

# HISTORIC STREET LIGHT COLLECTION

## Report to South East Area Committee



October 2020



Comhairle Cathrach  
Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City Council

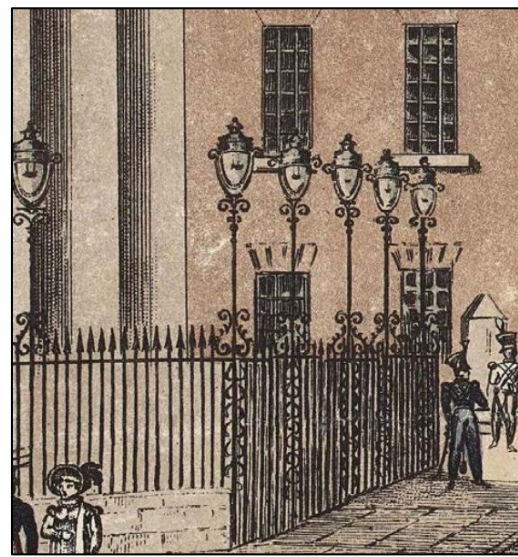
*This Report outlines a proposal by Dublin City Council to install a working collection of conserved historic lamp standards in Merrion Square Park. The proposal has been prepared by the Parks, Landscape and Biodiversity Section with the assistance of Public Lighting. Howley Hayes Conservation Architects with Fred Hammond Industrial Heritage Consultant were commissioned by DCC to develop and oversee the conservation, repair and installation of historic lamp standards stored by DCC.*

## **HISTORY OF PUBLIC LIGHTING IN DUBLIN**

The earliest recorded public lighting in Dublin dates back to 1616 and the passing of the “candlelight law”; for the following two centuries public lighting consisted of open-flame lanterns powered by candles or oil. These early fittings (by 1785 there were more than 10,000 lamps) were often integrated into railings of houses, parks or bridges, mounted onto stone plinths as independent standards, or supported on brackets fixed to the facades of buildings (some of which survive today).



Original lamp iron on Pembroke Street



Iron lamps on City Hall (then the Royal Exchange)

Gas-power lighting first appeared in London in 1807 and was first introduced in Dublin in 1825. With its higher light levels they made cities safer places to be during the darker winter months, while shops, businesses, restaurants and places of entertainment could open for longer hours and the concept of “nightlife” was born. The first public building in Dublin to be lit by gas was the Theatre Royal, Temple Bar on the evening of Saturday 20 March 1819.



Empty iron lamps City Hall replaced by gas street light c.1870



Early gas lamps at the GPO

The Dublin Coal Gas Company was the first of four companies established during the 1820s to supply the city with gas extending the supply to the suburbs of Kilmainham, Fairview and Rathmines. By 1884, there were apparently 3,750 street lamps in Dublin, attended to by 25 lamplighters who had to climb up and down their ladders 300 times per shift to attend to their quota of some 150 lights.



Lamplighter using pole



Lamplighter Phoenix Park

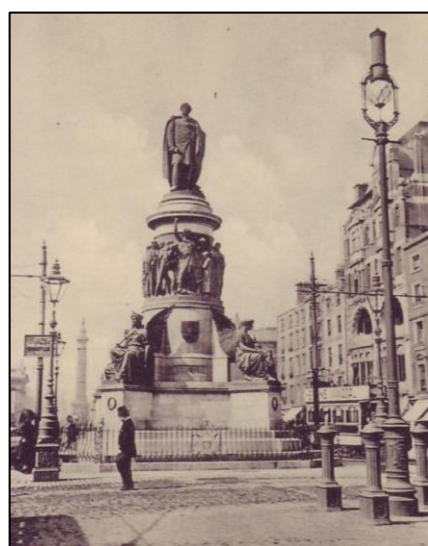
In their early form, gas lamp posts consisted of low moulded base with a slender shaft rising to a ladder-rest. Most lampposts consisted of single lamp fittings, with more elaborate multiple fittings located at key road junctions, bridges and civic buildings.

