

Reviving the artisan sculptor: the role of Ruskin, science, and art education

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In the existing literature James and John O'Shea, and Edward Whelan, of Ballyhooly seem to appear ready-made – a force of nature unleashed upon mid-nineteenth century architecture, conforming to Ruskin's idea of the rude Northern European spirit:

...with rough strength and hurried stroke, he smites an uncouth animation out of the rocks which he has torn from among the moss of the moorland, and heaves into the darkened air the pile of iron buttress and rugged wall, instinct with work of an imagination as wild and wayward as the northern sea; creations of ungainly shape and rigid limb, but full of wolfish life; fierce as the winds that beat, and changeful as the clouds that shade them.¹

On meeting the O'Sheas in Oxford Ruskin saw them as the ideal of the savage northern workmen, obstinate and generous who by natural instinct brought a fluidity, freshness and life to their work. Dr Henry Acland, instigator of the Oxford Museum, wrote of their 'wit and alacrity', while Ruskin referred to their 'genius'.² This energy was already apparent in their work at TCD's Museum Building. The carving is profuse, weighty and sinuous. Tendrils spring forward from the deep undercutting, giving space to the bend of a stem or the subtle curve and dip of a leaf. They varied the tone of their work as they moved around the building: where rude imagination dominates the central bays of the north front, on the outer bays flowers and foliage appear in neatly curated rows, symmetrical, and precise (figs. 8.1-2).

When they began work on the Museum Building the O'Sheas' creative engagement was hailed by the Dublin press as a vindication of Ruskin's ideas.

...the first experiment which has been made in the United Kingdom of giving the artisan's power of design full play, with only the necessary restriction, that he shall use none but natural objects for his models: a restriction which, indeed, leaves him illimitable scope; for every leaf and flower, properly studied, offers suggestions to the artist's eye, and, either imitated or idealized, affords innumerable forms adapted to architectural decoration.³

¹ John Ruskin, *The stones of Venice*, vol. 1 (London, 1851), p. 157.

² Henry Acland, *The Oxford Museum* (London, 1859), pp 43 and 77.

³ 'The new museum and lecture-rooms', *Dublin Daily Express*, 25 Sept. 1855.

But if their naturalism seems effortless, it was nevertheless pursued by a number of other artisan sculptors of the 1850s in Britain and Ireland, as outlined below – albeit not on the scale provided by Deane and Woodward at Dublin and Oxford. According to *The Builder* they were working under the supervision of a ‘Mr Roe of Lambeth’, an obscure character whose exact status and role is uncertain (see appendix 2). This suggests at least some English influence on their work.⁴ Indeed, Ruskin’s influence alone seems insufficient to account for the technical rigour with which his precepts were adopted by his contemporaries within the stone trade. While *The stones of Venice* may have served as a poetic call to arms, the skill of the workmen was rooted in wider aesthetic, technical, and stylistic changes in artisan training of the late 1840s and early 1850s, which drew on cross-currents between industry, science and art.

While relatively little is known about the background of the O’Shea brothers and their education, the work fits well into these currents. Their career in Ireland and Britain has been sketched by Frederick O’Dwyer, to which a little might be added here (see appendix 1 to this essay).⁵ It is not clear where the elder brother, John, was born as he does not appear in the baptismal registers for Ballyhooly, which do however record the birth of a James O’Shea on 3rd February 1824, son of Daniel O’Shea and Eliza Spellane. This date accords well with the age of James O’Shea recorded in the 1861 census. His father’s name, Daniel, is that given to the first born sons of both James and his brother John. James gave his second son, named James, the middle initial ‘S’, likely derived from his mother, and used the initial himself in his advertisement at Derby in the 1860s.

Twenty nine-year old James O’Shea was living in the parish of St Catherine in the Dublin Liberties as early as November 1853, where his son Daniel was baptised, some three months prior to the commencement of the Museum Building (see appendix 1). A James O’Shea is recorded on Thomas Street (in the same parish) in Griffith’s Valuation (1854), living in Madden’s Court, a group of ten tenements around a courtyard leased out by shoemaker Thomas Madden, who in turn held them from the dean and chapter of Christ Church.⁶ It was immediately next to the city saw mills and O’Shea (if the same person) lived here with his twenty-six year old wife Eliza née Burke, with whom he would have at least eight children.

The O’Sheas and Whelan did not advertise in the Dublin trade directories of the 1850s, presumably being too preoccupied with their work at Trinity College. However, James O’Shea did carve a speculative statue of the Immaculate Conception ‘4 feet 9 inches high, sculptured in Caen Stone’ representing the Virgin Mary as a girl ‘of twelve or thirteen years old’, which was offered for sale to

⁴ ‘Ireland, its progress in architecture’, *The Builder* 14:684 (1856), p. 144.

⁵ O’Dwyer, *Deane and Woodward*, passim; Frederick O’Dwyer, ‘O’Shea Brothers’, in P. Murphy (ed.) *Art and architecture of Ireland Volume III: sculpture 1600-2000* (New Haven and Dublin, 2014), pp 282-84. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt14jxtx2.27>. 24 June 2017.

⁶ Thomas Madden of 69 Thomas Street is listed as a bootmaker in *Thom’s Directory* (Dublin, 1854), p. 1139. *Thom’s Directory* of 1850 describes Madden’s Court as comprising ten tenements. See *Thom’s Directory* 1850, p. 760.

interested members of the clergy at 25 Wellington Quay in July of 1856.⁷ This was likely intended to capitalise upon Pius IX's papal bull proclaiming the dogma of the Immaculate Conception two years earlier. Where the statue went is unknown.

