The Monuments of Imperial London

Trafalgar Square, the Mall, and the British Empire

by

Sean Michael Stebbins

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Introduction: *Pax Britannica* and Imperial Nostalgia

In reacting to Queen Elizabeth II's death at the age of 96 in September 2022, British novelist Hari Kunzru wrote he hoped the event would enable his fellow countrymen to "recognize the unhealthiness of a dependency on imperial nostalgia for self-esteem."[1] Members of the British elite "have always understood that the monarchy is a screen onto which the people project their own fantasies," Kunzru charged, arguing that if the United Kingdom hoped to overcome the various domestic crises that have rendered its future "uncertain" in recent years, Britons must reject the outdated "myths" surrounding their late empire.[2]

Kunzru's observation resonates—but not just in today's Britain. In fact, throughout much of its 400-year history as an imperial power, both inhabitants and observers of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland regularly flirted with self-flattering "fantasies," referring to the state's global dominion as "an empire on which the sun never sets."[3] The 19th century saw the greatest period of imperial expansion—an age known as *Pax Britannica*—with the British Empire ultimately encompassing nearly a quarter of the world's population and landmass by its territorial peak in 1920.[4] This remains the largest empire in human history. As a byproduct of its expansionist ambitions, imperialism permeated British art, theater, and literature, dramatically altering the country's popular culture at home as its territories multiplied overseas. Scholar John

[1] Hari Kunzru, "My Family Fought the British Empire. I Reject Its Myths," *The New York Times*, September 11, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/11/opinion/queen-hari-kunzru-imperial-delusions.html.

[2] Kunzru, "My Family Fought the British Empire."

[3] Sir Henry Ward, United Kingdom, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 48 (25 June 1839), Parliamentary Debates, Commons, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1839/jun/25/waste-lands-of-the-colonies#column_847.

[4] Rein Taagepera, "Expansion and Contraction Patterns of Large Polities: Context for Russia," *International Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (1997): 482, https://doi.org/10.1111/0020-8833.00053.

Mackenzie has argued that the British government actively encouraged this permeation, directly or indirectly disseminating various forms of imperial propaganda throughout the public sphere. "It was no accident that the 'little wars' of Empire," he writes, "provided the most readily available source for […] adventure and heroism set in an exotic and alien environment."[5] And it was no accident that such material became hugely popular with the British public.

But studies like Mackenzie's frequently focus on popular art, theater, cinema, and literature, or on major national events like imperial exhibitions and royal jubilees, to demonstrate imperialism's centrality to British culture. Comparatively few scholars have devoted their studies to the actual imperial seat—the city of London itself—as its own living, breathing monument to the Empire. Throughout the Western world, traditionally marginalized groups have demanded that we collectively reconcile unacknowledged legacies of violence, oppression, and imperialism. Recognizing the role imperialism played in shaping the physical development of one of the world's foremost global cities, then, should be of prime concern—especially when the prominent imperial monuments it contains attract millions of tourists from former colonies each year. Such an investigation is relevant given politically charged debates across the West about how imperial legacies manifest themselves in public spaces, particularly with respect to the individuals that past generations chose to immortalize in prominent statues and monuments. Ultimately, I believe urban history—especially the history of public monuments—should be part of a broader conversation surrounding imperialism and its legacies in Britain and beyond.

London as an Imperial Case Study

In the same way that "Elizabeth's greatest asset as queen was her blankness," as Kunzru argued of the late monarch, public monuments have a similarly "blank" quality: successive

[5] John M. Mackenzie, *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 49.

generations can repeatedly project new meanings on to their stone faces.[6] Given the unrivaled extent of the British Empire's global dominion, London is perhaps the most important example of how individual imperialists and imperialism itself shaped monuments dotting a capital city. What I will call British social imperialists inaugurated specific public works projects to help realize an imperial vision for London. I will argue that social imperialists *believed* this vision would inspire national virtue amidst periods of domestic turmoil, but that it more clearly exposes their own deep-seated insecurities about the Empire's global role. This Scholar of the College thesis project will explore how social imperialists at each end of Britain's expansionist period envisaged London as a physical monument to the United Kingdom's imperial ambitions. It will contend that the construction of these monuments originated not from arrogance, but *a profound sense of insecurity* about having the world's largest empire. And finally, it will argue that the inability of its fiercest supporters to agree upon a unified imperial vision exposes the ideological bankruptcy of the British Empire. It will focus on two major revitalization projects in doing so: the redevelopment of Charing Cross into Trafalgar Square during the 1840s and the expansion of the Mall adjacent to Buckingham Palace in the 1900s. By way of conclusion, this thesis will examine the material legacy of empire throughout the city, exploring the implications of imperialism's presence in London's built environment.

Social imperialism drove Britons at varying levels of socio-political influence to demand the construction of the two monumental projects discussed in this paper. According to scholar F. H. A. Aalen, British social imperialists sought both "imperialism and social reform," believing the two to be "interdependent."[7] Social imperialism's proponents regularly argued that it, "rather

[6] Kunzru, "My Family Fought the British Empire."

[7] F. H. A. Aalen, "Lord Meath, City Improvement and Social Imperialism," *Planning Perspectives* 4 (1989): 132, https://doi.org/10.1080/02665438908725676.

than socialism," as Aalen explains, was "best calculated" to promote both socio-economic prosperity *and* "a more united, patriotic, healthy and efficiently organized nation."[8] It inspired the kinds of expansionist rhetoric espoused by ardent imperialists like Cecil Rhodes, whose assertion that "the Empire is a bread and butter question" best encapsulates the movement's motives.[9] Fundamentally, social imperialism represented a concerted attempt by a very vocal group of people, including intellectuals, architects, politicians, artists, and reformers, to secure popular support for the British Empire amid widespread domestic uncertainty about Britain's place in the world. And while Aalen, historian Andrew S. Thompson, historian Bernard Porter, author M. E. Chamberlain, and other scholars typically discuss the ideology in the context of the late nineteenth century, I will contend that advocates behind Trafalgar Square's creation—whose imperial anxieties manifested in strikingly similar ways—constituted an earlier version of the social imperialist movement.[10] This is because these advocates *also* sought to secure popular support for the British Empire, but believed the reflected glory of imperial monuments and their corresponding emphasis on personal responsibility was a sufficiently reciprocal scheme to raise the civilization of ordinary Britons. In essence, they attempted to turn the Empire's "civilizing mission" onto the domestic scene in the hopes of tying Britons more tightly to the social order.

While social imperialists came from a variety of classes and professions, they were united in their desire to remedy the supposed social "problems" associated with rapid urbanization in the capital and elsewhere. Their ranks included the likes of social reformer Lord Meath, the

[8] Aalen, "Lord Meath," 132.

[9] Cecil Rhodes, M. E. Chamberlain, "Imperialism and Social Reform," in *British Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. C. C. Eldridge (London: Palgrave, 1984), 148.

[10] Bernard Porter, "Peril and Propaganda, c. 1900," in *The Absent-Minded Imperialist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 173, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb06674.0001.001.

founder of the Metropolitan Gardens Association, John Pollard Seddon and Edward Beckitt Lamb, proponents of the unrealized megaproject called "Imperial Monumental Halls and Tower," John Nash, one of the designers of Trafalgar Square, and Sir Aston Webb, the President of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and the architect behind the Mall project.[11] Social imperialism eventually enjoyed some support among radicals like author George Bernard Shaw and political theorist Sidney Webb, the founders of the left-wing Fabian Society, who Thompson explains often argued that Britain "would not be equal to the demands of empire" if reform was not pursued.[12] Groups like the London Society—the architectural association committed to fostering "a public spirit for the study and encouragement of [London's] improvement"—and the all-women's Victoria League, which responded to anxieties over urbanization by providing an "imperial education" to children and the working class—represented further organizational converts to the doctrine's camp.[13]

In practice, as Thompson explains, social imperialism was designed to "combine a patriotic approach to imperial affairs, entrusted to an expert imperial ruling elite, with a limited measure of welfare collectivism," and was most often articulated by liberal imperialists hoping to cultivate popular support for the British Empire from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth

[11] Aalen, "Lord Meath," 133; G. Alex Bremner, "'Imperial Monumental Halls and Tower': Westminster Abbey and the Commemoration of Empire, 1854-1904," *Architectural History* vol. 47 (2004): 251, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1568824.

[12] Andrew S. Thompson, "The Language of Imperialism and the Meanings of Empire: Imperial Discourse in British Politics, 1895-1914," *Journal of British Studies* 36, no. 2 (1997): 160, http://www.jstor.org/stable/176010.

[13] Lucy Hewitt, "Towards a Greater Urban Geography: Regional Planning and Associational Networks in London During the Early Twentieth Century," *Planning Perspectives* 4 (2011): 556, https://doi.org/10.1080/02665433.2011.601608; Eliza Riedi, "Women, Gender, and the Promotion of Empire: The Victoria League, 1901-1914," *The Historical Journal* 45, no. 3 (2002): 578, 591, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3133497.

century.[14] Unlike Thompson and others, however, I will contend that the early version of what later became that "welfare collectivism" *was* an emphasis on unity-inspiring monuments, which early social imperialists believed was enough social reciprocity to satisfy ordinary Britons. They felt these Britons would, simply put, buy into the social order in exchange for imperial glory. Unfortunately for them, imperial unity was a far loftier cultural goal than mere statues and architecture could be expected to achieve. Social imperialism's failure to inspire it with both Trafalgar Square and the Mall illustrates, on the one hand, that its earliest version was fundamentally incoherent, and on the other, that as social imperialism became more coherent, the British Empire became less so.

A few points on the peculiarities of London politics and its impact on monumental construction should also be noted. As geographers David Gilbert and Felix Driver make clear, throughout the imperial period, London was primarily "a commercial city"—a reality that meant land values were relatively high city-wide and that developers were often incentivized to engage in "speculative developments even in the most auspicious of imperial spaces."[15] In addition, British politics in general placed a profound emphasis on localism in a way that other European governments did not, which Gilbert and Driver argue continually "undermined metropolitan-wide projects of urban improvement" like the two discussed in this paper.[16] Because the national electoral system "demanded from Members of Parliament (MPs) that they defend local interests and prevent granting any city special favors," as scholar Michiel Wagenaar points out, MPs who did not represent London boroughs "consistently voted against schemes to improve the city" at

[14] Thompson, "The Language of Imperialism," 157.

[15] David Gilbert and Felix Driver, "Capital and Empire: Geographies of Imperial London," *GeoJournal* 51, no. 1/2 (2000): 28, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41147494.

[16] Gilbert and Driver, "Capital and Empire," 29.

the expense of non-London taxpayers.[17] Both the Trafalgar Square and Mall projects suffered from delays and cost-cutting measures stemming from the two dynamics outlined above, but even more terribly from the inability of social imperialists to actually define their specific ideological purpose. They were eventually realized (over more than two decades each) thanks to a disorganized social imperialism and the immense popularity of the two figures commemorated with each project: Lord Horatio Nelson and Queen Victoria.

The Projects: Trafalgar Square and the Mall

Before examining British rhetoric surrounding the realization of the Trafalgar Square and Mall projects, it is important to understand the actual changes to London's urban environment each development project entailed. Charing Cross, the historical area that hosts Trafalgar Square, was essentially a large traffic junction connecting London travelers at the intersection of five different roads: St. Martin's Lane, Whitcombe Street, Pall Mall, the Strand, and Whitehall, the major Westminster thoroughfare home to the most powerful institutions of the British government.[18] The Royal Mews (the stables for the Royal Family), along with a collection of working-class shops and dwellings, had occupied the area to the north of Charing Cross since the seventeenth century. However, an Act of Parliament in 1813 called for the widening of several of its streets, the rehabilitation of some dilapidated timber buildings, and the creation of a large opening behind the junction into the stables.[19] In 1820, British officials inaugurated an even more comprehensive project helmed by architect John Nash, whose work culminated in the demolition and relocation of the Mews and the expansion of the new court north of Charing

[17] Michiel Wagenaar, "Townscapes of Power," *GeoJournal* 51, no. 1/2 (2000): 11, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41147492; Gilbert and Driver, "Capital and Empire," 29.

[18] Rodney Mace, *Trafalgar Square: Emblem of Empire* (London: Lawrence and Wishart), 2005, 26.

[19] Mace, *Trafalgar Square*, 33.

Cross.[20] Historian Rodney Mace, whose authoritative work *Trafalgar Square: Emblem of Empire* offers a comprehensive overview of the site's history, notes that Nash hoped his project would ensure that "many of the lower classes would not penetrate his new street or Park while going about their daily business."[21] That sentiment underscores the degree to which social imperialists designed the site as the center of London's imperial vision free from the presence of the yet-to-be-converted working class.

The revitalization of the Charing Cross site presented an additional opportunity for MPs, who capitalized on the extensive construction by voting to relocate the National Gallery of Painting and Sculpture from its existing site on Pall Mall.[22] In consultation with new architect William Wilkins, Mace explains, Parliament launched a decades-long project to construct "a long low building in the Neo-Classical style" that would house the new National Gallery behind the large forecourt created in 1813.[23] So extensive was the reorganization of the Charing Cross area that sporadic construction on the site lasted until 1867, when the monument dedicated to Lord Horatio Nelson, the hero leading the British fleet at the 1805 Battle of Trafalgar, was completed. While both King William IV (r. 1830-1837) and architect George Ledwell Taylor (who helped design the new National Gallery) took credit for the naming of Trafalgar Square, Mace describes an account in Taylor's autobiography detailing how he suggested "the opportunity of recording the victory at which Nelson fell a sacrifice" in 1830.[24] King William IV "took most kindly my arguments," according to Taylor, with the King reportedly saying "I like

[20] Mace, *Trafalgar Square*, 23.

[21] Mace, *Trafalgar Square*, 33-34.

[22] Mace, *Trafalgar Square*, 43.

[23] Mace, *Trafalgar Square*, 44.

[24] George Ledwell Taylor, Mace, *Trafalgar Square*, 42.

the idea, let it be called Trafalgar Square."[25] Today, Trafalgar Square is home to the Nelson Column and its four accompanying lions, two elaborate fountains, several statues of imperial figures like Lords Havelock and Napier of the Indian Army, and is the "zero point" from which distances in London and the United Kingdom are measured.[26]

The Mall, on the other hand, has a far more private history. As scholar Tori Smith explains, the Mall had been the "favored place for royal and aristocratic recreation" since the 17th century given its proximity to Buckingham Palace.[27] At the time, the Mall looked less like the wide, red-bricked boulevard we know today and more like a wooded playground running between Green Park and St. James's Park, owing its namesake to the ball-and-mallet game called "pall mall" often played there by members of the Royal Family. (The game also served as the namesake for Pall Mall, the road north of St. James's Park connecting Trafalgar Square and St. James's Street; see Figure 1.) In 1887, Queen Victoria agreed to open the Mall to public traffic for the first time, triggering discussions of its expansion that were only seriously entertained following her death in 1901.[28] Just weeks after his mother's death, newly crowned King Edward VII commissioned architect Aston Webb to design a memorial dedicated to Victoria. MPs on the newly created parliamentary select committee compared various sites around London for a monument before eventually settling on the Mall.[29] As Smith describes, Webb's 1901 design for the Victoria Memorial also involved "the widening of the main carriageway through the Mall, the creation of a circular 'place' at the Charing Cross end, and a semicircular enclosure in front

[25] Taylor, Mace, *Trafalgar Square*, 43.

[26] Mace, *Trafalgar Square*, 230.

[27] Tori Rhoulac Smith, "'A Grand Work of Noble Conception': The Victoria Memorial and Imperial London," *Imperial Cities* (2017): 23, https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526117960.00009.

[28] Wagenaar, "Townscapes of Power," 9.

[29] Wagenaar, "Townscapes of Power," 9.

of that place" next to Trafalgar Square.[30] The façade of Buckingham Palace was altered to reflect the grandeur of the new boulevard (See Figure 2). Webb added a building called the Admiralty Arch to his scheme in 1903, historian G. Alex Bremner points out, to accommodate offices of the Royal Navy while also providing "a formal entrance" to the new avenue from Charing Cross to Buckingham Palace.[31] His plan would transform the Mall into a processional way terminating before a massive statue of Queen Victoria, and would open up an area that had once been relatively isolated from the rest of London.

The Mall expansion project did not just entail the single monument to the departed Queen, however. "There was some thought in the planning stages that the Mall might be a suitable site for a large number of statues," as Smith explains, before officials eventually decided on four groups of statues representing the colonies of "India, Africa, Canada, and Australia."[32] The Admiralty Arch itself was also originally intended to reflect Britain's imperial prowess, with one Theodore A. Cook—a member of a society dedicated to its construction—stressing it should represent "men of all ranks […] from every part of the Empire, who fought under the British flag in South Africa."[33] Bremner notes that the Second Boer War (1899-1902), the conflict to which Cook referred, was perhaps the first "truly imperial affair," drawing tens of thousands of troops from all over the Empire to the distant African battlefield.[34] Explicitly imperial representations were largely absent from the final design due to budget cuts and delays, however, with the exception of a few gates around the Victoria Memorial that bear the names of colonies and

[30] Smith, "'A Grand Work of Noble Conception,'" 32.

[31] G. Alex Bremner, "'Imperial Peace Memorial': The Second Anglo-Boer War and the Origins of the Admiralty Arch, 1900-05," *The British Art Journal* 5, no. 3 (2004): 62, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41614580.

[32] Smith, "'A Grand Work of Noble Conception,'" 27.

[33] Thomas A. Cook, Bremner, "'Imperial Peace Memorial,'" 63.

[34] Bremner, "'Imperial Peace Memorial,'" 63.

despite what Smith calls their collective "substantial financial contribution."[35] Completed in 1924, the development of the Mall encapsulates the way in which social imperialists exerted enormous influence over the construction of one of the most significant monumental projects in London's history.[36]

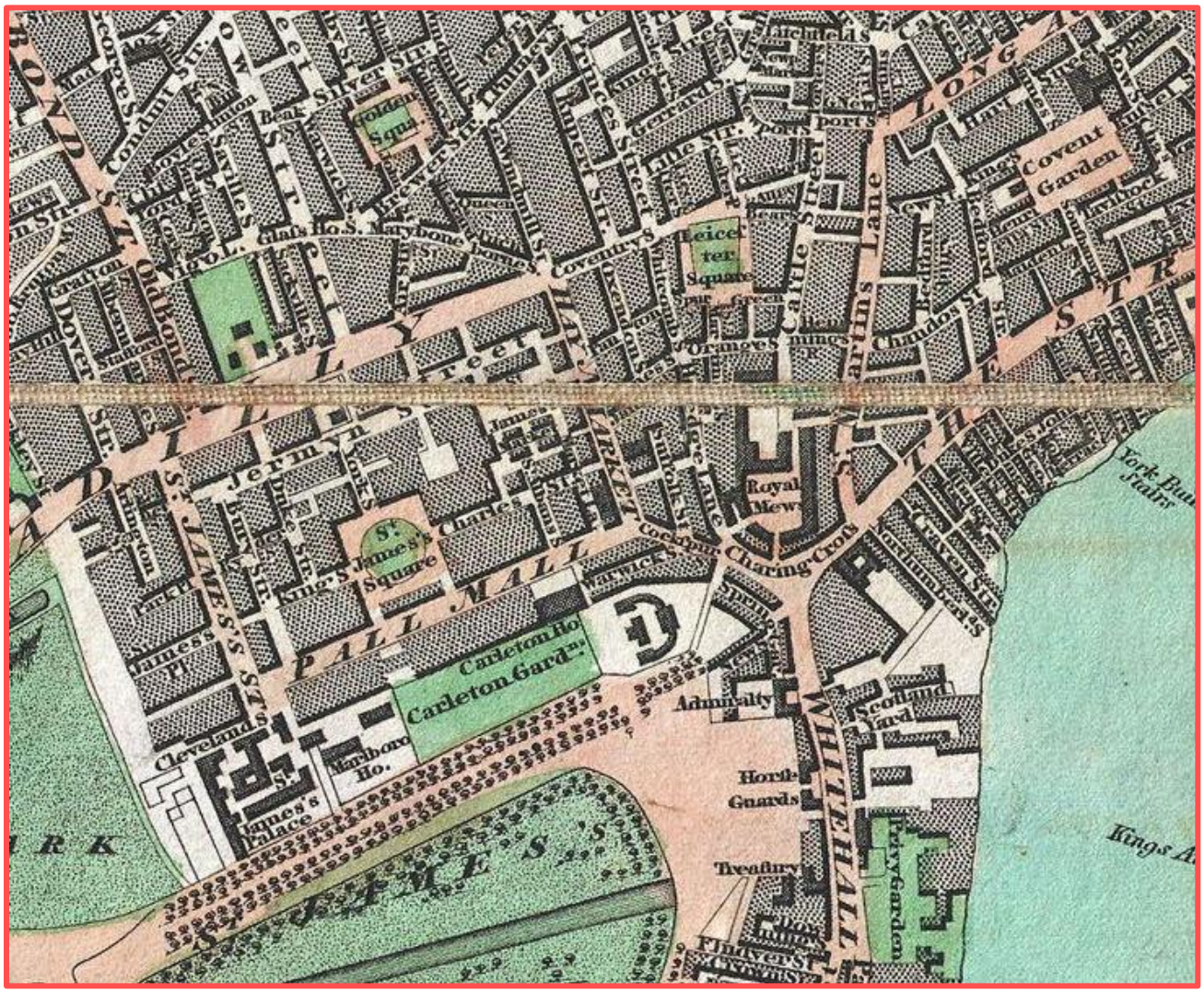

Figure 1: London Before *Pax Britannica*. Edward Mogg, *London in Miniature: Mogg's 1806 Pocket Map*, 1806, map, *Mapping London*, https://mappinglondon.co.uk/2015/london-in-miniature-moggs-1806-pocket-map/.

[35] Smith, "'A Grand Work of Noble Conception,'" 22.

[36] Smith, "'A Grand Work of Noble Conception,'" 33.

