

**Commemorating Picton in Wales and Trinidad:  
Colonial legacies and the production of memorial publics**

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## ABSTRACT

This article develops a dual analysis of commemoration in Wales and Trinidad that extends from a monument in the Welsh town of Carmarthen to Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Picton, the most senior officer to die at the battle of Waterloo and an aggressive imperialist who has since been accused of committing crimes against humanity in the name of the British Empire. Using torture and public executions to control the enslaved population of Trinidad during his term as military Governor of Trinidad between 1797 and 1803, Picton accumulated great personal wealth through ownership of slaves and plantations. The article seeks to extend emerging scholarly analysis of commemorative activism and, specifically, the application of memorial publics to a contemporary Caribbean context. Archival research on the history of the Picton monument from regional archives in Carmarthen and national archive collections in Aberystwyth is connected to data from contemporary interviews with activists and public officials in Wales and Trinidad and Tobago as well as detail from public surveys, audits, and policy reviews concerning commemoration in the public realm. Despite wavering public support since its first iteration in 1828, Carmarthen's Picton monument has endured to become an important social arena for reckoning with British colonial violence as demands for its removal in Wales has helped initiate Picton-related decolonising efforts in Trinidad and Tobago producing memorial publics that are variously confined and extended.

## KEYWORDS

Memorial publics, monument Thomas Picton, Decolonising, Wales, Trinidad, Commemorative Activism

In this article we develop a dual analysis of commemoration in Wales and Trinidad that begins with the story of a monument in the Welsh town of Carmarthen commemorating Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Picton, the most senior officer to die at the battle of Waterloo and a cruel imperialist who has since been accused of committing crimes against humanity in the name of the British Empire. He implemented atrocities such as torture and public executions to control the enslaved population of Trinidad during his term as military Governor of Trinidad between 1797 and 1803. We build on a long running geographical interest in monuments and memorialisation and a more recent focus in the literature on commemorative activism that feature monuments as social arenas in the ongoing production of social groups. Our aim is to contribute to the growing field of critical memoryscape studies by elaborating on the complex spatial politics of commemoration in colonised and colonizer contexts. We outline how the current global era of fallism, de-commemoration, and reform of commemorative practice is played out at places with different experiences of colonialism. We argue that struggles over commemorations in public space are often confined by a localist impulse involving the geographical restricting of who is allowed access to the commemorating community and who can participate in its decision-making. This confinement is a feature of surveys, audits, consultations and votes on contentious statues, monuments, and placenames, as the views of residents are prioritised while the views of people from elsewhere are cast as disruptive and illegitimate. By drawing together commensurate actions in Wales and in Trinidad and Tobago to

remove a range of public commemorations of Thomas Picton, we seek to highlight and strengthen links between distant communities in an expanded memorial public.<sup>1</sup>

The paper works through five main sections. Section two considers the monument as a device within geographical scholarship to detail the symbolic coding and ideological work undertaken by groups to secure social power before moving to more recent research showing how monuments feature as social arenas of struggle and dissent. Section three connects initial commemorations of Picton after his death at Waterloo to the formation of a not altogether enthusiastic memorial public in Britain and Wales, while sections four and five track a suite of recent efforts in Wales and Trinidad and Tobago to remove his enduring presence in statues, monuments, paintings, and placenames. As two male scholars operating within the Welsh higher education system and accustomed to the embedded advantage of whiteness, we carry out this work in the hope of contributing in a small way to an anti-racist scholar activism, that aligns with Baird, Rose-Redwood and Palonen's assertion that 'scholarly neutrality in the face of white, heteronormative, patriarchal, colonial monumentality is itself a form of commemorative

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<sup>1</sup> In Trinidad and Tobago, Thomas Picton is honoured in seven streets and places that bear his name across the islands: in the business area of Newtown, the Port-of-Spain suburb of Laventille, the north-eastern town of Sangre Grande, the town of San Juan, the settlement Diamond in Penal-Debe and Picton Court Apartments near the centre of the capital Port-of-Spain. In Wales, an audit of commemoration associated with the slave trade and British Empire, listed thirty-nine separate public dedications to Picton including four monuments, five buildings/places and thirty streets. Welsh Government, *The Slave Trade and the British Empire: An Audit of Commemoration* <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-12/the-slave-trade-and-the-british-empire-an-audit-of-commemoration-in-wales.pdf>; (last accessed 18 February 2022).

complicity’.<sup>2</sup> We try to remain conscious also that ‘When reckoning with forces of structural oppression in the landscape, it is important to note that minoritized groups are reckoning with these forces all the time, in ways both large and small.’<sup>3</sup>

Research on this project commenced two years ago with archival investigation, site visits, remote and in-person interviews with activists in based in Trinidad, West-Wales, Cardiff, and the wider UK, planners, and policymakers in Wales, participant observation at protests and demonstrations in Carmarthen and Aberystwyth, and challenges to the planning status of the Picton monument, which can be seen in figure 1, working with Stand-up-to-Racism-Wales. The research has now also become part of the knowledge-exchange project ‘Commemorative Futures’ that connected academics, activists and policy-makers at two events held over the summer of 2023, the first to begin a conversation about Aberystwyth University’s engagement with its own colonial foundations, and the second, to advance reform of commemorative practice in the Welsh planning sector more broadly.

Monuments have been a popular topic of study within historical geographical research. Harvey's 1979 story of the Basilica of Sacre-Coeur in Paris, a mausoleum-like building that ‘hides its secrets in sepulchral silence’, demonstrated the investigative work necessary to rescue a history

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<sup>2</sup> Ian Baird, Cindyann Rose-Redwood, and Emilia Palonen, ‘Monumentality, memoryscapes, and the politics of place’. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 21 (2022) 448-467 (p.458).

<sup>3</sup> Catherine D'Ignazio, Wonyoung So, and Nicole Ntim-Addea, ‘The audit: Perils and possibilities for contesting oppression in the heritage landscape’. In *The Routledge Handbook of Architecture, Urban Space and Politics, Volume I*, ed. by Nikolina Bobic and Farzaneh Haghighi (London: Routledge), p.251.

of class struggle from ‘monumental entombment’.<sup>4</sup> Despite its influence, by the mid 1990s Nuala Johnson was still moved to note that ‘monuments are an important, but underutilised, resource for the geographer interested in debates surrounding national identity’.<sup>5</sup> Since then, detailed historical geographies of specific monuments have been regularly deployed to expose the exercise of spatial power through individual studies of the Vittorio Emanuele II monument in Rome, the George Etienne Cartier monument, Montreal, and The Neue Wache Memorial in Berlin as well as many others.<sup>6</sup> David C. Harvey extended the temporal scope of analysis to ancient sites with monument-centred-investigations of Avebury in Wiltshire and County Meath Ireland explaining how each became secured within nation-building place myths through antiquarian and archaeological writing, while Cornelius Holtorf’s ‘life-histories’ of ancient megalithic monuments in Germany detailed manoeuvres familiar to studies of more modern monumental structures.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> David Harvey, ‘Monument and Myth’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 69 (1979) 362-381 (p.381).

<sup>5</sup> Nuala Johnson, ‘Cast in stone: monuments, geography, and nationalism’. *Environment and planning D: society and space* 13 (1995) 51-65 (p.51).

<sup>6</sup> David Atkinson, and Dennis Cosgrove, D, ‘Urban rhetoric and embodied identities: city, nation, and empire at the Vittorio Emanuele II monument in Rome, 1870–1945. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 88 (1998) 28-49; Brian Osborne, ‘Constructing landscapes of power: the George Etienne Cartier monument, Montreal. *Journal of Historical Geography* 24 (1998) 431-458; Karen Till, ‘Staging the past: landscape designs, cultural identity and Erinnerungspolitik at Berlin’s Neue Wache’, *Ecumene* 6 (1999) 251-283.