The later career of the O'Sheas has been charted by Frederick O'Dwyer, to which might be added the rather tragic demise of James O'Shea in 1881. In this year he left his family in Manchester to return to Oxford, the city where his fame had reached its height twenty years earlier – but now he was homeless, arrested 'drunk and incapable in Littlegate street', described as 'much addicted to drink'. He was, however, still described as 'well-known' in the town, suggesting his former success was not entirely forgotten.⁸

There is every indication that the O'Sheas' carving on the Museum Building was carefully planned and executed with controlled proficiency. Ruskin's illustrations of Venice likely provided the model for the type of capital employed in the interior of the Museum Building, which are similar to those from the upper arcade of the Palazzo Ducale. The carving itself has resonance with plate. 8 from the *Stones of Venice* vol. II (fig.8.3), which shows a series of concave Byzantine capitals, one of which (no. 13, from San Marco) has naturalistic carving 'treated in a manner which shows the mind of the workman to have been among the living herbage'.⁹ However, a more rigidly controlled format is introduced at the Museum Building: the carving is grafted onto a strictly symmetry layout on each side of the capital, comprising a single design mirrored eight times in the round. This was quite unlike the foliage illustrated by Ruskin in *The stones of Venice*, many of which, he commented, have 'no two sides alike'.¹⁰

The return to nature

The O'Sheas' approach to carving at the Museum Building – i.e. of specimens symmetrically arranged on the capitals – is exactly that advocated by James K. Colling, a lecturer at the newly established Architectural Museum in Canon's Row in Westminster: '*Natural objects geometrically disposed* might be made to produce for us a system of ornamentation copious, original, and beautiful.'¹¹

Founded in the early 1850s by Gilbert Scott in collaboration with several key figures, including Ruskin, the Architectural Museum advocated a revival of the best gothic sculpture of the high and late middle ages. Such a training ground had been advocated as early as 1842 and was taken up by *The Builder* in 1845.¹² As Brian Hanson has shown, Scott's first-hand experience of the Cologne *Bauhütte* showed him the value of working from both casts of existing gothic exemplars and casts taken directly

⁷ 'To the Roman Catholic clergy in general', *Freeman's Journal*, 3 Jul. 1856.

⁸ 'Drunk and Incapable', *Oxford Journal*, 4 Jun. 1881.

⁹ Ruskin, *The stones of Venice*, vol.ii, 131.

¹⁰ Ruskin, *The stones of Venice*, vol. 2, p. 133.

¹¹ James K. Colling, 'Ornamentation from natural types,' *The Builder* 6:268 (1848),150–51.

¹² Brian Hanson, *Architects and the "Building World" from Chambers to Ruskin* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 125.

from nature, i.e. casts of leaves. While Ruskin donated casts of Venetian capitals from the Doge's palace and 'other places',¹³ the majority of the casts in the museum were from English and French cathedrals.

Before its establishment Colling's illustrated writings drew on a range of works from the larger English cathedrals and churches, with particular attention to the chapter house at Southwell Minster in Nottinghamshire, the greatest English example of carving in the naturalistic style (fig. 8.4). Here was another valuable lesson that would be fully absorbed by the O'Sheas – the undercutting of the carving:

While sketching at Southwell I was particularly struck with the remarkable fidelity with which the natural foliage is imitated, and the extraordinary manner in which the whole of the carving is *undercut* and made to stand out from the more solid part of the stone.¹⁴

Colling reproduced engravings of drawings of both natural leaves and high gothic ornament from his own sketchbooks, commenting that 'It was from nature that the medieval artists obtained their abundant variety, and they often went back to the pure source for fresh inspiration.'¹⁵

The origin of this naturalism in English High Gothic sculpture was French, and incorporated maple, oak, hawthorn, ranunculus and potentilla, vine, ivy and hop,^{carved as} Nikolaus Pevsner commented, on the achievement of the Southwell chapter house, with 'supreme skill'.¹⁶ Pevsner was careful to distinguish this work from the generic work of the Victorian revival.

That the result is classic Gothic and not Victorian, that it has a soul does not only please the sense, is due to the fact that the carvers were never satisfied with mere imitation but succeeded in keeping stone as stone, in preserving intact the smoothness and firmness of surfaces; in short they achieved a synthesis of nature and style.¹⁷

Colling wrote on naturalistic architectural carving for *The Builder* in 1848, which would have made his ideas widely known to his contemporaries, including Deane and Woodward, and his work was later absorbed into the teachings of the government schools of design (see below). The same year he published the first volume to his practical guide on gothic ornament, *Gothic ornaments, being a series of examples of enriched details and accessories of the architecture of Great Britain drawn from existing authorities*, the second volume of which would appear in 1850. The examples were 'drawn sufficiently large in scale to be practically useful in facilitating the labours of the architect and artist'¹⁸ (fig. 8.5). Each plate carried the name of the publisher 'G. Bell 186, Fleet Street' and their original publication

¹³ 'The Architectural Museum', *The Builder* 13:706 (1855), p. 382.

¹⁴ James K. Colling, 'Gothic ornament from natural types,' *The Builder* 6:305 (1848), 595.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Nikolaus Pevsner and Priscilla Metcalf, *The cathedrals of England: midland, eastern and northern England* (Harmondsworth, 1985), p. 309.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Colling, 'Gothic ornament from natural types,' unpaginated address.

dated to various months of 1846, suggesting that they may have first been produced as small pamphlets intended for dispersal among practising carvers.¹⁹

The opening of Colling's second volume focuses on both the inheritance of botanical specimens in gothic precursors, and outlines how architectural carvers might re-engage directly with nature.

I would suggest to those who wish to study the forms of leaves in nature, that they should make a collection of tracings of such as they may meet with, in a similar manner to the Plates given. Most leaves may be traced, after having been pressed for a short time in a book, by simply passing a pencil along the edges, while held down upon a piece of paper with the left hand. Very complicated, or delicate leaves, may be attached to the paper with a little gum water.

The advantage of having the simple forms of leaves, which can be readily referred to when designing foliage, is very great. It is, also, as well to have several varieties of each kind of leaf, with a sketch of a small branch, shewing the seeds, flowers, or any peculiarity.²⁰

These articles must have prepared Deane and Woodward, and other architects, to respond more positively to Ruskin's plea in the late 1840s and early 1850s for a naturalistic approach to ornament.

At the same time, George Gilbert Scott, one of the instigators of the Architectural Museum, was rebuilding Exeter College Chapel in Oxford – significant for its use of native English coloured marbles – which drew on the Sainte Chapelle in Paris, one of the highpoints of medieval naturalism in carving. The carving of John Birnie Philip here, if inferior to that on Dublin's Museum Building, (fig. 8.6) nevertheless attests to Scott's commitment to the principles and goals of the Architectural Museum.²¹ Philip had cut his teeth at Pugin's wood-carving workshop at Westminster before becoming Scott's long term collaborator.²² Other work by Scott during this period reflects similar interest in craftsmanship and colour. In 1854, Philip had executed exquisite foliated carving on Scott's design reredos at Ely Cathedral²³. And again, here polychromy is an accompanying feature, with colourful inlaid panels that play upon the pattern of the C13 *cosmati* pavement in Westminster Abbey.

