

Rotary Lincoln talk. 18/03/2022 by Antony Dufort

Mr president. Thank you very much for inviting me to address members of the Rotary Club of Lincoln in your Centenary year.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have produced these booklets to give an idea of the sculptures I am going to talk about. I will refer to different pages for you to turn to- as I go along. They are not in any particular order.

What is sculpture?

Oscar Wilde- rather cynically- defined it as

'something you bump into when you step back to view a painting properly'.

Public sculptures like my monument to George Boole are a bit bigger than the Gallery bronzes he was talking about. But Health and Safety worries endlessly about their scope to injure people who (are stupid enough) climb on them; Like Oscar Wilde, they sometimes seem to view a public sculpture more as an obstruction than as a work of art to be enjoyed.

Why do we do it?

One doesn't do it for fame; no-one looks for the sculptor's name on the base of even a popular sculpture. So, satisfaction for me, comes for example, from seeing an old miner proudly showing his granddaughter the name of his colliery on a bronze plaque on the side of my tribute sculpture to the miners and collieries of the Nottinghamshire coalfields. (See pages 18 and 19). Adding some extra meaning and enjoyment to a place for local people and visitors is what it's all about for me.

The Monument to George Boole: please see the front cover of the booklet and pages 2,3,4 and 5

I was invited here tonight because I was commissioned to do a sculpture of Lincoln's self-taught mathematical genius, George Boole, a few years ago, by the Heslam Trust- which is chaired by your President. We hope to install it soon in the forecourt of Lincoln Railway Station, starting possibly in June after 18 frustrating months in storage.

Boole Biography

There is a brief summary of his life, engraved onto the back of the stone blackboard which forms part of the sculpture and tries to explain why his 'Boolean' logic is still so relevant today. You can read this on the inside of the front cover. (Page 2)

The idea for the sculpture

The idea I developed for the sculpture was to show Boole as teacher and educationalist; hence the two young children. His encouragement of education for women is symbolised by including both a young girl and a boy. She looks directly at Boole, listening intently. Is the boy doodling on his slate?

On the stone 'blackboard' (Page 4) in a facsimile of his handwriting, I show, in part, an important and apparently paradoxical Formula from his system of logic, $x=x$ squared where x equals zero or one; This is also a reference to Boole's pioneering use of the blackboard in teaching mathematics. but please don't ask me to explain it!

I would now like to talk about some of my other sculpture commissions:

First, The MCC Bowler. See pages 8 and 9

In the millennium year 2000, I won a competition to sculpt an anonymous fast bowler for Lord's cricket ground.

After a lot of research, I decided that the 'follow-through' position- after delivery of the ball, would make the most interesting idea sculpturally -with its dynamic arrow head outline. It's based on the aggression of fast bowlers like the late Dennis Lillee. A friend, an amateur cricketer and professional dancer, modelled in the nude to make sure the anatomical details were correct, with clothes to be added later. At a meeting of the Commissioners, the MCC Arts and Library Committee, where I presented this nude one third scale model, the chairman asked Lord Fellowes the Club Secretary if he thought a nude cricketer would be a good idea. 'Yes' was his reply 'if we want to be the laughingstock of the entire cricketing world.'

A few months after the unveiling by Sir Ted Dexter, I got a call from an inspector from Westminster Health and Safety. Are you the sculptor of the bowler statue at Lords' he asked? 'Yes' I replied.

'Those spikes on the bowler's boot, I want them filed off...' said the inspector. Rather hesitantly I enquired 'in case some Hooray Henry pogoes his face off after too much champagne?' 'Yes', he agreed.

'Let's meet on site', I said, playing for time, as a solution to this ridiculous and insulting situation started to suggest itself.

On the morning of the meeting, I grabbed a white sheet; went to Bronze age Foundry in Limehouse, where the sculpture had been cast. There, I collected a container full of bronze filings, some sandpaper and a couple of large files. At Lord's, before the inspector arrived, I sanded up the spikes until they were shiny, poured the bronze filings onto the cloth, which I had laid on the base of the sculpture, along with the two large files.

'Is that all right now' I asked the inspector when he arrived? 'Yes fine' he said, deluded into believing I had followed his orders. After he left, I re-coloured the spikes to match the rest of the sculpture and it looked exactly the same as before.

