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THE MARBLE ARCH

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The Marble Arch is one of London's familiar sights (Fig. 1). It has given its name to a tube station and hence to a district. It is vaguely admired and has recently been cleaned. Most well-informed people know that it was designed by Nash to stand in front of Buckingham Palace, that it was moved because it was unsatisfactorily sited, and that it is still unsatisfactorily sited. That is about all.

The Marble Arch was meant to be both the triumphal entry to Buckingham Palace and the official memorial to the Napoleonic Wars that London never enjoyed. The background to the creation of Palace and Arch alike was the surge in confidence and cultural pride which swelled the established classes of the nation after 1815. George IV had presided over victory as Regent, and as the world's most powerful sovereign



Figure 1. The Marble Arch, viewed from the south, in the 1930's. *English Heritage*.

now felt himself justified in his lavish style of life and expenditure. At the same time, Britain's architects and sculptors hoped to change the parsimonious pattern of expenditure on public buildings and monuments hitherto prevalent. London was now the wealthiest city in the world, and needed to look like it. The ambition to rival Paris was never far from their thoughts.

The Prince Regent contemplated moving from Carlton House to an enlarged Buckingham House as early as 1818, following his mother's death.¹ It took time after his accession for this plan to mature, while architects curried his favour. Soane, for instance, produced a grand plan for a palace in Green Park, which incorporated a triumphal arch entrance at the centre of a screen fronting a courtyard. When in 1825 revenues from the Crown Estate became available, things took off with a rush. It was inevitably Nash, intimate with the King over the Brighton Pavilion, who got the palace job and hastily concocted a design.

The chronology and shifting fortunes of 'the King's Palace in St James's Park', as it was known during the building campaign, are not well appreciated. Buckingham House had been expressly bought for Queen Charlotte; officially it was 'The Queen's House' till 1818. As his father and mother had done, George IV thought of it at first as his personal home, with which the Government and Parliament were not to be concerned, and Nash embarked upon the commission to reconstruct the house in that spirit. Only later did the King begin to talk of using it for state occasions; and only in 1828, when expenditure soared and he was obliged to apply to the Treasury for extra funds to supplement revenues raised by mortgages and sales of Crown property, did the project become the subject of official censure. By this time the public mood had swung, largely because of the trade slump that began in 1826, and there was widespread disgust at royal extravagance. So the Palace bowled along informally

enough from 1825 to 1828. Then came trouble. A parliamentary investigation into the procurement of public buildings in June 1828 was the first danger signal.² The following year a Select Committee scrutinized Nash's conduct relative to Crown leases in Regent Street.³ By 1829 work on the Palace was in difficulties and in 1830, after the King's death, it ground to a halt. Nash was now dismissed and his handling of the Palace became the chief target of yet another, more minute parliamentary enquiry, resulting in public censure in October 1831.⁴ Architecturally, all this proved disastrous for Palace and Arch alike.

Though few of Nash's drawings for Buckingham Palace survive, it appears that the separate Arch in front of the courtyard was a component from the start. It is mentioned in an estimate for 1825, when it was intended to be of Bath stone, like the rest of the Palace.⁵ It was not conceived in isolation, but as one of a pair of entrance arches into the Palace precincts from the parks, of which the other was what is now called the Wellington Arch. That arch was designed by Nash's younger colleague, Decimus Burton, in 1826-8, and was linked to Burton's screen leading in and out of Hyde Park. The intention is clear: to provide a ceremonial route on imperial Roman lines to the Palace from the west at the entrance to London (as Hyde Park Corner then was), first through the distant single arch and then through the triple arch into the palace forecourt.⁶ In the event the Wellington Arch became merely an incident at the top of Constitution Hill, and now stands on a site slightly different from its original one.

This whole scheme for the environs of the Palace seems to have been improvised between the King, his Francophile friend and artistic adviser Sir Charles Long (from 1826 Lord Farnborough), Charles Arbuthnot of the Office of Woods and Forests (who chose Burton for the Hyde Park

entrance) and Nash. In essence it was derivative. Monumental arches on the Roman model (or their trabeated Greek equivalents, *propylaea*) at city and palace thresholds were fashionable among neo-classical architects and proliferated after the French Revolution. The Paris *barrières* and Berlin's Brandenburg Gate of 1788–91 set the pace; Cagnola's Arco della Pace in Milan (1806–38) and the Puerta de Toledo, Madrid (1808–27) are just two of several successors listed in Uwe Westfeling's monograph on triumphal arches that precede the London programme.⁷ In England, such arches often turned up as projects, but few were built in this period (though a modicum of arches had turned up earlier as entrance-features or eye-catchers on country estates, as at Badminton, Blenheim, Garendon, Highclere, Holkham, Shugborough and Stowe). Other nations too built arches or *propylaea* to commemorate the defeat of Napoleon; in Moscow, for instance, there was Osip Bove's Tver Gate Arch (1827–34).

The immediate models for the Marble Arch and Wellington Arch were the two celebrated triumphal arches built in Paris by Napoleon himself on either side of the Tuileries palace: Percier's Arc du Carrousel (1806–8) surmounted by the pillaged four golden horses from Venice; and the more distant Arc de Triomphe (1810–36). The former represented the proximate point of entry to the palace from the Louvre and the city, the latter, separated from the Tuileries by the Champs Élysées, the Roman-style route into city and palace for the Emperor returning into Paris. The same concept is there in the London programme, but the two-sided logic and axial layout of the French original were distorted from the start by awkwardnesses of topography and compression of space.

When Nash visited Paris in 1814, shortly after the First Restoration, the Arc du Carrousel was as complete as it ever became; the bigger Arc de Triomphe had stuck at about twenty feet off the

base and did not get going again till the late 1820s.⁸ The Carrousel is the true prototype for Marble Arch. Both are modelled closely on the Arches of Constantine and Septimius Severus in Rome; indeed Nash in his off-hand and misleading way was to tell the Duke of Wellington that the Marble Arch was 'a plagiarism of the Arch of Constantine'.⁹ The dimensions of the London and Paris arches are remarkably close, the British arch slightly exceeding its French model. It is plain how this crib occurred. In 1825–6, the critical period for the genesis of the Arch, Nash's protégé and future chief assistant for finishing the Palace, James Pennethorne, was studying for six months in Paris under Louis Lafitte.¹⁰ Lafitte was the brother-in-law of Augustus Pugin, Nash's former assistant, and had provided the sketch designs for the sculptural programme on the Arc du Carrousel.¹¹ We know that Pennethorne sent illustrated notebooks back to Nash from Rome of what he saw and studied there in 1825, doubtless including the great marble-clad monuments of antiquity. It seems certain that he also communicated details of one sort or another to Nash about the Carrousel.

By the end of January 1826, work on the Palace proper had reached second-storey level but the Arch had yet to start. In a description of this date it is distinctly named as 'the Waterloo monument' and defined as a 'triumphal arch, with national emblems, trophies etc., and colossal statues' in imitation bronze at the front of a 'spacious circular enclosure'.¹² No mention is as yet made of cladding the Arch in marble, a decision suddenly taken at about this time. H. Clifford Smith, the historian of Buckingham Palace, suggested in 1952 what may have been the spark for this change of plan: the three sizeable marble-and-bronze models of the Arches of Titus, Septimius Severus and Constantine, purchased by the Prince Regent in 1816 and displayed today at Windsor Castle.¹³ The choice can be interpreted in two ways: as a reference to the imperial glory and

dignity of Rome and a brilliant device for making George IV look one-up over Napoleon; and as an empirical experiment with materials, so typical of Nash's attitude to architecture.