Two Eras, One Attempt at an Imperial Vision

This thesis project will examine monuments constructed at two bookended points in British imperial history and the rhetoric of their respective social imperialist advocates, who not only subscribed to, but sought to proliferate an imperial vision for both London and their country. The first chapter will outline some common themes of monumental construction, evaluating the almost identical arguments, justifications, and dogmas that encircled discussion of both the Trafalgar Square and Mall projects. It will point out that the rhetorical commonalities between the two temporally isolated groups reveals a perpetual sense of anxiety about their ability to realize an imperial vision worthy of their empire, and even more vexingly, a sense of anxiety about the actual vision of the British Empire they were trying to produce. The second chapter will discuss the Trafalgar Square project in the context of the decade in which its progress was greatest, the 1840s, and will further examine the extent to which early social imperialist concerns of national health and wellbeing governed the project's completion. The third chapter will outline social imperialists' role in executing the Mall project in the context of the 1900s, perhaps Britain's most classically "imperial" period, and the various exchanges and anxieties ingrained therein.

In each of these last two chapters, I will suggest that both Lord Horatio Nelson and Queen Victoria's selection as the focal point of their respective monuments was a particularly auspicious choice by social imperialists, who subconsciously conjured up larger-than-life conceptions of each figure's mythic deeds to arrest personal insecurities. I will conclude with an epilogue that will touch on the ongoing conflict between imperial London and the London of the future, a debate that is likely to intensify in the coming years as Britons reckon with the "myths," to use Kunzru's term, of their imperial past. Ultimately, I aim to demonstrate that while the

monumental projects British social imperialists inaugurated at both Trafalgar Square and the Mall *seem* like the most obvious examples of imperial arrogance, examining the processes through which they were envisioned, planned, and realized reveals a deep insecurity, both about who Britons were as a people, and ultimately, where they stood in the world as a nation. It is exceedingly difficult to identify a specific, overarching vision from any one British official for either project's realization precisely because there were so many competing interpretations of how social imperialists should monumentalize—not to mention the competing individuals themselves. Though this insecurity is probably not unique to Britain, I believe the ideological emptiness it betrays *is* unique to modern empire.

Social imperialism tried to use monuments to imperialism as a means of bringing the benefits of the British Empire to ordinary citizens in the United Kingdom. The idea was to create a sense of national pride and purpose through these monuments, which would help to raise the status of the British people and encourage them to support the Empire. During the mid-nineteenth century and the creation of Trafalgar Square, it was unrealistic to expect people without a vote and suffering from abject poverty to buy into the social order. Britons soon exposed the idea of using monuments to address social and cultural issues for what it was: absurd. Imperial monuments were static physical objects that lacked the ability to address complex social and cultural issues. They were inanimate structures, unable to actively engage with the public or affect meaningful change in society in the way early social imperialists envisioned.

Notwithstanding these initial challenges, however, social imperialism gained traction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly after the people had gained the right to vote and began asserting their own ideas about the social order. Social imperialists began

providing material support to Britons to foster a renewed sense of reciprocity while encouraging them to support the Empire, and designed an expansion of the Mall to encourage that support. But as social imperialism became more coherent, the British Empire became less so. Its meaning was hotly contested, and Britons themselves were far too divided for any monument to work. As a result, the social imperialist project failed. They abandoned the cultural work of the Empire, omitting it from the Mall project altogether. Despite this failure, the legacy of social imperialism and the monuments it created remain a significant component of British history, and continue to shape the way people think about the Empire and experience the London of today.

Figure 2: Renovating the Buckingham Palace Façade. London Metropolitan Archives, *Buckingham Palace*, 1913, photograph, London Picture Archive, Edward Mogg, London in Miniature: Mogg's 1806 Pocket Map, 1806, map, Mapping London, https://www.londonpicturearchive.org.uk/view-item?i=129567&WINID=1681844286761.

Chapter One: Common Themes of Monumental Construction

While the monumental projects at Trafalgar Square and the Mall occurred at dramatically different stages of Britain's imperial development, several common themes shaped their construction. For starters, social imperialists spoke of monumental construction in soaring terms, casting the beautification of London as a project of urgent national importance. Second, they regularly compared London to various "continental" European cities, all while bemoaning their fellow countrymen's apparent artistic inadequacies. Third, social imperialists continually bristled with London's uniquely commercial atmosphere (and the Britons who defended it) such that arguments over finance and cost haunted discussion of expansive monumental projects. Underlying these three commonalities was a palpable sense of uncertainty about the basic feasibility of their imperial vision. Social imperialists believed London's monuments "ought to express in some way the significance of that city as the nation's capital and the first city of Empire," as historian G. Alex Bremner posits, but apprehension about their nation's artistic capacity and the role of the Empire itself repeatedly materialized in discussions of both projects.[37]

Soaring Rhetoric: Monuments as Imperial Glory

Though in the 1840s the British Empire's dominion was a mere fraction of the size it would eventually reach by the turn of the century, Britons spoke of the construction of Trafalgar Square in illustrious terms befitting the psychology of a global empire. For instance, the report issued by the parliamentary Select Committee on Trafalgar Square included the testimony of

[37] G. Alex Bremner, "'Some Imperial Institute': Architecture, Symbolism, and the Ideal of Empire in Late Victorian Britain, 1887-1893," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 62, no. 1 (March 2003): 53, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3655083.

architect Sir Charles Barry, hired to construct the new National Gallery, who argued the square's revitalization would supply the kind of "sculptural art of high class" London so desperately needed.[38] The corresponding construction of the Nelson Column, he continued, would "excite amongst all classes that respect and admiration for art" he believed "so essentially necessary to the formation of a pure and well-grounded taste" around London and the nation.[39] Barry's view was not without its sympathizers in Parliament. Future Home Secretary Sir James Graham went so far as to claim the square would remain both an imperial beacon and "an eternal monument to the taste of the House of Commons"—a fitting tribute to that noble tradition of British humility.[40]

While detached aristocrats and members of Parliament engaging in bouts of self-congratulation are not especially noteworthy affairs, what distinguishes the Trafalgar Square discourse as typically social imperialist are two factors. First, such rhetoric was *not* limited to politicians, and second, it betrayed a sense of obvious apprehension among all parties involved despite the overarching goal of bringing Britain's civilizing mission home. On the first point, letters from ordinary British citizens also appeared in the Select Committee's report, and popular journalists extolled the same kinds of artistic virtues espoused by their parliamentary counterparts. Trafalgar Square "occupies the finest site of ground in the metropolis" the *Morning Post* observed, later anticipating the day the completion of the Nelson Column would finally

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[38] United Kingdom, House of Commons, "Report from the Select Committee on Trafalgar Square," *Sessional Papers*, 1840, Local Government and Local Finance, 27 July 1840, Vol. 12, 11.

[39] UK, HC, "Report from the Select Committee on Trafalgar Square," 11.

[40] Sir J. Graham, United Kingdom, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 55 (3 July 1840), Parliamentary Debates, Commons, https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1840-07-03/debates/b589ff04-fe79-4ff4-8f43-78a1b2d5fc8f/TrafalgarSquare.

solidify its "ornamental state."[41] "Trafalgar Square, with its beautiful terrace and fountains, was thrown open," *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper* volunteered upon its completion, applauding the excitement with which hundreds of Londoners "availed themselves of the opportunity thus afforded of perambulating this noble area."[42] The square's completion, these papers framed, should be celebrated as a national achievement, one that would inspire a renewed commitment to the established social order.

On the second point, it seems the weighty task of considering "what would *most contribute* to the embellishment of that part of the metropolis"—which the Select Committee identified as its major aim—seems to have contributed to a cacophony of questions, proposals, and embellishments that threatened its success from the outset.[43] For instance, Select Committee Chair Henry Gally Knight peppered Barry with suggestions about his plan for the National Gallery, inquiring as to whether the architect had considered alternatives ranging from "a stand for carriages" to the "width of the terrace," and even the "removal of the [Nelson] column" from the scheme altogether.[44] Other committee members requested assurances from Barry that his plan would "preserve a uniform line to the eye" from the street to the gallery and that he sought to "prevent any [visual] annoyance" from developing within its façade.[45] MP Sir James Loch's expectant query to Barry—a professional architect—that the 6-inch difference in height between

[41] "The National Anthem," *Morning Post*, February 7, 1840, 5, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/R3209967727/BNCN?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=cd67c8b4.

[42] "Stations of the Royal Navy in Commission on the First of May, 1844," *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper*, May 5, 1844, 76, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/BC3205317382/BNCN?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=09e69b51.

[43] UK, HC, "Report from the Select Committee on Trafalgar Square," iii.

[44] UK, HC, "Report from the Select Committee on Trafalgar Square," 11-12.

[45] UK, HC, "Report from the Select Committee on Trafalgar Square," 12.

the curb and the street in front of the gallery "is a point you have attended to?" perhaps best encapsulates the apparent anxieties about small details many Britons felt could jeopardize the project's success.[46] That later newspapers would decry the column as possessing a "curious effect" and "having been deprived of the proportions which were originally designed for it" suggests they failed to secure that success, at least in a particular sense.[47] In a much larger sense, social imperialists' apparent "failure" to maximize the monument's potential in the eyes of like-minded critics *despite* their painstaking efforts epitomizes the anxiety-inducing burden of capturing the imperial essence in Trafalgar Square and other physical monuments. What at first glance seems like incredible arrogance from Britain's most prominent elites actually reveals deep-seated insecurities.

Similar insecurities promptly reappeared during the planning of the Mall project some seventy years later, disclosed by yet another cycle of hubristic pontification. The *British Architect*, for example—a design-oriented periodical devoted to the doctrine of "building imperially"—declared the project "one of the finest opportunities in the whole world for artistic enterprise" under the capable stewardship of like-minded social imperialists.[48] "It will be a deplorable thing if such a magnificent opportunity is lost to create a grand processional roadway

[46] UK, HC, "Report from the Select Committee on Trafalgar Square," 12.

[47] "The Nelson Statue Finished," *Liverpool Mercury* (February 9, 1844): 43, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/BC3203960515/BNCN?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=edad3ac3; "The Nelson Column, Trafalgar Square," *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, December 8, 1849, 2, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/BB3206046894/BNCN?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=f586b961.

[48] R. W. Collier, "Building Imperially," *British Architect, 1874-1919* (Sep 11, 1914): 158, https://go.openathens.net/redirector/bc.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/building-imperially/docview/7234587/se-2; "Artistic Impossibilities," *British Architect, 1874-1919* (Aug 29, 1902): 143, https://go.openathens.net/redirector/bc.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/artistic-possibilities/docview/7205696/se-2.

from [Buckingham] Palace to Trafalgar Square," another *Architect* columnist observed, given an expansion would naturally "make the present roadway a mere lane through scrubby foliage."[49] In fact, the quality of the Mall's trees, which were torn up and replanted to accommodate the widening of the road as called for by designer Aston Webb, became something of a national controversy. Parliament actually issued an eight page "report on tree pruning" in response to widespread public concern for the Mall's ultimate appearance, consulting the keeper of Edinburgh's Royal Botanic Garden for expertise. Each replanted tree examined "was in robust health," the keeper assured MPs, whose "profusion of young twigs," "plump, bursting buds," and substantial "leafage" would ultimately confirm their "vigour."[50] He continued:

> The continuation bud may be the one immediately behind the point of abscission of the shoot tip, but often the shoot dies back to some distance behind the normal abscission line of self-pruning, and-thus the elongation of a shoot ill any one season is no measure of the permanent addition in length that is to be made to the axis, whether terminal or lateral, of which it is a part, for only the base of the annual growth may survive.[51]

Aside from illustrating that wonderful capacity to bloviate distinctive of British imperialists, the arborist's exhortation about the importance of a particular branch of landscaping illustrates the exacting degree to which they approached monumental projects. "That four unbroken lines of shapely, symmetric, healthy trees of the size they have now attained have been established in the Mall," the arborist concluded, "is a tribute to the skill with which they have been handled."[52]

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[49] "A Great Processional Road," *British Architect, 1874-1919* (Oct 02, 1903): 237, https://go.openathens.net/redirector/bc.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/great-processional-road/docview/7188541/se-2.

[50] United Kingdom, House of Commons, "Report by Professor I. Bayley Balfour, F.R.S., Regius Keeper of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, on Tree Pruning," *Sessional Papers*, 1911, Royal Parks and Gardens, 28 April 1911, Vol. 63, 733.

[51] UK, HC, "Report on Tree Pruning," 733.

[52] UK, HC, "Report on Tree Pruning," 733.

That the House of Commons commissioned a report on one incredibly narrow aspect of the Mall project in general, but *tree pruning* in particular, exemplifies a certain kind of obsessive impulse over monumental projects' minutiae. This impulse stemmed from a place of grave insecurity about both the Empire and Britain's place in the world. If central London were to be transformed into "the best of all sites in the best of all cities," as another *Architect* piece proposed, small errors that could compromise monumental projects—and thus reduce from their imperial splendor—had to be eliminated.[53] Soaring rhetoric, monumental construction, and an obsession with perfect imperial glory in public spaces were all part of the same peculiar, anxiety-induced phenomenon.

Though obsession remained a consistent theme, social imperialist Britons also pointed to each project as evidence of a renewed sense of national artistic ambition that curiously coincided with imperial expansion. For instance, in his testimony to the Select Committee, architect and future MP John Deering claimed the 1843 completion of Nelson's Column would "convey to the mind of the stranger" both London and Great Britain's "true and peculiar character."[54] The *Aberdeen Journal* echoed Deering's sentiments, arguing the column would "present a novel and very striking feature in the metropolis."[55] The artistic ambition Trafalgar Square and later the Mall embodied, however, did not arise without difficulty. "One of the hardest facts to learn," one *Architect* editorial lamented, was that "at every moment we are changing […], hastening forward to decay and death. Useless, indeed, is it to regret the loss of beautiful hair and rounded cheeks,

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[53] "Why Should London Wait?" *British Architect, 1874-1919* (Dec 27, 1912): 446, https://go.openathens.net/redirector/bc.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/why-should-london-wait/docview/7167357/se-2.

[54] UK, HC, "Report from the Select Committee on Trafalgar Square," 28.

[55] "Visit of the Emperor of Russia," *Aberdeen Journal,* June 5, 1844, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/BA3205648548/BNCN?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=49d14dc9.

and active, well-knit frames" characteristic of old age.[56] "The only true philosophy of life is to accept the inevitable," the paper continued, "Is it not so in the life of a great city?"[57]

The "philosophy" outlined by the *Architect* epitomizes the seriousness with which social imperialists framed monumental projects. To their mind, the perceived quality of London's monumental splendor personified the artistic health of the nation and the Empire. Imploring its readers to join the fight against the unyielding "forces of Philistinism—of destruction and carelessness," the paper opined in true imperialist fashion, "lover[s] of London" had to "do something by individual effort" to ensure the city reached its monumental potential.[58] Though this noble undertaking would be long, the periodical later conceded, "the day will come when our great city will be more united than it is; when we shall see the growth of the civic artistic spirit" it believed was crucial to London's endurance as the global seat of empire.[59] To social imperialists like those at the *British Architect*, elevating London's monumental stature was an essential civic duty. To neglect that duty was to neglect the health of the Empire, whose fate depended on the kinds of monumental projects at Trafalgar Square and the Mall.

London vs. The Continent: Comparing London to Europe

Another theme of monumental construction across both periods involved regular and almost universally unfavorable comparisons between London and the various "continental" cities

[56] "London and its Lovers," *British Architect, 1874-1919* (Jul 18, 1913): 37, https://go.openathens.net/redirector/bc.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/plot-behind-gate/docview/7229297/se-2.

[57] "London and its Lovers," 37.

[58] "London and its Lovers," 37.

[59] "Beautiful London," *British Architect, 1874-1919* (May 29, 1914): 411, https://go.openathens.net/redirector/bc.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/beautiful-london/docview/7177853/se-2.

social imperialists sought to emulate. London's lack of imperial splendor, this argument went, produced a decidedly sordid atmosphere that reflected poorly on Britain's status as global hegemon. In an 1842 article discussing a veterans' memorial erected in the small Austrian city of Innsbruck, for example, another architectural periodical called *The Builder* asked, "when [is] justice to be done to the memories of our own countrymen? And how is it that the Nelson monument in Trafalgar Square is *suspended for want of funds*?"[60] Similarly dumbfounded complaints were leveled amid construction of the Victoria Memorial decades later. *The Daily Mail*, for instance, regretfully announced that "while the citizens of every other capital—nay, of every provincial town—in Europe can with justifiable pride lead their foreign visitors from monument to monument, the Londoner must shamefacedly point out" the grotesque "chocolate sticks" (weather-weary bronze statues) dotting their own capital.[61] "When one compares the noble avenues of the Continental cities to the mean effect of our present Mall," the *British Architect* lamented, "it is obvious enough that we have a vast field of improvement open."[62]

Whether or not London actually compared unfavorably in any objective artistic sense to other European cities remains open to debate, despite the *Architect*'s claim that dignified monuments were "easily and naturally realised by most of our Continental Neighbors."[63] But that such prominent imperial advocates believed London did underscores the profound insecurity

[60] "Inauguration of the Monument Erected at Inspruck," *The Builder*, (1842): 236.

[61] G. P. Konody, "Victoria Memorial Fiasco," *Daily Mail*, March 8, 1905, 4, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/EE1862526356/DMHA?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-DMHA&xid=b417f674.

[62] "A Great Processional Road," 237.

[63] "Control of City Design," *British Architect, 1874-1919* (November 28, 1913): 379, https://go.openathens.net/redirector/bc.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/control-city-design/docview/7229874/se-2.

with which Britons approached monumental construction in their imperial capital. In the imperial mind, it was not sufficient to simply make London a distinctly British urban space that celebrated the nation's domestic and international triumphs. It was necessary to make London *better* than the capitals of Britain's European rivals to the point where one could feel that national prowess "permeated the whole city."[64]

No European capital engendered as much envy as Paris, however, the capital of Great Britain's eternal rival. British officials and civilians regularly juxtaposed Paris to their own imperial seat. Though the completion of Trafalgar Square marked a significant achievement, *The Builder* noted, the fact that "the French would produce ten workable and working [urban] patterns for our one" was a typical admission of the insecurity Britons felt with respect to Paris.[65] Londoners grew even more jealous of their French rivals following designer Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann's introduction of broad avenues, tree-lined gardens, and national monuments to the Parisian urban landscape during the 1850s and 1860s. The new Paris "might be said to be completely the idea of Napoleon," architectural commentator Max Judge argued, such that traveling along the city's newly minted boulevards in the view of sites like the Place de la Concorde and l'Arc de Triomphe was like passing "into eternity."[66] Indeed, emulating Haussmann's changes to Paris was an explicit goal of many Britons, especially with respect to the Mall project. "The connection of Buckingham Palace with Trafalgar Square […] has many what we may call 'Parisian' possibilities" Judge asserted of the Mall's expansion, with the *Mail*

[64] "Beautiful London," 411.

[65] "On the Nature, Objects, and Instruction of Schools of Design," *The Builder*, (1847): 347.

[66] Max Judge, "Concerning Paris," *British Architect, 1874-1919* (Mar 27, 1903): 219, https://go.openathens.net/redirector/bc.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/concerning-paris/docview/7211263/se-2.

noting London would likely acquire "a magnificent boulevard reminiscent of the Champs-Elysées" following the project's completion.[67] The reality that British citizens remained consistently jealous of their fiercest rival's capital illustrates the degree to which parochialism provoked calls for monuments. Such pettiness raises a potent question about the broader imperial project: if social imperialists were not satisfied with the territorial might of the British Empire, whose commercial, political, and military influence dwarfed that of the French in virtually every significant regard, what could? Their evident insecurity suggests that within the social imperialist movement, monumental displays that successfully encapsulated imperial might were sometimes more important than distant territorial holdings or heroic victories. What good were such holdings and victories, they wondered, if they were not monumentalized?

Elitism: Artistic Apathy, Poor Taste, and Parsimony

Criticism pervaded public discourse over the completion of both monumental projects. Though complaints arose from a certain degree of entitlement, especially by British aristocrats, they also stemmed from uncertainty over the Empire's role. Complaints largely took three different forms. First, social imperialists disparaged a general sense of artistic apathy they believed permeated certain elements of the British public. "The love of sculpture has not hitherto been one of the characteristics of the British race," one *Daily Mail* article bemoaned, attempting to attribute the supposed "fiasco" surrounding the delayed construction of the Victoria Memorial in 1905 to inherent flaws in the public's character.[68] The reconfiguring of Charing Cross into Trafalgar Square decades earlier was marred by similarly disparaging representations. Sir Francis Leggatt Chantrey, a prolific sculptor cited by the Trafalgar Square Select Committee, argued that

[67] Judge, "Concerning Paris," *219;* "London's Champs-Elysées," *Daily Mail*, May 3, 1904, 3, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/EE1866463129/DMHA?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-DMHA&xid=760fca8c.

[68] Konody, "Victoria Memorial Fiasco," 4.

"the arts of this country are in too low a state to accomplish so noble a work" as the Nelson Column with any degree of stylistic competence, and that as a result, government officials should simply "abandon the impossibility at once" and "try something more in keeping with our means and our genius" as Britons.[69] Indeed, observers in each period lamented their fellow countrymen's "careless attitude" or "hesitation and apathy" with a distinctly elitist flair, differentiating the middling artistic "developments of the unimaginative sort" characteristic of most British monuments from "the genuine flashes of high imagination" found among the monuments of Paris and elsewhere.[70] "The elite of the people" understood such stylistic subtleties, according to the *British Architect*, but because the average Englishman was "insufficiently trained to see the line of beauty" and altogether "indifferent to it," altering London's urban landscape in a manner worthy of its imperial stature might be something of an "artistic impossibility."[71]

Even when not marred by a general sense of apathy, so the second variety of criticism went, most members of the British public had a decidedly poor sense of taste. When discussing the proposed height of the Nelson Column before its eventual construction, for example, witnesses summoned by the Select Committee questioned whether "an injudicious association of modern things with ancient" might accidentally "put the [monument] out of the pale of classic beauty" with which they believed columns were associated.[72] The monument's status was further called into question by its supposedly uninspired location, architect Joseph Gwilt argued, and

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[69] UK, HC, "Report from the Select Committee on Trafalgar Square," 24.

[70] "London and its Lovers," 37; "A Great Processional Road," 237; "An Imperial War Memorial," *British Architect, 1874-1919* (11, 1918): 101, https://go.openathens.net/redirector/bc.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/imperial-war-memorial/docview/7188800/se-2.

[71] "Beautiful London," 411; "Artistic Impossibilities," 143.

