

Statues Review Report and Recommendations

Written by Alison Lowe

Introduction

On 10th June 2020, Cllr Judith Blake issued a statement on Black Lives Matter and statues, which strongly condemned the killing of George Floyd whilst also acknowledging the scourge of racism which still exists across the world; leading to injustice, discrimination and harm to the diverse communities of Leeds.

In the same statement, referring to the recent toppling of Edward Colston’s statue in Bristol, Cllr Blake said **“We also understand the anguish caused by statues of some historical figures. There will therefore be a city wide review of statues in Leeds to understand their history and context, as well as to ensure our city’s rich multi-cultural history is appropriately celebrated and represented and also to identify any gaps that exist. It is important the review works closely with communities and cultural partners from across the city. We are delighted to announce that Alderwoman Alison Lowe has agreed to lead the review and her vast experience in this area is very much welcome”**.

The day before on 9th June, the statue of Queen Victoria on Woodhouse Moor was vandalised with graffiti and the words “educate”, “colonise” and “slave owner” were sprayed over the statue. A petition to remove Sir Robert Peel from Woodhouse Moor, also began to circulate.

The Local Government Association announced a review of statues and developed [an advice note](#) for Labour-led authorities, which recommended “community dialogue” as the best way to hear all sides of the debate with an objective group of people – preferably academics and historians – to undertake the work.

The Reference Group

In line with the LGA recommendations, the work of the review has been overseen by a reference group of highly regarded academics and historians and has also included the Leeds Civic Trust, who are currently reviewing their blue plaque scheme. Membership of the reference group is as follows:

Dr Simon Morgan - Leeds Beckett University

Dr Emily Zobel Marshall – Leeds Beckett University

Dr Stephen Basdeo – Leeds Beckett University and Richmond University

James Rhodes – Leeds Historian

Martin Hamilton – Leeds Civic Trust

Jane Bhojroo – Yorkshire Sculpture International

Alison Lowe – Historian and Leeds Honorary Alderwoman

Cluny Macpherson formally supported the group alongside Elizabeth Appleby, Sarah Priestley and Sam Pollard.

Joe Williams, local historian: <https://heritagecornerleeds.wixsite.com/heritage-corner> was also consulted as part of the review. His comments about the architectural frieze and 18 Park Row were taken into account and are dealt with in our recommendations below.

Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference were agreed with Cllr Judith Blake, as initiator of the review, and a copy of the full document is attached at appendix one. The purpose of the review was agreed as follows:

- Review how individuals have been celebrated through statues in a diverse, proud modern city such as Leeds.
- Review mechanisms for the interpretation and understanding of the city's statues
- Review all statues and representations of individuals in the public realm in Leeds, including consideration of their siting.
- Consult broadly with a range of individuals and organisations on the above
- Prepare a report with recommendations for any future actions

These ToR were accepted by the inaugural meeting of the Statues Reference Group on 2nd July 2020.

Overview

The toppling of the statue of Edward Colston in Bristol has amplified concerns nationally about figurative statues which honour individuals with direct links to slavery. In the context of the debate about racism this has also expanded from slavery to interrogate colonialism more broadly. In Leeds the focus was on the statues of Queen Victoria and Sir Robert Peel (although focus on the latter has been moderated to a certain extent after it was clarified that some of the initial complaints about his alleged pro-slavery association actually related to his father with whom he shared a name).

As the reader will know, Leeds civic statuary is broadly Victorian and is mostly of white men reflecting the dominant social structures and attitudes of the time they were erected (often by public subscription).

For instance, in addition to 'Victoria' herself there are very few representations of women – limited to eight half-naked 'nymphs' on City Square, one member of a family group playing boules on Greek Street, 'Minerva' outside the entrance to Trinity on Briggate and Henry Moore's 'Reclining Woman: Elbow' outside Leeds Art Gallery.



Reclining Woman: Elbow by Henry Moore

Public Art as a whole in Leeds is arguably quite poor in general although more recently has been improved by a plethora of brightly coloured 2-D murals across the city centre in particular. Unlike other cities Leeds does not have iconic public art which can immediately locate the visitor as being in Leeds. Perhaps the Black Prince in City Square partly fulfils this function – although it was generally low profile until it was disrupted by the adding of a yellow jersey to it for the Tour de France!

Clearly statues, public art and public design symbolise and contribute to an understanding of the values and history of a place for residents and visitors alike. However these are sometimes in conflict with contemporary values. Arrive in City Square and the impression is arguably the opposite of one the city wants to give of a diverse, modern, democratic Leeds looking to the future. Instead there is a soldier on a horse (with no known links to Leeds), busts of 4 successful men from the 19th century and the topless nymphs. Diversity and inclusion is not visible. Only the recently installed 'Legs Walking' by Kenneth Armitage breaks up the narrative. Whether or not this should change - and how - has been a big part of the review.



