

HERITAGE SUBMISSION PART I

Appendix 2:2

THE EVOLUTION OF O'CONNELL STREET

NOTES ON THE EVOLUTION OF O'CONNELL STREET

1. INTRODUCTION

The history of the development of Upper O'Connell Street from its significant foundation as Gardiners Mall in 1749 to its formal renaming as Upper O'Connell Street in 1924, and from then to the present, has been extensively recorded and the following notes draw on those sources insofar as they tend to identify the association and circumstances and peculiar character of the street which the Dublin Central development seeks to conserve. A concise historical chronological history of the character of O'Connell Street forms part of the *Conservation Report on ACA and Protected Structures* prepared by David Slattery FRIAI Historic Buildings Consultant (*Heritage Submission Part I*)

An elevational study (see *Appendix 2:1 Composite Elevational Drawing Upper O'Connell Street 1770-2008*), based on the prints photographs and descriptions, has been carried out by Brian O'Connell Associates Architects, to demonstrate the architectural progression through the 250 years of evolution in which the character of the street has changed radically several times, while retaining the essence of a Georgian urbanity in its scale and disposition.



fig 1 *Dublin 1850s*

The Mid 19th Century image of the centre of Dublin centres on the GPO and Nelsons Pillar in the context of a linear street of generous proportions is typified in Wilson Archer and Watson's description in the *World and its Cities 1880*: 'Sackville Street, which runs due south from the Rotunda to the Liffey has long been the pride and boast of the citizens of Dublin. It is a fine thoroughfare exceptionally wide, and flanked by lofty houses, fairly uniform in size and architecture. The only public building of any importance which it contains is the General Post Office, the entrance to which is from a side street, though its principal front faces Sackville Street and is adorned with an imposing portico supported by six fluted ionic columns. Over the portico are three allegorical statues representing Hibernia, Mercury and Fidelity almost directly in front of the post office and right in the centre of the street rises Nelsons Pillar, a tall fluted column of the Doric order, erected in 1808 by the Irish admirers of Lord Nelson at the southern end of the street, facing towards O'Connell Bridge, stands Foleys noble statue of Daniel O'Connell, one of the few artistic monuments the city possesses. Sackville Street does not present many other features of interest. The houses composing it, though substantial and roomy edifices, are unpretentious from an architectural point of view and are chiefly occupied by shops, hotels and offices'.

2. EARLY DUBLIN

2.1 The Embankment of the River (1711-1768)

John Speed's map of Dublin of 1610 printed in Warburton Whitelaw and Walsh (1818) shows the city mainly to the south side of the river with its axis parallel to the river with one bridge at Church Street west of the present site of the Four Courts, then the Inns of Court. The extent of the city in 1610 is defined by the City Wall which incorporates the Castle and Christ Church Cathedral, with a concentric development of church centred clusters to the south. The north side of the river is defined by St. Michans Church and the Inns of Court, both immediately opposite the Bridge Gate to the west and east respectively, and by the revetment wall of St. Mary's Abbey to the north east, as a seawall protection somewhere in the vicinity of the modern day Liffey Street. At this time no part of the river estuary was embanked, and was open to tidal waters on both sides, east of the city wall to the south and east of the corresponding walls of St. Mary's Abbey to the north.



fig 2 *Speed's Map 1610*

The subsequent embankment of the river at the beginning of the eighteenth century gave improved access and form to the city centre as a centre bisected by the river, in place of the preceding traditional urban form on the south bank contained by the river.

The tributary rivers, the Dodder and the Ballybough, entered the estuary by means of tidal sub-estuaries forming shifting shoals and bars. In 1711, according to Warburton, the southern side of the river between Ringsend and the city to the south was enclosed by means of a timber structure with wicker kishes filled with stones, in effect recovering the tidal lands to the south. In 1717 the decision was taken to enclose the north bank from the location of the present Custom House to the bay by means of a similar timber and kish construction. The ground recovered was divided into Lots of equal size and sold in perpetuity to raise funds for the works; the recovered lands were known as the North and South Lotts, reference to which still remains in the contemporary street names. The kish walls were unsatisfactory and were substituted by means of diaphragm hatted sea defence walls to the south between 1748 and 1755: and to the north bank between 1761 and 1768, including the construction of a new light house to mark the entrance to the river mouth. According to Warburton the quay wall was considered to be the first construction of its kind in the world.

2.2 The Shift of Axis

Enclosure of the river by the Quays converted the natural form of the city from a settlement on the firm south bank of the estuary with outlying areas to the north west upstream where the river could be forded, to an arc both north and south bisected by the river, giving riverine access to the centre. The formation of the Wide Streets Commission in 1757 'probably the most powerful city planning organisation in European History' (Hegarty) bridged the river on the current O'Connell Street axis and permanently fixed the central thoroughfare by linking the established centre at College Green to the elegant residential plaza of Gardiners Mall and the Rotunda by a street of comparable width to

the Mall, crossing the river on its axis by Carlisle Bridge in 1794. The new thoroughfare was from the first distinguished by being terminated at one end by the first bi-cameral Parliament building in the world, and by the first dedicated Lying-in Hospital in the world at the other end.

'The Commissioners most spectacular achievement was the concept of the North South axis which shifted the whole emphasis of the city' Sommerville Large in *Dublin. The Fair City*



fig 3 Rotunda to Parliament 1846

2.3 St. Mary's Abbey (1537-1714)

The lands now occupied by O'Connell Street formed a part of the holding of St. Mary's Abbey. St. Mary's Abbey was founded by the Danes in 945, and its territory stretched from the district known as Oxmanstown down along the river until it met the sea. In the year 1304 a great fire took place in the Abbey by which most of the public records were burned. The spacious lands which had been owned by the monks came in due course to be let to persons who wished to build residences or places of business thereon. Following the Dissolution of the Monasteries the relevant lands were confiscated by Henry VIII in 1537 and granted to the Earl of Desmond, following whose attainder for rebellion the property reverted to the Crown. The lands were granted by James I to Henry King in 1610, from whom they were acquired in 1619 (confirmed by Royal Grant) by Garrett Moore First Earl of Drogheda in perpetuity who occupied St Mary's Abbey as a residence.



Fig 4 King James I

The Second Earl of Drogheda, Charles Moore, who continued to occupy the Abbey, died in the Battle of Partlester Co. Meath in 1643 in the Confederate Wars. The property remained in the Moore family, but was no longer used as a residence; it was laid out for development by Henry Moore the Third Earl of Drogheda. On the death of Henry Moore, his interest in the lands of St. Mary's Abbey was sold by his trustees in 1714 to Luke Gardiner. The Earl of Drogheda built a mansion on what was to become Sackville Street at No 10, known as Drogheda House.

3. SACKVILLE STREET FIRST PHASE (1749-1770)

3.1 Luke Gardiner

Luke Gardiner was a successful banker and Ranger of the Castleknock Walk in the Phoenix Park where he built a private house, which survives as the Ordnance Survey Office. Gardiner, having acquired the Moore Estate in 1714, enlarged his holding in 1721 by the acquisition of further Abbey Lands from the Reynell estate. Gardiner became a Member of the Irish Parliament in 1725 and subsequently was appointed Deputy Vice Treasurer of Ireland. Gardiner had married the niece of Viscount Mountjoy in 1711, who had himself married the daughter of Viscount Blessington: through this liaison Gardiner acceded to the Mountjoy and Blessington titles.

3.2 Dublin (1750-1800)

The second half of the 18th Century opens with the development by Luke Gardiner of Sackville Mall as an elegant residential development 'a fine new street, containing the most beautiful residences in Dublin' (Cosgrave) conceived in the enlightened context of Georgian urban planning which had come with the northern renaissance, which by its unique form and quality was to give Dublin its lasting character as a neo-classical city. Maxwell (*Dublin under the Georges* 1935 p. 100) quotes Lord Cloncurry recalling Dublin before the Union as 'One of the most agreeable places of residence in Europe. There were no conveniences belonging to a capital in these days which it did not possess. Society in the upper classes was brilliant and polished as that of Paris in its best days, while social intercourse was conducted with a conviviality that could not be equalled in France.'

The expenditure on infrastructure was increased in the second half of the 18th Century, by reinvestment of surplus: Maxwell obcit: 'The Irish Parliament had plenty of money at its command, and was determined that its dominating neighbour should not have use of it. Having failed to establish its authority over the surplus in 1753, it had taken care that henceforth no surplus should exist, and money was spent lavishly on local improvements – roads and canals manufacturers and building'

3.3 Drogheda Street

Gardiner commenced the development of Drogheda Street in 1749. It appears that at this time the south end of Drogheda Street ran into Strand Street running east to west parallel to and south of Henry Street which was separated from the river by the houses on Bachelors Walk, fronting onto the river (see Brookings map 1728). Likewise the north end of Drogheda Street ran into Great Britain Street, again running east west and parallel to and north of Henry Street. It appears from Brookings map 1728 that while the lower part of Drogheda Street was built up, the upper or northern part was virtually undeveloped, save for the buildings fronting onto Great Britain Street to the north, and the return from Henry Street to the laneway servicing the Henry Street buildings on the east, and Drogheda House on the corner of Drogheda Street and Henry Street (now Earl Street) to the west. Having acquired the lands in 1714, it seems unlikely that Luke Gardiner, 14 years prior to Brookings map of 1728, had built on upper Drogheda Street to subsequently demolish it. It also appears that Luke Gardiner did not have possession of all of Upper Drogheda Street, the sites at no's. 45 to 47 Upper O'Connell Street were in the possession of John McGill and in use as a sand pit until 1769, following which they were developed by George Darley as two houses (see *Geo Soc Rec. Vol. III* p. 91). It appears that Luke Gardiner carried out a limited amount of demolition to the west side of Upper Drogheda Street, at the junction at Henry Street and that of Great Britain Street, now Parnell Street, to provide the site for the proposed Gardiner Mall.

A Mall was a place in the form of a linear park where a fashionable game, comparable to croquet, was played in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century: Johnson gives the word as derived from 'mallaus – a hammer – a walk where they formerly played with malls and balls' (1755). By 1750 the mall had become a fashionable form of boulevard or common domain relating to a residential grouping, comparable to the great residential squares of the period. Gardiner conceived of what Craig refers to as an 'elongated square' (*Dublin 1660-1860* p.104), to attract aristocratic investment in the provision of town residences for Members of Parliament and like persons, especially as it was his apparent long term intention to link upper Drogheda Street with Westmoreland Street and the Irish Parliament, with access over the river, moving the north south axis of the city

eastwards from Capel Street and Essex bridge as it then stood - (McParland *Geo Soc Jan – Mar 1972* p. 9): this was to happen eventually, after Luke Gardiner's death. Gardiner also appears to have deliberately left the north end of the Mall open for future extension of the potential main artery to link with Dorset



fig 5 Obelisk in Rotunda Garden

Street as the main road to the North: this is given as the reason why Cassel's proposal to site the Rotunda as a focus to the Mall was rejected by Gardiner in the 1750's (Liddy *Dublin Today*). The Mall was described by Boyd in *Dublin 1745-1922 Hospitals Spectacle and Vice* as follows; One thousand and fifty feet long it is at least twice as wide as any of the surrounding streets. Down its middle there was an enclosed pedestrian area called 'The Mall' which was ornamented on its perimeter by a series of lamps and obelisks and may have involved Cassels in its design and laying out'. It seems probable that the stone obelisks in the garden to the rear of the Rotunda are some of those originally on Gardiners Mall (see figs 5 and 6) – per F. O'Dwyer.



fig 6 Sketch of Obelisks in Rotunda Garden



fig 7 John Jones Engraving of Tudor's Perspective

Lieutenant. It is not established if Gardiner appointed any one architect to prepare the proposal for Gardiner's Mall, it seems given the overall coherence of the concept that he did, more especially as he was in regular contact with all of the leading architects practicing in the city at the time, in particular Cassels. CP Curran in *Rotunda Hospital its Architects and Craftsmen* (1947) expressed the view that Cassels may have designed Sackville Mall. However, the perspective drawing of c 1752 is credited by almost all sources to Oliver Grace. Oliver Grace was an architect who practiced from Fleet Street in Dublin and who is recorded as having exhibited a design in the Society of Artists in Ireland Exhibition of 1765 at Georges Lane (Gilbert

Gardiner renamed Drogheda Street Sackville Street: the author of *Georgian Society Records Vol. III* suggests at p.77 that this was in honour of the Lionel Sackville, Duke of Dorset who had been Viceroy from 1731 to 1737 and was later (1751-1755) to be appointed Lord



fig 8 Engraving of Grace's Drawing c 1752

A History of the City of Dublin). Grace also submitted an entry in the Royal Exchange competition in 1769 (Craig *Dublin 1660-1860*). The perspective attributed to Grace appears to be an engraving of an early design drawing by Grace, later developed by Joseph Tudor into a full landscape and subsequently engraved from the Tudor original by John Jones: the Jones engraving is in the National Gallery of Ireland. Joseph Tudor died in 1759 at Dame Street and was, according to Strickland *A Dictionary of Irish Artists*, the principal landscape painter of that period in Dublin. The attribution to Tudor is by the National Gallery of Ireland. Jones' is a hand coloured engraving while Grace's includes a shell and an inscription to the Duke of Dorset. The circumstances seem to suggest, that the master scheme for Sackville place was designed by Oliver Grace and the formal perspective was drawn from this proposal by Tudor. A copy of both the Grace and Jones engraving are set out at figs 7 and 8.