[72] UK, HC, "Report from the Select Committee on Trafalgar Square," 24.

potentially moving it elsewhere represented an alteration by which the column's aesthetic value could "be vastly improved."[73] Even projects viewed as artistic achievements in their time—including (and perhaps especially) Trafalgar Square—were disparaged by later generations of Britons. It was "the heedlessness of previous ages" and "the lack of the sense of beauty" typical of the British public, one *Architect* commentator concluded, that "had somehow blinded the eyes of [our] forefathers" in producing a monumental space that "one wanted to see swept off the face of the earth."[74] Obviously, Britons were not united in a dislike of Trafalgar Square following the turn of the century, and it is quite likely that those who did were some of the more artistically uncompromising imperialists. But their overwhelming rhetoric demonstrates that these Britons were united in the insecurity they felt about national artistic taste as it manifested in London, in which it was imperative, they believed, to introduce what the *Architect* called "the element of beauty into the depressing greyness and monotony of this grim city."[75]

Finally, financial criticism plagued the discourse surrounding the construction of Trafalgar Square and the Mall. Many social imperialists adopted an extreme distaste for the parsimony of both government officials and average members of the British public, who they believed were hostile to the kinds of monumental projects they felt London desperately needed. A nameless architect who submitted his own design for the Nelson Column, for example, charged that Parliament had engaged in "dilatory or irresolute" inquiries related to the monument's cost that resulted in the "expense of time and labour to no purpose."[76] Those

[73] UK, HC, "Report from the Select Committee on Trafalgar Square," 26.

[74] "Beautiful London," 411.

[75] Konody, "Victoria Memorial Fiasco," 4.

[76] M. M. *Description of a drawn model (no. 113): proposed for the monument intended to be erected in Trafalgar Square to the memory of Lord Nelson: with some collateral remarks: by M. M.* London: Printed by C. Reynell,

measures did in fact delay the column's completion, which sat unfinished for years (like the Victoria Memorial decades later). "To give up a few feet of roadway at the cost of a considerable annual charge to the rates, to build a great municipal hall on very costly site instead of a cheap one, to look upon large sums spent in public civic adornments as good investments," one *Architect* analyst considered, "these are things beyond the practical politics of the British public."[77] The public, to social imperialists, was far too concerned with base matters to arouse support for London's monumental transformation. "Only feats in the cricket field will stir us up to subscribe thousands of pounds," the *Daily Mail* complained of the delays, apparently substantiating its suspicion that, in the paper's words, "the British are not an art-loving nation."[78] Again, whether British officials or ordinary civilians were the kinds of misers social imperialists charged is of little actual consequence. That they did so, rather, highlights the degree to which they approached imperial glorification with a profound sense of both arrogance and self-loathing. In essence, they resorted to paralyzing indictments of their national culture and extolled the need to address it with *truly* magnificent monuments to assuage their own deep insecurities.

Money Debates: The Steep Cost of Monumentality

Amid the plan to secure the completion of both projects, financial criticism eventually manifested itself into a pronounced divide over the unavoidable question of cost. For instance, Henry Vivian, 1st Baron Swansea and member of the Trafalgar Square Select Committee, asked a witness whether he felt "utility should be considered […] combined with ornamental effect?"[79]

1839, 4, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/JYMKWX421484434/MOME?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-MOME&xid=acba12b9&pg=5.

[77] "A Great Processional Road," 237.

[78] Konody, "Victoria Memorial Fiasco," 4.

[79] UK, HC, "Report from the Select Committee on Trafalgar Square," 30.

Public "utility" was especially important to non-English politicians during the construction of both monumental projects (Vivian was Welsh) given the steep cost. The erection of the Nelson Column provoked continued questions from officials about its value before, during, and after its completion—which took several years due to lack of funds. Even in 1857, some fourteen years after the actual columnar section's completion, MPs remained concerned about the amount of money the government had spent. Earlier officials had "undertaken the work without due regard to its ultimate cost," Welsh MP Sir Benjamin Hall accused of the Select Committee, with the cost increasing from £20,000 to £32,000 to an eventual £35,464.[80] Other officials complained that monumental projects were not fundamentally British, and that, as trade unionist and MP John Burns put it during debate over the expansion of the Mall, "we should depart from the German and French method of Haussmannising our parks in the country" using vast sums of "public money," which served only "to make London a second-rate Berlin, a fourth-rate Paris, or a fifth-rate Vienna."[81] While some members of the British government were vocal in their opposition to expending significant funds to secure each project's speedy completion, others were far more bullish.

The sentiment that Britons should not only be spending more, but *doing* more dominated discussion of both monumental projects. "That eternal question of cost," one writer complained at the turn of the century, "made it impossible for the best intentioned country or city council to

[80] Sir Benjamin Hall, United Kingdom, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 144 (22 February 1857), Commons, Parliamentary Debates, https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1857-02-12/debates/0f06a0b7-3e6d-44f9-89a5-d5e13bc46db9/TheNelsonColumn%E2%80%94Question?highlight=%22trafalgar%20square%22#contribution-de4fe6ce-3b8a-46e9-996b-54729f722097.

[81] John Burns, United Kingdom, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 130 (24 February 1904), Parliamentary Debates, Commons, https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1904-02-24/debates/445e0514-2443-48ab-9ee6-6b427c8ec277/ClassIi.

do many of the things they wished to do."[82] While discussing alterations in Trafalgar Square decades earlier, *The Builder* likewise reasoned that "if you do anything well, […] no one will accuse you of extravagantly laying out your money, whatever the sum."[83] "Paris is a noble city," the paper continued—combining the comparisons to the French capital noted earlier—but pointed out that "millions upon millions have been expended to render it so."[84] The delayed completion of the Victoria Memorial triggered similar recriminations. The *Mail* asserted that "the sums subscribed for the memorial were not sufficient to cover the expense of the ambition and really magnificent project" memorializing the beloved monarch, such that the monument itself "is gradually being restricted and mutilated."[85] The amount of money the United Kingdom expended on monuments should not only match the size of the Empire, social imperialists implied, but the indeterminate scale of the country's vast imperial ambition. Given that even "impoverished Italy" could raise a monument to King Victor Emmanuel II that would "cost some 2 million pounds," the same disgruntled writer protested, that "wealthy London cannot raise the £150,000 or £200,000 needed for the proper completion of the Victoria Memorial" was a national embarrassment.[86]

Conclusion

The British Empire's global influence was significant and rising in the 1840s and reached its height during the 1900s. And yet, anxiety-ridden rhetoric surrounding the two most significant monumental projects in London—the development of Trafalgar Square and the

[82] "Beautiful London," 411.

[83] "The New National Gallery," *The Builder*, (1852): 528.

[84] "The New National Gallery," 528.

[85] Konody, "Victoria Memorial Fiasco," 4.

[86] Konody, "Victoria Memorial Fiasco," 4.

expansion of the Mall—proved remarkably similar at various levels of the imperial social ladder. Social imperialists understood monumental projects as reflecting the ambitious expansionist value that had made London, as Bremner explains, "the center of the world's largest and most powerful empire," and discussed the importance of those monuments in appropriately grandiose terms.[87] But they approached monumental projects with a profound arrogance and often *despite* widespread disdain for London's lack of artistic flair, highlighting the insecurity many of them felt with respect to the Empire's role. In a revealing lecture to like-minded attendees, the *British Architect*'s editor, Thomas Raffles Davison, posited that "never could one hear the praises of, say, the Bridge of Prague, [so] eloquently described by the average cultured Englishman."[88] His argument epitomizes the dichotomy between social imperialists' inexplicable hubris and the barrage of complaints about apathy, design, and fellow British citizens. Given this psychology, it is difficult to come to any other conclusion than social imperialists were simply crushed by the sense of challenge that accompanied their monumental vision. As we will see in successive chapters, underlying monumental construction was the interminable, insecurity-motivated philosophy that London's physical elements should in some way express the might of the British Empire—however impossible a task that may be.

[87] Bremner, "'Some Imperial Institute,'" 53.

[88] "Beautiful London," 411.

Chapter Two: Trafalgar Square and the 1840s

This chapter will examine the creation of Trafalgar Square and its principal monument, the Nelson Column, in the context of the 1840s. Owing to its location at the intersection of major roads leading to both the historical City of London and the central government's Westminster, social imperialists envisaged the square as *the* monumental epicenter of imperial London. Despite its status as a period of significant overseas expansion, however, the "Hungry Forties" created an immense psychological contradiction for British citizens. On the one hand, Britons enjoyed a vast commercial empire whose subjects spanned multiple continents, languages, and cultures. On the other, the material fruits of that empire proved elusive for millions, a disconcerting reality that called the imperial project into question. Early social imperialists sought to bridge this divide through monumental projects like Trafalgar Square, hoping to inspire public virtue and imperial support in the face of enormous domestic and international challenge. Like the empire to which it was dedicated, however, Trafalgar Square witnessed a series of turbulent events over the course of the decade that threatened to rip these goals asunder.

During the mid-nineteenth century, Trafalgar Square was asked to make people without a vote, who suffered severe hunger at regular intervals, and who had no social safety net to buy into the existing social order. In this chapter, I will focus on three incidents of an empire in revolt to illustrate the absurdity of these ideas. The first is the Greenwich Pensioners, a group of royal sailors who staged a protest in Trafalgar Square despite their status as one of the only groups of workers in England to receive a state-funded pension. In this case, the very men whose lives were risked to expand the Empire and defend the nation were repaid for the mutilation of their bodies with a pauper's pension and empty monuments. That they went to an unfinished, scaffolded Trafalgar Square with begging boxes exposed the absurdity of the project's unity-

inspiring goals. The second instance is the appearance of Tsar Nicholas I, an iron-fisted leader on a diplomatic visit to London who toured Trafalgar Square under construction. Bewildered by the Nelson Column's incomplete state, the Russian Emperor donated a small sum in support of its construction—unintentionally sparking popular outrage. Britons were embarrassed by their leaders' groveling to a foreign despot for the sake of some monument, whose message of imperial independence the Tsar's donation seemed to compromise. The third and final instance is the 1848 riots in Trafalgar Square, which ignited in response to an income tax proposal working class Britons considered outrageous. They took to Trafalgar Square to express their opposition, however ineffectually, demonstrating the socio-economic tensions that made its monuments' task of fostering imperial unity absurd. Ultimately, these incidents collectively expose the degree to which deep-seated insecurities over Britain's status as an imperial power governed the square's realization, and how social imperialism's incoherence doomed its success from the outset. When brought home at mid-century and without corresponding progressive reforms, the presence of the Empire seemed only to bring into stark relief many Britons' poverty and distress.

A brief visual history of the square from 1835, when the monument was first conceived, to 1867, when it had finally been completed, gives some indication of the lack of coherence fundamental to early social imperialism. In the first place, there were no less than *four* architects involved in its construction. And just like the Mall project that followed it, Trafalgar Square did not have any one figure see the project through to completion. As alluded to in the introduction, the designer who cleared out the Royal Mews and laid out Trafalgar Square, John Nash, died in 1835 before the second round of construction could begin.[89] During this period, a crude wooden

[89] Mace, *Trafalgar Square*, 23.

fence was erected to encircle the square's vacant, dirty, and un-cobbled surface.[90] Nash was soon replaced by William Wilkins, who designed the National Gallery between 1832 and 1838, but whose plan for the square itself was abandoned by Parliament upon his death in 1839.[91] The fence—now more dilapidated than before and littered with advertisements, billboards, and notices—continued to dissatisfy, and was often satirized by the project's critics (See Figure 3). Wilkins was then replaced by Charles Barry, whose plan for the square and its fountains is the one we recognize today. Later additions, like General Henry Havelock's statue, were constructed in subsequent years.[92] However, Barry's plan did *not* include Nelson's Column, and Barry himself actually despised its eventual construction.[93] It was designed independently by architect William Railton and initially "completed" in 1843, but the bas-relief additions to its base, along with the four accompanying lions that had been part of Railton's original scheme, were not installed until the 1854 and 1867, respectively.[94] In addition, Railton had to reduce the height of Nelson's Column from 203 feet to 169 feet to accommodate Parliament's fears that the column would collapse under its weight, and because the Nelson Memorial Committee convened to procure money for its construction ran out of money in 1844.[95] The absence of a central design for the square mirrors the absence of any one design underpinning social imperialism at mid-century.

The reality that Trafalgar Square had no overarching designer assured its decades-long status as an irritating eyesore. From 1835, the site that was supposed to commemorate the

[90] Mace, *Trafalgar Square*, 26.

[91] Mace, *Trafalgar Square*, 44.

[92] Mace, *Trafalgar Square*, 43.

[93] UK, HC, "Report from the Select Committee on Trafalgar Square," 6.

[94] Mace, *Trafalgar Square*, 45.

[95] UK, HC, "Report from the Select Committee on Trafalgar Square," 12.

greatest victory in British maritime history was enclosed by a shabby wooden fence. The column whose soaring height and sumptuous emblems were meant to honor the bravery and sacrifice of the victorious Lord Nelson was scarred by haphazard construction materials. The wooden fence that had persisted for more than a decade was eventually removed in 1845, but the same could not be said for the scaffolding surrounding the column, which remained (to the enormous displeasure of Londoners and Britons alike) a prominent feature until the 1850s.[96] Ultimately, the lack of agreement between Trafalgar Square's *own architects* for the plaza's comprehensive design is a microcosm of the lack of ideological clarity that defined social imperialism.

Figure 3: Trafalgar Square Satirized During Construction. Charles Hunt, *Cross-Readings at Charing Cross*, 1836, print, The British Museum, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1880-1113-2807.

[96] Mace, *Trafalgar Square*, 107.

An Empire Expands, and Goes Hungry

Although the shabbiness of the square did not reflect the growing power of the British Empire, which reached new heights in the 1840s, it did indicate something flawed about British imperialism. Britain had inaugurated the First Opium War with China's Qing Dynasty in 1839, officially declared sovereignty over New Zealand in 1840, and consolidated its grip on the Indian subcontinent by the end of the decade.[97] Britons further laid claim to territories ranging from Hong Kong in China to the Gold Coast in Africa, in 1842 and 1844, respectively.[98] Despite London's efforts to "reduce the tax burden as much as possible," as historian Miles Taylor explains, the mounting costs of overseas expansion during the 1840s meant that British military expenditures soon reached record highs.[99] Britain's continued military successes from the early-century Napoleonic Wars spelled the solidification of what historian Ronald Hyam calls its "imperial century," and the emergence of *Pax Britannica* as a discursive idea.[100]

At home, however, as poor and working-class Britons toiled under unprecedented socio-economic strife, the Empire's "successes" seemed increasingly remote. Indeed, the 1840s saw the United Kingdom rocked by an economic depression, several bad harvests, protectionist fiscal policies, and a brutal potato blight, all of which contributed to what historian Eric Hobsbawm describes as "the extraordinary depth, desperation and bitterness of the social discontent in this

[97] Krishan Kumar, "The British Empire," *Visions of Empire: How Five Imperial Regimes Changed the World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 325, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvc773dq.10.

[98] Kumar, "The British Empire," *Visions of Empire*, 325.

[99] Miles Taylor, "The 1848 Revolutions and the British Empire," *Past & Present* 166 (February 2000): 148, https://www.jstor.org/stable/651297.

[100] Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century, 1815-1914: A Study of Empire and Expansion* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

period."[101] As Victorian scholar Charlotte Boyce explains, this was an era in which the unprecedentedly grim literature of Charles Dickens emerged, in which critics derided unpopular government policies as "Starvation Acts," and in which national leaders feared Britons were "becoming inured to [the] accounts of extreme hunger" that took up "column upon column of newsprint" throughout the decade.[102] One 1842 cartoon mentioned by Boyce went so far as to depict "a gaunt Britannia and a famished lion"—well-known personifications of the British Empire—brought to heel by wide-ranging domestic uncertainty.[103] For many Britons, this decade was defined far less by the expansion of their far-flung holdings than it was by the daily hunger that defined their existence. So arose the popular moniker, "the Hungry Forties."

At the same time, gallant accounts of imperial expansion *also* littered the pages of popular news outlets. "Prince Albert has made a donation of 100 guineas in aid of the subscription for the Nelson Memorial in Trafalgar-square" informed one issue of the *Hampshire/Portsmouth Telegraph*, whose headline piece, "China, India, and Egypt," summarized recent military exploits in those distant territories.[104] Early ocial imperialists sought to bridge the geographic and material distance between average Britons and the Empire by rendering it, in some sense, tangible. As Prince Albert's donation exemplifies, the erection of public monuments in London proved an especially attractive avenue for realizing this goal.

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[101] Eric J. Hobsbawm, "The Standard of Living during the Industrial Revolution: A Discussion," *The Economic History Review* 16, no. 1 (1963): 129, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2592521.

[102] Charlotte Boyce, "Representing the 'Hungry Forties' in Image and Verse: The Politics of Hunger in Early-Victorian Illustrated Periodicals," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 40, no. 2 (2012): 421, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41819951.

[103] Boyce, "Representing the 'Hungry Forties,'" 425.

[104] "China, India, and Egypt," *Hampshire/Portsmouth Telegraph*, April 12, 1841, *British Library Newspapers*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/BB3206031026/BNCN?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=a9bec4bb.

Former High Chancellor of Great Britain and co-founder of University College London Lord Brougham asserted as much in a parliamentary debate over "Public Monuments," reiterating a widely circulated petition's contention that access to cultural achievements "tended in the highest degree to elevate the character of a nation, and to improve the morals of all classes."[105] This classically social imperialist thesis justified "free admission" to sites in which imperial deeds materialized, Brougham maintained, including the British Museum (filled with prizes seized from imperial holdings) and the newly erected National Gallery.[106] The exploits of imperial heroes operating in distant lands, such leaders believed of the latter museum, must be made concrete for Britons in the imperial metropole—*especially* given the nation's domestic challenges. Thus began what Taylor calls "the use of empire to appease discontent at home," a project inaugurated materially, through the diversion of colonial riches to Britain itself, and more importantly, ideologically, through the erection of public monuments to the Empire.[107]

This project's most apparent obstacle, however, lied in its attempt to overcome a paradox at the heart of mid-nineteenth century British society. It sought to not only reconcile what Boyce dubs the "agitation and destitution" of the present age with the "moral impatience" of Britain's leaders, but also to justify the British Empire given the daily suffering of ordinary Britons.[108] It should come as no surprise, then, that social imperialists looked to a leader whose victories were critical to the foundation of the British Empire as the primary subject for the most significant

[105] Lord Brougham, United Kingdom, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 38 (30 June 1837), Parliamentary Debates, Lords, https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1837-06-30/debates/feb908c2-8c6c-408f-8ba1-f674da250735/PublicMonuments?highlight=%22trafalgar%20square%22#contribution-eb80c6f2-23a8-4890-b0fb-48315a472a34.

[106] Brougham, UK, *Hansard* Vol. 38, Lords.

[107] Taylor, "The 1848 Revolutions and the British Empire," 159.

[108] Boyce, "Representing the 'Hungry Forties,'" 441.

monumental transformation in London's history: Horatio Nelson. And it should come as no surprise that the success of this project was almost immediately imperiled by the very same imperial anxiety from which it spawned.

Social Imperialism in Trafalgar Square

Lord Nelson loomed large in British popular imagination even decades after his death for two signature reasons. First, as an island nation that had long depended on maintaining a strong navy for defense, Britain prided itself on its mastery of the ocean. Nelson, and his decisive defeat of the larger French fleet at the Battle of Trafalgar, personified that mastery. Significantly, this victory had not simply doomed Napoleon's effort to compete with the Royal Navy—it had also ushered in an era of uncontested supremacy over the high seas, a fact social imperialists regarded as essential to the British Empire's rapid nineteenth century expansion. Second, and even more important for these advocates of empire, was Nelson's final signal to his fleet before the battle, and the instructive disposition it encapsulated: "England expects that every man will do his duty."[109] This reminder epitomized early social imperialists' attitude towards the supposed "moral corruption" of the Hungry Forties, and made Nelson ideally suited for monumentalization. "There was not an Englishman who […] would not put forth all his energies to ensure the erection of a trophy worthy of the nation," argued London's *Morning Post* in an 1838 editorial, designating the inauguration of a monument to Nelson a "truly national and patriotic undertaking."[110] Early social imperialists understood public monuments that emphasized moral virtue as a potential antidote to urban squalor, and nothing inspired this virtue

[109] M. M. *Description of a drawn model*, 12.

[110] "National Monument to the Memory of the Late Lord Nelson," *Morning Post*, February 23, 1838. *British Library Newspapers*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/R3209954834/BNCN?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=fc243034.

like Nelson's final message. Once engraved on the side of his monument, social imperialists like Wilkins and Barry believed all England's expectation of dutiful service to the Empire would, in the words of the *Liverpool Mercury*, "go down to posterity."[111]

The imperial *ideal* of Nelson as a dutiful imperial servant propelled his eventual veneration. That ideal stemmed from Nelson's completely unblemished military record—save for the Battle of Santa Cruz de Tenerife (1797), in which he courageously lost an arm—his motivational yet instructive "England expects" message, and most important, his ultimate sacrifice for the British cause. Nelson's death aboard the HMS Victory immediately after his forces won the Battle of Trafalgar cemented his status as a legendary figure, and represented a pivotal moment in the War of the Third Coalition. Napoleon's army was trapped on Continental Europe, and could never again hope to threaten Britain itself.[112] Nelson's popular identity lent itself perfectly to social imperialism some decades later, whose proponents hoped to address domestic unrest with a unifying vision rooted in the victories of an early imperial British hero.

However, these Britons proved unable to manifest that vision, and were forced to gloss over the complexities of Nelson himself. Indeed, little attention was paid to Nelson's staunch support of the slave trade and active opposition to Britain's abolitionist movement as a member of the House of Lords, a reality conveniently ignored by social imperialists in their elevation of the popular imagination's "gallant admiral."[113] Britain's abolition of the slave trade in 1807, just two years after Nelson's death, was central to its self-identification as a civilizing, Christian

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[111] "Omskirk," *Liverpool Mercury*, February 9, 1844, *British Library Newspapers*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/BC3203960515/BNCN?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=edad3ac3.

[112] Brian Lavery, *Nelson's Navy: The Ships, Men, and Organization, 1793-1815* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2012), 18.

