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## Stabilizing History through Statues, Monuments, and Memorials in Curzon's India

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### Abstract

This article argues that projects to make Britain's imperial history visible to the public through the display of statues, the establishment of a history museum, and the renovation of historical markers solidified a colonial narrative about the British empire's permanence in India during the first two decades of the twentieth century, decades in which anticolonial unrest threatened the British occupation of the subcontinent. The monumental scale expressed permanence. An imperial aesthetic linked the cities important to showcasing the empire in Calcutta, New Delhi, and London. Contrary to mainstream assumptions that commemorations should be preserved for the sake of documenting history, these markers enacted a British story of triumph at a moment when mass campaigns against British rule were occurring. Coming at the end of a long nineteenth century of statue mania, when many European nations installed memorials to national heroes, the installation of monuments in India presented a colonialist public history of events such as the Black Hole incident of 1757 or the rebellions of 1857. Drawing from Viceroy George Curzon's ambitions in historical preservation and monumentalizing, the article shows how he stabilized a British narrative of India amid anticolonial campaigns of protest.

I believe that it will teach more history and better history than a study-full of books.

Lord George Nathaniel Curzon, earl of Kedleston<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Journal of the Queen Victoria Indian Memorial Fund*, for April 1901, published by Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, India, p. 11.

Addressing members of the Asiatic Society of Bengal on 26 February 1901, Lord George Curzon, then viceroy of India, announced the construction of a monumental building in honour of the recently deceased Queen Victoria that would serve as a 'historical museum'.<sup>2</sup> Instead of historical texts, Lord Curzon proposed what he imagined as an innovative type of historical record, a display of objects that was visible to the public rather than kept out of sight in libraries or archives. For Curzon, documenting, preserving, and displaying the history of British India was an important obligation; as he explained: 'I regard as a great Imperial duty, viz.,...to provide for us, that is, a standing record of our wonderful history, a visible monument of Indian glories, and an illustration, more eloquent than any spoken address or printed page, of the lessons of public patriotism and civic duty.'<sup>3</sup>

Curzon's ambitions for amplifying the history of British India were central to his projects of monumentalizing and commemorating empire, of which the Victoria Memorial Hall in Kolkata (spelled Calcutta until 2001) was the most visible. In his years as viceroy of India, he placed historical markers of events such as the eighteenth-century Black Hole incident, the 1857 Mutiny, and asserted the colonial government's authority over ancient buildings, such as the Taj Mahal. Through projects of historical preservation and historical construction, he stabilized the historical narrative of India into what he called 'enduring monuments' that represented a material permanence of the empire's existence.<sup>4</sup> Even as anticolonial protesters and activists contested the continued occupation of the British in India, Curzon used monuments to tell a triumphant history of empire, while 'silencing' the challenges to empire that occurred at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup>

Through Curzon's career, this article argues that projects to make Britain's imperial history visible to the public through the display of paintings, busts, and statues solidified a particular story about the British empire's permanence in India during two decades of anticolonial unrest in India that threatened the British occupation of the subcontinent. Akin to the architecture that marked the expansion of the Raj, permanence was expressed by its monumental size and coincided with the expansion of colonial cities, most particularly Calcutta and New Delhi, but London as well.<sup>6</sup> Contrary to the assumption that commemorations marked imperial heroism or triumph, these markers or memory objects did not seamlessly represent history. As Alex von

<sup>2</sup> Curzon of Kedleston, George Nathaniel Curzon, *Speeches* (4 vols., Calcutta, 1900–6), II, p. 230.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 213.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 193. Since the 2000s, after the four-volume translation of Pierre Nora, *Rethinking France* (Chicago, IL, 2001), the study of historical sites has generated a number of important titles about commemorative practices in the empire. Among them, Dominik Geppert and Frank Lorenz Muller, eds., *Sites of imperial memory: commemorating colonial rule in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (Manchester, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the past: power and the production of history* (Boston, MA, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas R. Metcalf, *An imperial vision: Indian architecture and Britain's Raj* (Berkeley, CA, 1989).

Tunzelmann notes, many commemorations were controversial; statues were often mounted in an effort to claim someone's positive reputation.<sup>7</sup>

By the time Victoria Memorial Hall was opened to the public in 1922, Calcutta was no longer the capital city of British India, and mass nationalist campaigns of boycott and non-cooperation led by Gandhi demanded that the British leave India immediately. The opening of the Victoria Memorial Hall became 'a site of ritualistic remembrance of a past glory if that future [of the British leaving India] arrived'.<sup>8</sup>

In these two decades, roughly from 1900 to the 1920s, commemorations designed to tell a public history of the British empire were built even as challenges to the empire escalated. Protests against the Anglo-Boer war in South Africa between 1899 and 1902, the first partition of Bengal in 1905, and the brutality of the shootings at Jallianwala Bagh in 1919 generated a steady drum-beat of opposition to the continued occupation of the British empire.<sup>9</sup> Amid this opposition, colonial officials such as Lord Curzon built statues, organized exhibitions, reorganized urban spaces, and preserved a history of the British empire. The events around 1857, perhaps the most significant anticolonial protest of the nineteenth century, generated a range of British-centred commemorations in the early decades of the twentieth century, the fiftieth anniversary in 1907 and on the occasions of the durbar held in Delhi in 1903 and 1911.<sup>10</sup>

Curzon's own career as viceroy of India came to a quick and dramatic end in August 1905 when he resigned and returned to England. Although he never returned to India again, he remained active as a patron for the public history of empire: combining his interests commemorating historical events along with historic preservation, he joined the work he did with the Victoria Memorial with new installations in London to emphasize the British empire's reach. These projects were not always welcome, either to Indian nationalists or to cautious British officials, yet Curzon persisted and his commemorative projects continued with private donations from his close allies of the empire.

Curzon's announcement calling for partitioning the province of Bengal in August 1904 provoked one of the first mass campaigns of anticolonial protest. The *swadeshi* movement (1905–7) called on Indians to buy only handcrafted textiles and refuse machine-made clothing, foreign cigarettes, alcohol, and factory-made goods from Britain. When the foundation stone for the Victoria Memorial was laid in Calcutta in 1906 by George, the prince of Wales, textile factories and mills were being set aflame in the surrounding rural districts. In 1911, the capital of British India was relocated to New

<sup>7</sup> Alex von Tunzelmann, *Fallen idols: twelve statues that made history* (London, 2021), pp. 21–2, where she critiques the 'man of his time' argument.

<sup>8</sup> Sumangala Bhattacharya, 'Taj of the Raj: appropriating the colonial legacy of Kolkata's Victoria Memorial Hall', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 41 (2019), pp. 521–41, at p. 526.

<sup>9</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Empire, the national, and the postcolonial, 1890–1920: resistance in interaction* (Oxford, 2002); Antoinette Burton, *The trouble with empire challenges to modern British imperialism* (Oxford, 2015); Jonathan Schneer, *London 1900: the imperial metropolis* (New Haven, CT, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Rosie Llewellyn Jones, *The Great Uprising in India, 1857–1858: untold stories, Indian and British* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 180–206; Sonakshi Goyle, 'Tracing a cultural memory: commemoration of 1857 in the Delhi darbars, 1877, 1903, and 1911', *Historical Journal*, 59 (2016), pp. 799–815.

Delhi where an even grander imperial city was being built.<sup>11</sup> Edward, the next prince of Wales, visited Calcutta on a royal tour in 1921–2 to open the finished Victoria Memorial Hall that commemorated his great-grandmother. This royal tour was scheduled to promote the empire's influence because Gandhi's year-long non-violent campaigns were underway. The non-cooperation movement of 1920–2 and the civil disobedience campaign of 1930–1 took their cues from the earlier *swadeshi* movement as Indians were encouraged to boycott foreign goods and withdraw their labour from the colonial administration. In 1931, the buildings of New Delhi were complete and opened to great fanfare amid the disruptions of civil disobedience. Just a half generation later, in 1947, the British administration left India and the urban centre of New Delhi, constructed of the red sandstone used in the Mughal-era old city of Delhi, became the postcolonial capital of the new republic of India. Many of the monuments built by the British remain on the subcontinent, decaying symbols of an empire that ended over seventy-five years ago. Their continued existence was what Curzon and his allies wanted: to solidify the empire in marble and bronze even as the empire's permanence was being contested.