In 1881 the Dublin Electric Light & Power Company was established to provide electricity to both homeowners and the public realm. The use of electrical lighting spread steadily, often by adapting and reusing former gas lamp standards.

In 1892 Dublin Corporation opened the Fleet Street Generating Station to power the 81 arc lamps that had been erected along the principal streets of the capital. With a modest capacity of 0.9 megawatts the station reached capacity fairly quickly and within less than ten years was replaced by the Pigeon House Generating Station.



Early electric street light Pembroke Road



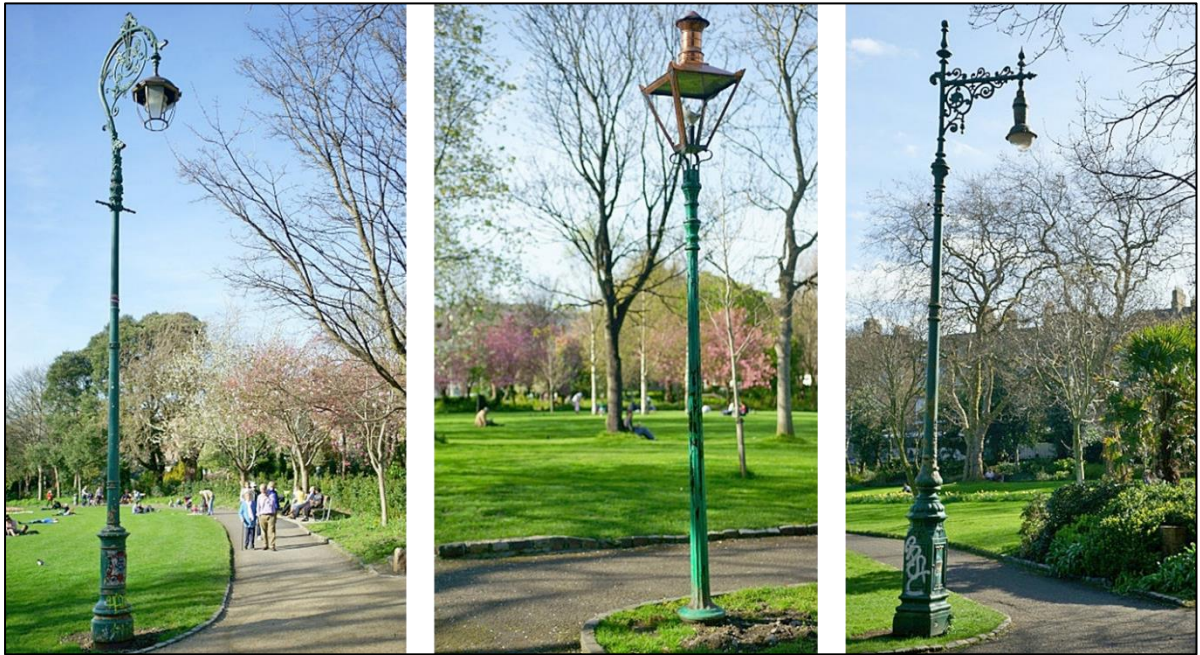
Mix of gas & electric lighting on O'Connell Street



Most of the new electric standards were fabricated in steel and to a lesser extent in concrete, but a large number of former gas standards were simply converted to accommodate electrically-powered lamps.

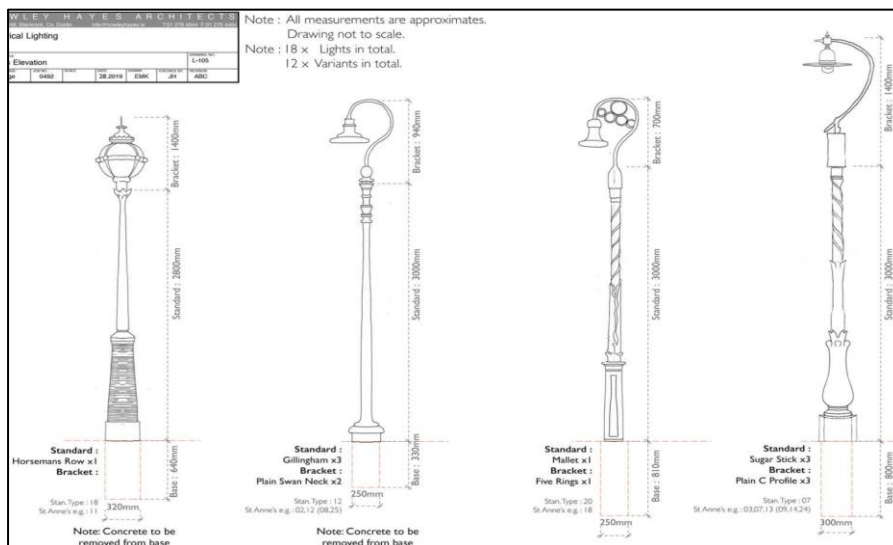
## THE COLLECTION – Conservation & Repair