[113] Christer Petley, "Reflections on 'Nelson's Darker Side," University of Southampton, July 12, 2018, https://blog.soton.ac.uk/slaveryandrevolution/2018/12/07/reflections-on-nelsons-dark-side/.

empire. Nelson's opposition to the trade's abolition during his lifetime undermined the capricious attempt to idolize him decades later. Given the evident contradiction between his actions and his popular image, few could agree about how to best exalt him, let alone how to bring out what he universally represented about the British idea.

Nevertheless, his reputation as the man who cemented British naval dominance into (and well beyond) the 1840s made a memorial to Lord Nelson an especially auspicious choice for the imperial plaza dedicated to his fiercest victory. Though there were existing memorials to Nelson's feats in other British cities, as one architect who submitted a proposal for his monument confidently declared, only a monument in London could "be emphatically *The* Nelson Monument" that would encourage "this and future generations […] to emulate his glorious deeds."[114] Social imperialists capitalized on Nelson's enduring popularity to emphasize the expansionist mindset they felt vital to arresting imperial anxieties. A Scottish newspaper, for example, claimed that simply looking upon Nelson's face "reveals the prevailing characteristic of the dauntless soul by which it was animated" because that soul contained "the aspect not only of the unconquered, but of the unconquerable."[115] As the earlier architect wrote of his proposal to memorialize "the immortal Nelson," a large column would best represent his "great Naval Victories" because of its resemblance to the towering "main-mast of an English First Rate" ship of the line.[116] "The Romans had no exclusively *nautical* implement sufficiently large to serve for the type of a structure," he continued, because their empire's sea battles "were in real fact mere

[114] M. M. *Description of a drawn model*, 6.

[115] "House of Commons," *Dundee Courier*, July 30, 1844, *British Library Newspapers*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/R3209563887/BNCN?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=9fb25f91.

[116] M. M. *Description of a drawn model*, 12.

small-craft or boat business" compared to those won by the late admiral.[117] For social imperialists, Nelson became the very manifestation of imperial virtue, and the Nelson Column—a physical representation of a ship-of-the-line's main mast, signifying Britain's choice weapon of war—was a means to inspire that virtue for a suffering public.

Though the Nelson Column was constructed at the center of Trafalgar Square and was thus its focal point, it was not the site's only imperial monument. In fact, Parliament's move of the National Gallery from its previous location on Pall Mall to Charing Cross presented an additional opportunity to transform the square into London's imperial center. RIBA's co-founder and first president, Thomas L. Donaldson, defined an imperial vision for the new National Gallery in an 1842 piece published by *The Builder*:

> We want our Pantheon of Antiquity, not to deify and worship our noble spirits who have lived among us, but to pay this tribute to their worth, to recall their features to our children's children, and bid them deserve a like reward for services rendered to their country, perchance to all humanity. Let this, then, be the central object of our national museum—a hall of glory to receive groups, statues, busts, and pictures of our great ones. […] Will this National Gallery be a less useful, or a less important object, when we consider it as instructing the people, improving the art manufactures of our kingdom, and thereby increasing our commerce?[118]

Donaldson's description of the National Gallery includes an allusion to the Roman Empire and typifies the social imperialist conception of monumentalization as an opportunity to "instruct" an unenlightened British public in implicitly imperial values. He makes these values *ex*plicitly imperial a few lines later, noting that whereas "a three-decker [ship] will cost from a hundred to a hundred and fifty thousand pounds," the National Gallery imperially conceived would "develop the capacities and resources of our men of genius, display the fine materials of our country, bring into operation our rarest inventions, and enshrine the mementos of England's

[117] M. M. *Description of a drawn model*, 12.

[118] Thomas L. Donaldson, "The New National Gallery," *The Builder*, (1842): 528.

noblest hearts and most gifted minds."[119] Donaldson thus establishes the utility of the National Gallery in the same terms as that of a three-decked warship—a weapon of war critical to the health of the British Empire in particular, expressly designed to defend its interests and increase its bounds.[120] The National Gallery, according to this conception, is similarly essential to that health, a reality that discloses the imperial motivations behind its placement neighboring the Nelson Column in the new Trafalgar Square.

Various officials in the British government regularly acceded to Donaldson's view. For instance, future prime minister Viscount Palmerston argued that "there was no country in Europe…which contributed so little to the encouragement of art" to its national detriment in an 1844 debate.[121] He further encouraged his fellow MPs to address the "inadequacy of the space" provided for imperial display in the National Gallery, suggesting that the design architect William Wilkins landed upon did Britain a disservice.[122] Architect and future MP John Deering, likewise, contended that "the object" of parliament's efforts at monumentalization was "not to arrive at Trafalgar-square or the National Gallery—it is to convey to the mind of the stranger the true and peculiar character of our capital [and] its endless continuation."[123] In this way, social imperialists rendered the gallery—and Trafalgar Square by extension—an imperial space, whose nascent monuments they hoped would increase along with the number of territories held by the

[119] Donaldson, "The New National Gallery," 528.

[120] Donaldson, "The New National Gallery," 528.

[121] Viscount Palmerston, United Kingdom, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 76 (22 July 1844), Parliamentary Debates, Commons, https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1844-07-22/debates/df145eea-0a99-4884-b7c9-c509e58b6ea4/TheFineArts?highlight=%22trafalgar%20square%22#contribution-008df107-6f0a-46f6-a414-54a2c5007f99.

[122] Palmerston, UK, *Hansard* Vol. 76, Commons.

[123] UK, HC, "Report from the Select Committee on Trafalgar Square," 28.

British Empire. But perhaps the most obvious way in which politicians conceptualized Trafalgar Square as an "Emblem of Empire," as Mace describes it, was in the actual funds Parliament sought to finance its completion.[124]

Though MPs from outside London were often skeptical of "the whole population of the country being taxed to pay for the erection of metropolitan buildings," as Oldham's William Cobbett complained in 1833, they did not levy such objections against taxes on Britain's imperial subjects.[125] Chairman of the Trafalgar Square Select Committee Henry Gally Knight, for example, in his examination of Nelson Memorial Committee Secretary Charles Davison Scott, restlessly inquired as to whether "anything [has yet] been received from India?" for the memorial's construction.[126] Scott replied in the affirmative, explaining that "there have been sums received from India" including a recent contribution of more than £173 "from Calcutta," on top of at least "one prior to it" to erect "a national monument to the memory of Lord Nelson."[127] Knight and other Select Committee members, excited at the prospect of future imperial funds, pressed Scott on whether the Government could expect "more subscriptions from abroad in the future"—emanating from the vast territories of the British Empire—to which Scott replied, "most decidedly."[128]

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[124] Mace, *Trafalgar Square*, 1.

[125] William Cobbett, United Kingdom, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 20 (23 August 1833), Parliamentary Debates, Commons, https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1833-08-23/debates/a981432c-ca84-4149-81da-4b5358316d01/NationalGallery?highlight=%22trafalgar%20square%22#contribution-71d35922-e7a8-4b13-b45d-818a83b3f1c5.

[126] UK, HC, "Report from the Select Committee on Trafalgar Square," 16.

[127] UK, HC, "Report from the Select Committee on Trafalgar Square," 16.

[128] UK, HC, "Report from the Select Committee on Trafalgar Square," 16.

In fact, Secretary Scott became far more explicit with his predictions. He went on to explain how his committee "had a promise from Sir James Carnac, when he went out as Governor to Bombay, that he would institute a subscription there for our funds" due to his "extremely warm interest in the success of the object," ultimately surmising that "the subscription may be considered at present as only in its infancy."[129] Carnac himself was an avowed imperialist, and during his years as an MP had once questioned why Canadians would ever choose to "gratify the views of designing patriots or liberal theorists" and seek independence when they could "remain a constituent portion of the British Empire, contributing to its greatness and prosperity."[130] That Knight and his fellow committee members proved so eager to obtain money for the Nelson Column raised from a tax levied on Carnac's Indian subjects, and that such an unambiguously expansionist figure like Carnac expressed a keen interest in the monumental project's eventual success, reveals the extent to which social imperialism advanced Trafalgar Square's construction. The project was, at least in part, financed by the Empire.

By conceiving of the square in such ambitious terms from the outset and exploiting imperial funds to do so, social imperialists cast the location as London's enduring imperial center. As one architect put it to the Select Committee, "the whole area would be left open for all those monuments which […] we hope, increase upon us" over the course of history.[131] And he was right. The square would be populated by future imperial monuments like that of Sir Charles

[129] UK, HC, "Report from the Select Committee on Trafalgar Square," 17.

[130] James Carnac, United Kingdom, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 40 (16 January 1838), Parliamentary Debates, Commons, https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1838/jan/16/affairs-of-canada#S3V0040P0_18380116_HOC_5.

[131] UK, HC, "Report from the Select Committee on Trafalgar Square," 11.

J. Napier of Magdala (erected in 1855), Commander-in-Chief in India whose 1842 defeat of Sindh helped consolidate British control of the subcontinent, and that of Major General Sir Henry Havelock (erected in 1862), whose suppression of the 1857 Rebellion led to the creation of the British Raj.[132] Havelock himself was a deeply pious man whose distinguished service in Burma, Afghanistan, and Persia made him an ideal candidate for helping to suppress the 1857 Rebellion on behalf of the British East India Company.[133] The debate surrounding the inscription on his statue, in particular—which initially included an excerpt from a speech he delivered to his troops before engaging a force of Indian rebels—reveals the sanitized, educative, and unnuanced conception of British imperial prowess that elucidated Trafalgar Square's utility in the minds of its advocates. These advocates tasked the monumental project with an enormous amount of socio-cultural work but could only rely on a certain interpretation of the Empire's actions to do so. For example, in a letter to First Commissioner of Works William Cowper-Temple, Sir Benjamin Hall (the position's former occupant) proposed a noteworthy alteration to the inscription's content:

> Although it was natural for a General in addressing his troops to remind them that they were the stay and prop of the British power in India, those who will read the inscription may require rather to remember that justice, truth, and mercy, qualities of which Sir Henry Havelock himself was a conspicuous example, should be relied upon, as well as military force, for the maintenance of British influence in India.[134]

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[132] Paul Kelso, "Mayor attacks generals in battle of Trafalgar Square," *The Guardian*, October 19, 2000, https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2000/oct/20/london.politicalnews.

[133] "Sir Henry Havelock," Military Leaders, Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henry-Havelock.

[134] Sir Benjamin Hall, "Correspondence with the First Commissioner of Her Majesty's Works, relative to placing a Statue, Pedestal, and Inscription, in *Trafalgar Square*, to the Memory of Sir *Henry Havelock*," *Parliamentary Papers*, May 9, 1861, 3, https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1861-037596?accountid=9673.

The fact that Havelock's troops overpowered those of his opponents was at least as important, according to Hall's doubly imperial view, as the general's supposed sense of Christian virtue. Indeed, what should be emphasized for the benefit of Britons visiting Trafalgar Square was not simply Sir Havelock's military genius, but his patriotic commitment to "justice" and "mercy"—a somewhat ironic suggestion given Havelock's strident racism and years-long campaign to brutally suppress Indian nationalists. Havelock could not have possibly embodied the kind of emancipatory principles Britons believed their empire held precisely because of his violent military background, regardless of any personal virtues he may or may not have exemplified. His placement in Trafalgar Square despite—or rather, *because* of that violence—underscores just how muddled Britons' conception of their empire really was, a dichotomy that became even more pronounced at the dawn of a new century.

Not only did Mr. Cowper-Temple agree with Sir Benjamin Hall's suggestion to alter the speech, however, he further suggested that the "enumeration of the regiments and companies of the Allahabad moveable column and of the Oude field force"—Havelock's native Indian troops—"seems out of place in Trafalgar Square."[135] The exploits of Indian soldiers were secondary to those of their British regimental counterparts (who are, in fact, enumerated on Havelock's statue), because the latter group's exploits could educate the British public in imperial virtue in a way that those of their imperial subjects could not. Like most Britons at the time, social imperialists believed the British Empire was delivering its subjects from a state of barbarism and savagery toward what Carnac, for his part, had called "a more advanced stage of

[135] William Cowper-Temple, "Havelock Correspondence," 4.

society."[136] The fact that Indian soldiers regularly fought with valiance in the British Army immediately muddied the representational waters for a monument glorifying the Empire, a principal component of which was the Indian subcontinent. Essentially, it was Britons like the "dauntless" Nelson who had supposedly advanced the Empire's civilizational mission that deserved memorialization in Trafalgar Square, *not* those they simply employed (or exploited) to do so.

The contradictions exposed by Havelock's statue speak to a larger disunity surrounding the vision behind Trafalgar Square's creation as a whole that doomed its success from the outset, at least in social imperialist terms. Early social imperialists did not grasp that adherence to the social order could not be inspired without an improvement in material conditions. "When our Empire makes of unworthy its cornerstone and lays its foundation in an alms-fed proletariat," British Egyptologist Sir Flinders Petrie argued in his opposition to the introduction of progressive economic reforms, "the day of some conquering Attila will not be far distant."[137] Whereas Porter cites Petrie's argument as an example of the kind of attitude social imperialism displaced, I believe it *was* the kind of nascent social imperialism that created a project like Trafalgar Square. This early doctrine's "foundation," rather than material systems of social reciprocity, was a duty to the social order and the Empire that could be inspired through and won by monuments. After all, the foundation of the Nelson Column itself was eventually inscribed with that very message: "England expects every man to do his duty." Unfortunately for the message's advocates, however, monuments were not the powerful cultural force they believed.

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[136] James Carnac, United Kingdom, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 41 (22 March 1838), Parliamentary Debates, Commons, https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1838/mar/22/east-india-policy#S3V0041P0_18380322_HOC_22.

[137] Sir Flinders Petrie, Porter, "Peril and Propaganda," 189.

The rest of this chapter will describe three incidents of Britons opposing social imperialism's attempt to wield this imagined power, a power that was especially ridiculous in the absence of anything except *reflected* glory (which they could not even render successfully). In particular, it will examine the appearance of the Greenwich Pensioners, anger at the Tsar's donation, and riots in Trafalgar Square itself as instances of an empire in revolt. Their protests exposed this early version of social imperialism and the unity it longed for as not just incoherent, but absurd.

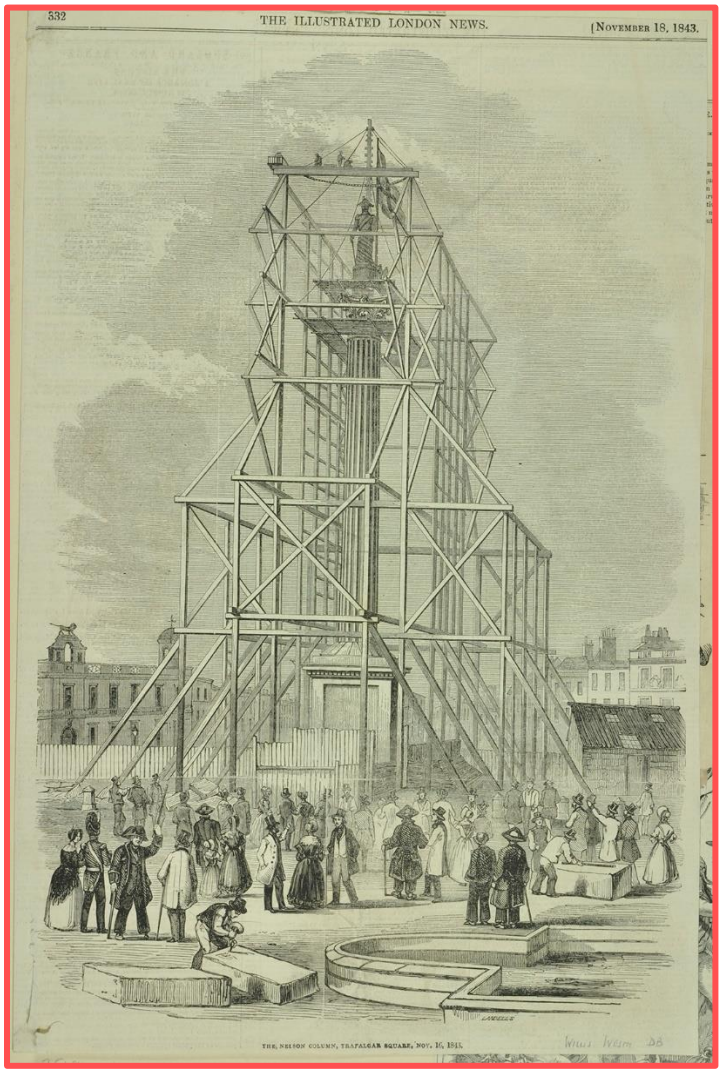

Figure 4: The Nelson Column Under Construction. *The Illustrated London News*, *Nelson's Column, Trafalgar Square*, 1843, wood engraving, London Picture Archive, https://www.londonpicturearchive.org.uk/view-item?i=312364&WINID=1681844286761.

Empire in Revolt: The Greenwich Pensioners, 1843

The first of these revealing episodes involved a group of government-accommodated Royal Navy veterans known as the Greenwich Pensioners, recognized as such by contemporary Britons for their residence at the Royal Hospital Greenwich.[138] Many of the pensioners, at that point in their 60s and 70s, had fought under Lord Nelson at Trafalgar and elsewhere and were revered by contemporary Britons for their heroism. At the same time, the veterans were known for their obvious physical impairments (like eye-patches and wooden legs), destitute economic position, and what Royal Museums Greenwich calls sporadic fits of "behaviour shocking to the public morals of the time."[139] They were jokingly called "Greenwich Geese" in some quarters of London to emphasize their irritating disposition, and had appropriated the moniker "Poor Jack" to refer to their indigence (which was explored in an 1840 rags-to-riches novel of the same name).[140] In 1843, the year the actual column of the Nelson Column (but not its characteristic bronze reliefs or lions) was completed, a group of impoverished pensioners appeared in Trafalgar Square bearing a few "begging boxes," signs reading "England expects every man to do his duty," and a placard with the following message:

> The veterans of Copenhagen, St. Vincent, the Nile, and Trafalgar, humbly beg to invite the British public to view […] their immortal hero in Trafalgar-square, on Friday and Saturday next, and trust they will drop a copper in the locker for the entertainment which is to be given to Poor Jack, on the glorious anniversary of the battle of Copenhagen. No charge made, but the smallest donation thankfully received.[141]

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[138] "Greenwich Pensioners," Royal Museums Greenwich, accessed December 1, 2022, https://www.rmg.co.uk/stories/topics/greenwich-pensioners.

[139] "Greenwich Pensioners."

[140] Frederick Marryat, *Poor Jack*, (London: Project Gutenberg, 1840), 1, 2022, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/21575/21575-h/21575-h.htm.

[141] "The Greenwich Pensioners and the Nelson Monument," *Northern Star*, November 4, 1843, *British Library Newspapers, https*://link.gale.com/apps/doc/Y3207533265/BNCN?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=78afc073.

Britons were outraged. The Nelson Memorial Committee had failed to secure the necessary funds for an event that would commemorate Nelson's victory and celebrate the pensioners. So the pensioners took matters into their own hands, appearing before the fence in Trafalgar Square to raise the money personally. "The most disgraceful, degrading spectacle, that has ever been inflicted upon Englishmen, was witnessed last week, when the statue of the immortal Nelson was exhibited to the gaze of the public," the radical *Northern Star* grieved.[142] "It is impossible to express in language the indignation which this unparalleled spectacle excited in the breasts of the citizens of London" it continued, anticipating that "when the United Kingdom is informed of it, there will be, no doubt, raised from one extremity to the other one general shout of execration."[143] To many Britons, the once-venerated pensioners' obvious socio-economic indigence and need to raise money independently was a reflection of the destitution of the age and the British government's neglect of its domestic responsibilities. It further underscored the impossibility of getting Britons to buy into a system of imperial reciprocity through which they would receive no actual material benefits.

This civic neglect of the neediest members of society was felt throughout the Hungry Forties despite Britain's overseas gains. But it was all the more insulting when it spurned a group like the pensioners, who during their time in the Royal Navy had been critical to both Nelson's personal success as an admiral and the United Kingdom's eventual defeat of Napoleon. These agents of empire echoed British outrage by appropriating Nelson's final reminder when asking the public for money. That disheartening paradox prompted a scathing rebuke in the *Northern Star* that encapsulated the indignant national mood. "Is it possible to conceive a more

[142] "The Greenwich Pensioners and the Nelson Monument."

[143] "The Greenwich Pensioners and the Nelson Monument."

humiliating instance of national ingratitude?" the exhortation began, mourning the striking contradiction between the visible magnificence of the Nelson Column with the destitution of Nelson's own soldiers.[144] It continued:

> Can Englishmen, whose character for even a reckless generosity and profuseness is notorious, wherever the name of Briton has been heard, behold those veteran warriors to whom England is indebted for the lofty and independent political attitude she holds among surrounding nations—some rivals, and all jealous of her naval power—thus reduced to the condition of the most abject mendicity?[145]

The *Northern Star's* emphasis on the distance between Briton's self-adopted image as a "recklessly generous" people and the "mendicity" of the Greenwich Pensioners is especially noteworthy. The socio-economic destitution they exposed flew in the face of Britons' self-identification with the "civilizing" mission of the British Empire and its supposed economic might, and speaks to early social imperialism's hollow core. Even British "naval power"—the longstanding cornerstone of the Empire's military success—seemed empty given the naval pensioners' destitution. "Yet such is the melancholy fact," the *Star* concluded.[146] "There stood at the base of the monument raised to Nelson's memory, those veteran tars who fought under him […] shivering with cold, and begging for a day's meal!! […] Who after this can call us a religious, a charitable, a humane, a generous, or even a just people![147]" Ultimately, the *Star*'s invocation of ideals crucial to Britons' conception of their Empire's role—a "reckless generosity," an "independent political attitude," unparalleled "naval power," and its status as "a just people"—struck at the heart of the paradox at the heart of 1840s British society. How could Britons *possibly* reconcile the enormous wealth generated by their vast global empire given the

[144] "The Greenwich Pensioners and the Nelson Monument."

[145] "The Greenwich Pensioners and the Nelson Monument."

[146] "The Greenwich Pensioners and the Nelson Monument."

[147] "The Greenwich Pensioners and the Nelson Monument."

abject misery of some of its most praiseworthy citizens? The Greenwich Pensioners' beleaguered appearance in Trafalgar Square at the base of a monument dedicated to their illustrious former admiral provoked this question.