Boyd in *Dublin 1745-1922 Hospitals, Spectacle and Vice* referring to the Grace print, having compared it to an illustration of the Interior of the Theatre Royal in the *Hibernian Magazine* of 1795 says; 'Here the strollers leisurely meander through and around the enclosed Mall ... In place of Theatre boxes, however, the houses of Sackville Streets blank windows gaze down at the street's activities and across at each other. But like the Theatre this gaze is not mono directional. The figures who inhabit the street, gossiping or simply staring, can catch glimpses of the houses' interiors beyond the prosaic and uniform façades. More specifically, their eye is drawn to the ceilings of the piano nobile. The section of the house and its relationship with the street allows the stuccodores's art to express the owners' wealth and taste in a florid riot of plasterwork while the remainder of the room remains invisible to the public realm. Those who inhabit the houses opposite, however could perhaps witness considerably more'.



The Grace perspective is of doubtful accuracy (F. O'Dwyer). Its technique expresses the dignity of the Italian engravings of the baroque Roman Piazzas, its scale and plan form being comparable to the Piazza Navona in Rome. Taking No. 42 Upper O'Connell Street as the only remaining unaltered building from the time of Gardiner's Mall, the perspective and the contemporary plot descriptions have been used in this submission to reconstruct the probable elevations of the west side of the Mall circa 1770, the time of its completion. It would appear from Rocque's map 1756 (see fig 9), that the south vista was closed by the buildings on the south side of Henry Street, with the remaining or southern sections of Drogheda Street, renamed Sackville Street, then aligning with the east side of the Mall.

fig 9 Rocque's map 1756

If No. 42 is taken as representative of the quality of the original development, it can be seen as the epitome of enlightened order expressed in contemporary urban architecture, through a Palladian discipline, enlivened in its interior by the grace of the rococo in which the architect orchestrates the individual creative energy of the artisan within the defined framework of the whole. The relatively modest exterior and corresponding terraces, unified by regulating lines, proportions and materials share a common



fig 10 No 42 Stucco First Floor

public domain, which in itself coordinates into a coherent whole under the conforming discipline of neo-classicism, and becomes an entity in itself, resulting in the concept of the outdoor piazza or civic space. (See *Appendix 2:1 Composite Elevational Drawing Upper O'Connell Street 1770-2008*)

The first phase of Sackville Street, the upper part, having commenced in 1749 was complete in or about 1770, and was to remain a prime residential location until the Act of Union in 1800 changed the pattern of society from that of the Capital of a Kingdom, to that of a Province.

3.4 Richard Cassels 1690 – 1751

No. 42 is attributed to the architect Richard Cassels. Cassels was born at Hesse Cassel in Germany and came to Ireland in 1727 on the invitation of Sir Gustavus Hume to design his house, Castle Hume in Fermanagh. Cassels, like Lovett Pearce, was a military engineer, and after Pearce and Gandon was the most significant architect practicing in Ireland in the 18th century. Pearce identified Cassels as the best architect then working in Ireland and retained him on the Parliament House which introduced Cassels to Dublin (O'Brien & Guinness *Dublin A Grand Tour*). According to Warburton Whitlaw and Walsh he was 'a man of integrity, but much addicted to intemperance. He had besides many peculiarities, he was proposed with an opinion that some barber would cut his throat, and he never would suffer anyone to shave him; but as he would not perform the operation himself, he prevailed on a Mr. Simpson, a stucco worker, to act as his barber for several years'. He is buried at Maynooth.



fig 11 *Front Façade No 42*

Cassels was architect of Leinster House, the Rotunda Hospital, Carlton and Russborough as well as private houses in Sackville Street, Henrietta Street and Stephens Green, and designed the Music Hall at Fishamble Street in which Handel first presented the Messiah to the world in 1741. Frank O'Connor writing of Cassels Chapel in the Rotunda Hospital says: 'here in place of the rigid symmetry of the Renaissance fully expressed in the boxlike solidity of the architecture you find each line subtly contradictory to the next, so movement replaces repose, symmetry almost disappears, and only perfect taste prevents the whole decorative scheme from degenerating into confusion. Good modern critics complain of the contradiction between restless plasterwork and decorous architecture, but I cannot say it ever worried me much. Half a chapel is better than no baroque'



fig 12 *Rotunda Hospital*

(*Country Books Dublin* p. 29).

The stucco ceilings and wall panels to No. 42 Upper O'Connell Street are attributed to Robert West, the leading stuccodore of his generation, who set up the School of Figure Drawing and Painting in the RDS in 1745.

3.5 London (1766)

As parallel with Dublin, the second city in the British Empire during the first phase of the development of Sackville Street, Edmonds on Rousseau describes London as first city in 1766 as follows:

'A manic construction boom was under way, ushering in a townscape of grand and elegant squares. The demand for bricks was such that they were delivered hot from the kiln, several carriages carrying them burst into flames. Green fields and orchards clung

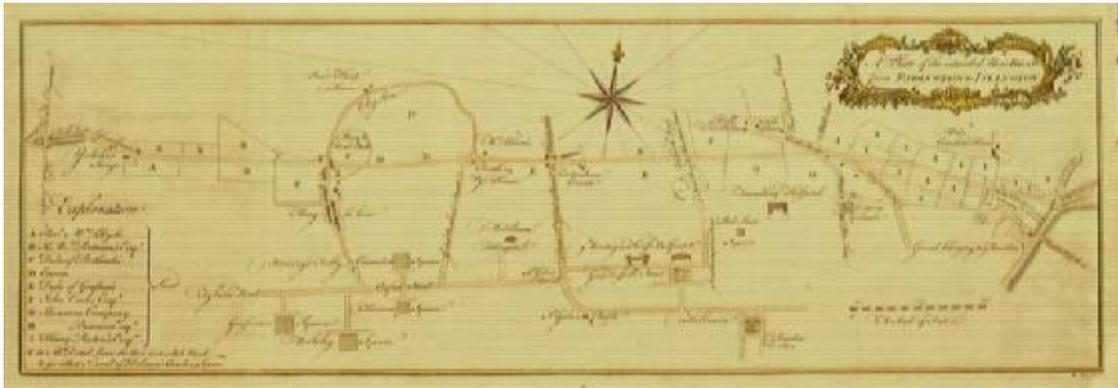


fig 13 1755 map of part of London showing Tyburn Road

on north of Tyburn Road (now Oxford Street), but the potential for development possessed their ducal landowners. The government began to bring in the services the town needed. Every month, there appeared better drains, more pavements [the Landmark Westminster Paving Act was passed in 1762], more street lights. Visitors from out of town as well as foreigners raised their eyes to the sky, struck dumb by the brightness.'

3.6 The Georgian Manner.

The Georgian manner was essentially a northern European Palladian character which merged the domesticity of the indigenous architecture with a grand rationalism of the Renaissance expressed through classical forms. George Santyana in his *Soliloquies in England* (1924) describes the investing of classical forms in England which had its parallel in Ireland: 'How pleasantly the Palladian forms were fitted to their English setting: how the windows were widened and subdivided, the low pediments forgotten, the pilasters sensibly broadened into panels, and the classical detail applied to the native gothic framework with its gables, chimneys and high roofs, whence the delightful brood of Jacobean and Queen Anne houses: and in the next generation the so genteel so judicious Georgian mansion, with its ruddy brick, its broad windows and its delicate mouldings and accessories of stone. The tragic and comic were spirited away together and only the domestic remained'.

4. SACKVILLE STREET: SECOND PHASE (1772 -1805)

4.1 The Wide Streets Commission

In 1757 an Act was passed for improving the access from the Castle to Essex Bridge, Commissioners were appointed with powers to achieve this. The Wide Street Commissioners, were 'supplemented in 1773 by the Corporation for Paving, Cleansing and Lighting the Streets of Dublin'

The later Commissioners were persons of political influence enlightened in the arts, and particularly in architecture. Luke Gardiner was appointed a Commissioner. McParland says in *Irish Geo Soc Jan-Mar 1972* 'Power alone could not have achieved what the Commissioners achieved in the late 18th century had this power not been accompanied by the discrimination and taste of these men'. McParland goes on to say 'it cannot be maintained that selfless patronage of the arts alone motivated the Commissioners. Luke Gardiner who owned a very large proportion of North Dublin east of Capel Street cannot have been a disinterested agent in the development of this region'.

In 1772 the Wide Streets Commissioners made grants available to widen the remainder of Drogheda Street with Westmoreland Street. It was not until Luke Gardiner's son was a Commissioner that a resolution was passed to extend Sackville Street to the river and to provide a bridge.

'1782 was a momentous year in the history of the Wide Streets Commission for it was that year that its membership was revamped, their powers extended and their funds supplemented by the proceeds of local coal tax. If the Commission had been timid on their endeavours up to this point, the new members were full blooded enthusiasts of civic improvement. They were now a body of ruthless men whose ideas were years ahead of their time. Their most prominent member, the notorious John Beresford, seemed a throwback to the Old Elizabethan adventurers with his combination of energy and cruelty..... by the end of the century, Dublin had a matchless display of public and private buildings' (Sommerville Large *Dublin The Fair City*)

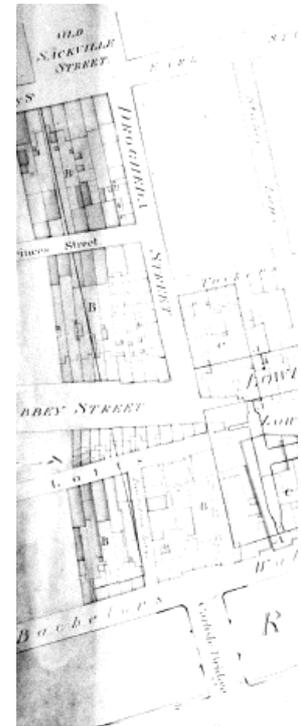


fig 14 WSC plan for Drogheda Street

In 1791 £100,000 had been assigned by statute to the Wide Streets Commissioners. A quarter of this was 'devoted to forming the pride of our causeways by easing the east of Bachelors Walk and Drogheda Street to Henry Street, so that Sackville Street should open a view from the river to the Rotunda' (Falkiner). This would include a new bridge proposed in 1780 and completed in 1794, Carlisle Bridge designed by James Gandon. Carlisle Bridge was described as 'a low strung profile with a double set of obelisks at each approach'.

Sheridan in *Designing the Capital City* traces the influence of the Wide Streets Commission in the evolution of Upper O'Connell Street as follows: The 1780's saw the birth of several important projects, which, when completed,



fig 15 WSC Elevation Lower Sackville Street

would give further coherence and grandeur to Dublin's central streets. In 1782 a plan was submitted to and approved by Parliament (Wide Streets Commission, 1802, p.5). This would continue the line of the widened Dame Street and College Green, cutting through the blocks of houses along Fleet Street to provide a link with a new bridge

across the Liffey and joining up with a new continuation of Sackville Mall beyond Drogheda Street to the river. This was the genesis of Westmoreland and D'Olier Streets and Carlisle Bridge. The Commission's plan to complete the great complex of axes by opening new streets to the river and linking them to an extended Sackville Mall, which had started by opening Parliament Street and widening Dame Street, was not in fact completed until shortly after the Act of Union in 1801.

In their published report of 1802, the Commissioners outline the reasons why they chose to develop Westmoreland Street and D'Olier Street as they did. Firstly, the plan as executed provided a good 'perspective view' of the portico of the House of Lords and Trinity College, a vista that they felt necessary to the aesthetic quality of Westmoreland Street, giving it a sense of direction and artistic purpose. Secondly, they felt the direct communication to the Parliament and Grafton Street afforded by the new streets to be important. They also thought that the width of the streets would be more suitable to shopping than another version that suggested greater width; an interesting early insight into the relationship between the physical form of streets and their function. Finally, that they favoured the greater regularity and uniformity of physical form has already been noted. The pragmatism expressed in their views on the relationship of the preferred forms to functions is very real and important, however mundane, and is an interesting feature of their approach to planning. Monumental planning need not be blind to less 'elevated' aspects of city life.