The technical aspect of this decision has never been remarked upon. The name 'Marble Arch' is no accident or later popularization; it was used almost immediately, and drew attention to the fact that the Arch was the first work of British architecture in which polished marble, familiar to the point of poetic cliché as the highest expression of Roman architecture, had been used for the complete external cladding of a building. For the Palace facades Nash as a fashionable novelty employed Bath stone, brought up to London by the new canal system, instead of the usual Portland stone (he hoped it would also come cheaper).¹⁴ *A fortiori*, cladding the Arch in marble was a technical stroke of equal daring to Nash's liberal use of iron girders inside the Palace.

Imported marbles had not been previously used on the outside of British buildings for three reasons – difficulty of supply, doubts about their weathering qualities, and cost. Marbles had however been imported into London in fair quantities since the seventeenth century for use by monumental masons and sculptors.¹⁵ There were many different varieties and sources, but the trend towards greater purity and elegance of texture in neo-classical sculpture favoured the white 'statuary' marble from the august Carrara quarries. Flaxman, for instance, went to Carrara in 1792 during his Italian sojourn to choose marble for his *Fury of Athamas*, following a long tradition of visits to the quarries by Italian sculptors.

In northern countries, where frosts were frequent, Carrara statuary marble had almost always been used for internal monuments or minor architectural elements. Exceptions, like the Francis Bird statue of Queen Anne outside St Paul's Cathedral, had weathered poorly. Soane, for one, having used exposed statuary marble for the Johnstone tomb

at St Mary Abbots, Kensington (1784), later in the famous tomb for his wife in St Pancras Churchyard (1816) confined it to a central bare monolith, sheltered from the elements beneath a dome. However Carrara produced marbles of several different types and qualities beside the white statuary marble. Among them was *ravaccione* or 'Sicilian' marble, a hard, dense, grey marble with a consistent texture somewhat like granite, a faint blue vein and a susceptibility only to a light polish. Quarried in particular from Monte Sagro west of Carrara, this was to be the marble eventually chosen for the Arch. It seems to have been known to British marble merchants before 1800 but little used.

Dramatic changes occurred in the Carrara marble trade after Napoleon took control of Italy.¹⁶ Massa-Carrara was at first allotted to the new Kingdom of Italy; but in 1806 Napoleon transferred it to his sister Elisa Baciocchi, recently established nearby as Princess of Lucca. Under the ambitious Elisa, the quarries were revitalized, a bank was established to promote marble exports and recover duties, and a school of sculptors was set up at Carrara. The French saw this move as a way to obtain marble cheaply for prestigious cultural projects in Paris and elsewhere. Elisa, on the other hand, wished to maximize her income and reserve as much carving as possible to her local school instead of exporting rough marble blocks. The main products of the Carrara school were mass-produced portrait busts, chiefly of Napoleon, though a few good sculptors were attracted briefly to Carrara.

Neither the Arc du Carrousel nor the Arc de Triomphe was ever meant to be sheathed in marble, but Carrara statuary marble was employed for the sculptural elements of both. On the Carrousel arch, Carrara marble was used for the reliefs and for the statues surmounting the columns (which are of native French pink marble), and one of the sculptors, Chinard, went to Carrara to execute his commission.¹⁷ So Nash on his Paris visit of 1814, and

Pennethorne in 1825–6, had been able to see Carrara marble in place and exposed upon a triumphal arch in a climate not dissimilar from London's. From this it was a short but bold step to specifying an arch covered entirely in marble.

With Napoleon defeated, the Carrara quarries were once more directly accessible to British marble merchants and sculptors. One person to visit them was Nash's friend, the sculptor Francis Chantrey, who was to be commissioned to make the equestrian statue of George IV supposed to stand atop the Marble Arch. Chantrey was keenly interested in marble supply. He spent time in Italy in 1819 looking over the Carrara quarries and selecting blocks for trans-shipment to England.¹⁸ Some at least of the marble he then selected was not statuary marble but *ravaccione*. This he used for an external monument in the burial ground of St John's Wood Chapel, perhaps believing it more resistant to weather than statuary marble.¹⁹ But by the end of the 1820s Chantrey was not so convinced; indeed he later gave as his reason for refusing to take on the lion's share of the sculpture for the Marble Arch his 'feeling that works of art in marble exposed to the climate of this country were not likely to be very lasting'.²⁰

Whatever the role of the marble-and-bronze models of Roman arches in George IV's collection, the decision to clad the Arch in marble followed on from an investigation of statuary marble supply for lining the staircase and the hall of the Palace. Nash had seen Thomas Cundy's new marble-lined staircase at Northumberland House, and determined to go one better for the King. In June 1825 he set an agent, William Freeman, on to investigating the supply of statuary marble available from accredited merchants in London.²¹ The result was disappointing. Shortly afterwards Nash began negotiating with Joseph Browne, marble dealer, of the Scagliola Works, Carmarthen (later University) Street. Browne is the most important figure after Nash in

the Marble Arch saga. Before they quarrelled in 1827, Nash described him as 'a statuary, a sensible man and a perfect judge of marble'.²² He had been a partner in Browne and Young, of the New Road (supplying, for instance, scagliola columns for the new St Pancras Church), but worked on his own from about 1821. He claimed to have an extensive connection among noblemen, gentlemen and leading architects. He held an exhibition of his notable marble collections at his premises in 1830; these collections were sold in 1856, presumably after his death.²³ To judge from Browne's letters and opinions he was well educated, shrewd, but combative and verbose. Browne is a common enough name, but the fact that Nash's managing clerk in the mid to late 1820s was called William J. Browne may be suggestive. There were also Brownes in the administration of the Office of Works.

In August 1825 Nash agreed informally with Browne that the latter should go to Carrara to choose and purchase statuary marble for paving and lining the main staircase of the Palace.²⁴ The exact terms on which Browne conducted this business were to become a source of controversy and bitterness. Browne saw himself as an independent agent, adviser and merchant working for the Government, who would be paid on commission according to the risks and responsibility he was taking; Nash thought of him as his own personal agent on behalf of the King, and hoped to keep him sweet with the promise that he would have the contract for cutting and fitting the marble on return.

En route to Italy, Browne stopped off in Ireland to investigate two new quarries, which had been mentioned to him in discussions about marble; these turned out to be disappointments. By November 1825 he was in Carrara, where he stayed on and off till July of the following year, leaving an assistant behind him to supervise the dispatch of marble. Browne's illuminating correspondence from Italy with Nash is preserved in an appendix to the 1831

parliamentary investigation.²⁵ At first all went well. He began by investigating the different types of marble, always keeping from the quarry owners and workmen the purpose of his presence. It would take too long to procure the quantities of statuary marble alone, he advised; instead, he suggested using a mixture of statuary, veined and ordinary or Sicilian marble – in other words, *ravaccione*. He bought some statuary marble in December. The quarries now closed for the worst of the winter, so while waiting to hear from Nash and Sir Charles Long (Lord Farnborough), Browne took himself off for self-education in marbles and antiquities to Florence and Rome. Nash and Long meanwhile duly sent their permissions to mix statuary and ‘marmo ordinario’.²⁶

In a letter of February 1826 Browne, by now back in Carrara, praised this marble, claiming that Canova had used it for his later bas reliefs. This is also the first document to mention that the Arch was now to be built of marble, Browne suggesting ‘ordinary vein’ or ‘ordinary marble’.²⁷ Replying in April, Nash wrote that he had consulted the King and Sir Charles Long and that the whole arch was now to be of the ‘ordinary marble’: ‘I rely on what you say of the marble, that, like the columns in the Hall, it will be of one uniform colour, and that it is more durable than any stone we have here, except granite.’²⁸ Along with this letter, Nash sent drawings of the Marble Arch and suggested that Browne obtain from Rome ‘a pressed mould’ of capitals from the Campo Vaccino (i.e. the Forum Romanum), or alternatively the interior of the Pantheon. He also told Browne how he envisaged the Arch would be constructed – ‘in ashlar, bonded with brick, which I shall have set into cement, that it may unite with the marble, which you see are in courses.’ Nash suggested thicknesses of four to five inches, with columns either in three pieces or one if possible. He hoped that much of the marble cladding could be got from the waste or ‘offal’ of the blocks for the

columns: ‘the length of the stones may be as unequal as possible, and the more unequal the better; from 2’ 0” length up to four or five’.²⁹ In May, Browne expressed his delight that ‘ordinary marble’ was to be used for the Arch, arguing that it was beautiful in colour, cheap and durable. He was about to send the blocks for the four square panels on the fronts of the Arch and two of the blocks for the figures to surmount the columns by way of a sample, he said. Browne wanted at least five inches of thickness for the cladding, and was getting a cast for the capitals from the Pantheon, on the grounds that they were less worn than those in the Forum.³⁰

