disappearing from the roundabouts in Delhi': British symbols of power in post-colonial India. Modern Asian Studies, 49(3), 787-831.

³⁰ BBC Culture (2020) [Black Lives Matter protests: Why are statues so powerful? - BBC Culture](#)

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THE following Resolutions were unanimously passed at a Meeting held at the Mansion House, on Saturday, the 15th instant:—

Moved by the Lord Chancellor, and seconded by Benjamin Lee Guinness, Esq.—

That, participating in the universal sorrow with which the death of the late Prince Consort has overshadowed the entire nation, this Meeting desires to express the most sincere condolence with our beloved Sovereign on the great affliction with which it has pleased a gracious Providence to visit her.

Moved by the Right Hon. Joseph Napier, and seconded by Dr. Corrigan:—

That, in order to perpetuate in Ireland the memory of that great and good man, the late Prince Consort, his eminent public services, his exemplary private virtues, his earnest cultivation of the arts of civilization and peace, and his entire devotion to her who reigns in the affections of all her people, a memorial be erected in our metropolis by subscriptions from every part of the country.

Moved by Rossborough Coleclough, Esq., Tintern Abbey, and seconded by the High Sheriff of the County Dublin:—

That the following noblemen and gentlemen be appointed a committee to receive subscriptions, and to report to a future meeting the most desirable mode of giving effect to the foregoing resolutions:—

COMMITTEE.

Of the Prince Consort Memorial Fund, with power to add to their number:—

CHAIRMAN.

The Right Hon the Lord Mayor.

The Lord Chancellor.

The Earl of Granard, Lieutenant of the County of Leitrim.

The Earl of Howth, Lieutenant of the County of Dublin.

Viscount Southwell.

Viscount Gough.

The Bishop of Derry.

Lord Stuart de Decies, Lieutenant of the County of Waterford.

Lord Carrow.

Lord Talbot de Malahide.

Right Hon John W Fitzpatrick, Lieutenant of Queen's County.

Right Hon Joseph Napier.

Right Hon Mr. Justice Fitzgerald.

Right Hon the Attorney-General.

Sir Richard Griffith, Bart, LL D.

Sir John Kingston James, Bart.

Sir James Power, Bart.

Sir Thomas Larcom, K C B.

High Sheriff of the City of Dublin.

High Sheriff of the County of Dublin.

Judge Berwick.

Judge Lynch.

Master Brooke.

The Dean of Leighlin.

The Dean of Derry.

Dean Meyler, P P, D D.

The Solicitor-General.

Alderman Atkinson.

H Barton, Esq, D L, Straffan.

Francis Brooke, Esq.

Dr Corrigan.

Alderman Campbell.

Rossborough Coleclough, Esq, D L.

Lundy E Foot, Esq.

Thomas M. Gresham, Esq.

Rev Mr Jellett.

Thomas Laffan Kelly, Esq.

George Pim, Esq, Brennanstown House.

Acheson Lyle, Lieutenant of County of Londonderry.

Thomas Pim, Esq.

Alderman John Reynolds.

Alderman Roe, D L.

Laurence Waldron, M P.

TREASURERS.

The Right Hon the Lord Mayor.

Sir James Power, Bart.

Sir John Kingston James, Bart.

Benjamin Lee Guinness, Esq.

William Dargan, Esq.

George Roe, Esq., D L.

SECRETARIES.

Thomas Pim, Esq.

Arthur E Guinness, Esq.

Edward K Moylan.

