



NELSON'S HEAD

WRITTEN BY JOHN PAUL HURLEY & ORLA O'CONNOR

PRODUCED BY JIM KREUTZER

WINDCHILL
MEDIA GROUP

Five daring boys are embroiled in a madcap heist story set in 1960's Dublin.

When Nelson's Pillar - the most controversial statue in Ireland - is blown to smithereens, the five lads decide to steal the head of the statue for ransom.

The Government and the Gardaí will go to any lengths to get it back.

...A TRUE STORY

"COLONIALISM GOT DECAPITATED"



SYNOPSIS...

Set against the backdrop of a rapidly changing 1960s Dublin, *Nelson's Head* is a true-life caper brimming with wit, charm, and youthful defiance. When a group of broke but brilliant art students—led by intrepid O'Connor twins from Derry—learn that Nelson's Pillar has been blown to bits, they hatch a wild plan to steal the fallen statue's intact head and ransom it to save their beloved student union.



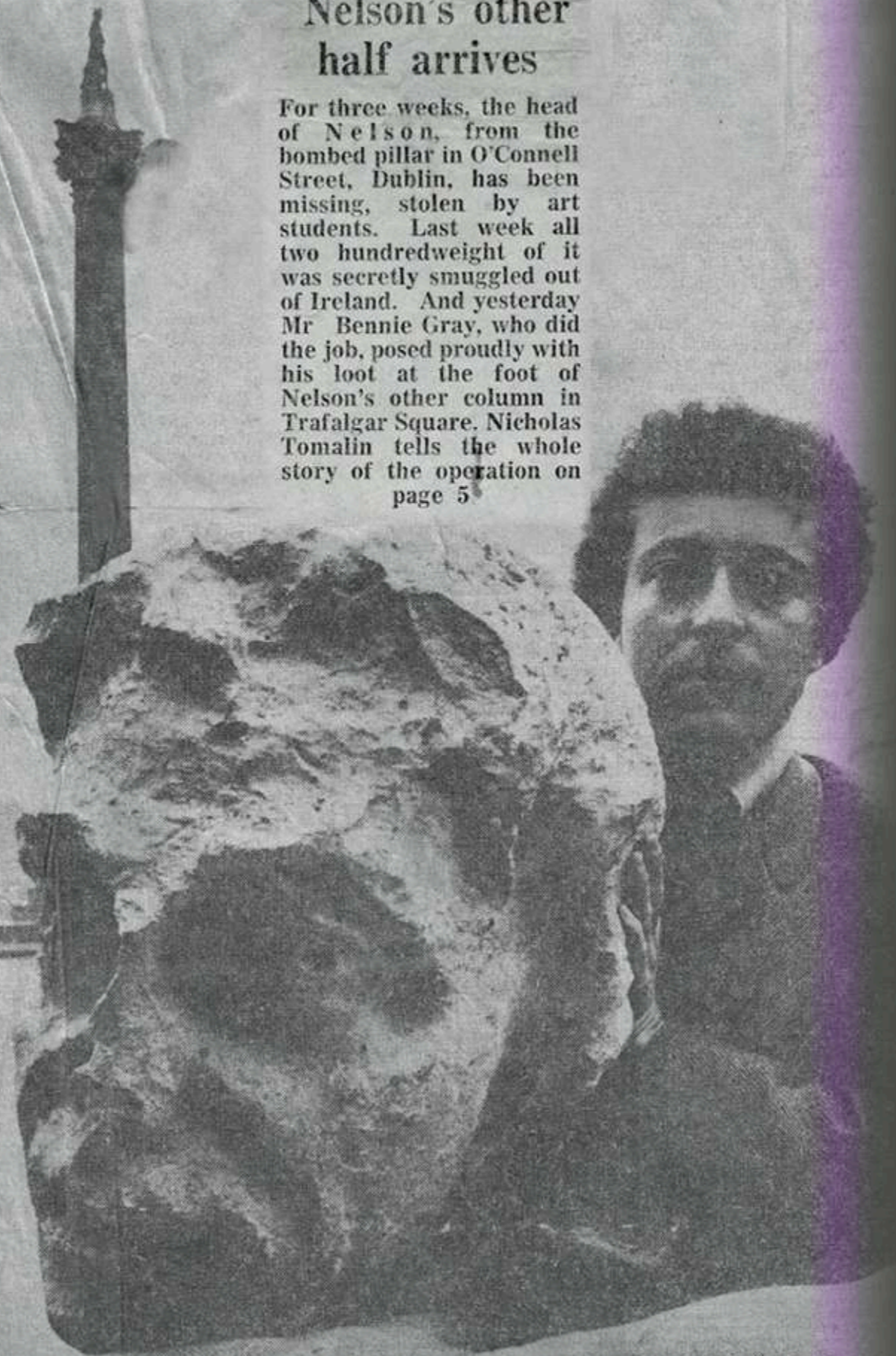
THE O'CONNOR BROTHERS — CIARAN (LEFT) AND BRENDAN — WITH NELSON'S HEAD.