Having the drawings for the Arch with him meant that in choosing the blocks Browne (in Nash’s words) ‘considered their conversion and designated part of one block for one purpose and part of it for another’.³¹ His task of inspecting, choosing, ordering and arranging transport once completed, he had to get all the marble he could down to the Marina at Massa before the summer harvest made labour for transport scarce. Browne next made his way to Leghorn, where shipping arrangements were made with the firm of Moses Ascoli and Sons, and then via Paris back to London, where he arrived in August 1826.³² Meanwhile the first of many large shipments, bearing first the statuary marble and then the *ravaccione* or ordinary marble, began to arrive in London, mainly from Leghorn and La Spezia. Some seventeen such boats docked between 1826 and 1829, carrying marble blocks to the value of nearly £25,000.³³ The trickiest consignments were the blocks for 104 Corinthian columns, some for the Arch but most for the Palace. This suggests that Browne had exceeded Nash’s expectations and managed to procure stones for them in one piece (the Corinthian columns on the Arch are certainly monoliths). The transport problems were not over when the marble reached London. In February 1828 *The Times* noted the arrival at Millbank of a barge freighted with immense

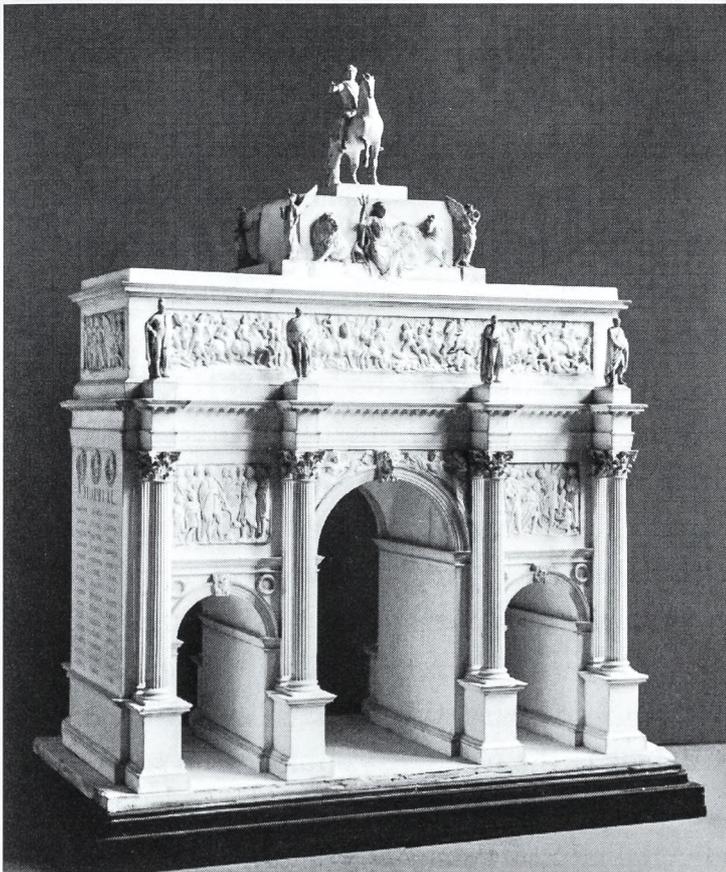


Figure 2. Model, c.1826, of the Marble Arch, as proposed, from the east. *Victoria and Albert Museum*.



Figure 3. Model, c.1826, of the Marble Arch, as proposed, from the west. *Victoria and Albert Museum*.

blocks of Italian marble weighing up to thirty tons each. One such block, estimated at 22–23' × 6' × 2' 6", was carried to the Palace site in a 'double-bodied' wagon drawn by twenty-three horses, which had to stop every five minutes.³⁴

Nash and Browne argued that buying direct in this way saved large sums. Rival London marble merchants disagreed. Several got a sight of the marble after a bitter dispute broke out at the end of 1826 between Browne and Nash over the definition of the former's employment. Browne came very close to suing Nash for commission allegedly lost on his strenuous efforts in Italy. He was mollified only by a large payment from Nash in June 1827 and by the assurance of generous prices for the finished work he had now to carry out for the Palace and the Arch. Various marble experts examined samples during the six-month course of this dispute. One, Peter Paul Grellier, though claiming to be a friend of

Browne's, hotly denied Nash's claims to have made any savings and was to tell the 1831 enquiry that *ravaccione* was an inferior, cheap and 'cloudy' marble, used only where public monuments were liable to get dirty. It had only been used, he alleged with some truth, because Nash and Browne could not get statuary marble in the size and quantity required.³⁵

Though Nash patched things up with Browne, their relationship was never cordial again, and broke down once more when difficulties over the building intensified. Matters were made worse when it turned out that insufficient marble had been purchased. So early in 1828 Browne was obliged to order extra – this time on his own account rather than as Nash's agent.³⁶ This double system of ordering marble caused confusion and appears in the end to have led to a surplus of the material. On his return to England, Browne proceeded apace

with cutting most of the marble to the pre-calculated sizes, either at his works or at sheds on site. Inside the Palace, he began fixing the marble for the staircase and hall – the start of many internal marble and scagliola jobs, small and large, which Browne was to perform. In 1827 the Arch had still yet to begin; finishing the Palace was the priority. With declining health, the captious King wanted to get into it – hence speed, rushed revisions and cost overruns.

The slow start for the Arch may also have been due to difficulties over the sculpture. A commemorative programme was being worked out in some detail between the King, Nash and John Flaxman for both the Palace exterior and the Arch in 1826. The model of the Marble Arch now in the Victoria and Albert Museum is largely a reflection of this (Figs. 2 and 3).³⁷ Nash described the programme succinctly in a letter to Wellington of 1829, when he hoped still to complete the Arch:

One side and one end dedicated to the Army, and the other side and end to the Navy. The east front and north end to be a record of the Battle of Waterloo, and the west front and south end a record of the Battle of Trafalgar . . . On the summit is an equestrian statue of the King.³⁸

Flaxman died in December 1826, leaving his sketches for the Palace and the Arch unexecuted. Chantrey seems then to have been approached but declined the commission, only to be persuaded to undertake the equestrian statue of George IV on the personal intervention of the King. He chose bronze in preference to marble because of his concerns about permanence, and indeed set up a bronze foundry at just this time. The marble sculpture on the flanks of the Arch was passed over to Baily, Rossi and Westmacott, with whom Nash made verbal contracts in June 1828. Though they are supposed to have worked from Flaxman's sketches, many minor iconographic changes took place; Nash's letter to Wellington was about one of them.³⁹

At last, late in 1827, work started on the Arch.

It seems to have been wholly entrusted to Browne, who undertook the brickwork core and foundations as well as the marble masonry. There were initial difficulties with the foundations, where a branch of the Tyburn caused a 'quicksand'.⁴⁰ By the end of the winter these problems had been resolved, the lower plinth had been reached and Browne had set the lowest courses of marble. The blocks were very big and his charges were high: 'there being no similar work in this country, there is no precedence for price,' he explained later.⁴¹ He built a special hoisting machine to raise the heavy blocks for the upper part of the work. Things were at last getting forward in the summer of 1828.