In Dublin naturalistic carving by English carver Henry Lane appears in the J. J. McCarthy churches of St Catherine, Meath Street (1852-58), and Church of St Saviour's, Dominick Street (1852-61),

¹⁹ James Colling, *Gothic ornaments, being a series of examples of enriched details and accessories of the architecture of Great Britain*, vol. 1 (London, 1848).

²⁰ James Colling, *Gothic ornaments, being a series of examples of enriched details and accessories of the architecture of Great Britain*, vol. 2 (London, 1850), p. 7.

²¹ The O'Sheas would execute the carving on the credence table here, see Jennifer Sherwood and Nikolaus Pevsner, *Oxfordshire* (New Haven and London, 2002), p. 136.

²² 'John Birnie Philip', *Mapping the practice and profession of sculpture in Britain and Ireland 1851-1951*, University of Glasgow History of Art and HATII, online database 2011 [http://sculpture.gla.ac.uk/view/person.php?id=msib5_1246458432, accessed 18 Sep. 2017]

²³ Ibid.

contemporary with the work of the O'Sheas on the Museum Building.²⁴ Lane's work demonstrates the same combination of naturalism and symmetry found on the Museum Building, if not the abundance or botanic range, and is executed with attention to the undercutting of the foliage (fig. 8.7). McCarthy certainly seems to have been a conduit for English sculptors arriving in Dublin during this period, as both Lane and Purdy & Outhwaite did work for him in Cookstown, Co. Tyrone (1854-60). As Tom Duffy has shown, existing Dublin workshops were eclipsed by a stream of English craftsmen arriving into Ireland in the late 1850s to service the post-Famine church-building boom, including Charles Harrison, James Powell and James Pearse.²⁵

The influence of the renaissance and antiquity

Ruskin's famous chapter on the nature of gothic and his admonishment of the renaissance has obscured the wider influences operating on the Museum Building, which combined an interest in naturalism with an appreciation of the ornamental carving of antiquity and the early renaissance. This is clear if we examine the stylistic sources for the Museum Building carvings. The foliation on the pilasters that frame the windows have a basic sub-structure of two types: straight, with symmetrically arranged leaves rising in pairs one above the other; or, serpentine, where identical pilasters are arranged inverted flanking the windows (fig. 8.8). This arrangement is that of the Casa Visetti, published in *The Builder* in 1851 and probably derived in turn from the Porta dei Borsari in Verona dating to the 3rd century AD (fig. 8.9).

British interest in the carved ornament of early renaissance Venice had grown in the decade prior to the Museum Building's construction (see Tierney, architectural sources, this volume). Even before the published work of Waring and McQuoid (1850), art educators were looking to Italy. By 1843 four cases of casts had arrived at the London headquarters of the government schools from Venice 'to illustrate the history of Venetian ornamental sculpture', as well as casts from Bologna and Florence.²⁶ In the late 1840s, when the Dublin School of Design was formed within the RDS, one hundred casts of ornament and architectural moulding were sent from London.²⁷ The significance of these casts was transmitted to the provincial schools in the lectures and writings of Ralph Wornum who drew on the extraordinary 5,000 volume collection of up-to-date international publications on ornament that had been assembled at Marlborough House (including the work of James Colling), where he was librarian, and which he catalogued according to their application to each industrial art.²⁸ The central London school was

²⁴ For these churches, see Christine Casey, *Dublin* (New Haven & London, 2005), 134-5 and 629. Lane must have worked in Dublin for some time, as he did not complete the high altar of St Catherine's until 1862. See dia.ie, citing DB 4, 1 Jul 1862, p. 172. Accessed 12 Nov. 2017.

²⁵ Thomas J. Duffy, 'Artisan sculpture and the stone carving firms of Dublin 1859-1910', vol. 1. (PhD, National College of Art and Design, 1999), 2 vols.

²⁶ *Minutes of the Council of the Government School of Design: December 1836 to April 1844*, vol. 1 (London, 1846), pp 258-262.

²⁷ John Turpin, 'The School of Design in Victorian Dublin', *Journal of Design History* 2:4 (1989), 243-256 at 246.

²⁸ R. N. Wornum, *An account of the library of the Division of Art at Marlborough House* (London, 1855).

responsible for sending art books to the provincial schools – Cork, for example, had two hundred or so in its art library, most of which were sent by London.

By 1854 the department of practical art had few examples of medieval sculpture, the emphasis of the collection being on samples of ancient and renaissance work, with a lot of emphasis on the arabesque ornament of quattrocento and cinquecento pilasters. Ralph Wornum, the principal lecturer for the Government Schools of Design, gave substantial attention to the architecture and sculpture of the various members of the Lombardo family, including Pietro, Tullio, Giulio, and Sante, and gave a list of buildings attributed to them in Venice, of whose sculptural work there were several casts in the possession of the Department of Trade.²⁹ Some six hundred people attended Wornum's series of lectures on ornamental art in Cork in May of 1851, more than in any other provincial city except Liverpool.³⁰ A condensed version of the lectures was later published by Wornum as the book *Analysis of ornament* (1856), with engravings of key works of ornamental art from the collection of casts in Marlborough House, with a heavy emphasis on architectural carving – particularly of panels and pilasters (fig. 8.10), along with a list of published sources of engravings. Illustrated here is the floral guilloche on the stringcourse of the fifteenth-century façade of Santa Maria dei Miracoli at Brescia (fig. 8.11), which parallels that on the Museum Building (fig. 8.12), and of which there was a cast at Marlborough House.³¹ The distinctive design of the acanthus flower (no. 48) on the Museum Building dado stringcourse appears to be derived from another engraving in Wornum's book (fig. 8.13a), itself derived from Ferdinando Albertoli's study of the ornament of Trajan's forum (1838). Other antique sources were likely used - many of the Museum Building flowers carvings bear a resemblance to the series of rosettes from Roman architectural fragments published by Carlo Antonini in 1781 (figs. 13b and 13c), which included cross sections.³² There is also evidence of consultation with more recent publications. In adding native species to the stringcourse a problem that had to be overcome was the difficulty of making arrangements of leaves in a rosette-like fashion. The solution was to curl a leaf tendril at the centre to mimic the centre-point of a rosette – an idea published in the *Builder* in 1848 by G. B. C. (fig. 8.13d) - and used for ivy and shamrock on the Museum Building.

