

**THE HOLBROOK BEQUEST FOR COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUES:
TRADITION, NARRATIVE AND ‘LOCAL PATRIOTISM’ IN
VICTORIAN NOTTINGHAM**

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INTRODUCTION: NARRATIVE AND IDENTITY

This article concerns a series of commemorative plaques and bronze busts erected in Nottingham a century ago. They were executed in fulfilment of the last will and testament of William Stephenson Holbrook (1826-1900). Formerly the schoolmaster of Magdalen College School at Wainfleet in Lincolnshire, he went on to become an influential figure in the establishment of Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery. Following his death on 24th March 1900 at the age of seventy-four his not inconsiderable fortune was put towards the ‘advancement of art’ in Nottingham. Specific sites in the city associated with historical events or famous people were identified and marked; the likenesses of seven poets connected with Nottingham were captured in sculpted portraits; and the art of painting was encouraged by the award of prizes to local artists and the purchase of paintings for the castle collection. As a consequence the so-called ‘Holbrook bequest’ provides an illuminating window onto aspects of the cultural and social character of Nottingham — and indeed Britain as a whole — at the turn of the 20th century.

In an essay on the British monarchy David Cannadine asserts that ‘the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth was a golden age of “invented traditions”’.¹ The opening years of the century witnessed the erection of a particularly

high number of commemorative monuments.² This concept of an ‘invented tradition’ can be usefully juxtaposed with Benedict Anderson’s seminal work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. As the title suggests Anderson characterises the nation as ‘an imagined political community’ and he asserts that such communities are ‘distinguished... by the style in which they are imagined.’³ The Holbrook bequest is an eloquent example of just such an ‘invented tradition’ which, by celebrating worthies with local associations, sought to define Nottingham as an ‘imagined community’ posited within the nation. The narrative of plaques and sculptural portraits punctuating the urban environment constructs a communal identity for the city.

It is Anderson’s contention that nationalism is the ‘secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning.’⁴ The haphazard profusion of past events and of the myriad births, lives and deaths of individuals occurring in the history of Nottingham undergo this transmutation through the medium of the Holbrook bequest. The concluding section of *Imagined Communities* includes the following assertion:

As with modern persons, so it is with nations. Awareness of being imbedded in secular, serial time, with all its implications of continuity, yet of “forgetting” the experience of this continuity... engenders the need for a narrative of “identity”.⁵

This statement encapsulates the motivations that prompted the wording of Holbrook’s will. He sought to guard his evanescent individuality from future neglect by interweaving his own identity within a collective narrative.⁶ In December 1898 he had sent a newspaper cutting entitled ‘Constable’s neglected grave’ to his solicitor, Thomas William Thimbleby:

During an investigation by Mr. Walter Wigram into the charities of Hampstead it transpired that the grave of Constable, the artist, was rather dilapidated, although a bequest had been made in 1889 by Isabel Constable of a certain sum, part of which was to keep the tomb in repair, and part to support the poor. It has, however, been decided by the High Court that legacies left for the maintenance of tombs which are not part of the fabric of a church are invalid, and the money accordingly went exclusively to the poor.

Holbrook added: ‘Cannot I, in the face of this, arrange for some means of keeping my grave in remembrance!’⁷

Whilst possessing a certain degree of social standing in the locality it is surely correct to conclude that Holbrook ‘played an interesting if minor role’ in Nottingham’s cultural sphere.⁸ His wealth was accrued from a number of mortgaged properties in Lincolnshire and by investing in a series of annuities.⁹ This, allied with the fact that his salary upon retiring from the castle museum in 1883 amounted to £300 per annum, gave him the capacity to promote an ‘imagined community’ or identity-building project of his own making. This in turn was employed by city leaders for their own purposes within a wider context. Such a process of rationalisation highlights how the same images can serve different ends within a political and contested process of identity formation. It is precisely for this reason that Holbrook’s scheme of personal aggrandisement and historical reclamation merges into the larger spheres of national and imperial identity. Given these broader implications it would therefore appear to be a particularly fruitful endeavour to consider the Holbrook bequest in the form of a case study. This article is therefore an analysis of monuments and memorials couched within the concept of the ‘imagined community’, for, as Anderson rightly puts it, each is distinguished by its particular form.

HOLBROOK AND WALLIS: BENEFACTOR AND ADVISER

Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery was inaugurated on 3rd July 1878.¹⁰ This municipal institution represented the culmination of a number of likeminded ventures. One such was the Free Museum of Natural History that opened in 1872 at 25 Wheeler Gate. Alderman J.T. McCraith made an explicit correlation between this establishment and the later museum during a council meeting in September 1902: this was in connection with William Stephenson Holbrook.¹¹ A later newspaper article described Holbrook as ‘curator of the first museum established by the Nottingham Corporation as an educational institution’.¹² This was the ‘Midland Counties Museum of Science and Art’ located in Exchange Buildings on Market Square and opened by William George Ward, the mayor of Nottingham on 20th May 1872. It was claimed that by the time of its closure in March 1878 some 763,806 persons had attended, equating to just over two and a half thousand visitors per week.¹³

Such conspicuous success prompted the move to the site of the castle in the summer of 1878. The former fortress had been replaced in the late 17th century by a mansion house built for the dukes of Newcastle. This impressive structure, empty and ruined following its torching by arsonists in 1831, was converted into a museum and art gallery in 1876-78 according to designs by the architect T.C. Hine (1814–99).¹⁴ Upon its opening William Holbrook became assistant director and curator. At his retirement some five years later the castle museum committee stated that Holbrook had ‘been in their service since the

foundation of the institution' and had 'served them so faithfully and well, especially in the earlier history of the museum.'¹⁵

Holbrook had, however, been superseded by George Harry Wallis (1847-1936), an assistant at the South Kensington Museum in London. He was invited to Nottingham 'to undertake the problem of building up a permanent collection.'¹⁶ He had an excellent pedigree being the son of George Wallis and brother to Sir Whitworth Wallis, keepers of the South Kensington Museum and Birmingham Art Gallery respectively. A student at the National Art Training School (now the Royal College of Art) from 1864-66, he was appointed assistant superintendent for the 'History of Labour' section of the British contribution to the 1867 Paris Universal Exhibition.¹⁷ He returned to Kensington before being placed in charge of the Bethnal Green branch from 1875 until 1878. It was then that he was appointed director of the castle museum, a post he was to hold for over fifty years until his retirement in 1929.¹⁸

These two protagonists represent the dual sides of the Holbrook bequest: benefactor and artistic adviser. The latter, as we shall see, played an instrumental role in the form and direction that the bequest was to take within the strict parameters set out in the will. It was Wallis who recommended which artists were worthy of recompense. He selected those individuals that were to be commemorated, where they were to be remembered, and which sculptors were to be commissioned to execute the work. These rather fraught decisions provide the subject matter of the following sections.

FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE POOR AND THE ADVANCEMENT OF ART

Susanna Holbrook née Williamson was, like her husband, a teacher in Lincolnshire. She died in January 1894 and, as the couple had no children, William sought some other means of bestowing his possessions and preserving his memory. On numerous social and business trips to visit his solicitor in Spilsby, Lincolnshire he must have frequently admired the magnificent statue to the Arctic explorer, Sir John Franklin (1786-1847) executed by Charles Bacon (1821-c.85) in 1861 and erected by public subscription in the place of his birth. Given his cultural interests Holbrook would most likely have also been aware that, since 1867, the Royal Society of Arts had been placing Minton tablets on to former London homes of famous individuals. Although the scheme lasted for thirty-three years only thirty-six were erected. It was taken up more enthusiastically by the London County Council, which later adopted the form of the 'blue plaques'. Eventually 331 tablets were put up over a sixty-five year period.¹⁹ The first plaque in 1867 marked the birthplace of Lord Byron at Holles Street, Westminster.²⁰ On 14th May 1900 a bronze bust within a Portland stone support was also placed upon the same building. According to London County Council's later *Return of Outdoor Memorials in London* it was designed by one Taylorson 'after the picture at Newstead Abbey' and 'erected and maintained by Mr. John Lewis.'²¹ This action on behalf of the benefactor came immediately before Holbrook's very similar undertaking commenced in Nottingham.

As early as 1889 the former curator had expressed an interest in setting up 'the Holbrook charity' to distribute his eclectic array of possessions. In April 1900, following his death, his will was proved and the two executors named as the solicitor, Thimbleby and Sir Samuel George Johnson, town clerk of Nottingham.²² The gross value of the estate was

£11,232 8s 11d. Appended to his original will, dated 14th October 1895, were two codicils, one from September 1897 and the other from January 1899. The latter was drawn up just one month after Holbrook's mailing of the newspaper cutting pertaining to Constable's grave (see above). It was surely with this in mind that he set aside funds for the erection and regular maintenance of a tombstone in his memory. He also named a series of philanthropic, corrective, medical or educational institutions based in Nottingham that were to receive his possessions. Books, microscopes, astronomical instruments, coins, violins, a piano, toys, maps, birds' eggs, butterflies, minerals and fossils were to form 'the Holbrook bequest'. The list of recipients provides a useful indication of the number and diversity of such organisations in the city.²³ They included Nottingham's Free Library, Mechanics Institution, the General Hospital as well as its Children's Hospital and Hospital for the Diseases of Women, Work House and Training Institution, Naturalists' Society, Natural History Museum, Corporation University and the prison together with the Gordon Boy's Home and Midland Institute for the Blind.²⁴

Furthermore, intending to benefit those most in need, Holbrook made provision for banquets to be held every Christmas for the city's most needy children and pensioners. These were later enthusiastically organised by the Nottingham Robin Hood Dinner Society under its treasurer, George H. Pochin. They continued each year until at least 1916.²⁵

Holbrook also left a collection of coins, art journals and a blunderbuss to the castle museum.²⁶ More significantly his former place of work was also to benefit from a fund totalling £2000 from which works by artists resident within a thirty-mile radius of Nottingham town hall were to be purchased. Similar criteria governed the distribution of

annual prize money amounting to £20 per annum to be awarded to four painters of distinction. The stated purpose was for ‘incouraging (*sic*) the development of the art of painting’ in Nottingham.²⁷ Furthermore, £1000 was to pay for ‘twenty cartoons or pictures representing the principal historical events connected with the said city from the earliest period’. Measuring 3ft long by 2ft high they were to be placed at the castle or a comparable public building to ensure their preservation and public accessibility.²⁸ With a similar concern for the history of Nottingham the sum of £200²⁹ was reserved for the erection of plaques ‘to mark the several spots’ within Nottingham ‘upon which events of historical interest have occurred, for example the spot where King Charles I raised his standard’.³⁰ Finally, and most importantly, £1,800 was to provide the means of memorialising poets associated with Nottingham ‘for the benefit and edification’ of its citizens.³¹ The benefactor wished this enlightenment of the people to be matched by opportunities to ‘encourage young sculptors and artists’ to compete for the commissions, rather than meet the high prices of those ‘of established reputation.’³²

SPOTS IN TIME

Extracts from the will were read before a meeting of the town council on 7th May 1900. The mayor, alderman A. Pyatt suggested that the matter of the memorials and plaques be ‘referred to the castle museum committee’.³³ The council indicated that it had ‘for some time had in view the desirability of placing commemorative tablets’ but were unable to do so due to lack of funds.³⁴ Later that month Samuel Johnson suggested to his co-trustee that George Wallis ‘should be asked to advise us.’³⁵ Wallis agreed to do so for a fee of

£50³⁶ and in April of the following year stated that he was dealing with the ‘matter of memorial tablets to be placed in birthplaces and upon historical sites in Nottingham’.³⁷ In May 1902 the funds were paid to the ‘museum committee to be expended from time to time as occasion arises upon historical places when identified until the capital is exhausted.’³⁸