Too late. For from this point on, the private and parliamentary attacks on the King via Nash intensified; and, as the architect's public credit started to crumble and the Office of Works at last got a grip on the Buckingham Palace project, progress on the Arch stagnated. Decimus Burton's parallel arch, built in Portland stone rather than marble and to cost (as Nash's critics at the 1828 enquiry stressed), was also hit but was all but structurally complete when the crisis struck; it lacked only the sculptural reliefs by Baily and Henning and the triumphal 'car' on top, never in the event to be commissioned.⁴²

In May 1830 Chantrey's secretary, the poet Allan Cunningham, made a spirited attempt to defend the whole palace project in *Fraser's Magazine*. He justified the expenditure in proto-Ruskinian terms as a way of training 'higher artisans' during a period of public distress; the Palace he called a 'moral duty' and the Arch 'the greatest work of mere ornament which has been yet attempted by the moderns' – better than the Carrousel and equalled only by the Arco della Pace at Milan, so he claimed.⁴³ Cunningham's arguments flew right in the face of public opinion. A few weeks later the King died; work on the Palace and Arch was immediately suspended. At this time 'the body of the arch was almost complete', says the *History of the King's*

Works. 'The upper part of the plinth was set, only three cornice stones remaining to be fixed'.⁴⁴ Behind the scenes was a shambles – sheds and materials lying around in the park, and an increasingly frustrated and shrill Joseph Browne pleading with the Office of Works and with Nash for money he was owed both for the original marble purchase and now for fixing marble. The cutting had mostly been done, but he could not get money until the stones were in place. Another bone of contention was Browne's special hoisting machine, which the Government had taken over at a valuation agreed by Nash, without consulting Browne. Eventually the sacked Nash paid Browne most of what he was owed for marble purchase, and in February 1832 was himself awaiting compensation from the Treasury.⁴⁵

William IV had no enthusiasm for completing his brother's extravagant building projects or inhabiting his palace. But though Palace and Arch alike may have been an embarrassment, the 1831 enquiry reluctantly concluded that they would have to be finished. Nash having been dismissed, a new architect, Edward Blore, was brought in to do this at cut-price rate under the superintendence of Lord Duncannon, the economy-minded Whig whom Lord Grey had installed at the Office of Woods.⁴⁶

Blore's involvement with the Arch is less well-known than his intervention at the Palace, but the upshot was scarcely less hamfisted.

Early in 1832 he consulted both Pennethorne (now running Nash's former office) and Joseph Browne, who protested that he was 'more desirous of finishing this National Monument for the credit that I hope to merit, than I am anxious to gain from it'.⁴⁷ Blore then submitted two schemes to the Government, one as Nash had intended but without the relief sculpture (for which he alleged that he could not obtain a drawing), the other with a lower attic and without the high pedestal on top for

Chantrey's equestrian statue. He preferred the second scheme for a particular reason: 'the lower it is kept the better will it look and the less will it interfere with the palace'.⁴⁸ Already Blore was adding attics to the Palace, creating new problems of bulk and proportions. To the Treasury, Blore's preference was simply cheaper, so they sanctioned it in June 1832.

Works were again proceeding within the Palace, but still nothing was done to the Arch. So late as July 1833 Duncannon put a proposal to Blore, perhaps emanating from the King, to remove the Arch altogether. This Blore resisted on grounds of cost, arguing that it was made of 'enormous blocks of marble secured together in the most firm and substantial manner by strong cramps and ties of metal'.⁴⁹ Soon afterwards he was able to secure tenders for completing the Arch 'commencing from the top of the plinth over the Corinthian cornice'.⁵⁰ Blore had been reluctant to re-employ the recalcitrant Browne, who was repeatedly and bitterly demanding unpaid money for the marble and compensation for his hoisting machine, and refusing to finish works inside the Palace until his grievances were settled. But such was the history of the project that Browne was really the only man for the job. He it was therefore who completed the masonry work of the attic to Blore's cut-down design in the latter half of 1833. The rubbing down and polishing of the whole Arch, however, Browne declined as yet to do.⁵¹

So the Marble Arch as completed by Blore and Browne in 1833 consisted of Nash's design up to the principal cornice only, with the Baily and Westmacott reliefs and other carvings flanking the arch duly in position; above all this was a ponderous, naked attic broken up with vulgar consoles, wholly by Blore. Duncannon had wanted to get rid of the sculpture altogether, and it was only with difficulty that Blore managed to incorporate portions of the attic frieze randomly into the revised upper elevations of the Palace (Fig. 4). The statues

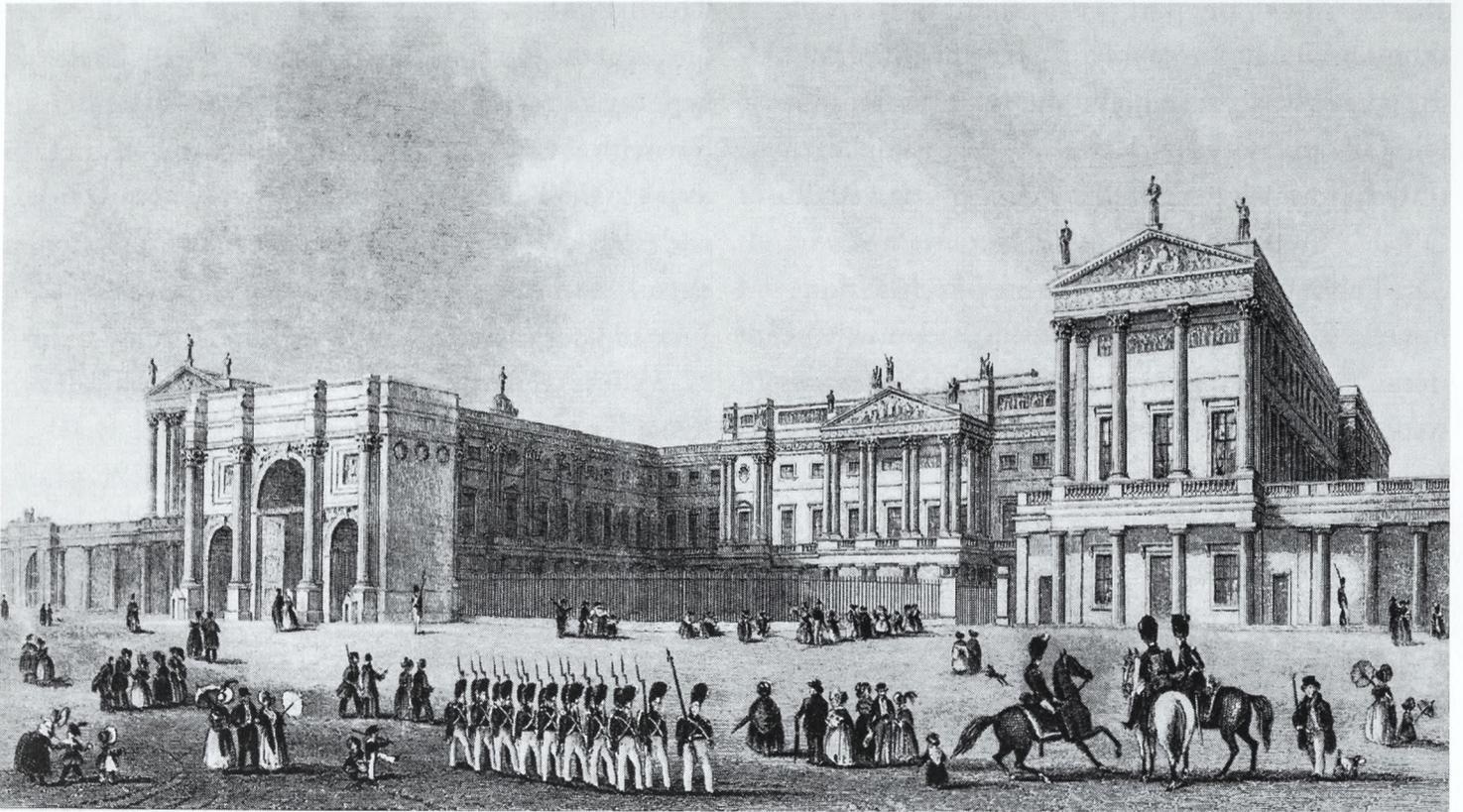


Figure 4. R. Garland, Buckingham Palace, view of c.1840. *Westminster Archive Centre.*

