

Nottingham City Sculpture Trail

by Jeremy Beach and Stuart Burch

In: Darke, J. (ed.) *A User's Guide to Public Sculpture*, London:

English Heritage, pp. 120-128 [ISBN 1-85074776-8]

[A] Nottingham City Introduction

The Castle, a prominent city symbol, acts as the focus of this introduction to Nottingham's variety of sculpture and memorials. Initially constructed by William the Conqueror in 1068, the Castle was rebuilt in the 12th century. It was a Parliamentary stronghold during the Civil War (1642-49) and was destroyed in 1651. Rebuilt in the 1670s by the Dukes of Newcastle it became the home of the Castle Museum and Art Gallery in 1878 - the first municipal museum of its kind in the country.

An earlier School of Art, established in 1872 by the Town Council, had been housed in the city's Exchange Buildings, Old Market Square. After 131,995 visitors attended the first year's exhibition, the museum's committee members stated, 'the Exhibition is daily teaching, in addition to other great principles, admirable lessons of order and self respect... mainly due to the refining influence which works of Arts and Sciences have on the multitudes who assemble to study them.'

The sculptures on this trail illustrate this notion that art can educate and 'improve' us in some way. This is most apparent in the statue of Albert Ball. Memorials of the valiant pilot took many forms including a number of biographies like Briscoe's *The Boy Hero of the Air from Schoolboy to VC*. As the title suggests, the book was aimed at aspiring youths who wanted to emulate Ball's daring life. Briscoe quotes the Earl of Beaconsfield on 'the legacy of heroes - the memory of a great name, and the inheritance of a great example.'

The statues and memorials in the streets and parks of Nottingham are intended to both decorate and educate. They reveal the history of the city: its role in various conflicts from the Civil War to the Great War and beyond; local heroes; industry and technology; history and legend. The grandiose Council House on Old Market Square, which replaced the Exchange Building, uses sculpture to narrate the

cultural, historical and industrial history of this long established and thriving city. This short trail aims to draw attention to some of these objects and provide enough information to increase both awareness and appreciation.

[B] Nottingham City Sculpture Trail

Start: Nottingham Castle. Finish: The Council House, Old Market Square

The route is all downhill with easy disabled access at all sites.

Nottingham Castle was replaced by the Duke of Newcastle's mansion (1674-9). This was burnt down in the Reform Act riots of 1831 and refurbished in 1876-8 by T.C. Hine, when it was converted to the Castle Museum and Art Gallery. A colonnade was added to the castle's west façade, under which are arranged six memorials to local poets. From left to right:

Philip James Bailey

Bronze bust and bronze panel on granite pedestal, 1901

by Albert Toft (1862-1949)

Thomas Miller

Bronze bas relief on stone tablet, 1901

by Ernest George Gillick (1874-1951)

William and Mary Howitt

Bronze bas relief on granite pedestal, 1901

by Sir George (James) Frampton (1860-1928)

Lord Byron

Bronze bust on granite pedestal, 1904

by (Edward) Alfred (Briscoe) Drury (1856-1944)

Henry Kirke White

Bronze bust and bronze panel on granite pedestal, 1902

by Oliver Sheppard (exh. 1891-1901)

Robert Millhouse

Bronze bas relief on stone tablet, 1904

by Ernest George Gillick

These six memorials to Nottinghamshire poets were erected as directed by the will of William Stephenson Holbrook (1826-1900). The Holbrook Bequest was established for the 'cultural advantage of the city' and the relief of the poor. Monuments were to be erected to famous local poets and also to mark spots in Nottingham where interesting historical events occurred.

Perhaps the most affecting of the sculptures is the high relief scene of the prolific 19th-century writers William and Mary Howitt, who are shown reading together. Kirke White, Byron and Millhouse are all depicted by sympathetic low relief portraits. Bailey is presented with a bronze relief below, which is an illustration of a passage in his book *Festus*, whilst the memorial to Thomas Miller does not have his image, but instead features two female allegories crouched on each side of a simple inscription.

If time allows walk through the main hallway and out the other side. On the northern façade of the Castle is a large stone relief coat of arms of the Duke of Newcastle and a much-disfigured equestrian portrait of the Duke (c.1680), carved in the round by Sir William Wilson (1641-1710). This was vandalised at the time of the Reform Act riots.