Now I'm going to talk about my sculptures of coal Miners,

You may have noticed that three of the sculptures in this booklet are of coalminers. Please look first at pages 12 and 13, **The Forest of Dean Miners monument**. I have lived in the Forest of Dean for 40 years. It was once a major coal mining area with deep mines and small drift mines. Almost all my neighbours were retired coal miners or mining families, many of them freeminers. What is a freeminer? Well, to become a freeminer of the Forest of Dean, you have to have been born within the Hundred of St Briavels, a triangular area bordered by the Rivers Severn and Wye. You need to have worked a year and a day in a mine and be over the age of 21. You can then apply to the Deputy Gaveler to lease a Gale, which signifies the mineral rights attached to any piece of land within the Forest of Dean, not currently being worked. These rights could include iron as well as coal. Gales are awarded at the Historic Speech House in the centre of the Forest. As there is no maternity ward in the Forest now, future freeminer's need to choose to be born at home.

These rights have existed 'Tyne out of mynd' but are alleged, according to oral tradition, to have been re-confirmed by Royal Charter by Edward the first in gratitude for the undermining of the walls of Berwick castle. The Freeminers' Association with 36 members has successfully retained the right to mine coal as a heritage industry and will continue to supply steam railways and blacksmiths as well as private people. Annual yields from the 6 or so drift mines still working are only a few thousand tonnes, so shouldn't add too much to the destruction of the Amazon rain forest. They were around centuries before the deep mines and have outlasted them all.

Cinderford Miner commission see pages 12 and 13

In 1998 I was commissioned by Cinderford Labour party and Town Council to make this sculpture of a coal miner clearing the 'roof' of the 'roadway' of 'droppers' or bell stones which

can fall without warning. It was to be their Millenium project to celebrate the Forest's mining History. The freeminer Robin Morgan seen above on page 12 putting in a roof support, took me down his mine near Coalway for an 8 hour shift, where I watched him and his cousin Hedley cutting coal in a 18" seam. 'Like mining under your kitchen table' he said. Another freeminer, Dave Harvey, modelled patiently, for the sculpture, making sure I got all the details correct. At the unveiling yet another old miner climbed up to check I had turned on the switch on the top of the carbide lamp which allows water to drip onto the carbide powder to produce acetylene gas. The Forest of Dean is the only coalfield in the world with no methane, so naked flame lamps were safe, if smelly and unpleasant. Miners could smoke underground though this was illegal. Health and safety asked if it was possible to remove the axe which is an integral part of the sculpture, worried that it could injure someone if detached.

I recently completed a second local Coal mining commission. To see this, please turn to the last two pages of the Book. This is the **Waterloo Colliery disaster memorial, pages 22 and 23**. It will be unveiled next week. You can read the story behind it beneath the photograph of this 8ft relief.

For the third mining sculpture please see **pages 18 and 19**. This is a tribute sculpture to the **Miners and collieries of the Nottinghamshire coalfields** which I mentioned at the beginning.

It was Commissioned by Nottinghamshire County Council and unveiled in 2005.

11 deep mines were still operating when I started my research for the sculpture. I was very fortunate to be allowed to go down Daw Mill Colliery near Coventry- then the most modern and productive coal mine in Europe, with 15-foot-thick coal seams – quite a contrast to the Foresters' shallow drift-mines- to get an idea of a what modern deep mine looked like.

To get to the coal face took over an hour, as it was several miles from the cage or lift, starting 3, 200 feet down at pit bottom. We first took a train, then an all-terrain vehicle over the bumpy roadway which had 'puffed up' over the weekend. Down at the coal face, the gigantic double ended coal shearer and the huge 15 ton hydraulic roof supports which snaked over to re-support the roof after the shearer passed, somehow seemed tiny in relation to the mass of rock and earth above us.

A team of 8 men could cut over ten thousand tons of coal in an 8-hour shift. Here **Methane gas** was the biggest danger, so after talking over a number of ideas with a group of miners, **Testing for gas** became an obvious choice of subject for my sculpture. You can see the miner squinting into his lamp to check the size and colour of the flame for signs of dangerous concentrations of the lethal gas. How dangerous modern mining was, is illustrated by the tragic fact that four men died at Daw Mill in 2006 and 7 after I was there, of preventable accidents including methane suffocation and the mine itself closed in 2013 because of an uncontrollable fire in one of the coal seams. I will never forget the sight of over a hundred miners at pit bottom waiting for the change of shift, all with Davy lamps on their belts – which they trusted more than the modern methanometers which they also carried.