But if early renaissance sculpture was channelling the ornament of late antiquity into Venice, that influence arrived in Dublin more directly too. At a meeting of the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland in January 1851, Sir Thomas Deane gave a paper on two sculptural fragments from the ruins of Baalbec in his possession – a subject which already had Irish resonance due to the published engravings by Irish antiquary Robert Wood a century earlier.³³ More naturalistic than the Venetian exemplars,

²⁹ Ralph Wornum, *Catalogue of ornamental casts in the possession of the Department, third Division: the renaissance styles* (London, 1854), pp 16-18.

³⁰ *House of Commons, Accounts and Papers* (1851), vol. 13, p. 49.

³¹ Ralph Wornum, *Analysis of ornament. The characteristics of styles*, p. 97; *Catalogue of ornamental casts in the possession of the Department, third Division: the renaissance styles* (London, 1854), pp 26-27.

³² Carlo Antonini, *Manuale di varj ornamenti tratti dalle fabbriche etc* (Rome, 1781), 2 Vols.

³³ For the origin of these carvings, see O'Dwyer, *Deane and Woodward*, pp 14-15.

George Papworth had made ‘artistic and faithful drawings’ of them a few days earlier which he presented to the institute. The most important aspect of Sir Thomas Deane’s paper is the way he anticipated the comments Ruskin would make in the *Stones of Venice* later that year.

In both of these specimens you will discover exalted mind in the composition – a peculiar adherence to characteristic nature – a power of producing effect by simple means rarely in our day acquired or applied. This you will perceive is by an artistic use of the drill. I mean by an artistic use, a feeling for, and knowledge of art in the workman, which produces that indescribable feeling best expressed by what may be termed the poetry of art.³⁴

Deane saw that the drill was particularly effective in the rendering of foliage:

In all sculpture drilling the points for what i[s] called boasting has ever been applied; but in the specimens under consideration the drill has been otherwise used in the formation of foliage, and producing effect by deep shadows and undercutting, but all by a master hand, knowing and feeling his subject.³⁵

Sir Thomas stated his purpose clearly in showing this antique work. ‘I have taken the liberty to put forth, by mutual good feeling, mutual instruction, and teachable minds, the exhibition by every means and at all times to the artisan of the highest models of antique and modern art.’³⁶

Deane’s commitment to bringing fine art to bear upon the Victorian artisan was both sincere and influential. Not only did he introduce a fine art gallery into the Cork Exhibition the following year for this purpose, but his son, J. C. Deane, brought fine art to both the Dublin Exhibition and conceived of extraordinary Art Treasures Exhibition at Manchester in 1857 – perhaps the greatest public exhibition of art ever assembled.³⁷

Botanical studies in mid nineteenth-century art education

No surviving evidence has yet been found regarding the training the O’Sheas received, but it is likely that they fell into the ambit of Sir Thomas Deane in County Cork. The births of all James O’Shea’s children, in 1847, 49, 51, 53, and 55, are recorded in Ireland (see pedigree, below), while John’s wife gave birth to their youngest children in 1850 and 1852 in Ireland, leaving little opportunity for an extended sojourn abroad during these years. Their work for Deane and Woodward coincides with

³⁴ ‘Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland’, *Cork Constitution*, 21 Jan. 1851.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ My thanks to Dr Philip Cottrell for placing this in context.

changes in art education in Ireland and expresses well the wider contemporary movement to cultivate native artisanal talent. Indeed, in both stylistic and methodological terms, the work of the O'Sheas (and their younger relation, Whelan) shares much in common with the new approaches advocated by the new Government Schools of Design.

Deane and Woodward were well-placed to draw from this new pool of formally tutored artisanal talent. From April 1848, members of Cork town council had proposed establishing a school of design in the city which would train designers for artistic and manufacturing purposes, some eleven years after the first such school was established in England.³⁸ Sir Thomas Deane helped establish the school at the Cork Institution, converting rooms in the building for this purpose, remarking that 'it gives me life and energy to think we have the entire concurrence of the Government.'³⁹ The lord lieutenant, Lord Clarendon (1847-52), formerly president of the Board of Trade, who had originally proposed the establishment of schools of design in Ireland, took a particular interest, visiting the new school at Cork in October 1849, when he was led around by Deane.⁴⁰

One third of the pupils at the Cork School of Design, as nominated by the Corporation, were admitted free – inspired by the *Gewerbeschulen* in Germany. By 1852 there was an average of fifty free pupils each quarter, who could not afford to pay and who were supplied with half-price drawing materials. Their names do not appear in the fee register, so we do not know if the O'Sheas were among them. However it is notable that the O'Sheas came from Ballyhooly – not only an area where Deane and Woodward were working during these years – but also the seat of the Earls of Listowel, to whose generosity and memory a plaque was erected in the Cork School of Design.⁴¹ The 1st Earl of Listowel had been responsible for acquiring the Canova casts from George IV for Cork, which had helped create the artistic environment at the Cork Institution from which John Hogan subsequently emerged. Sir Thomas Deane had provided the 2nd earl with a design for a temperance hall in Ballyhooly in 1840⁴² and Benjamin Woodward was involved in two architectural projects at Castletownroche, in the same parish as Ballyhooly, in the period immediately prior to the commencement of the Museum Building: the gatehouse at Annesgrove⁴³ and the Catholic parish church (1847-52).⁴⁴ The church, partially destroyed in a fire later in the century, was described in 1850 as being 'the prettiest Gothic Church in the Province, without being extravagant...with stately columns and splendid arches'.⁴⁵ It is possible, therefore, that the O'Sheas came within the firm's ambit at this time. The training of artisans was

³⁸ 'Town Council', *Southern Reporter and Cork Commercial Courier*, 20 Apr. 1848; 'Government Schools of Design', *Northern Whig*, 2 Dec. 1852.

³⁹ 'School of Design', *Southern Reporter and Cork Commercial Courier*, 12 Jul. 1849.

⁴⁰ 'Visit of his Excellency Lord Clarendon to the School of Design', *Cork Examiner*, 26 Oct. 1849.

⁴¹ 'Cork School of Design', *The Cork Examiner*, 9 Jan. 1850.

⁴² 'Lord and Lady Listowel – The Temperance cause', *Kerry Evening Post*, 27 Jun. 1840, p. 3.

⁴³ O'Dwyer, *Deane and Woodward*, pp 108-9.

⁴⁴ Ex info. Frank Keohane. See also 'Castletownroche', *Irish Examiner*, 24 May 1847.