Wallis saw to it that the sculptor Oliver Sheppard (1865-1941) designed the frames for the tablets. Sheppard, who had just moved to Ireland in order to take up a post at the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin, suggested that the surround of the plaques should be in bronze. He was paid £25 for modelling a design featuring ‘the Nottingham crest & coat of arms.’³⁹ Wallis envisaged that copies could be cast when required: ‘The centre of each tablet will of course be different, because of the inscription, and can be either of marble or bronze, fitting into the tablet frame.’⁴⁰ A paper cut-out is still extant reflecting the dimensions of the tablet with a rectangular shape pencilled in the centre to indicate the position of the insert.⁴¹

On Sheppard’s recommendation the casting was done by Enrico Cantoni, a specialist in ‘moulding and castings of all descriptions for sculptors’ based in Chelsea.⁴² Cantoni received £4 for each item and produced sixteen in total by the close of 1902.⁴³ S. Drake, a monumental mason who worked in a variety of stone, made the inserts in his workshop at the Ropewalk in Nottingham.⁴⁴ They were in ‘white marble with lead filled lettering’.⁴⁵

Drake had in fact just completed the memorial to Holbrook in the general cemetery. It cost £72 10s and took the form of a Celtic cross.⁴⁶ Samuel Johnson described it as ‘a striking monument and beyond anything else in the cemetery for artistic excellent (*sic*)

although it is very severe in character.⁴⁷ On the socle is written: 'BY HIS WILL THE DECEASED BEQUEATHED CONSIDERABLE / SUMS OF MONEY FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE POOR, AND / THE ADVANCEMENT OF ART IN THIS CITY.'

The tablet scheme commenced in 1902 and by 1911 some fourteen plaques had been sited in the city.⁴⁸ Wallis decided to begin the series with reference to two poets: the former residence of Henry Kirke White (1785-1806) on High Pavement and the birthplace of Philip James Bailey (1816-1902) at Weekday Cross. However, the siting of the panels was not without some slight controversy, as the question of Kirke White's birthplace was to quickly demonstrate. Mr. A. Gilbert wrote to Wallis to inform him that the site was not in fact the spuriously named 'Kirke White Tavern' and that he was keen to avoid 'the perpetuation of a possible second blunder' regarding the poet.⁴⁹ In 1907, on Gilbert's advice, a second plaque to the poet was accordingly put up in Cheapside.⁵⁰

The desire for veracity was also reflected in the one site stipulated by Holbrook: the raising of the standard by Charles I in 1642. Wallis admitted that there was 'still an uncertainty as to the position of the place.'⁵¹ This led to the erection of plaques in King Charles Street and St. James's Terrace, both stating that the event took place in the vicinity.⁵²

In January 1911 F.W. Pare, the proprietor of a lace manufacturers in Russell Street, wrote to Wallis to express his satisfaction with the recently erected tablet to John Leavers (1786-1848) at St. Helen's Street.⁵³ Leavers lived there and it is recorded that he was 'INVENTOR OF THE / LEAVERS LACE MACHINE / 1813.' Some years earlier

Leavers's niece, Clara Seymour and his sister, Elizabeth Leavers Greenwood had been stirred to defend the late inventor against accusations that he was 'a free-liver and irregular in his habits of business.' In their letters to the press they claimed that this misconception was initiated by William Felkin in his *History of the Hosiery and Lace Manufacturers of Nottingham*. This correspondence was sent to Wallis by Pare and F.W. Dobson, a lace dyer and dresser based at Queen's Road, to support their calls for a plaque. They informed him that Leavers died near Rouen at the age of 64 and that 'Rue Leavers' at Calais was so named in his honour. Pare and Dobson concluded:

We feel that it is not altogether creditable to Nottingham as a city to allow the inventor of the machine to which the prosperity of the town is so much indebted, to be forgotten, and we feel sure it is only necessary to bring the matter to your notice in order that justice may be done to another of Nottingham's notable men.⁵⁴

Other individuals so commemorated include the artist Henry Dawson (1811-78), the Dissenter Gilbert Wakefield (1756-1801), the priest William Carey (1761-1834) and Marshall Tallart or Tallard (1652-1728), a prisoner of war after the Battle of Blenheim in 1704.

A number of other persons and historical events were considered and rejected by Wallis and the trustees.⁵⁵ One such was Herbert Ingram (1811-60) memorialised in a fine monument by Alexander Munro (1825-71) at nearby Boston. As the inscription on the pedestal attests, Ingram was founder of the *Illustrated London News* in 1842. Erected in 1862 the carved sculpture depicts the publisher in contemporary attire holding a copy of his journal, propped up on two more volumes for the years 1842 and 1851, the latter coinciding with the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace. The proposed Holbrook

plaque was correspondingly to read: 'HERE LIVED / HERBERT INGRAM / (AFTERWARDS SIR HERBERT INGRAM, BART.) / FOUNDER OF THE ILLUSTRATED / LONDON NEWS.'⁵⁶ He had come to Nottingham in 1833 to establish himself as a printer and newsagent in partnership with his brother-in-law, Nathaniel Cooke. There was a spate of correspondence in the pages of the *Nottingham Guardian* from February to April 1911 concerning the supposed whereabouts of their shop at Chapel Bar. The ensuing uncertainty over its exact location may well have thwarted the idea.⁵⁷

Whilst Ingram failed to be included two more poets were successfully accounted for: George Gordon, sixth Lord Byron (1788-1824) and Robert Millhouse (1788-1839). Both these men, in addition to Bailey and Kirke White were to be further commemorated in the form of busts at the castle.

A PANTHEON OF POETS

In his will Holbrook named seven poets who had all spent some time as residents of Nottingham. They included Thomas Miller (1808-74) and the married couple, William (1792-1879) and Mary Howitt (1799-1888) in addition to the aforementioned Philip James Bailey, Henry Kirke White, Lord Byron and Robert Millhouse.

In his advice to the trustees, Wallis recommended that they commission bronze busts 'of heroic size' upon granite pedestals 'with decorative inscription tablets similar to one

erected to the late Major Jonathan White in the castle museum grounds.⁵⁸ This memorial to Major 'Jonty' White (1804-89) had been executed by Albert Toft in 1891.