<sup>7</sup> David C. Harvey, ‘National’ identities and the politics of ancient heritage: continuity and change at ancient monuments in Britain and Ireland, c. 1675–1850’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 28 (2003)

Monument biographies have enabled critiques of embedded structures of power with Adrienne Burk's feminist reading of counter monuments 'designed to be interactive and accessible rather than awesome, and Dydia Delyser's discussion of the statue Kentucky Daisy in Oklahoma, a fictional stereotype pioneer woman, whose celebration in monument form encoded sexism and affirmative narratives of pioneer settlement into the landscape.<sup>8</sup>

Scholarship on the emergence and operation of memorial bureaucracies have revealed a great deal. Kirk Savage's coverage of the battles surrounding the Washington Mall provides a longitudinal glimpse of the monumental landscape's engineering through competing political agendas.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Heffernan's examination of state intervention in post First World War mass grieving in Britain provides a useful example of the ways the apparatus of state is put in service of national identity.<sup>10</sup> But the role of monuments in maintaining structures of oppression is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in research relating to race. Derek Alderman has been central to connecting the politics of race and social memory for many years through detailed analyses of

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473-487; Cornelius Holtorf, 'Monumental past: The life-histories of megalithic monuments in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (Germany)' *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology* 13 (2001) 130-136.

<sup>8</sup> Adrienne Burk, 'Beneath and before: continuums of publicness in public art'. *Social & Cultural Geography* 7 (2006) 953; Dydia DeLyser, 'Thus I salute the Kentucky Daisey's claim': gender, social memory, and the mythic West at a proposed Oklahoma monument', *Cultural Geographies* 15(2008) 63-94.

<sup>9</sup> Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, DC, the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> Mike Heffernan, 'For Ever England: The Western Front and the Politics of Remembrance in Britain', *Ecumene* 2 (1995) 293-323.

heritage site interpretation, commemorative street naming and the erection and removal of confederate statues in the Southern United States.<sup>11</sup> Alderman's work underpins much of the geographical engagement with commemorative activism in the years leading up to and following the 2020 killing of George Floyd by a white police officer. In conjunction with the Rhodes Must Fall movement, this anti-colonial, anti-racist global iconoclasm echoes the wave of destruction in the cities of Brussels, Antwerp, and Ghent in 1566 known as Beeldenstorm when Calvinist mobs opposing persecution and catholic rule by King Philip the second of Spain, progressed from town to town burning paintings and systematically removing the heads and hands of religious figures in churches, sacrament houses, abbeys and convents as part of the Protestant Reformation.<sup>12</sup> The current wave of iconoclasm is another attack focussed on material cultures of imperial fealty and perhaps marks a similar change in the prevailing social and moral order. Gensburger and Wustenberg use the term 'de-commemoration' to stress continuities between contemporary and historical examples while Frank and Ristic's notion of urban-fallism while noting historical parallels, emphasise contemporary monument toppling as a struggle for racial equality and social

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<sup>11</sup> Derek Alderman, 'Commemorative Place Naming: To Name Place, To Claim the Past, to Repair Futures' in *The Politics of Place Naming: Naming the World*, ed. by Frédéric Giraut and Myriam Houssay-Holzschuch (London: Wiley, 2022) pp.29-46.

<sup>12</sup> Ruben Suykerbuyk, '1566: The Beeldenstorm and its Aftermath' in *The Matter of Piety: 2020 Studies in Netherlandish Art and Cultural History*, (Leiden: Brill, 2020) pp.240-255.



justice.<sup>13</sup> The precise cause of Beeldenstorm has been much debated but there are oddly no observations linking the ornate ecclesiastical artefacts and master paintings targeted in 1566 to increasingly important source of the wealth required to produce them. The Atlantic slave trade generated initial income for the Netherlands through a 1528 ‘Asentio de Negros’ contract between Dutch merchants and the Spanish Crown for the right to import 4000 enslaved Africans to the Caribbean. Such revenue would build to underpin modern European capitalism and bankroll the eighteenth century Dutch Republic, at that time, the wealthiest nation in the world.<sup>14</sup>

Emerging research on commemorative activism in this contemporary moment has detailed contradictions, nuances and tensions within toppling movements. For example, Rahul Rao’s account of the toppling of Gandhi statues across the world, shows a movement complicated ‘by a variety of social forces whose worldviews are radically incommensurable with one another’ exposing the representational limits of the statue form. Similarly, the removal of the statue of ‘Gassy Jack’ in Vancouver, allows Ramirez and Adzich to parse anti-colonial and decolonial challenges to the erasure of indigenous genocide through an imperial monument, while Baird *et al* stress a need to move beyond a preoccupation with the dynamics of state recognition to

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<sup>13</sup> Sarah Gensburger, Sarah, and Jenny Wüstenberg, *De-Commemoration: Removing Statues and Renaming Places*. Berghahn Books, 2023. Sybille Frank, & Mirjana Ristic, ‘Urban Fallism: Monuments, Iconoclasm and Activism’. *City* 24 (2020) 552-564.

<sup>14</sup> Pepijn Brandon and Ulbe Bosma, ‘The Importance of Atlantic Slavery for the Eighteenth Century Dutch Economy’. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2019/08/20/atlantic-slavery-history-dutch-economy/> (last accessed 1 November 2023); for a critique of the omission of slavery from scholarship on the Dutch economic history see Susan Buck-Morss, ‘Hegel and Haiti’ *Critical Inquiry* 26 (2000) 821-865.

consider instead the multiple relational ways groups can connect outside officially sanctioned designation frameworks.<sup>15</sup>

Another distinctive theme in the analysis of toppling has been the use of first-person ethnographies of protest.<sup>16</sup> Adom Philogene Heron's reading of the duppy conquering (duppy is a Caribbean ghost-spirit figure) of Colston's statue in the circum-Atlantic city of Bristol works to 'lay slavery's psychic and affective hauntings to rest'.<sup>17</sup> Philogene Heron notes Colston's aqueous burial: 'was apt. Not simply for the poetry of his effigy inhabiting that vast body of water across which his ships trafficked humans, casting overboard those that perished. Or because Bristol's waterways were imperial veins along which mercantile wealth was hauled into the city. But also because freshwater is said to "catch the spirit" (of the duppy), enabling the purification of space.'<sup>18</sup> Tim Cole's charting of the material and imagined afterlives and aftersites of the Colston statue by the people of Bristol speaks to similarly recuperative commemorative futures.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Margaret Marietta Ramírez and Tsatia Adzich, 'When Monuments Fall: Anticolonial Disruptions and Decolonial Urban Practices: Plenary Commentary', *Urban Geography* 44 (2023) 1084-1092; Rahul Rao, 'Gandhi Falling ... and Rising' *Journal of Historical Geography* 82 (2023) p.10; Baird, Rose-Redwood, and Palonen, 'Monumentality, Memoryscapes, and the Politics of Place'.

<sup>16</sup> Laura Choksey, 'Colston Falling', *Journal of Historical Geography* 74 (2021) 77-83.

<sup>17</sup> Adom Philogene Heron, 'Goodnight Colston. Mourning Slavery: Death Rites and Duppy Conquering in a Circum-Atlantic City'. *Antipode* 54 (2022) 1251-1276. (p.1258).

<sup>18</sup> Philogene Heron, p.1265.

<sup>19</sup> Cole, Tim. 'After the fall, where?: Relocating the Colston statue in Bristol, from 2020 to imaginary futures.' *Journal of Historical Geography* (2023) in press.

