

Our (relatively) new statue at St John's finally receives a description sheet (available at the back of St John's and also beside the statue in the Sacred Heart Chapel)

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, Hansons Auctions, Bishton Hall, Staffordshire, 2019)

Who was Hew Lorimer?



Hew Lorimer (1907-93), a devout Catholic, and among the pre-eminent Scottish sculptors of the 20th century, is best known for *Our Lady of the Isles* (1958), the great granite statue of Mary and the child Jesus, at Rueval on South Uist.

He was born in Edinburgh, the second son of the architect Sir Robert Lorimer, and educated at Loretto School, Musselburgh. After an academic year at Magdalen College, Oxford, he returned to Edinburgh to join the architecture department at Edinburgh College of Art, transferring later to sculpture under Alexander Carrick. After graduating in 1934, he worked with the sculptor Eric Gill at Piggotts in Buckinghamshire.

Lorimer was principally an architectural sculptor who carved his figures into the stone rather than copying from clay models, a practice known as 'direct carving'. A convert to Catholicism in 1941, his profound religious beliefs had a lasting effect on his art and subject matter. He carved *The Allegories*, seven figures depicting history, law, medicine, music, poetry or literature, science and theology, for the façade of the National

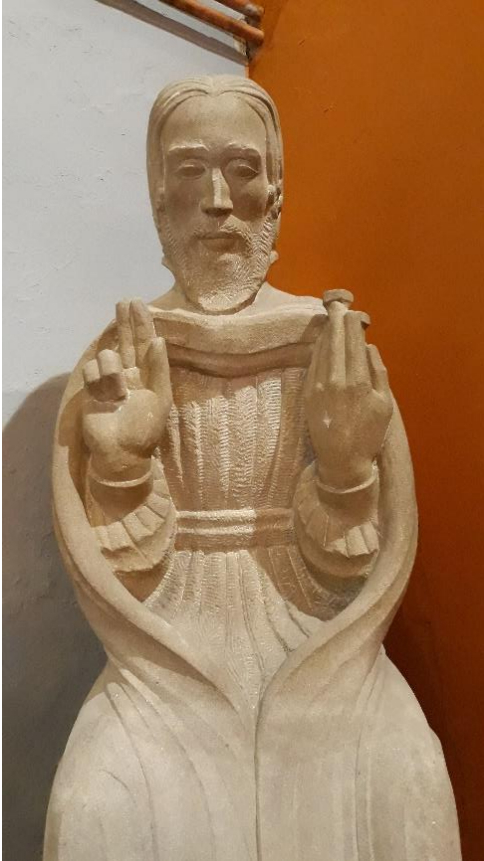
Library of Scotland, Edinburgh in 1955; and also carved the massive tympanum frieze, *St Francis's Return to Assisi at the End of his Life* (c.1959) for the Franciscan Friary, Tullideph Road, Dundee, Lorimer. One of his last commissions was *Eloi, Eloi Sabachthani* (1986), for the University Chaplaincy in Dundee.

Why have we been given his Statue of the Sacred Heart?

Hew Lorimer first exhibited his *Sacred Heart* in 1954, and subsequently gave it to Cecil and Freda Stafford Northcote for the school chapel, as a thank-you for educating his sons, Robin and Henry at St Bede's, Bishton Hall, Staffordshire. When the school closed in 2019, the devotional figure needed a suitable home. Cecil and Freda's son and daughter-in-law, Hugh and Hilary Stafford Northcote, asked Katharine Eustace, Hew Lorimer's biographer, if she knew of one. She had been at St Andrews in the 1970s when Fr Jock Dalrymple Snr was chaplain, had kept in touch with the younger Jock and attended Mass at St John's. Katharine wondered if St John's might be interested; Fr Jock took soundings, and confirmed that we would very much be so. She then liaised with the Stafford Northcotes, and visited the church to look at possible sites – very quickly recommending the Sacred Heart Chapel.

There remained a final problem – how to transport this massive and very heavy statue north. Generously, David Connarty offered to organize and fund the transport, in memory of his aunt, Eileen Brown who had recently died. The statue duly arrived at St John's on 7 November 2022, expertly transported by the C'Art Art Transport Team.

Extracts from Katharine Eustace's forthcoming biography:



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 reaffirmed 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, the title is indicated 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 is 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 a more obvious standing figure for the Church of Our Lady of the Assumption and St Meddan's, Troon.

The related plaster model now in the Studio at Kellie Castle, and most likely to have been exhibited at the RSA in 1948, has a cross boldly incised on the chest. This is not recorded in the sculptor's Log Book, but perhaps the idea germinated as Robin Lorimer first went to St Bede's School in 1947. With work on both Fasnakyle, and the National Library of Scotland coming up, it might have been set aside. In the summer of 1954, the year Henry Lorimer left St Bede's, Lorimer wrote to his friend Russell Kirk in Michigan: 'You will be amused to hear that I have a ¾ life size 'image' of the Sacred Heart in an exhibition of Religious Art, being held during the Edinburgh Festival, in the Canongate Church. I think it has "come off" rather well. I intend to show it in the Glasgow Institute in the Autumn but I fear that the faithful will not like it. It is not 'bloody' enough.'

In Darney stone, Lorimer's Sacred Heart has a highly finished, characteristically subtle surface, but with the marks of the chisel clearly articulating the folds of the robe over the torso, and the beard. Both hands carry slight inflections, darts denoting where the nails had pierced them. The traditional third nail lies like a dagger between the shod feet of the figure, while the seat, almost a misericord, is implied in elegant lines. The presentation further breaks with the traditional iconography in the cloak collar, sleeves, hair style and beard, all of which are more reminiscent of the sixteenth and seventeenth century than a quasi-medieval presentation. Perhaps a part was played in the sourcing of Lorimer's imagery by a group of seventeenth-century Netherlandish painted glass saints in St Bede's school chapel.