## II

Many of the monuments and statues that were installed in colonial India coincided with a century of monumentalizing in Europe, most notably in France and Britain where 'statue-mania' took hold.<sup>12</sup> Reflecting on the nineteenth century, a century in which collecting, classifying, and preserving evidence of the past was widely embraced by art collectors, preservationists, and government officials, Alois Reigl, a scholar of art history, defined the 'modern cult of monuments' as a range of values attached to material objects: art value, historical value, use value, as well as commemorative value. Distinguishing between those who accepted the decay of old buildings against those who advocated restoration, Reigl specified that a growing commitment to preservation invested many objects – particularly those that were dilapidated – with new meanings. As the century ended, the conceit of the modern era was that all types of historical evidence (old or not) were to be maintained, restored, and archived rather than lost to the past. As he argued, a monument with 'intentional commemorative value aims to preserve a moment in the consciousness of later generations, and therefore to remain alive and present in perpetuity'.<sup>13</sup> In Reigl's arguments, which were roughly contemporaneous with Curzon's memorial projects in India, the idea that one should actively preserve historical materials and install them

<sup>11</sup> G. H. R. Tillotson, 'A visible monument: architectural policies and the Victoria Memorial Hall', in Philippa Vaughan, ed., *The Victoria Memorial Hall, Calcutta: conception, collections, conservation* (Mumbai, 1997), p. 19.

<sup>12</sup> Von Tunzelmann, *Fallen idols*, p. 17, notes that London had 22 statues in 1844 and 215 by 1910; see also Deborah Cherry, 'Statues in the square: hauntings at the heart of empire', *Art History*, 29 (2006), pp. 660–97, see p. 683; Erika Doss, *Memorial mania: public feeling in America* (Chicago, IL, 2010); Holger Hoock, ed., *History, commemoration, and national preoccupation* (Oxford, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> Alois Reigl, 'The modern cult of monuments: its character and its origin', *Oppositions*, 25 (1982), pp. 20–51, at p. 20.

in a modern building that was meant to remind viewers of an ancient past embodied the modern mania for preserving historical artefacts.

In Britain and its empire, statues and busts were commissioned by artists of the Royal Academy and shared particular characteristics: figures were displayed on horses and dressed in imperial robes or military uniforms. Portrait statues showed a full-sized body while equestrian statues exhibited a man in uniform on a horse. Made of bronze, marble, or stone, their size, weight, and bulk rendered them permanent features of the civic landscape in London as well as in cities such as Delhi and Kolkata. Mounted on pedestals that ranged from eight to twelve feet tall, these so-called life-sized statues loomed over those passing by on foot or in moving vehicles, producing an effect of grandeur and impermeability.<sup>14</sup>

In the last decade, calls to remove statues that commemorated colonialism have got louder across the world, particularly in Britain and parts of its former empire. The Rhodes Must Fall movement emerging from student protests in Cape Town, South Africa, are perhaps the most visible of these recent campaigns.<sup>15</sup> The felling of a statue to Edward Colston in Bristol (England) in July 2020, in the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis (United States), and calls to remove the statue of Lord Robert Clive in London demonstrate how public statuary have become targets of transnational social justice movements invested in redressing a long history of racism that was at the heart of Britain's centuries-long history of colonialism.

Those who defend statues to colonial figures claim their position as 'advocates of history' who believe that statues accurately record the past; they presume that to remove a statue is to 'erase history', echoing statements made by the members of Britain's Conservative party, including Boris Johnson, the former prime minister.<sup>16</sup> Another logic for keeping the statues where they are currently located are based on arguments about preservation: they should remain where they are because they are historic and modern societies preserve the past.<sup>17</sup> Through an exposition of Curzon's career, I argue against these claims by showing that colonial monuments were constructed in moments of contestation over empire. Rather than think of historical markers, statues, or memorials as documenting history, I argue that these installations told a history of empire as the empire's continued existence was being actively debated. Even though contemporary defenders of statues treat these commemorations as if they marked historical facts, I show that installing statues was a

<sup>14</sup> Mary Ann Steggle and Richard Barnes, eds., *British sculpture in India: new views and old memories* (Norwich, 2011), pp. 40–2.

<sup>15</sup> Robbie Shilliam, 'Behind the Rhodes statue: black competency and the imperial academy', *History of the Human Sciences*, 32 (2019), pp. 3–27; Roseanne Chantiluke, Brian Kwoba, and Athinangamso Nkopo, eds., *Rhodes must fall: the struggle to decolonize the racist heart of empire* (London, 2018).

<sup>16</sup> David Olusoga: <https://youtu.be/6WekKiNtFf4> (accessed 14 Oct. 2021).

<sup>17</sup> Adita Iyer, 'UK's threat to punish museums for removing colonial statues is colonialism 101', <https://hyperallergic.com/627944/uks-threat-to-punish-museums-for-removing-colonial-statues-is-colonialism-101/> (accessed 13 Mar. 2021).

way to stabilize a colonialist version of history by making it publicly visible, seemingly permanent, and educational.

### III

George Nathaniel Curzon was uniquely positioned to serve as viceroy of India at the turn of the twentieth century, a position he had sought since he was a boy. Born at Kedleston Hall in Derbyshire in 1859, he was the oldest son and heir to the family estate. This hall was built in 1765 and designed by Robert Adam, an architect whose studies in Italy inspired a neoclassical revival in late eighteenth-century country homes in England. Drawing from Adam's designs for the façade of Kedleston Hall, Government House in Calcutta was built in 1803 to house the governor-general and, later, the viceroy of India. As Christina Casey writes, he 'took on the appointment [of viceroy] as if it were an inheritance'.<sup>18</sup> Curzon was aware of this architectural duplication between his childhood home and the house he lived in as viceroy; he had spent hours in the family's library reading about architecture and the works of figures such as John Ruskin and William Morris who worked to preserve Britain's architectural heritage.<sup>19</sup> As Curzon noted, it was 'the alleged correspondence of the two houses that first turned my attention, when a boy, to India, and planted in me the ambition, from an early age, to pass from a Kedleston in Derbyshire to a Kedleston in Bengal.'<sup>20</sup> While still in his twenties, he travelled through west, south, and east Asia and educated himself about the classical world outside Europe. He became an 'expert' in ancient monuments of bygone empires, drawing lessons about colonial conquest.<sup>21</sup> By the time Curzon was appointed viceroy, he had significant political experience, having served as under-secretary of state for India (1891–2) and under-secretary of state for foreign affairs (1895–8). When he arrived in Calcutta to take up his position in January 1899, Curzon was committed to building new infrastructure and restoring ancient and historic monuments. He was keenly aware of his own legacy, documenting his activities with voluminous speeches, correspondence, and increasingly with spectacular exhibitions, such as the 1903 durbar, that showcased the achievements of the empire.<sup>22</sup>

Curzon's plans for the history museum that became the Victoria Memorial Hall predated Victoria's death in 1901. When he addressed a group at the Asiatic Society, he admitted that he had always planned to build such a

<sup>18</sup> Christina Casey, 'Subjects and sovereigns: the husbands and wives who ruled British India, 1774–1925' (Ph.D., Cornell, 2017), p. 27.

<sup>19</sup> Derek Linstrum, 'The last of the Augustans: Lord Curzon and Indian architecture', in Vaughan, ed., *Victoria Memorial Hall*, p. 24; Santhi Kavuri-Bauer, *Monumental matters: the power, subjectivity, and space of India's Mughal architecture* (Durham, NC, 2011), pp. 61–6.

<sup>20</sup> Linstrum, 'The last of the Augustans', p. 26.

<sup>21</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, NY, 1978), pp. 213–16; George N. Curzon, *Russia in central Asia in 1889 & the Anglo-Russian question* (London, 1889); idem, *Persia and the Persian question* (London, 1892); idem, *Problems of the Far East: Japan–Korea–China* (London, 1896).