The research-activism of monument-related scholarship has been extended in broader campaigns and initiatives. D'Ignazio's advocacy for racial justice through non-profit studio monument lab has contributed to changes in urban policy as well as scholarship on commemoration.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Rose-Redwood's critiques are shaped by his commitment to highlighting the contested politics of renaming places on college and university campuses.<sup>21</sup>

There have been critical examinations of public memory in Trinidad over the years with Trotman noting the role of place naming as an important exercise of territorial possession by Spanish and British colonisers, and Fergus providing critical outlines of British Bi-centennial celebrations of the end of slavery from a Trinabagonian perspective.<sup>22</sup> Recently, Gelien Matthews detailed a growing intolerance toward 'the continued glorification of known perpetrators of genocidal oppression and racial terror' throughout Trinidad focussing on the removal of first viscount Lord Alfred Milner's name from a hall of residence at St Augustine Campus, University of West Indies, and protests at the statue of Columbus in Port of Spain.<sup>23</sup> Matthews, however, does not

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<sup>20</sup> <https://monumentlab.com/bulletin/christopher-columbus-we-never-wanted-him-here> (last accessed 6 September 2023).

<sup>21</sup> <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/baaa29f0b861439984df7792191810be> (last accessed 6 September 2023);

<sup>22</sup> David Trotman, 'Acts of Possession and Symbolic Decolonisation in Trinidad and Tobago', *Caribbean quarterly* 58 (2012) 21-43; Claudius Fergus, 'The Bicentennial Commemorations: The Dilemma of Abolitionism in the Shadow of the Haitian Revolution', *Caribbean Quarterly* 56 (2010) 139-158.

<sup>23</sup> Gelien Matthews, 'Toppling the Colonizers in Trinidad and Tobago', *North American Congress on Latin America Report on the Americas* 53 (2021) pp.180-186.

mention Thomas Picton, first governor of the island, who is honoured in street names across the nation. However, since the summer of 2020, and as a result of decolonising activism in Wales, Picton has become as a central character in demands by many in Trinidad for a national historical reckoning that works, as we will show, to extend the scope of a memorial public in circum-Atlantic affiliation with Wales.

**Fig.1.**

### COMMEMORATING PICTON

Several writers have examined Thomas Picton's governorship of Trinidad and his subsequent trial for authorising the torture of the 14-year-old girl, Luisa Calderón. Indeed, much of V. S. Naipaul's *The Loss of Eldorado*, is dedicated to the narrative reconstruction of the episode.<sup>24</sup> There is insufficient space here to examine the complex legal, political, and cultural background. Little in Picton's background had prepared him to govern a territory with a largely French-speaking Catholic population that included an unusually high proportion of free people of colour. Moreover, Trinidad lay at the fault lines of the European colonial empires in the Caribbean and was caught up in the political forces unleashed by the Atlantic Revolutions. The island was also the focus of intense political interest in Britain. Abolitionists saw in the new conquest an opportunity to create an alternative colonial economic model that that did not depend on

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<sup>24</sup> Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul, *The Loss of El Dorado: A History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), p.209-210.

enslaved labour. However, against the background of war, revolution, and insurrection in the Caribbean, Picton governed the island like a garrison and oversaw the expansion of the slave-plantation system. Although he was only put on trial in relation to the Calderón case, Picton's chief antagonist, William Fullarton, detailed twenty-eight charges of extra-judicial torture, mutilation, and execution.<sup>25</sup> Historians, such as James Epstein, Lauren Benton, Lisa Ford, and Caroline Spence, have pointed out that the scandal revealed the tensions at the heart of the British empire. It acted as a lodestone for contemporaneous debates on the nature of the British empire, the relationship between the imperial metropole and its colonies, the integration of newly acquired territories, and the very future of slavery.<sup>26</sup>

Picton was convicted at his first trial in 1806, although he received no punishment. At the retrial the jury accepted his defence that he had followed Spanish law, although Judge Ellenborough argued that since Picton had not allowed Calderón the opportunity of appeal, 'the act done by him [was] not justifiable'.<sup>27</sup> He subsequently became a war hero for his actions in the Peninsular War, was elected MP for Pembroke Boroughs and received the Order of the Knight of Bath. He died leading a charge at Waterloo on 18 June 1815 as the highest-ranking British officer to be killed in the battle.

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<sup>25</sup> William Fullarton, *A Statement, Letters, and Documents, Respecting the Affairs of Trinidad* London, 1804, p.60

<sup>26</sup> James Epstein, 'Scandal of Colonial Rule: Power and Subversion in the British Atlantic during the Age of Revolution' (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Lauren Benton and Lisa Ford, 'Island Despotism: Trinidad, the British Imperial Constitution and Global Legal Order' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 46 (2018) 21-46; Caroline Quarrier Spence, 'Ameliorating Empire: Slavery and Protection in the British Colonies, 1783-1865' PhD Harvard 2014.

<sup>27</sup> Howells, *A Complete Collection of State Trials*, 870.

It was for this that Picton was commemorated amidst broader state efforts to establish a memorial public centred on muscular nationalism. In the century after his death, monuments to him were erected in St Paul's Cathedral, London, Cardiff and elsewhere. These were part of a plethora of commemorations celebrating British heroes and victories of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Indeed, Picton's remains were reinterred in St Paul's beneath a government-sponsored Neo-classical monument designed by the Irish sculptor, Sebastian Gahagan.<sup>28</sup> Placed among other military figures of the French Wars, Picton was enveloped within a narrative of British military sacrifice against the French aggressor. These monuments were meant to convey a message of British patriotism, masculinity, and chivalry. The latter characteristic was believed inherent to the British character and, Holger Hock argues, 'among the heroes pantheonized at St Paul's, this was exemplified, *inter alia*, by General Picton'.<sup>29</sup> Thus, as Naipaul points out, 'the reputation of Picton and others was to be absorbed in Wellington's more complex, nation-building myth. Picton's glory abolished his disgrace; when the glory went, the man and his disgrace were forgotten'.<sup>30</sup>

Not entirely forgotten, however. Unlike previous military heroes, the infamy of Picton's trial was in living memory at the time of his commemoration. On the one hand, celebrating him in stone

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<sup>28</sup> *The Times* 30 June 1815. The St. Paul's monument was proposed by Lord Castlereagh.

<sup>29</sup> Holger Hock, *Empires of the Imagination: Politics, War, and the Arts in the British World, 1750 -1850*, (London: Profile Books, 2010), p.181.

<sup>30</sup> Naipaul, *The Loss of El Dorado*, 156.

offered an opportunity to firmly locate Wales within the British imperial state.<sup>31</sup> In a riposte to sneers over his Welsh origins, many supporters emphasised both his Welshness and Britishness. Linda Colley has argued that the long struggle against France was crucial for the development of a British identity that encompassed other identities, such as English, Scottish and Welsh.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the St. Paul's monument represented Picton as a Celtic warrior aside a British lion.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, where commemoration relied on public subscription rather than state support, a more ambivalent and at times conflicted memorial public was evident. Both an intense localism and, by the late twentieth century, a resurgent Welsh nationalism worked to undermine and unsettle Picton's status as national figure. Within this context Picton was never entirely able to escape his past.

## Fig.2

Proposals to commemorate Picton in Carmarthen were ratified by a public meeting in 1815, but plans were slow to gather pace. A key supporter was Captain Henry Lewis Edwards Gwynne, a Peninsular War veteran and relative of Picton by marriage. He campaigned to raise funds by public subscription for a monument in the town. As Kirk Savage as argued in relation to American Civil War monuments, such subscription campaign and subsequent dedication

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<sup>31</sup> On Wales and the British Empire see Martin Johnes, *Wales: England's Colony?* Cardigan, 2019, pp. 86-87 and *Wales and the British Overseas Empire: Interactions and Influences 1650-1830*, ed. by Hugh Bowen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

<sup>32</sup> Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World 1600-1850*, (London: Anchor, 2003).