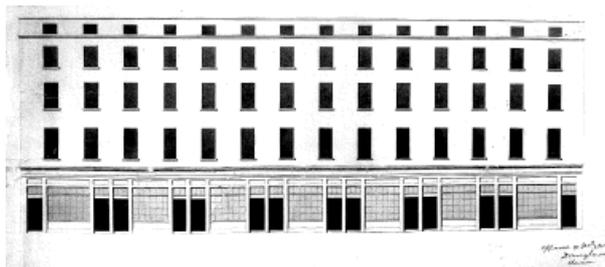


fig 16 WSC elevation to D'Olier Street

buildings (WSC/Maps/195/1A) were, however, not executed. Much plainer elevations than any previously suggested were accepted (WSC/Maps/195/2). These designs, which partially survive in a somewhat clumsy restoration of the former Irish Times offices on D'Olier Street, were quite austere but nonetheless elegant, the arched shopfronts of Dame Street and Lower Sackville Street replaced by almost unadorned straight lines. This austerity is counterbalanced by fine working of granite shopfronts, lintels and moulding over the windows and in the smooth sweep of the façade of the west side of D'Olier Street round onto Fleet Street. 'All of the new buildings erected under the auspices of the Wide Streets Commissioners had provided for shops at ground floor level with residences on the upper floors; commercial functions of the city were thereby linked with the provision of living space and the servicing of the affluent residential areas. Such strategies in planning ensured that Dublin's chief monumental axes became more than just representative facades of officialdom. The integration of varied facilities into the monumental streetscape ensured that the streets would have a life of their own not entirely dependent on activity centred in the Castle and Parliament, through visually and socially strongly influenced by it. The Castle and Parliament provided foci of state activity, balanced by the gardens and the Rotunda in Rutland Square, and punctuated by regular activity in the shops in the Wide Street Commissioners buildings'. (Sheridan)

Sherrards's 1792 designs for Westmoreland Street did not lead to any immediate building, and by 1799 the Commissioners were discussing the notion of a new type of continental-inspired design for the buildings on this street, incorporating colonnades into the ground-floor shop façades.

Henry A. Baker's designs for such buildings (WSC/Maps/195/1A) were, however, not executed. Much plainer elevations than any previously suggested were accepted (WSC/Maps/195/2). These designs, which partially survive in a somewhat clumsy restoration of the former Irish Times offices on D'Olier Street, were quite austere but nonetheless elegant, the arched shopfronts of Dame Street and Lower Sackville Street replaced by almost unadorned straight lines. This austerity is counterbalanced by fine working of granite shopfronts, lintels and moulding over the windows and in the smooth sweep of the façade of the west side of D'Olier Street round onto Fleet Street. 'All of the new buildings erected under the auspices of the Wide Streets Commissioners had provided for shops at ground floor level with residences on the upper floors; commercial functions of the city were thereby linked with the provision of living space and the servicing of the affluent residential areas. Such strategies in planning ensured that Dublin's chief monumental axes became more than just representative facades of officialdom. The integration of varied facilities into the monumental streetscape ensured that the streets would have a life of their own not entirely dependent on activity centred in the Castle and Parliament, through visually and socially strongly influenced by it. The Castle and Parliament provided foci of state activity, balanced by the gardens and the Rotunda in Rutland Square, and punctuated by regular activity in the shops in the Wide Street Commissioners buildings'. (Sheridan)

The Wide Streets Commission was finally abolished and its functions subsumed into the Corporation in 1851.

The Wide Streets Commissioners had inherited Gardiners Mall as an aristocratic residential boulevard and had transposed it into a linear metropolitan axis, while retaining much of its character as a boulevard. They had inherited a medieval city and had transformed the area within the canals to a neoclassical model.

4.2 Extension of Sackville Street to the River

Following the resolution passed by the Wide Streets Commission to extend Sackville Street to the river in 1784, Wyatt was asked to prepare a plan for the development of what was to be Lower Sackville Street, the first scheme of elevations for which was prepared by James Gandon. Gandon was also commissioned to design a new bridge, to be called Carlisle Bridge (completed 1794). He intended the bridge to have colonnades over the footways, in the Palladian manner, but this was abandoned as 'too expensive' (Craig p. 247). Gandon duly designed buildings to line the new Lower Sackville Street and Craig quotes (from letters to Parliament 1787) in criticism of Gandon 'there was lately exhibited [at the Royal Exchange] a design for new buildings, intended for the continuation of Sackville Street, to the river and signed J Gandon, (which redounds so little to his credit) in which shops were introduced, an absurdity so very gross, that it needs no comment on it; the best and most spacious street in Dublin, inhabited, chiefly, by the first nobility in the Kingdom, to be continued, and the continuation be to occupied by shopkeepers'. The brief from the Commissioners to Gandon had been that the ground floor of the new buildings be designed as shops. (McParland *Geo Soc Jan Feb 1972*). Gandon's design was not executed. At the end of 1789 Thomas Sherrard was directed to prepare elevations: these were duly adopted and construction was commenced. The continuation of Sackville Street at boulevard width to the river coincided with a change in the social status of the area with the Act of Union. The classist outrage that Gandon's proposed extension of Sackville Street should have contained shops is a response which it is unlikely would have had the support of Luke Gardiner had he been alive, himself a parvenu, whose elongated residential square of Gardiner's Mall was now set to adapt seamlessly to its transition in its second role as the principal street and civic identity of the second city in the Empire. (Craig).



fig 17 1798 Map Showing Sackville Street extended to the River

4.3 The Act of Union

The Act of Union in 1800 resulted in a union of the Kingdoms of Ireland and Great Britain. This led to the abolition of the Irish Parliament. The residents of the Sackville Mall at that time came principally from the ruling classes and the transfer of legislative powers to London led most of them to sell their properties and move to London.

'Dublin has been called 'a faded capital' and this description is true: in the 18th Century she was capital of a resident aristocracy, and in the 19th Century she faded' (Gwynne *Famous Cities of Ireland*). Although true, the combination of politically directed

investment and a war economy sustained a building programme for the first fifteen years of the 19th Century.

Sackville Street changed from a prestigious residential area to a prestigious commercial area and in a sense followed the fortunes of the city as it became a less aristocratic and more professional place. William Gregory in 1815 noted 'the shops are handsomely fitted up with considerable taste and so near are the resemblance of several streets to some [in London]...that a stranger from that city might imagine he was in London'. (Eamon Walsh *Sackville Mall the first 100 years*).

4.4 Lower Sackville Street

The buildings of Lower Sackville Street, in common with Westmoreland Street and Dame Street, were to reflect a professional commercial layer of the metropolitan society as its premier street, allowing a decline in residential use. The Wide Streets Commissioners had ensured a coherent architectural expression of this radical change in the structure of metropolitan society, and McParland says nothing similar was being built in England at this time; he cites Summerson to establish that 'up to the Napoleonic period a shop front was never considered either as part of the façade of which it formed the base or as part of a consistent architectural panorama at street level. The designed shopping street belongs to the Regency and after it and even then such streets were modest affairs, often mere passages, situated at the edge of big residential districts' – (*Georgian London* 1945). McParland *Geo Soc. Jan-Mar 1972* p.20. The Regency 1821 to 1830 came much later than Sackville Street, marking its emergence as the leading shopping street development in the then Kingdoms as an innovation. McParland considered Gandon's Sackville Street proposals as not only modish but revolutionary in design when referring to Bakers proposals, as Gandon's pupil and successor, in developing those designs for Westmoreland Street, and considers that they 'are remarkable chiefly for the wide glazed openings of the ground floor – too great it seems for the façade above to be adequately supported. The use of glass as infilling material between the vertical posts of the ground floor is an exceptional instance in Dublin 18th Century architecture of neo classical functionalism of the most advanced kind' – (*Geo Soc Jan – Mar 1972* p.22)



fig 18 Lower Sackville St 1821

Baron Haussmann. Instead of being a prestigious residential address, Sackville Street now became a prestigious commercial area with, by 1805, some thirty or forty businesses and three hotels' (Colm Lincoln *Dublin as a Work of Art* P. 69)

'The extension of Sackville Street to the river changed the Malls character. Whereas previously it had been an elongated square lined with private residences, it now became a great boulevard where shops were an integral part of the architecture ... Sackville Street was the first 'boulevard street on these islands. John Nash's Regent Street in London, which is often credited with anticipating other street development, was created much later, 1817

– 23; and even in Paris, the great avenues date largely from the time of Napoleon III and

Charles Dickens in *All the Year Round* records the change in the status of Sackville Street following the Act of Union. 'The year before the Union as 'old inhabitants' have

told the writer, Sackville Street, long and broad as it is, was literally crowded with coaches and six, waiting, drawn up, to take down noble lords and noble gentlemen to 'the House'. Only the year after the Union, as an ancient and fossilised coach-builder has also told us, the auction-marts and carriage yards were encumbered with coaches and carriages and horses; noblemen and gentlemen now 'out of work', with their calling gone, literally flying from the unhappy capital'

5. SACKVILLE STREET THIRD PHASE (1806-1820)

5.1 Nelsons Pillar and the GPO

Sackville Street saw great changes in the first two decades of the 19th Century with the construction of Nelsons Pillar and the GPO. Following the Battle of Trafalgar (1807) which re-opened the trading sea-routes following the Napoleonic Wars, a committee of Dublin merchants and bankers set about raising a memorial to the victor of Trafalgar, Admiral Horatio Nelson, funded by public subscription, and commissioned a suitable memorial from the London Architect William Wilkins, to whom Francis Johnston was appointed as consulting architect. Thomas Kirk, Cork Sculptor, was commissioned to carve a 13 foot high statue of Nelson to surmount the proposed Pillar. The Pillar was to be of the doric order and to be located on the intersection of Sackville Street and Henry Street-Earl Street, marking the centre of the extended Sackville Street, and visually marking the centre of the city. The approach to the spiral staircase within the core of the Pillar was underground rising to a viewing terrace on the abacus at the base of the statue of Nelson. The Pillar was 134 feet high and stood on a square base commemorating Nelsons battles. Access was raised to the ground floor by George P Beater in 1894. The Pillar was destroyed by dissident activists in 1966, having been felled along the street; the remaining base was destroyed by the army two days later and wholly removed.



fig 19 Nelson's Pillar and GPO 1820

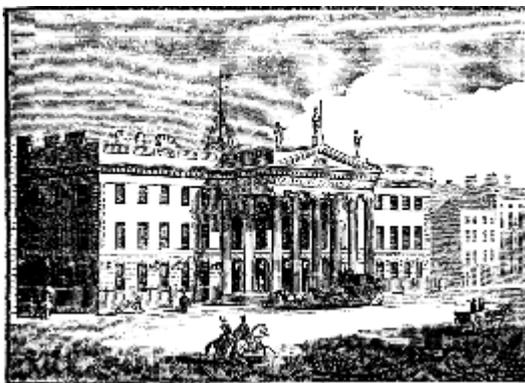


fig 20 the GPO 1827

The GPO (1815 to 1818) is the work of Francis Johnston, after Gandon the greatest name in Irish Architecture (per Craig *Dublin 1660-1880* p. 280). The GPO remains Johnston's most important work. Built in the Graeco Romano neo classical style, it is a commanding building in which the original ionic hexastyle portico of portland stone colonnades extends over the pavement to form a projecting visual focus at the centre of Sackville Street in dialogue with the Pillar, which predated its completion by some 10

years. The austere boldness of the building, its massive proportion, perfect scale and restrained detail, all combine to give it a unique personality which has come to symbolize Dublin: a masterwork, it embodies the quintessential aesthetic of its style.

The interior of the GPO was greatly altered throughout the 19th Century, and its latest alterations were just completed at Easter 1916 on the eve of the Rebellion. The building was burnt out at the end of the Rising and was reconstructed in 1924. Johnston's building was not the extensive building which occupies the site today: the extended building to Henry Street and Princes Street returning through the GPO Arcade is an OPW extension completed in the late 1920's.

The combination of the GPO and Nelsons Pillar fixed the civic character of the street and its iconography through its third transition from an elongated residential square in its first phase, to a metropolitan axis dedicated to professional and commercial services in its second phase, combining a metropolitan centre in its third phase.

5.2 The New Catholic Cathedral

The formation of the Catholic Committee in 1760 led to a series of Catholic Relief Acts and the Emancipation Act of 1829. Catholic Church building was formally authorised by the Catholic Relief Act of 1793, although several Churches were sanctioned after 1745.

In 1786 John Thomas Troy, a Dominican priest who had been appointed Bishop of Ossory 10 years earlier, was transferred to Dublin as Archbishop, he petitioned the Pope to allow him to take St. Mary's as his mensal parish. His request was granted and immediately Dr. Troy began to set aside whatever funds came his way to build a 'dignified spacious church' to replace St. Mary's in a central location. The Liffey Street St. Mary's had served its purpose. Unfortunately, further trouble lay ahead. The Rebellion of 1798 and consequent reprisals postponed his plans to build a large central church. Catholic Emancipation did not, as he had hoped, come with the Act of Union in 1800.

