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FROM PITCH TO PLINTH

Moving statues? The Champions Sculpture, West Ham United and Local Identity

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The Sporting Statues Project



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The Sporting Statues Project

'The monuments erected by a people... reveal who the people really are.'
Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation.*

'Memorials and statues can tell us what mattered to people. From grand men who tower above us in our towns and cities, to humble war memorials in the smallest of villages that speak of a nation's grief, to gold post boxes on suburban streets that surprise and delight.'
English Heritage, Immortalisation Exhibition, 2018

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The Sporting Statues Project

Project goals and progress

- ✿ Documenting statuary: www.sportingstatues.com
 - ✿ Statue databases for UK sport, US baseball, world cricket, and world football. Providing context for case studies, a resource for further research collaborations (contact us if interested!), a site for disseminating research – and some entertainment!
- ✿ Developing theory around existence and form:
 - ✿ Ten papers and book chapters published, collectively assessing genre history, design, process, motivations, and subject selection.

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The World's Football Statuary

- ✿ Over 500 subject-specific statues or statue groups
- ✿ Over 200 statues with anonymous subjects
- ✿ 500+ distinct subjects depicted
- ✿ 90% erected since 1990
- ✿ First women footballer statues erected in 2019!




Further information on every statue at www.sportingstatues.com

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The World's Football Statuary

Location types:



Club Stadium? National Stadium? Training Ground?
City of birth? City of club? Museum/Hall of Fame?
Gallery? Graveyard? Commercial? Significant site?

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The World's Football Statuary

- Statues seen as permanent installations – we talk of players being “immortalised”, and they are made of hard wearing materials
- Yet clubs move stadiums – so what of the statues that decorate their concourses and hinterland?
- If the statue is on the club's land and was paid for by the club we would expect it to move with the club. However not all cases are that simple...

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The Champions Statue, West Ham

- Project first suggested by local councillor in 2001
- Part of street improvement through public art at road junction near West Ham United's ground (replaced a derelict public toilet!)
- Jointly commissioned by local authority (Newham Council) and West Ham United
- Funded by public money (400K), small local donations from businesses and individuals, and the rest from West Ham United. Total approx' 750K.

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The Champions Statue, West Ham

- Statue features three West Ham United players from England's 1966 World Cup winning team – Bobby Moore, Martin Peters, Geoff Hurst
- Fourth player is Ray Wilson (Everton FC) – required to support the statue and because statue is a flashbulb memory



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The Champions Statue, West Ham

- Sculpted by Philip Jackson
- Unveiled April 2003
- 100 yards from West Ham's Upton Park ground, on busy street full of shops, so part of local community on a daily basis
- Pub opposite statue popular with fans and locals





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The Champions Statue, West Ham

Inscribed on plinth: MARTIN PETERS GEOFF HURST BOBBY MOORE CAPTAIN RAY WILSON ALAN BALL GORDON BANKS GEORGE COHEN JACK CHARLTON BOBBY CHARLTON ROGER HUNT NOBBY STILES ALF RAMSEY MANAGER

Plaque: THE CHAMPIONS. ENGLAND AND WEST HAM UNITED CAPTAIN BOBBY MOORE HOISTED ON THE SHOULDERS OF HIS TEAM MATES HOLDS ALOFT THE JULES RIMET TROPHY. THIS FAMOUS IMAGE CAPTURES ENGLAND'S MEMORABLE 4-2 VICTORY OVER WEST GERMANY IN THE 1966 WORLD CUP FINAL AT WEMBLEY STADIUM.

ENGLAND'S GOALS WERE SCORED BY WEST HAM UNITED'S MARTIN PETERS AND GEOFF HURST WHOSE HAT TRICK MADE HIM A FOOTBALL LEGEND. IT WAS A DEFINING MOMENT FOR BOTH ENGLAND AND WEST HAM UNITED. SCULPTURE BY PHILIP JACKSON. UNVEILED BY HRH THE DUKE OF YORK CVO ADC ON 28TH APRIL 2003.

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The Champions Statue, West Ham

Designed Meanings:

- Branding club though nostalgia, authenticity, reflected glory
- Branding club though national pride
- Branding local community through reflected glory? Inscription omits that Moore and Peters born locally
- Public art for environmental change




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The Champions Statue, West Ham

Accumulated meanings

- Like many statues, it became embedded within supporter ritual – a site of meeting celebration and mourning, and one that generates a collective and second hand nostalgia
- When England and West Ham fail it symbolises better times – and is a stick to beat the present with...



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The Champions Statue, West Ham

Goodbye Upton Park...

- In 2005 London awarded 2012 Olympics. Site in Stratford chosen for stadium. Political imperative for legacy and post-Games stadium use.
- Given stadium capacity, a Premier League football club always likely to be the ideal post-Games tenant, though protracted debate.



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The Champions Statue, West Ham

Goodbye Upton Park...

- In December 2012 West Ham successful in bid to be tenant (after years of legal wrangling)
- Profit from selling Upton Park site, and increased tickets sales at larger Olympic Stadium
- Stopped Spurs becoming tenants!
- Upton Park sold in 2014, last season to be 2015-2016




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The Champions Statue, West Ham

A moving statue? 2015... 2016

- West Ham planned to take The Champions statue with them to Stratford
- West Ham claimed a poll they commissioned in 2014/15 showed 87% of fans wanted the Champions statue transferred
- Supporters online poll in 2016 showed a slim 51%-49% majority for moving the statue

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The Champions Statue, West Ham

A moving statue? 2015... 2016

- For:
 - Moving on "I totally understand people wanting it to remain in the Upton Park area but for me, we have moved now and we are not going back."
 - They are our heroes "It'd give me that little feeling of pride in my stomach each time I walk past it on the way to the ground."
 - Racism "The statue means nothing to the people who live around there. It would be different if it was cricket players."