Toft (1862-1949) was a prominent figure in the world of sculpture and had a national reputation to match his local profile. He was selected by Wallis for the choicest of the Holbrook commissions, the opportunity to model Philip James Bailey from life. Wallis urged that this be done with great speed 'before any weakness of health should happen to him.'⁵⁹ Bailey was too infirm to travel to London so he sat for the sculptor in his own home during mid October 1900.⁶⁰ The work was cast at the J.W. Singer foundry in Frome whilst the granite pedestal was supplied by Gray & Son of Glasgow.⁶¹ The bust and a relief panel for the plinth were being cast in September 1902 when Toft received news of Bailey's death.⁶² Nevertheless, in his portrait the steady gaze and slightly knitted brow of the eighty year-old poet betray no signs of the frailties of old age.

Bailey was the illustrious author of *Festus*, first published in 1839 with a second, much longer edition of almost thirteen thousand lines appearing in 1845. In Britain, eleven editions had been issued by 1901, whilst there were approximately thirty in the United States. By the time of the poet's death it existed in seven different versions and reached nearly forty thousand lines.⁶³ Toft's relief sculpture is illustrative of the heavenly close of the poem and has the inscription: '*Festus*: Ah, blessed ones, come to me, / Are ye all here too with me? / *Angels*: All. / *Festus*: It is heaven.'⁶⁴

Contrary to Holbrook's wishes, Wallis urged the trustees to have work 'executed by sculptors of repute'.⁶⁵ In Wallis's 'anniversary loan exhibition' of 1903-4 marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the gallery and museum, 'a large and important collection,

illustrating British pictorial and sculptural art from 1878 to 1903' was installed. This featured works by four of the practitioners commissioned for the Holbrook bequest. These included Toft, Alfred Drury (1856-1944), George Frampton (1860-1928) and Ernest G. Gillick (1874-1951).⁶⁶ Only the latter was, to cite Wallis, a 'young sculptor, just beginning his career'.⁶⁷ In contrast, Frampton (later knighted) was one of the leading artists of his day and enjoyed an international reputation. At the time he accepted the commission for the Howitts he was about to leave for the Paris Universal Exhibition where he had been awarded a *grand prix*.⁶⁸

Frampton's work is perhaps the most successful in the series representing as it does an intimate double portrait of the two poets as they read from an open book. One of the sculptor's earliest letters to Wallis in November 1900 survives and represents an important accompaniment to the finished work: it includes a superbly spontaneous sketch of his proposal, which he described 'as a bold relief.'⁶⁹ It would appear that Frampton's piece was instrumental in the eventual siting of the busts. A note accompanying the design urged that 'it be placed within the recession of the old bastion in the drive of the castle grounds' to give it prominence and ensure it would always be seen in direct light (the latter deemed an important consideration for a bas-relief).⁷⁰ It was indeed under the colonnade on the main, west façade of the castle that the sculptures were sited and where they still remain.⁷¹ The bust of the Howitts was, like Toft's work, supported on a silver granite pedestal from Glasgow.⁷² The bronze was cast by the founders 'Hollinshead of Burton', based at Thames Ditton.⁷³ Both the Frampton portrait and Oliver Sheppard's bust of Henry Kirke White were in place by June 1902.⁷⁴

Sheppard was modelling master at Nottingham School of Art before his move to Dublin. Judith Hill has recently stated that this occurred in 1903, however his letters to Wallis indicate that he was already in Ireland by April 1902.⁷⁵ An Irish protestant, he learnt modelling at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art before moving to the National Training School at South Kensington in 1888. He regularly contributed to the Royal Hibernian Academy from 1891 and executed numerous public statues in Ireland, one of which was the bronze bust of the poet James Clarence Mangan (1803-49) commissioned by the National Literary Society and unveiled near to their offices in St. Stephen's Green, Dublin in 1909. During the early 19th century Mangan was a principal figure in the Celtic revival, alluded to in the marble relief of the 'spirit of poetry' on the pedestal. Sheppard's commission for the Kirke White portrait some years earlier must have provided a useful grounding for the later image of this Irish poet.

Two months after the erection of the Howitts and Kirke White busts they were joined by Alfred Drury's *Lord Byron*.⁷⁶ In the latter Byron's face is shown in strong profile achieved by the sculptor's decision to turn the subject's head sharply to the right. This dramatic effect is emphasised by a swathe of drapery across the chest. Drury was assisted by the fact that he had recently been sent a collection of 'every existing portrait of any kind that can be procured'. With this 'valuable addition', he rightly hoped to 'make a really noble and true bust.'⁷⁷ The acquisition of such material was obviously essential in the circumstances, given that only Toft was able to work from life. This explains Frampton's request to Wallis for 'all the likenesses of William and Mary Howitt you can collect.'⁷⁸ He made a similar plea for photographs in December.⁷⁹

The question of portraiture most taxed the least experienced of the sculptors. Ernest Gillick faced an apparent dearth of images for both Thomas Miller and Robert Millhouse. With regard to the latter it was initially suggested that, rather than commissioning a new memorial, Millhouse's tomb in the general cemetery be renovated.⁸⁰ It was subsequently observed that an inscription had been placed on this grave 'some years later by his friend Dr. Spencer T. Hall' and 'an oak in Sherwood Forest, under which Millhouse and Spencer Hall took refuge during a storm, bears the name of the poet.'⁸¹

In the event portraits were forthcoming from James R. Millhouse, the poet's son and a resident of the United States for some forty-four years. He had written to the mayor of Nottingham after reading about the Holbrook bequest and the lack of his father's likeness. He directed them to possible sources and added that his father was some 5ft 9in in height with 'high florid ruddy complexion and light curly hair.'⁸² Gillick's low relief of Millhouse, in profile and holding a quill was presumably based on such information.