Legs Walking by Kenneth Armitage

Slavery links

The current statutory of Leeds research (to date) has not identified any individuals who were central to the slave trade - even if many were the beneficiaries of hereditary wealth and colonialism more broadly. This is due at least partly because Leeds is not a port and did not rely on, or benefit substantially from, either sugar or cotton industries (with the notable exception of Harewood House). Sir Robert Peel was nevertheless listed on the www.toppletheracists.org website indicating locations of and a message to 'Take down statues and monuments in the UK that celebrate slavery and racism', which was countered by a change.org petition set up in response to the review.

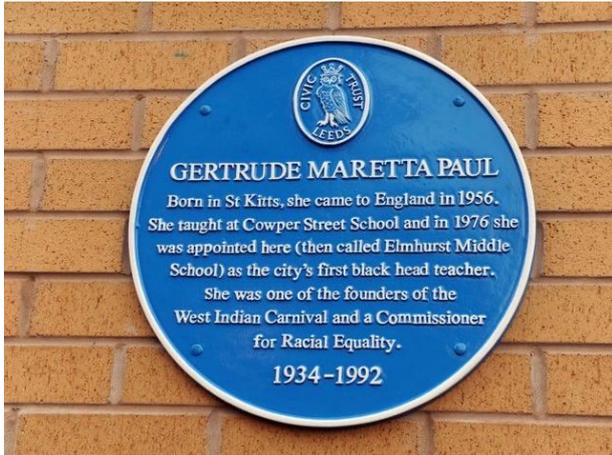
From our research, the only other work to have direct issues in relation to potential slavery is [This architectural frieze](#) on 18 Park Row (Former West Riding Union Building). It is not a Council building and is in private ownership and is a frieze rather than a statue. The frieze includes 'an African lifting a bale....' which is considered degrading of black people and is also thought to celebrate Leeds's colonial past.

The building at 18 Park Row was an original branch of the West Riding Union Banking Company which merged with the Bank of Liverpool and Martins in 1928. The original Bank of Liverpool had previously absorbed Heywood's Bank, founded by brothers Arthur and Benjamin Heywood in 1773. The Heywood brothers, having been left a fortune by their father, established themselves as Africa merchants, engaging in at least 125 slaving voyages. While the original Martins Bank is not known to have any direct links with the slave trade, banks were inextricably linked to the trade in eighteenth-century Liverpool, supplying the credit essential to a risky business which offered relatively long-term returns.

How else Leeds honours individuals

Of course statues are only one way in which individuals are honoured by the city. Leeds also honours people through the Freeman (sic) of the City such as Nelson Mandela (who also has a garden in his name) and Dame Fanny Waterman and the Leeds Award which has been bestowed on local "heroes" such as Arthur France, co-founder of the Leeds West Indian Carnival. Individuals' names are immortalised through the naming of buildings (by the owners) and streets.

There is a council policy on street naming [HERE](#) – and it is useful to note that any proposed street name change requires the consent of every property owner on the street. There has not been a formal review of either street or building names in terms of diversity or for any specific links with slavery. The origin of the 'Leopolds' in Chapeltown has been questioned, but helpfully, they were not named after King Leopold II of Belgium whose rule of the Democratic Republic of Congo is thought to have led to the murder of around 10 million Africans. The 'Lascelles' in Harehills may be linked to the Harewood family which was built on the profits of slavery, although these street names have not been raised publically as far as the reference group is aware.



Leeds Civic Trust Blue plaque in Chapeltown

The Leeds Civic Trust honours individuals through its Blue Plaques scheme. The Blue Plaques scheme recently celebrated its 30th anniversary. Following the publication of the Trust's five year strategy which emphasises “untold stories” and the Trust becoming more representative, and informed by the Black Lives Matter movement and the death of George Floyd, the scheme is now being reviewed (this includes a review of existing plaques and the process and criteria followed for the identification of new plaques)

Leeds's sporting stars, Nicola Adams and Alistair Brownlee, have been honoured with gold post boxes whilst Billy Bremner is immortalized at Elland Road football club.



Nicola Adams' & Alistair Brownlee's gold post boxes

Current activity in Leeds

The issues raised by the current protests are not new and the city has ongoing programmes looking to address both the issues of statues specifically, and of colonialism and slavery more broadly. Of particular note are the following:

1. A proposal from the David Oluwale Memorial Association for a landmark sculpture and garden to be situated in Aire Park which remembers the life of David Oluwale (subject to development and funding).
2. About three years ago Rachel Reeves MP and Councillor Blake raised the issue of representation of women in statuary in the city. Working alongside Leeds Arts University this led to a sculptural competition which was won by artist Pippa Hale with her work 'Ribbons'. What is great about this work is that it allows us to honour not one, but potentially hundreds of women. Details on this project is here: <https://pippahale.com/portfolio/ribbons/> there is still a funding gap for this project but the organisers are optimistic it can be fabricated and erected some time in 2021. It will be sited between the Leeds Playhouse and the new Leeds City College building.



Ribbons by Pippa Hale

The Review

At its first meeting on 2nd July 2020, the Reference Group reviewed the Leeds figurative statues inventory which forms part of the consultation pack (see below) along with a background document which had been drafted by Cluny Macpherson and his team. Some changes and additions to the list were suggested, and accepted.

