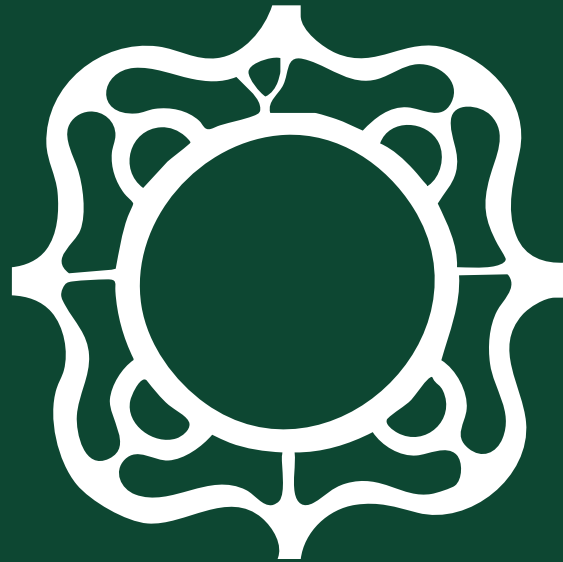


Mountjoy Square Park



1802

2025



Re-imagining Mountjoy Square

ILLUMINATING MOUNTJOY SQUARE
Study into reinstating Georgian Lamp Irons



ILLUMINATING MOUNTJOY SQUARE
Study into reinstating Georgian Lamp Irons

Introduction

This study has been compiled by Dublin Civic Trust and the Mountjoy Square Society in response to conservation and restoration works now underway on the original wrought-iron railings of Mountjoy Square Park.

As part of the refurbishment contract, a sample hand-worked iron lamp is to be commissioned from the appointed ironworking contractor to inform authentic lighting reinstatement on the square. In order for this to be carried out, evidence-based research is required to guide the works and to ensure that the lighting is designed in an appropriate, conservation-led manner.

This study concludes that Mountjoy Square was almost certainly originally illuminated by a total of 84 oil lamp standards, known as 'lamp irons' or 'globe irons', integrated at regular intervals into the wrought-iron railings. The report also concludes that it is unlikely lamps were ever erected on arches above the square's entrance gates, either as part of the original scheme or at a later date.

The report puts forward a firm case for reinstating, as part of the refurbishment project, the original Georgian lighting design for the square as erected c.1802-3. This was based on a series of oil-fuelled 'lamp irons' incorporated into the wrought-railings, serving the dual purpose as structural newel posts and as public lamp standards. This lighting scheme was similar to those used in most of the Georgian squares, promenades and public gardens in 18th-century Dublin, of which none now survive anywhere in the modern city.

The refurbishment of the original railings of Mountjoy Square is arguably the most ambitious project of its kind to ever have been undertaken in Ireland and we fully endorse Dublin City Council's research-based approach to the works. In fulfilling a proper conservation-led approach, however, it is both essential and a requirement that the original design intent of the protected railings, located in a statutory Architectural Conservation Area, be fully understood. This must be considered within the context of the square's former public lighting design before any proposed modern lighting scheme is carried out, before any gate arches are considered, or indeed before further substantial repair works to the newels posts gets underway.

The purpose of this document, therefore, is to provide clarity on the design significance of Mountjoy Square's original oil lamps within the wider Dublin historical context.

There is little doubt, if correctly pursued and founded on evidence-based research, that the reinstatement of the original lighting of Mountjoy Square would deliver an urban landscape conservation project of considerable international importance. We believe that the community of Dublin 1 deserves this standard of public investment and we are willing to work in partnership with Dublin City Council to see this proposal through to delivery.

Dublin Civic Trust and the Mountjoy Square Society

January 2017



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Cover Image: Surviving wrought-iron lamp iron in the Rotunda Gardens, Dublin, c.1870

1. Georgian Street Lighting – Fuelled by Oil

Street lighting in 18th and early 19th-century Dublin, as across Ireland, Britain and many other European countries, was powered by oil. A common misunderstanding is that gas was the dominant source of power for street lighting historically, but this only came about in the 19th century following a successful demonstration of gas street lighting on London's Pall Mall in 1807. Mainstream gas lighting projects were installed on the streets of London from the 1810s onwards and in European cities generally from the 1820s-30s onwards. In Dublin, gas was first used to light public streets in 1825 following the establishment of the Dublin Coal Gas Light Company, the Hibernian Gas Light Company and the Dublin Oil Gas Company.ⁱ

For almost the entire Georgian period, therefore, whale oil was used to power street lamps, with each lamp manually filled on a daily basis by a lamplighter. Prior to 1784, responsibility for lighting Dublin's streets moved periodically between private contractors, parishes and commissioners. In that year, these tasks were given by parliament to a single body: the Directors and Commissioners for Paving, Cleansing and Lighting the Streets of Dublin, otherwise known as the Paving Board. Other commissions were also established for individual projects including the lighting and improving of Sackville Street and improvements – including railing-mounted lighting – to the environs of the Rotunda gardens on Rutland (Parnell) Square. The Paving Board funded the installation of public oil lamps through a tax on each building calculated on the value of the property. Prior to its establishment, there were 2,247 lamps recorded in the city – this rose to 10,220 by 1785, mostly operated by private contractors who tendered services to the Board.ⁱⁱ

On Mountjoy Square, it was the Commissioners of the square, appointed by an act of parliament, that were responsible for commissioning the public lighting surrounding the central garden, which was installed as part of the railings works c.1802-03. The lighting aspect may have been specified under the wider auspices of the Paving Board.

Lamps on the terraced house sides of the square were typically erected as upright standards, not as over arches, as part of entrance step railings. These were usually fixed to the railing corner piers of large houses, and placed behind corner newels in the case of the majority of more ordinary houses. Remnants of the latter can still be seen on Mountjoy Square.

2. Georgian Street Lamps – Type and Form

Georgian street lighting can generally be classed into four types:

1. Building-mounted lighting hosted on brackets. These could be public or private, and were found on most streets, lanes and on bridge structures.
2. Freestanding public lamp standards on streets, often hosted on bollards.
3. Lamp standards mounted on public railings surrounding gardens and public buildings.
4. Lamp standards mounted on private house railings.

A variety of these Dublin lamp types are depicted on the following pages.

Almost all Georgian street lamps used the same relatively primitive oil lighting technology. The typical oil lamp 'head' consisted of a hand blown glass bowl hosted within a simple wrought-iron hoop supported by a bracket, or by an arm or pair of arms in the case of a standard. The glass globe was usually of a substantial size and varied in shape from a straight oblong cylinder to bulbous and curvaceous forms.