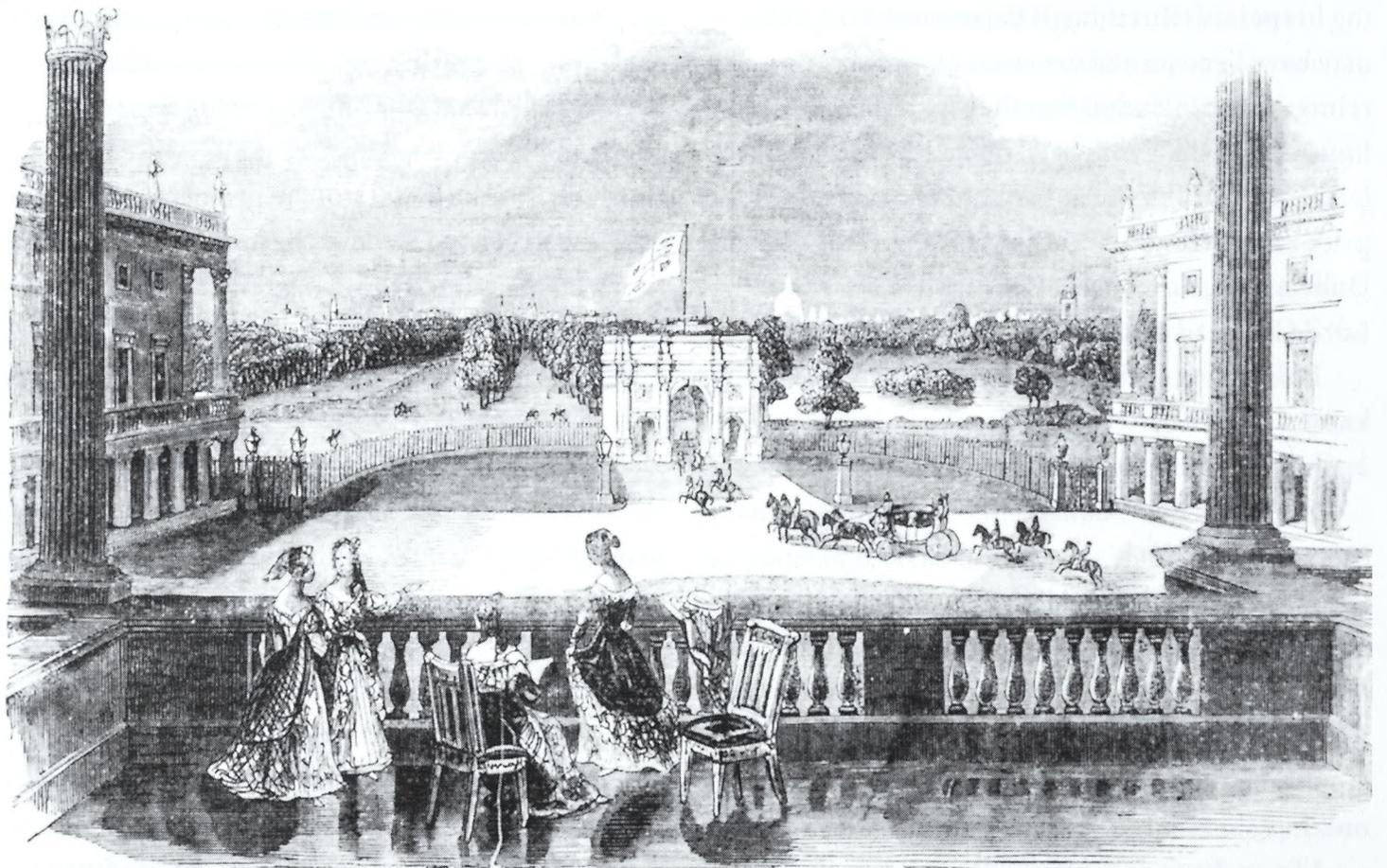


Figure 5. View of the Marble Arch from Buckingham Palace, c. 1840. *Westminster Archive Centre.*

intended to surmount the columns he was able to pass on to William Wilkins for use on external niches of the National Gallery, while other pieces of frieze were dispersed or stored away, some to be sold at Christie's as recently as 1985. No pedestal on the arch meant no equestrian statue of George IV. Chantrey's great bronze remained in his studio, to await a plinth in Trafalgar Square.⁵²

Joseph Browne had to wait until October 1835 for his outstanding bills to be paid. The case was submitted to arbitration and dragged on, until at last he received the massive arrears of £14,799.⁵³ Presumably he cleaned and polished the Arch once the case was settled.

Still the Arch was not then quite complete; there remained the matter of the great central gates. These, along with the main staircase railing in the Palace, had been assigned to the reputable smith, bronzist and lampmaker Samuel Parker, brother of the architect Charles Parker (author of *Villa Rustica*). From the start, the metalwork of the Arch and enclosing railings to the Palace had been intended to be in 'mosaic gold', a metallic composition 'patronized by Mr Nash', stated *The Times* in 1826.⁵⁴ 'Mosaic gold' or *aurum mosaicum* seems generally to have meant a bronze powder based on tin,⁵⁵ but here a solid substance is implied. Parker, evidently the expert in this field, had got some way with the ornamental portions before the stop on works in 1830. The hiatus caused difficulties for many of the craftsmen involved with the Palace; in Parker's case it precipitated his bankruptcy in April 1832.⁵⁶ Later that year there were various packages lying about at the Palace and more at Parker's Regent's Canal foundry for the main staircase and for the gates of the Arch.⁵⁷ It fell to W. J. Browne, Nash's former clerk, to sort these out. He reported in March 1833 that the framing of the carriage gates 'containing the circular panels with the vandyke borders and honeysuckle enrichments' were complete, together with portions of the overthrow.⁵⁸

This report also suggests that the royal arms were to be over the gates, but since no one could produce a drawing of what Nash had intended, Blore was forced to improvise. In 1834 he employed James De Ville to make plain railings to front the palace court, joining the Arch to the side wings, and also iron side gates for the Arch. Blore was concerned by the whole aspect of the forecourt enclosure, feeling that the principal fault of the Marble Arch was its 'want of Architectural connexion' with the Palace. A stone forecourt wall, he came to feel, would have linked it better with the wings of the Palace than railings. Such were his reflections when Duncannon, so late as January 1837, finally ordered the completion of the forecourt, suggesting inter alia a 'low gate' in lieu of Parker's incomplete gates to the Arch.⁵⁹ This Blore was able to resist, and in April of that year Bramah and Prestage were commissioned for a modest sum to put together Parker's pieces of bronzework (for bronze of a kind they certainly are), make good what was missing and erect the whole minus the overthrow, which Blore thought better omitted.⁶⁰ The George and Dragon and lion roundels in the gates are therefore presumably Parker's, but the 'VR' monograms, executed in a skimpier style, must be Bramah and Prestage's, indicating that the Arch in its bastardized form was not finally completed till the accession of Queen Victoria in June 1837. The Palace, too, after seven years of alterations by Blore, was handed over just as William IV died. He never lived there (Fig. 5).