<sup>22</sup> In addition to David Gilmour, *Curzon: imperial statesman* (New York, NY, 2003); earl of Ronaldshay, *The life of Curzon* (London, 1928); Katherine Rose, *Curzon: a most superior person* (London, 1969).

historical museum. For Curzon, the queen's death had provided an appropriate occasion to monumentalize the empire.<sup>23</sup> He likened Queen Victoria to the Emperor Ashoka, whose pillars and inscriptions across the subcontinent had provided archaeological evidence for the spread of his empire; the building of a large permanent hall would establish material evidence of the reach of Victoria's empire.<sup>24</sup>

In these speeches, Curzon was careful to distinguish the permanent from the temporary. Even as he gestured to the importance of museums, exhibitions, and public spectacles to represent the British empire's putative achievements,<sup>25</sup> he specified how a 'historical museum' was distinct from other types of display, such as the archaeological or industrial museum. Curzon clarified that the memorial would *not* be a

museum of antiquities, filled with undeciphered inscriptions and bronze idols and crumbling stones. It will not be an industrial museum, stocked with samples of grains, and timbers, and manufactures. It will not be an art museum, crowded with metal-ware of every description, with muslins, and kinkobs, and silks, with pottery, and lacquerware, and Kashmir shawls. It will not be a geological, or ethnographical, or anthropological, or architectural museum.<sup>26</sup>

In this long list of objects that would *not* be in the historical museum, he specified the many ways that nineteenth-century displays had showcased the empire's progress. In building the Victoria Memorial, the history museum was different because it was to be a permanent colonial exhibition that stabilized a colonialist story of the past into a narrative about the imperial foundations of India's future.

Like many Victorians, Curzon was committed to the centrality of history to legitimizing the empire. As Gilles Tillotson, an art historian, has noted, in planning the Victoria Memorial Hall, Curzon went beyond written accounts and 'conceived the memorial as a physical embodiment of a history lesson'.<sup>27</sup> The contents of the museum paid significant attention to British events and figures serving to educate those who visited the Victoria Memorial. The idea that material items, such as monuments, could narrate the history of a nation or empire constituted an archive: for Curzon, monuments, as he noted in a parliamentary debate about the importance of archaeological preservation, 'are documents just as valuable in reading the records of the past as is any manuscript or parchment deed to which you can refer'.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Curzon, *Speeches*, II, p. 214.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 216.

<sup>25</sup> There is a deep body of scholarship on this aspect of empire from Peter Hoffenberg, *An empire on display: English, Indian, and Australian exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War* (Berkeley, CA, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> Curzon, *Speeches*, II, p. 229.

<sup>27</sup> Tillotson, 'A visible monument', p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> Ancient Monuments Consolidation and Amendment Bill, HL Deb. 30 Apr. 1912 vol. 11 cc 863–94.

Curzon's interest in preserving ancient monuments was closely linked to his patronage of building new monuments. As viceroy of India, he reformed the Archaeological Survey of India, and passed important legislation on ancient monuments and their protection.<sup>29</sup> He took particular interest in restoring the Taj Mahal. These campaigns protecting ancient monuments generated a form of political legitimization that reaffirmed Britain's civilizational superiority over its colonial subjects and placed Britain's protection of India's past as an obligation.<sup>30</sup> Through building and restoration projects, Curzon explicitly linked Queen Victoria (and, indeed, the British crown) as part of a lineage of empires in India that began with Ashoka, continued with the Mughals, and rested with the British. Much as the Taj Mahal – a tomb to a Mughal queen – had materialized the Mughal dynasty's presence in Agra and outlasted the end of the Mughal empire, the Victoria Memorial stabilized proof of the British empire's existence before it, too, might end.<sup>31</sup> By invoking the solidity that a new building offered, particularly a building that was inspired by a Mughal-era tomb renowned for its aesthetic, Curzon 'adroitly contrived to give permanence and monumentality to a building that did not exist, and in so doing, to provide a solid "foundation" in the past for the British Indian empire.'<sup>32</sup>

The likeness between the Mughal-era Taj Mahal and the colonial-era Victoria Memorial became an important analogy that explained delays when the building of the Victoria Memorial stalled: in an article in the *Times of India*, in December 1921, a reporter noted that in spite of the delays in building the Victoria Memorial, the Taj Mahal had taken nearly two decades as well, which was one of Curzon's talking points to explain why the building was not complete.<sup>33</sup>

Curzon revived the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), which had been founded in the 1860s and had fallen under some financial strain by the 1890s. In a speech about archaeological preservation that he gave to an audience at the Asiatic Society, he stated that he 'regarded the conservation of ancient monuments as one of the primary obligations of Government'. Comparing India to Europe, where 'private wealth' took up the task of conservation, in India many ancient sites were on British-occupied territories. Thus, Curzon argued, the 'peculiar responsibility' of conservation lay with the Government of India. He claimed Indians lacked the ability to appreciate ancient ruins, so the protection of ancient artefacts aligned with an imperial commitment to protecting evidence of India's past. With Curzon's strong

<sup>29</sup> Astrid Swenson, 'The heritage of empire', in Astrid Swenson and Peter Mandler, eds., *From plunder to preservation: Britain and the heritage of empire, c. 1800-1940* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 6–10.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Betts and Corey Ross, 'Modern historical preservation', *Past & Present*, 226, supplement 10 (2015), pp. 12–14.

<sup>31</sup> Metcalf, *An imperial vision*; Bhattacharya, 'Taj of the Raj', pp. 521–41, especially pp. 526–7.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas R. Metcalf, *Forging the Raj: essays on British India in the heyday of empire* (New Delhi, 2005), p. 163.

<sup>33</sup> 'The Victoria Memorial Hall', *Times of India*, 30 Dec. 1921, p. 8. See also Curzon's speech at the Eleventh Annual Calcutta Dinner held at the Hotel Cecil in London on 11 June 1913, Curzon, *Subjects of the day: being a selection of speeches and writings* (London, 1915), p. 68.



recommendation, a new director-general, John Marshall, was appointed to supervise the changes at the ASI. Trained as a classicist at Cambridge, Marshall had had experience with archaeological excavations in Greece. The central government consolidated both funding and oversight over local branches of the ASI.<sup>34</sup>

Curzon was especially critical of the British military's occupation of key buildings, such as the Mughal forts in Delhi, Agra, and Lahore, in the period after 1857. In order to make room for offices, marble walls were painted white, sandstone pillars were replaced with brick, and walls and fences were installed for security.<sup>35</sup> Jewelled inlay, marble, and granite had been looted by English visitors from these sites, something that Curzon felt reflected poorly on the British occupation. He supervised the removal of these destructive changes, drawing from his knowledge of Islamic architecture.<sup>36</sup> He also demanded the return of artefacts that had been stolen and sold to museums and dealers in Britain.<sup>37</sup>

In 1904, after raising funds to restore Mughal monuments – the Taj Mahal and its gardens in Agra, Humayun's tomb in Delhi, as well as the Red Fort – Curzon put the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act before the Legislative Council. The provisions expanded from the Treasure Troves Act, which had been passed in India in 1888 to prevent the traffic of Indian antiquities outside India. The legislation called for archaeological museums near each site to show small or movable objects that required protection from thieves. Prized materials were sent to national museums in Calcutta and Bombay so a larger number of tourists, visitors, and local inhabitants could experience India's classical past as it was curated in a colonial building.<sup>38</sup>

Moving beyond the 1888 legislation, the 1904 act rendered India's ancient ruins into 'protected monuments' that required the colonial government's oversight.<sup>39</sup> Registration specified which monuments and sites would fall under the government's purview. The legislation allowed sites in use for religious purposes to be placed in the custody of local groups who required these buildings for ritual purposes.<sup>40</sup> Similar legislation was passed in Britain in 1882

<sup>34</sup> Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, objects, histories institutions of art in colonial and postcolonial India* (New York, NY, 2004), pp. 116, 196–9; Upinder Singh, *The discovery of ancient India: early archaeologists and the beginnings of archaeology* (New Delhi, 2004), p. 314.

<sup>35</sup> G. N. C. Curzon of Kedleston and T. Raleigh, *Lord Curzon in India: being a selection from his speeches as viceroy & governor-general of India, 1898–1905* (London, 1906), pp. 190–1 (hereafter *Curzon in India*); Mrinalini Rajagopalan, *Building histories: the archival and affective lives of five monuments in modern Delhi* (Chicago, IL, 2016), pp. 44–57.