<sup>33</sup> Holger Hock, p. 171.

ceremony was crucial for ‘manufacturing popular enthusiasm (and money)’ for memorial projects.<sup>34</sup> The Picton monument was no different. The original list of ‘Subscriptions towards the Erection of a Monument to perpetuate the Glorious memory of the late Sir Thomas Picton’ is preserved in the National Library of Wales and can be seen in figure 2. Although the Carmarthen Corporation donated £100 and the Duke of Wellington another £50, it seems that raising donations was a slow process.<sup>35</sup> Eventually the committee succeeded in raising £3000 and commissioned a design by renowned artist, John Nash.

The laying of the foundation stone in 1825 was accompanied by a dedication ceremony. Alongside the local nobility and town dignitaries, ten thousand spectators attended the event which included a procession, speeches, a banquet, and fireworks display. The *Cambrian* declared it ‘a day that must ever be considered an epoch in the history of Wales’. Picton was described a ‘Gallant Hero’ who died in ‘glorious Victory which broke the tyrant's [Napoleon's] sceptre’.<sup>36</sup>

At this dedication, when speakers referenced his controversial governorship of Trinidad, they did so only to decry his critics. Sir Christopher Cole, M.P. for Glamorganshire, had served with Picton at in the Caribbean as a naval officer. He expressed his ‘disgust’ that a ‘violent persecution existed against the conduct and character of this honest and upright public servant’ and reminded his audience that Picton had distributed relief funds following the Great Fire of

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<sup>34</sup> Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth Century America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press), p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> *North Wales Gazette*, 17 June 1824.

<sup>36</sup> *Cambrian*, 20 August 1825.



1808 in Port of Spain.<sup>37</sup>

### Fig.3

As figure 3 shows, the original monument in Carmarthen resembled what was described as ‘Trajan’s Pillar in Rome’ and consisted of statue of Picton atop a column. The base included friezes depicting Picton’s military exploits. A plaque on the south side of the monument declared ‘His grateful countrymen, to perpetuate past and incite to future exertions, have raised this column under the auspices of his majesty king George the 4th to the memory of a hero and a Welshman’.<sup>38</sup> Its unveiling was accompanied by considerable fanfare that emphasised Wales’s place within the British imperial state. Sixty Peninsular War veterans marched in the procession carrying banners emblazoned with the battles in which Picton had fought, while the Carmarthen Militia fired three volleys ‘which was answered by the 19-gun salute of the shipping, at the close of which the band struck up *God Save the King*’. Thus, the themes of martial valour and sacrifice that Hoock has identified for the St. Paul’s monument applied equally to the monument in Carmarthen. John Jones, MP for Carmarthen, eulogised Picton as a ‘Hero and a Cambrian’ and hailed him as an exemplar of ‘devoted patriotism and of fearless courage’.<sup>39</sup>

The *Cambrian* correspondent noted of the monument that the ‘durability of the materials (black

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<sup>37</sup> *Cambrian*, 27 August 1825.

<sup>38</sup> Caradoc 1832, 165.

<sup>39</sup> *Cambrian*, 9 August 1829.

marble) promises to survive the wreck of many ages'.<sup>40</sup> This confidence proved misplaced as the monument had already fallen into disrepair by the late 1830s. Eroded by the elements, the monument was in a such a dilapidated state by the 1840s that *The Welshman* described it as 'a monument of poverty or something worse'.<sup>41</sup> Two years later the same newspaper decried the fact that the monument had been 'plastered over with handbills and advertisements of forthcoming sales - defaced with the ribald pleasantries of electioneering wits, coarsely daubed over it with red paint'.<sup>42</sup> Thomas Campbell Foster, the *Times* correspondent despatched to South Wales to cover the Rebecca Riots of 1839 to 1843, lambasted the alleged parsimony of the people of Carmarthen for refusing to repair the monument revealing a decidedly reluctant memorial public. [It] 'remains a shabby, defaced, nondescript, to excite the indignation of every stranger, and their pity - their contemptuous pity for the people of Carmarthen!'.<sup>43</sup>

A new committee was established in 1844 to raise subscriptions to the repair the monument but the response was muted. Only £300 had been raised by 1845, something *The Welshman* ascribed to the 'indifference of the inhabitants' to a man not born in Carmarthen.<sup>44</sup> The monument appears then to have been the victim of forces of localism that some have seen as a defining characteristic of Victorian society.<sup>45</sup> As a consequence, 'it fell... into such a disgraceful state of

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<sup>40</sup> *The Cambrian*, 9 August 1829.

<sup>41</sup> *The Welshman*, 3 June 1842.

<sup>42</sup> *The Welshman*, 20 December 1844.

<sup>43</sup> *Times*, 7 December 1843.

<sup>44</sup> *The Welshman*, 7 March 1845.

<sup>45</sup> K.D.M. Snell, 'The Culture of Local Xenophobia', *Social History* 28 (2003) 1-30.

dilapidation that it became necessary in 1846 to pull it down.<sup>46</sup> Due to limited funds, a full restoration had to be abandoned in favour of a simple obelisk initially with lions surrounding the base but those too were then omitted to save money.<sup>47</sup>

Local ambivalence towards Picton extended across Wales. In 1913 an open-air monument in Pembrokeshire was proposed as part of the upcoming centenary celebrations of the Battle of Waterloo. A letter to the *Western Mail* commented that although Picton was ‘one of the best soldiers of his age, he was also one of Pembrokeshire’s noblest sons. Yet, strange to say, we have little or no evidence of it on our own county’.<sup>48</sup> At a meeting of the Milford Haven Council, Colonel Roberts lamented that there was so little support. Criticising wealthier members of the town, he stated: ‘They were very fond of waving the Union Jack on public platforms but when it touched their pockets all their idea of Empire, to quote Sheridan, “Oozes out of the palms of our hands, Sneaks off”’. Instead, the Milford Haven Council responded by renaming Wellington Street, Picton Street.<sup>49</sup>

Against the background of the First World War, Picton’s memory was repeatedly invoked during recruitment drives as a vehicle for articulating a sense of Welsh identity nested within the British

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<sup>46</sup> Joyce Lodwick and Victor Lodwick, *The Story of Carmarthen* (Carmarthen: V.G Lodwick and Sons Ltd.,1972), p.237.

<sup>47</sup> Cadw 2023, Listed Building Full Report, Picton Monument. Reference number 9503. Amended 30 June 2023, p.2.

<sup>48</sup> *Western Mail*, 6 January 1913.

<sup>49</sup> *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph*, 21 January 1914.

imperial state. For example, in a meeting at the Guildhall in Carmarthen the Stipendiary, D. Llewellyn Thomas referred to the ‘monuments of many brave men in the town’ and asked the young men to ‘remember the lesson taught by General Picton’.<sup>50</sup> Similar sentiments were expressed at other recruitment meetings across Wales.<sup>51</sup> The creation of the 38<sup>th</sup> (Welsh) Division in April 1915 and the centenary of the Battle of Waterloo encouraged leader writers to draw further parallels between the current struggle and Picton’s martial exploits, while the Welsh Department of the Board of Education issued a book to schools for St. David’s Day 1915 that included addresses to ‘martial’ Welsh heroes, Owain Glyndwr and Picton.<sup>52</sup> The booklet made brief allusion to Picton’s trial but passed on quickly to his role ‘as the most heroic figure in the army which freed Europe’.<sup>53</sup>

The Carmarthen monument became an important focus of events to mark the centenary of Waterloo. Wreaths were placed before Picton’s portrait in the Carmarthen Guildhall and at the monument in the presence of Boy Scouts, soldiers, and local inhabitants.<sup>54</sup> Numerous anecdotes and stories concerning Picton also appeared in the Welsh press throughout the year lamenting the paucity of monuments. In February 1915 the author and future politician, James Alexander Lovat Fraser addressed the Constitutional Club at Llwynypia. Referring to Picton, Lovat Fraser noted

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<sup>50</sup> *Carmarthen Weekly Reporter*, 14 November 1914.