The final ignominy for the Marble Arch was its outright removal, as the symbol of a discredited era. This followed logically on from Blore's further act of vandalism at Buckingham Palace, the concealing of the front courtyard with a new east wing, sited so near the Arch as to overpower and nullify it. The issue of where to move it arose in 1846 when work on the east wing began, but no immediate decision was taken. Busybodies wrote over the next few

years to the papers proposing various new locations – *inter alia*, Kensington Gardens, the Spring Gardens entrance to St James's Park (the site of the later Admiralty Arch) and the front of the British Museum. Most suggestive was the idea of using the Arch to connect Portland Place and the Broad Walk in Regent's Park.⁶¹ With the wing approaching completion in 1850, Decimus Burton (a veteran of the events of 1825–31) and W. A. Nesfield were instructed to prepare a plan for the new palace forecourt and environs.⁶² The Arch was dismantled and its cladding left to lie 'piecemeal in an inclosure in the Green-park' for some months while its future was being decided.⁶³ Finally Burton and Nesfield suggested that the Arch be moved to Cumberland Gate at the north-east corner of Hyde Park, there to be linked to Burton's chain of lodges and to form an entrance to the park from the top of Park Lane and west end of Oxford Street. The timing of this decision seems to have had nothing to do with the Great Exhibition, impending on the other side of the park.

Thomas Cubitt, Prince Albert's confidant and contractor for the east wing of the Palace, offered in November 1850 to rebuild the Arch on this new site, on condition that he could choose for himself how the foundations and core were to be built.⁶⁴ His specification survives, but we do not know how far it differs from the original construction.⁶⁵ The foundations were to be dug down to ten feet maximum and filled with concrete, on which the York stone landings were to be laid. Existing York steps and paving to upper floors are mentioned, iron girders were to be refixed, and copper skylights repaired. The core of the structure was stock brickwork, laid in mortar and cement. As to the marble cladding, it was 'carefully bedded and cramped and run with cement'. Various comments make clear that the *ravaccione* had already suffered from London's atmosphere. It was therefore 'fine sanded' but not polished, and defects were made good with fresh marble where required. Work on the re-erection

began in January 1851 and was completed in the early spring, when *The Times* pronounced that the rebuilt Arch presented 'a very chaste appearance. The upper part of the arch has been constructed as a police station, and will contain a reserve of men'.⁶⁶ The works involved reorganizing the roadway and rebuilding the Cumberland Gate lodge and cost over £3,000 in all.

The new position for the Arch was criticized from the start. Despite the many suggestions for its site there had been no public consultation or parliamentary debate. A coruscating leader from George Godwin in *The Builder* contained the following unheeded plea:

At the time when Buckingham Palace was first placed in the hands of Mr Blore, with a view to its improvement, the arch was, as it has continued to be, a subject of difficulty and discussion. It was at length determined to abandon the expensive style of decoration commenced by Mr Nash; to patch it up at as little cost as possible; and, after finishing it in a plain manner, to leave it standing where Mr Nash has placed it, satisfied with exclaiming, 'Thou canst not say I did it'. Among the fragments of Mr Nash's intention was found a handsome frieze, executed by some of the first sculptors of the day, and intended to adorn the upper compartment of the arch. Not knowing how to apply this piece of work, yet desirous of reserving it from being cast aside as rubbish, Mr Blore fixed the several pieces of the frieze in separate compartments of the external wall of Buckingham Palace; but was compelled, by the nature of the elevation, to place them at such a height that since that time they have never attracted observation, and are probably forgotten; and, moreover, they are now inclosed in the court formed by the recent addition to the building.

Would it not be worth while to consider, whether, in finishing the arch in its new site, the original plan might not partially be carried into effect, adding to the beauty and importance of the work, by removing these pieces of sculptured marble, and others now scattered about, to their original destination? A bronze Victory, or car and horses, resembling that on the Brandenburg Gate at Berlin, would be a material addition to its general effect.⁶⁷

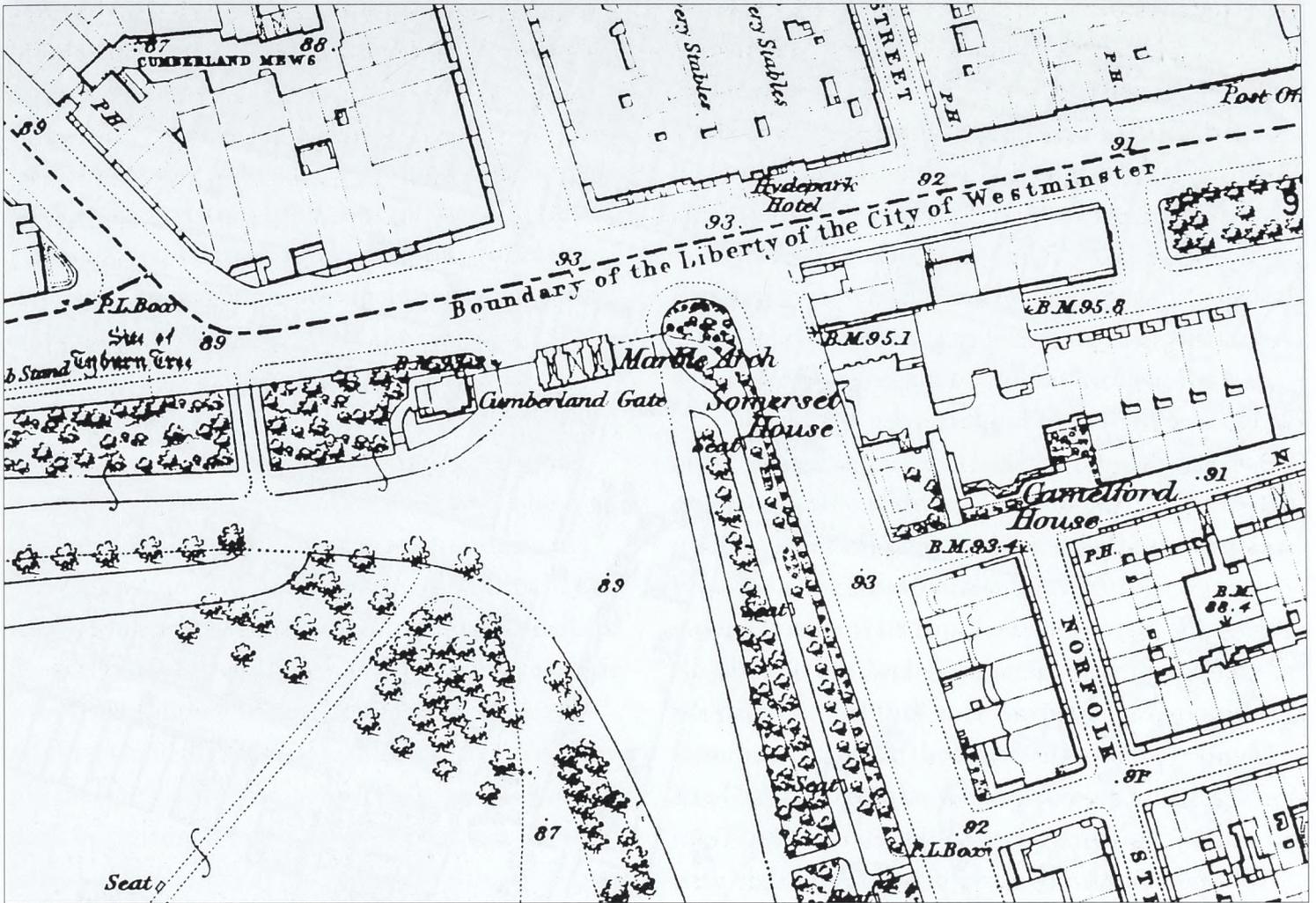


Figure 6. Plan of Cumberland Gate entrance to Hyde Park as it was between 1851 and 1908. *Ordnance Survey, 1867-71.*



Figure 7. The Marble Arch from the north-west in 1902. *English Heritage.*



Figure 8. Plan of Cumberland Gate entrance to Hyde Park as it was between 1908 and 1962. *Ordnance Survey, revision of 1914.*