The 'hat' of the lamp was typically made of tin and was either hinged or could be lifted off to allow for refuelling and cleaning [Fig. 1]. The hat was perforated like a chimney to draw air and encourage a brighter flame.

A small oil dish was suspended on wires within the glass bowl, sometimes with glass bullions attached to the sides to magnify the light. It was the job of a lamplighter to place a cotton wick or wicks within the suspended dish, to keep the wicks trimmed, and to fill the dish each evening with oil – typically whale oil – before lighting. The capacity of dishes was designed to accommodate enough oil to keep the lamps burning for a specified period before self-extinguishing.



Records of the Police Commissioners in Edinburgh from the year 1820 provide an excellent specification for the lamplighter's role:

*"...the Contractor shall furnish the lamps with a sufficient quantity of the best Greenland whale oil and two wicks of sixteen threads of the best Oxford cotton conform to specimen to be produced – that he shall cause the lamps to be trimmed daily and the globes to be cleaned at least three times in the week and for that purpose keep a sufficient number of hands."*ⁱⁱⁱ

Fig. 1: 'Lamplighters' depicted by W. Pyne.

3. Dublin Oil Lamp Depictions

The following is a selection of historic images showing public oil lighting on the streets of Georgian Dublin sourced primarily from the National Library of Ireland.

Public Brackets



Fig. 2: Extract from James Malton's View of Essex Bridge, c.1790s, showing a lamplighter tending to one of many bracketed oil lamps.



Fig. 3: Extract from James Malton's View of Essex Bridge, c.1790s, showing private oil lamps mounted over shopfronts on Capel Street. A public street lamp bracket is positioned on the corner with Ormond Quay. The suspended oil dish is clearly apparent in each lamp.

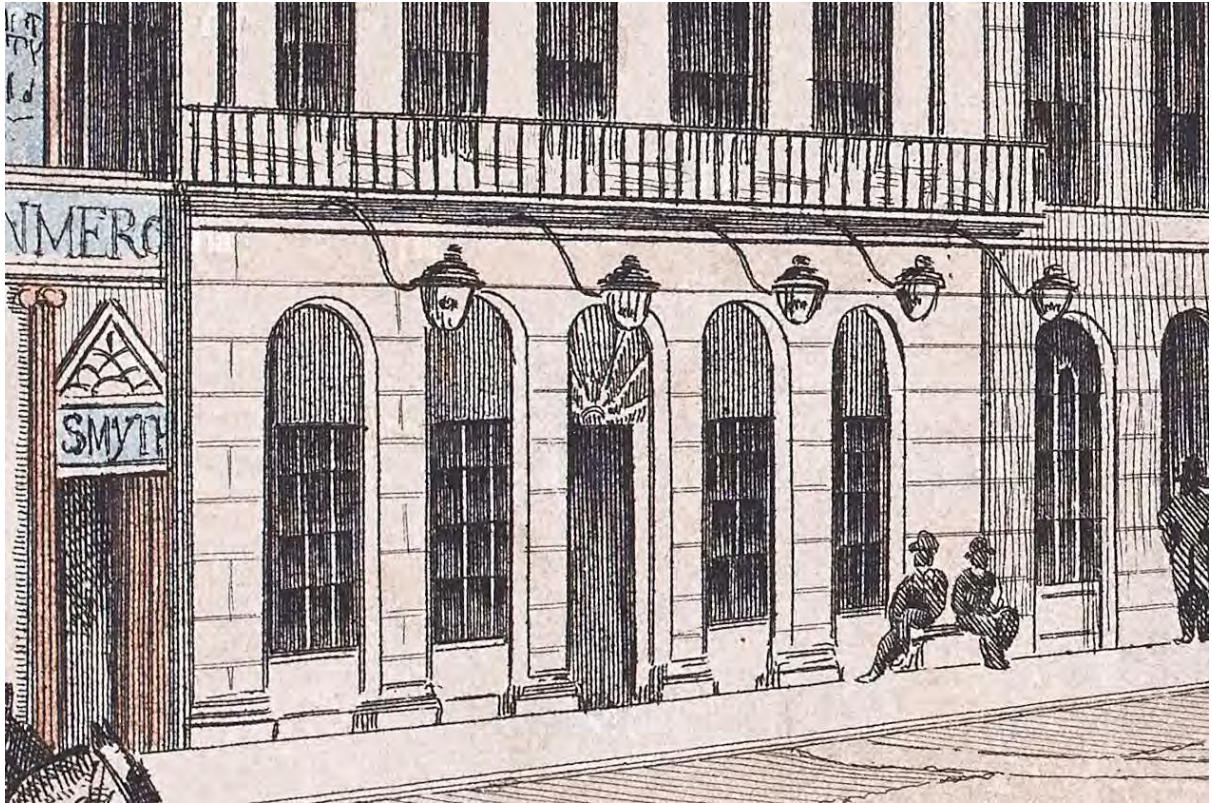


Fig. 4: Extract from Henry Brocas' view of College Green, c.1828, showing bracketed oil lamps adorning the entrance to the former Daly's Club.



Fig. 5: Extract from a late 18th-century view of lower Grafton Street showing a splendid bracketed oil lamp in crisp detail – one of many along this stretch of the street. The oil dish suspended on wires is clearly apparent. The bowl is a decorative bulb shape in acknowledgement of the fashionable location. The hat also has a refined profile.



Fig. 6: Extract from James Malton's *View of Powerscourt House*, c.1790s, showing bracketed oil lamps projecting from the Society of Artists' premises (now the Irish Georgian Society).



Fig. 7: Extract from Henry Brocas' *View from Carlisle Bridge*, c.1820, looking towards Westmoreland Street and Trinity College. Oil lamp brackets are mounted on the newly built Wide Streets Commission terraces and matching oil lamps are depicted adorning Carlisle Bridge, sited on standards.