In 1796 Drogheda St was widened on its west side to align with Gardiners Mall to become Dublin's premier thoroughfare then known as Sackville Street. The site on the south of Henry Street at its junction with Sackville Street was occupied by a range of houses which were occupied as a temporary barracks: this site was now considered by Dr. Troy as a site for the new St. Mary's. GN Wright in his *Historical Guide* 1825 says these houses were 'so badly built, and so shaken by their numerous inmates, that while occupied by the military they fell down, the soldiers and their families having scarcely time to escape'. Wiser counsel prevailed on the matter of relocating St. Mary's as it was feared that such a bold step might only delay or jeopardise Emancipation, and Dr Troy's attention was directed to a less conspicuous site nearby, leaving the Sackville Street site to become the site of the new GPO.



fig 21 *St Mary's Pro Cathedral*

By 1803 a committee formed by Dr. Troy had managed to put together sufficient funds to make a deposit on Lord Annesley's house. This fine mansion stood on the corner of Marlborough Street and what is now Cathedral Street; it cost £5,100. It would be a

further 12 years before a foundation stone was laid. The adjoining site was acquired in Marlborough St and work commenced in 1815. The severely classical design is thought to be by John Sweetman who based his concept on Grecian models as well as the Church of St Philippe le Roule in Paris. The Pro Cathedral was dedicated on November 14th, 1825. (*Irish Heritage series (60)*, Dermot Mc Carthy 1988)

6 SACKVILLE STREET FOURTH PHASE (1821-1916)

6.1 Decline of Sackville Street

Sackville Street was set in the 1820s to the early 20th Century to decline: the decline parallels the decline in the influence of the Wide Streets Commission which finally ceased to exist in 1851.

Dublin was formally acknowledged in the status of the second city of the Empire by the Imperial Parliament in 1813 when the Corporation of Dublin claimed the right to be heard before the Bar of the Imperial Parliament in the matter objecting to the relaxation on the disabilities of Catholics proposed in a motion to parliament by Henry Grattan on March 1st 1813. The status of Dublin changed in 1863 when the Mayor of Dublin was accorded access to the Crown after the Mayor of London: this was challenged by the City of Edinburgh, which succeeded in its application and took precedence as the second city from 1863: by then the matter was of little relevance.

The editors in Boyd's *Dublin 1745-1922 Hospitals Spectacle and Vice* write in the introduction: 'The centre of Dublin at the time of the Act of Union was seen by many international commentators as a jewel of European planning... On a leisurely walk down eighteenth century Sackville Street you would have encountered well-dressed ladies and gentlemen, who enjoyed been seen and wanted to be admired. But in Malton's prints of that time you also see men in rags courageously confronting elegant men on horseback to beg for a few coins or women huddled with babies in their arms on street corners waiting to receive small gifts of money. The nineteenth century was less kind to the city to the degree that Dublin became famed for its beggars and degradation rather than its landscapes'



fig 22 Malton print Capel Street 1800

The extension of the Mall and the construction of D'Olier Street and Westmoreland Street helped to change the character of Sackville Street. Instead of an elegant square lined with private residences, it had become a prestigious commercial boulevard where shops and businesses were an integral part (see fig 23).



fig 23 *Sackville Street 1840s*

Many of the houses on the street, such as those built by Nathaniel Clements, were converted into uses such as hotels and offices. Other houses were demolished and new purpose built premises were built, such as Gilbey's wine merchants on Upper Sackville St.

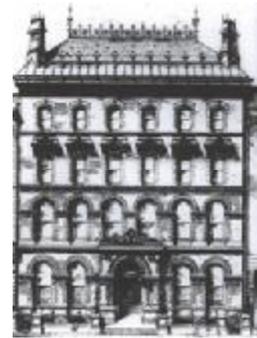


fig 24 *Gilbey's Façade*

The decline into mediocrity during the second half of the 19th Century was inevitable given the laissez faire policy in public administration and the corresponding absence of any policy on architectural coherence. The east side of Upper Sackville Street had been developed first, and was generally recognised as the more aristocratic side: the west side developed between 1750 and 1770 was largely built by speculative developers, including Clements, Darley, Stewart and Thompson. The west side attracted more commercial interest, and at an early stage included a number of wine merchants. The business of the wine merchants expanded and by the end of the 19th Century at least three of the houses on the upper west side of Upper Sackville Street were associated with the wine trade and were evidently forming an important facet of the class culture.

There had been, from the early stages, a practice of providing hotels in prime residential areas: at first, during the eighteenth century, these appear to have been houses in which suites were let to visiting aristocrats convenient to the Parliament and the social centre of the Capital: this practice became established, and by the end of the 19th Century there were 4 hotels on Upper Sackville Street: No. 56 on the upper west side known as the Bilton, being one of the earliest. The advent of railways led to the merchant and professional class living in the outer suburbs and commuting to places of business in the city, which in turn led to an increased pure commercial use in Upper Sackville Street. The demands for commercial use required larger plots and the 18th century plots were in some cases merged to provide for larger buildings. The ostentation associated with



fig 25 *No 56 (previously Bilton Hotel)*



fig 26 *detail No 60 example of Lombardic Romanesque Revival*

commercial success led banks and merchants to design to the opulent taste of the time, and by the late 19th Century the Lombardic Romanesque Revival (see fig 24), Beaux Arts Classicism and eclectic styles such as Scottish Baronial appear, without reference to any coherent sense of the street. While buildings were individually praised, the sense of unity, once the pride of the street and the objective of the Wide Streets Commission, waned.

Notwithstanding the change in use and its corresponding expression in the built form, most of the commentators on Sackville Street at the end of the 19th Century still recognised its intrinsic Georgian neo-classical quality as the main boulevard of the capital city.

Maura Shaffery in her essay on O'Connell Street says of it 'as the 19th Century progressed, Sackville Street became very much a commercial street. By mid-century virtually every building had a commercial use. With hotels, wine merchants, tobacconists, grocers, boat makers, linen drapers, hosiers, glovers and military outfitters, apothecaries, cap and umbrella manufacturers, china glass and earth ware establishments, lamp manufactures, confectioners, book sellers and jewellers flourishing among others, the street was a lively place'



fig 27 O'Connell Street 1890

GN Wright in a later (1830) edition of his *Historical Guide to the City of Dublin*, says of Sackville Street, 'The proprietary is certainly very much changed, but the picture has rather gained in interest by the transition; the solemn silence, which generally reigns amid the places of the great, has been succeeded by the animation that accompanies a busy commercial scene'.

6.2 Sculptures

In 1882, Foley's celebrated statue of O'Connell, completed by Brock, was placed at the south end of the street, and in 1880 the Carlisle Bridge was extended as O'Connell Bridge, on a level with and equivalent in width to the then Sackville Street. Foley, recognised as among the greatest sculptors of his time, was also sculptor of the Albert Memorial in London, the abiding symbol of the Victorian era, designed by Gilbert Scott.



fig 28 O'Connell Monument
fig 29 Parnell Monument



Augustus St. Gaudens Sculptor (1848-1907) who was born in Ireland of Irish and French parents, but moved to America aged 6 months, was commissioned to commemorate Charles Stewart Parnell. St. Gaudens had recently cast the memorial to General Sherman in the Grand Army Plaza New York 1903, and was then considered the leading American sculptor; he retained Henry Bacon as architect to design the base and attending memorial. The Parnell Monument which closes the north end of O'Connell Street was unveiled by John Redmond in 1911. Henry Bacon was later the architect of the Lincoln Memorial at Washington, the abiding symbol of American Democracy.

6.3 Clubs on Sackville Street.

Upper Sackville Street included a number of clubs including The Sackville Club at No 59, and the Irish Farmers Club and later the Catholic Commercial Club at No 42. Other clubs included the Oxford Billiard Rooms and the YMCA, and for a time the Friendly

Brothers of St. Patrick, a club dedicated to the abolition of duelling. The Sackville Club founded in 1794 by Blaney Townley Balfour of Townley Hall Co. Louth, was established in No 59 which was converted to a gentleman's club which was, like other similar clubs, not open to Catholics.

The Royal Agricultural Society occupied No 42 from the 1850s until 1863 when it was taken over by the Irish Farmers' Club. This dissolved in 1880 leaving the premises vacant. In 1872 a Sodality of Commercial and Mercantile Young Men was founded and attached to the Jesuit Church at Gardiner Street. The Sodality formed a Company in 1881 to be known as the Catholic Commercial Club which acquired No 42 as a premises in which to establish itself.

According to the Freemans' Journal, the Catholic Commercial Club 'embraces members of the commercial and professional classes, bringing them together for the useful purpose of social intercourse and mutual instruction'. The Memorandum of the Club gave as its first objective 'to promote the moral social and intellectual improvement of the members, and to provide them with a lending library, reading room, gymnasium, billiards, bagatelle and other amusement rooms, rooms for lectures and a restaurant'. Ladies (in common with all clubs of the period) were at first not admitted. The activities of the club were sporting, educational, social and musical, and there was ongoing sporting rivalry with the YMCA occupying the adjoining premises No 43 from 1895 until it was severely damaged in 1922.

In 1885 the Directors decided to take down the old buildings at the rear of the Club and considered providing a Hall in lieu. Work on a hall designed by George Beater was commenced in 1892: the hall was to be a Lecture Hall and Gymnasium, in response to the objectives of the Memorandum of Association of the Club: the Hall was known as the O'Connell Hall.

During the Easter Rising No 42 was hit by artillery fire from Great Britain Street, now Parnell Street, and the parapet damaged: the billiards room to the rear was also damaged. *The Irish Builder* on 13th May 1916 reported that 'on Upper Sackville Street on the western side, the YMCA [No 43] and the Catholic Club [No 42] were shelled and a couple of large shell holes are visible in each' No 42 was occupied by Irregulars during the Civil War in July 1922, the building again suffered damage from attack: but while extensive in the case of No. 43, at No. 42 it was, fortunately, limited. The Catholic Commercial Club was wound up in 1954 (foregoing is based on *The Story of the Catholic Commercial Club* by Piaras Beaslai).

fig 30 Nos 43 and 42 1916



The building was subsequently incorporated in part into The Royal Dublin Hotel, including the O'Connell Hall which is used as a function room, and known for its good acoustics, by virtue of which it is used for orchestral rehearsal. The rooms at No 42 above ground floor have not been reused since the Catholic Commercial Club was closed in 1954.

6.4 Renaming Sackville Street

(Based on *Law and Emergence of Modern Dublin* WN Osborough and other sources referred to)

Many of the names of streets and bridges in Dublin related to past glories of the British Empire or commemorated various members of the British establishment or their ruling elite in Dublin. Street naming and more significantly renaming became an important element in asserting a sense of Irish national identity. Urban space became increasingly contested terrain in the 19th century as both nationalist and loyalists struggled to claim it as a political resource. As nationalists assumed control over the institutions of local government, they inherited a symbolic landscape that celebrated the legitimated union between Ireland and Britain.

Douglas Hyde said in 1892 that 'our place names have been treated with about the same respect as if they were the names of a savage tribe which had never before been reduced to writing, and with about the same intelligence and contempt as vulgar English treated the topographical nomenclature of the red Indians' (*City of Empire, Site of Resistance* p100)

The renaming of Sackville Street to O'Connell Street had been a contentious issue. After a report prepared by a whole house Committee of Dublin City Council of 31st October 1884 recommending that the name Sackville Street be changed to O'Connell Street, the residents of the street requested that the Corporation not make the change. The Dublin Chamber of Commerce also passed a Resolution asking for the street name not to be changed, stating that it would be 'injurious to the interest of the trading and commercial classes'.

Dublin Corporation adopted the motion to change the name accordingly: this was followed by an application to the Vice Chancellor for an injunction to restrain the Corporation from changing the name then or in the future: the action by the householders of Sackville Street against the Corporation in **Anderson v Lord Mayor and Corporation of Dublin** [15L. R. Ir 410] was heard in 1885. By virtue of the provisions of *47 Geo 3 Section 86* the Paving Commissioners of Dublin were empowered to fix a sign on any street with the name by which it was usually called or by which they thought it proper to call it. This Act had been repealed by The *Dublin Improvement Act 1894* which incorporated the provisions of The *Towns Improvement Clauses Act 1847*. By *Section 64* of the 1847 Act the Wide Streets Commissioners had the power to erect signs to state the name by which a street was to be known. There had been a practice of this power being used without reasons being given, but in most cases it had been used with the consent of the householders; and no case of the power being used contrary to the wishes of the householders of a particular street could be cited. The Corporation proposed to change the name 'for the



fig 31 1935 map of O'Connell Street

purpose of the commemorating, by this and other intended alterations in street nomenclature, the past historical events of the country, and the names of illustrious men'. The majority of the householders objected on the grounds of inconvenience and detriment to their trades and business. It was held that the Corporation had no power by statute or common law to change a street name, and even if they did the Court had the inherent jurisdiction to restrain it if satisfied that to do so would be injurious to the owners or occupiers of the street. Members of the Corporation who had actively promoted the proposal were ordered to pay costs. Chatterton VC in his judgement anticipated what would today be called the jurisdiction in judicial review, by asking rhetorically if the Courts had no authority to check the Corporation if it decided to call Dame Street 'Dirty Lane' or Fitzwilliam Place 'Catpurse Row'.