The Cumberland Gate site was in fact by no means so forlorn and illogical a position for the Marble Arch as it is today (Figs. 6 and 7). In the 1820s Decimus Burton, under the aegis of the Office of Woods, had reorganized the whole Park Lane side of Hyde Park, laying out a new carriage road inside the park, substituting an iron railing and belt of trees for the former high brick wall along Park Lane, and creating new entrances with lodges – the Hyde Park Corner screen at the south end, next to Apsley House; Grosvenor Gate opposite Upper Grosvenor Street; and Cumberland Gate in the north-east corner of the park next to Oxford Street and opposite Cumberland Place. These improvements had much enhanced the neighbourhood and

made the top of Park Lane more fashionable.⁶⁸ The Arch in its new position was intended to add to the park's attractions. It was by no means left bare in the middle of a traffic island, nor was it connected with Oxford Street or Park Lane; instead it was positioned on axis with Great Cumberland Place as a new ceremonial entrance into Hyde Park. The lodge was rebuilt just to its west, separated from the Arch by one of two low gates on either side for ordinary traffic (the main gate being opened only for royalty entering or leaving the park). To the east of the Arch was the end of a shelter-belt of trees and shrubs shielding Hyde Park from the traffic of Park Lane. In this way the experienced Burton and Nesfield contrived that the Arch would enjoy a

sense of scale, and that its setting would not suffer too much from its proximity to large roads with distant views.

In this tolerably satisfactory position the Marble Arch remained until 1908. Not till then did London County Council road improvements propel the Arch into its current hapless role as the focus of a traffic island. The reason was the enormous volume of traffic at this intersection – the busiest in all London, the Royal Commission on London Traffic had discovered, with 29,320 vehicles between 8am and 8pm on the day of their survey. The Commission recommended in 1905 shifting the whole Arch once again, by setting it further back as a new entrance to the park and leaving its position clear for a major rearrangement of roads.⁶⁹ Counter-proposals followed, most persistently from an architect called F. W. Speaight, who favoured leaving the Arch where it was and detaching it from the park by putting it in the centre of a grandiose traffic island. *The Builder* at first opposed this concept absolutely:

The arch now stands as a gate to the park, though not one generally used; in Mr Speaight's scheme it would lose that appearance entirely, and would merely be an erection standing apart, without any meaning. Mr Speaight says he took the idea from the position of the Arc de l'Etoile at Paris, but unfortunately the Marble Arch is not a grand structure like the Arc de l'Etoile The Marble Arch is no such monumental work; it is a small and rather insignificant specimen of a triumphal arch.⁷⁰

Nevertheless in due course the LCC plumped for an economical version of Speaight's idea, while the Crown agreed to give the necessary land for a roadway south of the Arch and to pay for a new iron fence to the park and a set of new gates aligned with the Arch. The LCC Improvements Committee argued:

We consider that the effect will be better if the arch be retained in its present position as the central architectural feature of the proposed large open space to

be formed outside the park. The position of the arch would thus be similar to that of arches in Paris, and other continental cities.⁷¹

Thus did the questionable precedent of the larger-scaled Arc de Triomphe, not the comparable Arc du Carrousel, come to decide the fate of the Marble Arch.

The result was a dog's dinner (Fig. 8). *The Builder* (by now reconciled to the Speaight scheme) called it 'a lopsided arrangement in respect of which the arch has almost ceased to have any significance . . . as an architectural scheme it is a blunder and a good idea has been spoilt'.⁷² The central island was divided asymmetrically, with the traffic system between Park Lane and Edgware Road swirling round it; the Burton lodge was moved further west (opposite the end of Edgware Road); and the Arch found itself not the gateway to the park or any other enclosure, but an isolated monument outside the precincts of the park, opposite Great Cumberland Place and leading to nothing. On axis to its south were the new park gates, with high stone piers topped with lamps by W. Bainbridge Reynolds, and ornamental iron leaves of a respectable Edwardian design 'prepared, or remodelled in the Office of Works' and made by the firm of H. H. Martyn (Figs. 9 and 10).⁷³

Later changes of 1961–2 emphasized the setting of the Arch as a monumental object in the middle of a traffic island and increased its contextual isolation. They derived from the widening of Park Lane – one of several big London traffic improvements programmed as far back as 1951. The doubling of Park Lane took 21 acres out of the park and destroyed Decimus Burton and James McAdam's carriage road inside the eastern perimeter of the park.⁷⁴ It also entailed the westward elongation and complete reorganization of the Marble Arch roundabout, and a third repositioning of the little Cumberland Gate lodge, which once again moved further west. The Edwardian gates on axis with the Arch were bought by Vantona Ltd; they were



Figure 9. Cumberland Gate entrance to Hyde Park, from the south-west, with the Marble Arch behind it, in the 1930's. English Heritage.



Figure 10. Cumberland Gate entrance to Hyde Park, from the south-east, with the Marble Arch behind it, in the 1930's. English Heritage.

supposed to be re-erected outside Richard Hawarth and Company's factory, Ordsall Lane, Salford, but allegedly went for scrap, though a portion seems to have escaped to a park somewhere in Saskatchewan.⁷⁵ An intricate system of pedestrian underpasses was introduced by the LCC, as at Hyde Park Corner and Elephant and Castle. The above-ground architecture of the Marble Arch roundabout is said to have been one of the few schemes which engaged the personal attention of the LCC Architect of the time, (Sir) Hubert Bennett. Certainly the cool, residually neo-classical form of the curbs, walls, pavements and low landscaping is old-fashioned compared to the typical work of the LCC architects of the early 1960s. It harmonizes well enough with the Arch, but has insufficient force or character to support it or rescue it from its environmental predicament. Ian Nairn's criticisms in 1964 were biting:

the attempts at formality and the grand manner affected around the Marble Arch are hopeless failures, and the pedestrian subway and steps are arid, grinding and inhuman. The only hope is to cover the whole lot up with messy varied activities as soon as possible.⁷⁶

Hope of a happier future for the long-suffering Marble Arch seemed to dawn in 1994, when the Royal Parks held a competition for a better setting for the whole roundabout. Alas, its terms were drawn too narrowly; though some of the entrants proposed moving the Arch slightly, none of the

premiated schemes took the bull by the horns by discerning that a monument once radically moved might best be moved again. This I have recently proposed in an article for *Architectural Research Quarterly*, where it is suggested that Park Square, Regent's Park would be the best setting for the Arch, as proposed anonymously back in 1846.⁷⁷ The only practical upshot of the 1994 initiative has been the cleaning and partial restoration of the Arch – a gesture that has revealed the *ravaccione* marble over which Joseph Browne expended such effort to be far less drab and textureless than one had imagined. Once again the Arch proclaims itself to be of marble and has taken back something of the imperial glamour that Nash envisaged for it. But for how long? The site where it stands is impossibly polluted; much of the marble is cracked, and some of the Corinthian capitals above the great fluted monoliths have been damaged by the atmosphere. Cleaning is only a stop-gap; the long-term future of the Arch has still to be faced. What better than to move and restore it, even better, to reassemble and complete it with all the sculpture destined for it, much of which survives? The recreation of the lost Euston Arch has excited many heads. Why not restore the existing Marble Arch for the Millennium in the guise it was supposed to have taken, as a monument to the ill-commemorated Napoleonic Wars? Its vicissitudes have, after all, proved just as shameful to British architectural pride as the demolition of its Doric sister, that harbinger of the railway age.