Thomas Miller's appearance proved totally elusive and Wallis instead directed Gillick to provide a panel with 'an allegorical subject suggestive of the poet's sympathies with nature.'⁸³ His representation of two female allegories crouching either side of a simple inscription does just this and Gillick received, like all the other sculptors, a fee of £300.⁸⁴

Wallis was notably supportive of Gillick, whom he described as 'a distinguished student of the Nottingham School of Art'.⁸⁵ His early introduction to the rigours of the sculptor's profession must have been a sobering experience. Practitioners of sculpture lived a precarious existence due in part to the relative scarcity of commissions, the best being keenly fought over, and the high cost of their materials. Collectively the Holbrook busts

represent an excellent example of the potential pitfalls. Toft and Frampton were highly experienced but both, according to Wallis, were delayed 'by the bronze casters who did not fulfil their promise to the sculptors.'⁸⁶ Frampton had earlier written from France in September 1901 that he would shortly return to London and, aware of the peregrinations of the casting process, stated that he was unwilling to begin casting while away, stating: 'I like to ~~see it~~ (*sic*) have it under my eye all the time.'⁸⁷

Drury, too, visited the foundry responsible for his Byron and discovered 'that half the head didn't run in bronze; we have had to make another wax, which will mean a delay of three weeks.' This was an all too common occurrence.⁸⁸ Fortunately all went well and by the end of May 1902 he was able to say that it was 'a magnificent cast'. A further week's work at the foundry was necessary to provide the patina, the surface finish so critical to the appearance of the metal.⁸⁹ Drury sent an assistant to patina the bronze on 11th August.⁹⁰ This was a pressing concern for the sculptor who at one point grumbled that the bust looked 'dreadful'.⁹¹ On 15th August he pleaded with Wallis not to allow anyone to dust it. He complained that a bust by him at the Tate Gallery was 'absolutely ruined, by the man who goes round every morning with a duster and polishes it up like a door handle: if it is not touched the patina will go a beautiful colour.'⁹²

In the light of these manifold dangers the inexperienced Gillick was very vulnerable. In October 1903 he lamented that he was unable to complete the panels of Miller and Millhouse as he was 'practically powerless in the matter, being in the hands of one of the most dilatory moulders that ever stepped out of Italy.'⁹³ The unnamed founder apparently broke all his deadlines and promises. The following month Gillick despondently announced that there was 'pure bad luck for all concerned' and that the first castings were

‘certainly ruined’. The sculptor was left feeling ‘very sick about the whole business’ and was forced to conclude: ‘Truly the Devil’s own luck has attended these panels.’⁹⁴

Wallis responded by informing Thimbleby about ‘the unfortunate’ Gillick. He added that ‘four times the casting has been a failure’ and that he had therefore to pay four times the sum to the founder. Whilst admitting this to be an accepted risk, Wallis emphasised that Gillick’s career was just beginning and therefore asked if the trustees would agree to increase his payment.⁹⁵ As luck would have it £39 remained in this section of the memorial fund and this was indeed paid to him.⁹⁶

OF PRIZES AND PURCHASES

By January 1904 the busts had been successfully completed.⁹⁷ A satisfied Wallis wrote to Thimbleby on the eleventh of that month and urged him to purchase Alfred Toft’s bronze, *The Spirit of Contemplation*. This had first been exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1901 and was shown in Nottingham’s ‘anniversary loan exhibition’ of 1903-4. Wallis gave an enthusiastic account of the piece and warranted that its addition to his collection would be fulfilling ‘the spirit of the late William Holbrook’s wishes and doing much for the edification of the citizens of Nottingham.’⁹⁸ This met with short shrift when Thimbleby replied: ‘I prefer adhering to the trusts of the will and personally cannot express my admiration of the bronze sculpture.’⁹⁹

A cast of *The Spirit of Contemplation* is in the Laing Art Gallery at Newcastle-upon-Tyne.¹⁰⁰ It is an archetypal example of the ‘New Sculpture’, a phrase first deployed by

Edmund Gosse in 1894 to describe an imaginative generation of British sculptors who adhered to ‘a close and reverent observation of nature’.¹⁰¹ All the artists chosen by Wallis can be categorised within the broad aesthetic of this period. The likes of Toft, Frampton and Drury produced some of the best examples of sculpture at this time and their works in Nottingham are of notable importance.

Wallis’s idea ‘of acquiring fine examples of art for our permanent collection’ was arrived at after discussion with Sir Samuel Johnson.¹⁰² Their conversation pertained to the additional monies for prizes and purchases for the castle collection as well as the commissioning of twenty historical cartoons. With regard to the former it was decided that the awards were to be distributed at the *Twenty-fourth annual exhibition of pictures in oil and watercolours by local artists* to take place from May to September 1902. The watercolours were to be hung in gallery C and the oils in D of the castle museum. As the exhibition was restricted to artists from a thirty-mile radius of Nottingham it fitted well with Holbrook’s stipulations.¹⁰³ These displays of local art had commenced at the inception of the gallery in 1878 and Holbrook must have had it in mind when preparing his will.

The trustees and Wallis decided to purchase Vernon Howard’s watercolour *Sand Dunes on the Lincolnshire Coast*, and the oil paintings *The Last Coble* by Harold Knight, *Hardanger Fjord, Norway* by Henry Enfield and A.W. Redgate’s *Trespassers*.¹⁰⁴ These were acquired at the reduced prices of £25, £50, £15 and £20 respectively.¹⁰⁵ The prize money of £20 was also given to four artists, with Denholm Davis’s *Saul and the Witch of Endor* taking first place.¹⁰⁶