From the Castle, walk down the slope to opposite the children's play area.

Memorial to Major Jonathon White

Bronze bust on pink granite pedestal, 1891

by Albert Toft

This over-sized portrait is set on a pedestal which carries a bronze swag and laurel wreath, upon which is an inscription showing the intentions of the subscribers: 'In affectionate remembrance of the simple manliness of his character and the devotion of his life to the performance of his duty'. Major Jonathon ('Jonty') White was born in Radford 1804 and rose to become Adjutant of the Robin Hood Rifles

(formed in 1859), retiring as a Major in 1879, and died 1889. He served in the First Afghan War, which is commemorated by the next memorial on the trail.

Retrace your steps and turn left beneath the Castle, looking up to the right where a pair of stone lions guard the top of the steps up to the north front. Continue walking down the hill to your left, where you will see a plaque marking the spot where Charles I raised the Royalist standard on 22 August 1642, marking the beginning of the Civil War. Just beyond this is:

Afghan Campaigns War Memorial

Granite obelisk on granite pedestal and steps

By W. Jackson

As the incised gold inscription on the front of the pedestal attests, this large obelisk commemorates the officers and men of Her Majesty's 59th Regiment who died in battle or of wounds in the Afghan campaigns from 1878 to 1880. The other three sides of the pedestal are covered with the names, ranks and day of death of those who perished and significantly the main inscription tells us that the memorial was 'Erected by Comrades'. The Afghan wars were the first since the Crimean War on which the names of common soldiers were mentioned.

Walk south-eastwards across the Castle grounds to the Albert Ball memorial, looking to the right to see two further carved free-standing lions.

Albert Ball Memorial

Bronze sculpture on granite and stone pedestal and base, 1921

by Henry Poole ARA (1873-1928)

Born in Lenton in 1896, Albert Ball enlisted with the Sherwood Foresters in 1914, rising to the rank of Second Lieutenant. He transferred to the Royal Flying Corps in 1916, flying with enormous skill and courage: in six months over France he shot down more German aircraft than any other Allied pilot. By February 1917 Flight Commander Captain Ball was made Honorary Freeman of the City of Nottingham, but soon after his return to France on 17 May 1917 he crashed and died. Ball's exploits were recognised by the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross: as one of the inscriptions on this memorial states, he was 'England's Airman Hero'.

This fine sculptural group consists of a full length portrait of Ball in his airman's uniform, but bare-headed as was his custom. Floating up behind Ball is a female allegorical figure of *Air*, pointing skywards offering inspiration. Carved into either side of the pedestal are bas reliefs of the aeroplane that Ball flew and another scene of a plane over German trenches, with a cartouche on the front face carrying an inscription. There are also bronze eternal flames and peace fronds on either side.

The unveiling ceremony on 8 September 1921 was undertaken with great pomp and ceremony, commencing with a procession from the station to the Mayor's parlour, before the unveiling at 3.30 by Air Marshal Sir Hugh Trenchard.

Leave the Castle grounds and turn right down Castle Road to an open space beneath the Castle walls.

Robin Hood, An Idle Moment in the Forest, and Relaxing in the Forest

Bronze sculptures on low bronze pedestals, 1952

By James Woodford RA, FRBS, OBE (c.1894-1976)

Four Scenes from the Life of Robin Hood

Bronze low reliefs set onto stone tablets, 1952

by James Woodford

Perhaps the best-known statue in Nottingham, Woodford's depiction of Robin Hood shows him firing his bow and arrow in characteristic pose. The other two, rather smaller, sculptures show the Merry Men relaxing in the forest: on one Alan-a-Dale plays the harp to Will Scarlet; on the other Friar Tuck reads to Little John and Will Stukely. The four relief panels show other scenes from the life of Robin Hood.

The sculptures were presented by Philip E. F. Clay to commemorate a visit by Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh on 28 June 1949 (the city's quincentenary celebrations) and were unveiled on 24 July 1952 by the Duchess of Portland. The statue of Robin Hood has always been popular with tourists, as he is the archetypal symbol for Nottingham around the world.