SUNDAY TIME

APRIL 17 1966

Nelson's other half arrives

For three weeks, the head of Nelson, from the bombed pillar in O'Connell Street, Dublin, has been missing, stolen by art students. Last week all two hundredweight of it was secretly smuggled out of Ireland. And yesterday Mr Bennie Gray, who did the job, posed proudly with his loot at the foot of Nelson's other column in Trafalgar Square. Nicholas Tomalin tells the whole story of the operation on page 5.



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What follows is a rollicking game of cat and mouse with the Irish authorities, led by the determined detective D.I. Audrey Sidney – all set to the soundtrack of rock 'n' roll, student protests, and a city on the brink of cultural revolution.

As Nelson's Head makes its perilous journey around Ireland, artists and anarchists of all persuasions seek association with it. The boys even rent it out to appear in advertising commercials for Guinness and nylon stockings. It finds itself centre stage with The Dubliners and as cover art on chart-topping albums, before it is eventually sold to a London antique dealer for an exorbitant fee.

...CONTINUED

Every barman and taxi driver in Dublin claims to know who has the Head. Is it the Americans or the Soviets? The I.R.A. or the F.B.I.? Some believe it has been stolen by the Argentinians, others by the Iranians. Rumours grow legs and run all over the country. The Gardaí, however, remain convinced that our boys have been smuggling Nelson from safe house to safe house - and they are determined to re-capture the Head and bring its kidnappers to justice.

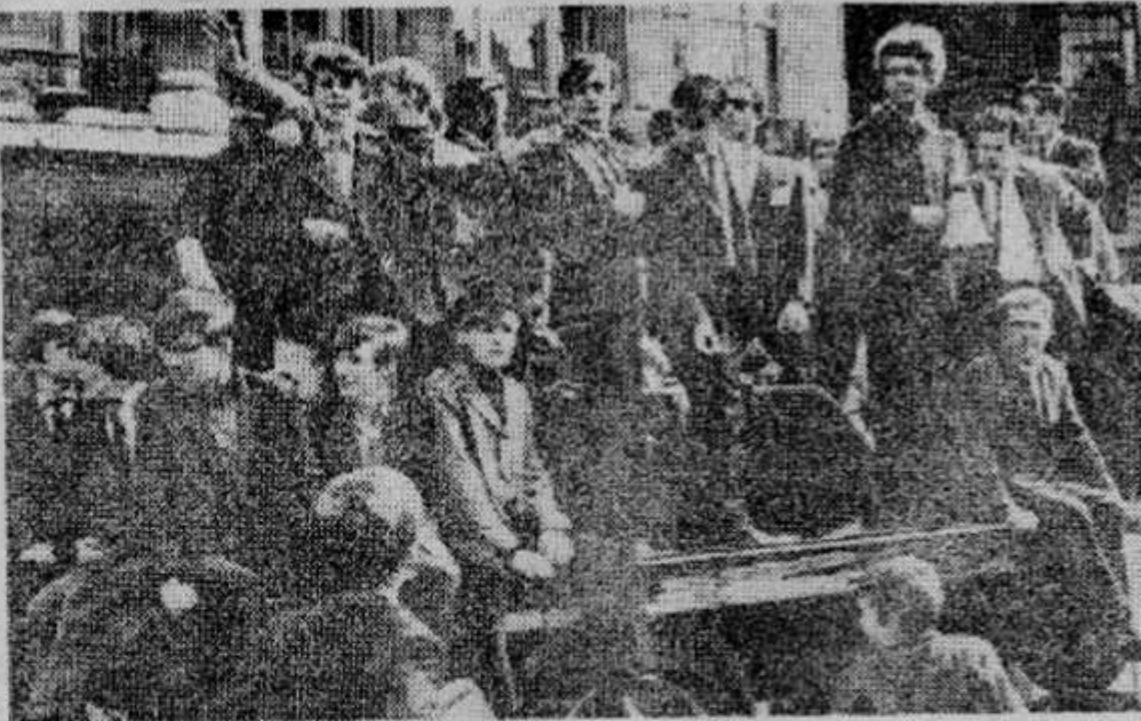


A 16-STONE HEAVE-HO!