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NOTES

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- 2 Report from the Select Committee on the Office of Works, British Parliamentary Papers 1828 (446), iv (henceforward 1828 Report).
- 3 Report from the Select Committee on Crown Leases, British Parliamentary Papers 1829 (1), iii.
- 4 Report from the Select Committee on Windsor Castle and Buckingham Palace, British Parliamentary Papers 1831 (329), iv (henceforward 1831 Report).
- 5 H. Clifford Smith, *op. cit.*, 42.
- 6 See notably Christopher Davy in *Mechanics' Magazine*, viii, 18 Aug. 1827, 65–8 and ix, 23 Feb. 1828, 49–51; also 1828 Report, examination of Decimus Burton, 13 May 1828, where in the interests of economy Burton does his best to deny the existence of a grand scheme.
- 7 Uwe Westfehling, *Triumphbogen in 19 und 20 Jahrhundert*, Munich, 1977.
- 8 Michel Dillange, *L'Arc de Triomphe et le Carrousel*, Rennes, 1983. See also Thomas W. Gaetgens, *Napoleons Arc de Triomphe*, Göttingen, 1979; Christian Dupavillon and Francis Lacroche, *Le Triomphe des Arcs*, Paris, 1989.
- 9 *Despatches, Correspondence and Memorials of Field Marshal Arthur Duke of Wellington, KG*, new series, vi (1829–30), 1877, 3–4.
- 10 Geoffrey Tyack, *Sir James Pennethorne and the Making of Victorian London*, Cambridge, 1992, 8–12.
- 11 Benjamin Ferrey, *Recollections of A. W. N. Pugin and his father Augustus Pugin*, London, 1861, 31.
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- 13 H. Clifford Smith, 'Vicissitudes of the Marble Arch', *Country Life*, cx1, July 4 1952, 38–9.
- 14 1828 Report, examination of John Nash, 3 April 1828.
- 15 Nicholas Penny, *The Materials of Sculpture*, London, 1993, 49–67.
- 16 Gérard Hubert, *La Sculpture dans l'Italie Napoléonienne*, Paris, 1964, 327–81.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 374–80.
- 18 George Jones, *Sir Francis Chantrey, RA*, London, 1849, 234–5; see also the Chantrey ledgers published in *Walpole Society*, LXVI, 1991–2, 244–5.
- 19 Joseph Gwilt, *An Encyclopaedia of Architecture*, section on marble (1903 edn., 489).
- 20 1831 Report, examination of Chantrey, 30 March 1831.
- 21 *Ibid.*, examination of Peter Paul Grellier, 24 March 1831.
- 22 *Ibid.*, Appendix 13 (6 July 1826).
- 23 For Browne, see 1831 Report, examination of Joseph Browne, 22 March 1831 etc.; Howard Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600–1840*, London, 1995, 171; Rupert Gunnis, *Dictionary of British Sculptors 1660–1851*, London, 1968, 65–6; *Survey of London*, xl, London, 1980, 138 (closing-down sale).
- 24 1831 Report, Appendix 13, correspondence between Nash and Browne, July – August 1825.
- 25 *Idem.*
- 26 *Ibid.*, letters of Nash and Browne, Dec. 1825 – April 1826.
- 27 *Ibid.*, Browne to Nash, 22 Feb. 1826.
- 28 *Ibid.*, Nash to Browne, 13 April 1826.
- 29 *Idem.*
- 30 *Ibid.*, Browne to Nash, 23 May 1826.
- 31 London, Public Record Office (henceforward PRO), WORK 19/3/232, letter from Nash, 20 Nov. 1827.
- 32 1831 Report, Appendix 13, letters of Browne to Nash, July – August 1826, and examination of Joseph Browne, 22 March 1831.
- 33 PRO, WORK 19/3/160–1, marble account, July 1831.
- 34 *The Times*, 11 Feb. 1828, 3b and 12 Feb. 1828, 3e.
- 35 1831 Report, examination of Peter Paul Grellier, 24 March 1831.
- 36 *Ibid.*, examination of Joseph Browne, 22 March 1831; PRO, WORK 19/3/164, letter from Nash, 25 July 1831.
- 37 For the sculpture of the Marble Arch see Margaret Whinney, *Sculpture in Britain 1530 to 1830*, London, 1988, 374–6 and 471, and Alison Yarrington, *The Commemoration of the Hero 1800–1864*, London, 1988, 229–45.
- 38 *Despatches, Correspondence and Memorials of Field Marshal Arthur Duke of Wellington, KG*, new series, vi (1829–30), 1877, 3–4.

- 39 Yarrington, *op. cit.*, 232; Nicholas Penny tells me that Westmacott subcontracted much of his work to his son, Richard Westmacott junior.
- 40 1828 Report, examination of John Nash, 3 April 1828.
- 41 PRO, WORK 19/4/676-9, letter of Joseph Browne to the Treasury, 2 April 1832.
- 42 1828 Report, examination of Decimus Burton, 13 May 1828; Yarrington, *op. cit.*, 243-5.
- 43 *Fraser's Magazine*, I (4), May 1830, 379-88.
- 44 Crook and Port, *op. cit.*, 296.
- 45 PRO, WORK 19/4/640.
- 46 Crook and Port, *op. cit.*, 277-80.
- 47 PRO, WORK 19/4/638, Joseph Browne to Blore, 31 Jan. 1832.
- 48 PRO, WORK 19/4/742, memo from Blore, 31 May 1832.
- 49 PRO, WORK 19/5/1238, Blore to Lord Duncannon, 15 July 1833.
- 50 PRO, WORK 19/4/1004, tenders of 20 Aug. 1833.
- 51 PRO, WORK 19/5/1204, letter from Joseph Browne, 10 June 1834.
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- 53 PRO, WORK 19/6/1488, award to Joseph Browne, 21 Oct. 1835.
- 54 *The Times*, 23 Jan. 1826, 2e. For Parker, see Gunnis, *op. cit.*, 291.
- 55 On mosaic gold see Robert Dossie, *The Handmaid to the Arts*, 1796, I, 286 and 308-9, and P. F. Tingry, *The Painter's and Colourman's Complete Guide*, 1830, 63 (kindly communicated by Patrick Baty via Clive Wainwright).
- 56 *The Times*, 7 April 1832, 3a. E. H. Baily also went bankrupt in 1832 [PRO, WORK 19/4/844].
- 57 PRO, WORK 19/4/841, letter from W. J. Browne, 24 Oct. 1832.
- 58 PRO, WORK 19/4/838-40, report from W. J. Browne, 20 March 1833.
- 59 PRO, WORK 19/6/1530, letter from Edward Blore, 17 Jan. 1837.
- 60 PRO, WORK 19/6/1543, Blore to Duncannon, 6 April 1837.
- 61 *The Builder*, VI, 11 Nov. 1848, 549.
- 62 PRO, WORK 19/8/2665, Nesfield to Lord Carlisle, 19 Nov. 1849.
- 63 *The Builder*, IX, 11 Jan. 1851, 28-9; Hermione Hobhouse, *Thomas Cubitt*, London, 1971, 408-9.
- 64 PRO, WORK 19/8/2900, letter from Cubitt, 12 Nov. 1850; Hobhouse, *op. cit.*, 407ff.
- 65 Specification in PRO, WORK 19/8/2901.
- 66 *The Times*, 6 Jan. 1851, 3c.
- 67 *The Builder*, IX, 15 Feb. 1851, 99.
- 68 *Survey of London*, XL, London, 1980, 265.
- 69 London County Council Minutes, 21 Jan. 1908, 46-7.
- 70 *The Builder*, xc, 17 Feb. 1906, 163.
- 71 London County Council Minutes, 21 Jan. 1908, 46-7.
- 72 *The Builder*, xciv, 4 April 1908, 388, 397.
- 73 *Ibid.*, 11 April 1908, 428.
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- 75 Roger Bowdler, report for London Region of English Heritage on Marble Arch improvements, 1 July 1994; John Whitaker, *The Best: A History of H. H. Martyn & Co.*, Cheltenham, 1985, 97-8.
- 76 Ian Nairn, *Modern Buildings in London*, London, 1964, 13-14.
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