<sup>36</sup> Gilmour, *Curzon*, pp. 178–81.

<sup>37</sup> Derek Linstrum, 'The sacred past: Lord Curzon and the Indian monument', *South Asia Studies*, 11 (1995), p. 12; Kavuri-Bauer, *Monumental matters*, p. 70.

<sup>38</sup> *Curzon in India*, speech given at Legislative Council, 18 Mar. 1904, pp. 202–3; Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments*, p. 199; Singh, *Discovery*, pp. 212–15, 239–46.

<sup>39</sup> Hilal Ahmed, *Muslim political discourse in postcolonial India: monuments, memory, contestation* (New Delhi, 2014), pp. 80–90; Deborah Sutton, 'Inhabited pasts: monuments, authority, and people in Delhi, 1912–1970s', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 77 (2018), pp. 1013–35.

<sup>40</sup> Indra Sengupta, 'Monument preservation and the vexing question of religious structures in colonial India', in Swenson and Mandler, eds., *From plunder to preservation*, pp. 171–85.

and 1913, although it preserved the right of individual property holders to do what they wanted with their estates. Notably in India, the list of protected monuments included archaeological finds that were ancient ruins or monuments. Rights to property were not central to the colonial legislation as they were in Britain, so that the legislation acted as a form of dispossession for Indians.<sup>41</sup>

The fact that the colonial government in India established sovereignty or, in the words of the legislation, ‘responsibility’, over ancient heritage sites that predated the British occupation of India resulted in an important outcome: many monuments of colonial figures (such as the queen) installed during the British period did not fall under the terms of this legislation. After 1947, when the British left India, this distinction became critical: statues installed by the British to commemorate colonial historical events were initially not under the oversight of the ASI, which meant that their ownership was in question. This uncertain situation about who was responsible for the colonial statues led to prolonged discussions between the governments of Britain and newly independent India and Pakistan about which government could legislate over colonial monuments and what should be done with the statues left behind.<sup>42</sup>

Amid his campaigns for archaeological restoration and conservation of the Ashokan and Mauryan empires in the past, Curzon invested in commissioning, collecting, and restoring new monuments in India. These new and renovated monuments materialized the British empire’s presence on the subcontinent with marble and bronze statues that exhibited key historical events and figures. Curzon had a particular interest in the Black Hole incident, in which over a hundred British men, women, and children, had been imprisoned at Fort William, where the East India Company’s armies were stationed. Tricked into surrender by the nawab of Bengal’s forces in 1756, the governor John Zephaniah Holwell, was locked in this dungeon in the fort overnight, along with those he commanded. About two dozen people survived, including Holwell, whose account provided the British with the rationale to continue in their battle against the leadership in Bengal. Robert Orme’s history of this moment justified military intervention because it represented the ‘political stupidity of Siraj, and just retributions for his crimes against the English’.<sup>43</sup> Subsequently, the company’s armies, under the command of Lord Robert Clive, defeated the nawab’s forces at the battle of Plassey in 1757.

When Curzon arrived in Calcutta in 1899, he noticed that a monument that had been installed in honour of Holwell in 1760 and markers for the victims of the Black Hole incident were nowhere to be found. The monument had been removed in the 1820s and the site of the actual dungeon was

<sup>41</sup> Swenson, ‘The heritage of empire’, pp. 3–28; P. Basu and V. Damodaran, ‘Colonial histories of heritage: legislative migrations and the politics of preservation’, *Past & Present*, 226, supplement 10 (2015), pp. 240–71, see especially pp. 242–3.

<sup>42</sup> Paul McGarr, ‘“The viceroys are disappearing from the roundabouts in Delhi”: British symbols of power in postcolonial India’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 49 (2015), pp. 787–831.

<sup>43</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *Black Hole of empire: the history of a global practice of power* (Princeton, NJ, 2012), pp. 44–9, at p. 47.

unknown.<sup>44</sup> With the support of local archaeologists, Curzon identified the site of the original siege and excavated the site to find the grave markers of those who had died. With help from local officials who styled themselves historians of British India, S. C. Hill, C. R. Wilson, and H. E. Busteed, Curzon sponsored the installation of a replica of the old memorial at Dalhousie Square, which he unveiled on 19 December 1902. Curzon's monument was made of marble, whereas the original had been made of brick, and the tablet explaining the event was revised. In his speech to unveil the new monument, Curzon explained,

I determined to reproduce this memorial with as much fidelity as possible in white marble, to re-erect it on the same site, and to present it as my personal gift to the city of Calcutta in memory of a never-to-be-forgotten episode in her history, and in honour of the brave men whose life-blood had cemented the foundations of the British Empire in India.<sup>45</sup>

Curzon's version of the monument was made in marble, aligning it with the aesthetic of older monuments such as the Taj Mahal, which were also made of white marble. Its placement at the same site made visible an atrocity – a 'never-to-be-forgotten episode' – that had brought about colonial occupation, even though this history was widely questioned.

The so-called replica was not exact. Curzon admitted that he had made 'two very material alterations' to the original inscription: he changed Holwell's inscriptions and added twenty names of those who had not died at the actual Black Hole but were 'pioneers' of the British conquest of India. Notably, the replicated monument changed the inscription. The 1902 inscription removed responsibility for the massacre from Siraj-ud-Daulah, the nawab. New historical evidence had surfaced, which showed that the nawab had not been solely responsible for the siege.<sup>46</sup> By correcting the historical record in this new Holwell monument, Curzon changed Holwell's version of the Black Hole incident, which had long been understood as the rationale for the British occupation of eastern India in the 1750s.<sup>47</sup> As Partha Chatterjee has observed in a longer study on the legacy of the Black Hole, as a metaphor as well as a monument, 'the movement of the Black Hole memorial is to unravel the mythical history of empire'.<sup>48</sup>

Curzon's improvements for Calcutta involved making the city both a repository for the British history of India and a site for history's display. When Queen Victoria died, he announced at the Asiatic Society of Bengal that the memorial hall built in her name should be 'a standing record of our wonderful history, a visible monument of Indian glories'.<sup>49</sup> He argued that an appropriate historical timeline ought to begin with the Mughal dynasty, and include those who had

<sup>44</sup> Metcalf, *Forging the Raj*, pp. 160–3; Chatterjee, *Black Hole*, pp. 65–6.

<sup>45</sup> Curzon in India, 'Holwell monument', 19 Dec. 1902, p. 445.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 446–7.

<sup>47</sup> Iris Macfarlane, *The Black Hole: or, the makings of a legend* (London, 1975).

<sup>48</sup> Chatterjee, *Black Hole*, pp. 1–6.

<sup>49</sup> Curzon, *Speeches*, II, p. 213.

rivalled the Mughals, such as the Marathas, the Sikh confederacy, and the various princely successor states across Rajasthan, the Deccan, and southern India.

The process of building the Victoria Memorial Hall from Curzon's speech in 1901 and its opening in 1922 was stymied multiple times: it was slowed by a sinking foundation, the inability to raise funds to meet the costs, and a threat by anticolonial activists to sabotage the electric supply to the building.<sup>50</sup> Naysayers protested on the grounds that funds raised for the memorial would be better spent on services for those who were impoverished and starving because of the frequent famines. One letter to the editor in the *Times of India* noted that the memorial was not particularly useful: 'India is not a land that can afford useless ornaments.' This anonymous writer recommended that funds be raised for a School of Tropical Medicine instead.<sup>51</sup>

Faced with significant opposition to constructing such a grand building, especially since much of India had been struck by famine in the decades leading up to Victoria's death, Curzon insisted that funding for famine relief would not decline for the sake of raising money to build the memorial. Instead, he deflected this concern about cost and invoked other monarchical memorials that had drawn attention to past royalty: the Albert Memorial in South Kensington, which had been built to honour the legacy of Prince Albert, the queen's consort, when he died in 1861. Just as the Albert Memorial had drawn visitors to the newly built South Kensington area of London, Curzon imagined the Victoria Memorial and its gardens would attract tourists who came to India's capital city and make the city an attractive hub.<sup>52</sup>

Although he appealed to the Indian public for donations and encouraged Indian princes and local elites to offer materials from their private collections, much of the original contents of the Victoria Memorial Hall were curated by Curzon himself. Collections already in the hands of elite and educated Indians were in the process of establishing vernacular libraries such as the Banga Sahitya Parishad in Calcutta and the Khuda Baksh collection in Patna.<sup>53</sup>

To build the collections at the Victoria Memorial Hall, Curzon included oil paintings and sculptures by British artists who were members of the Royal Academy in London and had already been exhibited. These artistic commissions had formed an important component of publicizing British rule, particularly in the late eighteenth century when the East India Company was attempting to defend its indebtedness to the British parliament.<sup>54</sup> Paintings and sculptures were often displayed at the Royal Academy in London before

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<sup>50</sup> Curzon expressed frustration about the slow progress given at a speech given at the Eleventh Annual Calcutta Dinner held at the Hotel Cecil on 11 June 1913 in London; see Curzon, *Subjects of the day*, p. 68. The *Times of India* identified several moments in which the construction stalled due to poor supply in marble and escalating costs, see for instance, issues dated 7 July 1915, p. 8, and 18 Apr. 1921, p. 11.