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The Champions Statue, West Ham

A moving statue? 2016... 2017

- Local residents, and their political representatives did not want the statue moved. Nor did all the fans...
- Local businesses did not want it moved
- Campaign instigated to retain statue on present site




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The Champions Statue, West Ham

A moving statue? 2016... 2017

- Against:
 - Sense of place/context: "It should stay in its rightful home, close to the ground those players played at."
 - Nostalgia and identity: "The people want a reminder of the 100 years of West Ham history that took place down the road."
 - Legal ownership: "It's not the football club's. It wasn't their idea to commission it, they paid for less than half."
 - Environmental: "lifts the cultural quality of the area"




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The Champions Statue, West Ham

A moving statue? 2016... 2017

- Increasingly so, as West Ham's move to the Olympic Stadium is seen in a negative light...
- Anger at club leaving: "That West Ham board are so greedy it beggars belief, why don't they just commission another statue?"
- "Will there be any trace of WHUFC left at Upton Park?"
- "Why? Ripping the heart and soul out of our club. Upton Park is our home and u have no interest in leaving any legacy behind"




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The Champions Statue, West Ham

A moving statue? Spring 2017...

- Local council refused to allow statue to move to Stratford
- West Ham's Vice-chairman Karen Brady claimed "We have made promises to our supporters that the statue would sit outside our new home. Your decision to keep the statue at Barking Road will result in what will be perceived as a broken promise. You should consider this as a risk... in the context of events at London Stadium in March this year"
- West Ham commissioned new statue for Olympic Stadium – fans preference was for a Champions copy!



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The Champions Statue, West Ham

What does this tale tell us?


- Statues' meanings and interpretations are fluid
- Statues are a mark of ownership of both territory and narrative. They can tell us who has control
- Statues are "hollow icons"
- Each of these issues is a strength and a weakness of sports statues in terms of their use by sports organisations

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The Champions Statue, West Ham

Statues' meanings and interpretations are fluid

- The Champions statue has become a memorial to West Ham's time at Upton Park as much as to the players depicted
- It is a constant reminder to fans of a 'better time' taken from them by the club's decision to move



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The Champions Statue, West Ham

Statues' meanings and interpretations are fluid

- For local people it is a reminder of lost trade and income – but perhaps also the negative side of matchdays.
- For local Labour politicians it is a token victory for their beliefs and the idea of 'community' in an ideological war against the naked capitalism of professional football




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The Champions Statue, West Ham

Statues are a mark of ownership of both territory and narrative

The Champions statue represents the club's heritage. Who owns that heritage?

- Fans?
- Local people?
- The Club's legal owners?



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The Champions Statue, West Ham

Statues are a mark of ownership of both territory and narrative

- Fans initially split on the statue moving, increasingly opposed
- Fans and the local community are not entirely distinct but certainly not the same




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The Champions Statue, West Ham

Statues are a mark of ownership of both territory and narrative

- Over past 50 years, many West Ham fans migrated out to Essex.
- Matchday was a symbolic pilgrimage back to family heritage, i.e. the old east end, or a heritage adopted through support of West Ham.
- They reasserted that the east end was their territory on matchday



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The Champions Statue, West Ham

Statues are a mark of ownership of both territory and narrative

- So loss of Upton Park ground is loss of a physical link to that heritage they claimed.
- Statue is a small but symbolic reminder of matchday and that they still feel ownership of the east end - a marker of territory in absence of the ground.



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The Champions Statue, West Ham

Statues are a mark of ownership of both territory and narrative


- For local community statue became part of the streetscape
- Large ethnic minority population, many intimidated or priced out of matchday experience
- However still see themselves as East-enders – local businesses contributed towards statue and wanted it to stay

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The Champions Statue, West Ham

Statues are a mark of ownership of both territory and narrative

- For club, the failure to take statue with them showed loss of ownership of not just the statue but also of 'new stadium' narrative
- Embedding heritage in new stadium an important strategy to get fans to accept it




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The Champions Statue, West Ham

Statues are a mark of ownership of both territory and narrative

- Yet fans see that heritage as theirs
- If fans do not trust the club, the club's use of heritage to engage fans can feel as if club are stealing something that is already belongs to the fans and selling it back to them



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The Champions Statue, West Ham

Statues as hollow icons

- Advantage of statue to club is that it can simultaneously tell different stories to different groups of fans: the football tourist, the new fan, the stalwart supporter, the local community
- Yet they can also hold meanings - e.g., nostalgia for an old home and a sense of authentic but parochial identity - that don't necessarily fit with a club's ambitions and official narrative


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The Champions Statue, West Ham

Statues as hollow icons

- Club, fans, community can claim their own interpretations. when a statue is in place, there is at least stability in competing narratives
- When a statue is slated to be moved, this disrupts these claims and meanings, and acts as a metaphor for wider tensions between club, fans, community



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Resources and publications:
Articles (academic and populist) and the statues database can be found at www.sportingstatues.com

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