⁴⁵ 'To the editor of the *Cork Examiner*', *Cork Examiner*, 14 Jun. 1850.

something of a hobbyhorse with of Sir Thomas Deane, as he admitted in his lecture on sculpture to the RIAI in 1851, and the O'Sheas may well have been protégés of his at the Cork School of Design.⁴⁶

Given Sir Thomas Deane's promotion of the Government Schools of Design for the artisan class, it is worth considering the influence of their culture and training on the O'Sheas – at first or second hand. In the list of trades given of those attending the Cork School of Design, carvers appear first.⁴⁷ In addition to the morning classes from 10am-1pm, evening classes from 6.30 to 9.30 were provided to allow artisan workmen and women to attend after working hours. The tradition that the O'Sheas based their Museum Building carvings on specimens taken from the Botanic Gardens probably has some basis in truth, as the practice was common in the schools of design. Ornamental design was the most prominent subject, approached via drawing, painting and modelling,⁴⁸ which included learning to render plants, fruits and flowers in these media.

This botanical interest was widespread in the Government schools of Design. In 1849 Richard Redgrave, A. R. A. had given a lecture on the importance of botany to design to the head School of Design in London, which he commended as a source for 'infinite and never-ending study' – a cure to the dull repetition and plagiarism of the ornament on existing buildings.⁴⁹ This attention to botany came from France where generous copyright laws protected the economic interests of designers and manufacturers, making original design worth pursuing.⁵⁰ From the late 1830s Europe's most important design school, the Académie des Beaux Arts de Lyon had served as a model for the British schools of design and included botany among its six departments – the others being painting, sculpture, architecture, ornament, and engraving. In support of this interest in nature, the school was provided with its own botanic garden.⁵¹

The École Gratuite in Paris was also influential in this regard. In 1837, when the first Government School of Design was being established in London, Apsley Pellatt reported that in the Paris School of Design 'modelling from living plants is much practised'.⁵² Six years later a similar report confirmed the approach:

Of course I visited M. Belloc, at the Ecole Gratuite. I think our Pupils already draw better than the French Students; but as regards ornamental modelling from nature, leaves, fruits, flowers, birds, and animals, I feel that we shall be some time before we are able to compete with them. I am certain that you should take steps to get one of the French modellers to teach for a short time

⁴⁶ 'The Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland', *The Constitution*, 21 Jan. 1851.

⁴⁷ 'Cork Scientific and Literary Society', *Southern Reporter*, 15 Jan. 1852.

⁴⁸ 'Cork School of Design', *Cork Examiner*, 9 Jan. 1850.

⁴⁹ Richard Redgrave, 'Importance of the study of botany to the ornamentist', *The Journal of Design and Manufactures* 1 (1849), 147-151.

⁵⁰ Stuart Macdonald, *The history and philosophy of art education* (London, 1970), p. 79; Lara Kriegel, *Grand designs: labor, empire, and the museum in Victorian culture* (Durham, 2007), 52-85.

⁵¹ Macdonald, *The history and philosophy of art education*, p. 79.

⁵² *Minutes of the Council of the Government School of Design: December 1836 to April 1844*, vol. 1. p. 15.

in the School. One mode of giving instruction to the masons and workmen in stone and moulding, struck me as particularly excellent. The Professor draws in a very bold style the outline (with a little shading) of the frieze or capital, or other ornament, before the class, who copy or sketch from his drawing, make notes of his explanation, or his lecture, on the peculiarities of the style, the mode of execution in different substances, the application of the ornament, its history, &c. &c., and the result is seen in every street in Paris, in the beautiful stone ornament on almost every other house, all executed by common workmen, with nothing but a sketch by the architect as their guide. M. Belloc stated (and truly, I believe) that these lectures (which have been in operation for ten years) have been, in great degree, the cause of the general excellence of the execution of stone ornament by the workmen. (H. Bellenden Ker, Paris, Oct 25, 1843)⁵³

As early as 1841, a ‘Committee of Casts’ was formed for the Government School of Design at Somerset House to select the casts that would be required in the school. Along with the casts of antique and gothic figure and ornamental sculpture from the collections at the Louvre and the École des Beaux Arts, there was provision for ‘casts from Nature’, i.e. casts to be made directly of ‘plants, flowers, fruit, animals, &c.’⁵⁴In 1849 the Royal Dublin Society was judged the most competent organisation to take on responsibility for the new government school in the city, due to what were described as its many ‘facilities for collateral instruction’, which included its botanic garden – described as ‘an adjunct to the School of Design’,⁵⁵ which would provide some two hundred different varieties of plants, arriving twice a week.⁵⁶ One thousand specimens were provided to the school in a three month period in 1852, while the students were permitted free access to the gardens to draw. They were also allowed to take examinations in botany following the spring and summer lecture series.⁵⁷ In addition, ‘the choicest plants are also contributed by the liberality of the authorities of Trinity College’.⁵⁸Similarly, the pupils of the Cork School of Design were drawing from nature as seen from the accounts, which for 1851 include £3 2s for ‘examples of Art, and of Nature’.⁵⁹ When Michael Murphy gave a lecture on botany at the Cork Scientific and Literary Society in January 1852 he arrived with ‘a very fine bush of mistletoe...carefully sawn from the tree which fostered it, with a stout piece of timber attached’, which had been lent to him by the Cork School of Design.⁶⁰ These may have been supplied by Cork University,

⁵³ Ibid., pp 290-94.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ ‘The National Art Union – the projected school of design’, *Limerick Reporter*, 27 Mar. 1849; ‘Royal Dublin Society’, *Dublin Weekly Register*, 17 Nov. 1849.

⁵⁶ ‘Botanic Garden’, *Farmer’s Gazette*, 14 Feb. 1852.

⁵⁷ ‘Annual report from the professor of botany’, *Farmer’s Gazette*, 12 Feb. 1853.

⁵⁸ ‘Eleventh public distribution of premiums’, *Proceedings of the Royal Dublin Society* 89:10, cxix.

⁵⁹ ‘Report of the Cork Government School of Design’, *Cork Examiner*, 2 Feb. 1852.

