




A Story of English Football in Seven Statues

Ffion Thomas
 International Football Institute,
 University of Central Lancashire

Chris Stride
 University of Sheffield

The Sporting Statues Project

www.sportingstatues.com








The Sporting Statues Project

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!




The Sporting Statues Project

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

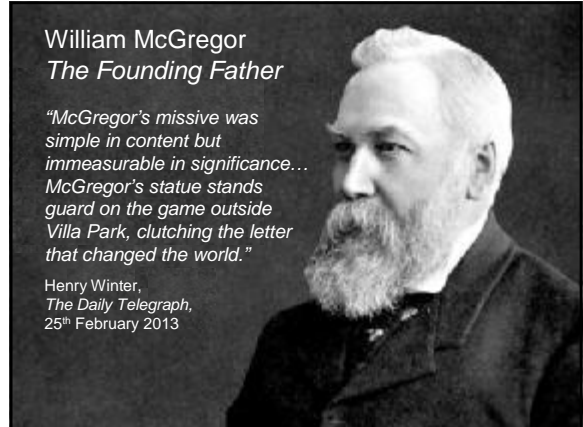
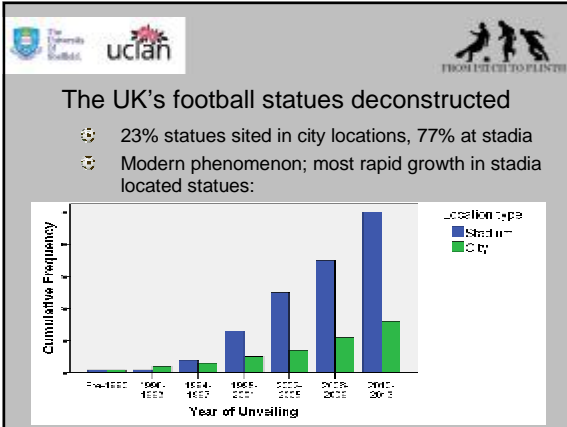
- ❖ A brief description of the UK's football statuary
- ❖ Highlighting the typical and varying...
 - ❖ motivations and facilitators for construction,
 - ❖ impacts of motivation on design and subject selection,
 - ❖ foregrounded narratives
- ...of the genre through seven statues, whose subjects form a 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%).






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

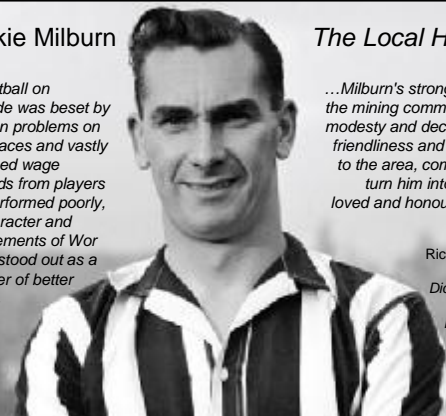


Jackie Milburn
The Local Hero

"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..."

...Milburn's strong roots in the mining community, his modesty and decency, his friendliness and devotion to the area, combined to turn him into a much loved and honoured local figure."

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.



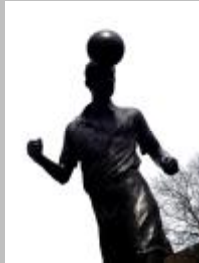



Roy Sproson (1930-1997) *The Honest Pro'*

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."

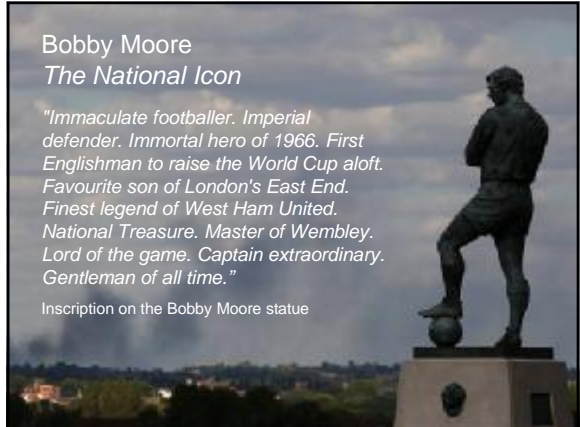
Phil Shaw, *Backpass Magazine*, January 2008



Bobby Moore *The National Icon*

"Immaculate footballer. Imperial defender. Immortal hero of 1966. First Englishman to raise the World Cup aloft. Favourite son of London's East End. Finest legend of West Ham United. National Treasure. Master of Wembley. Lord of the game. Captain extraordinary. Gentleman of all time."

Inscription on the Bobby Moore statue



Bobby Moore (1941-1993) *The National Icon*

Location: Wembley Stadium, London
Unveiled: 11th May, 2007
Sculptor: Philip Jackson

- Project organised and funded by football authorities, with a prestigious sculptor.
- Evoking nostalgia for a golden age, 1966 and all that...
- Attaching identity to the blank canvas of a new stadium.



Bill Shankly *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 its 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



Bill Shankly (1913-1981) *The Club-building Manager*

Location: Liverpool FC, Anfield, Liverpool
Unveiled: 4th December, 1997
Sculptor: Tom Murphy

- Overt depiction of success.
- Importance of 'flashbulb memory' design in evoking nostalgia and associated stories.
- Commissioned and donated by sponsors Carlsberg.





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

"If watching Henry play football is often an exercise in disbelief, then his good fortune off the pitch is no less a challenge to credibility. Lean, handsome, charismatic and inordinately gifted, he draws adoration from a fan base that is restricted to neither men nor sports fans. He is one of those rare individuals, whose wealth and success no one begrudges. Indeed, his life appears so closely to resemble a capitalist fantasy that a Renault car commercial made a capitalist fantasy out of his life."


Andrew Anthony, *The Observer*, 3rd October 2004



Thierry Henry (1977-)

The Global Celebrity Footballer

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





- Branding club through glamour.
- Component of 'Arsenalisation'.
- Appeals to children and tourists, not just middle-aged fans.
- Appeals on different levels to a hierarchy of fandom.

A Story of English Football in Seven Statues

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:

- Thomas, F.E. and Stride, C.B. 'The Thierry Henry statue: A Hollow Icon?' *Leisure Studies* (in press).
- Stride, C.B., Wilson, J.P. and Thomas, F.E. 'From pitch to plinth: documenting the UK's football statuary'. *Sculpture Journal* (2013).
- Stride, C.B., Wilson, J.P. and Thomas, F.E. 'Honouring heroes by branding in bronze: theorising the UK's football statuary'. *Sport In Society* (2013).
- Stride, C.B., Thomas, F.E., Wilson, J.P. and Pahigian, J. 'Modeling Stadium Statue Subject Choice in US Baseball and English Soccer'. *Journal of Quantitative Analysis in Sports* (2012).

Contact Details:
info@sportingstatues.com www.sportingstatues.com