In 1903 it was decided to abandon the display of local artists' work at the castle and the following year the award of prizes was transferred to the annual displays of the Nottingham Society of Artists exhibited at the Corn Exchange, Thurland Street.¹⁰⁷ These gifts were not always gratefully received: Alfred Oliver was the unappreciative recipient of £3 in 1905 and in his letter of receipt he satirised it as 'Poor Relief for indigent painters' before going on to speculate whether or not 'it would be more suitable for the biggest cabbage from "Hunger Hill" gardens.' Resisting the temptation to retain the cheque solely 'for the sake of the august autographs' he decided instead to send 'the children down to Llandudno for the day with the money'.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless the awards and purchases continued for many years: for example, in 1916 *Arthog Marsh*, a watercolour by W. Adderton won first prize.¹⁰⁹ In 1917 Wallis recommended that *Flamborough Head*, a pastel by T.W. Hammond should be bought for £15 and *The Vale of Keswick* by W.L. Turner for £65.¹¹⁰ Additional expenditure occurred in 1924 and 1927, and from 1929 to 1952 there were nine further 'Holbrook bequest gifts'.¹¹¹ At the 'local artists' exhibition' of 1973 the £25, £15 and £10 prizes were duly given.¹¹²

Even more open-ended was the question of the historical cartoons. Wallis suggested that a single 'painter of eminence' might be able to produce one or two pieces for the available funds, but to expect as many as twenty would result in a 'lack [of] quality and artistic value.' He proffered an alternative idea of using the money for travelling scholarships to pupils of the art school with preference being given 'to those students who show particular ability in regard to the treatment of historical subjects.'¹¹³

For his part Samuel Johnson displayed a weariness of the entire bequest. He was in fact eager to be relieved of his role as trustee given that he only agreed to it on the

understanding that he had liberty over the application of the money. This was not given.¹¹⁴ Johnson reserved his greatest scorn for the history paintings and concluded that the ‘provision of twenty cartoons of local events is manifestly absurd. They would be placed in the cellars of the museum, and the money would have been wasted.’¹¹⁵ Whatever the merits of the scheme it was never realised and its fund went unspent.

REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING

That the Holbrook bequest was so characteristic of its time is demonstrated by the fact that it coincided with a plethora of memorials to Queen Victoria. During her reign the monarch had been commemorated throughout Britain and its empire and one art historian has commented on the ‘imperial ambitions’ associated with these monuments, adding that ‘statues of the queen were legion in India during her reign.’¹¹⁶ So, when on 19th March 1902 George Wallis wrote to Thomas Thimbleby he expressed his relief that ‘after much trouble’ the busts of the poets were ‘approaching completion’. He continued: ‘Through the death of the late queen they [the sculptors] have been very busy with memorial works and it has been simply impossible to get things done in time.’¹¹⁷ Alfred Drury had made a similar comment some months earlier. He confessed that he had made little progress on account of the fact that he had to make

two models for the Bradford ‘Victoria memorial’ (which consists of a statue of her late Majesty and fountains). As it was a most important commission I did not wish to lose it and so left other work till that was done.¹¹⁸

Toft was responsible for the statue of Victoria at Royal Leamington Spa of 1902 and at Nottingham some three years later. Frampton produced a Jubilee monument to the queen at Calcutta from 1897-1902.¹¹⁹ This design was subsequently repeated in locations as far apart as Winnipeg and Leeds.¹²⁰

This broader picture provides a pertinent context to the bequests initiated by William Holbrook. Indeed, on completion of the busts at the castle, the *Nottinghamshire Guardian* declared that:

Under the terms of the Holbrook bequest, Nottingham has been relieved of the reproach that she had done little or nothing to commemorate, in any worthy sense, the memory of some sons and daughters of the town and county, who, in bygone years, enriched the poetic literature of their native land.¹²¹

This indicates the perceived universality of this phenomenon and the fact that it was driven by civic pride and a sense of competition between communities within the nation and among dependencies within the empire. The sculpted portraits of ‘native’ poets are lauded as ‘worthy’ commemorations. Executed by artists of repute the aesthetic and physiognomic value of these works was augmented by ritual and ceremony. An instance of this was the fact that, soon after his bust had been completed, the centenary of the birth of Henry Kirke White was honoured in Nottingham.¹²² A speech given at a celebratory banquet by the mayor was reported in the *Nottingham Guardian* the following day:

The gathering was prompted by a feeling of patriotism that he should like to see burn brighter in their midst. He thought Kirke White himself had that feeling in a strong degree, because whilst pursuing his studies at Cambridge he did not forget the old town. Their forefather’s played their part worthily in history, in art, in literature, and in all that went to make this nation’s of ours great, and he hoped they would never forget the great men who had gone before them in this city and country. That celebration, which he rejoiced to take part in, was a sign of the existence amongst them of a strong feeling of local

patriotism, and he thanked the committee heartily for inviting him to preside over it. (Applause) The proceedings terminated with the singing of the National Anthem.¹²³

These demonstrative words spoken by a figure of authority indicate the officially sanctioned nature of this act of commemoration. The synthesis of the local with the national is especially important to an understanding of the Holbrook bequest. By lauding the universal achievements of a figure such as Kirke White, Nottingham was able to demonstrate its useful service to the national cause. It was ‘imagined communities’ constituted by the poet Philip James Bailey, the industrialist John Leavers and the artist Henry Dawson that furnished Nottingham with an ‘invented tradition’. Yet- importantly- this in no way rivalled the imagined *national* community. On the contrary, it would appear that such distinct effusions of ‘local patriotism’ were essential to the establishment of the state: as demonstrated by the fact that Nottingham’s historical significance is hypothesized within a national narrative.

However, it is apt that Benedict Anderson’s revised edition of *Imagined Communities* should conclude with a chapter entitled ‘Memory and Forgetting’.¹²⁴ The centrality of continuity to the national cause and the necessity for a ‘narrative of “identity”’ to remind and reconfirm these disremembered links has already been alluded to. ‘Forgetting’ therefore appears to be both a motivating force *and* a perennial danger to the national project. Tangible monuments and anniversary rituals guard against collective amnesia.