Public Standards

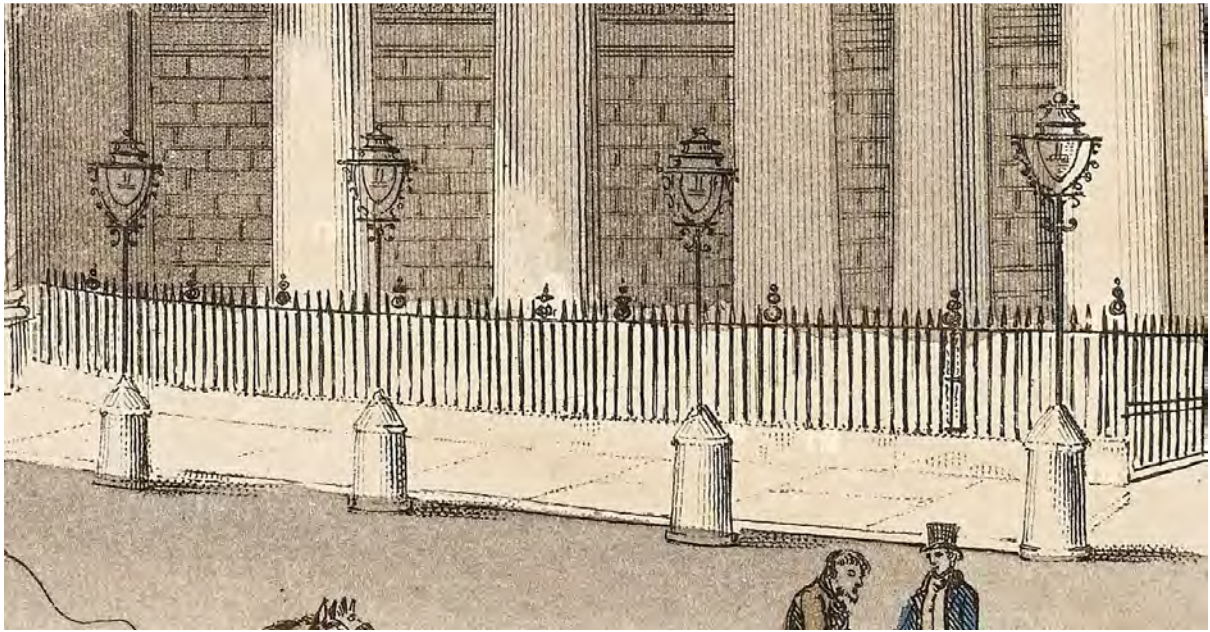


Fig. 8: There is little documentary evidence depicting freestanding oil standards on Dublin's streets, as it appears most lamps were economically hosted on brackets on buildings. This rare example is from outside Bank of Ireland on College Green, depicted by Henry Brocas c.1820. The lamp irons are extravagantly decorated with scrolls and fancy hats, mounted on stone bollards.

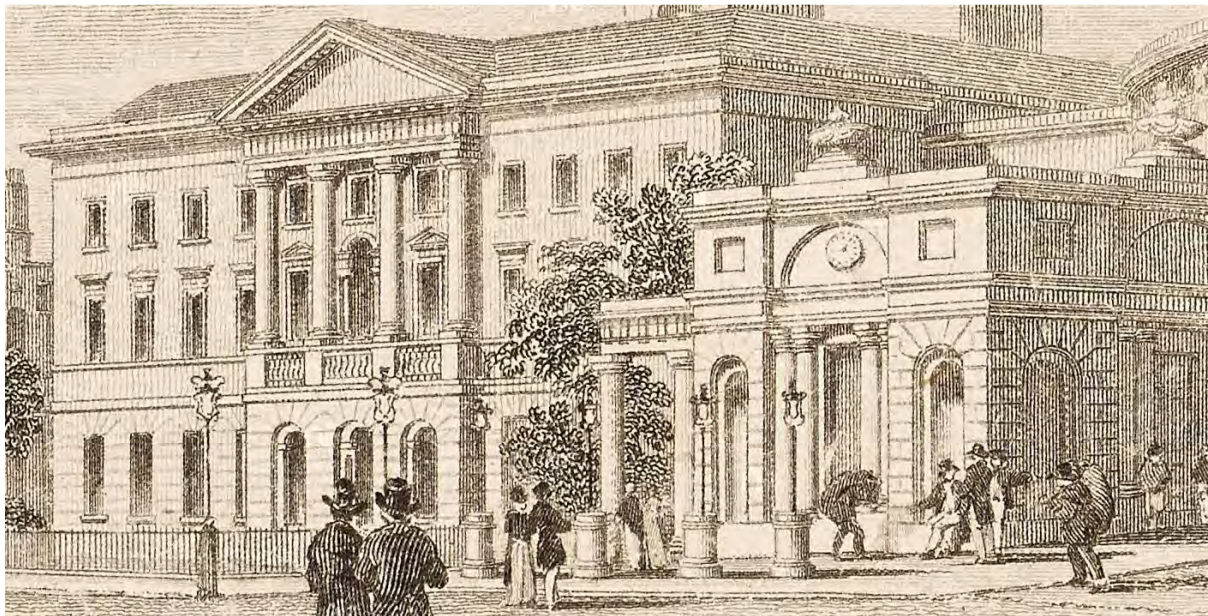


Fig. 9: Extract of unattributed view of the Rotunda Hospital and entrance to the Rotunda Great Room, 1821, showing lamp irons mounted on stone bollards (middle). These appear to be the same stone bollards that survive scattered in the grounds of the hospital today. Lamp irons are also hosted on the piers of the hospital railings to the left.

Private House Standards



Fig. 10: A misconception persists that Georgian private house lighting consisted of arches over doorways as surviving and reproduced in parts of Bath, England. However, surviving evidence on Dublin's streets and historic perspectives almost universally confirm that Dublin's private houses were normally illuminated using upright lamp standards, known as 'lamp irons', and only rarely arched over steps and entrances.

The above perspective by Henry Brocas depicts Cavendish Row c.1820. All of the lamp irons adorning the houses are free-standing columns. In the distance, to the left, the public lamp irons on the railings of the Rotunda gardens are visible - erected in 1784-85.