⁶⁰ ‘Cork Scientific and Literary Society’, *Southern Reporter*, 15 Jan. 1852.

where the professor of agriculture had been sent 465 plants by the RDS towards the formation of a botanic garden there.⁶¹ In addition, the inclusion of birds within the design of foliage – as found on the Museum Building - was supported by the provision of stuffed specimens which were supplied to the Cork School of Design by the Board of Trade, which routinely sent supporting materials to the regional schools.⁶²

The aesthetic ideas of the Government Schools of Design were communicated in a series of illustrated lectures given by Ralph Nicholson Wornum in London and all the provincial schools, including Cork and Dublin, which were later published. His recommended approach to botanical carving parallels that taken by the O'Sheas at the Museum Building:

...plurality of members seems to do away with the special symmetry of the individual member; and where there are several flowers from one root or on one stem, the deviation from individual symmetry is always in favour of the symmetry of the collective group.⁶³

The schools' emphasis on drawing as a core skill for designers of all trades is echoed in the O'Sheas' working practices. The anonymous writer of the 1856 *Builder* article (who called himself 'Quondam') described the sculptors laying out a design for the cornice by painting it first onto a wooden block.⁶⁴

That the schools produced a common ornamental language between the various branches of art at this period is clear from the collaboration between practitioners in different fields. For example Deane and Woodward collaborated with William Fry and Co. of Westmoreland Street to create gothic library furniture of oak for the Paris Exhibition of 1855, carved with 'vine, holly, shamrock, hop, and ivy', which were placed on view to the public in Dublin prior to being shipped to Paris.⁶⁵ Dublin's poplin manufacturers, Richard Atkinson and William Fry, were at the forefront of the design movement in early 1850s and sat on the RDS committee of fine art. It was in their interests that Irish designers develop a competence in drawing from nature and their floral and foliated patterns show an attention to detail that rivals that of the O'Sheas' in stone.⁶⁶ Already by 1853, Atkinson was employing a designer from the Dublin School of Design to create patterns for his poplin.⁶⁷ Some of this work, now preserved in the National Museum of Ireland, shows strange organic patterns that were conceivably inspired by an accompanying input from scientists that encouraged designers to see the beauty in all types of nature – as outlined in the section below.

Science and art

⁶¹ 'Botanic Garden', *Farmer's Gazette*, 14 Feb. 1852.

⁶² 'Cork School of Design', *Cork Examiner*, 9 Feb, 1853.

⁶³ Ralph Nicholson Wornum, *Analysis of ornament. The characteristics of styles: an introduction to the study of the history of ornamental art* (London, 1860, 2nd ed.) p. 13.

⁶⁴ 'Ireland, its progress in architecture', *The Builder* 14:684 (1856), p. 144.

⁶⁵ 'Paris Universal Exhibition', *Saunders's News-Letter*, 10 Mar. 1855.

⁶⁶ Mairead Dunlevy, *Pomp and poverty: a history of silk in Ireland* (New Haven and London, 2011), p. 145.

⁶⁷ 'Latest intelligence', *The Advocate or Irish Industrial Journal*, 5 Jan. 1853.

Much has recently been written on Victorian intersections between science and art, but relatively little in an Irish context. When the Museum Building was being conceived science was beginning to find expression in prominent new buildings designed to encourage industry. Already by 1849 the glass-domed London Coal Exchange on Thames Street had integrated into the upper register of its structure large painted encaustic panels of plant and fossil remains found in coal from specimens in the British Museum.⁶⁸ The Museum of Economic Geology in London and the Museum of Industry in Dublin incorporated native English and Irish decorative stone within their fabrics. It was George Allman, Professor of botany at Trinity College (fig. 8.14), who in 1849 first publically expounded there Ruskin's views on the importance of natural history to the artist, quoting at length from *Modern Painters* in an illustrated lecture to the Royal Dublin Society.⁶⁹ Acknowledging the superiority of the French in this regard in 1849 he had seconded the proposal to re-establish the RDS schools under the Government Schools of Design.⁷⁰ In his lecture at the annual student prize giving, which was published in both the *Irish Industrial Journal* and *The Northern Whig*, he set out the context for this new departure: The example... has long since been set us in the schools of the Continent; and it is an important fact, and one well worthy of the serious attention of all interested in the Arts of Design in this country, that in several continental towns, - as in the city of Lyons, for example, so celebrated for the perfection to which these arts have been there brought, - the manufacturers mainly attribute their eminence to the high estimation of which botany and zoology are held among them, and to the fact of these sciences being made an essential part of the course of instruction in their schools.⁷¹ In addition to botany, Allman expounded widely on the overlooked source material for designers in vertebrates, invertebrates and micro-organisms.

⁶⁸ *The Builder*, 7:347 (1849), 462.

⁶⁹ John Turpin, 'The School of Design in Victorian Dublin', *Journal of Design History* 2:4 (1989), 243-256 at 249.

⁷⁰ *Proceedings of the Royal Dublin Society* 85 (1849), p. 66.

⁷¹ George Allman, 'On the importance of natural history studies to the artist', *Proceedings of the Royal Dublin Society*, vol. 85 (1849), p. xlvii; 'Royal Dublin Society distribution of prizes', *The Advocate; or, Irish Industrial Journal*, 24 Jan (1849), 3-4.

Even in that strange world of infinitesimals into which the microscope conducts us, and in those dubious beings which hover between animality and vegetability, forms of surpassing grace and sculpture of the most elaborate beauty are everywhere presenting themselves; and yet, strange to say, it is no easy task to call to mind the application of a single one of them to the humanizing purposes of decorative manufacture.⁷²

Even if the designer did not imitate these microscopic forms directly, he argued, they may contribute to ‘the peculiar mental training which their study necessarily involves, and to the storing of his mind with ideas of symmetrical and beautiful organic form.’ A similar argument was soon after made in France regarding the potential of the scientific study of insects to inspire art. As Barry Bergdoll has argued, Jules Michelet’s 1857 book *L’Insecte*, and the chapter in it entitled ‘De la renovation de nos arts par l’étude de l’Insecte’, reflects ‘the panorama of intersections between natural history thinking and architectural thought and practice’ during the nineteenth century.⁷³

Despite his background as a scientist, Allman did not hesitate to venture into art history. He was so moved by Ruskin’s analysis of the rendering of nature in Titian’s work that he pursued his own analysis in the work of Leonardo and Raphael both of whom he commended for their botanical accuracy. He was aided in his lecture by at least one drawing by ‘my friend, Mr Burton’ (presumably William Frederic Burton), who reproduced for him Rubens’ ‘Lion Combat’ (*sic*), as an example of that artist’s zoological interests.