The Dublin Corporation Act 1890 expressly empowered the Corporation to rename streets. Acting in pursuance of its statutory powers, which superceded the injunction, Dublin Corporation finally changed the name from Sackville Street to O'Connell Street on 5th May 1924.

'O'Connell Street remained Dublin's premier thoroughfare but, ironically, by the time this great 18th Century set piece was completed, the Parliament to which it led had voted itself out of existence and so, instead of commemorating the achievements of the ascendancy world, O'Connell Street is now remembered for its part in some of the great dramas in the emergence of Catholic Nationalist Ireland. Its change of name is eloquent in itself for, if Sackville the man is now an unremembered Lord Lieutenant, O'Connell was certainly the most important representative of the up and coming Catholic Middle Class who upstaged the old order ... it was in O'Connell Street Jim Larkin made his dramatic address to Dublin workers during the bitter lock out of 1913 and it was in O'Connell Street that a small group of determined nationalists took over the GPO in Easter 1916 and declared an Irish Republic. Indeed, it is due to this rebellion – and the later civil war – that so much of the 18th Century streetscape was destroyed. Though rebuilt in the classical style in the 1920's O'Connell Street no longer brings to mind the Ireland of Grattan's Parliament and its chief monuments commemorate instead the rich and varied sources of the nationalist tradition and their role in the birth of modern Ireland' (Colm Lincoln *Dublin as a Work of Art* P 72)

6.5 O'Connell Street and Revolution

It is curious to note that the area north of Upper O'Connell Street bounded by Parnell Street and the Rotunda was the same ground occupied in its final stages by each of the two occupying powers, the Vikings during Easter 1014 (Hegarty p.21) and the British, 1902 years later, during Easter 1916.

O'Connell Street from its early days as the civic centre and a metropolitan boulevard had an association with revolution. Percy Bysshe Shelly preached revolution from No 7 Sackville Street in 1812 in an attempt to awaken Dubliners to the wrongs they suffered; in his letter to Elizabeth Hitchner he records standing on his balcony on Sackville Street throwing his printed Address to the Irish People at likely passers-by (Packenham p.119)

DH Atkinson, Professor of History at Queens University Ontario Canada in the introduction to Hahns *Fractured Emerald* says '... for the Irish nationalist revolution (the Easter Rebellion) was the first of the wars of National Liberation that became so prevalent in our times. Ireland seems almost to have been the template for the new

familiar revolutionary pattern: national revolution against an external oppressor, followed by civil war, culminating in a long period of domestic repression.'

The Easter Rising of 1916, which centred on O'Connell Street, symbolised by the GPO, is recognised as an event of international as well as national historical importance, and the point of transition from its past to the present state.

fig 32 An original 'Guinness' armoured car O'Connell Street 1916

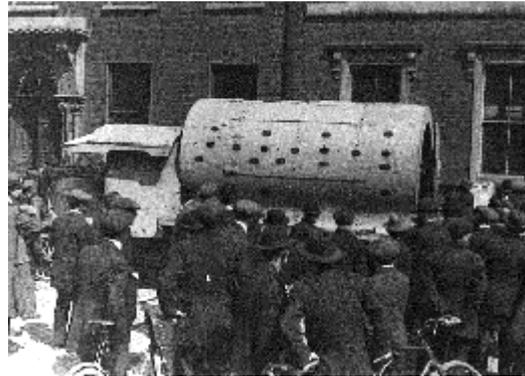


fig 33 James Connolly

In another context O'Connell Street entrains international history: James Connolly had studied with Trotsky in Chicago: according to CH Bretherton in the *Real Ireland* (1925) 'The Citizen Army which marched to the GPO on Easter Monday 1916 was later accurately described by Lenin as the 'first red Army that ever took the field'' p.72

Colm Lincoln in *Dublin as a Work of Art* identifies Dublin as having the dubious distinction of being the first European Capital to be wrecked by war in the 20th Century.

Violent conflict was the cause of the destruction of O'Connell Street in the course of its evolution in the 20th Century and remains a layer in its composition: like many of the great metropolitan arteries of Europe, its strategic quality adapts readily to celebration and commemoration of its revolutionary origins within the culture which its layers of history and sense of place endorse.

6.6 O'Connell Street and Ceremony

O'Connell Street has acted as the Metropolitan Grand Plaza, and has been a centre of civic and national ritual and commemoration.

O'Connell Street, then Sackville Street, was decked out in 1821 for the visit and ceremonial submission to George IV as King, the first to come to Ireland on a mission of peace. According to William Blacker 'a mock triumphal arch was erected across the street' scaffolding was erected in front of many of the houses which were generally filled with 'elegantly draped females' and the 'neighbouring counties sent forth their peasantry in their Sunday clothes and the entire of Sackville Street was a mass of jolly faces'. George IV accepted the 'keys of the city' from the Lord Mayor at the mock arch and duly returned them in a symbolic gesture.

Daniel O'Connell on behalf of the Catholic Association regularly addressed the people in O'Connell Street as did Parnell, in this it became the recognised place of public assembly.

O'Connell Street was the centre of the O'Connell centenary celebrations in 1875 illustrated in Charles Russell's painting which is reproduced on the inner cover of this document, giving a sense of carnival of which the street is capable. Gwynn says in *Dublin Old and New* that in 1912 the whole of O'Connell Street was so packed with a

demonstration in support of Redmond and the Home Rule Bill that you could have walked on men's shoulders from end to end of it.



fig 35 *Collins Funeral Cortege 1922*

O'Connell Street was central to the ceremonial mourning of both Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins in 1922. O'Connell Street was a centre in the national celebration of the Eucharistic Congress in 1932 and remains a symbolic place in the process of public celebration: this function remains a retained layer in the public awareness of the street.



fig 36 *Eucharistic Congress Mass 1932*

O'Connell Street, then still officially Sackville Street, was the scene of an unusual event on St. Patrick's Day 1923, when five hundred Free State Troops arrived with a fleet of armoured cars to secure the junction of Princess Street and O'Connell Street and in particular the La Scala Theatre, where the world heavyweight championship between Battling Siki, a Senegalese boxer and the Irish boxer Mike McTigue took place, won by McTigue as the first Irish world heavyweight champion. Britain had refused entry to the non-white boxer, and the Free State, to prove its independence had welcomed the event at the height of the Civil War. The Irregulars had proscribed the fight as an amusement and undertook to prevent it. Their attempt to disrupt the event by blowing up the power supply at Henry Place to the rear of No. 62 Upper Sackville Street failed despite a massive explosion and the fight proceeded to an Irish victory. To endorse the Free State approval, the Minister for Trade and Commerce and the Attorney General were in attendance. Apart from its immediate political significance, this was possibly a first formal state recognition of a mixed colour event. Boxing had become a popular sport during the first world war, and it was reported that 30,000 had gathered in Sackville Street to see the first Irish Heavyweight World Champion win his title. (Gallimore *A Bloody Canvas* 2007)



fig 34 *McTigue/Battling bout Dublin 1923*

7 SACKVILLE STREET FIFTH PHASE 1916-2008

7.1 Reconstruction after the 1916 rising

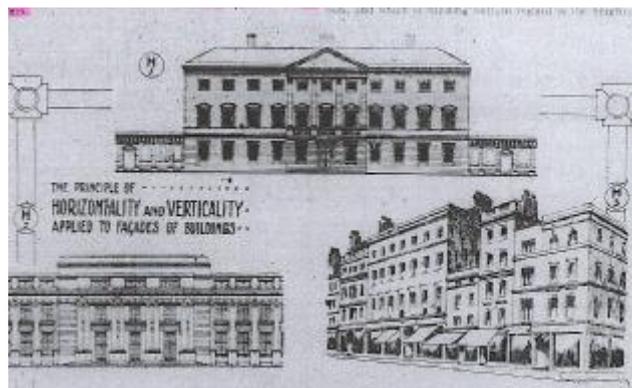
(Based on J. Fitzgeralds *Dissertation* Trinity 1985 and *Ireland and the New Architecture* by S Rothery)

Extensive debate, thought and formulation went into the development of an approach to the redevelopment of O'Connell Street, both after the 1916 Rising and the Civil War in 1922: the consensus would seem to be that while some success was achieved, the overall result failed to achieve the coherence and status that was sought. The majority of

the redevelopment work did not take place until 1924 due to material shortage during the Great War and the political transition to Free State.

In 1916 Local Authorities were limited to powers under Public Health Acts which limited considerations to Safety & Health. The opportunities for reconstruction of Sackville Street were evident, and a Reconstruction Bill was to give the Local Authority power to make Bye Laws with respect to structure, materials, design, alignment and general symmetry of the new buildings. Commercial interests objected to possible additional expense without compensation however and an Expert Advisory Committee, set up to advise on Legislation, considered that control of height and design would be too restrictive and inflexible. The scope of the amended provisions was limited to a power in the City Architect to 'disapprove of anything in the design, line of frontage, or materials proposed which would be injurious to the amenity of the street'. The Local Authority would not have the power or means to improve or enoble the street but was to depend on the cooperation between the developers and the City Architect. The City Architect, JJ McCarthy, prepared a number of elevations in 1916 which 'set out the main heights of the buildings according to the position of the streets in which the structures are to be erected and give the approximate positions of the main cornices, balustrades, etc.' The outline elevations were to serve only as a framework with the aspiration of a 'harmonious coordinated style' giving 'unity and variety'.

The reconstruction opened a debate on the urban design approach which ought to determine the character of the street. In June 1916 the *Architectural Review* published an article *Dublin after the Rebellion* promoting a coherent uniform design. The *Irish Builder* sought a uniform silhouette, an object lesson for architects from all over the world: it regretted that Dublin had suffered the baneful results of an excess of English influence in the imitation of cheap current English architecture and saw the rebuilding as an opportunity to improve on the 'nondescript patchwork collection of houses' (which was the description given to the Street in the RIBA Journal of May 1916). WA Scott Professor of Architecture at the National University advised a single overall design for the street conceived as an architectural unit in a stripped classical style. RM Butler later Professor of Architecture at the National University proposed a coordinated scheme in which all street façades would be the work of one architect, he considered that the traditions of Dublin were reflected in the 'fine monumental classical renaissance which was evolved as a local style in the latter half of the eighteenth century'. The *Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland* advised control of the design to enhance the architectural dignity of the city. Horace T O'Rourke, to become City Architect in 1922, published an



article *Dublin Reconstruction, the Principles of Horizontality and Verticality* in the *Irish Builder* in 1917 in which he promoted the use of a framework regulating the lines of the street but leaving freedom to each architect to work within it: 'The Reconstruction Act 1916 gives the Corporation control powerful enough to create and maintain a complete rhythm and balance of design for all new forms in the destroyed area and our effort will be to secure coordination as a first essential. ...The hopeless architectural failure of our

streets has been due to the neglect of the principle of horizontality and verticality in some or all of its aspects. ...The unhappy destruction of large areas of Dublin has thrust upon the citizens an historic opportunity of arriving at some unity of conception which would be a source of gratification to our city for generations to come'.

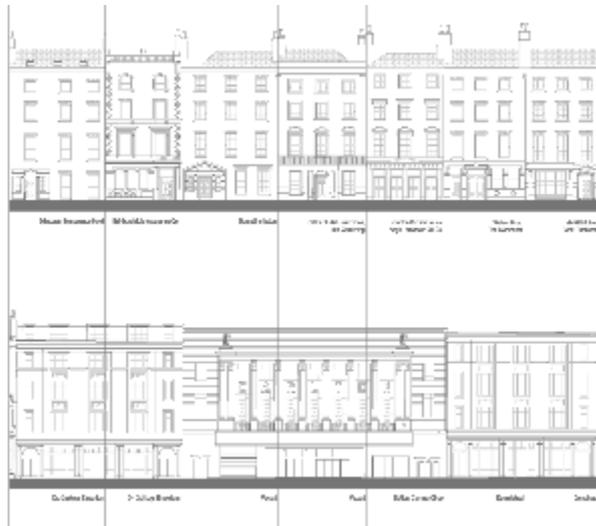


Fig 38 Nos 50-56 O'Connell Street 1916 and today

Shops, banks, offices, department stores, hotels, cinemas and restaurants might occupy the premises to be rebuilt and the range of interests which the designs had to reflect was therefore much more wide-ranging than that which Baker had to deal with. While shop owners had to adapt their business to suit the uniform design in the 19th Century this reconstruction allowed them to build according to the needs of their own business and property owners wanted their premises to stand out. As a result the integrity of the block was endangered. Scott's scheme largely reconciled the opposing aims of the Corporation and the property owners and a level of 'unity and variety' was achieved.