Social imperialism's reaction to the Greenwich Pensioners' appearance further illustrated the kind of superficial pageantry that defined its monumental priorities during the first half of the nineteenth century. As London's *Morning Post* described, elites in the British government and military had first planned a subscription "for the purpose of giving dinner to those men who fought under Nelson" at his column's official opening.[148] Officials had long hoped to celebrate the victories of the late admiral among those veterans who had helped realize them—many of whom were Greenwich Pensioners. The committee convened to facilitate the event included the Earl of Carrington; Admirals, the Hon. Sir R. Stopford, Sir Edward Codrington, Sir P. Durham, and several other naval officers.[149] These officials, along with a group of a few hundred Greenwich Pensioners, would then be treated to a dinner surrounded by "the different flags which were employed in [Nelson's] eventful contests" in Trafalgar Square itself.[150] Rather than, say, addressing the socio-economic hardships that had contributed to the pensioners' appearance in the square, however, Admiral Edward Codrington argued it was instead "incumbent on the Government not only to commence but also to complete the column, as a national tribute to the

[148] "Express from Paris," *Morning Post*, April 3, 1845, 6, *British Library Newspapers*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/R3210013189/BNCN?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=2319c9f0.
[149] "London, May 21," *Jackson's Oxford Journal* [1809], May 25, 1844, *British Library Newspapers*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/Y3202676097/BNCN?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=176feae1.
[150] "London, May 21."

hero of whose exploits it was intended to be a memorial."[151] Disputing some Pensioners' understandable desire to hold the ceremony at Greenwich Hospital, a location readily accessible to those of them with physical disabilities, Codrington stated that their ceremony "should in every respect bear a national, instead of a private character."[152] By manipulating the location of the ceremony and arranging it to begin with, leaders treated the pensioners like political pawns to engender support for the Empire. The completion of the Nelson Column in Trafalgar Square would epitomize their accomplishments and would distract from the fact that the pensioners were not being provided with a substantive, material tribute to their service.

But British imperial greatness proved difficult to define for Nelson's veterans, whose physical and psychological wounds acquired during their service still governed their daily lives. As if to illustrate this fact all the more plainly, the pensioners' Trafalgar Square dinner never took place. The committee could not raise the necessary funds, and in any case, the opening of the column itself was continually delayed. An August 1844 report in the *Morning Post* summarized the trivial hurdles faced by the pensioners in almost comic fashion. "It was intended to have the dinner on the 21st of October [1843], being the anniversary of the battle of Trafalgar, which could not be accomplished, owing to the works not being completed," the paper explained.[153] The promised bas-reliefs had yet to be installed on the column's base, and prominent scaffolding remained an obstacle to the aesthetic congruity that ought to characterize an ostensibly celebratory occasion. Organizers then postponed the dinner to April 2, 1844, but

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[151] Edward Codrington, "The Dinner to the Greenwich Pensioners," *Morning Post*, August 2, 1844, 5, *British Library Newspapers*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/R3210006820/BNCN?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=09a099f7.

[152] "The Dinner to the Greenwich Pensioners."

[153] "The Dinner to the Greenwich Pensioners."

had ultimately failed to hold it on that date. "In consequence, it was postponed to the 2nd April [1844]," the *Post* continued, only to have Lord Lincoln (who oversaw construction) inform the dinner's organizers that "the asphalte was not fit to be trodden on" due to the lack of necessary funds.[154] Indeed, the Nelson Memorial Committee had increasing difficulty raising money the longer the column sat incomplete despite pronouncements about the kind of "reckless generosity" that would surely continue to characterize British donations. A skepticism about the ability of its overseers to secure construction and a lack of enthusiasm for the monument itself had proved fatal to Committee funds, which dried up in 1844.[155] Finally, the *Post* reports, "the 1st of August, being the anniversary of the battle of the Nile was fixed upon, […] but on the 12th of July the committee received a letter from Lord Lincoln interdicting the dinner in the square under any circumstances."[156] Social imperialism's attempt to bridge British imperial might with an uncertain domestic audience in the new Trafalgar Square had been killed by the column's continued lack of progress.

Not wishing to trot out the veterans before fences and scaffolds, on April 2, 1845, the committee conducted a replacement ceremony at Greenwich Hospital. They provided each man with a medal "bearing the bust of Nelson, surrounded by his immortal signal—'England expects every man will do his duty," along with a depiction of the (still incomplete) Nelson Column on its reverse side.[157] Nearly a year and a half after the pensioners' "humiliating" appearance, not only had social imperialists done nothing to address their economic plight, they had also proven unable to provide them the imperial ceremony they promised. That they provided the Greenwich

[154] "The Dinner to the Greenwich Pensioners."

[155] Mace, *Trafalgar Square*, 102.

[156] "The Dinner to the Greenwich Pensioners."

[157] "Express from Paris."

Pensioners with a literal token gesture *instead* of material assistance illustrates the obvious inanity of social imperialism, and the insecurity that defined Britons' relationship to their empire amid domestic strife. Despite Britain's social imperialists rendering the square an imperial space from the outset, the Greenwich Pensioners' appearance betrayed a sense of anxiety that underpinned the nation's experience during the Hungry Forties. Moreover, they exposed the British Empire as a destitute shell of a political entity masquerading as a comprehensible ideological vision. The Nelson Column still was not done.

Empire in Revolt: A Visit from the Emperor of Russia, 1844

The second incident of an empire in revolt that exposed deep-seated insecurities over the Empire's role and its corresponding vacuity involved an 1844 diplomatic visit by Russian Tsar Nicholas I. British newspapers initially hailed the arrival of the Russian Emperor as a sign of their country's unmatched imperial prowess. The *Aberdeen Journal*, for instance, claimed the Tsar's visit offered "splendid proof that the position of this country in relation to the other States and Sovereigns of Europe is raised to so high a pitch of greatness and dignity, that of the Powers of the world the strongest seek our friendship."[158] The British Empire, it noted, "fills too large a space in the world to subside into a mere auxiliary of France or of Russia."[159] For social imperialists, the Tsar's visit from the icy shores of St. Petersburg seemed to prove that the world marveled at its various domestic and international achievements, and looked to Britain alone for true progress. Moreover, the *Journal* anticipated that Tsar Nicholas would likely "contrast with astonishment the concentrated wealth and culture of this island, the focus, of the British Empire, with the more irregular grandeur of his own nobility."[160] In little England, the paper argued, "the

[158] "Visit of the Emperor of Russia.".

[159] "Visit of the Emperor of Russia."

[160] "Visit of the Emperor of Russia."

labour and civilization of centuries have established on every acre, and every stream, proofs of the dominion of industry over soil"—a reality Britons felt would not be lost on the leader of vast Russia, a mere unexplored backwater by comparison.[161] Critical to social imperialism, and the logic underpinning the British Empire itself, was the idea that England had achieved a material and commercial abundance matched by no other nation on Earth. The idea that foreign leaders from "lesser" nations would marvel accordingly when visiting the British mainland was a component part of that understanding.

During Nicholas I's trip through London, he passed through Trafalgar Square, observing the scaffolding around the Nelson Column in its incomplete state. "When, having been informed that a want of the necessary funds was the only obstacle to its completion," *The Era* reported, "the Emperor immediately directed [a British diplomat] to put down his name for a considerable sum."[162] A small cadre of Britons viewed this gesture as an act of "munificence" by the Tsar, a gift that signified mutual imperial respect.[163] These Britons, as *The Era* articulated, expected the Tsar would become "extremely popular with all those persons desirous to see the national testimonial to our greatest naval hero promptly and satisfactorily completed."[164] His donation demonstrated a personal belief in the importance of a monument to Britain's overseas accomplishments, and epitomized, in one sense, an offer of trust from one empire to another.

Most other Britons, especially those in the British government, were markedly less satisfied. In one parliamentary exchange initiated by Bridport's Alexander Baille Cochrane, an

[161] "Visit of the Emperor of Russia."

[162] "The Emperor of Russia," *The Era*, June 16, 1844, *British Library Newspapers*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/BA3202402968/BNCN?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=cf6832b1.

[163] "The Emperor of Russia."

[164] "The Emperor of Russia."

avowed Tory and proponent of the jointly imperial and paternalistic Young England movement, Cochrane argued the gesture "was extremely disgraceful to this country" because "a national monument ought to be paid for by the people alone, and not to be the result of foreign assistance."[165] Trafalgar Square Select Committee Chairman Henry Gally Knight concurred, lamenting that the incident seemed to confirm the existence of a "curse on the architecture of London. Vast sums were expended, and nothing satisfactory was produced."[166] Cochrane, for his part, complained that the column's height "had been reduced twenty feet in consequence of the falling-off of the funds" to the Nelson Memorial Committee, suggesting that the Tsar's exposure of the monument's inadequacy had compromised British dignity.[167] For social imperialists, the Russian Emperor's donation had completely undermined the prideful anticipation with which they had first framed his visit. Instead of marveling at the "concentrated wealth and prowess" of their nation's domestic success, the Tsar had beheld the incomplete Nelson Colum with what most Britons interpreted as pity, pity for a nation that had failed to live up to its *own* expectations of imperial greatness.

Even years later, Britons remained appalled that an autocrat whose domineering pronouncements and "uncivilized" culture seemed antithetical to British values had helped further realize their monument to Nelson—which still sat, maddeningly, incomplete. In 1846, for

[165] Charles H. Kegel, "Lord John Manners and the Young England Movement: Romanticism in Politics," *Western Political Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (1961): 691; Alexander Baille Cochrane, United Kingdom, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 76 (22 July 1844), Parliamentary Debates, Commons, https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1844-07-22/debates/df145eea-0a99-4884-b7c9-c509e58b6ea4/TheFineArts?highlight=%22trafalgar%20square%22#contribution-008df107-6f0a-46f6-a414-54a2c5007f99.

[166] Henry Gally Knight, UK, *Hansard* Vol. 76, Commons.

[167] Cochrane, UK, *Hansard* Vol. 76, Commons.

instance, MP William Rickford Collett lambasted the inaction of his countrymen, receiving approbation from other MPs and the Speaker of the Commons:

> Two or three years since a foreign despot—["Order!"] had been allowed to contribute a sum of £500 towards the completion of the Nelson Monument; he understood that this foreign despot—[Cries of "Order,"]—well, then, this foreign *hero*—had been allowed to contribute £500 towards what ought to be a national or public testimonial to the great Nelson. The question he wished to put to the noble Lord, was, whether, seeing the completion of this monument had been so long delayed, it was the intention of Her Majesty's Government to complete it?[168]

Though some British audiences hailed Nicholas' "munificence" as a token of respect from one empire to another, like Collett, those in Parliament felt humiliated. His donation could not have been more embarrassing to a Britain expecting to impress, and exemplified the paralyzing sense of national anxiety that governed the conception of Trafalgar Square. That social imperialists had *still* failed to complete the Nelson Column's accompaniments, let alone remove the scaffolding, rubbed psychological salt in the wound of an already materially suffering public. Outrage at the Russian Tsar's visit exposed the Empire's memorialization as something disconnected from, and in this case, antithetical to the civic freedom espoused on the British mainland.

[168] William Rickford Collett, United Kingdom, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 83 (23 January 1846), Parliamentary Debates, Commons, https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1846-01-23/debates/a7d110b6-0ea2-4989-8b07-2671b23affed/TheNelsonMonument?highlight=%22trafalgar%20square%22#contribution-fb4bc4aa-85b5-4c12-8ca7-1fb4866131eb.

Figure 5: The Nelson Column, Incomplete. William Henry Fox Talbot, British, 1800-1877, *Nelson's Column under Construction in Trafalgar Square, London*, April 1844, salted paper print, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, https://jstor.org/stable/community.15608703.

Empire in Revolt: Riots in Trafalgar Square, 1848

The final early nineteenth century instance of an empire in revolt that highlighted Trafalgar Square's emergence as an imperial monument born from uniquely British insecurities occurred in 1848. In response to a new income tax measure proposed by the Government, Charles Cochrane, a Scottish social reformer, helped arrange a protest of thousands of Londoners

on March 8, 1848 in the city's imperial center.[169] "At noon the large area of Trafalgar Square was filled with a mob" of some "15,000 persons," according to an article reprinted from *The Times*, the members of which belonged "almost entirely to the working classes."[170] After several speakers aired grievances against governmental injustice, hailed the Paris Commune, and bemoaned working-class unemployment as a threat to the rights of labor, the protest eventually spilled out of control, with rioters attacking the scaffolding around the Nelson monument.[171] Over the course of the afternoon, the crowd's violence intensified. According to the *Southampton Herald*, rioters soon began assaulting oncoming policemen "with dirt and stones, which they collected within the boarding round the Nelson Column," eventually arming themselves "with pieces of wood, snatched from the palisade [fence]" surrounding the column itself.[172] Though the disorder apparently fizzled out as more metropolitan police were brought in to restore order, the destabilizing impact of the riot on the British psyche was clear. Not only were there practical financial barriers continuing to delay the completion of a monument to Britain's supposedly "immortal" naval hero. It was individual Britons—using the column's scaffolding to arm themselves against their state—who were quite literally forestalling the monument's progress. Their actions flew in the face of the kind of national virtue social imperialists had hoped the Nelson Column would inspire.

The 1848 riots represented the very first time Britons would use Trafalgar Square as a place to voice their opposition to, rather than accordance with the national status quo, and

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[169] "The Open Air Meeting in Trafalgar Square," *Caledonian Mercury*, March 9, 1848, *British Library Newspapers*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/BB3205457229/BNCN?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=8bfc0f46.

[170] "The Open Air Meeting in Trafalgar Square."

[171] "The Open Air Meeting in Trafalgar Square."

[172] "The Metropolis," *Southampton Herald*, March 11, 1848, 7, *British Library Newspapers*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/R3208549333/BNCN?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=4459112f.

threatened to forever upend the social imperialist vision underlying its monuments for an increasingly frustrated public. In fact, the income tax riots imprinted Trafalgar Square as the primary location to protest the British Empire for the rest of its history, a rich history Rodney Mace details in *Emblem of Empire*.[173] 1887's Bloody Sunday, a failed protest against the Irish Coercion Acts, is one such example, as are later demonstrations organized by socialists, communists, and members of the left-wing Fabian Society during the 1890s.[174] A satirical column that identified this new role for Trafalgar Square early on succinctly illustrates the distance between its conception according to social imperialism and the far more precarious reality. "Not a night passes [in Trafalgar Square] that does not offer to her Majesty's more lawlessly disposed subjects undisturbed opportunities of rendering themselves obnoxious to what the Scotch lawyers describe as 'the four pleas of the Crown,'" the *Morning Post* mocked: "fire, murder, rape, and robbery."[175] The *Post* suggested "the necessity of raising gas lamps" in the square to counteract the impropriety of these subjects, some of which were later, ironically, destroyed by the rioters.[176]

As early as the Hungry Forties, Trafalgar Square had become, in an essential sense, the very antithesis of its social imperialist conception. Britons regularly availed themselves of the opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with their government beginning in 1848 in a manner

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[173] Mace, *Trafalgar Square*, 172.

[174] "'Killed by the Police!'" *South Australian Register*, January 13, 1888, 6, *Trove*, http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article46868187; Owen Holland, "From the Place Vendôme to Trafalgar Square: Imperialism and Counter-Hegemony in the 1880s Romance Revival," *Key Words: A Journal of Cultural Materialism* 14 (2016): 112, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26920413.

[175] "Trafalgar-Square," *Morning Post*, May 17, 1844, 5, *British Library Newspapers*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/R3210004568/BNCN?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=6a6a1771.

[176] "Trafalgar-Square," 5.

that exposed an empire in revolt, a reality that continues in the Trafalgar Square of today. The 1848 riots were yet another episode in a long saga of domestic dissatisfaction and national insecurity despite the successes of the overseas imperial project, and represented a remarkable instance of Britons using Trafalgar Square—a monument to the British Empire—to expose its incoherence. The Nelson Column, of course, remained incomplete.

Conclusion

For all the talk of imperial greatness, the example of Trafalgar Square illustrates the degree to which early social imperialism proved unable to distill British might for an anxious public. During the Hungry Forties, though the column itself and the statue atop it had been officially raised in 1843, the monument to Lord Nelson as we know it today remained unfinished. As early as 1840, Trafalgar Square Select Committee Chairman Henry Gally Knight had argued that "the Government did not appear to have informed themselves sufficiently as to the probability of the work being accomplished," predicting that "the whole work would possibly be spoilt by an erection which the Government had sanctioned" without appropriating sufficient funds.[177] The *Southampton Herald* synthesized British imperial anxieties in light of the monument's repeated obstacles in 1849:

> 'There is your English Napoleon!' said a foreigner to his companion—pointing as he spoke to the statue on the summit of the column in Trafalgar-square. Eminently judicious as the phrase was as indicating the pre-eminent glory of this one among all the other captains of England—its irony was exquisitely bitter as hinting the contrast of the homage paid by the two countries to the memory of their two heroes—by England to Nelson, by France to Napoleon. […] Even the monument erected to commemorate the wonderful career of Nelson in the metropolis of the wealthiest empire in the world is

[177] Henry Gally Knight, United Kingdom, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 55 (27 July 1840), Parliamentary Debates, Commons, https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1840-07-27/debates/eec7b0e6-9b61-44d2-bc4f-b8e6907a00f2/Supply%E2%80%94NelsonSMonument?highlight=%22trafalgar%20square%22#contribution-3dd5eaa9-54a4-4daf-9772-ffe261e6b4a3.

> allowed to remain month after month, year after year, incomplete—one of the disgraces of the capital, and a perpetual subject of ridicule to the Government.[178]

The inability of "the wealthiest empire in the world" to not just realize a monument to one of its foremost military heroes, but to encapsulate the essence of its achievements for the British public, epitomized the painful sense of anxiety underlying Britain's imperial project. Compared to how effectively the French commemorated their great imperialist, the *Herald* piece noted, Britons' imperial legacy seemed obscure and detached.

That anxiety endured, and was evident in a despondent letter from a Greenwich Pensioner published by the *Morning Post* in 1850: "what a pity the four lions are not to adorn the base [of the column]! Want of money, I am told, is the cause."[179] The Nelson Column remained incomplete. Three years later, George de Lacy Evans, the former British Army general and a long-serving MP, similarly contended that "it was not creditable to the patriotism of the country that [the Nelson Monument] should remain [incomplete]" more than *thirteen years* after its construction had begun.[180] Again, the monument's bronze reliefs were eventually installed in 1854, and its four accompanying lions in 1867. But, as the episodes involving the Greenwich Pensioners, the Tsar's visit, and the 1848 tax riots exposed, the imperial vision behind the creation of Trafalgar Square was compromised by destitution and disunity from the outset. Despite its unambiguous status as an "Emblem of Empire," the incidents exemplify the enduring disconnect between Britain's foreign imperial might and the status of its domestic citizenry, and

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[178] "The Daughter of the Hero of Trafalgar and Lady Ann Hamilton," *Southampton Herald*, September 22, 1849, 6, *British Library Newspapers*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/R3208788755/BNCN?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=090fe5c9.

[179] "The Nelson Monument," *Morning Post*, May 29, 1850, 3, *British Library Newspapers*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/R3211634150/BNCN?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=3b623fb2.

[180] George de Lacy Evans, "Nelson's Monument," *The Builder,* (1853): 344.

early social imperialism's amorphous solutions to an essential problem. They further highlight the fundamental insecurities over Britain's status as an imperial power and the way in which they precipitated the necessarily doomed creation, at least according to social imperialism's own metrics, of the square.

Trafalgar Square is an excellent case study in the inability of the British Empire's most passionate advocates to come up with a unified vision to support its existence. Britons riddled with anxieties stemming from the common themes explored in the first chapter—deficient imperial glory, London's peculiar inadequacy, a history of lackluster artistry, and the inability to bring Britain's economic might to bear—most ardently waged the monumental crusade. Significantly, this group included virtually everyone of elite status in mid-nineteenth century Britain, a situation that continued into the twentieth century. But while these crusaders agreed about both the importance of and opportunity presented by the erection of monuments to the Empire, no one agreed as to *how* they should do it. "That the British nation allowed upwards of a quarter of a century to elapse before ever any steps were taken to erect a national monument in commemoration of Waterloo, and the splendid victories of the Peninsula," *The Builder* had argued in 1842, was "a national reproach."[181] How right it was. Like the Mall project that succeeded it, Trafalgar Square's troubled creation exposes the spiritual emptiness of Britain's imperial project, and the inability of its advocates to satisfy that emptiness through the creation of inescapably temporal public monuments.

Their ill-fated attempts to do so stemmed from a kind of monolithic view of empire characteristic of an expansive world map, caked in British red, with "Little England" at its center. Realistically, however, there were far too many competing elements to and interpretations

[181] "Inauguration of the Monument Erected at Inspruck," 236.

of the British Empire to possibly produce a singular imperial vision, *especially* given the lack of tangible social reciprocity Britons could expect during the mid-nineteenth century. Trafalgar Square ultimately became something early social imperialists could not truly agree upon, and as a result, could not adequately fund. The common theme of social imperialism's nascent form is therefore disunity, not unity. Or rather, the advocates behind Trafalgar Square possessed a certain unity in identifying the importance of imperial monuments when confronted with the paralyzing dichotomies of the "Hungry Forties," but an inevitable disunity when it came to realizing them. This is because the British Empire was not, like Persia or Rome before it, an "empire" in any coherent sense. That reality made it difficult to construct monuments or produce the kind of extraordinary vision for London social imperialists had envisioned with each successive project—especially as Britons gained the political tools to undermine them.

Chapter Three: The Mall and the 1900s

This chapter will investigate the realization of the Mall project and the construction of the Victoria Memorial in the context of the 1900s. British elites' attempt to render London a stage for imperial display meant the transformation of what had essentially been a private park into an imposing boulevard fit for parades and coronations. For social imperialists, the Mall's immediate proximity to Trafalgar Square, their first monumental creation, made the site perfect for the ever-more elaborate pageantry that marked the British Empire's final years. Indeed, while a superficial examination of Britain's achievements might suggest the early 20th century was the height of its imperial prowess—the Empire did, after all, reach its territorial peak in 1920—in reality, its global dominance was already coming to an end. Britons had, of course, enjoyed decades of domestic prosperity under Queen Victoria, who further consolidated her nation's hold on India and elsewhere. But the onset of the disastrous Second Boer War in 1899 and the Queen's untimely death in 1901 spelled trouble for the fate of the Empire. In the face of domestic uncertainty strikingly similar to that of the 1840s, social imperialists hoped to assuage fears of an empire in decline and defend the prevailing social order through the Mall project. And like Trafalgar Square, that project fell victim to incoherence—not among social imperialism, but because of a hotly contested understanding of the Empire's role among ordinary Britons. That contestation promptly jeopardized its imperial goals.