Portrait busts. Please go to page 6: Cardinal Basil Hume. Basil Hume, who had been my housemaster at school in the 1960's had an unusual and endearing face which matched his kind and gentle character. I sculpted him in his monk's habit with Abbot's cross for Ampleforth Abbey in 2002 for their bicentenary, shortly after he died. In 1996 he had unveiled my sculpture of a **Mother and Child** – seen on the opposite page, for the London Oratory school chapel- a Catholic state school. Strangely, this was a controversial sculpture for a while.

The week after a photo of it was published in the Catholic Herald newspaper, a shocked letter from an Irish doctor appeared, complaining that this was an immodest way to represent

the virgin 'who had always been so pure and chaste', and would encourage 'impure thoughts in a boy's school. The following week there were several letters from incredulous catholic mothers asking what on earth the doctor thought breasts were for and saying how much they liked the sculpture. I was later told by the lady head teacher at the Junior school, that for those children without younger siblings, it was a invaluable teaching aid. Nevertheless, it did not stay in the school chapel for long.

Portrait busts 2 Harry Winter. see page 16

The bust of Harry Winter on page 16 was done as a tribute to an old friend. For 20 years he regaled me with wonderful stories. He was a great favourite with the ladies of Streatham Hill South London where he cleaned shop windows from 1947 until he retired in 2019 aged 93. 'Give us a hug Harry' they used to say as they passed him working up his window cleaner's ladder.

He told me that the splendid shape of his nose was the result of getting it trapped in the top hatch of a gun carrier during the war. I will tell you just one of his stories. Well, On Fridays, when he was a young boy, he would go to the bank with his horse dealer, market trader and prize fighting father. They would collect 250 sovereigns or guineas, which Harry would carry back in his dad's upturned half-height top hat. Meanwhile his grandmother would have spread brown paper over the kitchen table. The whole family would then sit round carefully scraping small gold filings from the edges of his or her pile of sovereigns. The filings and dust would go into a chamois leather pouch, for his father to buy more horses when he had collected enough. The sovereigns would be returned to the Bank the following Monday.

£2 coins

Talking of Gold coins... on the opposite page is an image of probably my smallest public commission, for the Royal Mint. Though it has been the official currency £2 coin since 2015, only a few million have been made so far, which makes it a rare coin apparently. The design of Britannia was based on my sculptor wife Dorota who is Polish. A headline in The Daily Express, showing its usual lack of taste, screamed 'Britannia on the new £2 coin is a Polish immigrant !!!'. It is not true by the way that I get a commission on each coin minted... unfortunately.

John Gillespie Magee, pages 10 and 11

A second Lincolnshire commission which I am now working on, is a 9ft image of spitfire pilot, John Gillespie Magee, who died in a mid-air collision with a trainee pilot from Cranwell at the age of 19 in 1941. He is buried in Skopwick cemetery. In my maquette, on the right-hand page, he has returned from a flight at 33,000 feet while with N0.53 operational training unit based at Laundau in Wales and has jotted down his famous poem 'High flight' (see back page) on his pad, which he carries along with his gloves in his left hand. Like so many other teenage pilot Officers, he has grown a small moustache to try and look older.

He later sent the original draft of his poem to his parents in Washington (he was an Anglo-American), where it is now on display in a glass case in the Library of Congress next to the original of Rupert Brookes' poem 'If I should die, think only this of me'. He was trained with the RCAF in Canada and after joining No 412 RCAF fighter squadron, based at RAF Digby, here in Lincolnshire, was billeted in Wellington Hall while the squadron was dispersed there. The John Gillespie Magee foundation which commissioned the memorial obtained planning permission for it in a small park nearby. They are still raising funds to complete the commission.

Details of his flying gear, especially the helmet and oxygen mask had to be meticulously researched to be correct for late 1941 as both the materials and design changed frequently.

Margaret Thatcher. Pages 14 and 15.

In 2003, I won a competition to sculpt the daughter of Alfred Roberts JP a distinguished Alderman and Mayor of Grantham and member of Lincoln Rotary. At the top of page 14 is

Tony Banks chairman of Mr Speakers Fine Arts Committee which commissioned the sculpture. He had diametrically opposed political views to Margaret Thatcher, but felt it was important to commemorate her with a sculpture in Members' Lobby of the house of Commons as the first female Prime minister alongside Atlee, Lloyd George and Churchill. Tony Banks had a droll sense of humour. When asked to have a draft title ready for when he was ennobled in the New year's Honours list, he asked if he could be styled 'Lord Banks of the Thames'. He was told 'no'. He became Baron Stratford instead.