<sup>51</sup> *Times of India*, 16 Apr. 1920, p. 18.

<sup>52</sup> Curzon, *Speeches*, II, p. 197.

<sup>53</sup> Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments*, pp. 123–34.

<sup>54</sup> Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Picturing imperial power: colonial subjects in eighteenth-century British painting* (Durham, NC, 1999); Romita Ray, 'Robert Clive and the birth of an imperial image', in Julie Codell, ed., *Transculturation in British art, 1770–1930* (Farnham, 2012), pp. 21–37.

they were shipped to India, where they hung in grand homes of high-ranking officials or in the associations and clubs that brought the elite together. Portraits by Tilly Kettle and Johan Zoffany held special appeal for display in this historical museum because they had been commissioned to show the contributions of the British in India. For display in the Victoria Memorial, Curzon chose two portraits of Elijah Impey that hung in the High Court. Impey had served as the chief justice of the court after it had been established by the first governor-general of India, Warren Hastings, in 1774. Impey, like Hastings, was impeached by the British parliament on charges of corruption, but his reputation was revived in the latter half of the nineteenth century when his portraits were donated by his descendants to cultural institutions such as the National Portrait Gallery in London and the Victoria Memorial in Calcutta.

Beyond these portraits, Curzon gathered historical paintings that depicted key triumphant moments in the British conquest of India: a magisterial painting depicted Haider Beg's procession to meet Lord Cornwallis painted by Zoffany. This very large painting, which is still hanging in the Victoria Memorial Hall, was displayed in the Royal Academy in the summer of 1796 and then brought to India. Another Zoffany painting drew from an event that showed the capture of Tipu Sultan's sons by Lord Cornwallis; this event, which led to the dramatic defeat of Tipu Sultan's defeat in 1798, was widely depicted by British artists who popularized the idea of Indian rulers resistant to the civilizing influence of British rule.<sup>55</sup> The version of Tipu's defeat painted by Zoffany was purchased by Lord Curzon in 1922 and mounted in the Victoria Memorial Hall when it opened.<sup>56</sup>

As Curzon curated the objects that would be on display in the Victoria Memorial, he carefully specified what types of materials would be suitable for display at the Victoria Memorial and differentiated between the permanence of a museum made in marble and exhibitions that showcased the temporary or seemingly ordinary objects of Indian life.<sup>57</sup> He specified that it would NOT be 'an industrial museum, stocked with samples of grains, and timbers, and manufactures'.<sup>58</sup> Curzon maintained a distinction between the art commissioned by European artists in the Royal Academy – which he welcomed into the Victoria Memorial – while Indian arts were classified as technically proficient rather understood as fine art or aesthetically sophisticated.<sup>59</sup>

During his term as viceroy, Curzon also supervised the celebrations in honour of Edward VII's coronation at the Delhi durbar in 1903, which featured an

<sup>55</sup> One account shows multiple engravings after the paintings of Mather Brown, Robert Home, and Henry Singleton: [www.notesonindianhistory.com/2021/02/reception-of-mysore-hostage-princes.html](http://www.notesonindianhistory.com/2021/02/reception-of-mysore-hostage-princes.html) (accessed 26 Apr. 2022).

<sup>56</sup> Gholam Nabi, 'The paintings of Johan Zoffany (1793–1810) in the Victoria Memorial Hall, Kolkata', an e-catalogue, [www.victoriameorial-cal.org/uploads/E-Catalogue-List/E-Catalogue%20of%20Johan%20Zoffany.pdf](http://www.victoriameorial-cal.org/uploads/E-Catalogue-List/E-Catalogue%20of%20Johan%20Zoffany.pdf) (accessed 26 Apr. 2022).

<sup>57</sup> Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral vistas: the expositions universelles, great exhibitions, and world's fairs, 1851–1939* (Manchester, 1988).

<sup>58</sup> Curzon, *Speeches*, II, p. 229.

<sup>59</sup> Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments*, ch. 5.

art exhibition of Indian handicrafts as well the installation of memorials to figures of the 1857 Mutiny in which British armed forces had put down a rebellion by Indian soldiers. This distinction between the cultural value of European art, which was seen to be permanent, and Asian handicraft, which was perceived to be not as long lasting, was important as Curzon planned the 1903 durbar in the city of Delhi. He dramatically expanded the 1877 durbar, which had celebrated the crowning of Queen Victoria as empress of India and had integrated the rituals of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Mughal durbar with British monarchical traditions.<sup>60</sup> The 1903 durbar took place on New Years' Day and celebrated the coronation of King Edward VII and his accession to the title of emperor of India. Curzon made this durbar into more of a spectacle than the previous one and featured some of the improvements he had made in Delhi to historic sites.<sup>61</sup> As a result, the 1903 durbar 'attracted mockery as well as admiration' and the 'Curzonation' of the durbar bordered on assessments of being overly exhibitionist.<sup>62</sup> Curzon had hoped to welcome King Edward VII back to India, whose royal visit as the prince of Wales at the durbar of 1877 had been such a huge success. Instead, the king's brother, the duke of Connaught, attended the durbar along with hundreds of British dignitaries and Indian princes. Staged in the city that had, until 1858, been known as the capital of the Mughals, the 1903 durbar was a way to occupy the spaces that had been the site of battles against British forces in 1857, when Indian soldiers had rebelled against British commanders.<sup>63</sup>

Notably, the art exhibition at the durbar featured Indian artists, but not the well-known masters of European art. As Tapati Guha-Thakurta has noted of Indian artists and scholars of this period, 'Art, with a capital A, defined in the new sense of the fine arts, was seen as a matter of superior, refined knowledge imparted by the West.'<sup>64</sup> Two features of the durbar stand out because they consolidated Curzon's specifications about what type of art should go in a 'historical museum'. The art exhibition included arts produced in art schools and by crafts people across India. The guidebook to the durbar specified how Indian arts were 'traditional', distinct from the 'modern', which was represented by the West: 'special efforts having been directed to the exclusion of all trace of modern influence which have tended to debase the ancient indigenous arts'.<sup>65</sup> Unlike the materials that Curzon had specified as appropriate

<sup>60</sup> David Cannadine, 'The context, performance, and meaning of ritual: the British monarchy and the "invention of tradition", c. 1820–1977', and Bernard Cohn, 'Representing authority in Victorian India', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The invention of tradition* (Cambridge, 1983).

<sup>61</sup> Julie Codell, 'On the Delhi coronation durbars, 1877, 1903, 1911', *Britain, Representation, and Nineteenth-Century History*, [www.branchcollective.org/?ps\\_articles=julie-codell-on-the-delhi-coronation-durbars-1877-1903-1911](http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=julie-codell-on-the-delhi-coronation-durbars-1877-1903-1911) (accessed 29 Oct. 2020).

<sup>62</sup> Gilmour, *Curzon*, p. 239.

<sup>63</sup> Codell, 'On the Delhi coronation durbars'; Nayanjot Lahiri, 'Commemorating and remembering 1857: the revolt in Delhi and its afterlife', *World Archaeology*, 35 (2003), pp. 52–3.

<sup>64</sup> Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments*, p. 142.