<sup>51</sup> *Glamorgan Gazette*, 5 March 1915.

<sup>52</sup> *Aberdare Leader*, 6 February 1916.

<sup>53</sup> Cited in R. Grigg, ‘You Should Love Your Country and Should Ever Strive to be Worthy of your Fatherland’: Identity, British values and St David’s Day elementary schools in Wales, c. 1885-1920, *Welsh History Review* 29 (2018) p.116

<sup>54</sup> *Herald of Wales and Monmouthshire*, 26 June 1915.

‘he was the one great soldier that Wales had produced in modern times, and yet where were the memorials of him?’<sup>55</sup>

Interest in Picton waned after the First World War in Wales and by the 1980s the Carmarthen monument had once again fallen into a state of dangerous disrepair. Protective netting was installed to prevent local collapse of masonry onto passing vehicles and surveys revealed substantial listing, twisting and outward bulging of the obelisk together with wide vertical cracks in the limestone blocks and severe water ingress that can be seen in figure 4.<sup>56</sup>

**(Fig.4.)**

In May 1983 the *Western Mail* lent support to a ‘Save the Monument’ campaign launched by local historian, Richard Goodridge, to restore the monument to its former condition.<sup>57</sup> Goodridge had previously been involved in the restoration of the Picton’s Iscoed estate in Carmarthen and solicited the support of the Wellington Society and Carmarthen Civic Association to save the obelisk.<sup>58</sup> He also reached out to the 8th Duke of Wellington, senior military figures, such as Field Marshall Lord Carver and Major General A. F. K. Walker, and legal experts, like Judge

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<sup>55</sup> *Western Mail*, 4 February 1915.

<sup>56</sup> Mander, Raikes & Marshal Consulting Civil & Structural Engineers, Picton Monument Carmarthen, structural report and recommendations, January 1984 Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments Wales, Aberystwyth

<sup>57</sup> *Western Mail*, 4 May 1983.

<sup>58</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, 9 January 1987.

Henry Pownall QC as part of his campaign.<sup>59</sup> However, despite these interventions, attitudes towards the monument proved just as ambivalent in the 1980s as they had in the 1840s.

Carmarthen Council considered options that ranged from restoration to ‘total removal of the monument to tip and grassing of the site’ which accompanied both a diagram of the proposed options as seen in figure 5, and a comment that complete removal ‘may not be acceptable politically, to the public, or the Welsh Office’s Historic Building Council’.<sup>60</sup>

**(Fig.5.)**

The Welsh Government’s historical environment service Cadw issued a compulsory order to return the monument to its original state and Carmarthen Council requested an extension due to lack of funds with several councillors maintaining that the, by then £200,000 could be much better spent elsewhere.<sup>61</sup> In another discursive attempt to articulate the memorial public’s geographical remit, Councillor Del Thomas pointed out ‘it has to be remembered that Sir Thomas was not a ‘son’ of Carmarthen. He was a Pembrokeshire man’.<sup>62</sup> Several letter writers to the local paper, the *Carmarthen Journal*, made the same point.<sup>63</sup>

Cost and Picton’s origins were not the only objections raised. Picton’s controversial past, which

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<sup>59</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, 13 May 1988; 6 May 1983; 24 January 1986.

<sup>60</sup> Mander, Raikes and Marshall, Structural Report, Appendix A.

<sup>61</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, 11 June 1985.

<sup>62</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, 18 September 1987.

<sup>63</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, 7 February 1986 & 15 February 1985.

had been ignored almost entirely during centenary celebrations of Waterloo, now reappeared in the local press. One contributor even took on the persona of Luisa Calderón to call on the people of Carmarthen to resist the restoration. Quoting the 1806 guilty verdict, the author declared, ‘So much for the pomp and dignity of the British Raj’! Yet Mritish (sic) justice prevailed, and perchance British common sense may yet prevail over wantonly extravagant proposals’.<sup>64</sup>

An opinion piece in the *Carmarthen Journal* set out the story of the trial and described Picton as ‘as not such an entirely admirable character as implied by the hazily adulatory notion in the minds of most people - if, in fact they have even heard of him’.<sup>65</sup> A later piece by the same author complained at the lack of protest over the compulsory order and accused Cadw of ‘blackmailing’ the Council. The article also lamented that in Carmarthen ‘*all* of the prominent monuments that you see (now that the Old Oak is gone) are memorials to wars waged by the occupying power to its generals’. This represented a sharp departure from the sentiments expressed in the nineteenth and early twentieth century when Picton was held up as a Welsh and British hero. Now he was depicted as a representative of an English state that had occupied Wales. The paper suggested that: ‘Suppose against all the odds, that the Picton site was cleared and became available for something different. Couldn’t we have a monument to a *Welsh* national hero for a change? How about Llewelyn ap Gruffydd or Owain Glyndwr? Taliesin or Dafydd ap Gwilym?’ Or even perhaps - to symbolise the healthy rebelliousness that has always characterised the people of Dyfed - Twm Sion Cati or the redoubtable Rebecca?’<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, 15 February 1985.

<sup>65</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, 6 November 1987.

<sup>66</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, 11 December 1987.

This reassessment of Picton occurred against the background of a resurgent Welsh nationalism in the post-war period, exemplified in the activities of Cymdeithas yr Iaith Cymraeg (The Welsh Language Society) and the Welsh nationalist party, Plaid Cymru. Plaid Cymru won its first Parliamentary seat in Carmarthen in 1966 and by the late 1980s had called for the Council to be released from its obligation to repair the monument.<sup>67</sup> The growing influence Plaid Cymru, therefore, provided a rhetorical space to discuss the future of obelisk, but also risked downplaying Wales's role in the British empire by characterising Picton an agent of a repressive English state. Taken together these disputes demonstrate how memorial publics are produced through struggles over meaning and also financial responsibilities and moral obligations.

### ACTIVISM IN CARMARTHEN

These struggles would take on new life on 8 June 2020 one day after the statue of Edward Colston was torn down and dumped into Bristol Harbour, when a nineteen-year-old Carmarthen resident started an on-line petition that received almost twenty thousand signatures. The petition stated: 'It is unthinkable inappropriate, ignorant and structurally racist to be honouring the achievements of an inexplicably evil individual and implies that the Welsh state does not care enough about the importance of remembering the struggles of colonial subjects, but also black

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<sup>67</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, 13 June 1983.



lives in general’.<sup>68</sup> The petition and subsequent protests at the monument itself gained attention from audiences world-wide particularly in Trinidad, and also from residents of towns and streets that bear his name in Wales, England, Canada, and Aotearoa-New Zealand.<sup>69</sup>

This moment of revision and reflection is not over the memory of Picton himself or his actions but over how a public is produced in relation to his commemoration. Just as Rahul Rao notes of the toppling of statues of Gandhi which came about ‘not because we have discovered something previously unknown but because we are re-evaluating things we have long known’, so Picton’s exploits in Trinidad became impossible to ignore.<sup>70</sup>

In August 2020 Carmarthenshire Council launched a survey about the monument in an attempt to manage burgeoning tensions amongst residents within the town. In answer to the question: ‘Do you think Carmarthenshire County Council need to take any steps in response to the recent public discussion about the Sir Thomas Picton monument?’<sup>71</sup> 1613 answered ‘No’, only 744 answered ‘Yes’.

Acting on the data, the Council adopted a retain-and-explain approach that would soon be formalised and adopted in England declaring: ‘that the monument should remain, and should not

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<sup>68</sup> Gweni Marni, ‘End Commemoration of Colonial Murderer ‘Sir’ Thomas Picton - Picton Memorial Carmarthen’, [bit.ly/pictonobelisk](http://bit.ly/pictonobelisk) (last accessed 25 September 2023).