Scott prepared a scheme for the street which proposed a larger unit site size than those laid out by the Wide Streets Commission, with 4 units being proposed where in 1789 11 had been set down over the same block of Lower Sackville Street by Henry Aaron Baker (pupil of and successor to Gandon). 'Whereas Baker's design is automatically harmonious, since it is based on repetition of a single unit, harmony and balance have been achieved in Scott's design only as a result of the conscious articulation of elements'. Fitzgerald goes on to note 'the actual function of the street has

dramatically changed from being a

The skeleton elevations were used as a basis for redevelopment, but a debate arose over the appropriate material. Cut stone was recommended but the smaller owners wanted to use the cheaper option of red brick, a conflict was perceived. The City Architect took the view that he did not have the power to enforce the use of any specific material, and while stone was preferred, in many cases brick was used.

Reconstruction of O'Connell Street was slow, due to lack of materials and in particular shortage of steel, which promoted the development of reinforced concrete construction.

Both the Town Clerk and City Architect attended in London in May 1917 on behalf of the Reconstruction Committee to secure supplies of building materials, which were otherwise consumed in the British war effort, and obtained permission for the City Architect to certify requisitions for the steel and timber required to reconstruct the damaged buildings, the major building activity recommenced after 1918 following the end of the First World War.

The *Architectural Association of Ireland* (AAI) was cynical about all of the opposing ideas for the reconstruction. The Year Book of 1916-1917 included notes on the 'Rebellion' in

which the writer complained: '[We are] flooded with diverse and dubious schemes of town and street planning; defended with clamorous cries for 'uniformity of building' on one hand and 'individual expression' on the other.'

Opinion was divided between uniformity and individual expression. In 1917 Edwin Bradbury as President of the AAI expressed what was to become the new architectural ethic of that post great war society, which Rothery in *Ireland and the New Architecture* compares with the later ideas of Corbusier, 'Valueless relics of the past – passing fashion in art – useless extravagancies of dress, human and architectural – all these must be scrapped. The war is revealing and producing man at his best: natural and strong and rational. Let us endeavour to help by producing a rational architecture – an architecture which excludes the unessential and embodies only what is true and of unassailable worth'.

In 1922 (*Irish Builder*) RM Butler proposed the creation of a new public domain between the Pro Cathedral and Upper O'Connell Street, as the site of a R.C. Cathedral 'as large as St. Marks Venice or the new Cathedral of Westminster' – this never happened.

7.3 The Concept of the Street

By the 1920's the concept of the street as a conscious composition had been eroded by the emphasis on individual expression, and the policy of the City was now to impose a sufficient measure of order to restore an integrity: this would be difficult where the economic and social policy which generated the funding was essentially *laissez – faire*. The reconstruction acts following 1916 had not been successful, but this would not deter Horace T O'Rourke, City Architect in the second phase of reconstruction following the Civil War, from attempting it. The general architectural tenor is reflected in 1926 by PL Dickenson in *History of Architecture in the British Isles* reflecting on the street architecture at the time of the second major post rebellion reconstruction of the street: 'Individually much modern work is excellent: the trouble lies not in the building but in the street. There is at present no cohesion and buildings jostle shoulders with one another which is mutually detrimental. A modest design is overshadowed by a more exuberant one, and a good but rather rich building appears vulgar when compared to a simple neighbour. To walk down a modern street in a large city is, architecturally, a bewildering business: it is more, it is a nightmare. Yet it is easy to find examples of good street architecture all around us. The street is the unit, and unless we face that fact and deal with it, either by a combination among architects, which would be not so good, we shall not have cities which are worth having and of which we can feel proud.

The old squares of many cities teach a most obvious lesson in this respect. Some of the plainest of these, as in Dublin, are the most successful. Here we see tall houses of the Georgian period almost exactly alike and of the most simple design in long rows, the only variety often being in the treatment of the doors and railings. Yet there is no monotony – rather a pleasant sense of harmony and dignity. Such squares suggest the parallel of a number of distinguished guests at a dinner party of well bred people. All are dressed alike in the main, yet there is a personal note in each which serves to emphasise character. The London Street, on the other hand, suggests a fancy dress parade in which each person is striving to outdo his neighbour: vulgarity is the key-note. Repose, restraint, dignity are all lacking. It is all very well as a temporary joke, but as a permanency it is dreadful'.

Eventually, the only part of the street which was built to any co-ordinated scheme was part of the upper east side. This was referred to as a matter of regret by O'Rourke in a speech to AAI in 1932.

In 1920 RM Butler considered that 'no inspiration for a real architecture is to be found in the bold, unadorned structures of the past few years'.

Butler had said in *Studies 1916*, that Sackville Street before the Rising was 'as perfect an example of an important 18th Century thoroughfare as could be found in Europe. It was in its way unique'. In an article in the *Irish Builder* in 1923 he considered the reconstruction of Sackville Street between 1916 and 1923 as an opportunity lost and Sackville Street was now a street filled with buildings of many sorts and fashions, without particular relation to one another. With due thought and a little extra cost a magnificent street of palaces might have been made. He suggests that the recent destruction afforded an opportunity for making one grand boulevard from the river to the Rotunda, hoping that the failures of the 1916 reconstruction could be avoided.

7.4 Construction in the 1920s

After independence in 1922, the new Irish Free State began to look beyond Britain for advice and examples. The ties were not easily broken, however, and although the number of British architects obtaining commissions in Ireland decreased greatly from the 1920s onwards, some continued to come to work in Ireland and many Irish architects were still trained in Britain or worked there for a period.

Dublin Civic Survey 1922, commissioned by the Civics Institute, saw O'Connell Street as 'an artificial centre', and sought to reorient the city between O'Connell Street and Kilmainham, which would be the seat of the Oireachtas – the GPO was to become the City Hall – a radical break with the past. 'In the event central Dublin did not undergo the process of Hausmannisation' (Daly *Surveying Irelands Past*)

One of the major successful developments in O'Connell Street between the Rebellion and the Civil War was Clerys Department Store (1920) designed under the title of Ashlin Coleman, it was a derivative of Selfridges (1907-09) in London, an example of the Chicago School modified to English taste by Swales Burnett and Atkinson. Frank Atkinson came to Dublin during the First World War, and was employed by Ashlin Coleman.



fig 39 Clerys Department Store

The *Modern Building Record 1910 (Public Buildings)* referring to Selfridges as follows: 'here two problems are involved – how to invest the front building, which is to consist as far as possible of plate glass, with the appearance as well as the reality of stability and dignity; and, secondly what external semblance to give a building whose chief components are steel and concrete. Rothery *obcit* considers it probable Atkinson was responsible for the design of Clerys. Rothery's evaluation of Clerys is of a 'superbly appropriate scale' a clear identity with a monumental composition which does not dominate the elevation of the complete street, 'an indirect American influence, a building which embodies the combination of Beaux Arts Styling and Chicago Structural Rationalism.'

The Free State was faced with the reconstruction of the city centre. Reconstruction was delayed due to sharp price increase following the 1914-1918 war, and by a Government preoccupied with matters of security and state finances. The Government then operated in difficult economic circumstances since the post war economic boom had turned into economic stagnation and this dampened the enthusiasm for radical change – Brady *Reconstruction Dublin City Centre in the late 1920's*.

The public policy was to await a fall in construction costs. In 1924 JJ McElligott the Assistant Secretary to the Department of Finance reported that WT Cosgrave, Taoiseach, and E Blyth Minister for Finance had agreed. 'The Corporation requirements from the aesthetic and planning point of view should be reduced to a minimum in order to expedite the rebuilding of O'Connell Street. They consider that insisting on the proper alignment and fenestration is of course essential and as to materials they think that brick and stone fronts, if not plain brick fronts, should be sufficient. They very plainly express the desire that our prime consideration should be to get work started at once and that all other considerations ought to be subordinate' (M Daly P 577-8). Cosgrave believed that cut stone would be too expensive.

The neoclassical phase of the O'Connell Street development reached its height with the Gresham Hotel in 1925. The north west side of Upper O'Connell Street was wholly destroyed in the Civil War in 1922-23 and was rebuilt after 1924. Horace T O'Rourke was City Architect during this phase of development and was successful in guiding the



formation of Cathal Brugha Street, the Hamman Buildings and the Gresham Hotel. The Gresham Hotel was designed by Robert Atkinson then Director of the Bartlett School in London. The classical form of 'the plain stone faced surfaces and shallow modelling of the façade make this building a good example of the evolving stripped classical style of the interwar years'. (Rothery) **fig 40** *Gresham Hotel 1920's*

Joseph Brady in *Reconstruction Dublin City Centre in the Late 1920's*, gives a vignette of Upper Sackville Street in the early 1920's as follows: 'In 1911 the upper part of O'Connell Street was similar in character to Dawson Street, not quite a front rank shopping street but a good location nevertheless. There was a mixture of land uses, but relatively little retailing above the dividing line of Earl and Henry Street. This had not changed by the 1920's. The west side of the street had been little damaged either in 1916 or 1922, and business occupancy too was little changed. Lairds chemist shop was still at the corner of Henry Street and Nobletts (Confectioners) was only a few doors away. Manufacturing industry still occupied central locations. Thwaits and Co. continued to manufacture mineral waters from their premises at No 57. Gilbeys, the wine and spirit merchants, had their bottling store at No's 46-47 and Purcells cigarette factory was the upper end of the street. Many of the commercial users were familiar names such as the Dublin United Tramway Co. at No 59. Elsewhere the Richmond Institution for the Instruction of the Industrious Blind operated their basket factory and showrooms (with



fig 41 Pillar Picture House 1920's

dormitories overhead), while next door at No 42 the Catholic Commercial Club offered a gymnasium, billiards and club rooms. Change was evident too. There were two cinemas, the Pillar Picture House (No 62) (see fig 41) and the Carlton Cinema, which replaced a wine merchant. The Temperance Hotel had been lost and there was a new bank (The Provincial) on the corner with Parnell Street'

Maura Shaffery in her essay on O'Connell Street says of the reconstruction following the Civil War that 'unified schemes were not achieved may be true. The street is not, however, without considerable interest and although the buildings are largely individual expressions, they are tied together by their basic elements, uniformity in height, cornices and string courses and their blend of material, stone and brick'.

7.5 1930-1990

The West side to Upper O'Connell Street, the subject of the Dublin Central proposal, was partially damaged during the Rebellion and the Civil War, although not extensively: but was subsequently substantially demolished and reconstructed throughout the 20th Century. The Carlton Cinema on had opened at 52 Upper Sackville Street in 1915: a scheme for the reconstruction of the Carlton Cinema between 1936 and 1938 resulted in the demolition of No's. 52 to 54 and their incorporation in the new cinema, creating a large urban element comparable to the scale of the buildings on the east side, in the composition of the street façade.

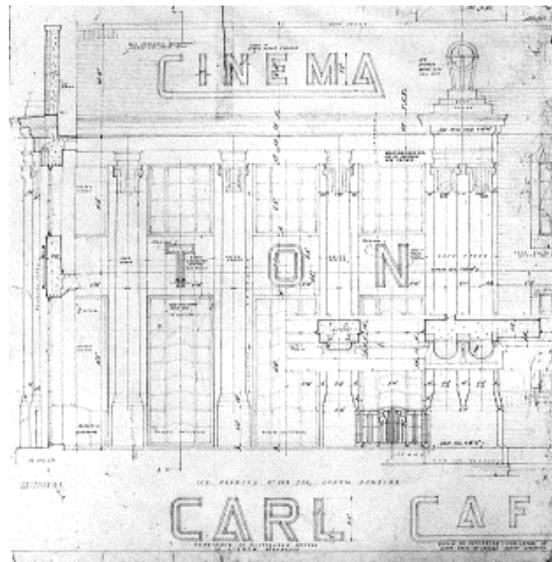


fig 42 Robinson Keefe drawing of Carlton Façade



fig 43 Entrance to Gilbey's The site was sold to a British property developer who demolished the building with only the stone heads of Gladstone and Palmerston being salvaged. The

The demolition of Gilbey's Wine Merchants premises at 46-49 Upper O'Connell Street in 1974 removed a significant building by W.G. Murray, in the Lombardic Romanesque Revival style, which had itself challenged the scale and coherence of the preceding street façade, and replaced it with the current unsympathetic commercial building. 'Perhaps the most outstanding building on O'Connell St after the GPO was Gilbey's. It had a high Victorian Romanesque façade, with an elaborate porch and a crested roof in the style of a French chateau. But in 1970, before moving out to the Naas Road, Gilbey's showed no sentiment by getting outline planning permission for an office development on the site.

new block was supposed to be a 'sophisticated mix of shops, showrooms, offices and extensive car parking'. The new building was described by one critic as 'the profile of the units and the horizontal grills incorporated within the present the image of a skeleton gnashing its teeth'. (McDonald *Destruction of Dublin*)

The demolition of No's. 40 and 41 to make way for the Royal Dublin Hotel circa. 1970 had removed the remains of the original terrace from 42-40: No's. 43, 44 and 45 had been demolished and rebuilt as commercial and public service buildings between 1925 and 1930. As a result of progressive intervention, the only complete remaining building from the 1750 development of the Gardiners Mall, is the main house at No. 42. Numbers 57, 58 were reconstructed as commercial premises, in 1924: No. 59, earlier the Sackville Club, was substantially demolished in 1959 to make way for what is now the Dublin Bus HQ, retaining and incorporating No. 60, which is an office building designed for Colonial Insurance Co. in 1863, again in the Lombardic Romanesque Revival style by W.G. Murray. No. 61 retains a part of its upper facade from the original development of 1750 but is otherwise wholly altered to its current use as a restaurant.