It is therefore ironic (if not entirely unexpected) that, with the notable exception of Lord Byron, the individuals memorialised, the people who benefited, and even the artists selected in fulfilment of the Holbrook bequests have not been remembered. Indeed the process of forgetting was in some cases underway as soon as it had begun. In 1921 Wallis

commissioned a report on the plaques in the city. It revealed that just under half of them were dirty or discoloured. More seriously the tablet to the artist Edwin Ellis (born 1803) at 18 Manvers Street had been lost when, in 1905, the edifice was ‘demolished under the Corporation development scheme’ leaving ‘no trace of the building’.¹²⁵ It also revealed that 17 High Pavement, where Kirke White lived, was advertised for sale. It was later demolished, as in 1930 was the ‘Rancliffe Arms’ on Sussex Street supporting the historian John Blackner’s plaque. Gilbert Wakefield’s St. Nicholas’ Rectory and William Carey’s chapel have been pulled down. So too has Robert Millhouse’s birthplace and, in 1959, the John Leavers building. A number of the tablets were repositioned but seven of them have been lost altogether. Those that do survive can still be seen. Their marble panels were replaced by slate in 1928 due to the rigours of climate and pollution.¹²⁶

The celebrity of Henry Kirke White and James Bailey has long since faded despite the longevity of their memorials. When working on his bust of Bailey, Albert Toft felt that there was ‘no occasion’ to add the word *Festus* to the pedestal.¹²⁷ Perhaps his authorship of this apparently eternal classic was considered too self-evident to need reiteration. However, it is revealing that Robert Birley’s Clark Lectures of 1960-61 includes *Festus*; indeed it brings to a close his volume entitled, appropriately enough, *Sunk Without Trace*.¹²⁸

Nevertheless, the Holbrook bequest lives on, as the sporadic awards for paintings affirm. Despite the decidedly chequered history of the Holbrook plaques the lasting appeal of this form of commemoration is attested to by an additional series of tablets erected in 1976, supplemented by an on-going sequence currently sponsored by the *Evening Post* newspaper.¹²⁹ The busts of poets still retain their privileged positions flanking the

entrance to the castle museum, and in the mid-1960s there were even abortive plans to incorporate a sculpted portrait of D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930) among the literary pantheon nestling under the castle colonnade.¹³⁰

One recent commentator has persuasively argued that the present age is ‘the era of commemoration’, even to the extent that we are experiencing symptoms of ‘commemorative bulimia’.¹³¹ This might explain why an interest in the Holbrook bequest should resurge at this particular moment in time. Whilst pausing in contemplation it should be acknowledged that this forms yet another cycle in the process of forgetting and remembering. One ought also to muse at the serendipity of the fact that this homage, occurring as it does at the start of the 21st century, doubles as something akin to a centenary celebration.

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ENDNOTES

¹ D. Cannadine, 'The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the "Invention of Tradition", c. 1820-1977', in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), 101-164, 138.

² Cannadine (1983), 'Table 4: Commemorative statues erected in London and Washington', 164.

³ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1991), 6.

⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (1991), 11.

⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (1991), 205.

⁶ This sense of an individual narrative was echoed by G.H. Wallis, artistic adviser to the Holbrook bequest. The sculptor Albert Toft, whilst working on a bust for the bequest, was personally commissioned by Wallis to execute a memorial to commemorate his daughter, Catherine Carey Wallis. Originally erected in the now-demolished St. James's Church it was moved in 1933 to St. Peter's Church, as was a work by another of the Holbrook bequest sculptors: George Frampton's bronze relief to the Reverend Lawrence Wilkins. St. Peter's History Group, *The Monuments of Saint Peter's Church Nottingham* (1990), 6.

⁷ N(ottinghamshire) A(rchives) O(ffice), DD 890/13/7, Holbrook writing from Welbeck House, 18 Bentinck Road to Thimbleby, 17th December 1895.

⁸ T. Fry, 'William Stephenson Holbrook a Nottingham benefactor', *Nottingham Civic Society Newsletter*, 113 (2000), 23.

⁹ N.A.O., DD 890/2-3, fo.1.

¹⁰ S. Burch and J. Beach, 'East Midlands' in J. Darke (ed.), *A User's Guide to Public Sculpture* (2000), 120-121.

¹¹ N.A.O., DD 890/40. *Nottingham Guardian*, 9th September 1902.

¹² N.A.O., DD 890/21. ‘Holbrook Charity’, *Nottingham Guardian*, 1st January 1913.

¹³ (B)rewhouse (Y)ard, ‘Registrar’s Book Number 51’. *Nottingham Guardian*, 27th June 1929.

¹⁴ A. Hamilton, *Nottingham’s Royal Castle and Ducal Palace* (1999).

¹⁵ N.A.O., DD 890/16. S. Johnson, writing from the Municipal Offices, Town Clerk’s Department to W. Holbrook, 8th December 1883.

¹⁶ B.Y., ‘Registrar’s Book Number 51’, ‘Foreword’, 3.

¹⁷ B.Y., ‘Registrar’s Book Number 51’, ‘Mr. G. H. Wallis to Retire. Curator at Castle Museum. Record of 50 years.’ *Nottingham Journal*, 27th February 1929.

¹⁸ B.Y., ‘Registrar’s Book Number 51’, *Nottingham Journal*, 24th May 1930.

¹⁹ M. Hunter (ed.), *Preserving the Past. The Rise of Heritage in Modern Britain* (1996), 64.

²⁰ T. Fry, *Nottingham’s Plaques and Statues* (1999), 1.

²¹ London County Council, *Return of Outdoor Memorials in London... Prepared by the Clerk of the Council* [G. L. Glomme], *under the direction of the Local Government, Records and Museums Committee of the Council* (1910), 14.

²² N.A.O., DD 890/6; MI37/1-2, Copy of the *Probate of the Will and two Codicils of Mr. William Stephenson Holbrook* sent to J.W. Woodward, secretary of the Mechanics’ Institute, Nottingham in May 1900.

²³ N.A.O., DD 890/7.

²⁴ N.A.O., DD 890/10.

²⁵ N.A.O., DD 890/39; N.A.O., DD 890/13/11, DD 890/13/13, *Nottingham Daily Guardian*, 20th December 1901, 7. Pochin was then an auctioneer and valuer based at the Express Buildings in Parliament Street.

²⁶ N.A.O., DD 890/10.

²⁷ N.A.O., DD 890/6, 7.

²⁸ N.A.O., DD 890/6, 9.