<sup>69</sup> Andrew Fyall, ‘The Picton Connection’, *Pembrokeshire LIFE* (February 2002 ) pp.30-32.

<sup>70</sup> Rahul Rao, ‘Gandhi Falling’, 3

<sup>71</sup> Equality and Diversity Task and Finish Group, *Interim Report*, 4

be repurposed, renamed or altered' [but...] 'to reflect recent global events', information boards should be installed 'to educate and inform in a more comprehensive way'.<sup>72</sup>

Even this modest modification caused outrage when connected to culture war discourses invoking populist totems of freedom, identity and government waste. Politician Neil Hamilton, for example, broadcast on social media from the base of the monument declaring: 'I believe that we should have a referendum on whether this monument should be removed. The woke police want councillors to vote to take it down. I believe that decision should be for the people. Haven't we got better things to spend our money on at the moment? So, if like me you think that Wales's history matters and Britain's history matters save our heritage, save our statues. Vote UKIP'.<sup>73</sup>

Such populist dynamics are echoed in Batory and Svenson's analysis of the abuse of participatory governance in Hungary to defend right-wing agendas as the core will of the people.<sup>74</sup> In Carmarthen, far right groups Voice of Wales and Patriotic Alternative make similar claims. A co-authored pamphlet circulated during one Carmarthen protest featured Picton overlaid with the text: 'Leave History Alone' and extolls: 'Foreign interests have no right to suggest the removal of our historic figures from our towns and cities as much as we have no

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<sup>72</sup> Equality and Diversity Task and Finish Group, *Interim Report*, 9

<sup>73</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/NeilUKIP/videos/the-picton-monument-must-stand/345136693163571/> last accessed 25 September 2023; UKIP is the United Kingdom Independence Party founded in 1993 to take Britain out of the European Union.

<sup>74</sup> Agnes Batory and Sara Svensson, 'The Use and Abuse of Participatory Governance by Populist Governments'. *Policy & Politics* 47 (2019) 227-244.

business in trying to enforce the removal of Augusto di Prima Porta from the Vatican in the centre of Rome or the French and Spanish have the claim to topple Lord Horatio Nelson's column from Trafalgar Square in our own capital city of London.<sup>75</sup>

With such rhetorical moves, the public is locally confined through assertions that commemoration is an internal issue that should be defended against outside influence. These oft repeated spatial imaginaries have worked to secure the category of public many times and, as Staeheli *et al*'s analysis of media coverage on immigrants in the United States makes clear, they have immense power to 'condition the possibilities for inclusion'.<sup>76</sup>

While the Picton monument in Carmarthen endures in the form shown in figure 1, the approach taken by Cardiff City Council to remove a one-and-a half tonne marble statue of Picton shown in figure six from the Heroes of Wales Collection located in City Hall, worked as a model of civic decolonisation. On 23 July 2020, Cardiff City Councillor Said Ebrahim proposed a motion to remove the marble statue of Picton to: 'send a message to Black people in Cardiff and across the world that the city recognises the role people like Picton played in slavery and that we must seek to address the systematic racism that still exists due to slavery and Empire.'<sup>77</sup> The motion passed fifty-seven to five with nine abstentions and an application for listed building consent was

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<sup>75</sup> Patriotic Alternative, *Leave History Alone* pamphlet, no date.

<sup>76</sup> Lynn Staeheli, Don Mitchell, and Caroline Nagel, 'Making Publics: Immigrants, Regimes of Publicity and Entry to 'The Public'. *Environment and planning D: Society and Space* 27 (2009) p.634.

<sup>77</sup> BBC News, 'Statue of Slave Owner Thomas Picton to be Removed From Cardiff City Hall', 23 July 2020.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-53512384>. (last accessed 1 November 2023).

commissioned and ultimately approved in March 2021.<sup>78</sup> During the public consultation period, an on-line planning portal became a venue to assert who the legitimate public could be.

A few vocal loud people are not representative of the British silent majority. You must CONSULT all taxpayers prior to making any decisions. That is the only fair way of ensuring that this issue has NOT been hijacked. A local poll of local TAX PAYERS ONLY.<sup>79</sup>

Alderman's findings on the naming of streets after Martin Luther King in Eatonton, Georgia, USA identifies this type of civic expression as the scaling of memory: 'Many whites do not personally identify with King and public opposition often leads to the confinement of his name to minor streets or portions of large streets in African American areas of the city.'<sup>80</sup>

**(Fig.6.)**

Other forces of confinement are at play in the debate around Picton's commemoration in Carmarthen. By September 2022, Carmarthen Council discretely installed information panels across the road from the monument in a move that might be described as 'symbolic annihilation'

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<sup>78</sup> Cardiff City Council Planning Application Documents

<https://www.cardiffidoxcloud.wales/publicaccess/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=ZZZHXDECDR431>

<sup>79</sup> Cardiff City Council Planning Application Comments:

<https://www.cardiffidoxcloud.wales/publicaccess/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=makeComment&keyVal=ZZZH XDECDR431>

<sup>80</sup> Derek Alderman, 'Street Names and the Scaling of Memory: The Politics of Commemorating Martin Luther King, Jr within the African American Community', *Area* 35 (2003) p.164.

for their similarity to the representational strategies deployed by some plantation museums in the Southern United States that deflect, minimise or deal with the institution of slavery in a perfunctory way.<sup>81</sup>

The first 289 of 450 words in total (English language version), describes local support for the Picton monument during a wave of national pride and celebration following the battle of Waterloo. The final paragraph, notes Picton's links to Trinidad and the emergence of missing viewpoints.

In 2020 the Black Lives Matter activist movement opened debates on racism. Public monuments came under scrutiny. The Picton monument is being looked at again through today's historical lens to reach a different understanding. In this way, missing viewpoints are brought to the forefront, recognising that aspects of Wales's past involved the exploitation of enslaved and colonised people around the world.<sup>82</sup>

This text is set against a sketch of Luisa Calderón that was widely distributed in the early 1800s and used in Picton's trial. Calderón, in white nightdress with fragile wrist held aloft suspended by rope onto a spike by a darker figure is a configuration that equates femininity with whiteness and whiteness with innocence and vulnerability. By repeating this spectacle on the side of a busy

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<sup>81</sup>Jenifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (Washington D.C: Smithsonian Books, 2002).

<sup>82</sup> Carmarthenshire County Council Interpretive Board 2022.

trunk road, the information board is guilty of a profound lack of sensitivity that belies the assumed whiteness of its audience.

Angela Kinlaw of Take ‘Em Down NOLA’, a group working for the removal of all symbols of white supremacy in New Orleans, spells out one of the common missteps in commemorative reform: ‘We do not celebrate images that fetishise black trauma, and suffering... and just because you put up the image of a black person does not make it about liberation if indeed those images to black people further perpetuate black exploitation or oppression’. <sup>83</sup>

Over the years, Calderón has been made to perform a huge amount of symbolic labour as an emblem of the horrors of slavery. Her deposition at the 1806 trial qualified her’s as ‘the first narrative of Trinidad and Tobago’s literary tradition and ‘as one of two forgotten stories that had Trinidad ‘touched by history’ or at least brought within European consciousness’. This move has received critique.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Angela Kinlaw, ‘Symbols of genocide, racism, colonialism and other crimes against humanity’, part of the 2022 Kwame Ture Memorial Lecture Series, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Gr5ZBvIK6U> (last accessed 30 September 2022).

<sup>84</sup> Selwyn. R Cudjoe, *Beyond Boundaries: The Intellectual Tradition of Trinidad and Tobago in the Nineteenth Century*, (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003); Naipaul, *The Loss of El Dorado*. The impulse to use Luisa Calderón and her compatriot Kitsimba as a prop for a story about the horrors of slavery is interrogated and subverted by M. Jaqui Alexander ‘Healing Work is the Antidote to Oppression’ *Pedagogies of Crossing*, (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 2005) pp.339-348.