Students help Mr. Bennie Gray (bottom right) to lift the 16-stone head off the lorry before handing it over.

TRUCK RIDE IN CITY CENTRE

Students drive along O'Connell-street with the sack-covered head resting on a box. Mr. Gray holds a loud-hailer.



NELSON GOES HOME BY LORRY

By JACK KENEALY
THE granite head of Lord Nelson went back to Dublin's O'Connell-street yesterday . . .

On the back of a lorry surrounded by bearded ballad singers.

It could have happened only in Ireland.

For when Bennie Gray, who had had it on display at his London antique supermarket for the past five months, smuggled it back to the Republic in a private aircraft, he could find no-one to give it to.

Finally Dublin Corporation agreed to take it—after an official had tested its authenticity by scratching it with a two-shilling piece.

Last night it was back

again in a corporation depot.

Mr. Gray, 29, explained: "When I arrived here I seemed to be the only one with any interest in the head."

"We tried the trustees of the Bank of Ireland, but they didn't want anything to do with it."

Crowd

"Then we tried the Lord Mayor's office and even went as far as the Prime Minister but no-one wanted to know about it."

But the day Nelson went back to O'Connell-street—even though it was only

for a few minutes—caused a near riot.

The ballad singers, led by Ronnie Drew and Barney McKenna, sung snatches of rebel songs with a line or two from the ballad Up Went Nelson.

Hundreds gathered around the lorry as it pulled in to the exact spot where Nelson used to tower above the city.

There were cheers and shouts as Mr. Gray announced from the lorry: "Is there anyone here who will accept Nelson's head?"

"Is there any one here from the Bank of Ireland?"

Is there a here?"

No one answered. As lunch began to pile up, pulled away to where a official and the were standing.

Amid cheers, hundredweight lowered from and hustled corporation v

Rent

Nelson's head, survived intact, raiders blasted his 134ft. O'Connell - s March.

For nine days a corporation before student and then ren Gray.

A corporation man said: "In our s

NELSON'S HEAD 'FLIES' TO LONDON VIA BELFAST

THE STOLEN HEAD of Admiral Lord Nelson was ingloriously shuttled through Belfast en route for London at the week-end.

The two hundredweight granite head, shorn from the Admiral's statue after it was blasted from its plinth five weeks ago, was being smuggled out of Dublin to be the centrepiece of the opening ceremony of a London antique gallery.

It was packaged for the air trip to London in the Bank Street, Belfast, recording studio where the Dubliners folk singing group recently recorded a ballad about the gelignite blast that knocked Nelson off his perch on O'Connell Street.

An attempt to insure the head for £100 through a Belfast insurance broker failed when no insurance company would accept the valuation.

Insurance

Said insurance broker Mr. Jim Aiken: "Dublin students from the National College of Art and the man who bought the head from them, Mr. Bennie Gray, owner of the London art gallery, arrived at my office with the head early on Thursday morning.

"They asked me to arrange insurance cover for it and to package it for its flight. We took it to the recording studio in Bank Street and packed it in a box that we got from a department store.

"I was surprised that passers-by took no notice of what we were doing. The students were behaving very suspiciously but nobody

bothered us, although one man did ask if it was Nelson's head that we were carrying about.

"The next morning the head was loaded into the boot of a car and put on board the 12-55 flight from Aldergrove.

"Mr. Gray said that he intended to return the head to Ireland in two months' time. He said that he had given the students a considerable sum of money and that he would let some of it back when he returned the head."

Police in Dublin and London are taking little interest in the movements of the head, but its authenticity is still disputed by Irish-born London publican, Mr. Buttie Sugrue, who claims to have the genuine article hidden away for an unveiling ceremony in his pub, the Admiral Nelson, on May 18.