Further examples of private lamp irons can be seen in **Figs. 22-28**

Public Railing Standards

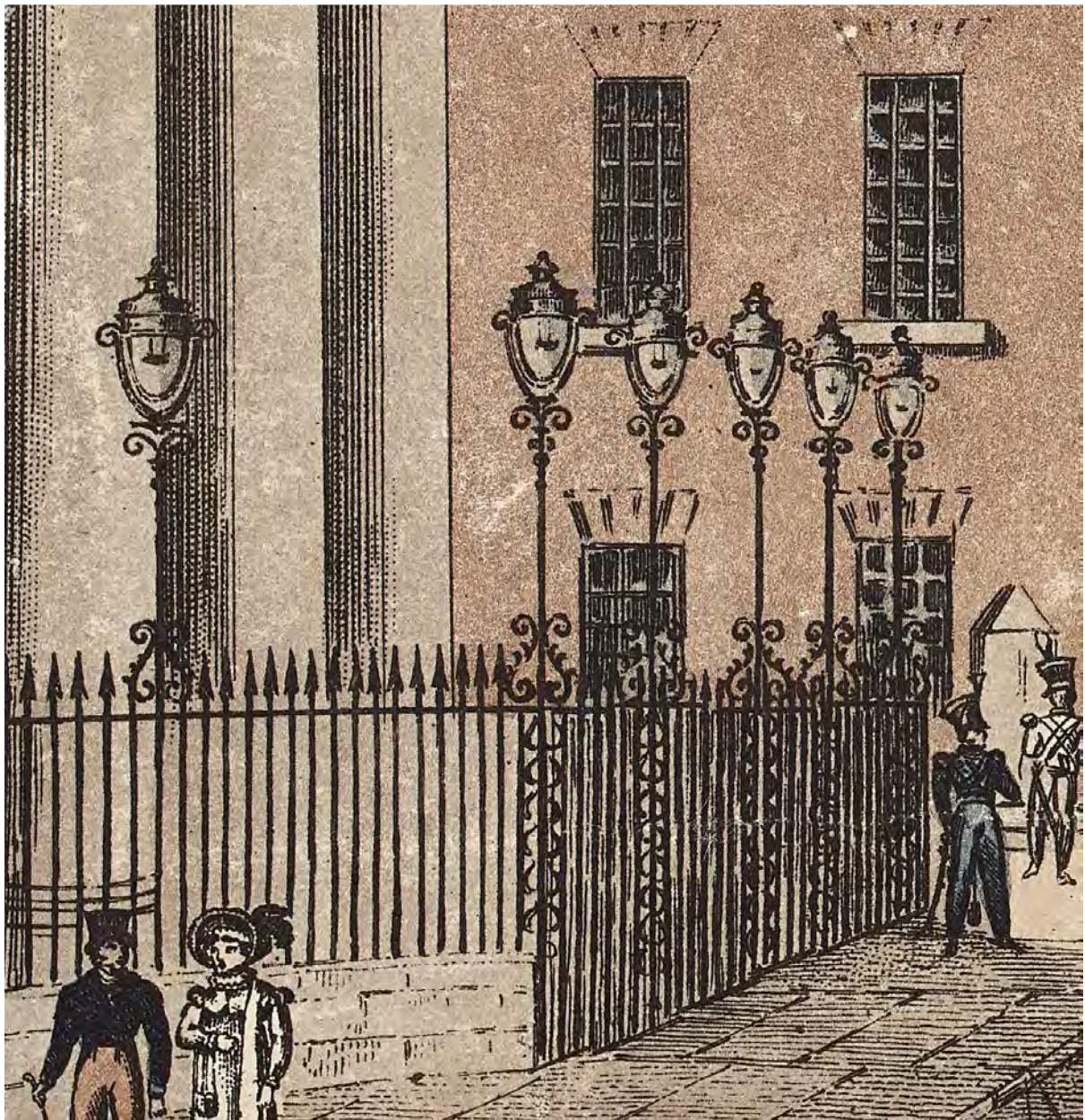


Fig. 11: Lamp iron standards hosted on railings in Dublin were extremely common, encircling not only squares and promenades but also public buildings. The above extract from a view of Cork Hill and Dublin Castle by Henry Brocas in the early years of the 19th century shows the decorative nature of the lamp irons dressing City Hall (then the Royal Exchange).

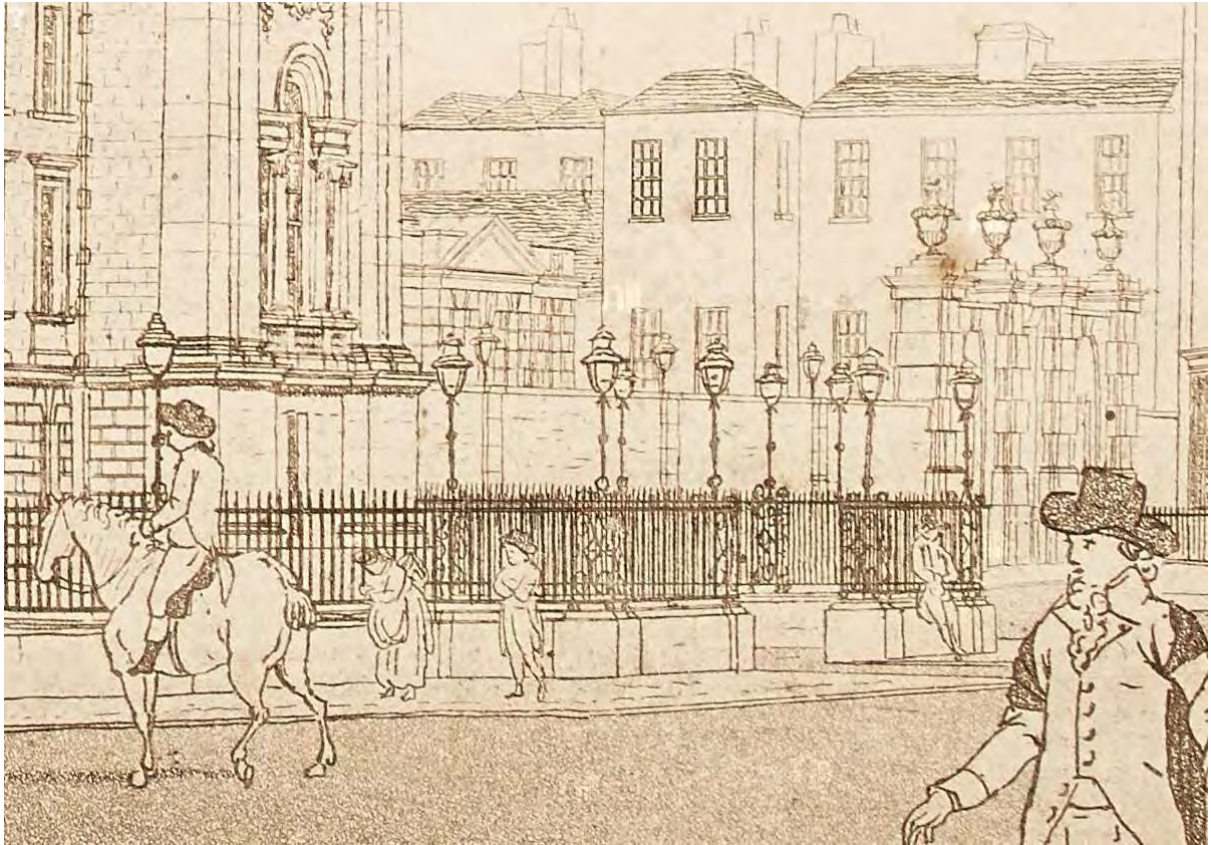


Fig. 12: Extract from a preparatory sketch view of College Green, c.1790s, showing multiple lamp irons dressing the railings of Trinity College.