The recirculation of the Calderón sketch here compounds those critiques first, because it frames the violence of plantation slavery as an exceptional event carried out by a rogue individual rather than a structural component of British imperialism and second, because, in the words of one Trinidad activist, as a mixed race British subject Calderón: ‘emphasises the disregard the law had for actual slaves who were not even eligible for consideration or remark’. <sup>85</sup>

Adapting Patrick Wolfe’s phrasing we might say that supplements to the Picton monument makes plain how colonialism ‘is a structure not an event’ that remains ongoing in countless small decisions about heritage that take protection and value as a default. D’Ignazio’s outline of Patricia Hill Collins’s Black feminist model of heritage as part of a ‘matrix of domination’ is instructive here. City spaces are made legible in ways that codify racism into the landscape through seemingly benign procedural routines that ignore different perspectives of its Black, Asian and Minority-Ethnic community their anti-racist allies. <sup>86</sup>

Rejecting activist requests to delist the Picton monument, for example, Cadw mobilised planning law and architectural expertise to instead amend its ‘reason-for-designation’ statement to read: ‘Included notwithstanding reconstruction and Picton’s culpability in crimes against humanity, as a good example of the obelisk form, for townscape value in distant views of Carmarthen, and as a landmark on a grand scale; and for historical interest as a memorial to a highly contentious

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<sup>85</sup> (interview with author 10 June 2022).

<sup>86</sup> Catherine D’Ignazio, Wonyoung So, and Nicole Ntim-Addea, ‘The Audit: Perils and Possibilities for Contesting Oppression in the Heritage Landscape’. In *The Routledge Handbook of Architecture, Urban Space and Politics, Volume I*, ed. by Nikolina Bobic and Farzaneh Haghighi (London: Routledge), p.251.

historical figure and his death in the Napoleonic Wars'.<sup>87</sup> Here aesthetic contribution outweighs any potential harm or offense caused by the triumphant public endorsement of a figure so closely associated with enslavement and colonial violence. The memorial public in this case is produced by officials in support of the status quo.

The next section outlines events and activities underway in Trinidad that highlight the operation of a much broader memorial public encompassing a diverse set of perspectives and experiences to expose the official position taken in Carmarthen as decidedly myopic.

## ACTIVISM IN TRINIDAD

Wales's commemoration of histories of transatlantic slavery has been explored in a number of works including Marion Gwyn's analysis of bi-centenary celebrations of abolition and Olivette Otele's review of Wales as a reluctant site of memory.<sup>88</sup> Critical reflections on public memory in Trinidad and Tobago have been completed by Bridget Brereton charting the successive inclusion of the nation's different ethnic groups into a national narrative, by Claudius Fergus on historiographies of slave resistance, and by Audra Diptee detailing the destruction of colonial

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<sup>87</sup> Cadw, 'Full Report for Listed Building 9503 Picton Monument'. Date amended 30 June 2023, <https://cadwpublic-api.azurewebsites.net/reports/listedbuilding/FullReport?lang=&id=9503>. (last accessed 30 September 2023)

<sup>88</sup> Marian Gwyn, 'Wales and the Memorialisation of Slavery in 2007', *Atlantic Studies* 9 (2012) 299-318; Olivette Otele, 'Mourning in Reluctant Sites of Memory: from Afrophobia to Cultural Productivity' in *Post-Conflict Memorialization: Missing Memorials, Absent Bodies*, ed. by Olivette Otele, Luisa Gandolfo and Yoav Galai (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp. 35-54.



documents by the British in Trinidad just before independence as part of Operation Legacy.<sup>89</sup> Recent coverage of Trinidad's reckoning with persisting legacies of colonialism in the landscape includes Geliene Matthews on the re-naming of Milner Hall, and the recent volume *Collective Memory, Identity and the Legacies of Slavery and Indenture* that explores the evolution of collective memories of labour mobility in the Caribbean region.<sup>90</sup> There has also been acknowledgment within the heritage sector that a reckoning with slavery is long overdue. The National Trust for Trinidad and Tobago, for example, notes on their website that the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 prompted increased self-reflection and scrutiny:

There is little to no onsite acknowledgment of the atrocities that took place on the plantations because this does not align with the representation of the islands, as tropical paradise. Locals and foreigners alike relax by the hotel pool and play golf on the manicured lawns and guests

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<sup>89</sup> Bridget Brereton, 'Contesting the Past: Narratives of Trinidad & Tobago history'. *New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 81 (2007) 169-196; Claudius Fergus, 'Centring the City in the Amelioration of Slavery in Trinidad, 1824-1834.', *The Journal of Caribbean History* 40 (2006) 117-140; Audra Diptee, 'Breaking From the Chains of the Past: Recounting Caribbean History Accurately is Hard when Many of the Documents have been Destroyed', *Index of Censorship* 47 (2018) 64-66.

<sup>90</sup> Geliene Matthews, 'Toppling the Colonisers'; *Collective Memory, Identity and the Legacies of Slavery and Indenture*, ed. by Gounder Farzana, Bridget Brereton, Jerome Egger, and Hilde Neus, (London: Routledge, 2022). See also Bridget Brereton, 'Contesting the past: Narratives of Trinidad & Tobago history'. *New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 81 (2007) 169-196.

can have lunch in the remains of a sugar factory. The discussion of the atrocities committed on the plantations barely skims the surface of the issue.<sup>91</sup>

This burgeoning revisionism is also driven by an awareness of actions in Wales including press coverage of protests over the Picton monument in Carmarthen, a National Museums Wales exhibition entitled: 'Reframing Picton' by Trinidad national Gesiye Souza-Okpofabri and members of the Trinidad and Tobago diaspora in the UK, and the publication of *The Slave Trade and the British Empire: An Audit of Commemoration in Wales's* authored by a committee chaired by Gaynor Legall who advocated for a similar review in Trinidad.<sup>92</sup>

One Trinidad newspaper saw the relative lack of action compared with other places as 'a national shame': 'While Wales is coming to terms with the cruel truths about its military hero, here in Trinidad where Picton reigned brutally for six years, there is little appetite for historical reckoning, redress and reparation'.<sup>93</sup> Other commentators in Trinidad also invoked Wales to push for national reform: 'He was racist and a vicious Welshman. The Welsh historians did their research. It's so sad so many places are named after a vicious, cruel person. Places should not be

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<sup>91</sup> National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago, *Contested Heritage in 2020*, <https://nationaltrust.tt/contested-heritage-in-2020> (last accessed 10 November 2022).

<sup>92</sup> Welsh Government, *The Slave Trade and the British Empire*.

<sup>93</sup> *Daily Express*, 'A National Shame', 15 November 2021, [https://trinidadexpress.com/opinion/editorials/a-national-shame/article\\_95fbc2d4-4675-11ec-95a0-235824935301.html](https://trinidadexpress.com/opinion/editorials/a-national-shame/article_95fbc2d4-4675-11ec-95a0-235824935301.html), (last accessed 1 November 2023).

remembered by rascals like Picton’.<sup>94</sup> These affiliations and linkages indicate the complex relations at play in the production of memorial publics that span a global portfolio of extant monuments to British imperialism facing local protest and scrutiny from global media.

Eventually, on 21 July 2022 in a statement from the office of the prime minister Keith Rowley a five-member historical review committee was announced that would report on the placement of statues, monuments and other historical signage and recognition.<sup>95</sup> However, because of long-running reluctance to reckon with the national past, many in Trinidad were sceptical: ‘This move comes across as insincere, as lip service, as a way to pacify the demands of activists who are pointing out the need for fundamental change in the society’.<sup>96</sup> Many others expressed similar caution: ‘There's lots of corruption and denial and avoidance of history of slavery in Trinidad

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<sup>94</sup> Michelle Loubon, ‘Time to Erase Picton’: Brinsley Samaroo on removal of Picton name from streets and places.