Admiral Nelson makes hi

By Nicholas Tomalin

OF ALL the events commemorating the Dublin Easter Rising last week, possibly the oddest was the smuggling out of Ireland of two granite hundredweight of Admiral Nelson to publicise an antique shop.

Ever since Nelson, a hated symbol of English naval glory, was gelignite off his pillar in O'Connell Street by Republican extremists five weeks ago, pieces of the Admiral and his plinth have been finding their way into Irish bar-rooms. But the best bit, his battered head, has been in the hands of seven braggadocio students from the National College of Art, who pinched it from a Dublin Corporation storeroom to raise interest in their annual ball.

Nelson's face, with its nose knocked off from his fall, bears the agonised expression of a man suffering from acid indigestion before the arrival of a popular piece of contraband. Nelson's head was put on a stand, a bandstand for "The Dubliners," ballad to improve road holding, or a special chunk of granite for a Belfast sculptor? What was worse, the Ulster Special Constabulary were out in strength, armed to the teeth. "If they stop you, for God's sake come quietly," said the Irish Earl. "Nothing's worth a Protestant bullet in the stomach—not even Lord Nelson."

'Al Capone'

At the post itself, the calmest man was Mr. Sheridan ("You can describe me as the Al Capone of the Dublin racetrack—I'm used to this kind of thing"). Just a trip with a few musical instruments for a Belfast concert, he explained.

Unfortunately Mr. Gray had already been impetuous enough to declare on Irish Television his interest in Nelson. The recorded programme was broadcast five minutes before the Morris 1100 passed through the post. The officers turned from the television screen to see the Nelson's Head man walk in through the door.

"Well, and have you got Nelson aboard?" they asked.

"Yes, of course. He's under the seat," said the smuggler, mustering a smile.

"Get away with you, you funny man." The car roared off towards Northern Ireland.

Clamp-down

Less than an hour after Nelson slipped past customs officers on the Belfast Road, the Ulster Government announced an unprecedented clamp-down on the border to stop anyone "engaging in subversive activities or otherwise endangering peace in Northern Ireland." But this move, as it turned out, was aimed more

lounge, Mr. Gray was pacing up and down in the foyer, a convention of antique dealers was discussing the valuation of Nelson sculptures in the restaurant, and the seven art students (for once without the black Ku Klux Klan hoods they used for television appearances) were conducting a Press conference in the basement.

At 4.30 Nelson set off for Belfast in the boot of the Morris, accompanied by Bennie Gray, a Mr. John Sheridan, publicity manager for "The Dubliners," a local folksong group who'd been making free with the Admiral in their songs, and a secretive Irish nobleman willing to engage in some sculpture-running for a few hours.

At Dundalk, just before the border, the conspirators stopped for two pints of porter apiece and to work out a cover story. Suppose the authorities did they arrive? Nelson's head was put on a stand, a bandstand for "The Dubliners," ballad to improve road holding, or a special chunk of granite for a Belfast sculptor?

What was worse, the Ulster Special Constabulary were out in strength, armed to the teeth. "If they stop you, for God's sake come quietly," said the Irish Earl. "Nothing's worth a Protestant bullet in the stomach—not even Lord Nelson."



Nelson exploded: at the base of his pillar

among the wood shavings. "Oh, ho, you've got enough powder there to blow up the whole Ulster Parliament!" shouted a passing wag. Further wintry smiles.

At Belfast airport, another snag. BEA refused to accept Nelson's Head as excess baggage. A frantic half-hour of rapid negotiation, and Nelson was accepted as Air Cargo and fork-lifted into the 12:55 Vanguard for London.

And finally, late on Friday afternoon, he was driven into London and, after a sentimental visit to see his more exalted replica in Trafalgar Square, unpacked for display at The Antique Supermarket, in Barrett Street, W.1.

One problem

Now only one problem remains. Bennie Gray has proudly declared his enterprise as a salute to a splendid gesture of anarchy. Will he not have himself transported back to Ireland to be hanged, drawn and quartered at the hands of indignant Irishmen?

The law is confused on this point but it looks as though he

The return of Nelson's head

THE planned ceremonial handing back of Nelson's head to the city of Dublin yesterday was thwarted by the lunchtime traffic—and by a small force of gardai who were determined that traffic would not be held up.