In the middle of the 20th century, O'Connell Street was seen as the ideal location for major semi-state companies such as Aer Lingus and CIE, both of which located their principal tourist offices in the street; the new I.T. culture has made such accessibility redundant. During the 1980's the attendance at city centre cinemas fell sharply and several of them closed down, including the Carlton on O'Connell Street.

Aer Lingus offered to sell No's 40 and 41 for a suitable hotel scheme. In 1968 the two buildings were demolished to make way for the Royal Dublin Hotel, the first hotel to be built in the city centre since the reconstruction of the Gresham in the 1920's.

This phase of the development of O'Connell Street can be seen in the observations of Kenneth Brown in *Dublin Townscape* in the *AR 1974*; he says of Dublin in general '...discontinuity is the chief mark of intervention in Dublin. This is partly an architectural fault, the outcome of functionalism. Modern buildings are normally designed without regard to their neighbours; therefore whatever merit they may have in themselves, they do not fit: and their neighbours do not add up to an intelligible whole. In Le Corbusier's words 'the Street is dead'; but what for him was a cause for satisfaction, for us is a cause for dismay'.

Up until the end of the 20th Century further development of the entertainment and fast food outlets, the diminishing use of upper floor accommodation and poor internal infrastructure and dereliction, accelerated the decline in the quality of Upper O'Connell Street, leaving a number of the major urban elements which gave it its unique character in place in a deteriorating medium of surrounding uses and fabric. A Metropolitan Streets Commission was established by the Coalition Government in 1986 to transform O'Connell Street to the status of Grafton Street as a showcase of architectural sensitivity and environmental awareness. This Commission proposed the reconstruction of Nelsons Pillar: it was abolished by a Fianna Fail Government in 1987 (Colm Lincoln *Dublin as a Work of Art*).

The image of Dublin and O'Connell Street perhaps reached its lowest ebb during the decade of the 1980s and this is reflected in much of what was written at that time.

Referring to O'Connell Street in 1980 Tom Corkery in his book *Dublin*, having observed the decorous Georgian territory of Fitzwilliam and Merrion and the hushed sanctuary of museums and medical men and Ministers of State, and the tall elegant suburbs of Pembroke finds: 'North Dublin has fewer of these little self sufficient enclaves. Its Gardiner Georgian has vanished or decayed, its once famous low-life quarter of Monto has been levelled. One quarter just seems to flow into another quarter and everything finally flows into O'Connell Street, where the big cinemas, the jukebox cafes, the neon, the ice cream salons and the crowded pavements make everybody somebody but nobody anybody'



fig 44 *O'Connell Street 1980*

The demise of O'Connell Street mirrored the general dilapidation and malaise throughout Dublin. By the 1980's the city had become 'the shabbiest, most derelict city in Europe, chaotic and disorderly like the capital of some third world country', and the centre was peppered with 'weed strewn derelict sites surrounded by decaying hoardings, dilapidated buildings boarded up and left to face the elements, gap-toothed streets and grotesque modern office blocks.' (McDonald *Destruction of Dublin*)

'This magnificent thoroughfare could have become Dublin's answer to the Champs Elysée, lined with fashionable shops and terraced cafes where people could sit and watch the world go by. Instead, the capital's main street was transformed into a honky tonk freeway, cluttered with fast food joints, slot machine casinos, ugly modern office blocks, vacant buildings and even the odd derelict site.' (McDonald *Destruction of Dublin*)

Referring to Horace T O'Rourke, MacDonald writes: 'As city architect of the 1920's he was responsible for rebuilding O'Connell Street after 1916 and the Civil War but the dignified and noble facades he had ordained got scant attention from the developers who descended on the street during the late 1960's and early 70's'. (Frank McDonald *Destruction of Dublin*)

'Between the County Councils offices and the Carlton cinema there is a gaping hole in the streetscape. This large derelict site, fronted by the usual large tatty hoarding, is located opposite the Gresham hotel where the view must surely endear guests to the amenities of Dublin. At the time there were two sound buildings on the site, Gills bookshop and Penney's department store'. (McDonald *Destruction of Dublin*)

'Socially the most grievous loss to O'Connell Street was the demolition of the Metropole and Capitol in mid-1973... ...They were more than mere cinemas behind its narrow terracotta façade in Princes Street; the Capitol had a restaurant, cafes, lounges and meeting rooms as well as an elaborately decorated theatre with seating for over 1,400 people. And the Metropole's bars, restaurants, and ballroom were at the very hub of Dublin's social life for many years' (McDonald *Destruction of Dublin*).

7.5 1990-2008

In 2000 Pearson observes: 'There have been several attempts to recover the dignity of the street over the last twenty-five years, and substantial sums have been spent on widening and repaving the central mall, which has improved the general aspect of O'Connell Street greatly. One thing is certain: only the highest quality buildings should be permitted in the street. This was the guiding principle of the committee that oversaw the rebuilding of O'Connell Street in the 1920s, and those structures, with their cut-stone facades, have the mark of quality. They may not be highly original in their design but they are appropriate to the status of the street. Dublin Corporation has made a commitment to enhance the overall quality and public perception of O'Connell Street and its neighbouring districts. This difficult task will address issues of the presentation of premises, of paving, of the uses of buildings and the linking of various districts together'(Pearson *Heart of Dublin*)

In the early 1990s the RIAI ran an architectural competition on behalf of Dublin City Council, to provide a contemporary monument on the site of Nelsons Pillar. The winning entry by Ian Ritchie was intended to be in place for the new millennium but was delayed due to planning appeals and a High Court case and was finally unveiled in January 2003 amid much public interest and excitement. The Spire marked the beginning of a series of improvement projects for the street.

In 1998 Dublin City Council launched the *O'Connell Street Area Integrated Plan of 1998*, with a view to improving the serious physical and social problems of the central thoroughfare of the capital city. The plan outlined a series of aspirations and a list of infrastructural projects to help to deliver these objectives. These include built projects as well as traffic management proposals and improved environments for the pedestrian.

The effect on O'Connell Street eight years into the plan has been in the main very positive. Traffic has been reduced to two lanes in either direction and private cars are re-routed away from O'Connell Street thus reducing traffic volume. Street furniture was upgraded although a suite of kiosks designed by London bloc Architects in consultation with Buro Happold have not as yet been built. A 'room' with sophisticated and elegant paving was conceived at the base of the Spire and giving a frontispiece to the GPO. Square clipped peach trees were planted in pairs along the central avenue where

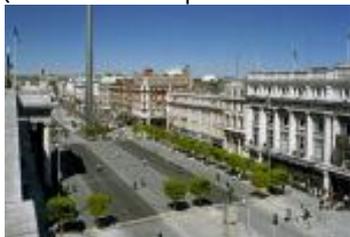


fig 46 *O'Connell Street Upgrade*



(with the exception of the heritage monuments) all other clutter has been removed. The Luas now runs across O'Connell Street at Abbey St

and the overall effect of the past 10 years has altered the view from the bridge north for the better.

fig 45 *Base of Spire*

'The scale and elegant proportions of O'Connell Street, its combination of buildings, sculpture, lighting and trees positions it in the league of great European boulevards, drawing the huge pedestrian volumes towards its focal point of the spire and the GPO plaza. The economic and political confidence has been restored, allowing the street to reflect the positive aspirations of the capital and the nation. But the work is far from complete. (CABE *O'Connell Street Dublin: A Case Study*)

However, the buildings that contain this upgraded mall suffer in the main from the malaise that attached itself to the street as a whole since the 1960s and this is especially true of the Upper west side; the Dublin Central site. The positive moves made to the public place of O'Connell Street can now be carried through to the walls of buildings that enclose and define this important urban place.



fig 47 Upper West O'Connell Street Today

8 CONCLUSION

8.1 Upper O'Connell Street – Reflections on the Image

The image of the street throughout the ages is not easy to define. The following excerpts give an indication of the complexity and variety of responses Sackville Street provoked.

fig 48 Wrought iron balcony detail



WM Thackeray, recognised as among the first English commentators to understand the complexity of Irish history and who wrote that if he remained more three months in Ireland could not write about it, saw the essence of place as a cultural spirit reflected in its character. Thackeray notes, even in 1842, that the upper part of Sackville Street faded as it proceeded northwards, implying that the contribution of well designed and generous shops, designed into the later lower end of the street within the Wide Street Commissions policy, were essential to its vital character, saying: 'The Street is exceedingly broad and handsome; the shops at the commencement, rich and spacious; but in Upper Sackville Street, which closes with the pretty building and gardens of the Rotunda, the appearance of wealth begins to fade somewhat and the houses look as if they had seen better days. Even in this great street of the town, there is scarcely anyone, and it is as vacant and listless as Pall Mall in October'. (WM Thackeray *Irish Sketch Book*).

George Sala (1828-96) reflecting the establishment of Victorian England recognised the O'Connell Street of the nineteenth Century as 'certainly one of the four great streets in Europe'. (Peter *Dublin Fragments*).



fig 49 Jules Verne

Jules Verne (1828-1905) a popular French author wrote a novel entitled 'P'tit bonhomme' in 1893 set in Ireland espousing the nationalist cause against the repressive Land Laws. Minority wealth contrasted with majority poverty is the underlying theme, and place is a reflected analogy: in this context, Verne, who relied on contemporary French sources uses the image of Sackvills Street in 1882, as mirroring this social dichotomy '... Sackville Street with its statues, Nelson's Pillar, the vast post office, its handsome houses and fine

shops. Alas! also its poor and shabby pedestrians and many signs, impossible of concealment, of the poverty that abounds in Dublin, and which no authority or watchfulness can hinder from obtruding itself upon the sight of the well-to-do inhabitants.'

In the twentieth Century Sean O'Faolain saw O'Connell Street 'at its centre it is Georgian in every line. But it is Georgian with a difference. It is certainly not, never was, a part of Georgian England: not even on the face of it' (O'Faolain *An Irish Journey*)

Robert Lynd looking at the city in 1908 saw it 'impress on the eye and imagination the Dublin of the Parliament House and Trinity College, the Dublin of the Anglo Irish Colony and the Irish nation struggling through centuries to its birth' (Lynd *Home Life in Ireland*)

Kate O'Brien in her autobiography refers to the post 1922 O'Connell Street as a 'stretch of absolutely comical commercial vulgarity'.

Eric Whelpton in 1948 says of O'Connell Street: 'Sackville Street, as it was first called, is a fine thoroughfare because it is broad and well laid out. Nelson's Column half way up its course gives it a metropolitan character, and so do the other monuments and statues placed at intervals down the centre. Unfortunately a great many of the old mansions of this fine street were destroyed during the 'troubles' and some of the reconstructed buildings have no particular character, but it is difficult to spoil the general appearance of a broad well planned street. In any case there is always an atmosphere of liveliness' (Whelpton *The Book of Dublin*)



fig 50 Upper O'Connell Street 1940s

authorities to arrest the ruin of such a noble thoroughfare. In its heyday it must have been one of the finest streets in Europe, perfectly planned and built in the most meticulous taste, but today [1949] it presents a sorry spectacle of what is called utilitarian building, although why people cannot see that beauty is the highest form of utility I can never understand. Order has gone from it, taste is smothered under a blanket of chromium vulgarity and building is as haphazard as could be. But parts of the old dignity remain, notably in the splendid ionic façade of the General Post Office, which was designed by Francis Johnston, the Armagh Architect, in 1814; and in the perfectly proportioned Nelsons Pillar, erected by the same Architect ten years earlier...the finest monument of its kind in Europe, perfect alike in its impeccable proportions, its complete dignity, its magnificent lettering and in the moving rectitude of its utter fitness to its position and surroundings'. (*City of Dublin 1949*)

Richard Hayward reflects a similar ethos: 'Back to O'Connell Bridge we may continue northwards along the wide O'Connell Street, child of the Wide Streets Commission of 1782. It is a thoroughfare which has been losing its character for many years, and the destruction wrought during the troubles did much to hasten this regrettable and unnecessary degeneration: unnecessary because such destruction should have been seized upon by competent planning

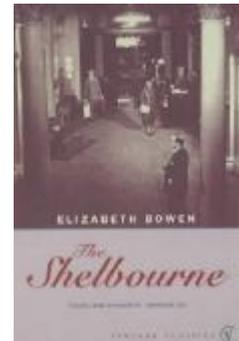
In the same vein Louis McNeice saw 'Nelson on his pillar watching his world collapse'.

