

Royal Society of Sculptors Annual Reports

First World War related excerpts

1919

In the view of the increasing grasp that your Society is obtaining in directing the character of memorials to be erected by the various authorities and the many serious points that arise in reference thereto which must be decided without delay, it is important that every member of the Society should be present at the forthcoming General Meeting. The wisdom of the decisions arrived at, at the Meeting, may enable your Council to secure for the members of the Society a very large quantity of work during the next few years.

1920

During the year, the work which has absorbed by far the greater part of your Council's time and energy has been that of propaganda, and advising public bodies and private citizens in matters of taste, and the best means of obtaining artistic designs for memorials.

With this object, in addition to adopting the means mentioned in the last Annual Report, your Council inserted advertisements in the "Times" and other newspapers from time to time, offering their gratuitous services to anyone requiring advice and assistance in that direction [...]

It was not of course to be anticipated that the applicants would do more than ask the advice of your Council as a preliminary step, nor could it be expected that the results would be immediate, but it may be reasonably assumed that in most cases the advice of your Council was acted upon to the extent that applicants got into touch with artists instead of going to trade firms, which they would have done had it not been for your Council's timely offer.

In a great many cases the funds at disposal were altogether inadequate, and it is not improbable that the local Committees concerned have postponed action pending the raising of further funds so that the negotiations with your Council may perhaps be re-opened.

The various points on which advice was sought, are too numerous to mention in detail, sometimes the question was one of site only, but whatever the enquiry was it enabled your Council to diffuse broadcast a greater knowledge of the true intent and purposes of sculpture, and a higher appreciation of the value and importance of taste in selection.

The one great lesson taught by your Council was, to go direct to the sculptor for sculpture and, if deemed necessary, to engage an Assessor to advise on taste and craftsmanship, and the Council ventures to think that their communications conveyed to large bodies of business men cannot have failed to give food for earnest thought and consideration which, though perhaps not bearing immediate fruit, will ultimately prove of the greatest benefit not only to members of your Society, but the Art which it is your Society's aim to foster and cherish.

In one case, namely Folkestone, a design had already been accepted, and in response to their offer of advice, your Council was asked to criticise it from a photograph which was

submitted. The design not being one which could be approved by a body of artists, it was abandoned by the Local Committee, who then asked your Council to organise a competition for the memorial to cost £2000, afterwards increased through the influence of your Council to £3000.

Your Council appointed your President to act as Assessor, and the local Committee not only expressed high appreciation of the design chosen (which was found to be by Mr F. V. Blundstone) but congratulated themselves on having been able to obtain your Council's advice and assistance, thereby bringing to an end a disagreement amongst the Town Authorities extending over a considerable period, and which at one time threatened the abandonment of the idea of erecting a local memorial at all.

Another competition which your Council was asked to organise, viz., that of Leominster, has not reached fruition owing to the fact that the local Committee could not see their way to sign the Conditions, to essential points of which they took exception. The correspondence having revealed certain unsatisfactory features, members are strongly urged not to enter into any competition which may be advertised in connection with that town, without first ascertaining from your Secretary whether the conditions are fair and reasonable.

This warning may indeed apply to all competitions, and your Secretary will at all times be pleased to give information, or make inquiry into the *bonâ fides* of any competition advertised, on receipt of a card from members interested.

Your Council is gratified at the gradually expanding influence of your Society, as evidenced by questions on sculpture being referred to it by such public authorities as the War Office, the High Commissioner for New Zealand, the Royal Academy, and others.

The attention of your Council having been directed to the conditions of a competition for a War Memorial at Chatham, from which it appeared that an Architect had been appointed sole Assessor, notwithstanding that sculpture was to form an important feature, a letter was addressed to the Committee pointing out the desirability of appointing a Sculptor to act as joint Assessor with the Architect. To this reply was received expressing the opinion of the Royal Engineers War Memorial Committee that "the appointment of a joint Assessor for this competition will, under the circumstances, be unnecessary."

The unsatisfactory nature of this reply clearly demonstrates the need of unremitting propaganda, until the importance of having sculpture selected and judged by sculptors is instilled into the minds of all public bodies.

1921

Your Council have continued the policy of making the aims of the Society known by circular and by advertisement in the public press, from which a great number of enquiries for advice, and information, have resulted, especially regarding proposed War Memorials.