The head arrived—as planned—at the site where the pillar had stood in the centre of O'Connell street at 1 p.m. It was wrapped in a sack and carried in the back of an open lorry. It was accompanied by Mr. Bennie Gray, the 29-year-old London antique dealer who has been its custodian for the past five months, and The Dubliners, the ballad group who had used the head as a prop during a performance at the Gate Theatre.

As the slow-moving lorry drew alongside the flower bed which has replaced the plinth, Mr. Gray, using a hand megaphone, inquired from the crowd of several hundred if there was among them a trustee of the pillar who would accept Nelson's head.

After a few moments' confusion, a Corporation official raised his hand and said he would take it. However, all the time the lorry was kept in motion by the gardai and the crowd had to chase after it for about 30 yards. Here, the lorry was brought to a halt and the unveiling of the head began to the accompaniment of "Nelson's Return," a ballad sung by The Dubliners.

But the singing ended after a few "bars" and the ceremony was unceremoniously cut short by a garda sergeant who used more than gentle persuasion to bring Mr. Gray down off the back of the lorry and made him hand over the ignition keys to the driver, who was instructed to "keep moving."

A few Corporation workmen just had time to drag the two-cwt head from the side of the lorry before it moved away. They then carried it to a van. A spokesman said later: "We are satisfied the head is authentic. We have taken possession of it and it is now in safe-keeping." He declined to say where it was being stored.

"LOTS OF FUN"

"LOTS OF FUN"

Mr. Gray, after the head had been taken away, said it had been "lots of fun" having it in his antique shop. But he gave the impression he was glad to be rid of it. For a time it seemed he would find nobody to accept it.

He said: "I tried to get one of the trustees to accept it, but they wanted nothing to do with it. I even tried the Prime Minister and the Lord Mayor, but nobody seemed interested."

He explained that bringing the head from London to Dublin, where it arrived on Monday, was a "complicated operation." Part of the journey was by road and then the head was flown to Dublin by a peer in a private plane.

He declined to identify the peer, but said it was the same person who helped him smuggle the head out of Ireland.

Mr. Gray said the venture, designed to attract publicity to his antique business, had cost him about £300 and "was worthwhile." He refuted a claim by one of the art students who was involved in the deal that he still owed £300 "rent" for the head.

The money, according to one of the students, is to be used to help colleagues with their college expenses.

Students ask Corporation for Nelson's head

The representatives of T.C.D.'s weekly newspaper, *Trinity News*, have asked Dublin Corporation to hand over Nelson's head in order that it may be displayed in the grounds of the college.

A spokesman for the paper said this morning that if the Corporation decline to donate the head of the broken statue they will launch a fund-raising campaign to finance its purchase.

The paper's request to the Corporation said that the Nelson monument was "tragically demolished by explosive," and added: "To preserve this relic for posterity we should like permission to have its custody, so that it might reside within the college walls as a fine example of the sculpture of 19th-century Dublin. As proof of our sincerity, we would be willing to start a public appeal for funds to have this historic fragment permanently displayed on exhibition, if possible in Trinity College."



