Revivalist archaeology and museum politics during the Irish Revival

ELIZABETH CROOKE

The Irish Revival of 1880s–1920s has been characterized as a time when art met propaganda with the politicization of language, sport, literature, and theatre providing the evidence. Each of these movements drew from an imagination of the Irish past, a past littered with the spirit of heroes and the belief in a glorious past that could provide inspiration for the future. Incorporated into these aspirations was an interest in the archaeology of the Irish landscape and the material remains that it revealed – this provided stimulation for Irish antiquarians, the basis for important collections, and was placed on public view in the Dublin Museum of Science and Art, which opened on Kildare Street in 1890. The history of collecting and exhibition building in Ireland exposes these practices as vehicles for the cultural and political propaganda that dominated Irish nationalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This essay is an evaluation of how some of the characteristics associated with the Irish Revival also shaped the archaeological and museum movements in Ireland.

Of the characteristics that the archaeological and museum movements in Ireland shared with the Irish Revival, two will be explored in this essay. Firstly, the way Ireland's past was understood and celebrated and, secondly, the tensions arising from the influence of Britain on Irish culture and institutions. In the case of the former, the idealization of the Irish past that inspired the language and literature movements also stirred people to collect and exhibit archaeology for public benefit. In relation to the second point, it was a matter of distrust in Britain and a belief in its lack of understanding of Irish culture, which sustained the various conflicts regarding the development of the Dublin museum and its collections. Although this essay considers mainly examples of activity during the revival of the 1880s–1920s, they should not be isolated from the pursuits of antiquarian and cultural movements earlier in the century.[1] The later period is, however, particularly relevant; it was when almost a century of interest in the creation of a national museum for Ireland culminated in the Dublin Museum of Science and Art.

The imagining of ancient Ireland during the revival was a product of versions of cultural nationalism and a century of politicization of the past. Since

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1 Some of the themes of this essay are put in this wider context in Elizabeth Crooke, *Politics, archaeology and the creation of a national museum in Ireland: an expression of national life* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000).

the time of O'Connell's meeting on Tara Hill, and the writings of Thomas Davis and the Young Ireland movement, archaeology had been incorporated into the nationalist campaign and was used in the writing of key propagandists. Firmly established in popular writing was a belief in the unique nature of the Irish past, represented in ancient writing, folklore and antiquities. Ireland was represented as having a long established tradition, encapsulated in historical and archaeological sources, and it was the preservation of this heritage that was used as one of the arguments to justify the drive for independence.

Many who were prominent in the late nineteenth-century revival built upon this popular perception of the Irish past and promoted the preservation of archaeology and antiquities as part of the national endeavour. The romantic vision of the past, promoted by revivalist activity, fuelled interest in Ireland's archaeology and a belief that the collection and display of antiquities was an expression of public duty. For cultural nationalism, the material presence of archaeological sites, monuments and objects provided a tangible link with Ireland's golden age. The founder of the Gaelic League, Douglas Hyde, referred to Ireland's folklore as the 'golden legends of far-off centuries',[2] which reconstructed the mind of 'Prehistoric man'.[3] Collecting the ancient folk songs and stories of Ireland was presented as an essential part of recalling Irish nationality, which had long been under threat from external influences. In an address delivered in New York, Hyde declared his interest in 'going here and there throughout the entire island and gathering, here and there, every relic of the past upon which we can lay our hands and gathering them together into one great whole and building and enshrining every one of them in the temple that shall be raised to the godhead of Irish nationhood'.[4] The novelist, George Moore, believed that the 'ancient architecture, whether in palace or cottage is beautiful; all of the coins, weapons and pottery of the ancient world are beautiful'.[5] Historian Alice Stopford Green wrote of the grandeur of Irish archaeology; in her mind, 'no jeweller's work was ever more perfect than the Ardagh Chalice', the 'fame of Tara was in the heart of every Irishman'. To her, these were 'national relics', 'memorials of ancient life', and should be preserved.[6]