Baroness Thatcher was very helpful; posing off as herself delivering a major speech in the River room of the House of lords. To make her lips look as if she was talking, I asked her to say some words beginning with the letter 'B' to get just the right shape of her lips. Without hesitation she said 'Britain... Britain... great Britain'. When I thanked her for her contribution to the sculpture she said 'Well, it was in my own best interest'. She unveiled the sculpture herself on the 24th of February 2007, with Tony Blair the only absent major politician. The unveiling cloth got stuck on her pointing finger and Michael Martin, the Speaker had to pull it off. Afterwards she said 'The house has done me a great honour, I might have preferred iron but bronze will do, and it won't rust...'

Finally, HM The Queen, pages 20, 21

However hard one tries to anticipate problems; things can still go wrong. Here is probably the worst

example from my entire career.

In 2016, I was commissioned to do this bust of the Queen to celebrate her 5 yearly or 'quinquennial' visit to the Honourable Artillery company of which she has been Captain General since before her Coronation. She had unveiled another of my sculptures in 2012 so I had met her before and had a good idea of how she looked. I chose to sculpt her as she was in her seventies, rather than in her nineties. As the deadline was too tight for a bronze cast, I agreed to do a bronze resin cast with the finished bronze to follow. 1,800 people had been invited to witness the unveiling on the parade ground in front of a huge marquee. A couple of hours before the unveiling I arrived at the gate. The commanding officer and a couple of visiting generals were waiting for me, looking deeply worried. I asked what had happened. 'A terrible accident' came the reply. 'A shooting accident, I asked, fearfully?'. 'No, much worse'. I followed them into the guard room where I had left the bust the evening before. It was lying on the floor where it had been pulled of its plinth by two young soldiers practicing unveiling it. They had forgotten to attach the securing screws first, as instructed. It looked like a very large, but broken easter egg; cracked all round and a 6" long hole in one side from the eyebrow down to the mouth.

Some of the broken pieces were missing. 'Is there anything you can do' they asked-anxiously. 'Ring the palace and warn them that there may be a change of plan'. I said. 'I will do my best'. I put on my apron, opened my toolbox and called for the Regimental Sergeant Major. I gave him a list of things to find in the next fifteen minutes:

I asked him to get: expanding foam, car body filler, six tubes of superglue and bronze paint. Bubble wrap and plasticene I already had with me. After gluing and strapping the two halves together I half-filled the cavity with expanding foam which was bright green. I wondered when or if, it would stop expanding. After about half an hour I pushed in the bubble wrap, got the RSM to cut bits off a chair leg, which I pushed into the cavity on top of the bubble wrap to form the foundation for the car body filler. Once this was hard, I glued on the surviving fragments of the cheek. I filled the gaps with grey plasticene from my tool kit and started painting it all with bronze paint which we had found in a nearby art shop.

But there was a problem:

Green worms of expanding foam were still coming out of her majesty's nostrils and ears. I put wads of body filler on to my fingers and held them firmly in each aperture until the worms

seemed to stop. We walked out onto the parade ground and put the sculpture in place, securing it firmly onto the vacant plinth in front of the huge crowd, who had been staring at in puzzlement for over two hours. We put the unveiling cloth on top. The Royal cortege arrived shortly after. Her Majesty, accompanied by the Commanding Officer, took hold of the gilded unveiling cord. The two young soldiers prepared to lift the cloth.

I couldn't help worrying that there would still be green worms coming out of the sculpture's nostrils.

Happily there weren't. In the presentation line afterwards, the Queen said to me, 'I hear you had a bit of a problem this morning'. 'Yes, you could call it that, your majesty' I replied. As I wandered over to the sculpture, afterwards, champagne in hand, I saw someone looking closely at the bust. 'You can't even see the cracks' said the lady who turned out to be a member of the Royal Party, Princess Michael of Kent, - obviously in on the story'. I think I may have been a bit of a hero in the Officers mess- for a day. Or so.

Thank you, Ladies and gentlemen. I can answer questions if anybody has. one