<sup>65</sup> Coronation durbar, Delhi 1903; official directory (with maps) (Delhi: Foreign Office Press, 1903) [https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.\\$b294679](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.$b294679) (accessed 23 Oct. 2020), p. 181; Indian art

for the Victoria Memorial, which were to be installed permanently, the handi-crafts displayed at the art exhibition of the durbar were taken down at the end of February 1903.<sup>66</sup>

Abanindranath Tagore was awarded a best prize for his work. Tagore's winning watercolours obliquely critiqued Curzon's triumphalist vision for the durbar in Delhi. One of the three images featured the death of Shah Jahan, the Mughal emperor who had built the fort in which the colonial durbar was held.<sup>67</sup> Another watercolour featured moments of the 1857 Mutiny that 'were offered in a spirit of resistance to the British appropriation and signification of Mughal culture, symbols, and, most important, space'.<sup>68</sup>

Curzon's goal of making visible Britain's victory over the Indian soldiers who had begun a rebellion in 1857 involved situating two permanent memorials. He installed a monument to acknowledge the importance of those who had been working in the Delhi telegraph office in the fateful month of May in that year. Curzon explained that this monument was 'repairing the omissions of our predecessors'.<sup>69</sup> The one lone survivor was able to attend the unveiling of the monument, a ceremony that was attended by a number of the luminaries already in Delhi for the durbar.<sup>70</sup> Curzon also supported a public subscription fund to install a statue to honour John Nicholson, who died on the ridge in Delhi in 1857. A simple tablet had long marked where Nicholson was buried; by 1900, it was a well-established pilgrimage site for Britons visiting India on 'Mutiny tours' after 1857.<sup>71</sup> Lord Frederick Roberts who (as a young soldier) had watched Nicholson die near Kashmiri Gate initiated a subscription drive for a statue for Nicholson. Financially supported by European soldiers who had survived the mutiny, the group raised funds for a bronze statue mounted on a tall stone pedestal.<sup>72</sup> In April 1906, nearly fifty years after the rebellion, a statue of Nicholson wearing his uniform and holding a sword in his left hand was unveiled. Thomas Brock, the sculptor who was a member of the Royal Academy, was commissioned to design the 1906 statue of Nicholson; a bust was also moved from the Dalhousie Institute to the

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exhibition Delhi, India, and George Watt, *Indian art at Delhi, 1903: being the official catalogue of the Delhi Exhibition, 1902-1903* (Calcutta, 1903), <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/wu.89056198278> (accessed 23 Oct. 2020).

<sup>66</sup> Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments*, pp. 157, 159-67.

<sup>67</sup> Bhaskar Sarkar, 'Plasticity and the global', *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 56 (2015), pp. 459-91, at p. 466. The three watercolours were titled, 'The capture of Bahadur Shah', 'The construction of the Raj', and 'The final moments of Shah Jahan'.

<sup>68</sup> Kavuri-Bauer, *Monumental matters*, p. 91.

<sup>69</sup> *Curzon in India*, p. 439.

<sup>70</sup> Goyle, 'Commemoration of 1857', pp. 805-7.

<sup>71</sup> Manu Goswami, "'Englishness' on the imperial circuit: mutiny tours in colonial South Asia", *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 9 (1996), pp. 54-84; Lahiri, 'Commemorating and remembering 1857'; Mrinalini Rajagopalan, 'From colonial memorial to national monument: the case of the Kashmiri Gate, Delhi', in Mrinalini Rajagopalan and Madhuri Desai, eds., *Colonial frames, nationalist histories: imperial legacies, architecture and modernity* (Farnham, 2012), pp. 91-7.

<sup>72</sup> 'A Nicholson memorial; proposed statue at Delhi', *Times of India*, 23 June 1902, p. 4.

Victoria Memorial in Kolkata.<sup>73</sup> Brock later designed the Victoria Memorial in front of Buckingham Palace, as well as the statue of Queen Victoria that stands near the entrance to Victoria Memorial Hall.<sup>74</sup>

When Curzon resigned as viceroy in 1905 and left India, he left behind a renovated Taj Mahal, historical markers of the Black Hole incident and the 1857 Mutiny, and a plan to build the Victoria Memorial Hall. Despite his efforts to stabilize a triumphant history of British India in marble and bronze, he will perhaps always be remembered for his decision to partition the province of Bengal in 1905 into two administrative parts that unleashed the *swadeshi* movement.<sup>75</sup> He framed the decision as one of administrative convenience but many Indians, particularly those in Calcutta, believed that the measure was an effort to divide a Hindu-majority population in western Bengal from a Muslim-majority population in east Bengal. Curzon returned to England in late 1905. Due in part to widespread unrest against the colonial government, the partition was reversed in 1911 and Bengal was reunited into a single province. At the imperial durbar in 1911, King George V announced that the capitol would be moved from Calcutta to New Delhi, leaving the not-yet built Victoria Memorial in a city that was no longer the centre of British India.

#### IV

Curzon's six years as viceroy in India were followed by two decades of public service in Britain, during which anticolonial resistance against the British empire escalated. During this tumultuous period of Britain's history, Curzon served as the chancellor of Oxford University, was a member of the war cabinet during the First World War, and served as foreign secretary from 1919 to 1924. In his spare time, Curzon focused on expanding Britain's national and imperial image through a steady stream of patronage directed at monument-building and historic preservation, focusing on preserving old houses and building new monuments in London and in Calcutta.<sup>76</sup> Between his official and unofficial activities, Curzon's commemorative projects served to promote a positive image of the empire even as anticolonial protests were under way. He was active in associations that celebrated their connections with empire, which included the National Portrait Gallery, the Royal Geographical Society, and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, later the National Trust. He advocated for the national celebration of Empire Day, which became an annual event in which school children were given a day off from the regular curriculum to practise drills and reflect on Britain's imperial achievements.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Tapati Guha-Thakurta, 'A view from Calcutta: the nation's colonial and postcolonial sculpture', in Steggle and Barnes, eds., *British sculpture in India*, p. 82; *Times of India*, 9 Apr. 1906, p. 7; *Descriptive catalogue of busts and statuary in the Victoria Memorial* (Calcutta, 1973), p. 30.

<sup>74</sup> *Times of India*, 7 Apr 1906, p. 9.

<sup>75</sup> Sumit Sarkar, *The swadeshi movement in Bengal, 1903-1908* (New Delhi, 1973), is still the classic account.

<sup>76</sup> Gilmour, *Curzon*, p. 397.

<sup>77</sup> Brad Beaven, *Visions of empire: patriotism, popular culture and the city, 1870-1939* (Manchester, 2012), ch. 6.



Curzon's projects to commemorate the British empire combined with his interest in making London into a grand imperial city. As the president of the Royal Geographical Society from 1911 to 1914, he joined with a number of elite men to advocate for a new urban plan in which London became a city that befitted its historic status as the 'heart of empire'.<sup>78</sup> Curzon had rebuilt the Holwell monument and planned the Victoria memorial in order to make Calcutta into a historic colonial city; when he arrived back in London, he proposed that London should be made historic. In a speech that he gave to the London Society in 1913, he encouraged urban improvements that highlighted London's history: even as 'we revere, and so far as it is possible, conserve what is left of London of the past'.<sup>79</sup> Curzon echoed the widespread feeling that London did not compare favourably to other European cities; as urban reform took hold in Paris, Berlin, Washington, DC, architects, merchants, businessmen, and political elites bemoaned the lack of public amenities in London, the city that was seen to be the heart of a global empire.<sup>80</sup> Yet, as a capital and imperial city, statues in London far outstripped the number of statues installed in Washington, DC, between 1860 and 1910.<sup>81</sup>

When the queen died in 1901, parliament convened a memorial committee to consider an adequate homage to the long-serving monarch, with the idea that the area around Buckingham Palace could be redeveloped. Within the year, the site was chosen in front of the palace. Through a public process, Thomas Brock was chosen to design the British memorial to the queen. Siting the queen's memorial in front of Buckingham Palace provided the rationale for building the Admiralty Arch and connecting Trafalgar Square to the mall. In the 1910s, the mall was widened to make the approach to Buckingham Palace appropriate for royal processions. Subsequently, the palace's façade was resurfaced and a balcony was installed so that future monarchs could wave to their subjects from above.<sup>82</sup>

In part because Curzon had raised sufficient funds for a memorial to the queen in India, the Government of India made no contribution to the memorial in London. Instead, the memorial in front of Buckingham Palace is flanked by gates on four sides that acknowledged the donations of Britain's colonies in Canada, Australia, and South and West Africa. While the memorial was being built in London, construction of the memorial in Calcutta had stalled with Curzon's departure; a foundation stone was laid in 1906, but the building's structure was not erected until 1912. Curzon remained active in managing what was happening in Calcutta from afar. Through various commissions, he populated the halls of the 'Taj of the Raj.' He insisted on visual conformities that linked London to Calcutta: the winged statue to represent victory that

<sup>78</sup> On 'grooming the image of the city', see Madge Dresser, 'Set in stone? Statues and slavery in London', *History Workshop Journal*, 64 (2007), pp. 162–99, at p. 168.