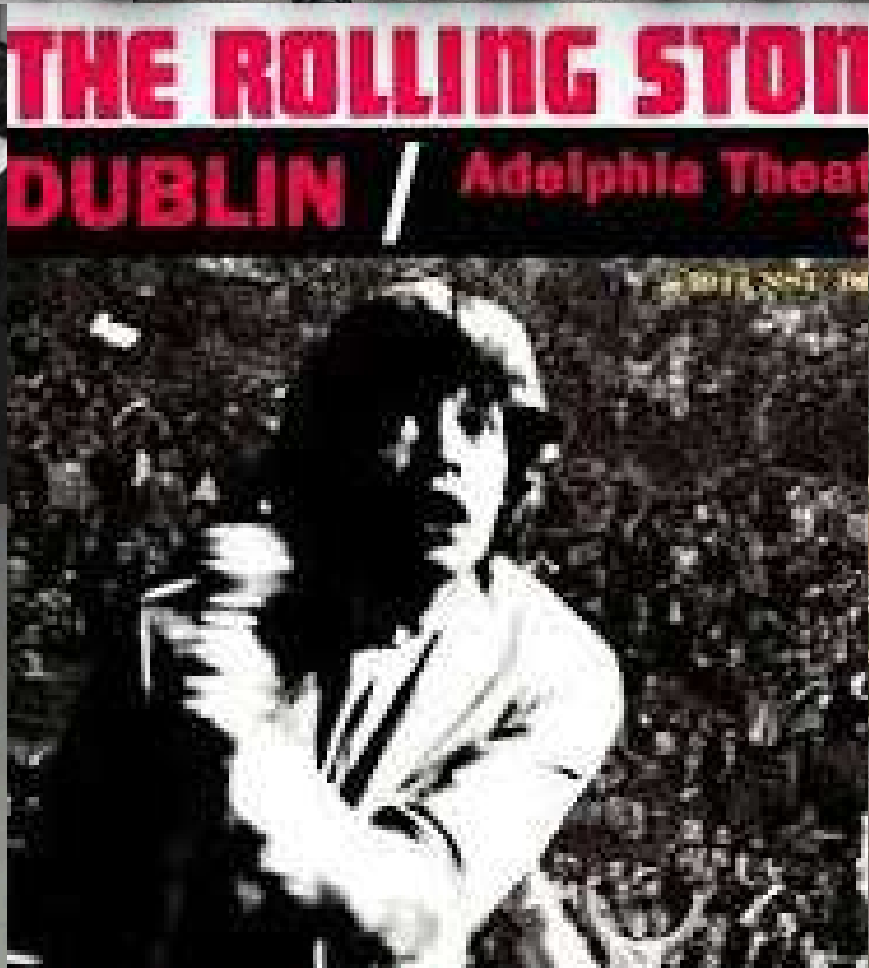


THE O'CONNOR BROTHERS — CIARAN (LEFT) AND BRENDAN — WITH NELSON'S HEAD.



Colour Photo by John Hinde, F.R.P.S.

...& THE COLOURS OF THE 60'S



LIMITED # EDITION COLLECTOR SE



A bearded ballad singer strums a lament as Nelson's head is uncovered in O'Connell Street, Dublin, before being returned to the corporation. A lunchtime crowd watched as the chipped stone, daubed with rouge and lipstick, was handed over by Mr. Benny Gray, a London antique dealer, on the site of the pillar which was blown up earlier this year.

At its heart this story is about young people taking bold, creative action against the systems and symbols that don't serve them — something we're seeing again today, whether it's through protest, art, or the toppling of outdated statues around the world.

