

Remembering Cornelius O'Brien MP



O'Brien memorial column, Co Clare.
Photo Jackie Elger

Remaining memorials to 'good' landlords are now a rare enough phenomenon in the backwaters of Irish history, so it is interesting to note the recent restoration of the 70-foot high, fluted Doric column erected in honour of Cornelius O'Brien (1782-1857)

near Liscannor and the Cliffs of Moher in Co Clare. And hats off to the work of The Follies Trust, a Northern Ireland-based charity, which since 2006 has been quietly restoring smallish, idiosyncratic 'follies' North and South of the border.

Certainly O'Brien was an unusual landlord for his time, a Protestant owner of the Birchfield House estate which extended over 10,000 acres. He was also a solicitor and magistrate for Co Clare. Nevertheless, while still a young man, he was convicted of the manslaughter of Francis Drew in a duel and sentenced to six months imprisonment (of course, he got it reduced to one week!). He supported Catholic emancipation, Repeal of the Union and was a

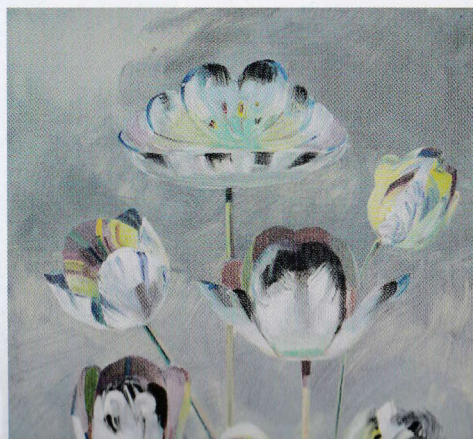
member of a committee which selected Daniel O'Connell to run in the 1828 by-election in Co Clare. He was himself elected Repeal MP for Co Clare almost continuously from 1832 until his death in 1857. So it was understandable that his tenants of over half a century decided to put their erstwhile landlord on a pedestal soon after his death although strangely with an elegant stone urn atop rather than an image of the man himself.

Come now to The Follies Trust where **Primrose Wilson** was the main mover in its foundation in 2006 and continues as Chairperson. In her own precise summary, she states that 'the Trust aims to encourage – throughout the island of Ireland – the conservation, preserva-

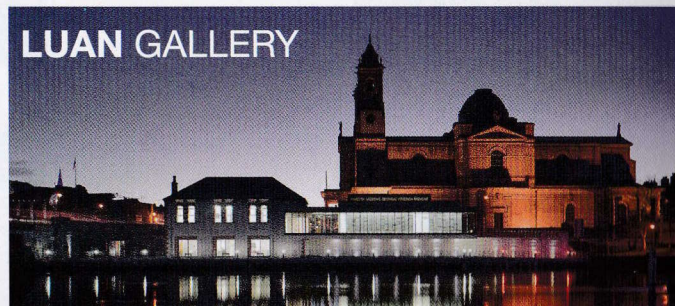
tion, restoration and protection in their original setting, of mausolea and monuments, follies, grottoes, garden buildings and other structures of particular beauty or historic, environmental or industrial significance' – all of which sounds like a mini version of the Irish Georgian Society which, in many respects, it is.

Anyhow, thanks to the active co-operation of local enthusiasts in West Clare, the Follies Trust has done Cornelius O'Brien proud and secured his monument at least for another 100 years. Of course the Trust needs support to carry on its work which it deserves as an average 90% of contributions go direct to restorations. www.follies-trust.org ■ **JM**

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