Walk north-eastwards down Friar Lane to Old Market Square, using the underpass to cross Maid Marian Way. Proceed to the western end of the Square, at the junction of Long Row West and Market Street.

Quartet

Bronze sculpture on low bronze pedestal, 1986

by Richard Perry (b.1960)

This life-size group consists of four figures representing the daily passage of people through the city and based upon observation of human behaviour. *Quartet* was commissioned by Nottinghamshire County Council in conjunction with East Midlands Arts. It took 7 months to make and cost c.£25,000 before being unveiled by Princess Anne on 5 December 1988.

Walk to the Council House at the opposite side of Market Square.

Council House

Portland Stone sculptures; high, bas and low reliefs, 1929

Architect T. Cecil Howitt; sculptor Joseph Else (1874-1955) and assistants

Nottingham's neo-classical Council House was opened by the Prince of Wales on 22 May 1929, with its sculptural decoration modelled by the Principal of Nottingham School of Art, Joseph Else, assisted by Charles Doman, Robert Kiddy, A.W. Pond, Ernest Webb and James Woodford.

The 200 ft high dome has an allegorical figural group at each corner representing Knowledge, Prosperity, Civil Law and Commerce (only visible by standing well back from the Council House).

The pediment on the west façade carries 21 high relief sculptured allegorical figures in a modernistic style, representing the Council's activities including Justice, Architecture, Literature and Education. A low relief frieze below the pediment extends 25m. across the width of the building and depicts ancient trades of Nottingham, as carried out by an army of naked putti. Coal mining, alabaster carving, leather working, and textile manufacture are among those represented.

Resting on pedestals at ground level are two large Portland Stone statues of male lions. This is one of the most popular meeting points for shoppers and the ending point for this sculpture trail.

[C] Other Areas of Sculptural Interest in Nottinghamshire

In Nottingham look for other public sculptures and monuments in the Arboretum, Waverley Street; the Memorial Gardens on the Victoria Embankment, which has a statue of Queen Victoria by Albert Toft (unveiled 1905) which stood in Old Market Square until 1953; and the historic Lace Market.

Nottingham University's Campus between Beeston and Lenton is notable for its bust of pharmacist and philanthropist Jesse Boot by C.L.J. Doman (1934) outside its University Boulevard entrance. There is a Barbara Hepworth abstract sculpture near the University library (**title, date?**); a statue of D.H. Lawrence by Diana Thomson (1994); a cast of Hubert Dalwood's untitled abstract bronze and steel sculpture (1974) at the University's medical school.

The National Watersports Centre at Holme Pierrepont is beginning to install sculptures as part of an on-going project; Rufford Country Park to the north east of Mansfield has a number of modern works. There is a large gothic memorial to Lord George Bentinck by T.H. Hine (1849) in the centre of Mansfield town – a statue of Bentinck was never installed, however, due to his unpopularity.

[D] Book List and City Travel Information

Anon, *Nottingham Castle and Museum Guide*, Castle Museum, Nottingham, 1984.

Walter A. Briscoe, *The Boy Hero of the Air from Schoolboy to V.C.*, Oxford, 1921.

Terry Fry, *Nottingham's Plaques and Statues*, Nottingham Civic Society, 1999.

Henry C. Hall, *Artists and Sculptors of Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, 1750-1950. A Biographical Dictionary*, Herbert Jones and Son, Ltd., Nottingham, 1953.

Carol A. Jones, 'A Real Presence in the Town – Joseph Else', pp. 58-69 in *A History of Nottingham School of Design*, Nottingham, 1993.

R.H. Kiernan, *Captain Albert Ball. A Historical Record*, London, 1933.

E.R. Kelly (editor), *Kelly's Directory of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire*, sixth edition, London, 1887.

John Sheffield and David Mills, *Nottingham Castle*, Nottingham, 1994.

Wright's Directory of Nottingham and Neighbourhood 1915-16, London, 1915.

R.A. Preston, 'Nottingham and the Reform Bill Riots of 1831', pp. 84-94 and John Wrigley, 'Nottingham and the Reform Bill Riots of 1831', pp. 95-103 in *Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire*, volume LXXVII, 1973.

Nottingham and its Council House, City of Nottingham Public Relations, available from the City Information Centre.