A brief visual history of the Mall project from its inception in 1901 to its completion in 1924 illustrates the new challenges faced by social imperialism in an altered socio-political landscape. Like Trafalgar Square, the Mall project evolved into a disparate collection of monumental priorities and was constructed over the course of nearly two-and-a-half decades. The prospect of expanding the Mall into a processional boulevard had been discussed as early as

the 1860s, but tellingly, it was Victoria's death that spurred Britons into action.[182] Her son and successor, King Edward VII, immediately convened a Victoria Memorial Committee to organize a monumental project worthy of his mother's exalted stature. As historian Tori Smith notes, the nascent committee explicitly ignored requests from the public to establish "a philanthropic fund or institution" to commemorate the late Queen because monuments, in its view, were "'the only things that last.'"[183] That rhetoric typifies *Pax Britannica* social imperialism, whose proponents tasked monuments with the enormous cultural challenge of rendering the Empire tangible for domestic audiences, and which scholars like F. H. A. Aalen and Bernard Porter argue crystallized at the end of Victoria's sovereignty.[184] Social insurance, workman's compensation, land reform, and the franchise had all appeared to varying degrees around the turn of the century, which went hand-in-hand with a corresponding emphasis on militarism and expansion.[185] Social imperialism came into its own in the early 20th century not just because more Britons knew about and appreciated their empire, but because of the material support its advocates supplied to maintain the social order. That reciprocity only appeared *because* Britons now had the vote, however, which also empowered them to assert their own ideas of what their social order—and their empire—would look like.

Unlike previous scholars, I believe social imperialism played a role in Trafalgar Square's Victorian Era creation as well. After all, Britons had since the square's creation so strongly associated Victoria's reign "with stability, progress, and imperial growth," as Smith describes,

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[182] Davenport Bromley, United Kingdom, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 185 (22 February 1867), Parliamentary Debates, Commons, https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1867-02-22/debates/.

[183] Smith, "'A Grand Work of Noble Conception,'" 22.

[184] Aalen, "Lord Meath, 132; Porter, "Peril and Propaganda," 173.

[185] Porter, "Peril and Propaganda," 190.

that her 1901 death seemed to threaten all three.[186] The committee hoped to address these fears. It selected the Mall as the best site for the memorial and arranged a competition between five RIBA designers, each of whom submitted independent proposals.[187] Sir Aston Webb, RIBA's President and founder of the architectural advocacy group known as the London Society, was ultimately given the responsibility of helming the Mall project. Webb's design included renovating the façade of Buckingham Palace, tearing up trees to widen the Mall roadway, and opening up a plaza-like entrance to the Mall from Trafalgar Square, which had been separated by a series of buildings housing the Admiralty.[188] The committee also proposed a statuary section of the Mall with groups of bronze representatives from India, Africa, Canada, and Australia, a nod to the project's imperial ambitions.[189] Webb then added a triumphal archway to the Charing Cross-end of the scheme to formalize the Mall's entryway in 1903, styling it an "Imperial Peace Memorial" dedicated to veterans of the Boer Wars.[190] Just as their predecessors had in Trafalgar Square, however, the committee made two fatal mistakes.

For starters, it appointed architect Thomas Brock to design the Victoria Memorial *independent* from the rest of the project, falling victim to the same problem of competing imperial visions experienced by Charles Barry and Thomas Railton. Moreover, the committee overestimated Britons' willingness to pay to honor their chosen subject's imperial significance—

[186] Smith, "'A Grand Work of Noble Conception,'" 22.

[187] "The Queen Victoria Memorial Competition," *British Architect, 1874-1919* (Nov 01, 1901): 306, https://go.openathens.net/redirector/bc.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/queen-victoria-memorial-competition/docview/7169000/se-2.

[188] Bremner, "'Imperial Peace Memorial,'" 62.

[189] Smith, "'A Grand Work of Noble Conception,'" 27.

[190] Bremner, "'Imperial Peace Memorial,'" 63.

Queen Victoria—by choosing to raise money from public (and colonial) subscription.[191] Despite the creation of new governing bodies designed to prevent the kinds of snares that had snagged Trafalgar Square, like the Metropolitan Board of Works in 1855 and the London County Council in 1889, short-sighted decisions and the discordant ideology they stemmed from imperiled the Mall's progress from the beginning.[192] Predictably, faced with limited funds, Webb abandoned the idea of erecting the Imperial Peace Memorial in 1905 and chose to incorporate an archway into the existing buildings rather than tearing them down.[193] Construction began in 1905, and Britons celebrated both the Victoria Memorial and its accompanying Admiralty Arch's "completion" in 1911 at the coronation of King George V.[194] However, virtually all of the explicitly imperial aspects of the project's initial design were *never* completed—including the proposed statuary to the Empire—and neither the actual widening of the Mall nor the final touches of the Victoria Memorial itself were fully finished until 1924.[195] Thanks to the muddled vision of its advocates, the strictly imperial success of the Mall project suffered almost identical obstacles to that of Trafalgar Square. Those obstacles underscore the Empire's increasing unintelligibility at the end of Britain's imperial century, even among its most strident proponents.

An Empire Reaches its Zenith, and Goes Missing

The gradual abandonment of the Mall project's imperial elements failed to reflect British public discourse's outsized focus on the Empire, which had reached its territorial and cultural peak in the early twentieth century. Instead, it struck at the heart of something missing to the

[191] Smith, "'A Grand Work of Noble Conception,'" 34.

[192] Aston Webb, "The London Society's Map, with Its Proposals for the Improvement of London," *The Geographical Journal* 51, no. 5 (1918): 276, https://doi.org/10.2307/1780069.

[193] Bremner, "'Imperial Peace Memorial,'" 66.

[194] Bremner, "'Imperial Peace Memorial,'" 66.

[195] Smith, "'A Grand Work of Noble Conception,'" 34.

imperial project that anti-colonial movements would eventually expose. Britain had waged a bloody campaign against guerilla Afrikaner forces of the Boer Republics in South Africa between 1899 and 1902, using concentration camps and scorched-earth tactics to eventually annex their territories at the conclusion of the Second Boer War.[196] As Bremner notes, that conflict was Britain's first "truly imperial affair"—tens of thousands of colonial troops from India, Australia, and elsewhere had fought for the Empire.[197] But Britain had also cemented its hold on Sudan, the Gold Coast (Nigeria), and East Africa during the "Scramble for Africa" of the 1890s, and had arrested control of Egypt from both France and the Ottomans in earlier years.[198] The exploits of prominent imperialists like Cecil Rhodes dominated headlines, and Queen Victoria's 1897 Diamond Jubilee even featured a colonial procession the *Daily Mail* dubbed "a mighty object-lesson in Empire."[199] One could argue that by certain metrics, the United Kingdom reached its imperial zenith at the dawn of a new century.

At home, however, social imperialists faced the renewed task of rendering that illusory imperial "success" tangible for domestic audiences. While the health, maintenance, and expansion of the British Empire had become a prominent component of public discourse, the intensification of its success came at great financial—and moral—cost. Its use of concentration camps to quell Afrikaner unrest is an obvious, if extreme, example that flew in the face of the Empire's Christianizing mission. It was quite easy for Aston Webb to propose a toast to "The

[196] Bremner, "'Imperial Peace Memorial,'" 63.

[197] Bremner, "'Imperial Peace Memorial,'" 63.

[198] Bruce Vandervort, *Wars of Imperial Conquest in Africa, 1830-1914* (London: University College London Press, 1998): 183.

[199] "Colonial Procession," *Daily Mail*, June 16, 1897, 3, *Daily Mail Historical Archive*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/EE1863541241/DMHA?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-DMHA&xid=fcadf64a.

Colonies," as he did at the 1902 RIBA dinner celebrating his election as President and his design for the Victoria Memorial, but much more difficult to actualize the sentiment it entailed.[200] Even the late Queen's all too self-consciously imperial Jubilee failed to deliver a distillation of British imperial greatness for many observers. "There is always a hope that it is only the Queen's English, and not the Imperial Idea, which is being murdered in the official programme," the *Mail* complained, suggesting the "colonials" had paraded through London's streets far too early to link the Empire's presence with Victoria herself.[201] The disconnect at the heart of the paper's Jubilee criticism reveals an ideological incoherence festering under the surface of British imperial spectacle that presages the fate of the Mall project. Most Britons understood the monarch, the personification of the nation itself—and the Empire, Britain's collection of overseas territories—as distinct socio-political entities. That division threatened to undermine Britain's imperial hegemony, even at the height of its power. As this chapter will go on to explain, many Britons struggled to see the importance of monumentalizing the distant Empire in a locale *already* distant to most of the nation: London. And unlike during the Hungry Forties, they now had the political means to express it. Despite all its supposed glory, the Empire was *missing* from Britain.

Six decades after beginning construction of the Nelson Column, both the British Empire and social imperialism were in a very different place. On the one hand, the Empire's inflated cultural presence and the introduction of mechanisms of social reciprocity meant social imperialism was more coherent. On the other, the meaning of that empire had become hotly contested. Was Britain truly the civilizing force it impersonated given the violent expansion of its empire? For the social imperialist successors of Trafalgar Square—including Mall designers

[200] Bremner, "'Imperial Peace Memorial,'" 65.

[201] "Colonial Procession," 3.

Aston Webb and Thomas Brock, *British Architect* commentators Thomas Raffles Davison and Wilmot Corfield, and even Kings Edward VII and George V—monuments were still the answer to imperial anxieties. What was missing was not an idea about empire itself, they believed, but an appropriate *stage* on which to project the "Imperial Idea." The Mall project was social imperialism's solution, a way to not just geographically, but conceptually unite the early nineteenth century maritime victories of Trafalgar Square with the territorial triumphs of the late nineteenth century. It was London's second and final great imperial project, designed to do the enormous cultural work of inspiring loyalty to the Empire and the social order it supported.[202]

And yet, as Smith suggests, "it is hard to define what contemporaries meant when they described London as 'imperial,'" a descriptor social imperialists routinely levied during the Victoria Memorial's construction.[203] Of course, Britain had already given way to some degree of social reform such that a figure like Nelson—whose focus on duty, honor, and personal responsibility in service to the Empire that social imperialists believed was so compelling during the Hungry Forties—was no longer politically viable. And even though they conceived of Queen Victoria as enough of an omnipresent cultural figure to convey the Empire's benevolence, their lack of clarity illustrates the degree to which they attempted to compensate for lasting imperial insecurities with yet another monumental project. It further underscores how the British Empire's growing ideological incoherence condemned that project's success from the outset.

[202] Gilbert and Driver, "Capital and Empire," 28.

[203] Smith, "'A Grand Work of Noble Conception,'" 25.

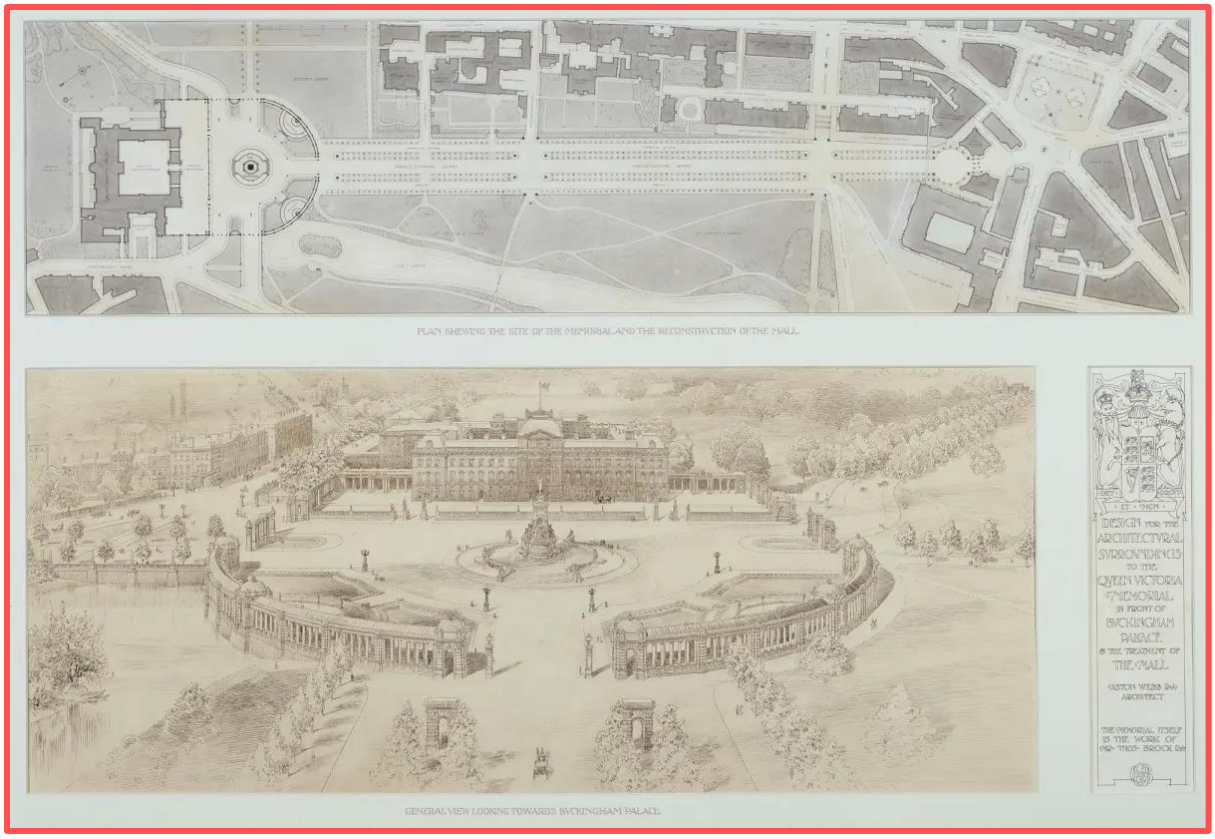

Figure 6: Aston Webb's Plan for the Mall. Sir Aston Webb PRA, *Design for Queen Victoria Memorial, the Mall, Westminster, London*, November 1903, plan, Royal Academy, https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/work-of-art/design-for-queen-victoria-memorial-the-mall-westminster-london-plan-and.

Social Imperialism in the Mall

Social imperialists elevated Victoria during the Mall project because of her overwhelming domestic popularity. Contemporary poems, songs, and literature often portrayed Victoria as humble, kindly and maternal, and were dotted with more mundane descriptions of the Queen "comforting her subjects or enjoying domestic pleasures."[204] Because of her caring reputation, she served as the standard-bearer for the kind of compassionate British Empire elites hoped to emphasize at the turn of the century. Indeed, her unique status as the "Queen Mother"—the caretaker of the British nation—played into social imperialist hands. "For late

[204] Smith, "'A Grand Work of Noble Conception,'" 28.

Victorians and Edwardians, ideas about motherhood were central to ideas about imperial strength," Smith argues, to the point where elite Britons often conceived of the Empire itself as a vast global "family."[205] Similar to Nelsons' reputation, Victoria's popular image epitomized her time's understanding of Britain's imperial prowess. Whereas Nelson's "dauntless" image atop his column had very much emphasized all England's duty to the imperial cause in a martial sense, Victoria's would emphasize the filial duty of all imperial subjects to its maternal empress. In its first mention of the Victoria Memorial, for instance, the *Daily Mail* noted that the monument "shall be in the widest sense a national one," such that appropriating government funds at taxpayers' expense would prove unnecessary.[206] This was, of course, a decision that created the same exact problem faced by Nelson's Column decades earlier: the Victoria Memorial Committee ran out of money in 1911.

Once again, social imperialists had adopted an oversized sense of Victoria's, and by extension, the Empire's, importance in the minds of average Britons—or at the very least, their willingness to pay for its monumentalization. Critics charged these decisions compromised the "character" of their monument from its inception.[207] According to a *Mail* report, designers predicted the entire Mall project would cost around £250,000—the equivalent of about £9,000,000 today—and yet assumed that "small subscriptions from every class of the community" would ultimately suffice.[208] It would further, the *Mail* expected, "be national in the

[205] Smith, 'A Grand Work of Noble Conception,'" 24.

[206] "Queen Victoria's Memorial," *Daily Mail*, March 20, 1901, 5, *Daily Mail Historical Archive*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/EE1865997902/DMHA?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-DMHA&xid=e0fa7abb.

[207] "Queen Victoria's Memorial," 5.

[208] "Victoria Memorial," *Daily Mail*, April 5, 1901, 5, *Daily Mail Historical Archive*, https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?p=DMHA&u=mlin_m_bostcoll&id=GALE|EE1865999722&v=2.1&it=r&sid=bookmark-DMHA&asid=211d38ec.

fullest acceptance of the term," financially and otherwise, precisely because of Victoria's maternal reputation.[209] Social imperialists believed the Queen's capable stewardship as national mother had precipitated decades of British imperial hegemony. As such, her death was sure to galvanize an outpouring of support from across the Empire for an accordingly resplendent imperial memorial. In reality, however, Queen Victoria's romanticized imperial significance was known primarily among social imperialists themselves.

In 1901, the *Daily Mail* explained, architect Thomas Brock had included "attendant statues of Maternity, Truth, and Justice" in his design for the Victoria Memorial, along with "an appropriate figure of winged Victory crowning the summit" bestride the late Queen.[210] Those representations, celebrating the maternal steward of a civilizing British Empire, were the qualities social imperialists wanted to accentuate in Victoria's monument. Like Nelson before her, the imperial *ideal* of the Queen drove her monumentalization. That ideal emphasized Victoria's maternal political reputation ("Maternity"), loyalty to the memory of her late husband Prince Albert ("Truth"), and wholehearted endorsement of British expansionism ("Justice" and "Victory"). The various qualities of Victoria's character her imperialist advocates hoped to elucidate for the public-at-large were eventually represented in the Victoria Memorial with its accompanying statues.

Of course, Aston Webb's design for the rest of the Mall project had also included what the *Mail* described as "other figures emblematical of the march of Empire" to complement the

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[209] "Victoria Memorial," 5.

[210] "The Victoria Memorial," *Daily Mail*, October 18, 1901, 3, *Daily Mail Historical Archive*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/EE1866333031/DMHA?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-DMHA&xid=aa8f0a1d.

Indian Empress herself.[211] But Victoria, as they saw it, was the focal point. She had successfully *led* Britain's global "imperial march" over the course of her reign. As such, the *Mail* claimed a "splendid suggestiveness" accompanied the "calm, wise presence of Victoria the Great and Good" at her memorial's initial 1911 unveiling.[212] What was being suggested? In the same way that a physical representation of Nelson's "dauntless soul" could animate every Englishman's personal sense of duty to the Empire, Briton's elite believed the Victoria Memorial could instill a national feeling of inexorability behind the British Empire's advance toward global hegemony.

However, there were a great many difficulties in settling on a plan for memorializing Empress Victoria. First, the Queen herself was a hodgepodge of mixed messages. She was a queen who did not believe women should wield political power, a mother of nine who put the royal stamp on "separate sphere" domesticity while overseeing the expansion of the largest empire in human history, a widow who entertained the sexual advances of servants and political leaders, and an elderly woman whose ailing figure came into conflict with traditional femininity. She made her opposition to women's rights (but not her right to rule) clear in 1852, admitting that "I am every day more convinced that we women, we are to be good women, feminine and amiable and domestic, areas not fitted to reign."[213] How could maternal rule benefit the Empire if the maternal ruler, despite carving out a personal exemption, disagreed? The imperial ostentation of her "Great and Good" image proved similarly suspect given that Victoria despised pomp and

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[211] "Victoria Memorial Designs," *Daily Mail*, October 31, 1901, 3, *Daily Mail Historical Archive*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/EE1866334248/DMHA?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-DMHA&xid=847a2da6.

[212] "The Unveiling," *Daily Mail*, May 17, 1911, 7, *Daily Mail Historical Archive*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/EE1866480742/DMHA?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-DMHA&xid=b451040d.

[213] Queen Victoria, Munich, "Queen Victoria, Empire, and Excess," 267.

circumstance and regularly refused to wear a crown.[214] Likewise, though the widowed Queen had mourned her husband Prince Albert, who died in 1861, until her death, she often welcomed flirtatious advances from both government officials and male servants, including Abdul Karim, an Indian subject.[215] And her ailing physical figure, which historian Adrienne Munich argues became "a distortion of maternal form" toward the end of her life, came into conflict with traditional conceptions of femininity.[216] This "dilemma of representability," as Munich puts it, made the eventual work of trying to produce a coherent imperial vision through Victoria extremely difficult.[217]

Second, the "march of empire" social imperialists wanted to celebrate was, by the late nineteenth century, both amorphous and politically contested. "It might well be considered hopeless to satisfy any particular scheme," the *British Architect* lamented of proposals for the Mall in 1901, decrying the conflict that threatened to derail the project's symbolism.[218] Imperial disunity would only intensify in the coming years, however, as the Empire's violent actions overseas and its attempt to extract funds from ambivalent domestic audiences incited political opposition to London's monumentalization. Given these complexities and the difficulty of making static objects do so much cultural work, social imperialists struggled to distill the Queen's imperial reputation in the Victoria Memorial. As during the 1840s, it duplicated their struggle to produce a coherent vision of the British Empire itself.

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[214] Smith, "'A Grand Work of Noble Conception,'" 31; Adrienne Auslander Munich, "Queen Victoria, Empire, and Excess," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 6, no. 2 (Fall 1987): 266, https://www.jstor.org/stable/464272.

[215] Munich, "Queen Victoria, Empire, and Excess," 267.

[216] Munich, "Queen Victoria, Empire, and Excess," 270.

[217] Munich, "Queen Victoria, Empire, and Excess," 266.

[218] "The Queen Victoria Memorial Competition."