*Trinidad Express*, 3 August 2022. [https://trinidadexpress.com/news/local/time-to-erase-racist-picton/article\\_50456596-12c7-11ed-a98f-db33e6bf391f.html](https://trinidadexpress.com/news/local/time-to-erase-racist-picton/article_50456596-12c7-11ed-a98f-db33e6bf391f.html), (last accessed 10 November 2022).

<sup>95</sup> Trinidad Dailey Express, ‘Cabinet appoints committee to review placement of statues,

monuments and signage in T&T’, *Trinidad Express* 3 August 2022, [https://trinidadexpress.com/newsextra/cabinet-appoints-committee-to-review-placement-of-statues-monuments-and-signage-in-t-t/article\\_d76cfce8-1345-11ed-a94c-834023c6e526.html](https://trinidadexpress.com/newsextra/cabinet-appoints-committee-to-review-placement-of-statues-monuments-and-signage-in-t-t/article_d76cfce8-1345-11ed-a94c-834023c6e526.html) (last accessed 10 November 2022).

<sup>96</sup> Joshua Seemungal, ‘Confronting T&T’s colonial past: Historians call for dialogue on statues and street names’,

*Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*. 7 August 2022. <https://guardian.co.tt/news/confronting-tts-colonial-past-6.2.1529179.91c1ff4dad> (last accessed 10 November 2022).

and Tobago. Statue removal can be cosmetic, superficial, not a real reckoning with the past. We need a proper public conversation.’<sup>97</sup>

Official press coverage was more optimistic: ‘This committee should be seen not as merely the offshoot of a desire by the Prime Minister to have these matters addressed, but as an opportunity to set in motion a culture of deep engagement with the living legacy that is our country’s rich and complicated heritage’.<sup>98</sup> There has been no reporting on the outcome of the committee since then.<sup>99</sup>

The linkages emerging in this move towards reform connect Trinidad with Wales through a circum-Atlantic memorial public. The uneven affiliations established through battles over who constitutes a public and who should be included in decisions about its memory need to be understood as operational beyond the locality of their material setting. Memorial publics can be a broad and diverse constituency operating at different scales across multiple sites. We can see something of this re-drawing the scope of memory in Cadw’s forthcoming guidelines on contentious commemorations in Wales:

[commemorations] can be statements about the character and history of the local area, so local people may have the greatest stake in them...But commemorations are also statements about

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<sup>97</sup> Interview with author, July 2022.

<sup>98</sup> Trinidad and Tobago Newsday Editorial, ‘Putting TT history where it should be’, 10 August 2022, <https://newsday.co.tt/2022/08/10/putting-tt-history-where-it-should-be/> (last accessed 25 September 2023).

<sup>99</sup> 18 October 2023.

the area's relationship to much wider histories. They may be "about" a great many people who live well beyond the local area. Personalities and events commemorated in Wales may have an international dimension. Local areas have porous borders so public commemorations may be experienced by many people from outside the immediate area; for example, people coming to work or use services, and visitors. This means it is also important to consider what message is being communicated to these wider audiences.<sup>100</sup>

In the case of Carmarthen's Picton monument, a memorial public was produced and maintained by sponsors in a context of waning enthusiasm, local ambivalence, and occasional critique. Indeed, as the debate on the future of the monument in the 1980s demonstrates, the structure had been a contested site of memorialisation before the twentieth century. In the years since 2020 that memorial public becomes confined as local with boundaries for legitimate participation tightly controlled. Against that discourse of localism is a powerful extending of the memorial public as affiliating groups find ways to connect to demand removal of triumphant symbols endorsing figures associated with colonial violence.

## CONCLUSION

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<sup>100</sup> Cadw, 'Draft of Public Commemoration in Wales: Guidance for Public Bodies'. 14-15, (p.14)

<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2022-11/public-commemoration-in-wales-guidance-for-public-bodies.pdf> (last accessed 25 September 2023).

In this article we have elaborated on the complex spatialities of commemoration and resistance in colonized and coloniser contexts by extending a story of the Picton monument in Carmarthen to a burgeoning rejection of Picton's commemoration in public spaces across Wales and Trinidad. The article details the ongoing formation of a memorial public subject to forces of confinement and extension. Memorial publics are a useful way of shifting analysis beyond close-up archaeologies of statues, monuments, and street signs often dealt with in isolation, to the processes by which social groups form themselves through struggle, debate and negotiation. Memorial publics are constituencies or diasporas formed in relation to a past that is remembered collectively. In this case, running alongside localist attempts to restrict the scope of the memorial public, myriad linkages and affiliations between Wales and Trinidad emerge to challenge his persistence as a venerated symbol of British imperialism.

In Wales, confronting the legacies of transatlantic slavery and empire has been driven by a progressive government as part of anti-racist drives towards a more inclusive national memory. This is informed both by global events and a sense of moral obligation to people both resident and overseas. In Trinidad, a long-running reluctance to engage with the histories of indigenous genocide, enslavement, and colonialism that are still affirmed in statues, monuments, and placenames to European and British rulers, is now being overcome with help from decolonising initiatives elsewhere in the Caribbean, around the world, and also in Wales.

We highlight these links between Wales and Trinidad in the hope that they add weight to commemorative reforms underway. The paper also contributes to scholarship by moving beyond

pre-occupation with the politics of recognition which Baird, Rose-Redwood and Palonen identify as problematic because it takes for granted, the de facto authority of official systems to designate.<sup>101</sup> In Carmarthen and in Trinidad, as we have shown, recognition by state authorities is being tested by circum-Atlantic affiliations in the form of memorial publics connecting in ways that exceed local and national remits and do not require recognition. This transnational activism exists through conversations, swapped stories, shared strategies, and mutual challenge to the infrastructures of white supremacy that persist in many more monuments to British imperialism.

## CAPTIONS

Fig.1.Contemporary image of the Picton monument in summer of 2022 (author's own, 2022).

Fig.2. Photograph in the National Library of Wales Collection entitled 'Subscriptions towards the Erection of a Monument to Perpetuate the Glorious Memory of the late Sir Thomas Picton' in File containing correspondence, newspaper cuttings and photographs, etc, 1975-84, Relating Mainly to Sir Thomas Picton, Picton's Monument, and Picton Family ....., n.d. MMS ID 992097013502419.

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<sup>101</sup> Baird, Redwood and Palonen, 'Monumentality', p.454.

Fig.3 Sketch of the original 1828 monument designed by John Nash. Available at National Library of Wales, Image Collection, File DV405 no.88, Creative Commons:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Picton\\_Monument,\\_Carmarthen#/media/File:DV405\\_no.88\\_Picton\\_s\\_monument\\_Carmarthen.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Picton_Monument,_Carmarthen#/media/File:DV405_no.88_Picton_s_monument_Carmarthen.png) accessed 23 October 2023.

Fig.4. Drawing of damage to the second monument by structural engineers Mander, Raikes & Marshal in January 1984. Used with permission from Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments Wales, Aberystwyth.

Fig.5. Drawing of alternative cost estimates Mander, Raikes & Marshal survey 1984, Used with permission from Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments Wales, Aberystwyth.

Fig. 6. Picton Statue Cardiff on far left before removal from the Marble Hall, Heroes of Wales Collection, City Hall, Cardiff. Photograph by Colin Smith, taken March 2011. Courtesy of Creative Commons. [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bd/Heroes\\_of\\_Wales\\_-\\_geograph.org.uk\\_-\\_1423469.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bd/Heroes_of_Wales_-_geograph.org.uk_-_1423469.jpg) accessed 23 October 2023.