A Story of English Football
in Seven Statues
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www.sportingstatues.com

Why research sporting statues?
- The first sustained integration of UK sport and sculpture, and of UK sport and public art.
- The first time that sport history is widely and proactively being taken beyond the confines of archival material and artefacts to be displayed in a physical form visible to the wider public.
- A substantial investment of public and private resources.
- A modern phenomenon that has mostly appeared since the mid-90s and become embedded in the sporting and cultural landscape without warning, fanfare, over-arching coverage or scholarly investigation.

The Sporting Statues Project

Why research sporting statues?
- Potentially rich narrative for sport and society:
  - Statues tell us as much (more?) about the society that constructs them as about the subject depicted.
  - Statues can carry multiple messages, offer multiple readings that may change over time, and can be about forgetting as well as remembering.
- Assumptions to challenge:
  - Statues are ‘about commemorating the dead’ and ‘about celebrating great lives’.
  - Statues are ‘historical’.
  - The joy of collecting!

Project goals and progress
- Documenting the statuary: www.sportingstatues.com
  - Providing context for case studies, a resource for further research collaborations and a site for disseminating research. As of Sept 2013, UK sport, US baseball, world cricket completed. World football in progress, scheduled for 2014.
  - Developing theory around its existence and form:
    - Four papers published, assessing genre history, design, process, motivations, subject selection.
    - Primarily centered on UK football statuary, the most numerous single-sport statuary outside of the US.

Talk Outline
- A brief description of the UK’s football statuary
- Highlighting the typical and varying...
- motivations and facilitators for construction,
- impacts of motivation on design and subject selection,
- foregrounded narratives
- of the genre through seven statues, whose subjects form a series of archetypes that trace a history of English football.

The UK’s football statues deconstructed
- 63 figurative subject-specific statues in situ, featuring 58 different subjects, 9 more in progress. 3 stored or removed!
- Subject-specific statues in situ:
  - 68% feature Players
  - 26% Managers
  - 6% Chairmen/Founders
- 6 further in situ statues of anonymous players or fans.
- Also club emblems, statuettes and busts
- Sculptors and commissioners favour action designs (48%) above posed (30%) and triumph designs (22%).
The UK's football statues deconstructed

- 23% statues sited in city locations, 77% at stadia
- Modern phenomenon; most rapid growth in stadia located statues:

William McGregor
The Founding Father

"McGregor's missive was simple in content but immeasurable in significance… McGregor's statue stands guard on the game outside Villa Park, clutching the letter that changed the world."

Henry Winter,
The Daily Telegraph,
25th February 2013

William McGregor (1846-1911)
The Founding Father

Location: Aston Villa FC, Villa Park, Birmingham
Unveiled: 28th November, 2009
Sculptor: Susan Holland

Supporter activism and staking a claim for 'owning' history.

"The trust was looking for a supporter-driven project, and as other trusts had done statues, I suggested one."
Tony Barnes, Villa Trust

Jackie Milburn
The Local Hero

"As football on Tyneside was beset by hooligan problems on the terraces and vastly increased wage demands from players who performed poorly, the character and achievements of Wor Jackie stood out as a reminder of better times…"

Richard Holt,
Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

Jackie Milburn (1924-1988)
The Local Hero

Location: Ashington, Northumberland
Unveiled: 5th October, 1995
Sculptor: Sir John Mills

Instigated by local authority, funded by public money and appeal.

A located hero bringing identity to a town that had lost its traditional industry.

Roy Sproson
The Honest Pro'

"I have always loved the game and I have always loved the club. The satisfaction of playing the game I love for the club I love has always been enough for me."

Roy Sproson
Roy Sproson (1930-1997)

The Honest Pro

Location: Port Vale FC, Vale Park, Stoke-on-Trent
Unveiled: 17th November, 2012
Sculptor: Mike Talbot

In the current era, when the term ‘one-club man’ is almost as outmoded as goalkeepers in cloth caps or cricketer-footballers, the length of Sproson’s service would be unthinkable.”

Phil Shaw, Backpass Magazine, January 2008

Bobby Moore (1941-1993)

The National Icon


Inscription on the Bobby Moore statue

Bill Shankly (1913-1981)

The Club-building Manager

Between his appointment as Liverpool manager in December 1959 and his retirement 15 years later, he transformed a second-rate club into the finest team of the generation, winning three First Division titles, two FA Cups, a Second Division Title and a Uefa Cup. He led Liverpool like a revolutionary leader, casting his personnel not just as footballers but soldiers to his cause, and became a folk hero to the fans.”

James Corbett, The Observer, October 2009

The United Trinity

European Glory

My vivid memory is the courage they displayed at all times, always wanting to take a ball. It’s the one quality a player must always have, taking the ball. These players would always do that. That’s why they will always be remembered, for their daring and ability.”

Sir Alex Ferguson
‘The United Trinity’

European Glory

Location: Manchester United FC, Old Trafford, Manchester
Unveiled: 29th May, 2008
Sculptor: Philip Jackson

- Creative reimagining of apparent flashbulb memory scene for purposes of convenience.
- Religious overtones of title.
- Offers focal point for mass BIRGing.

Thierry Henry

The Global Celebrity Footballer

Location: Arsenal FC, Emirates Stadium, London
Unveiled: 9th December, 2011
Sculptor: MDM Ltd.

- Branding club through glamorous appearance.
- Component of ‘Arsenallisation’.
- Appeals to children and tourists, not just middle-aged fans.
- Appeals on different levels to a hierarchy of fandom.

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The honouring of these individuals reflects the varied motivations of the artistic genre…

- Branding through nostalgia – reinforcing the club-fan bond by reawakening or stimulating positive memories.
- Branding through BIRGing – overt displays of past success.
- The moral ownership and knowledge of fans.
- Branding through celebrity to a wide audience.
- Proclaiming identity and authenticity
  - in a new build stadium,
  - in a declining urban environment,
  - in a globalised game.

Further Information and Contact Details

Published Project Papers:


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