Archaeological remains were perceived as tangible links that encapsulated the memories of a glorious past, and this gave them political value. Nationalist and author William O'Brien described archaeological monuments as the homes of the Irish nation and the Irish landscape as an historic entity 'woven inextricably around the Irish heart'. For O'Brien, archaeology inspired patriotism, which he

2 Douglas Hyde, 'The unpublished songs of Ireland' (1885), in Hyde, *Language, lore and lyrics*, ed. B. Ó Conaire (Dublin: Irish Academy Press, 1986), p. 73. **3** Hyde, 'Irish folklore' (1889), in O'Conaire, *Hyde*, p. 3. **4** Hyde, 'The Gaelic Revival' (1905), in O'Conaire, *Hyde*, p. 184. **5** George Moore, 'Literature and the Irish language', in Lady Gregory (ed.), *Ideals of Ireland* (London: At the Unicorn, 1901), p. 50. **6** Alice Stopford Green, *Irish nationality* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1911), pp 12, 17, 143, 239.

defined as 'the weird voice we hear from every graveyard where our fathers are sleeping, for every Irish graveyard contains the bones of uncanonized saints and martyrs' and their ruins were 'the most eloquent schoolmasters, the most stupendous memorials of a history and a race that was destined not to die'. Archaeological monuments were described as 'majestic shrines in which the old race worshipped … the voice of Ireland's past'.[7] This sense of worshipping the remains of antiquity was a constant theme in such popular writing. In 1881, Standish O'Grady wrote about how the history of Ireland clung to and grew from Irish barrows, so that the history of one generation became the poetry of the next. For O'Grady, the monuments of Ireland were the material representation of Ireland's legends; the legends provided the 'names, pedigrees, achievements and characters' of the 'massive cromlechs and great cairns'. These were the remains of 'prehistoric times and nations'. In his typical style, O'Grady damned the 'scientific' development of archaeological practice that did not adopt his more imaginative approach. He criticized archaeological 'explorers' for destroying the 'noble sepulchral raths' and unearthing our bones and ashes of kings and warriors, 'laid there once by pious hands'. He disapproved of those who hoarded and made fruitless a treasure of 'stone celt and arrow-head, of brazen sword and gold fibula and torque'.[8]

What such writers had in common was a spiritual relationship with archaeology that elevated ancient artefacts and sites to the status of national relics or shrines to be worshipped. This sentiment defined and sustained some of the essential beliefs of Irish nationalism – the golden age waiting to be reborn and the national space of the Irish landscape and its archaeology. This environment symbolized Irish nationality, archaeology had long been established as a national emblem – both monuments, such as the round tower, and portable remains were frequently used to illustrate national life. The membership card of the Repeal Association, for instance, was decorated with a harp against a sunburst with Bronze Age artefacts in the foreground – a sword, horn, or trumpet, axehead and penannular brooch. Later in the century Irish architecture and design reused these motifs, which became representative of the Celtic Revival. The arts and crafts movement took inspiration from the patterns of the ancient past: the Tara Brooch was frequently reproduced; the Book of Kells provided templates for embroidery and lace work; and the gold of Bronze Age Ireland was the stimulus for new work in silver.[9]

Many of these inspirational works of art and artefacts were held in the Royal Irish Academy collection under the care of the antiquarian George Petrie

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7 William O'Brien, *The Irish national idea* (Cork: Young Ireland Society, 1886), p. 7. **8** 'Celt' is an antiquarian term used in reference to stone or bronze axes, it is no longer in use. L. Flanagan, *A dictionary of Irish archaeology* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1992), p. 54. **9** See discussion in Jeanne Sheehy, *The rediscovery of Ireland's past: the Celtic Revival, 1830–1930* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980). See page 28 for an image of the membership card and chapter four for the use of images of archaeology in art and architecture.