In most cases, however, the insufficiency of funds, and the reluctance of local Committees to surrender their personal judgment to professional Assessors has proved a bar to progress, but there is every evidence that the value of the Society is getting more wildly known, and appreciated, and your Council entertain no doubt that the continuance of their

efforts to inspire confidence amongst the uninitiated will slowly but surely be rewarded by ultimate success.

The activities of your Council in the direction have been extended to the Colonies, and India, and the various High Commissioners have expressed appreciation of the Council's efforts, and have transmitted the circulars to their respective Governments.

With reference to the War Office Competition for the reverse of a medal to be presented to certain foreign subjects, your Council has pleasure in reporting that the award was made by the professional assessors to MR. C. L. J. Doman, whose design was submitted to the King, and personally approved by him. The following letter was subsequently received from the Army Council :-

"Sir, I am commanded to request that you will be good enough to convey to the President and Member of the Royal Society of British Sculptors the grateful thanks of the Army Council for the whole-hearted assistance and support rendered by them in arranging, and participating in, the Subjects who assisted British prisoners of war.

"I am to say that the design executed by Mr. C. L. J. Doman which was considered by the Selection Committee to be the best and most suitable, has been submitted to his Majesty, who has been graciously pleased to approve it.

"The Council hope that, should occasion arise, they may again be permitted to receive similar assistance from your Society.

I am, Sir,
Your obedient Servant
(Signed) B. B. CUBITT.

[....]

A completion of a War Memorial at Paisley, in which sculpture is to form an important feature, and in connection with which Sir Reginald Blomfield and Mr. D. Y. Cameron had been appointed Assessors, was brought to the notice of your Council.

As it appeared that owing to a serious illness Mr. Cameron would be unable to act, so that the onus of selection would fall entirely upon one man, your council wrote to the War Memorial Committee expressing willingness to appoint a Sculptor of standing to act as joint Assessor with Sir Reginald Blomfield, and assist him in his arduous task. Your Council regret that the Committee did not see their way to accept the offer of their good offices.

Dundee having decided to promote a Competition for a War Memorial, your Council in response to an invitation from the Dundee Committee, through your late President, appointed him to act as joint Assessor with an Architect, which appointment was duly acknowledged. Nothing further being heard for some considerable time a letter was addressed to Dundee asking how matters were progressing; after some further delay your Council were astonished to receive an intimation that on the grounds of the costliness of sculpture, it had been decided to put up something of an architectural character, and that therefore the services of a Sculptor Assessor would not be required.

From a newspaper report of the proceedings of the War Memorial Committee, which your Council had before them at the same time, it appeared that the statement made to your

Council as to the shortness of funds was hardly accurate, as it was still proposed to spend a sum identical with that mentioned in the invitation to Mr. Colton. The fact seemed to be that the Committee had altered the intention as to the character of the Memorial which they now decided should take an architectural form, owing to advice from a prominent Architect. In view of the fact that this decision was arrived at without consulting the definitely appointed Sculptor Assessor, your Council addressed a strong letter of protest to the War Memorial Committee, to which so far they received no reply.

In both the above cases and regarding the one at Chatham also your Council cannot but recognise the very strong influence of the Architect amongst all public bodies, owing no doubt to the fact that the maintenance of townships necessitates an Architect being appointed a permanent official of all Municipal Bodies. It is only natural that in cases of Memorials the Committee should turn to their Architect for preliminary advice, and his thoughts would obviously lay in the medium to which he is accustomed. Your Council have made, and continue to make strenuous efforts to counteract the influences by bringing the attention of local committees to the existence and importance of Sculpture in every case which comes to their notice.

1922

As a result of their advertised offer to help in such matters, your Council have been consulted by a number of committees who proposed erecting memorials. A competition has been lately carried through for a War Memorial at Gwersyllt, Wrexham, and Mr. Cawthra has been awarded the first place and the commission. The Vice-President acted as assessor for the Society. The Council have been in negotiation regarding another and more important competition for a memorial, which they hope may be ultimately secured by a member. They have pleasure to report that the Committee for the Welsh National War Memorial recently invited the Council to nominate a member of the Society to join their committee of selection, as the representative of sculptors. Sir Hamo Thornycroft was appointed. The competition in this case is to be by invitation of the Welsh Committee. It is gratifying that for so very important a memorial our Society should have been asked to nominate the sculptor assessor.