As early as 1845 Allman had been expounding on the aesthetic and moral implications of studying nature, in 1846 gave what was described as Trinity College’s first lecture in the open air, using the college gardens to demonstrate the key typological distinctions between flowering and flowerless plants, and ‘the establishment of five great classes of vegetables’.⁷⁴ By 1848 he was giving lectures to the Mechanics Institutes on the relationship between natural history, design, and manufacturing.⁷⁵ In 1853 he advocated the creation of a museum of economic botany, which might supply ‘specimens of vegetable substances used in the arts or in manufactures’.⁷⁶ In 1854, the year in which the O’Sheas began their carving on the Museum Building, Allman gave a course of six lectures on ‘Botany as applied to the Arts’ at the Museum of Irish Industry, where he was acting professor of natural history.⁷⁷ At the same time Joseph Beete Jukes, professor of geology in the Museum of Industry gave six lectures on ‘Geology as applied to the Arts’. When Jukes’s book *Popular physical geology* (1853) was reviewed by Trinity’s *University Magazine*, it was largely discussed as a useful primer for the artist.⁷⁸ The physicist Rev. Dr Humphrey Lloyd, one of two members of the building sub-committee for the Museum Building, journeyed through Europe in the summer of 1853, visiting Bologna, Ferrara, Geneva, and Berlin, in each of which he admired collections of casts of ancient sculpture – an experience which made him an advocate of the establishment of a national art collection in Ireland.⁷⁹

Conclusion

To a large degree the traditional image of the O'Sheas as natural, untutored native talent whistling to their own tune seems improbable. Whatever about Ruskin's romantic notions of the rude northern spirit, the Museum Building's carved ornament owes a debt to several contemporary movements in art and architecture; the new interest in carving from natural types, as promoted by *The Builder* in the late 1840s; the spread of a cast-based artisanal education on the French model, as epitomised by the creation of the Architectural Museum in Canon's Row and the Marlborough House collection in London; the encouragement of a free-spirited competency in ornamental detailing among masons after the Parisian model, which fostered a more collaborative relationship between sculptor and architect; the widespread emphasis on botanical studies fostered by the Government Schools of Design, after the model of the *École des Beaux Arts*; an increased availability of published sources, facilitated by the Schools of Design, which included engraved sources from both Gothic and Antique architecture.

The fact that Irish scientists such as Allman and Jukes were such strong advocates for the collaboration of science and art suggests that the Museum Building grew out of fertile intellectual soil, richly sown with the latest ideas on art and architecture, where disciplinary boundaries were routinely and purposely crossed in a spirited pursuit of industrial and societal progress.

A similarly broad coalition of scientific and artistic interests lay behind the geological and botanical showcase that was Deane and Woodward's Oxford Museum, which John Holmes has argued 'has a strong claim to be the greatest single work of Pre-Raphaelite art'.⁸⁰ As Holmes has acknowledged, 'many aspects of Woodward's work at Oxford are anticipated at Trinity'. However, he argues that the fundamental difference between Deane and Woodward's museum buildings in Dublin and Oxford is that the latter succeeds in representing the science of the natural world, whereas in the case of Dublin '[t]hat the carvings revealed natural history was neither here nor there.' While the participation of scientists such as John Philips in the choice of stone and botanical samples at the Oxford Museum is well known, it is worth noting that the Oxford Museum is much better documented as a whole. Lack of detailed accounts and correspondence for Dublin's Museum Building should not preclude input from Trinity's scientists – particularly as they were keenly aware of the collaborative potential between science and art.

⁸⁰ John Holmes, *The Pre-Raphaelites and science* (New Haven and London, 2018), p. 118.

Appendix 1: O'Shea genealogy

Daniel Shea + Eliza Spillane⁸¹	
<p>John O'Shea (b. <i>circa</i> 1822, location?) + Bridget, (b. <i>circa</i> 1829, location?)⁸²</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mary (b. 1850, Ireland) 2. Daniel (b. 1852, Ireland) 3. Bridget (b. 1860, Oxford)⁸³ 	<p>James O'Shea (bapt. Ballyhooly, 1824⁸⁴) + Eliza Burke (b. 1827, Ireland) 'Sculptor's wife'⁸⁵</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Elizabeth (b. 1847, Ireland, married (?), possibly the person by this name consigned to Manchester workhouse as 'lunatic' in 1881 census, aged 34 [possibly mother of James, junr, born 1881. Occupation listed as 'housekeeper']⁸⁶ 2. Justin (b. 1849, Ireland, Milliner[+ Martin Carter of London, living in Manchester 1881])⁸⁷ 3. Bridget (b. 1849, Ireland) 4. Mary (b. 1851, Ireland)⁸⁸ 5. Alice (b. 1853, Ireland, dressmaker)⁸⁹ 6. Daniel (b. 1853, Dublin, stone mason)⁹⁰

⁸¹ See Baptismal records for Ballyhooly 3 Feb 1824, National Library of Ireland. <http://registers.nli.ie/registers/vtls000632864#page/90/mode/1up>. Accessed 21-04-2017.

⁸² Bridget is likely the same Bridget O'Shea who acted as sponsor at the baptism of Daniel O'Shea in Dublin in 1853.

⁸³ 1861 census. Ancestry.co.uk. Accessed 21-04-2017.

⁸⁴ Baptismal records for Ballyhooly 3 Feb 1824. Listed as 'stone carver, (unemploy)' in 1881 census, when he and his family were living with his eldest (?) daughter Justin and her husband – a knife cleaner and machine maker. 7 Irk Passage, Market Street, Manchester. James had a four-month-old son in this year (by another woman?).

⁸⁵ 1861 census – so described in James' absence. Her surname is found in the baptismal records of several of her children in the parish of St Catherine, Dublin, see below. She may have also been from Ballyhooly where the name Burke is found in the parish records of the 1820s.

⁸⁶ 1861 census.

⁸⁷ 1881 census.

⁸⁸ 1861 census.

⁸⁹ 1861 and 1881 census.

⁹⁰ Baptised 1 Nov 1853, parish of St Catherine, Dublin (Irish Genealogy.ie church records. Accessed 24 Apr. 2017). See also 1861 census. In the 1881 census, aged 27, he is listed as 'stone mason' living at 20 Stonehewer Street, Manchester.