<sup>79</sup> Aston Webb, *London of the future* (New York, NY, 1921), p. 34.

<sup>80</sup> Felix Driver and David Gilbert, 'Heart of empire?', *Environment and Planning D Society and Space*, 16 (1998), pp. 11–28.

<sup>81</sup> Cannadine, 'The context, performance, and meaning of ritual', p. 164.

<sup>82</sup> Tori Smith, "'A grand work of noble conception": the Victoria Memorial and imperial London', in Felix Driver and David Gilbert, eds., *Imperial cities: landscape, display and identity* (Manchester, 1999), pp. 21–39.

is the centrepiece for Brock's memorial in London is replicated in a similar statue that is on top of the Victoria Memorial Hall in Calcutta.<sup>83</sup> He subsequently commissioned Brock to sculpt a marble statue of the young queen that was placed inside the Victoria Memorial Hall in Calcutta.<sup>84</sup>

With these sculptural commissions, Curzon secured his own legacy: two statues of Curzon were installed at the Victoria Memorial site in the 1910s, even before the building was completed. It was unusual to install a monument to someone who was still alive. Even though he had resigned the viceroyalty, the partition of Bengal that he had initiated had been reversed, and the British capital was relocated to Delhi; there are two statues to him at the Victoria Memorial Hall. One statue is at the north entrance, mounted on a pedestal with bas-reliefs that showed Curzon's accomplishments in India: receiving the leaders of the Northwest Frontier Province, promoting railways and commerce, and unveiling the Black Hole monument in Calcutta. That statue remains where it originally stood.<sup>85</sup> Another, much larger, statue of Curzon was designed and sculpted by the Royal Academician Hamo Thornycroft and was situated in the gardens. Inspired by Thornycroft's statue of the former prime minister in London, William Gladstone, which had four allegorical figures representing inspiration, education, brotherhood, and courage, Curzon's statue in the gardens of the Victoria Memorial represented peace, agriculture, famine relief, and commerce.<sup>86</sup> That statue was removed after Indian independence and placed out of sight from the public.

As Curzon developed the visual similarities between the statues in London and Calcutta, he campaigned for the installation of a statue to Lord Robert Clive in the centre of London.<sup>87</sup> Lord Clive, a military adventurer and trader whose eighteenth-century plunder of India had represented the East India Company as corrupt, had died in 1774, reportedly killing himself over the investigations into his finances. Subsequently, the British parliament had passed two regulating acts to enforce greater oversight of the company's activities in India. Lord Minto, Curzon's successor as viceroy, and John Morley, secretary of state for India, opposed installing such a statue, fearing that it would further inflame anticolonial tensions in India.<sup>88</sup> Nonetheless, Curzon raised funds to commission a statue of Clive by John Tweed, a Scottish sculptor who had trained at the Royal Academy.<sup>89</sup> In 1916, the Clive statue was installed outside the Foreign Office in Whitehall, showing Clive standing with a sword in his left hand, and a scroll in the right hand. Three bas-reliefs on the sides of the pedestal show three historical

<sup>83</sup> Narayani Gupta, 'India and the European cultural inheritance: the Victoria Memorial Hall', in Vaughan, ed., *Victoria Memorial Hall*, pp. 43–4.

<sup>84</sup> [www.victorianweb.org/sculpture/brock/64.html](http://www.victorianweb.org/sculpture/brock/64.html) (accessed 19 Nov. 2020).

<sup>85</sup> Linstrum, 'The last of the Augustans', p. 34.

<sup>86</sup> [www.victorianweb.org/sculpture/thornycroft/42.html](http://www.victorianweb.org/sculpture/thornycroft/42.html) (accessed 2 June 2022).

<sup>87</sup> Richard Goebelt, 'The memory of Lord Clive in Britain and beyond: imperial hero and villain', in Geppert and Muller, eds., *Sites of imperial memory*, pp. 142–3.

<sup>88</sup> <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/london-statues-and-monuments/robert-clive/> (accessed 2 June 2022).

<sup>89</sup> Gilmour, *Curzon*, pp. 370–1.

scenes from Clive's career in India: his victory at the battle of Arcot in 1751, his victory at the battle of Plassey in 1757, and the accession to *diwani*, which was the agreement to grant the East India Company the right to collect the revenues of Bengal in 1765.<sup>90</sup> The document in Clive's right hand likely represented this treaty, from which Britain's occupation of India unfolded over the next century and a half. A marble replica of this Clive statue was shipped to Calcutta, where it was installed in the gardens of the Victoria Memorial, a hundred and fifty years after Clive's term in India had ended. This version of the statue in India lacks the bas-reliefs depicting key battle scenes, presumably because Indians might not need to be reminded of the battles that had led to the British conquest of India.

By the time Curzon died in 1925, the rise of mass anticolonial unrest in India guided by Gandhi's non-violence tactics had shown how united Indians were on the subject of the British leaving India. After Curzon died, his family urged that a statue be installed in the heart of the West End; they suggested a place among the statues at Waterloo Place, where previous viceroys such as John Lawrence and the Mutiny hero Colin Campbell had been monumentalized. These proposals were rejected by the Department of Works. Instead, a statue to him was built on a modest corner of Carlton Gardens in 1931, near his London residence and about a block from the mall of heroes.<sup>91</sup> Across the street, on the façade of a Regency-era town house designed by John Nash, a blue ceramic plaque reads: 'George Nathaniel Curzon, Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, 1859–1925, lived and died here.'

## V

Curzon's commemorative projects, many of which extended beyond the period of his viceroyalty in India, brought together his investments in monument preservation and monument building. From his defence of ancient monuments, his restorations of the Taj Mahal in India, the reorganization of the Archaeological Survey of India, the patronage for building and curating the Victoria Memorial, along with his sponsorship for renovating the Black Hole monument and erecting statues of Lord Clive and John Nicholson, he made the history of the British empire in India visible to Indian and British publics who moved through capital and colonial cities such as Calcutta, London, and later New Delhi. Alongside the preservation projects, commemorative statues to historical figures who represented the history of the British empire in India placed figures of eminent Britons permanently on the urban landscape of India. In India, Curzon's protection of ancient monuments focused on monuments that were constructed before the British occupation of India; these buildings included the grand architectural heritage of the Mughals as well as ruins left behind by previous dynasties. His attention to Mughal forts and tombs meant that the Taj Mahal, the Red Fort, and Humayun's tomb were granted protected status under the Ancient Monuments legislation, which has been updated several times since India's

<sup>90</sup> <https://statues.vanderkrogt.net/object.php?webpage=ST&record=gblo036> (accessed 3 Nov. 2020).

<sup>91</sup> National Archives, Kew, WORK 20/181, 'Lord Curzon memorial in Carlton Gardens'.

independence. Subsequently, these Mughal-era sites have been classified by UNESCO as world heritage sites. In contrast, few of the colonial statues or historical markers that Curzon promoted in India come under similar protective legislation.

Curzon's history showcase involved the preservation of ancient history as it required prolific monumentalizing of the modern British empire. Commissioning new statues resolved some of the ongoing political challenges that the British government faced over their Indian empire: Curzon's restoration of the Holwell monument in 1902, the installation of the Nicholson monument in 1906, and Clive's monument in London in 1913 'whitewashed' larger debates about the empire. In all of these cases, critics raised questions about whether these installations were suitable at a time of rising anticolonial protest, famine, and unrest about the partition of Bengal. While some scholars imply that Britain's global profile at the turn of the century might have merited statues and monuments,<sup>92</sup> I argue these monuments settled historical disputes with a permanent artefact in stone or bronze; their installations solidified a history of the British empire that was increasingly being challenged by anticolonial protests.