Third, memorialists not only wanted the Mall—a fixed, three-dimensional space—to represent the reign of a contradictory empress and her contested empire, they also wanted it to be part of a larger constellation of monuments that would represent the far reaches of that empire in its totality. As articulated by the *Architect*, they felt London's status as an imperial stage meant its monuments were a "national affair" on a "higher plane" than those of a "merely provincial city."[219] Aston Webb, for his part, asserted the Mall would be "a fit setting for the statuary" of various imperial figures in the four aforementioned groups, representing India, Africa, Canada, and Australia, respectively.[220] He and other social imperialists envisioned the Mall as the perfect staging ground for those Britons of each colony whose contributions to the Empire deserved lasting recognition. *Architect* columnist Wilmot Corfield synthesized their view when he claimed statues were "sermons in bronze" that would inspire Britons "to earnest effort in high endeavor."[221] Social imperialism relied on inspiration from imperial figures for imperial unity.

The way social imperialists talked about Lord Clive, who established British East India Company control in Bengal, illustrates how the Mall's statues would produce these sermons.[222] For Corfield in particular, Clive represented both "England and Anglo-India;" he claimed

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[219] "London," *British Architect, 1874-1919* (Aug 30, 1907): 143, https://go.openathens.net/redirector/bc.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/london/docview/7255324/se-2.

[220] "Victoria Memorial," *Daily Mail*, July 27, 1901, 5, *Daily Mail Historical Archive*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/EE1866400942/DMHA?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-DMHA&xid=65eb69b6; Smith, "'A Grand Work of Noble Conception,'" 27.

[221] Wilmot Corfield, "The Call of the Statues," *British Architect, 1874-1919* (1917): 49, https://go.openathens.net/redirector/bc.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/call-statues/docview/7277887/se-2.

[222] William Dalrymple, "Robert Clive was a visions asset-stripper. His statue has no place on Whitehall," *The Guardian*, June 11, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/11/robert-clive-statue-whitehall-british-imperial.

"Empire is in his glance."[223] Corfield's assertion that Clive's mere visage could inspire fellow countrymen to imperial heroism bears striking resemblance to the talk of Lord Nelson's stirring "gaze" above Trafalgar Square decades earlier. Others Corfield recommended for the Mall's statuary, which was "above all else suitable for statues of English men of action," were Lord Napier, Lord Clyde, Gordon, White, Wolseley, Burgoyne, Franklin, Lawrence, Cook, and Drake.[224] Both Aston Webb and the Victoria Memorial Committee considered most of these figures for inclusion in the statuary over the course of the 1900s, and some of these men now have statues around London. But by 1917—more than 16 years after the project began and in the throes of World War I—the imperial statuary remained conspicuously absent from the Mall. "Empire in England's keeping means strength, peace, progress, and dominion for the sons of men who quit themselves as men," Corfield had written in 1913.[225] If this compelling vision of empire had been as important to ordinary Britons as social imperialists believed, why did Corfield's allies so spectacularly failed to deliver? The answer is that the Mall project suffered from the same delusions and lack of ideological coherence on display during Trafalgar Square's construction some sixty years prior. Not only were social imperialists forced to whitewash the reputation of the monument's principal figure, Queen Victoria. The much-touted statuary's absence from the final project underscores the reality that the Mall's designers could not agree on a coherent vision for the British Empire, let alone one that could be represented in static monuments.

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[223] Corfield, "The Call of the Statues," 50.

[224] Wilmot Corfield, "Ten Statues for the Mall," *British Architect, 1874-1919* (Jul 25, 1913): 58, https://go.openathens.net/redirector/bc.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/ten-statues-mall/docview/7301626/se-2.

[225] Corfield, "The Call of the Statues," 50.

Fourth, despite the difficulties of how to represent a highly contested, amorphous entity with a statue of a contradictory figure, social imperialists agreed on one thing: that significant funding should come from imperial subjects. As Smith explains, the project's organizers "pressed colonies to donate by announcing that the colony which did not contribute would not be represented" in the Mall.[226] While colonial governments eventually contributed some £130,000—representing a third of the project's expected cost—that kind of compulsory donation did not exactly exhibit the kind of imperial unity the Mall was supposed to embody.[227] Even among territories considered "domestic" to the United Kingdom, many Britons were dissatisfied with new 1904 appropriations. MP James O'Mara of Kilkenny, who later became an Irish nationalist, claimed to speak for his fellow Irishmen who "had not been consulted in the matter at all" and would "never receive any benefit from the improvement" when he opposed the diversion of more than £18,000 from the Royal Parks and Gardens fund to the Mall project.[228] In Trafalgar Square's footsteps, the Empire was asked to pay for a second project in the metropole.

The final testament to the contested nature of the Empire the committee set out to memorialize is the fact that the finished Mall contained very little representation of empire at all. Officials could not come up with funds to construct the proposed statuary, and the only visible homage to the colonies was on a series of shields atop gateposts surrounding the Victoria Memorial.[229] India—which loomed large as the "jewel" of the imperial imagination and was so central to Victoria's own "Empress" status—was not represented at all. Lord Curzon, Viceroy of

[226] Smith, "'A Grand Work of Noble Conception,'" 34.

[227] Smith, "'A Grand Work of Noble Conception,'" 34.

[228] James O'Mara, United Kingdom, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 130 (24 February 1904), Parliamentary Debates, Commons, https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1904-02-24/debates/0a612596-33ec-482d-8ef0-89eeebc0154a/ClassI?highlight=%22the%20mall%22#contribution-eebcdf8d-df78-4ee8-bc6d-5d551845c20d.

[229] Smith, "'A Grand Work of Noble Conception,'" 34.

India, chose not to contribute Indian funds to focus on his *own* monumental project in Calcutta.[230] First Commissioner of Works Viscount William Harcourt had confidently predicted the Victoria Memorial would be finished "early in 1909" after additional appropriations in 1907, but even that did not open officially until 1911.[231] Brock continued to make additions to the space, of course, for an additional thirteen years. Yet again, Britons seemed unable to complete a monumental project as all-encompassing as their own conception of the British Empire was. The *Architect*'s editor and illustrator of Webb's plan for the Mall project, Thomas Raffles Davison, perhaps expressed that frustration best in reflecting upon its delayed progress in a regretful 1912 column:

> We do anything and everything *except* intelligently guide and govern this great city of London into a gradual transformation from inconsequence and ugliness to well-ordered plans and beautification worthy of an imperial city. Is there no chance for the Englishman to rise above his muddling methods, which have been so characteristic of him in the past?[232]

When the Mall was finally completed in 1924, those "muddling methods" meant the explicitly imperial elements of Webb's plan that were abandoned. Ultimately, the Mall's imperial fate suffered due to incoherence at each level of representation. A prime illustration of how incoherence across those levels sabotaged social imperialism in the Mall, and its role as a cultural force, was King George V's 1911 coronation. It is an important example of social imperialists unsuccessfully attempting to use monuments as a tool to reflect the glory of the

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[230] Krishna Dutta, *Calcutta: A Cultural and Literary History* (Northampton: Interlink Publishing, 2003), 131.

[231] Viscount William Harcourt, United Kingdom, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 176 (17 June 1907), Parliamentary Debates, Commons, https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1907-06-17/debates/8afc1072-e3fa-46c4-ab30-5bd2610345c3/MallImprovement?highlight=%22trafalgar%20square%22#contribution-270b34c9-ad53-45d6-91dc-bbfe62f156f7.

[232] Thomas Raffles Davison, Alfred East, "The Future of London," *British Architect, 1874-1919* (Jan 26, 1912): 71-72, https://go.openathens.net/redirector/bc.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/future-london/docview/7211397/se-2.

British Empire at home. In so doing, they hoped to raise the civilization of ordinary Britons while reinforcing their adherence to the social order. However, social imperialism charged physical monuments with doing far more cultural work than was possible.

The coronation of King George V is a manifestation of the imperial unity monuments were *supposed* (but failed) to inspire. In 1911, Kaiser Wilhelm II, German Emperor and another grandson of Queen Victoria, attended his cousin George's coronation. The Mall was selected to celebrate the ascension of Britain's new monarch as a nod to the scheme's progress and the United Kingdom's corresponding imperial might. Even though scaffolding remained around the Victoria Memorial itself, by early 1911, enough of it had been removed so that its visual impact could be appreciated.[233] On the surface, the Victoria Memorial seemed to have accomplished its goal of fostering imperial unity. British officials prepared for the coronation in the succeeding months, which consisted of a royal procession across London and down the Mall that would end at the newly refurbished Buckingham Palace. And they decided that George V would officially dedicate the memorial to his and Wilhelm's grandmother upon receiving the crown as a show of friendship between Britain and Germany.

At the same time, Britons exposed Thomas Brock, the Victoria Memorial's sculptor, to the same anxiety-ridden incriminations to which Trafalgar Square's various architects had been subjected in an earlier era. The *Mail* claimed the new Victoria Memorial had "neither the statuesque weight and dignity of truly monumental art nor the exuberant life and movement" which "alone" could "atone for the absence of the other qualities."[234] Indeed, the absence of any other aspects of the Mall expansion's completion up to that point made celebrating the *partial*

[233] "The Unveiling," 7.

[234] "The Unveiling," 7.

completion of this one a rather difficult task for even the overall project's most ardent defenders. Delivering his remarks, King George V admired the Victoria Memorial's remembrance to…

> …that happy age of British history, when a woman's hand held for a period which almost equalled the allotted span of human life the sceptre of the Empire, and when the simple virtues of a Queen comforted the hearts of nations. […] It is a source of deep satisfaction to me and to my family that my dear cousin the German Emperor, accompanied by the Empress, is present at this historic ceremony. […] Strong and living ties of kinship and friendship unite our thrones and persons.[235]

On the one hand, George's remarks whitewashed Victoria's personal complexities and ignored her abhorrence of imperial exhibitionism. But it was the King's strange elevation of Kaiser Wilhelm's bonds of "kinship and friendship" with Britain that speak to the memorial's foundational incoherence. Could the Victoria Memorial itself—and the *idea* of Victoria by extension—really unite the geopolitical agendas of two competing empires on the world stage?

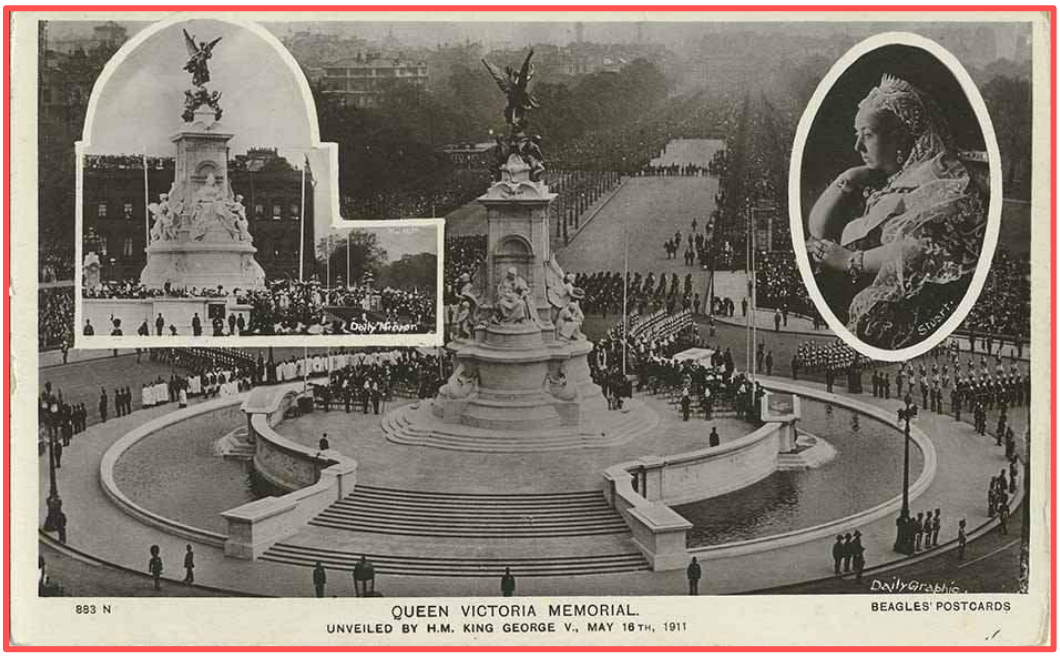

Figure 7: The Victoria Memorial and the Coronation. Thomas Brock, *Queen Victoria Memorial, Unveiled by H.M. King George V*, May 16, 1911, postcard, Yale Center for British Art, https://interactive.britishart.yale.edu/victoria-monuments/224/national-victoria-memorial.

[235] "The Unveiling," 7.

The First World War proved disastrous for the Mall project, which was immediately forestalled due to wartime priorities. The war seemed to confirm that the Mall's all-important "sermons in bronze" would have to wait. But even on the eve of war with Germany, its social imperialist utility was sorely lacking. The *Daily Mail*'s description of a 1914 British military parade conducted in the Mall and attended by thousands of Londoners, for instance, exposed social imperialism's continual inability to produce a unified monumental vision. "And the crowd?" the *Mail* questioned…

> …the loyal British subjects to whom the flag should be the symbol of the *Pax Britannica*, the state of peaceful prosperity ruling from London to Rangoon, in which the British subject may safely pursue his commercial pursuits—what do they do, these sons of England, Englishmen as much as the red-clad soldiers who may such ostentatious honour to the colours? They press forward and they stare and they point. But do they salute the flag? […] No. A crowd whose utter indifference to the colours and their glorious past and all they mean to the Army and to England offends one like a blow in the face. […] Rain or fine, it is a spectacle which for impressiveness and picturesqueness is not surpassed in any other European capital. But the co-operation of the public in thought as in deed is required to bring out the full solemnity of the ceremonial.[236]

Ordinary Britons, the *Mail* felt, could not care less for the century-long "peace" brought on by the Empire itself, from London to Rangoon—much less imperial display. If they could not even bring themselves to salute the flag on this representational imperial stage, and to recognize the importance of the Empire in "thought," how could they possibly be expected to do so in "deed"—to *live* "imperially"? Insofar as Britain's social imperialists were able to construct "picturesque" stages for imperial display the likes of which could not even be found in "any other European capital," the public's adherence to and cooperation with their imperial vision were clearly *far* from certain. As the tax riots of a prior century in another imperial monument

[236] Valentine G. Williams, "The Soldiers in the Mall," *Daily Mail*, March 13, 1914, 6, *Daily Mail Historical Archive*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/EE1862642780/DMHA?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-DMHA&xid=0630e45d.

exposed, the vision behind monuments to its empire could not overcome Britain's indifference or hostility to the actions of the British Empire itself. An important difference in this century, however, was the British public's ability to affect the completion of those monuments politically, which I will discuss in this chapter's final section.

The Great War exposed the King's aggrandizing words at his 1911 coronation, his supposed "friendship" with the German Kaiser, and Britain and Germany's common heritage he claimed the Victoria Memorial would immortalize as utterly hollow. So too was the monumental vision his speech entailed, but many disconcerted social imperialists looked for answers. The *British Architect*'s Wilmot Corfield adopted an apocryphal approach following the outbreak of the war, comparing British leaders who questioned the efficacy of the Mall project to those who during the 1840s "bitterly strove to prevent the making of Trafalgar Square."[237] These "enemies of London," he argued, "have their descendants to-day," claiming that "war is a cross sent for our upraising."[238] It is hardly a wonder that such a myopic view of imperial monuments failed to catch on amongst the British public. But Corfield's complaints underscore the degree to which the cultural work monuments were intended to do devolved after the onset of such an apocalyptic conflict, one that completely undermined the Empire's relevance to Britain's domestic security.

To monumental social imperialists like Corfield, the Great War and the sacrifices it required were an opportunity. The *British Architect* published a 1918 editorial calling for the construction of an "Imperial War Memorial" dedicated to British heroism given the enormous

[237] Wilmot Corfield, "The Mid-War Halt of the London Society," *British Architect, 1874-1919* (Dec 11, 1914): 323, https://go.openathens.net/redirector/bc.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/mid-war-halt-london-society/docview/7236172/se-2.

[238] Corfield, "The Mid-War Halt of the London Society," 324.

losses the United Kingdom sustained during the conflict.[239] And Corfield himself wrote that if Britain's "war of all wars" finally "brings closely home, as it will, to the heart and conscience of London the claims of India as a sister Empire to the personal affection of us all," then "a further welding of the bonds between justice-loving peoples will have been affected to the glory of God and the welfare of humanity."[240] If anything, the bloodshed of subsequent years systematically disproved the imperial unity the designers of the Victoria Memorial hoped to project on the world stage, affecting ruin across Europe and triggering Britain's 1920s turn to isolationism. The disparity between the monumental imperial vision for the Victoria Memorial outlined in King George V's coronation speech and Britain's actual geopolitical reality bears striking resemblance to the psychological discord sown by the Greenwich Pensioners' appearance in Trafalgar Square decades earlier. Kaiser Wilhelm's attendance, followed by a war between two empires whose "kinship" had been touted beside an imperial monument erected not three years prior, yet again exposed the Empire as utterly disconnected to Britain itself. Monuments simply could not foster the kind of cultural unity between empires imperialists had hoped, let alone within their own.

The remainder of this chapter will examine Britons' opposition to social imperialism's attempt to use monuments as a potent cultural force. Specifically, it will explore the opposition to both the Imperial Peace Memorial and the Mall Approach Improvement Bill as instances of Britons successfully contesting the Empire's meaning. As during Trafalgar Square's creation, social imperialism tasked mere monuments with the enormous cultural work of bringing the Empire's civilizing mission home. But unlike during the first half of the nineteenth century, thanks to the franchise, British citizens could now express their opposition in a politically potent

[239] "An Imperial War Memorial," 101.

[240] Corfield, "The Mid-War Halt of the London Society," 324.

way. In part *because* of social imperialism's introduction of progressive reforms, the two sections will demonstrate that imperial reciprocity as a mode of governance in exchange for a material social safety net was no longer operative. This is because what the British Empire meant, and what kind of civilizing process could be expected of it, was called into question. In the end, Britons dropped the social part of the reciprocal agreement by refusing to pay the full sum, while social imperialists dropped the cultural work the Empire was meant to do by omitting it from the Mall altogether.

Empire in Revolt: The Imperial Peace Memorial, 1905

This section focuses on the way in which Britons expressed their opposition to the short-lived Imperial Peace Memorial proposal—conceived in response to the Second Boer War—and how it illustrates the Mall's inability to foster the kind of adherence to the established order social imperialism envisioned. Britons' opposition to the Peace Memorial parallels a prior generation's opposition to elements of Trafalgar Square's creation, but their actual *success* in sabotaging the monument's construction illustrates that the Empire was in a much different place. Internal divides in Britons' affinity for and fidelity to their empire could now affect dramatic change, compromising social imperialism's purported ability to foster imperial harmony through monuments. To illustrate the Mall's failure at this task, I will begin by discussing the Second Boer War itself, and then focus on how it was (planned) to be memorialized.

Aston Webb's initial Mall plan, submitted to the Victoria Memorial Committee in 1901, entailed the demolition of a series of derelict naval offices and the construction of a circular forecourt adjacent to a new entrance to the boulevard via Trafalgar Square. By 1903, however, it became clear that limited real estate would prevent the Admiralty from adhering to Webb's

design and simply vacating the available offices. As a result, Webb was forced to alter his scheme slightly to accommodate them, with a notable addition: the "Imperial Peace Memorial." In 1899, Britain had dispatched tens of thousands of troops to put down an uprising of insubordinate Voortrekkers and to eliminate the two remaining Afrikaner Republics of South Africa in a conflict that became known as the Second Boer War.[241] After driving the Boers inland decades earlier, the Empire hoped to consolidate its newly constituted "Scramble for Africa" holdings along the Cape of Good Hope while also securing the large deposits of gold that had been discovered in the Boers' remaining territories.[242] Webb used the Admiralty's request for alterations to his scheme as an opportunity to memorialize the many veterans of the war, which ended in 1902 after galvanizing opposition to the Empire's brutality and claiming an astonishing 25,000 British lives.[243] His design entailed the inscription of each victim's name onto the memorial itself, an appropriately mournful approach to the imposing grandeur of the renewed processional avenue. Strikingly similar to the Greenwich Pensioners' appearance in Trafalgar Square decades earlier, however, Britons proved unable to recognize the sacrifices of its soldiers. The monument to an enduring imperial "peace" was quickly discarded.

Webb, an ardent imperialist, clearly devised the Peace Memorial as a reaction to the Second Boer War's extreme brutality. As previously explained, the British Empire pioneered the use of concentration camps and scorched earth tactics to quell Boer civilians during the conflict, while at the same time suffering dearly from the guerilla tactics Boer combatants employed to

[241] Fransjohan Pretorius, "The Boer Wars," *BBC History*, March 29, 2011, https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/boer_wars_01.shtml.

[242] Pretorius, "The Boer Wars."

[243] Bremner, "'Imperial Peace Memorial,'" 63.

great practical effect.[244] In 1901, future Prime Minister David Lloyd George decried British tactics as "wicked" due to their inhumanity and in light of the United Kingdom's domestic indigence, while just a year later Webb reflected upon the war's outcome by proposing his toast to "The Colonies."[245] That two figures at the forefront of their respective disciplines adopted such discordant positions with respect to the war's outcome perfectly encapsulates the contested understanding of the imperial project. Despite its well-known brutality, however, the Second Boer War seemed to heighten many Britons' feelings of attachment to the Empire. London, too, was "seized by this jingoistic fervor," historian Bremner argues, a reality that contributed to the social imperialist Webb's "peaceful" addition to the Mall.[246]

By late 1905, however, rifts in imperial understanding had infiltrated the Peace Memorial's construction. The monument became a battle ground over interpretations of the war and the Empire's role therein. Liberal Party Leader Henry Campbell-Bannerman—a fierce opponent of the Boer War—expressed reservations about the memorial's "propriety," undermining parliamentary support.[247] London's Office of Works, moreover, soon cast doubts about the ability of even completing the monument as planned, considering Webb's proposal to inscribe the names of each of the 25,000 veterans' names into the memorial spatially (and fiscally) dubious.[248] As rumors swirled of the memorial's abandonment, the *British Architect* trotted out a familiar lament directed at all of London's wished-for monuments to the Empire: "the most golden opportunities for the elevation of London into an Imperial City worthy of the

[244] Pretorius, "The Boer Wars."

[245] David Lloyd George, Marvin Rintala, "Made in Birmingham: Lloyd George, Chamberlain, and the Boer War," *Biography* 11, no. 2 (1988): 124, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23539369.

[246] Bremner, "'Imperial Peace Memorial,'" 66.

[247] Bremner, "'Imperial Peace Memorial,'" 66.