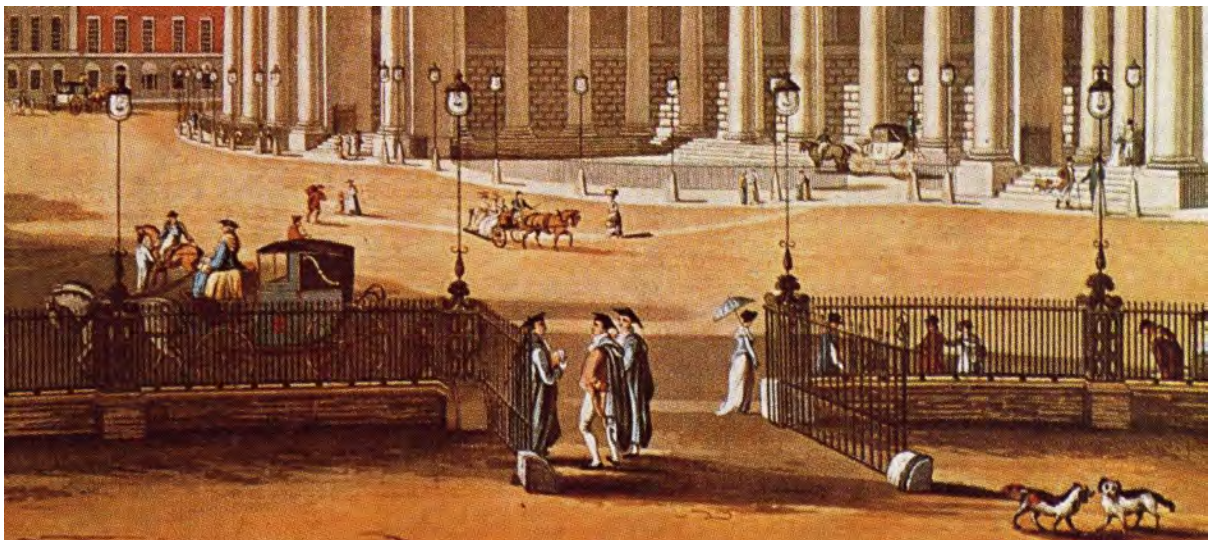


Fig. 13: Extract from a view of College Green after T.S. Roberts, c.1820, showing the multiple lamp irons of Trinity College and an apparently simplified version of the previously mentioned lamp standards set on bollards in front of Bank of Ireland.

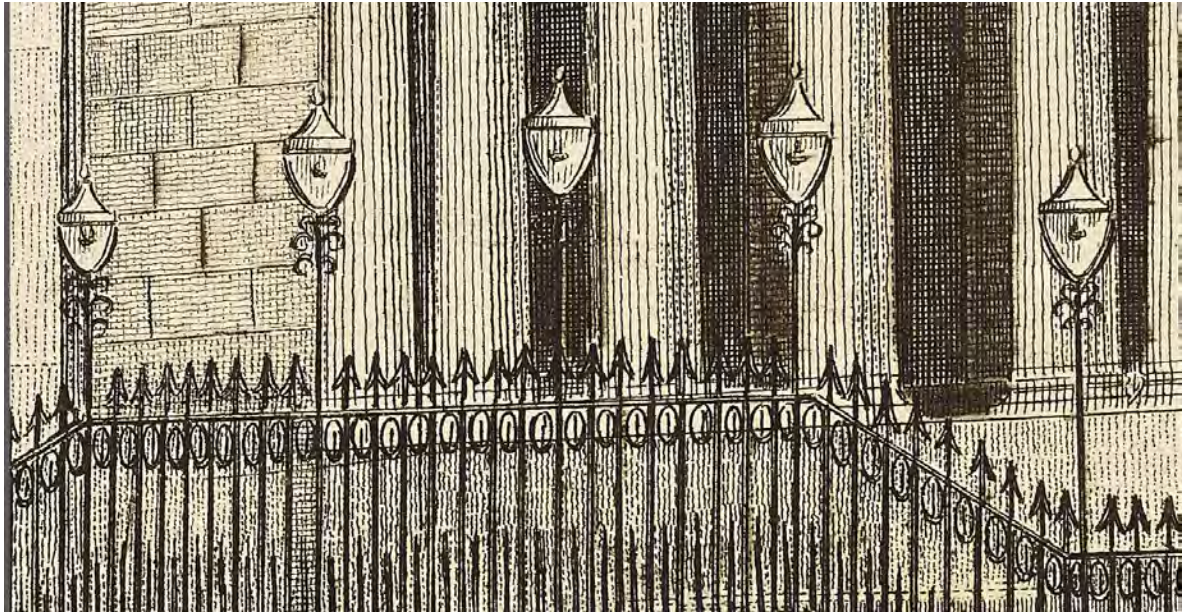


Fig. 14: Extract from a view of Dame Street and the Royal Exchange, c.1820, showing the original lamp irons on its railings.



Fig. 15: Extract from James Malton's view of Rutland Square, c.1790s, showing the elegant array of lamp irons as newly erected on the railings that were installed as improvements carried out to the perimeter of the Rotunda gardens in 1784-85. This view is probably the best representation of modest railing-mounted lamp irons on a Dublin square and are directly comparable, perhaps minus scrolling ornament, to the original lamp irons of Mountjoy Square.



Fig. 16: Extract from a view of the Lower Yard of Dublin Castle by Robert Havell & Son, 1816, showing railing-mounted lamp irons and globes with suspended oil dishes.



Fig. 17: Extract from a view of the Lower Yard of Dublin Castle, c.1820s, showing a variation on a railing-mounted lamp standard with bracket outside the Chapel Royal. These lamps were likely to have been designed by Francis Johnston and executed by the Turner foundry.



Fig. 18: View of Merrion Square and Leinster House showing the array of original railing-mounted lamp irons surrounding the west and south sides of the square.