(1789–1866), among others. During his time in the Academy, the collection was ordered into the Three-Age system of stone, bronze and iron; a catalogue was produced (the final form was compiled by William Wilde); and a vast collection of gold artefacts, most famously the Tara Brooch, was secured for the nation.[10] Well before the popularization of Irish language and literature stirred the Anglo-Irish later in the century, a sense of national pride and inspired interest in Irish antiquities is evident among the members of the Royal Irish Academy. In 1851, T.R. Robinson, president of the Academy, declared the pursuit of literature and antiquities as the main source of their national influence and in true harmony with their duty to their country.[11] The mathematician and astronomer Sir William Rowan Hamilton claimed the study of antiquities as the 'guardian of the purity of history – the history of nations and mankind'.[12] In 1856, the president of the Royal Irish Academy, the Revd James Todd spoke of the importance of 'our national antiquities' because it 'brings to light the manners and customs of our forefathers; it makes known to us the origin of our noblest institutions … [and] it connects, as by a golden chain, the present and the past'. Many of those who contributed to the creation of this important collection of Irish archaeology, such as those named above, can be described as cultural rather than political nationalists. Although the language of the antiquarians, in relation to prehistory, may have resembled that of their nationalist political contemporaries, the former did not necessarily agree with the politics of the latter. The antiquarians did, however, have a political or cultural agenda. When the members of the Royal Irish Academy created their museum of Irish antiquities, which they considered as being provided for public and national benefit, they were not only providing a display about the Irish past but were building themselves into that story. They were exhibiting their own aspirations as well as Ireland's history.

These themes of collecting, displaying and building museums as being as much about the self, as about the object, are important in any consideration of the history of museums and is an essential part of the story of the museum on Kildare Street. This museum today still reflects the description of the role of a national museum provided by the one-time director, George Noble Count Plunkett. Plunkett, appointed director in 1907, was already an established political figure and was active in the Royal Irish Academy and Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland. His position in the museum came to an end in 1916 because of the involvement of his son, the revolutionary Joseph Plunkett, in the Easter Rising. Count Plunkett's politics no doubt shaped how he understood the purpose of the museum in Dublin. In 1912, speaking to a meeting of the Museums

10 G.F. Mitchell, 'Antiquities', in T. O Raifeartaigh (ed.), *The Royal Irish Academy, a bicentennial history, 1785–1985* (Dublin: The Royal Irish Academy, 1985), pp 93–165. **11** T.R. Robinson, 'Presidential address to the Academy', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 5 (1851), p. 109. **12** W.R. Hamilton, 'Presidential address to the Academy', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 1 (1838), p. 117.

Association of Britain and Ireland, held that year in Dublin, he declared 'no community, however small and insignificant, considers itself properly provided for unless it has a museum'. For Plunkett, a museum went beyond classifications and systems; rather, a museum was 'part of the national life, it is an expression of the national life and of the higher qualities of the people to whom it belongs. It is something which locally has struck its roots, and we may expect from it such flowers and fruit as belong to the nature of the place.'[13] This statement from Plunkett reveals the belief held by many emerging and new nations that a museum could be used as one of the locations to forge a shared identity and present a view of history endorsed by the new political regime. However, the Dublin Museum, when it was founded in 1877 and opened in 1890, did not reflect 'national life' in the way for which Plunkett and followers of Irish cultural nationalism would have perceived it. A truer description of the early days of the museum is provided by Professor A.B. Meyer, a visiting academic from Dresden, who in 1905 said that the museum 'like the one of the same name in Edinburgh, is copied more or less after the South Kensington Museum' and added that 'this uniformity of the museums in the Island Kingdom corresponds to the uniformity of life there'.[14] What these points recognize is that despite the fact that the Dublin museum emerged from a century of cultural nationalism and that the artefacts it contained provided inspiration for that ideology, the museum's initial form was not true to such thinking. It is the tension over what a national collection and museum should be, at a time when Ireland's cultural identity was being so hotly debated, that provides the subject of the remainder of this essay.