[248] Bremner, "'Imperial Peace Memorial,'" 67.

name have been hopelessly lost."[249] Insofar as Britons had agreed of the *general* importance of imperial victories with respect to Trafalgar Square during the first half of the nineteenth century, the empire was decidedly less humanitarian—or even humane—in the second. After the exposure of the atrocities in South Africa, the abandonment of the Peace Memorial seemed to malign Britain's "Christian" imperial project. Faced with insurmountable opposition, Webb abandoned his Imperial Peace Memorial in November 1905.

Figure 8: Scaffolding Under the Admiralty Arch. London County Council, *Admiralty, Arch, The Mall, Westminster LB*, 1910, photograph, London Picture Archive, https://www.londonpicturearchive.org.uk/view-item?i=141032&WINID=1681911724382.

[249] "London Improvements," *British Architect, 1874-1919* 64, no. 17 (Oct 27, 1905): 287, https://go.openathens.net/redirector/bc.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/london-improvements/docview/7261774/se-2.

In the face of atrocities committed in South Africa and its architectural infeasibility, Webb replaced the Peace Memorial with a new monument—the Admiralty Arch—which only seemed to magnify the Empire's shortcomings. "Victoria Memorial Fiasco: A Mutilated Monument" read one apocalyptic *Daily Mail* headline, the author of which complained that the appropriations "were not sufficient to cover the expense of the ambitions and really magnificent project which is gradually being restricted and mutilated."[250] Britons levelled similar charges of "restriction" and "mutilation" over the course of the Nelson Column's construction decades earlier, underscoring how much their response to the Peace Memorial's struggles paralleled their response to the Greenwich Pensioners' appearance in Trafalgar Square. The "splendid colonnade," the *Mail* columnist further complained, the Peace Memorial itself, had been "replaced by that meagre-looking balustrade" that eventually became Webb's Admiralty Arch.[251] Webb conceived of the Arch as a noble alternative to the Peace Memorial that could also accommodate government offices. But to its critics, the Arch represented an abandonment of a necessary testament to British veterans, the very agents of empire who had lost their lives in South Africa, in favor of a cost-cutting rehabilitation of existing buildings.

For all the talk of the British Empire's grandeur, the successes of imperial monuments were still few and far between. "Although the triple arch designed by Sir Aston Webb for the eastern end of the Mall is nearly ready for opening," the *Mail* explained five years later, "nothing has been done to improve the buildings which lie between this portion of the Victoria Memorial

[250] Konody, "Victoria Memorial Fiasco," 4.

[251] Konody, "Victoria Memorial Fiasco," 4.

scheme and Trafalgar-square."[252] Like the hoarding and scaffolding that surrounded the Nelson Column during the 1840s, the area around the Admiralty Arch was a "gloomy," "dingy," and "derelict […] eyesore" according to the *Mail*, whose buildings remained in waste well through 1910 due to a familiar refrain: "want of money."[253] Despite Webb's empty promises, the ultimate fate of his Imperial Peace Memorial was emblematic of the polarizing outcome of the Second Boer War itself: the Empire could not bring peace after all. Bremner notes that even Webb's Arch seemed to waver between both "English and continental influences," highlighting the continued domestic insecurities that undermined the supposed "triumph of 'British' cultural and political ideals."[254] Despite social imperialists interpreting the restructured Mall as a stage dedicated to the achievements and sacrifices of the British Empire, the abandonment of the Peace Memorial illustrates enduring anxieties over the success of the imperial project. It had subjected the British Empire to moral scrutiny among domestic audiences, who could now express their opposition to its actions and monuments through their elected representatives.

Empire in Revolt: The Mall Approach Improvement Bill, 1914

The final incident that uncovered the incoherence underlying the Mall project occurred in Parliament and involved a debate surrounding the Mall Approach Improvement Bill. The Improvement Bill was read in Parliament in April 1914, and was designed to appropriate the necessary funds to complete the Mall project once and for all. The debate involved three principal parties: the planners of the project, the owners of the dilapidated buildings that formed

[252] "Trafalgar-Square Project," *Daily Mail*, January 26, 1910, *Daily Mail Historical Archive*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/EE1866104145/DMHA?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-DMHA&xid=56cce827.

[253] "Trafalgar-Square Project."

[254] Bremner, "'Imperial Peace Memorial,'" 64.

the unfortunate backdrop to the Mall, and a combined cohort of Parliament, the London County Council, and the Westminster City Council, which were willing to provide the funding.[255] The project had been stalled since the King's coronation despite the Admiralty Arch's 1911 completion, with the area surrounding the "approach" to the Mall from Trafalgar Square in particularly poor condition. Delinquent office buildings and haphazard scaffolding compromised the Arch's imposing grandeur.[256] "We are muddling on, as usual," the *British Architect* lamented of the government's continued fiscal neglect, harkening back to Trafalgar Square's labored construction.[257] Two private companies—the Liverpool and London and Globe Insurance Company and the Phoenix Insurance Company—owned property in some of the buildings Webb had hoped to demolish, and had repeatedly refused to sell despite the government's offers.[258]

Nonetheless, Parliament was poised to complete Webb's scheme with the passage of the Improvement Bill in 1914, which entailed the appropriation of up to £115,000 in additional funds and the securing of the companies' property. However, many MPs cast doubt on the British government's ability to successfully render the imperial vision designers had had in mind when conceiving the Mall project years earlier. Parliamentary skepticism and the arguments MPs used to substantiate it illustrates the extent to which opposition to projects that cost British taxpayers

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[255] "The Mall Approach and Trafalgar Square," *British Architect, 1874-1919* (May 08, 1914): 354, https://go.openathens.net/redirector/bc.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/mall-approach-trafalgar-square/docview/7311614/se-2.

[256] Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith, United Kingdom, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 48 (10 February 1913), Parliamentary Debates, Commons, https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1913-02-10/debates/a7121b4b-5b28-4df3-982b-268726d6adc2/MallApproach?highlight=%22the%20mall%22#contribution-5009431c-96c6-4231-816c-a859d91d22ee.

[257] "The Mall Approach and Trafalgar Square," 354.

[258] Walter Essex, United Kingdom, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 60 (April 7, 1914), Parliamentary Debates, Commons, https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1914-04-07/debates/7b8ea737-e2d5-47cf-b767-c076563c2748/MallApproachImprovementBill.

continued to undermine both the Mall and the imperial unity social imperialism believed it would engender.

Britons first objected to the Improvement Bill on fiscal grounds, balking at the drastic new sums their government planned to expend despite the Mall's stalled construction. In Parliament, Liberal MP Walter Essex asked the bill's advocates to explain why costly monumental projects "of which the average Londoner who has any sympathy with or appreciation of architecture has no reason whatever to be proud" should continue, expressing his hope that "in the very centre of the Empire" his fellow MPs would choose to "safeguard ourselves against any further extension of the architectural abominations."[259] His party colleague, James Dawes, MP from Southwark, agreed. "I represent a part of London where we have less than 1½ acres of open space to 58,000 of population," Dawes complained in his objection to new taxes to complete the monument—"I doubt very much whether it would not be in the interest of my Constituents to oppose [the bill] on the ground that it is an extravagant and rather thriftless scheme."[260] After thirteen long years, social imperialists had yet to realize the Mall according to Aston Webb's original design. The distance between Conservative MP's Alfred Bird derision of the project's discontinuity as "a national disgrace" and the class-conscious objections of many Liberal MPs to yet more monumental funds speak to the elitism that defined social imperialism.[261]

Parliament's July 1914 discussion of the actual expenses for the Mall, and an amendment that proposed to limit them to £38,000, also enflamed longstanding tensions between the Conservative and Liberal parties that spoke to Britain's enduring internal political divide over

[259] Walter Essex, UK, *Hansard* Vol. 60, Commons.

[260] James Dawes, UK, *Hansard* Vol. 60, Commons.

[261] Alfred Bird, UK, *Hansard* Vol. 60, Commons.

their empire's role. MP Frederick Handel Booth, another member of the Liberal Party from Pontefract in industrial Northern England, argued that the proposal to complete the Mall amounted to "a case of a great and wealthy district like London sponging on the poorer parts of the country."[262] His argument characterized opposition to the bill shared by many Liberal MPs, who not only failed to conceive of the Mall as fundamentally "national" in character, but were—like David Lloyd George—quite skeptical of the British Empire in general. In response to Booth continued with a series of criticisms:

> I always did oppose this ridiculous attitude of the powers-that-be in London. […] What would Hon. Members think if Manchester, or Liverpool, or even Pontefract came here and asked Parliament to tax the whole country in order to straighten out a corner in one of their main thoroughfares? It is all very well to say that this is of national importance, but who in the provinces cares whether you have a square end or a round end to some building in Trafalgar Square.[263]

Booth's questioning of the Mall's "national" role and protest to London's supposed status as an imperial stage worthy of "glorification" illustrates the disconnect between social imperialists' vision for the Empire and Britons' material reality. Like Booth, most Britons could care less what happened to the Mall regardless of its touted imperial role, and were understandably far more worried about their own socio-economic conditions—and the new taxes the bill would impose. For decades, social imperialists had tried to overcome that fundamental divide through the erection of imperial monuments in London, and had, to their credit, implemented some degree of economic reciprocity through gradual social reform.[264] But the fact remained that those

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[262] Frederick Handel Booth, United Kingdom, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 65 (July 20, 1914), Parliamentary Debates, Commons, https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1914-07-20/debates/5613319d-fca1-49c3-8fb4-be33185da2aa/MallApproachImprovementExpenses?highlight=%22trafalgar%20square%22#contribution-39dfcb0a-d803-4afc-8e3a-1529e0e10d06.

[263] Booth, UK, *Hansard* Vol. 65, Commons.

[264] Porter, "Peril and Propaganda," 191.

outside London continued to face their own local economic circumstances, and viewed attempts by its representatives to extract funds as blatantly self-interested. Moreover, Booth's remarks illustrate the extent to which the actual doings of the Empire—prosperous as it was overseas, and central as it was to the culture of cosmopolitan elites—hardly concerned most Britons at all.

The Improvement Bill's appearance in Parliament likewise accentuated the geographic and cultural divisions within Britain that social imperialists had still failed to overcome despite their attempts to project imperial unity. Scottish objectors to the bill, for example, were often far more aggressive than Englishmen in their criticism. "I hope that this House will agree to limit this money very severely," Scottish MP James Hogge argued.[265] "We from Scotland," he maintained…

> …object very strenuously to our money being used for the purpose of glorifying London, especially when the Government is reluctant to grant Scotland any money at all for public purposes. What is this money for? I understand it is to effect an improvement at the end of the Mall. I want to know exactly *what* difference it is going to make to the architectural beauty of that particular corner.[266]

The lowland regions of Scotland, quite similar to Northern England, were home to many of Britain's manufacturers and were replete with MPs representing the working-class communities of Edinburgh and Glasgow. Despite—or perhaps *because* of the British Empire's success in its conquest of South Africa, India, and elsewhere compared to the relative poverty of its own population, many Scots felt ignored by their domineering English counterparts.

In addition to the injustice of asking the nation to pay for London's imperial beautification project, opponents to the bill further cited the injustice of how little Westminster

[265] James Hogge, UK, *Hansard* Vol. 65, Commons.

[266] Hogge, UK, *Hansard* Vol. 65, Commons.

residents themselves paid in taxes for the nation. Hogge continued his remarks with a question to Smith that encapsulated the English-Scottish divide:

> I have heard [Mr. Smith] complain of the low wages paid, for instance, to bakers. How can he, as a representative of a working class community and a large industrial community, support this extraordinary expenditure of public money in a city, out of which he makes his bread and butter. The Westminster area is one of the lowest rated areas in the whole of London. Why should other parts of the country be mulcted in a large fine of this kind in order to give to the lowest rated part of London this sum of money?[267]

Alexander MacCallum Scott, a Liberal from Glasgow and early convert to the Labour Party, agreed with his countryman. Scott argued that the Mall Approach Improvement Bill "is a proposal for the adornment of one of the wealthiest districts of the metropolis" at the expense of the rest of the country.[268] Proponents of the bill like Harold Smith argued that "whether one represents a Lancashire borough or an important Scotch constituency," MPs had to "bear in mind that London is the very centre of the greatest Empire that the world has ever known."[269] Enraged, Scottish Liberal MP Henry Watt then asked whether it was "in order" to tell his English colleagues "to shut up?"[270] Chaos erupted on the Commons floor, along with chants of "Divide! Divide!" by English and Conservative MPs, hoping to initiate Parliament's "division of the assembly" into the "Ayes" and "Noes" and move ahead with the vote.[271] Booth's amendment to further limit new appropriations failed by a vote of 30 to 129, and the bill became the Mall Approach Act in August of 1914.[272] But the contentious debate over its passage, a tax riot of a different kind, clarifies that social imperialists had still failed to arrest longstanding cultural

[267] Hogge, UK, *Hansard* Vol. 65, Commons.

[268] Alexander MacCallum Scott, UK *Hansard* Vol. 65, Commons.

[269] Smith, UK, *Hansard* Vol. 65, Commons.

[270] Henry Watt, UK, *Hansard* Vol. 65, Commons.

[271] Watt, UK, *Hansard* Vol. 65, Commons.

[272] Booth, UK, *Hansard* Vol. 65, Commons.

tensions between Scotland and England—not to mention the class divide between Londoners and the rest of the country. As identified by Liberals and Scots, the British Empire's ideological incoherence made the success of social imperialists' task impossible from the outset.

Figure 9: The Admiralty Arch, Incomplete. London Metropolitan Archives, *Admiralty, Arch, The Mall, Westminster LB: The Mall from Charing Cross*, 1910, photograph, London Picture Archive, https://www.londonpicturearchive.org.uk/view-item?i=141053&WINID=1681911719643.

Conclusion

Even though the British Empire reached its territorial peak in 1919 following Germany's defeat during World War I, the Mall project serves as a premonition of its eventual dissolution. Social imperialism could not reconcile deep-seated divisions within British society that

threatened to derail their vision of London as a stage through monuments, and it could not quell many Britons' questioning of the empire's actual relevance. The war's outbreak soon after the Improvement Bill's passage delayed the Mall's completion. Even Aston Webb, social imperialism personified, expressed trepidation to a 1918 meeting of London Society members that his magnificent project stood "in danger of being forgotten."[273] Of course, the Mall project was eventually completed—but not until 1924, more than two decades after it had begun. The continued inability of the largest empire in the world to reflect imperial prosperity at home stemmed from the same anxieties about Britain's imperial project that Trafalgar Square had exposed a generation prior. The people social imperialists hoped to tie to the Empire's success were far too divided on what they owed to their nation for any monument or group of monuments to do any cultural work at all.

As the episodes involving the Peace Memorial and the Improvement Bill illustrate, the imperial *idea* behind the Mall was compromised by the very same popular "revolt" that plagued Trafalgar Square's creation during the mid-nineteenth century. Though the Mall was ultimately finished, it was not quite according to Webb's initial design. What were the things that were sacrificed? The *imperial* aspects of the project. The colonies, despite contributing nearly a third of the project's overall funds, were barely recognized. Their only remaining marker is on the small gateposts surrounding the Victoria Memorial. Because of Lord Curzon's self-aggrandizing greed, India—the locale Victoria had appointed herself "Empress" of—was not included at all. The tendency to forget the contributions of racial others in the expansion of the British Empire is reminiscent of the omission of Sir Henry Havelock's Indian regiments from his Trafalgar Square plinth despite the inclusion of his British ones. Even today, the Mall is spatially associated with

[273] Webb, "The London Society's Map, 283.

Buckingham Palace, and is far more culturally reminiscent of the United Kingdom's *domestic* Royal Family than Queen Victoria or the British Empire.

The Mall project is another example of Britain's most ardent imperialists failing to produce a unified vision to support their political project. The anxieties discussed in the first chapter concerning a lack of imperial magnificence, London-specific anxieties, deficient British artistry, and economic elitism yet again undermined the "*there* there" of a usable British Empire. Though they largely agreed on the imperial monuments' national importance, few could agree on how best to secure them. The Empire lacked coherent meaning in the lives of actual Britons, and so the Mall project—which was meant to use that empire to do social and cultural work elevating those lives—failed. In Porter's terms, the social reforms introduced around the turn of the century could not be combined with things like "compulsory drill and military conscription" that "obviated the need to grant [Britons] full citizenship" at their direct expense.[274] The erection of imperial monuments was another element of that jingoistic campaign, which failed because of its anti-democratic undertones and contested interpretations of the Empire's meaning. Britons could not simply be expected to perform the duties or "deeds" of civilized, imperial citizens when presented with mere empty words or superficial statues.

[274] Porter, "Peril and Propaganda," 190.

Epilogue: Imperial London and the London of the Future

In the summer of 2020, anti-racism protestors tore down a statue of Edward Colston in Bristol, England, before throwing it into the city's harbor.[275] Colston had been a prominent philanthropist, whose sizable donations to Bristol occasioned the widespread use of his name across the city and the erection of his 1895 monument at its center. However, Colston had also played a more sinister role in the city's history. He was a senior executive of the Royal African Company, which dominated England's trans-Atlantic slave trade during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[276] His repugnant actions were cited by many of the protestors who toppled his statue as an enduring manifestation of some of the ugliest parts of Britain's imperial past.[277] In recent years, protestors have also called for the removal of statues memorializing imperialists like Cecil Rhodes, William Gladstone, and Robert Milligan, among others.[278] And Henry Havelock and Charles Napier's plinths, so prominently placed in Trafalgar Square, have raised public scrutiny for their racism role in suppressing India's first attempt at independence.[279]

That scrutiny raises the question: what should twenty-first century Britons, and Westerners broadly speaking, make of imperial monuments? On the one hand, removing statues and other symbols that memorialize or even celebrate colonialism, slavery, and oppression seems

[275] Suyin Hayes, "Monuments of Slave Traders, Genociders and Imperialists Are Becoming Flashpoints in Global Anti-Racism Protests," *Time*, June 9, 2020, https://time.com/5850135/edward-colston-statue-slave-trader-protests/#:~:text=On%20June%207%2C%20protesters%20in,monument%20into%20the%20city's%20harbor.

[276] Kenneth Morgan, "Edward Colston and Bristol," *Local History Pamphlets* 96 (1999): 3, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/http://www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/History/bristolrecordsociety/publications/bha096.pdf.

[277] Hayes, "Monuments."

[278] "Edward Colston statue pulled out of Bristol Harbour," *BBC*, June 11, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-bristol-53004748.

[279] Kelso, "Mayor attacks generals."

like a straightforward way to denounce ignominious history. On the other, imperialism's actual material legacy likely exerts a far more harmful impact on the populations of former colonies than the psychological trauma inflicted by physical statues. Statues are certainly a symptom of that legacy, one could argue, but not its cause—should addressing that reality not be the priority? This conversation becomes even more complex when considering famous spaces like Trafalgar Square and the Mall, whose respective monumental projects marked the largest imperial reworkings of urban fabric in London's two-thousand-year history and yet are simultaneously some of Europe's most iconic tourist destinations. These monumental projects' primary subjects—Nelson and Victoria—certainly had ties to some of the most problematic aspects of the British Empire, and their social imperialist advocates clearly had its glorification in mind during their construction. But does seeking to erase the objectionable aspects of their history do more harm than good, and prohibit the development of a more nuanced understanding of Britain's dark imperial past? The growing conflict between imperial London and the London of the future will continue to provoke these questions as Britons themselves reconcile that history.

It might be worth considering some of the lessons of Trafalgar Square and the Mall's construction in reflecting on these divisions. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Britain's early social imperialists attempted to utilize imperial monuments to promote British nationalism and instill a sense of imperial pride, loyalty, and responsibility in ordinary Britons. Their objective was to encourage support for the British Empire through the reflected glory of Trafalgar Square, casting monuments to imperialism as a key tool in bringing the Empire's civilizing mission onto the domestic scene. But Trafalgar Square's troubled construction exposed that people without substantive political power, whose lives were mired by some of the worst poverty Britons have ever experienced, would revolt rather than simply buy into the empty

reciprocal arrangement imperialists put forward. Despite their grandeur, imperial monuments were, after all, nothing more than static collections of stone and bronze, unable to conduct the kind of cultural work early social imperialists intended. A generation later, the Empire was in a different place, thanks in no small part to the material support social imperialists had begun to offer British citizens. Through imperial monuments, they sought to establish a renewed commitment to the reciprocal arrangement their predecessors had outlined while encouraging domestic support for their empire, and they hoped the Mall's expansion would help realize this goal for a new century. But as social imperialism gained ideological coherence, the British Empire lost what little it had already had. Britons became divided over the Empire's status given its brutality and an all-encompassing global conflict that undermined its domestic relevance. Moreover, they asserted their opposition to being forced to pay for the glorification of a locality most of them would never visit. The social imperialist project thus failed, and monuments' cultural work was abandoned, resulting in the Empire's relative omission from the finished Mall.

The overarching point, then, is that ceding imperial monuments the ability to authoritatively dictate the legacies of people, places, and history gives them *far* too much power—and far more power than their creators could have hoped to achieve. Ironically, granting that power would be to give in to the kind of wayward "imperial nostalgia" Kunzru maligned in this project's introduction, which nevertheless seems to have always been a component of Britain's imperial history.[280] The projects devised by social imperialism continue to play a crucial role in British history, of course, and shape how people perceive the Empire and experience the monuments of imperial London. And statues like those of Lord Clive, whose heinous actions in defense of slavery are utterly beyond the pale, deserve complete

[280] Kunzru, "My Family Fought the British Empire."

condemnation. But those monumental projects failed to foster the kind of imperial unity their advocates hoped precisely *because* mere material matter cannot accomplish that kind of decisive cultural unity. And one has to remember that it was insecurity—above cultural arrogance, economic success, and victory on the battlefield—that prompted Britons' turn to imperial monuments. There were so many competing interpretations of how social imperialists should erect monuments, not to mention interpretations of the Empire's meaning itself, that imbuing any one monument with the power to define history according to any specific vision is to grant them a power they did not and still do not have. The two projects explored in this thesis illustrate the degree to which even at the height of their empire's global prowess, Britain's standing in the world has always been most uncertain amongst none other than Britons themselves.

Figure 10: The Monuments of Imperial London: Trafalgar Square and the Mall. GetMapping PLC / Science Photo Library, *Central London, Aerial View*, photograph, Science Photo Library, https://www.sciencephoto.com/media/157466/view/central-london-aerial-view/.

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