

# A New Statue for St John's – Hew Lorimer's Seated Sacred Heart (1954)

*“If you really want to turn heads, a chapel statue by Hew Lorimer is a wonderful object. It's over 6ft tall and stands on a plinth. Lorimer (1907-1993), a renowned Scottish sculptor, had profound religious beliefs which had a lasting effect on his art and subject matter.” (‘Treasures of Bishton’ Sale at Hansons Auctions, Bishton Hall.)*

## Who was Hew Lorimer?



*Our Lady of the Isles*

Hew Lorimer (1907-93) was perhaps the pre-eminent Scottish Catholic sculptor of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most well-known for his statue of **Our Lady of the Isles** (1958), a massive granite statue of Mary and the child Jesus, sited at Rueval on **South Uist**.

He was born in Edinburgh, the second son of architect Sir Robert Lorimer. He was educated at Loretto School in Musselburgh, then at Magdalen College, Oxford University, but he left Oxford prematurely to study design and sculpture under Alexander Carrick at the Edinburgh College of Art.

After graduating in 1934, he entered an apprenticeship with the sculptor and stonemason Eric Gill.

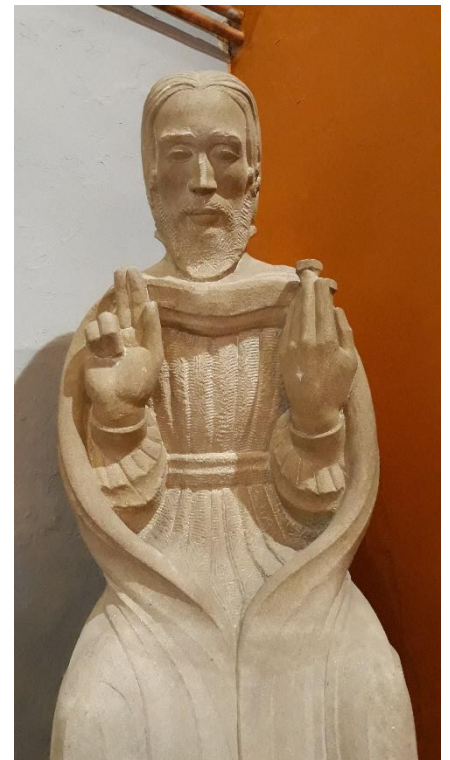
Lorimer was principally an architectural sculptor, and his profound religious beliefs had a lasting effect on his art and subject matter. After World War II, he worked on many grand sculptures, including Our Lady of

the Isles. Between 1950 and 1955 he

also sculpted the artwork adorning the facade of the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh, for which he produced a series of tall, allegorical figures, depicting history, law, medicine, music, poetry, science and theology.

The architect of the library was Reginald Fairlie, who had been apprentice to Lorimer's father Robert. Lorimer carved the figures directly into the stone rather than copying from clay models, a practice known as direct carving. Also, for Fairlie, Lorimer created a massive tympanum frieze showing St Francis returning to Assisi for The Friary in Dundee in 1959. One of Lorimer's final public commissions was the statue of Christ on the Cross for the University of Dundee Chaplaincy (1983, completed in 1986). He was awarded an OBE in 1986 for services to architecture and conservation.

Lorimer lived in Kellie Castle in Fife. The castle is owned today by the National Trust for Scotland who maintain a changing exhibition of his works plus those of his father, Robert Lorimer, and his uncle, the painter John Henry Lorimer



## Why are we being given his Statue of the Sacred Heart?

In 1949-50 Hew Lorimer carved this sculpture and in 1954 gave it as a gift to Cecil and Freda Stafford Northcote, intended for the school chapel at the preparatory school they ran, St Bede's, Bishton Hall, in Staffordshire, as a thank you for educating his sons. The school and school

chapel are no longer in existence and in 2019 the Stafford Northcote's son, Hugh, and daughter-in-law Hilary, began to look for a suitable home for the sculpture they loved. They approached Katharine Eustace, who is writing a biography of Hew Lorimer and collating his work, to ask if she knew of a suitable home.

Katharine had been at university in St Andrews in the 1970's when Fr Jock Dalrymple snr was chaplain, had kept in touch with the younger Fr Jock and been to Mass at St John's. She duly approached Fr Jock to find if the parish might be interested, since Hew Lorimer had been a close friend of Fr Jock snr. He took soundings and then confirmed that we would very much be so. Katharine duly liaised with the Stafford Northcotes and then visited St John's again to look at possible sitings – very quickly deciding on the Sacred Heart Altar.

There remained a final problem – how to transport this massive and very heavy statue north and to pay for that. Very kindly, David Connarty volunteered to organize and fund the transportation in memory of his aunt, Eileen Brown, who had recently died. And so, after much toing and froing with an art transport company, **the statue is due to arrive on the morning of Monday 7 November at St John's....**

### **An Excerpt from Katharine Eustace's forthcoming biography of Hew Lorimer**



*'The heart, a universal emblem of love, and in the Sacred Heart a particular devotion in the Catholic Church, had its twelfth century antecedence re-energised in the late seventeenth century, re-emerging popularly in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1956 Pope Pius XII was to reaffirm devotion to the Sacred Heart. The familiar iconographic form for a Sacred Heart statue is a standing figure, usually gesturing towards a heart superimposed on the torso, sometimes three dimensional, and most often in the ubiquitous plaster versions of the era, painted aflame. In Hew Lorimer's version, however, with the figure seated and its right hand raised in blessing, the iconographic type appears more a Christ in Majesty or Pantocrator, but his left hand holding up two heavy-headed nails is exceptional. While there is no obvious heart, nor is there a crown which would suggest a Christus Rex. The heart of the title is implied in Christ's enfolding cloak.'*

*There is a possible source in a work included in the exhibition English Medieval Art at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1930.*

*Had Hew Lorimer seen it, which is possible, its date of 1480 to 1500, just before the English declaration of independence from Rome would undoubtedly have appealed, as would its survival as a piece salvaged from the systematic iconoclasm that had then ensued. A haloed, seated Christ holds up a Tau-cross, and superimposed on that a cross in a roundel, itself possibly emblematic of a host. Though the figure would originally have been robed in gilded canvas, the stripped-down simplicity, passivity, and its historical rarity would have had further appeal. Once again, Hew Lorimer provides a devotional figure which does not follow accepted formulae. It is his own interpretation. He would return to the subject in the more obvious mode of a standing figure for the Church of Our Lady of the Assumption and St Medden's, Troon.'*

**NB Next week we hope to offer details of a striking Crucifixion by Peter Howson, the renowned Scottish artist, which has been offered on loan to St Mary Magdalene's.**