A collection of decommissioned lamp standards were erected (but never connected) by Dublin Corporation in the 1990s in Merrion Square Park. As part of the upgrading of the Park the lamps were removed to storage in recent years.



Some of the Merrion Square collection before removal

This collection has now been carefully cleaned, repaired and restored with additional lamps being added to enlarge the collection by including other designs that were stored in the Public Lighting Department depot. A total of 20 lamp standards have been conserved and repaired.







Lamps before cleaning & Conservation



Lamps cleaned & Repaired with the first coat of primer applied





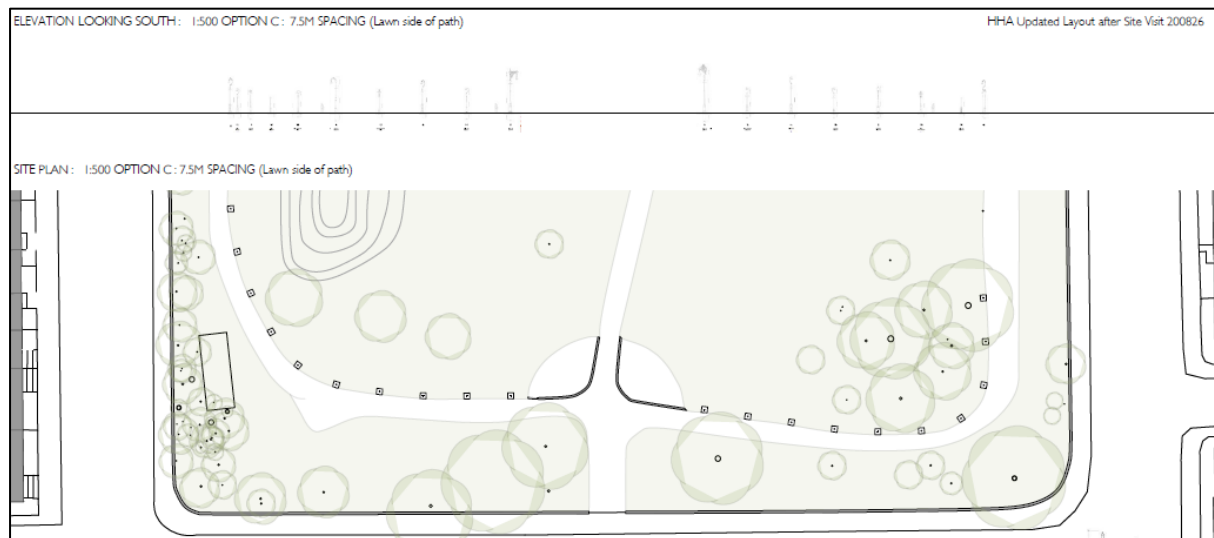
A second coat of primer is applied



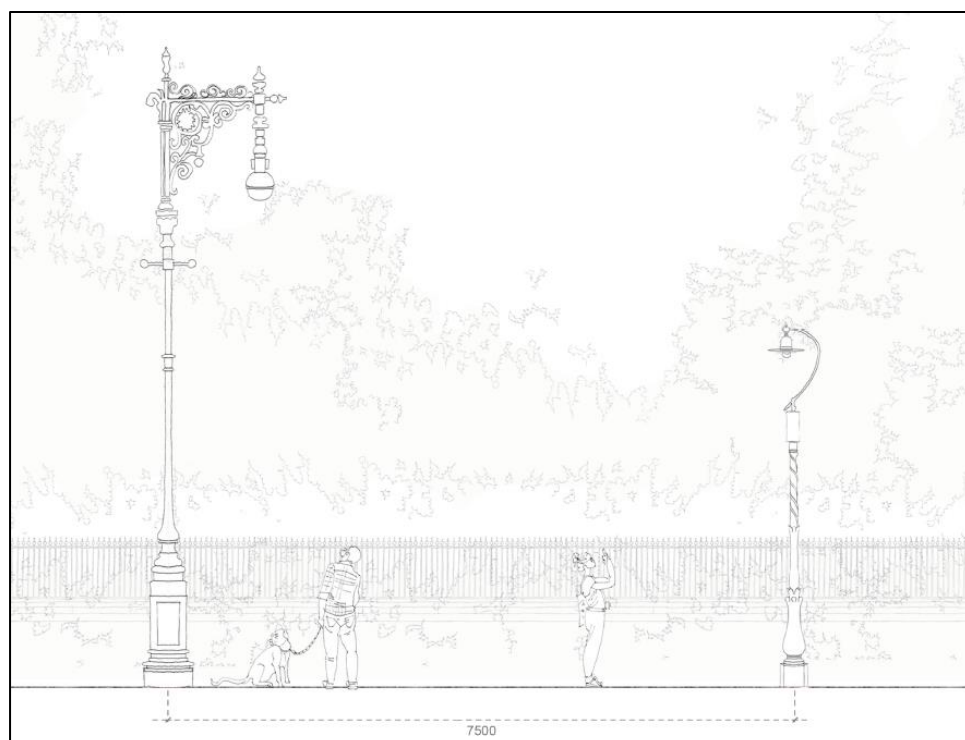
Final coat of paint applied ready for installation

## Installation of Collection in Merrion Square

It is now proposed to re-erect the lamps (20 in total) as a coherent historical collection back in Merrion Square Park. While the final layout is the subject of ongoing discussion, one option is to place the collection at regular intervals (7.5m between each one) along the inside of the path to the eastern end of the Park. This