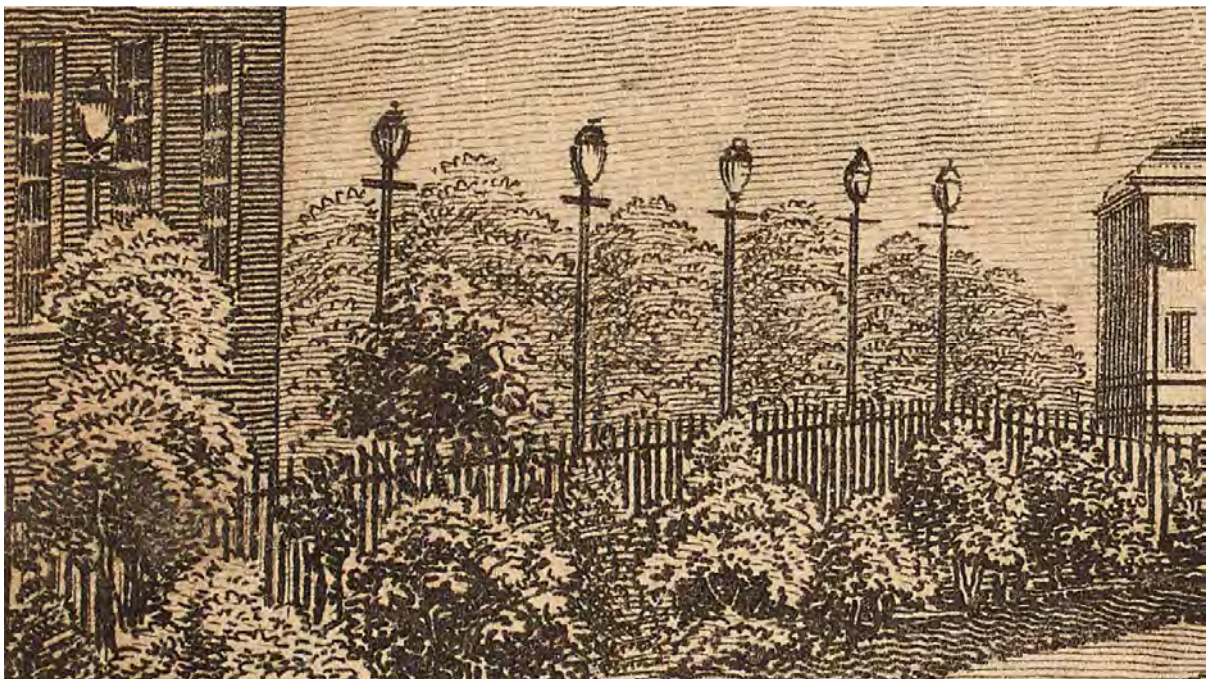


Fig. 19: Close-up view of Merrion Square showing detail of the plain arms designed to support lamplighters' ladders. The detail of the lamp heads is loosely depicted, however these would have been similar to most other oil lamps in the city with an oblong globe and graduated hat. Warburton, Whitelaw and Walsh's description of Mountjoy Square's "*plain but neat lamp irons*" matches this depiction of Merrion Square's lamps. The Mountjoy Square Commissioners also specifically referenced the design of Merrion Square's railings and lamp irons in commissioning the equivalent for the northside square.



Fig. 20: Extract from a Sadler view of the Rutland Fountain, Merrion Square, c.1810, showing the same lamps as mentioned previously. Again, the depiction is relatively non-descript however it would suggest that these were relatively plain irons, to be expected of such a large square.

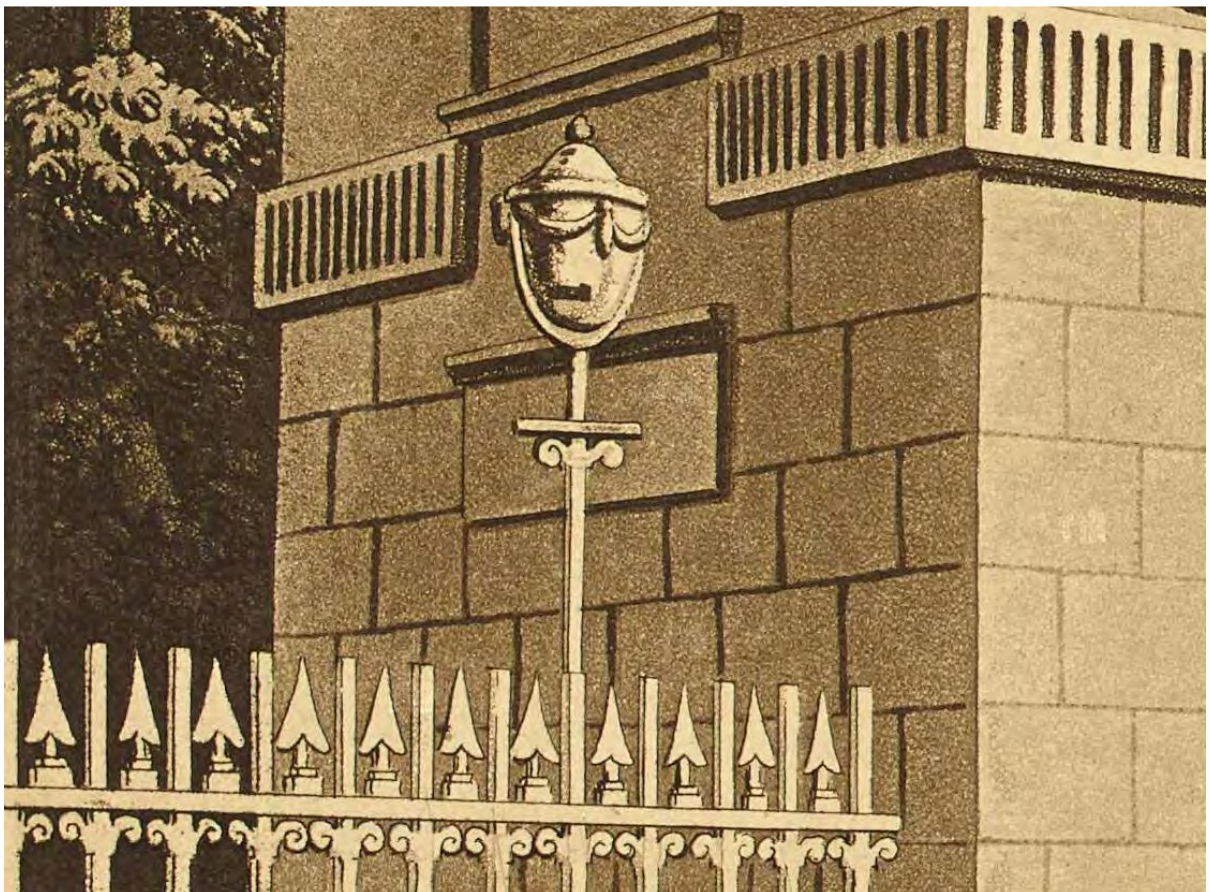


Fig. 21: Extract from same view as above, showing a decorated neoclassical lamp iron. This was unusual in Dublin and may have been artistic licence on the part of the artist. Alternatively, the lamps immediately flanking the Rutland Fountain may have been given grander treatment.