'Nelson's Pillar is the natural centre of Dublin and an eyesore to all true Nationalists. Like the General Post Office which stands beside it, another lovely piece of Greek Revival, it is the work of one of the best Irish architects, Francis Johnston. Unlike the Pillar, the Post Office, having been the headquarters of the Rebellion, has worked its passage, and is now regarded as something like a national shrine, though this in no way improves the temper or efficiency of the staff. The Royal Arms had been removed from the pediment, one of the many steps we have taken to exorcise the devils of Anglicisation and make our monuments feel at home'. (Frank O'Connor *Country Books - Leinster*).

An unusual glimpse of O'Connell Street in 1948 by comparison to 1940 is recorded in Charles Graves *Ireland Revisited* c 1949. '...we walked through O'Connell Street. This magnificent thoroughfare glitters at night with almost as many neon lights as Fifty-Second Street New York. I shall never forget seeing it in March 1940. The contrast with the blackout of London was fantastic. If it comes to that, the contrast in 1948 was equally remarkable. Here is a country without coal of its own and yet with a lavish display of electric sky signs in all colours of the rainbow; while England, the home of coal, is allowed no neon lights at all'.

Elizabeth Bowen writing in 1951 saw beyond the decline: 'Dublin's growth as a fine residential city, imposing and civilized capital of what used to be known as the 'sister kingdom' had taken place in the eighteenth century. The new ideal was classicism and space. At first, development ran to the north side, where the rising ground was thought to be more salubrious. There wealth and fashion first set up house; and though much of North Dublin has now grown shabby, those airy uphill squares and long straight streets are still haunted by the elegance of their youth'. (Bowen *The Shelbourne*)

fig 51 *The Shelbourne* book cover



'Sackville Street was an enigma in the early years of the 20th Century. It was supposed to be the pre-eminent street of the city but it has never really managed to line up to that description. In its earliest incarnation as Sackville Mall, it was the place of resort for the well to do a place to see and be seen (Dickson 1987). It never recaptured that status following its widening and joining to the south city via Sackville Bridge. Even today the problem remains. It has of late been characterised as being somewhat seedy and some effort has been put into improving street frontages and signage so that it does not look like a larger fast food restaurant. It is sometimes suggested that it is its very width – one of its celebrated characteristics – that has militated against its development into a prestigious area. However, the Champs Elysees in Paris is just as wide, if not wider when the footpaths are taken into account'. (Joseph Brady *The Heart of the City* 1987)

In *Joyce's Dublin 2000* Negretti, the author, reflects on Joyce's city as he might now find it. She gives the following description of O'Connell Street at the heart of the city in 2000; 'Dirty light bulbs are strung and knotted around branches of the trees, no doubt to light up the place at night and make it into a fairy tale. By day O'Connell St is a mess, the trams are gone in favour of double decker buses, the traffic filling both sides of the streets, bumper to bumper. It smells of chip fat and exhaust fumes, and the shops are appalling: fast food places and amusement arcades. A rickety art deco cinema is being

squatted by a man selling different types of bags. This is the sort of place where children play truant, smoking nervously on street corners’.

In the most recent portrait of Dublin by Neil Hegarty in *Dublin – A View from the Ground* 2007 referring to Upper O’Connell Street he says: ‘It always was an odd area of the city. Marketed as self-contained Sackville Mall in the eighteenth century, as the most fashionable quarter in the city, and with the pleasure gardens of the Lying-in Hospital next door, it was agreeable enough for some time – before the engineers and planners connected it with the river and its history as a thoroughfare began. Its wide spaces and lack of intimacy have always marked it out as quite distinctive in Dublin terms; but it was never as fashionable – not really - as other city streets and neighbourhoods. All the same, it has remained the principal street of the city ever since the eighteenth century, and its decoration of statuary has gradually served to copper-fasten that status. And it was strategic too – commanding the bridge over the river, with clear views east and west along the Liffey, and south to College Green and to Trinity. It was as a result of this strategic value, and even more as a result of its iconic value, that the leaders of the Easter Rising chose to headquarter themselves here, on the main street of the country’.

Maurice Craig, in *Dublin 1660 to 1860* says: ‘In fact Sackville Street, like Portland Place in London, which was built 20 years later, was intended as a sort of elongated residential square, but just like Portland Place found itself flooded with traffic when Nash built his Regent Street in the years following 1811, so Sackville Street was vulgarised, first by the creation of Lower Sackville Street in 1784 onwards, and then in 1790 by the building of Carlisle Bridge which carried the line across the river. The process was further intensified when Westmoreland and D’Olier Streets were made about the time of the Union; and all but completed when the bridge was built in 1880. But the final transformation was not effected till fires of Easter 1916 and June 1922 laid three quarters of the great street in ruins. When it rose again, resplendent with cinemas and ice cream parlours, it might seem far removed from Luke Gardiner’s ideas. But at least it paid him the compliment of confirming the eastward drive, which he had done so much to foster; and the Gardiner’s, who were always devotees of drama, would perhaps not have resented the transformation as much as we think’.

Positive interventions have been the building of the Spire which reinstates the Pillar as a vertical element recapturing its effect in a novel and contemporary way, sufficient in its appropriateness to have already become the symbol and landmark centre of the city. The O’Connell Street restoration to contemporary boulevard standard and the restoration works to the GPO have contributed a sense of improvement: the major proposed redevelopment of both south and north quarters of the street as city blocks, with enhanced permeability creating urban depth and uses will consolidate a contemporary European metropolis in scale and disposition, with an enhanced urban residential presence. The current redevelopment proposals contain the remaining elements in the transition of O’Connell Street to its next phase in its return to the city as its premier street and as the metropolis and the heart of a significant European Capital. Henry Street and Moore Street will be drawn in as an intrinsic part of the redevelopment of the west side of Upper O’Connell Street. The current proposals address this phase of the redevelopment of the Upper O’Connell street streetscape in a structured approach to the context of the of its evolution from 1750 to its corresponding to its contemporary status at the heart of the metropolis in a new order.

8.2 Transition to the Culture of the Free State

The year 1924 appears to have been a significant and extraordinary year in the consolidation of the fortunes of the State, evidenced in many sources, but seen with a measure of professional detachment by Lord Shaw of Dunfermline, an eminent judge of the House of Lords, appointed as chairman of the Commission on Compensation for military damage appointed by the British Government in 1922: in his autobiography "The Other Bundle", he wrote that the Commission sat in the Four Courts in 1922 at the height of the Civil War and transferred to Green Street when the Four Courts was occupied by Irregulars and besieged by the Free State: he revisited Dublin in 1924: when he says "but it was very vividness of those awful recollection of 1922 that visiting the metropolis on the Liffey the other day, my hopes for Ireland and for Dublin were revived. Let me sketch in outline the fundamental contrasts between the Dublin revisited in 1924 and the Dublin of 1922 in which I passed so many tragic hours ... I wonder if any Royal Commission engaged in peaceful and peace labour, ever in the course of English history had a similar adventure The change that there now is is wonderful to see. The streets are calm, I did not hear a shot. Never again, may it please Heaven, will the evening quiet or the hours of sleep be gashed and riven by the sounds that I have heard – of war, and the bitterest war. And already, by day, not only are the ordinary bustle and avocations resumed, but the terrific hurry of the bad times has given place to the placid and humorous exchanges of ordinary trade and traffic Furthermore, different ranks of opinion, even different ranges of society, are realizing that, after all, a new era has begun, and in it they have got to live together. And even with the shock of this realization has come the humour of the readjustments and the drawing of some common civic hopes the best of constitutionalism is coming into sight, which substitutes discussions for fighting, and permits friendship among those who differ I think temporary interruptions may occur. But the salutary and steady weight of constitutional feeling will make itself felt. Meantime, within the Free State, how much there is to be done! What patience, what sternness in the love of order, what a bending to the task, and what a painful and heavy uplifting! Take Dublin itself; take the fine old Sackville Street. Up its length looks the statue of O'Connell; down its length looks that of Parnell. If these Irish leaders were there in the flesh both of them would share the pity of the view. On the one side, even in 1924, lay the Gresham Hotel and the fine commercial buildings – all one tumbled mass of ruins; on the other, the dignified and solid Ionic structure of the Central Post Office, gaunt and spectral, torn and ravaged by explosion and by fire. Perhaps as the view of the great leaders extended it might rest, as the eyes of one revisitant rested, on two other fabrics, which were the architectural triumphs of their country's golden age. (Custom House and Four Courts).....



fig 52 Lord Shaw of Dunfermline

Yet these ruins form but a part-noble but relatively small – of the vast problem of reconstruction which faces the Free State Government of Ireland today. After a volcanic upheaval it is vain to expect that reconstruction, rebuilding, can be secure while the lava is still hot beneath the labourers feet. Time is the great healer; it is also the great cooler. Already the dome of the Four Courts has been restored. Meanwhile, uneasiness and occasional and fitful explosions arrest the good work. But encouragements grow; the taking up of the loan of ten million pounds was a heartening fact, and the part played by the Protestant Church of Ireland was a significant act, steadying to public security and showing that Ireland believes in and will be true to herself".

8.3 The Evolved Culture of O'Connell Street

The culture of O'Connell Street is embodied in its history: its history tends to show that its evolution has been in many respects accidental: its origin is based on a baroque vision of order and civic space expressed through classic Irish Georgian forms; the evolved cultural image of O'Connell Street is complex and multifaceted as seen from literary and historic references which inform the layers of subconscious meaning: despite all of the circumstances it remains coherent, its character expressed through its unchanging urbanity. Baron Haussmann is said to have drawn his vision for Paris from the work of Nash: Nash is said to have been influenced by the combined work of the Wide Streets Commissioners and the Dublin renaissance of in the eighteenth century. AE Street, writing on Haussmann in the *Architectural Review* in 1905 says:- 'the Paris he has left us, if it lacks individual points of interest, is dignified in mass, laid out on large and comprehensive lines, the vistas well considered, the important buildings standing where the eye demands them': this might with credit reflect back on O'Connell Street. Gardiners Mall, the indent of the portico of the GPO into the perspective of the street, Nelsons Pillar now transposed to the Spire, the Wide Streets Commission extension of the boulevard: the progressive introduction of marker buildings at its various stages of evolution in response to a changing society has resulted in a variant on the Street's analysis of Haussmanns Paris in identifying what makes the street unique, in its essence it is a dignified mass laid out on large and comprehensive lines, the vistas well considered, ordered but not uniform, where the important buildings standing where the eye demands them.

Upper O'Connell Street is characterised by a process of evolution which mirrors the changing fortunes of the State. The recent interventions of the Spire, the upgraded public domain and proposed redevelopment of the lower east side of the street, the projected re-generation of the GPO taken with the proposed Dublin Central development and the corresponding development to the south, is a radical regeneration of the street and deepening of the city centre, effectively achieving a transition from a linear centre to a permeable quarter again reflecting and embodying in its scale and architectural identity the new status of the State in the European Union of States, itself an achievement which flows directly from the independence, which Lynd foresaw, and which is to be commemorated in the Moore Street National Monument in dialogue with the GPO as its symbolic centre.

It seems appropriate to conclude this review of the sources which in some measure disclose the influences on the formation of O'Connell Street as a symbolic place which informs the character of the city as a whole, by quoting Horace T O'Rourke in the context of his vision in the same year 1924. The conclusion to the Dublin Civic Survey written by O'Rourke in 1924 on the verge of the second phase of the reconstruction of O'Connell Street after the Rebellion, in the context of a new and further radical phase in the evolution of O'Connell Street. 'For many centuries Dublin has been the residence of numerous notabilities, who knew it for the brief years that constituted their lives – then passed into the great Silence. Generation after generation has arisen to come under the spell of its glamour and magic influence. The old buildings, though voiceless, seem still to speak of the long-buried past, and to whisper tales of other times. Go out to the fair hills that look down upon the city, gaze upon the beauty of its setting, and mark its towers and spires. Dublin is a city redolent of charm; a city of castle, sea and distant hills; a city full charged with the glory and pathos of the past. Let her citizens resolve that Dublin shall have a great future!' Horace T O'Rourke FRIAI (Dublin City Architect) 1924