The creation of the Museum of Science and Art was one of the most prominent additions to the cultural landscape of late nineteenth-century Dublin. Passed in 1877, the Museum Act initiated collecting and the appointment of a director. An architectural competition for the museum building was launched in 1881, followed by a second competition in 1883, and the first stone of the building was laid in 1885. In 1890, the doors opened to the new building on Kildare Street. From its foundation until 1899, the Museum was under direct administration of the Department of Science and Art, South Kensington, London. After 1899, the museum became the responsibility of the newly formed Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction in Dublin. For many, the new institution contravened the ideal of a museum provided for the celebration of Ireland's past and managed by and for the Irish people. The tensions arising from this are evident in various reactions to stages in the Museum's history, most clearly concerning the new museum building, the display of archaeology within it, and the ownership of a collection of antiquities known as the Broighter hoard.

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13 Count George Noble Plunkett, 'Presidential address delivered at the Museums Association Dublin conference', *Museums Journal* 2:12 (1912), pp 33–9. 14 A.B. Meyer, *Studies of the museums of the United States and Europe* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1905).

When the officials of the Department of Science and Art became interested in developments in Ireland, their aim was to improve and guide public education throughout the island within a framework defined for both Britain and Ireland. To investigate pre-existing provision, in 1876, a parliamentary commission was established to gather information and make a recommendation for the improvement of science and art instruction. When in Dublin the commissioners met with two proposals: the creation of a national museum of archaeology and the establishment of a 'Royal Irish Institute'. What is essential about these proposals is that both institutions were to be independent of the London Department and have a distinctively Irish character. The proposal to create a national museum of archaeology, supported by public funds, came from the Royal Irish Academy. The Academy had long recognized that it had not the financial means or the physical space to maintain its collection, which had been growing in size and importance. The Academy had, as a result, been looking for an opportunity to create a large-scale public institution worthy of their museum. In 1868, when the idea of a new cultural institution for science and art instruction was mooted at a parliamentary enquiry, the president, the Revd J.H. Todd, proposed the foundation of a separate 'National Museum of Irish Antiquities and Historical Monuments'.[15] On the same occasion, William Wilde referred to the need to establish a 'great national collection of antiquities properly housed, safely guarded, scientifically arranged and displayed in a great Celtic museum', led by the Royal Irish Academy.[16]

The second proposal that was presented to the commissioners came from those involved in the development of Irish industry. This interest was channelled into the proposal for a 'Royal Irish Institute', which would do the equivalent work of the Department of Science and Art in London but as an independent body. Those proposing the new institute visualized the creation of a 'national museum' within or on the site of the 1853 Exhibition Palace that had been built on Merrion Square. The purpose of the institute would be to develop and design technical education among the 'middle and lower classes in Ireland', and it would include a permanent exhibition of Irish art, design and manufactures. It would be an amalgamation of services already provided by the Royal Dublin Society and the Museum of Irish Industry, which had existed in Dublin in various forms since 1852. The significance of this new institute was that it would be independent from the Science and Art Department in South Kensington, which was already leading developments in England, Scotland, and Wales. John Prendergast Vereker, secretary of the proposed new institute, speaking at a parliamentary commission that was put in place to investigate the development of science and

15 Todd, Report from the commission on the Science and Art Department in Ireland 21 (1868–9), p. 337. 16 William Wilde, *Report* from the commission on the Science and Art Department in Ireland 24 (1868–9), p. 461.

art instruction in Ireland, suggested that under no circumstances could a London body adequately direct training in Ireland. His desire was to see a body managed 'completely under the control of Irishmen who have no object dearer to their heart than the promotion of the industry and the manufactures and the progress of their own country'. He argued, 'I don't think Irishmen would have any confidence in an institution that was dependent on South Kensington'.[17] This mistrust was, Vereker added, based on the 'strong feeling [which] still obtains among the people that the ignorant prejudices which formerly induced England to destroy Irish manufacturing industry are still in existence'.[18] Vereker's purpose was 'the founding in Ireland of a great national institute, governed in Ireland, responsible to the Irish government alone'.[19]