4.0 Surviving Lamp Irons in Dublin

There are virtually no surviving lamp irons in Dublin city today. The majority of the few that populate Georgian streets such as North Great George's Street, Gardiner Row and Merrion Square are 20th-century reproductions and cannot be used as an accurate guide (invariably, they are also inaccurate in detail). A set of four Regency-era lamp irons do survive on North Frederick Street and are excellent examples of their type.

A pair of late Georgian, private lamp irons survives in Pembroke Street, Dublin 2 [below]. By virtue of their level of intactness and excellent state of repair, their survival is remarkable and makes them one of the most important set pieces of Georgian lighting in the city.

The lantern suspended within the lamp irons dates to c.1980s, but otherwise the iron standards are completely intact. They feature a relatively thick cross rail dressed with decorative scrolls.



Fig. 22: One of the pair of lamp irons surviving on Pembroke Street.



Fig. 23: Bolted construction detail of Pembroke Street lamp iron.



Fig. 24: Transition detail between square newel and octagonal lower shaft of column.



Fig. 25: Transition detail between octagonal and rounded profiles of column.

A further late Georgian private lamp iron survives on Pembroke Street across the road. This is a simply designed iron and is probably the best representation of a typical, plain iron of a standard Dublin house of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It features plain wrought-iron members, including a simple ladder cross rail finished with iron baubles.



Fig. 26: Pembroke Street lamp iron detail.



Fig. 27: Contextual view of lamp iron.



Fig. 28: Detail of profile transition from multi-sided base to rounded column.

5.0 Mountjoy Square Railings and Lamp Irons

The commissioning and erection of the railings of Mountjoy Square in 1802-03 as recorded in the Mountjoy Square Commissioners papers is recited by the Mountjoy Square Conservation Plan 2014. By assessing the verbatim quotations of the Commissioners referenced in the plan, as well as a contemporary description of the square and surviving physical evidence, a number of conclusions can be drawn in relation to the original lighting scheme.

The Commissioners letters record the approval of the following on 14th May 1802:

*"...Clarke's proposal for iron railings with four doors and **forty four globe irons** with locks...the same as round Merrion Square within six months...."*^{iv}

By 18th October 1802, this specification had changed to:

*"...hewn mountain granite plinths, railings of English iron painted a lead colour, with the **upper cross rail arched over four gates, 80 lamp irons**, rolled small powder paving..."*^v

Note the above does not reference lighting above the gates. The term 'lamp iron' is used in its own right, within a list, and appears to specifically mean lamp standards, as later echoed by Warburton, Whitelaw and Walsh's description of 'lamp irons' in 1818.

The Commissioners' papers record that **84 globe irons** were eventually paid for and this is the number of newels that survives on the square today. This reference from the Mountjoy Square Conservation Plan recites the precise wording 'globe irons', further suggesting that the commissioned lighting was confined to lamp standards only.^{vi}

In Warburton, Whitelaw and Walsh's *History of the City of Dublin*, 1818, it was noted that Mountjoy Square was:

*"enclosed by a neat iron palisade on a dwarf wall of hewn mountain granite, gracefully rounded at the angles and ornamented with **82 lamps**, fixed in plain but neat lamp irons, at the distance of about twenty one feet asunder, and which with those at the fronts of the houses are abundantly sufficient to illumine this square."*^{vii}

By any calculation, including or excluding gates, 82 is not divisible by four. It is therefore likely that the figure of 82 lamps is simply a miscalculation on the part of the authors.

As finally erected, **84 single newels** were placed evenly around the square (in addition to the pairs of double newels at each entrance gate). These single newels comprise 20 newels on each side of the four sides of the square and a single newel within the curve of each corner. This would suggest that **84 lamp irons** – i.e. lamp standards - were originally erected and that the gates were simply arched over without a lamp. This would be a logical arrangement as the entrance gates are positioned centrally between the tenth and eleventh lamp iron bays. Placing lamps over the gates would have been unnecessary, costly and disrupted the regularity of the square's evenly disposed lighting scheme.

6.0 Removing Lamp Irons and Gate Arches – Mountjoy Square and Fitzwilliam Square

Fitzwilliam Square's railings were erected c.1813 and also originally featured newel post lamp irons. The four entrance gates are positioned centrally on each side of the square, as at Mountjoy Square. Unlike Mountjoy Square, the original arches above the gates still survive on Fitzwilliam Square, consisting of two modest arches on the east and west sides, and two grander, double arches on the north and south sides. In all instances, there is no evidence that these arches ever hosted lamps. On the contrary, the smaller arches were simply not designed to accommodate lamps, being mounted with spikes, while the larger arches feature elaborate ironwork throughout that precludes the structural accommodation of a lamp. There is no evidence of lamp fixings.



Fig. 29 (left): Original Fitzwilliam Square gate on the east side featuring a small over arch adorned with spikes. There is no place to accommodate a lamp.

Fig. 30 (below): Detail of over arch showing spikes. There is no place to accommodate a lamp.