²⁹ N.A.O., DD 890/27/5. Thimbleby to Johnson, 9th June 1904. The actual amounts were reduced by the legacy duty payable on each bequest. The plaque fund, for example, was £180.

³⁰ N.A.O., DD 890/6, 9.

³¹ N.A.O., DD 890/6, 8-9.

³² N.A.O., DD 890/6, 9

³³ N.A.O., DD 890/38, 'Nottingham City Council', *Nottingham Daily Express*, 8th May 1900, 8.

³⁴ N.A.O., CA/MU 3/22, *Trans. Thoroton Soc.*, 5 (1901), 42.

³⁵ N.A.O., DD 890/13/8.

³⁶ N.A.O., DD 890/18, fo.3.

³⁷ N.A.O., DD 890/18, fo.23.

³⁸ N.A.O., DD 890/13/11.

³⁹ B.Y., Holbrook Bequest Letters, Sheppard writing from the Metropolitan School of Art, Kildare Street, Dublin to Wallis, 16th and 28th April, 5th May 1902.

⁴⁰ N.A.O., DD 890/13/11, Wallis to Thimbleby, 30th April 1902.

⁴¹ B.Y., Holbrook Bequest box file.

⁴² N.A.O., DD 890/19; B.Y., Holbrook Bequest letter file, Cantoni writing from 100 Church Street, Chelsea to Wallis, 21st November 1902.

⁴³ N.A.O., DD 890/13/12, Wallis to Thimbleby, 15th January 1903; B.Y., Holbrook Bequest letter file, Cantoni replied on 21st November 1902 and 28th January 1903; N.A.O., DD 890/19 and DD 890/46 for records of payment.

⁴⁴ N.A.O., DD 890/19, Drake's receipt, 10th January 1903.

⁴⁵ B.Y., Holbrook Bequest letter file, Wallis to the Doulton & Co., 25th September 1923.

⁴⁶ N.A.O., DD 890/18 fo.19; DD 890/26.

⁴⁷ N.A.O., DD 890/13/10, Johnson to Thimbleby, 8th February 1901.

⁴⁸ *Trans. Thoroton Soc.*, 9 (1905), 106-7; (L)ocal (S)tudies, Angel Row Library, L92, 'Commemorative Tablets (Holbrook Bequest)'.

⁴⁹ B.Y., Holbrook Bequest letter file, A. Gilbert, Arthur Street, Mount Vernon to Wallis, 12th January 1903.

⁵⁰ N.A.O., DD 890/13/14, Drake's bill, dated 5th July 1905.

⁵¹ N.A.O., DD 890/13/11.

⁵² T. Fry, *Nottingham's Plaques and Statues*, 3.

⁵³ B.Y., Holbrook Bequest letter file.

⁵⁴ B.Y., Holbrook Bequest letter file.

⁵⁵ B.Y., Holbrook Bequest box file; see also T. Fry, 'The Holbrook Bequest: other suggestions for Holbrook plaques', *Nottingham Civic Society Newsletter*, 116 (2001), 4-6.

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⁵⁷ B.Y., Holbrook Bequest box file, 'Supposed site of Ingram's Shop- Chapel Bar', *Nottingham Guardian*, 15-16th, 18th, 20-25th, 27-28th February 1911; 2nd, 4th, 6th, 14th March; 10 April 1911.

⁵⁸ N.A.O., DD 890/27/6-8, Wallis to Thimbleby, 25th July 1900; N.A.O., DD 890/18, fo.4 in which he enclosed his 'Report to the Trustees of the Holbrook Bequest upon Prizes for Local Art, Historical Cartoons, Monumental Memorials to Poets'.

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⁶⁰ N.A.O., DD 890/13/9, receipt dated 13th November 1900.

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⁶² B.Y., Holbrook Bequest letter file, Toft writing from 11 Trafalgar Studios, Manresa Road, Chelsea to Wallis, 9th September 1902; Toft to Wallis, 22nd September 1902; N.A.O., DD 890/40, 'The Late Mr. Philip James Bailey. Local Tribute', *Nottingham Daily Guardian*, 9th September 1902.

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⁶⁸ S. Beattie, *The New Sculpture* (1983), 243.

⁶⁹ B.Y., Holbrook Bequest letter file, Frampton writing from 32 Queens Road, St. John's Wood to Wallis, 16th November 1900.

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⁷⁵ J. Hill, *Irish Public Sculpture: A History* (1998), 124, 137-9 and 264 note 154; see also S. Bhreathnach-Lynch, 'Public Sculpture in Independent Ireland 1922-1972', *The Medal*, 21 (1992), 44-52.

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⁷⁷ B.Y., Holbrook Bequest letter file, Drury writing from 6 Gunter Grove, Fulham Road, Chelsea to Wallis, 6th September 1901.

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⁷⁹ B.Y., Holbrook Bequest letter file, Frampton to Wallis, 7th December 1900.

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⁸² B.Y., Holbrook Bequest box file, J. Millhouse to the mayor of Nottingham, 4940 Germantown Ave. Philadelphia, 16th May 1902.

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⁸⁴ Gillick's fee of £300 was, however, for *two* works. N.A.O., DD890/19, for the complete set of contracts and payments (in three instalments).

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⁸⁸ B.Y., Holbrook Bequest letter file, Drury to Wallis, 10th April 1902.

⁸⁹ B.Y., Holbrook Bequest letter file, Drury to Wallis, 26th May 1902.

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⁹⁴ B.Y., Holbrook Bequest letter file, Gillick to Wallis, 12th November 1903 and 13th January 1904.

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¹⁰⁰ Beattie, *The New Sculpture*, plate 176.

¹⁰¹ Gosse's article, 'The New Sculpture, 1879-1894' was published in the *Art Journal* of 1894 and is cited in Beattie, *The New Sculpture*, 3.

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¹¹² B.Y., lever-arch file entitled 'The Holbrook Trust from 2nd April 1954 to 1963 (*sic*)'.

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¹²⁰ Beattie, *The New Sculpture*, 243.

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