	<p>7. Ellen (b. 1855, Dublin)⁹¹</p> <p>8. Anne (b. 1858, Oxford)⁹²</p> <p>9. James S. O'Shea (b. 1881, Manchester)⁹³</p>
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1861: James O'Shea and family living at 41 Wellington Street, Oxford.⁹⁴

1863: James O'Shea, announces his move from Manchester to Oxford.⁹⁵

1865: 'Messrs O'Shea and Whelan', work on Manchester Assize Court.⁹⁶

1867: James S. O'Shea 'wood, stone, and monumental sculptor' in Derby.⁹⁷

1868: James O'Shea 'sculptor of the new museum...prepared to undertake any work in his branch of art'⁹⁸

1876: James O'Shea, sculptor, living in 44 Needwood Street, Rochdale Road, Manchester.⁹⁹

1881: 'James O'Shea, stone carver, of no home, an elderly man well known in Oxford', charged with being 'drunk and incapable in Littlegate street'. He was 'much addicted to drink' and had already been brought to the station once before that week. The magistrate fined him 10s and 3s 6d costs, or 14 days in gaol.¹⁰⁰

Appendix 2: Mr Roe of Lambeth

There has been much speculation about the identity and role of 'Mr Roe of Lambeth', the Englishman who *The Builder* in 1856 described as primary figure responsible for the carving on the Museum Building, with the O'Sheas and Whelan working as his assistants:

⁹¹ 1861 census. Baptised 11 Sept 1855 in the parish of St Catherine, Dublin ((Irish Genealogy.ie church records))

⁹² 1861 census.

⁹³ 1881 census.

The 1861 census lists the following children at 41 Wellington Street, Oxford: Elizabeth (14), Bridget (12), Mary (10), Alice (8), Daniel (7), Ellen (5), Ann (3). The 1871 census lists the following: Justin (32), Alice (28, unmarried, dressmaker), James S. (4 months)

⁹⁴ 1861 Census.

⁹⁵ 'James O'Shea', *Oxford Chronicle and Reading Gazette*, 02 May 1863.

⁹⁶ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 26 June, 1865.

⁹⁷ 'James S. O'Shea', *Derbyshire Advertiser and Journal*, June 7, 1867.

⁹⁸ 'James O'Shea', *Oxford Chronicle and Reading Gazette*, 20 June, 1868.

⁹⁹ *Slater's Directory of Manchester and Salford*, part I, 1876, p. 392.

¹⁰⁰ 'Drunk and Incapable', *Oxford Journal*, 4 June. 1881.

‘...to one Englishman, Mr Roe, of Lambeth, assisted by the native talent of three (*sic*) brothers, workmen, the O’Sheas, of Ballyhooly, county Cork, the whole of these sculptures are owing.’¹⁰¹

Despite the prominence accorded to him in this account, Roe has proved an elusive figure. There is little evidence of him as a carver or sculptor working in Britain and Ireland during these years, and it is perhaps significant that he was not brought by Deane and Woodward to work on the Oxford Museum. More likely he was a master mason of some kind, directing and managing a broad array of workmen cutting the stone at various skill levels on site. One figure with whom he may be identified was William Roe, 36, stone mason, recorded in the 1841 census living in the parish St John the Evangelist, Westminster, with his wife Sarah, 26, and daughters, Ann, 2 years old, and Eleanor, 7 weeks.

Unsurprisingly given the ongoing construction of the Palace of Westminster, the census reveals a neighbourhood full of stone masons, bricklayers, painters, and carpenters.¹⁰² He would appear to be same man recorded in the 1851 census as William Roe, 50, of 2 Stangate, Lambeth, ‘stone mason and journeyman’, born in Lancaster. He was married to Sarah, 33, from Worcester, with two daughters, Ellen aged 9 (b. 1842, Middlesex, Westminster) and Sarah Martha aged 5 (b. 1846, Lambeth), and Thomas, aged 1.¹⁰³

Despite the strange age differential between the two censuses, there can be little doubt that these are the same people (William has aged 14 years in 10 while his wife Sarah has aged only 7, a testament to the pliability of age within Victorian society). At Stangate in Lambeth, Roe was living very close to the building yard for Grissell & Peto, contractors for the new Palace of Westminster.¹⁰⁴ It was also close to one of the major stone carvers and building contractors of the mid-nineteenth century: George Myers, who had a long association with A. W. N. Pugin, and whose large stone yard was at Ordnance Wharf in Lambeth (site of County Hall). A great fire in 1850 destroyed his premises along with a lot of stonework being prepared for Pugin – though, despite this, he continued his business afterwards in the same place.¹⁰⁵ If the O’Sheas did spend any working or training in London prior to their job in Dublin, it is possible they encountered Roe there – though at present there is no direct evidence for this.

List of illustrations

Figure 8.1 The rich and expressive carving around the door of the Museum Building. Photo: Adrian Lantry

Figure 8.2 Carving from the north front of the Museum Building

¹⁰¹ ‘Workmen’s capitals’, Trinity College Dublin, *The Builder*, Mar 29. 1856, p. 171.

¹⁰² 1841 Census, Ancestry.com.

¹⁰³ 1851 Census, Ancestry.com.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Patricia Spencer-Silver, “George Myers, 1803-75, Stonemason, Builder, Contractor,” *Construction History* 5 (1989): 47–57.

Figure 8.3 Capital from *The Stones of Venice* (vol. 2, plate 8)

Figure 8.4 James K. Colling, "Gothic Ornament from Natural Types," *The Builder* 6:305 (1848): 595.

Figure 8.5 Tracings from natural samples from James Colling, *Gothic Ornaments*, vol. 2 (1850), Plate I.

Figure 8.6 Carving by John Birnie Philip at Exeter College Chapel, Oxford (1853-9)

Figure 8.7 Naturalistic carving attributable to Henry Lane, St Catherine's, Meath Street, Dublin 1852-6

Figure 8.8 Pilasters on the west facade of the Museum Building. Photo Adrian Lantry

Figure 8.9 Carved pilasters on the Porta Borsari, Verona. Photo: Wikipedia Commons

Figure 8.10 Plate from Ralph Wornum's *Analysis of Ornament* (1856)

Figure 8.11 String course from Santa Maria de Miracoli at Brescia

Figure 8.12 Dado string course, Museum Building

Figure 8.13 a) Acanthus flower from the forum of Trajan (Wornum 1856) and as found on the Museum Building SC48 (numbered from NE) b) Carlo Antonini, vol. I, Plate XV with SC2 c) Carlo Antonini, vol. I, Plate XVI and SC32 d) Design for a carving of Hawthorn by G. B. C., published in *The Builder* 1848; carving of ivy SC29

Figure 8.14 George Allman, National Portrait Gallery, London