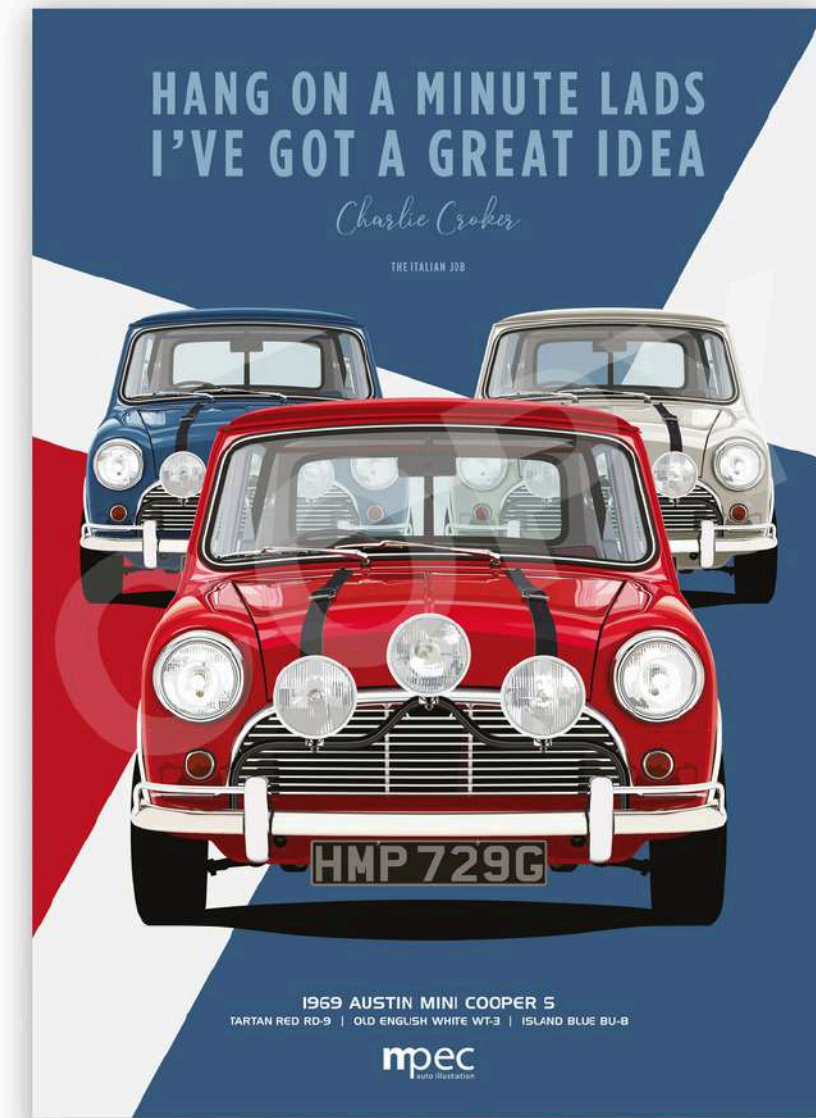
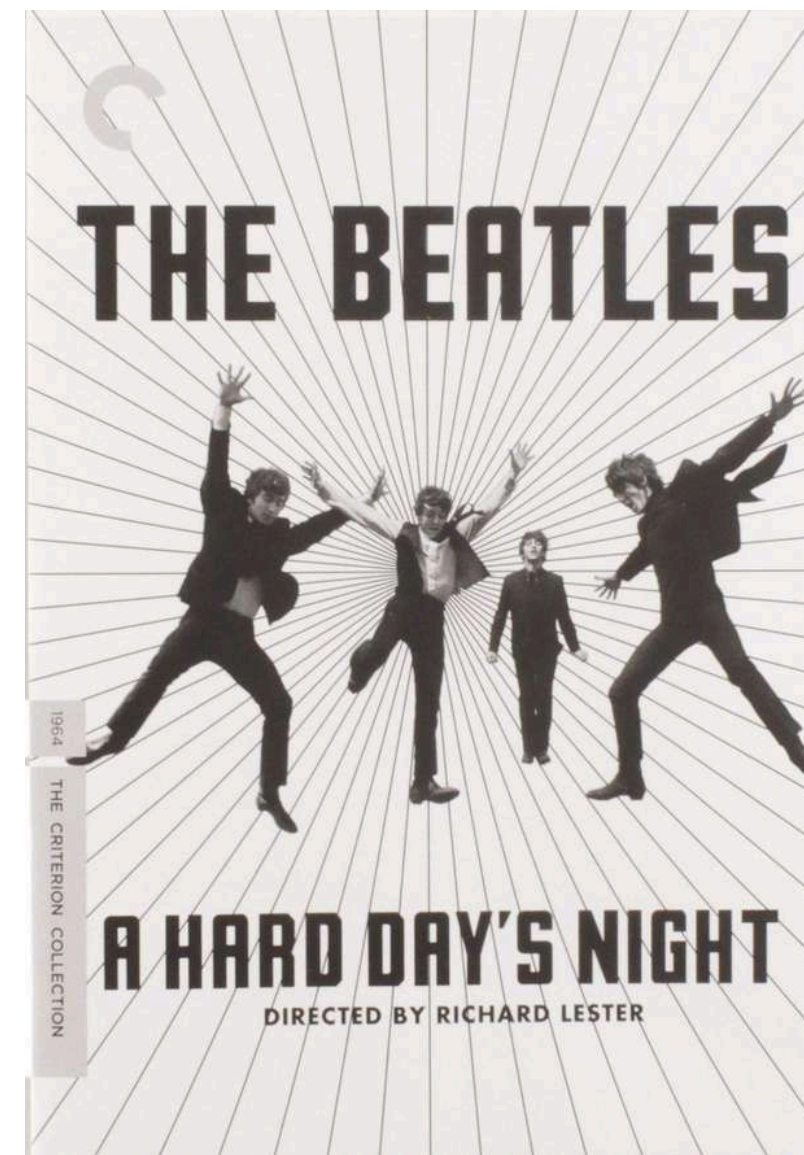
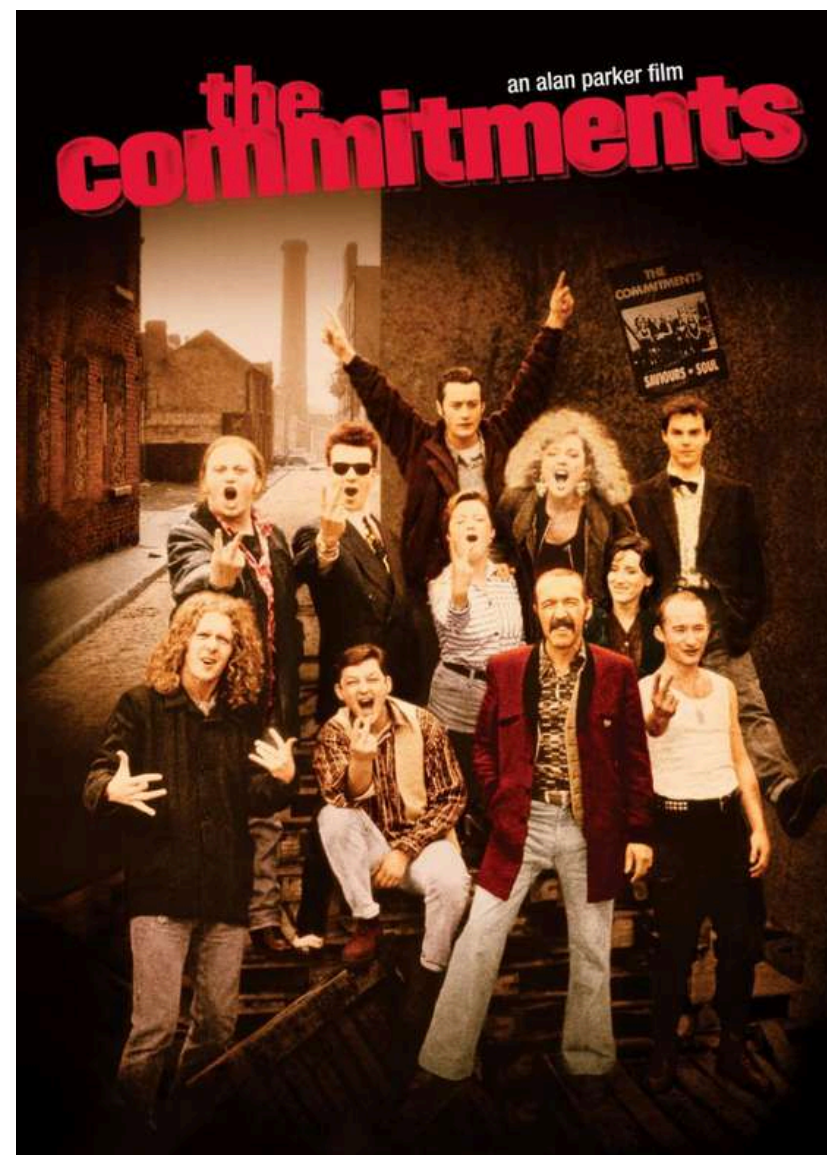
The theft of Nelson's head wasn't just a prank—it was a political act, an artistic statement, and a rebellion rolled into one. It has the spirit of Banksy, the energy of student protest, and the wit of a classic caper. With conversations today around student debt, the role of public art and debates over who has the right to write History - this film feels like a mirror held up to the here and now of current times.

BEFORE BANKSY, THERE WERE THESE GUYS.



***PART HEIST, PART ROAD TRIP -
ALL SET AGAINST THE EPIC LANDSCAPE OF IRELAND***





THE THRILL OF THE
ITALIAN JOB—THE
HEART OF THE
COMMITMENTS—THE
STYLE OF A HARD DAYS
NIGHT!

THE
ITALIAN
JOB





THE WRITER...



...JOHN PAUL HURLEY

STORY DEVELOPMENT



...ORLA O'CONNOR

CONTACT...

PRODUCER... JIM KREUTZER
WIND CHILL MEDIA GROUP
LAKE FOREST, IL USA
WWW.WINDCHILLMEDIAGROUP.COM

E: WINDCHIL9@YAHOO.COM
T: 001 262-939-9936

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