

A Story of English Football in Seven Statues

Ffion Thomas (UCLAN) and Chris Stride (University of Sheffield), Sporting Statues Project

Over the past two decades almost 50 statues of players, managers and chairmen have appeared outside English football grounds and in city centres. The Sporting Statues Project at the University of Sheffield has catalogued these monuments and the background behind them through extensive research and interviews with sculptors and project organisers. This talk analyses seven of these statues, illuminating characters who form a lineage of English football history - a founding father, local heroes, the honest pro, a World Cup winner, European champions, a club-building manager, and the modern celebrity footballer. These archetypes and sporting histories are being creatively re-imagined by clubs, fans and local authorities to enhance the sense of authenticity and identity at stadia and in cities, proclaim ownership of territory and the wider game, and market clubs as tourist destinations through the evocation of nostalgia and reflected glory. By studying the motivations for subject choice and aesthetic form behind this artistic genre, we learn as much about the current state and future of our game as we do about its history.