arrangement would allow the standards to be serviced and thereby lit again. The placing of the lamp standards in Merrion Square would also allow the modest expansion of the collection of other decommissioned historic pieces from time to time. The collection will be accompanied by an online guide to the history of lighting in the city as well as an information panel for visitors to the park.

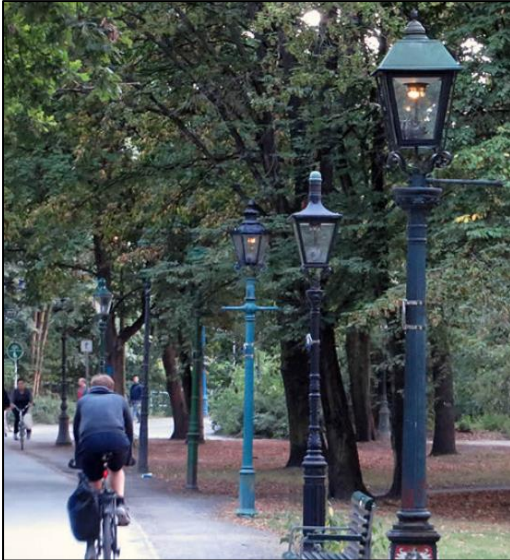


Layout option for lamp standards at eastern internal path of Merrion Square Park



The surviving examples of historic lighting in Dublin tell a fascinating story about the birth of public lighting in the city from open flame lamps fuelled by whale oil, through gas, and into the electrical era.

Historic lighting is valued and preserved within many cities in Europe and is recognised as being of considerable importance, while at the same time visually enriching our streetscapes.



Open Air Light Museum in Berlin

History, science, technology and artistic achievement combine to make the historic light fittings that survive in Dublin, a collection of considerable cultural significance, and of European importance.

Donncha Ó Dúlaing  
Parks, Biodiversity & Landscape Services