The Department's response to these proposals was mixed: it recognized the sentiment of the Irish appeal but would not give way to the more long-term implications of independent provision. With regard to the Academy, they agreed on the importance of the Irish antiquities collection. Sir Henry Cole, director of the Department of Science and Art, even went so far as to suggest that the creation of a new institution in Dublin, which would properly care for this collection, would do justice to Ireland and contribute to the debt England owed to Ireland. This necessary, Cole claimed, because Ireland is 'the nation towards which we pursued in former times an policy that ought to make us blush'.[20] However, the commissioners concluded that the creation of an entirely independent Department of Science and Art for Ireland 'would be detrimental to the interests of Science and Art in that country'.[21] Instead, they recommended the establishment of 'a General Industrial and Fine Arts Museum in Dublin' so that the people of Ireland 'would then obtain the fullest opportunity of improvement in the cultivation of the Industrial and Decorative Arts by the Study of approved models and objects'.[22] The letter from Lord Sandon, the vice-president of the Science and Art Department, to the Royal Irish Academy declared that 'the time has now arrived when the wants of the community at large have outgrown the useful action of private societies', and so 'a thorough rearrangement and consolidation of existing institutions have become an essential condition precedent for further progress'. The Department's interest was to develop a common museum network or infrastructure administered from London, of which Ireland was to be a part. Lord Sandon announced that, in keeping with the rest of the kingdom, 'their Lordships propose to build … a Science and Art

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17 John Prendergast Vereker, *Report* from the commission on the Science and Art Department in Ireland 24 (1868–9), p. 56. Vereker was not alone in this opinion, many others at the same enquiry voiced similar views. **18** Ibid., p. 56. **19** Ibid., p. 73. **20** Henry Cole, *Report* from the commission on the Science and Art Department in Ireland 24 (1868–9), p. 120. Cole here acknowledges that he is quoting Sir Stafford Northcote, cabinet minister. **21** *Report* from the commission on the Science and Art Department in Ireland 24 (1868–9), p. i. **22** Ibid., p.

Museum for Ireland, somewhat similar to that now existing in Edinburgh for Scotland.'

The Department of Science and Art in South Kensington had initiated the merger of the Dublin institutions, although they were aware that the Royal Irish Academy would strenuously oppose the move. By collaborating with the new institution, the members feared that the collections of science, art, and industry would distract from the importance of antiquities. Samuel Ferguson's fear was that this would lead to a derogation of the scholastic and scientific supremacy of the Academy. In their response to the Department of Science and Art in South Kensington, the Academy referred to the proposed transfer as an act of subordination.[23] Their objections were based on a number of factors. In the first place, the Academy was certain of the importance of having a museum that regarded collecting the antiquities of Ireland as one of their main purposes. In previous years, the Academy had made the decision to give Irish antiquities prominence; they had donated their geological collections to the Royal Dublin Society and had taken non-Irish antiquities off display.[24] Repeatedly, successive presidents of the Academy had spoken of the importance of Irish antiquities for national and cultural life within Ireland, and many felt the collection had achieved a prominent place in European archaeology.[25] Lord Sandon's advice, however, was for the Academy to accept the merger: by 'declining to become a branch of the South Kensington Establishment, the Academy would show a selfish inclination to stand in the way of the creation of a great Science and Art Museum in Ireland'.[26] Rather than the creation a new independent institution, Ireland was being further drawn into the imperial model of museum education defined in London.