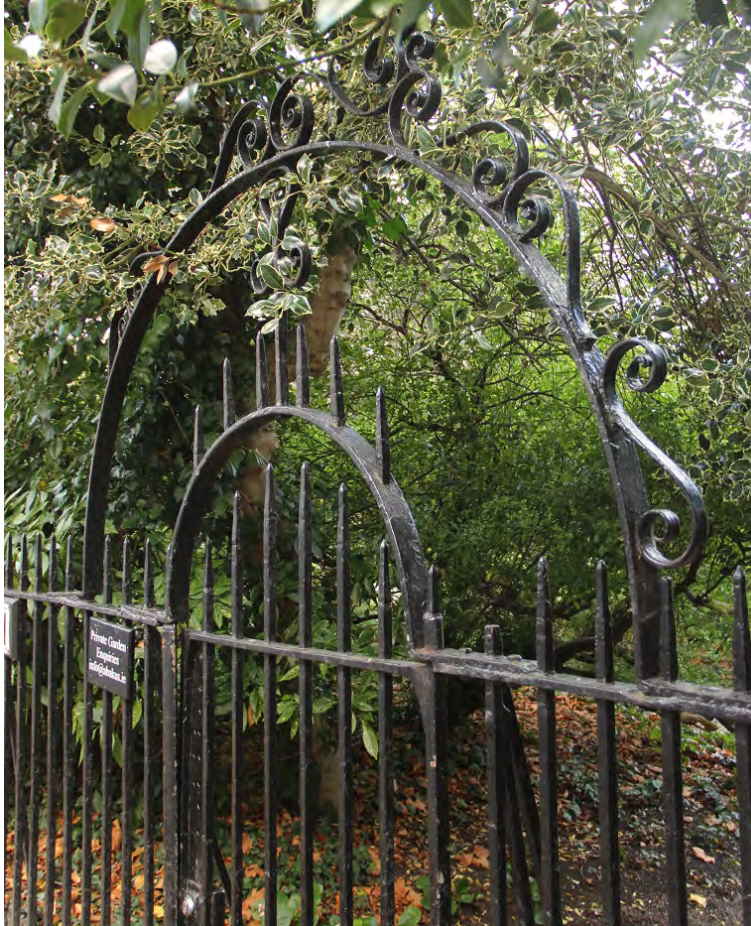


Fig. 31 (left): Original Fitzwilliam Square gate on the south side featuring a small over arch adorned with spikes. This is surmounted by an elaborate outer arch with scrolling ironwork. There is no place to accommodate a lamp.

Fig. 32 (below): Detail of outer over arch on the south side of Fitzwilliam Square.



Fitzwilliam Square, like Mountjoy Square, retains its former lamp iron posts as newel posts, however the approach to cutting down the lamp irons on both squares – likely occurring in the first half of the 19th century with the advent of gas lighting - was slightly different.

At Fitzwilliam Square the columns were cut and the remaining newel shaved into a semi-rounded, blunt point. At Mountjoy Square a sharp cut was made in the column, followed by a cutting/shaving process that retained a sharp point. An iron collar was then placed around the base of the point creating a more attractive resolution than at Fitzwilliam Square.



Fig. 33: Fitzwilliam Square former lamp iron newel, shaved to a blunt point.



Fig. 34: Mountjoy Square former lamp iron Newel, shaved to a sharp point with collar.



Fig 35: One of two rare examples of newels on Mountjoy Square that have lost their collars and point, showing the raw cut made when the lamp irons were cut down during the 19th century.



Fig 36: The double newels flanking the gates of Mountjoy Square (pictured) feature much thicker points than the 84 former lamp iron newels on the square. The likely explanation for the variation is that the over arches, originally commissioned in 1802, were removed at a much later date in the 19th century or even in the early 20th century. The removal of the arches, which served a decorative function, is likely to have been entirely unrelated to the removal of the lamp irons earlier in the 19th century which had been prompted by the advent of gas street lighting.

7.0 Conclusion

The former public oil lighting of Mountjoy Square, commissioned in 1802, was an integral component of the original design and function of the planned Georgian square. Based on the research in this report, it may be reasonably concluded that the original lighting scheme consisted of 84 oil-fuelled lamp irons, i.e. freestanding lamp standards, incorporated at regular intervals in the railings enclosing the square.

There is documentary evidence to support the likely erection of decorative iron arches over the square's four entrance gates but there is no indication that these featured lamps and no known description of what the arches originally looked like.

The available evidence suggests that the square's lighting was confined to lamp irons only and generally points to an original number of 84, which is consistent with the number of single newels surviving on the square today.

8.0 Recommendations

Dublin Civic Trust and the Mountjoy Square Society submit to Dublin City Council that there is a strong conservation and community gain motivation for reinstating the entire original Georgian lamp iron lighting scheme on the railings of Mountjoy Square. Such a project would complement the current proposals to reinstate the original layout and undertake wholesale re-landscaping of Mountjoy Square Park. It would also widen the scope of that project to embrace the entire square as a holistic designed entity, as well as acknowledge the present extreme deficiencies in public lighting around the paved perimeter of the square.

Properly guided and informed, the reinstatement of original Georgian lighting to conservation standard on a major 18th-century urban square would, in short, represent a project of outstanding architectural significance. To our knowledge, there is no city in the UK that has managed to deliver a historic lighting initiative on such a scale. It is more comparable to the pioneering heritage lighting reinstatement recently undertaken in the centre of the German city of Leipzig, where precise reproductions of the city's gas lamps have been combined with LED lighting technology to accurately replicate the original lighting and atmosphere of the 19th-century city core. We believe this calibre of research and collaboration is demanded to achieve the optimum realisation of Mountjoy Square's architectural and landscape significance.

As a community amenity, Mountjoy Square is ideally placed to gain from the aesthetic and functional benefits of high standards of public lighting investment. Such a project would reaffirm the square's central position in the life of Dublin's north city centre and make an outstanding statement of investment on the part of public authorities.

- We recommend that this study be used as a base from which architectural and technical drawings are drafted outlining lamp iron design options for Mountjoy Square. This should include detailed designs for iron plinths, shafts, ladder cross rails and Georgian oil globes based on exemplars and/or documentary sources. Historic lamp manufacturers capable of bespoke work should be consulted.
- The current ironwork contractors should devise a best conservation-led approach to reworking/stitching/replacing as required the existing wrought-iron newels to accommodate new lamp irons.
- A specialist electrical consultant should be engaged to liaise with Dublin City Council and with the ironwork contractors to devise lighting and electrical design options for accommodating LED lighting and wiring routing in reproduced lamp irons. This should include specific guidance on lighting effects, lux levels and colour temperatures.
- It is recommended that the over arches to the four entrance gates are not reinstated unless detailed research is undertaken into their original form and design. Otherwise this would lead to an unacceptably conjectural intervention. Furthermore, should the full reinstatement of the square's lamp irons proceed on the single newels, the present collared double-entrance newels would serve as an important reminder of how the square's railings were modified during the 19th or early 20th centuries.

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- ⁱⁱ Exercise in Authority: Surveyor Thomas Owen and the paving, cleansing and lighting of Georgian Dublin; Finnian Ó Cionnaith, 2016
- ⁱⁱⁱ A History of Street Lighting in the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh World Heritage Site; Khrystyna Shakhmatova, 2012
- ^{iv} Minutes of Mountjoy Square Commissioners 1802 – 1884, 14th May 1802 (Mountjoy Square Conservation Plan, 2014)
- ^v Minutes of Mountjoy Square Commissioners 1802 – 1884, 18th October 1802 (Mountjoy Square Conservation Plan, 2014)
- ^{vi} Reference 34, Mountjoy Square Conservation Plan; Howley Hayes Architects, 2014
- ^{vii} History of the City of Dublin From the Earliest Accounts to the Present Time in Two Volumes, Illustrated with Numerous Plates, Plans, and Maps, Volume 1; Warburton, Whitelaw and Walsh, 1818