1923

During the year a considerable number of notices of proposed memorials and competitions for memorials have been sent to Members from the Society's office. It is hoped that Members have benefited or will later do so. It is known that one very important competition has been secured by a Member—Mr. Montford having received the commission for the sculpture upon the National Memorial to be erected in Melbourne, for which a sum of about £40,000 will be expended upon the sculpture. Mr. Montford is to be congratulated upon his deserved success after having decided to try his fortune overseas.

1924

During the year a considerable number of notices of proposed memorials have been issued to Members from the Society's office. As a result of these notices giving early intimation of proposed public memorials, it is gratifying to be able to report that the usefulness of this

official work is confirmed. During the past year—as a result—at least two Members have secured commissions. Mr. Brook Hitch has been awarded the order for the Ross Smith Memorial for Australia, and Mr. Bentham a War Memorial for Carnforth. Both these Members have thoughtfully written to express appreciation of this work of the Society, as otherwise they might never have heard of the invitations to submit designs.

1925

Regarding the Canadian War Memorial International Competition, of which the Society gave Members an early intimation. As a result of the sending in of preliminary designs, two of your Members (amongst seven in all) were selected to prepare and submit their designs in a more elaborated form.

All members were also, through the Society, invited to contribute to the Special Exhibition of War Memorial designs held at the Imperial War Museum in the Autumn.

1929

In May, your Council was requested by the President of H.M. Office of Works to nominate a representative to act as an assessor for the competition of designs for the Memorial statue to the late Field-Marshal Lord Haig. Your President was nominated for office. Your Council wish to put it on record that before they were approached the Office of Works had already arranged the competition.

Of the models submitted, the majority of the assessors placed that by Mr. Hardiman first. As the photos of this design, published in the Press, met with considerable public opposition, it is understood that Mr. Hardiman has agreed to prepare a modified design for further consideration.

[...]

The President (as the Society's nominee) reported having urged the Roads of Remembrance Committee to include amongst their chief operations, a real endeavour to get decorative British Sculpture introduced to add beauty and interest to the countryside and roads. In this he had so far succeeded that a strong Sculpture Advisory Committee had been formed to give assistance to would-be donors as to suitability of work and its site and setting.

The Roads of Remembrance Committee have taken practical steps by issuing broadcast some 8,000 copies of a carefully drawn up leaflet, one of which has been sent to each member. A good start has already been made, as Mr. Hartwell's "Goatherd's Daughter" is being acquired by the National Council for Animals Welfare, and it is proposed to erect this on an ideal site upon the village green of Chiddingfold on the border of Surrey and Sussex: possibly one of the most beautiful villages in the country. It is hoped that this movement, of great value to British sculptors, may be taken up and gradually spread.

1931

Exhibition of small works by British Sculptors, catalogue foreword

This is the first important exhibition of small works organised by the Royal Society of British Sculptors. To it most of our sculptors of repute are contributing. A previous Exhibition of Small Works by British Sculptors was organised by a few leading sculptors and, thanks to the generosity of Messrs. Waring and Gillow Ltd., held on these premises, under the patronage of Her Majesty, during the War in 1915. Owing to the large number of sales effected this resulted not only in considerable benefit to the artists exhibiting but also in a substantial sum being placed to the credit of the Fund to aid sculptors in distress owing to the War.

During periods of deep depression, and especially at the present time, the first people to suffer are those whose livelihood consists in producing works of art wherewith to beautify the houses and surroundings of others. The purchase of such works is necessarily to some extent a luxury, and consequently it is the first item of expenditure which is knocked off by those desirous of practicing economy. More especially does this consideration bear hardly on sculptors, who are obliged to spend much more than other artists on producing their works.

Immediately after the War sculptors received a large number of commissions for War Memorials of all sorts, but this "boom" in sculpture rapidly died down, and during the last ten years there has been a heavy "slump" in the art, many sculptors being obliged to abandon it and try to make a livelihood in other directions.

Yet (in spite of one or two unfortunate recent examples which have not hit the public taste) the level of excellence in British sculpture has never been so high as at present.