From the passing of the Museum Act in 1877, the new Science and Art Museum was destined for the cultural core in the Leinster Gardens area composed of the National Gallery, the Natural History Museum and the Royal Dublin Society buildings. The earliest proposal was that the Museum should be located on the Leinster Gardens, but Lord Pembroke objected to the loss of his flowerbeds;[27] henceforth, the new buildings were planned for Kildare Street. When the first architectural competition for the new Museum buildings, launched in 1881, resulted in a shortlist that did not include any Irish architects, past discontent returned. *Hibernia* announced to its readers: 'we regret to announce that the new museum of Science and Art in Dublin is not to be the work of an Irishman'. This was described as 'a serious error detrimental to our interest as Irish men, and an unmerited reflection upon our intellectual status

23 Lady Ferguson, *Sir Samuel Ferguson in the Ireland of his day* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1896), pp 298–9. 24 Recorded in the Minutes of the Antiquities Committee, 1855. 25 The pioneering Danish archaeologist J.J.A. Worsaae visited the collection in 1847 and the British Association for the Advancement of Science visited it in 1857. 26 Sandon, Minutes of the Royal Irish Academy Council, 14 Feb. 1876. 27 Report of Department of Science and Art 37 (1881), p.xxii.

has been committed by the Department of Science and Art under the very cover of doing us service'.[28] The *Irish Builder* added to the debate, declaring that 'we have not much faith in the good intentions of South Kensington officials respecting Ireland or matters Irish'.[29] The newspaper warned that London was bearing a negative influence over the cultural institutions in Ireland. The Royal Dublin Society was accused of surrendering to the 'sister kingdom'; the Royal Irish Academy had been 'swallowed' and 'its splendid collection of antiquities, literary and art treasures were hungered for by the rapacious maw of South Kensington'. The *Irish Builder* promoted the idea that the Irish people should not be answerable to London officials by stating 'we believe in these matters the Irish people are the best judges of their own wants, and should be allowed to exercise their undoubted rights'.[30] The *Irish Builder* was not alone in their objections to the integration of the Academy with this new museum. In the *Gaelic Journal*, William O'Brien condemned the Academy for being 'languid in spirit' and 'surrendering to a South Kensington collection of curiosities, the inestimable relics of Celtic antiquity bequeathed to them by the pious patriotism of generations of Hudsons, Hardimans and Wildes'.[31]

It is evident from both the foundation and history of the Museum that there were a number of competing interests in this new cultural institution. The Department in London wanted to guide, define and control of art and technical instruction in Ireland and draw the Irish sector into the framework being developed across Britain. Those involved in Irish industry wanted to be charge of their own public education. Those committed to the preservation and display of the archaeology of Ireland were principally interested in the development of a national museum in which archaeological collections would take prominence. The tensions between these groups continued even after the museum doors were opened to the public.

Tensions between London and Dublin were also very much evidence in relation to the dispute that arose concerning the ownership of the Broighter hoard. The hoard was found in 1896 during ploughing in Broighter townland, Co. Londonderry. The hoard comprised a tubular gold collar, two bracelets, two necklaces, a gold bowl, and a gold boat complete with oars. Once found, the hoard was sold by the landowner to a dealer. The dealer sold it to the British Museum, which placed the items on display. When the Royal Irish Academy became aware the hoard was in the possession of the British Museum, they appealed for its return by insisting that under treasure trove law the rightful place for the hoard was in their collection and that the British Museum was holding the hoard illegally. In 1897, a bill was brought to parliament to enable its return, but this failed. In 1898, a committee was established by her majesty's treasury to

28 *Hibernia* 2 Jan. 1882, p. 108. **29** *Irish Builder* 15 Nov. 1882, p. 326. **30** *Irish Builder* 15 Jan. 1883, p. 17. **31** William O'Brien, *Gaelic Journal* 4:43 (July 1892), p. 164.

investigate the ownership of the hoard. The committee recommended the return of the hoard to Ireland on long-term loan, but again the British Museum refused. Consequently, in June 1903, the crown brought the British Museum to court to investigate whether or not the hoard was treasure trove and, based on that, to establish its legal ownership. When the case came to conclusion, Justice Farwell declared that, 'the articles in question are treasure trove belonging to His Majesty by virtue of the prerogative royal'.[32] This meant that the British Museum was holding the collection illegally and, in 1906, the hoard was returned to Dublin.