Moved by Master Brooke, and seconded by Charles Hopes, Esq.:—

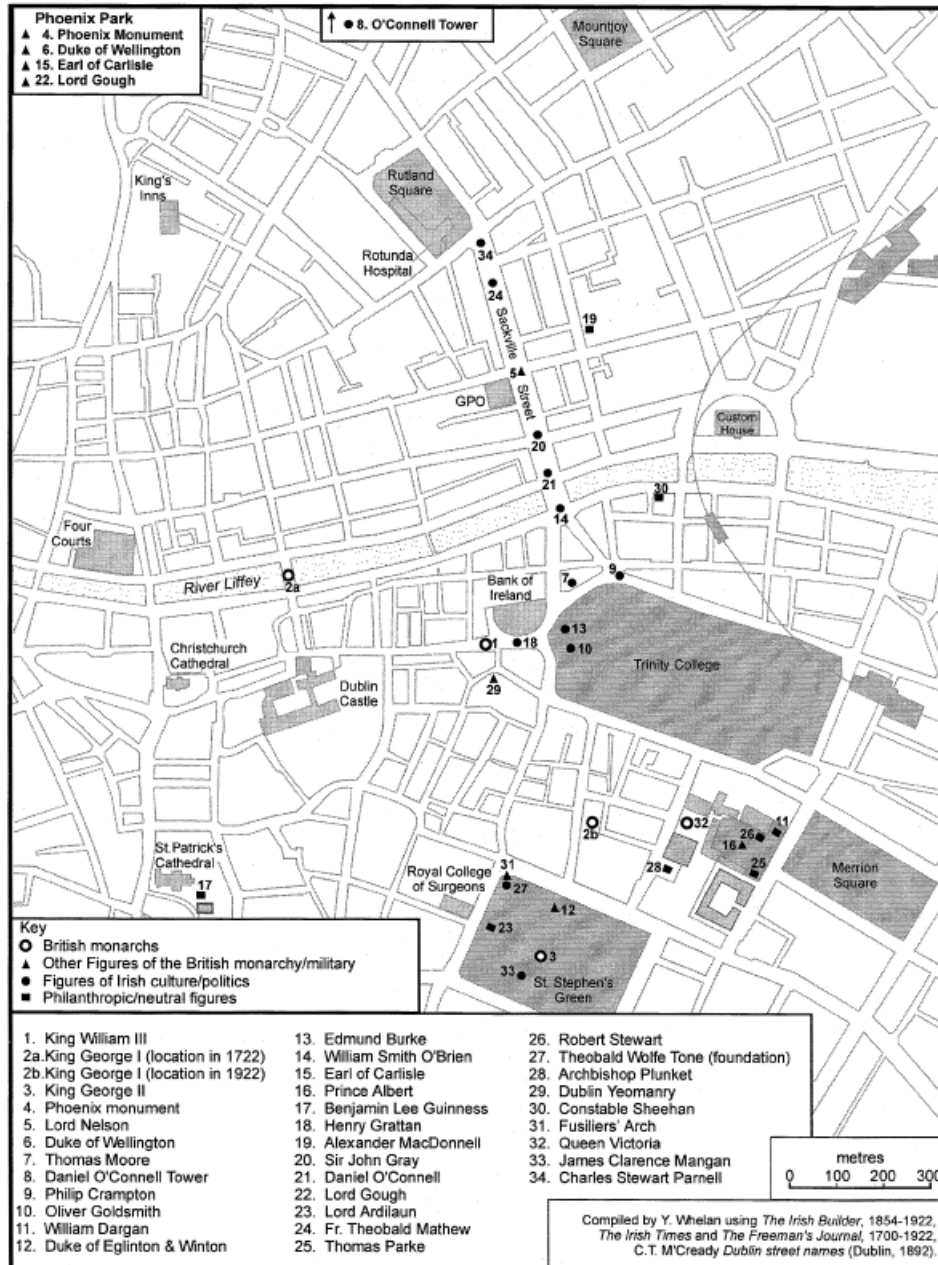
That the Lord Mayor, Sir John K James, Bart, Sir James Power, Bart, William Dargan, Esq, and George Roe, Esq, be requested to act as Treasurers to the Fund.

THE SUBSCRIPTION LIST TO THE PRINCE CONSORT MEMORIAL FUND.

Benjamin Lee Guinness, Esq	£	s	d
William Dargan, Esq	200	0	0
The Most Noble the Marquis of Waterford	100	0	0
The Hibernian Bank	100	0	0
The Earl of Wiclow	100	0	0
Lord Viscount Gough	60	0	0
The Lord Chancellor, in addition to £50 sent to the London Committee	60	0	0
John Barton, Esq, Stoneyhouse	80	0	0
The Earl of Erine	60	0	0
Lady Emmons	25	0	0
Right Hon John W Fitzpatrick	25	0	0
Hugh Barton, Esq, Straffan	25	0	0
The Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoresse	25	0	0
Sir Thomas Larcom, K C B	20	0	0
Lord Stuart de Decies	20	0	0
Right Hon Mr Justice Fitzgerald	20	0	0
Right Hon Mr Napier	20	0	0
George F Brooke, Esq	20	0	0
Alderman Atkinson	20	0	0
Charles Hopes, Esq	20	0	0
The Bishop of Derry	20	0	0
The Solicitor-General	10	0	0
George Roe, Esq, D L	10	10	0
Mrs George Roe	10	10	0
Hon Barton Fitzgerald	10	10	0
C B Barry, Esq, Q C	10	0	0
Judge Berwick	10	0	0
O'Brien Butler, Esq	10	0	0
D and T Fitzgerald, Esqrs	10	0	0
Charles Leslie, Esq	10	0	0
Messrs William Fry and Co	10	0	0
Alderman Campbell	10	0	0
Thomas M Gresham, Esq	10	0	0
Master Brooke	10	0	0
David Drummond, Esq	10	0	0
Mrs Pim, Brennanstown House	10	0	0
N Stewart, Esq, Shirlfield	5	0	0
Francis Brooke, Esq	5	0	0
Sir James Power, Bart, in addition to £5 sent to the	5	0	0
Verford Committee	5	0	0
Dennis C Heron, Esq, Q C	5	0	0
N Barton Straffan	5	0	0
Peter Augier, Esq	5	0	0
Robert O'Brien, Esq, T C	5	0	0
Hon Mrs Fitzgerald	5	0	0
Edward Fottrell, Esq	5	0	0
Alexander Comyns, Esq	5	0	0
Charles F Smith, Esq, Stephen's-green	5	0	0
John McAuliff, Esq.	5	0	0
William Roche, Esq.	...					

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Appendix 2. Public Monuments in Dublin, 1922



Source: Yvonne Whelan (2002) "[The construction and destruction of a colonial landscape: monuments to British monarchs in Dublin before and after independence](#)". *Journal of Historical Geography* 28, 4

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