In the postcolonial era, calls to remove monuments have emerged at critical moments of reconsidering India's colonial past. Monuments installed by Curzon that retold the history of empire have been targeted for removal by anticolonial activists. The new Holwell monument was removed as the result of a series of protests and agitations by followers of Subhas Chandra Bose in 1940 when Britain entered the war and enlisted the Indian army to the cause: the monument was relocated and reassembled in the (less public) graveyard of St John's Church, where it remains today.<sup>93</sup> The Nicholson monument was moved in 1957, when the threat of protests on the tenth anniversary of Indian independence and the hundred anniversary of the rebellion led the Nehru government and the British High Commission in Delhi to ask if anyone in the British Isles would be willing to raise the funds to take it.<sup>94</sup> The statue was installed on the grounds at the Royal Dungannon School in Northern Ireland after its alumni association paid for the costs of shipping; when it was unveiled in April 1960, Lord Louis Mountbatten, the last viceroy of India, was on hand to give a speech.<sup>95</sup>

Lord Clive remained a controversial figure for commemoration during his lifetime and long after. When Clive died in 1774, local officials refused to install a commemoration in Shrewsbury, where he was from. A statue of him by the renowned sculptor Carlo Marochetti was installed in the centre of the town over seventy years later. In London, his descendants refused to mount a blue plaque in 1908 to mark his London home in Mayfair; a blue plaque was

<sup>92</sup> Richard Evans, 'The history wars', *New Statesman*, 149 (6 June 2020), pp. 22–7.

<sup>93</sup> 'Holwell monument agitation: Lord Curzon's mistake', *Times of India*, 18 July 1940, p. 3; Chatterjee, *Black Hole*, pp. 264–8.

<sup>94</sup> National Archives, Kew, DO 35/9041, 'General John Nicholson's statue outside Kashmir Gate, Delhi: proposal on preservation of statue from Royal School, Dungannon'.

<sup>95</sup> British Library, Asian, Pacific, and African Collection, MSS Eur F146/5/12, newspaper cuttings, Jan. 1940–Apr. 1960, *Belfast Herald*, 14 Apr. 1960.

finally mounted in 1953.<sup>96</sup> Thus, recent calls to remove statues to Clive are part of a longer history of objections to celebrating his imperial career.<sup>97</sup> Nonetheless, as grade II monuments under the purview of Historic England, the national body that oversees British heritage, both Clive statues will likely remain where they are for the time being, supported by preservation legislation that was enacted in the early part of the century in Britain under the influence of politicians such as Curzon.

In spite of the attention given to the removal of statues, not many colonial statues have been vandalized by protesters in South Asia, even though few are considered to be protected by monuments legislation of the type that exists in England. The safety of colonial statues has been most pronounced in India and Pakistan where they have been gathered and placed in museums or parks.<sup>98</sup> As Narayani Gupta, historian of India, has noted, statues in India have commanded respect and are often garlanded on auspicious occasions. Although 'the nineteenth-century habit of outfitting all public figures in Roman togas must have perplexed Indians', there have been few protests on the grounds of Victoria Memorial.<sup>99</sup> Coronation Park, located on the grounds on which durbars had been held in 1877, 1903, and 1911 in north Delhi, became the site for gathering many of the statues around the city and keeping them safe in a somewhat remote location. In 2011, a plan to revive the park was adopted, although it is in some disarray now, a sign of 'duress' that is common to many postcolonial sites.<sup>100</sup> Tapati Guha-Thakurta recalls Robert Musil's well-known claim that most statues are hardly noticed: 'The more they surround us in our cityscape, the less we tend to see them.'<sup>101</sup> In Calcutta, many statues, including the one of Curzon that used to be in the Victoria Memorial gardens, were removed to Barrackpore, across the Hughli river to the country home of the Bengal governors, where they are largely out of sight. Special permission is required to see these former monuments to empire.<sup>102</sup>

Today, as we deliberate over what to do about monuments to and statues of objectionable figures of a colonial past, the logics behind preserving history have been conflated so that some defend any monument that is considered old. In Alois Reigl's terms, historical and commemorative values have been prioritized over use or artistic value. Few protesters or defenders of statues make the

<sup>96</sup> The entry for Clive's blue plaque explains the circumstances: [www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/blue-plaques/clive-of-india/](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/blue-plaques/clive-of-india/) (accessed 14 Oct. 2020).

<sup>97</sup> William Dalrymple, [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/11/robert-clive-statue-whitehall-british-imperial](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/11/robert-clive-statue-whitehall-british-imperial) (accessed 13 Oct. 2020).

<sup>98</sup> Deborah Cherry, 'The afterlives of monuments', *South Asian Studies*, 29 (2013), p. 6.

<sup>99</sup> Gupta, 'India and the European cultural inheritance', p. 39.

<sup>100</sup> J. Daniel Elam, 'Let them rot', <https://scroll.in/article/852791/in-delhi-statues-of-british-monarchs-have-been-trashed-left-to-rot-a-fitting-end-to-a-cruel-rule> (accessed 14 Dec. 2020); Aparna Balachandran and Deborah Sutton, 'Delhi's Coronation Park highlights how urban governance ignores both history and the public', <https://thewire.in/history/coronation-park-confederate-statues> (accessed 7 Jan. 2019). For 'duress', see Ann Stoler, *Duress: imperial durabilities in our times* (Durham, NC, 2016).

<sup>101</sup> Guha-Thakurta, 'A view from Calcutta', p. 79.

<sup>102</sup> 'Banishing visual reminders of subjugation in Kolkata', <https://thewire.in/politics/kolkata-british-imperial-statues>.

argument that the artistic value of the sculptor needs protection; instead, the focus is very much on which historical pasts we should commemorate.

The rationale provided by nineteenth-century colonial preservationists that modern societies should be able to protect ‘their’ ancient artefacts have become the grounds on which contemporary claims about governance and sovereignty over national monuments and artefacts are made.<sup>103</sup> As in the nineteenth century, the protection of monuments is a way to prop up the legitimacy of the state against the putative radicalism of protesters who call for statues to white supremacy to be removed.

In this sense, the battle over statues or ancient monuments is not a battle about preserving the past, but rather about retelling history by erasing history’s contestations. Protesters are doing more than protesting the existence of a historical marker; most are calling for racial justice of which statues are a contested component of history.<sup>104</sup> When protesters in Britain and its empire call for statues to be removed, they challenge a centuries-long effort by political elites to preserve the nation’s colonial history through monumental installations that convey stability, historical continuity, and whiteness. Curzon was a powerful figure with a great deal of authority to tell a history of empire that was intended to overlook the many ways in which Indians dissented from colonial conquest.

Statue savers and the statue removers disagree about which figures represent a history worth remembering. In 2020, as statues across the world were taken down, vandalized, or became targets of protest, protesters drew attention to the ways that existing monuments were installed at moments when white supremacy was promoted and being actively consolidated. The turn of the twentieth century, when Curzon promoted the building of the Victoria Memorial Hall, was one such moment. Curzon’s role in actively commissioning monuments – to John Nicholson and Robert Clive, to give two examples – coincide with this period of global statue-mania; through his patronage, Curzon revived the reputation of those who were widely known to have been corrupt colonial figures.

Even as defenders of monuments argue that these monuments represent history, the argument of this article is that monuments in bronze or marble are often installed at politically contentious moments. In this solid state, statues and historical markers get to have the last word. As Joseph Koerner has noted, ‘Monuments are built obstinately to endure.’ Intended to outlast controversy, statues are permanent installations that silence a past in which anticolonial protests were prominent at the turn of the twentieth century when Curzon was most active in his projects of imperial monumentalizing. Inspired by ancient forms, these colonial statues marked public space so that passersby might feel that these monuments, however recently they had been installed, had always been there.

<sup>103</sup> Françoise Choay, *The invention of the historic monument* (New York, NY, 2001).

<sup>104</sup> Rahul Rao, ‘On statues’, <https://thedisorderofthings.com/2016/04/02/on-statues/> (accessed 2 Jan. 2019).