

Nelson's Pillar

Everyone in a position to exercise choice now avoids the north side, and this is largely contributable to the obstructive position occupied by the Nelson Pillar.

R.M. BUTLER, *IRISH BUILDER*, 11 MARCH 1922

William Wilkins of London won the 1807 competition for a Dublin monument to Nelson. A modified, less expensive, version of Wilkins's design was constructed between 1808 and 1809 under the supervision of Francis Johnston.

The Pillar survived Easter Week 1916, a little scratched around the edges but otherwise unscathed, and provided a perfect platform from which photographers including Thomas Johnson Westropp could record the devastation. However, within weeks of the Rising, the architect Rudolf Maximillian Butler, echoing calls that had been made many times before, demanded in the *Irish Builder* that the Pillar be dismantled. It formed, he contended, an intolerable obstruction to traffic east and west, divided north from south arbitrarily, spoiled Sackville Street as a business street, and contributed to the decline of the northern part of the city as a residential quarter.

Whether it went to Merrion Square, St. Stephen's Green, or the Phoenix Park, the removal of the Pillar was 'an imperative necessity'.

In an 'aftershock from the Rising' and just weeks before its fiftieth anniversary, a still-unidentified Republican 'splinter group' took it upon itself to remove the Pillar. Butler would have approved the outcome, if not the method, the motive, or indeed the commemorative intent. Shortly before 2am on the morning of 8 March 1966 carefully placed explosives decapitated the structure, toppling Nelson into the street. A week later the remains were cleared away by the Irish Army, ensuring that the shattered stump did not spoil the views of the official 50th anniversary Easter Rising commemorations.

Almost as soon as it was gone, a clamour for something to replace the Pillar began. Over the years there were calls for a new column to be topped by Pearse, or Nelson Mandela, or a harp. To mark Dublin's Millennium in 1988, Shane O'Toole, architect and critic, organised the *Pillar Project* architectural ideas competition in which architects and sculptors collaborated to suggest a replacement. A decade later, in 1998, the O'Connell Street Monument architectural competition yielded Ian Ritchie's Spire, arguably the last direct architectural legacy of the Rising.



Nelson's Pillar, proposal by William Wilkins or Francis Johnston, 1808
IAA RIAI Murray Collection, 92/46.704



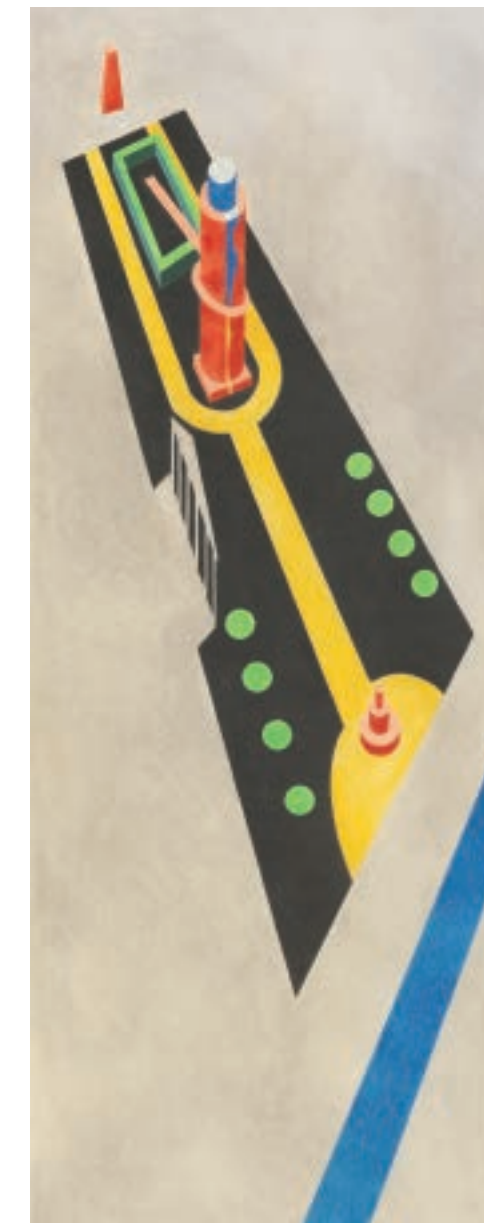
Nelson's Pillar, c.1890
IAA Photographic Collections, 12/30V14



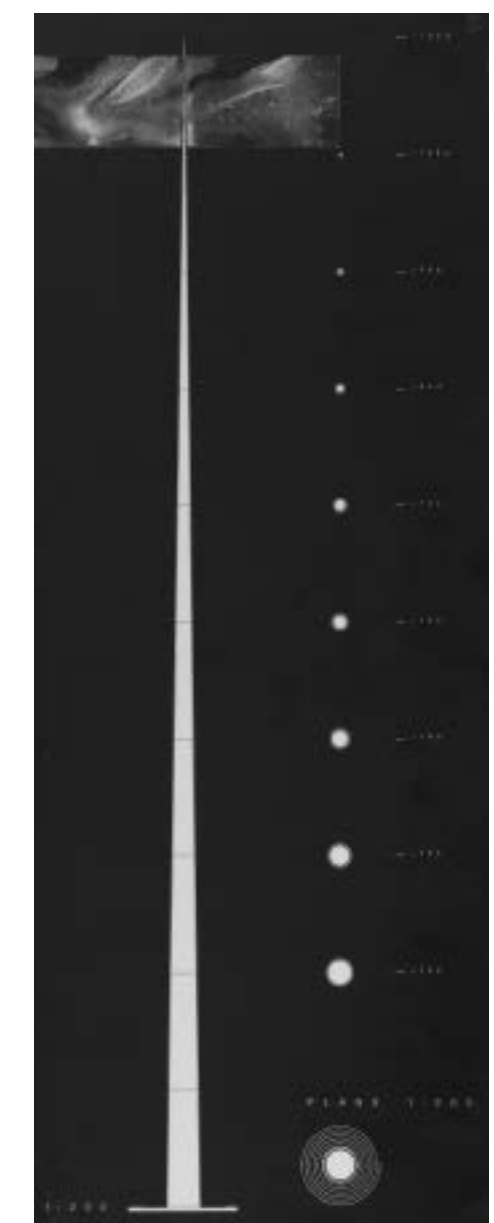
Nelson's Pillar, October 1959
IAA AA Photographs Collection, 95/142



Nelson's Pillar,
13 March 1966
IAA Photographic Collections,
12/30 (78421)



Pillar Project architectural ideas
competition entry, Leo Higgins, Shane
O'Toole and James Scanlon, 1988
IAA Shane O'Toole Collection, 2004/166



O'Connell Street Monument, detail
from competition winning entry,
Ian Ritchie, 1998
IAA RIAI Archive, 93/136