The intensity of the debate concerning the hoard reveals the tensions that could easily arise between cultural institutions in Ireland and England. The director of the British Museum, Sir Edward Thompson, argued that the 'ornaments' were very valuable for the British Museum.[33] Indeed, the collection of Irish antiquities was considered relevant to the museum because the museum 'represents the Empire. It is not a London Museum, it is not an English Museum, it is a British Museum.'[34] The idea of the British Museum representing the empire as justification for it keeping the Irish collection was also voiced by C.H. Read, the keeper of British and medieval antiquities and ethnography, and Sir John Robinson, fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in London. Viscount Dillion, the president of the Society, argued that London, as the capital, was the best location for the objects because he considered the people of England, Scotland and Ireland 'as being all members of one nation'. He described the loss of the collection from Ireland as 'not a national calamity … particularly as, after all, Ireland is part of England'.[35] In Dublin, the *Evening Herald* responded in anger. It described the retention of the collection by an English museum as 'a flagrant violation of one of the few national rights of Ireland that has been allowed to us'.[36] The hoard became representative of the struggles of Ireland with its near neighbour. If the return of the hoard can be considered as granting of a national right, one must consider the paradox inherent in the point that it was returned only because it was declared the legal property of the crown.

The return of the hoard to Ireland in the early twentieth century came at a time when the Dublin Museum was involved in a slow transformation towards the character described by Count Plunkett when he addressed the Museums Association in 1912. In 1899, the museum, for the first time, came under Dublin-based administration through the establishment of the Department of Agriculture

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32 Justice Farwell in *Law Reports Supreme Court of Judicature Chancery Division 1903*, vol. 2 (London, 1903), p. 614.   **33** Sir Edward Thompson, cited in 'Report of a committee appointed to inquire into the circumstances under which certain Celtic ornaments found in Ireland were recently offered were recently offered for sale to the British Museum and to consider the relationships between the British Museum and the museums of Edinburgh and Dublin with regard to the acquisition and retention of objects of antiquarian and historic interest' 77 (1899), p. 699.   **34** Ibid., p. 702.   **35** Viscount Dillion, Ibid., p. 24.   **36** *Evening Herald*, 8 Dec. 1897.

and Technical Instruction. Horace Plunkett stated that the new Department would set about 'encouraging national freedom, aiming at distinctive national qualities having at hand, as part of its inspirations, the beautiful and suggestive objects of the Museum'.[37] Shortly after Count Plunkett was appointed as director of the Museum, its title was changed. Previously referred to as the Dublin Museum of Science and Art, it became known as the National Museum of Science and Art, Dublin; later in the century, it was to become known by the now familiar title, the National Museum of Ireland. The introduction of the word 'national' in the title was considered more appropriate to a 'Museum of Ireland and treasury of Celtic antiquities'.[38] Count Plunkett also set about rearranging the museum, by giving the museum less consideration of 'foreign objects'. Irish antiquities and objects illustrative of Irish arts and industries were now allowed more prominent display space than previously awarded to them. With these changes, the museum was beginning the process of becoming an expression of national life.

The history of the National Museum provides a new and vital dimension to understanding the significance of the Irish Revival of the 1880s–1920s to Ireland's cultural history. The nature of the interests in Irish archaeology, in collecting and in the creation of a national museum in Dublin brings greater depth to our knowledge of the political nature of engagement with the past. Throughout its history, the museum on Kildare Street has provided a venue for the expression of national and cultural aspirations. The objects, displays and the building itself gathered meanings from the political context in which they were exhibited. The politicization of archaeology and collecting spanned the nineteenth century but gathered pace over the debates on the creation of the museum and the ownership of the Broighter hoard. The examples of these cases reveal that the tensions in the literary and language revivals also materialized in other aspects of Irish cultural life. The Abbey Theatre may have been a better-known cultural venue in Dublin in the early twentieth century, but the National Museum was another stage on which similar political conflicts were acted out. In both the literary and the museum movements an Irish ideal was being constructed and challenged.

37 Horace Plunkett, Report of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction 20 (1902), p. 541. 38 Horace Plunkett, Report of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction 22 (1908), p. 14.