After review of the inventory it was agreed that none of the statues listed met the standard of an “Edward Colston” and the Reference Group could see no value in recommending removal of any of the statuary at this stage, subject to feedback from the consultation process taking place and any new information emerging from this wider consultation.

It was agreed that the Council needed to expand the references to the Empire and colonialism within the background document and to point out those pieces that could be considered potentially controversial i.e. Sir Robert Peel, Queen Victoria, Arthur Wellesley (First Duke of Wellington), in that context.

Drs Simon Morgan and Stephen Basdeo agreed to re-write the scripts currently describing Queen Victoria, Sir Robert Peel, the Duke of Wellington and Edward, the Black Prince and their role and relationship to Leeds and to provide a strong counter narrative to what the city was presently telling through its icons. This is an exemplar of one approach that can be taken to improve the interpretation of our statuary – similar work could be done with others and included in interpretation boards, online or in other forms.

There was a strong feeling that the existing statues over-celebrated Empire, Christianity and 'great' white men. The group recognised that there was an opportunity to balance out the positive and challenging aspects of the characters whilst not over celebrating or congratulating Leeds and its role in empire building - although it was stated that British history is World history and the Leeds we know is a result of that - but rather to recognise that the City's success was indebted to those who had suffered to create its wealth and prosperity.

It was also suggested that some of the statues were figures who had no direct connection with Leeds at all and this imbalance should be addressed.

Consultation

The form of the consultation was discussed along with the questions that should be asked, see the link for the consultation pack and questions asked. <https://www.leeds.gov.uk/your-council/consultations-and-feedback/statues-review>

It was felt that the questions, as well as asking about the current statues and how people felt about them, should also focus on how we celebrate future contributions; considering what are the qualities and values we want to memorialize as well as where are the gaps and the opportunities.

Promotion of the consultation was discussed and it was agreed to ask the Yorkshire Evening Post to host on their website, Leeds Live, the Leeds Library, the Thoresby Society, James Rhodes' various social media platforms, Black lives Matter, Black Voices Matter and all Leeds media outlets. A press statement would also be written by the Chair to launch the consultation. The Civic Trust also promoted the consultation via Martin Hamilton's webinar 'Statues, Sculpture and Ornamentation: A Virtual Tour Around Leeds City Centre' – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jlJY17nM6to&feature=youtu.be>

As part of the consultation, the Chair also spoke to members of BLM and BVM and did a Vlog for the BLM Facebook and other social media. An agreement to extend the submission deadline was approved for both groups and a range of additional support was put into place to allow feedback in a range of different and more accessible formats, including recorded Zoom meetings, texts and messages via social media.

A long list of organisations who should be consulted was also compiled by Culture and Sport and these organisations were asked to encourage responses to the consultation.

Cllr Andrew Carter (Conservative Group Leader), Cllr Stewart Golton (Liberal Democrat Group Leader), Cllr David Blackburn (Green Group Leader) and Cllr Mark Dobson (Garforth and Swillington Independent Group Leader) were also consulted by the Chair, as part of this process.

Outcome

The consultation ended on 10th August and 813 responses were received. 41 responses were not included either because they were not relevant or were duplicate responses which meant that 772 emails were analysed.

Additionally, all 772 emails were then categorised into broader themes, based on the comments made and, in total, there were 1262 references to specific themes. The analysis of the consultation responses is attached at appendix 3, and is summarised below.

Overarching theme	Count	As %	Sub Theme	Sub Theme %	Count	% of total
Against removal or review	692	55%	It's part of our history	52%	362	29%
			Pandering to BLM/protesters	29%	199	16%
			Leave them alone (not specific)	10%	66	5%
			Waste of LCC money	7%	49	4%
			Retain a specific statue	2%	16	1%
Suggestions for future statues/installations/art	425	34%	More diverse statues required	33%	139	11%
			Specific person mentioned	24%	102	8%
			General feedback	22%	95	8%
			Need plaques/explain the history	21%	89	7%
Support removal or review as a whole	123	10%	Generally support the review	65%	80	6%
			Remove specific statue	35%	43	3%
Contains abuse/hate	22	2%	Contains abuse/insults/hate	2%	22	2%
TOTALS	1262	100%			1262	100%

The Reference Group considered the analysis report and accompanying excel spreadsheet containing all the responses and concluded:

- There appeared to be no ground swell of anger towards Queen Victoria and Peel statues and only 10% of respondents supported removal or whole-scale review.
- Responses were diverse and generally sensible, though it was clear some responders had missed the point of the review.
- Although small in number, the prevalence of some hate speech in the public consultation was disappointing, but also re-emphasises that racism is not a problem limited to history.

- The sentence sentiment analysis found a 44% positive score with only 21% negative.
- A broad spread of people/groups to potentially commemorate was suggested.
- There was a cross over from all respondents (both for and against removal/review) in the use of language and words such as “city”, “history”, “people”, “art”, “public” and “women”.
- Respondents felt some of the existing statue plaques told a wrong or inadequate story.
- There appeared to be a lack of knowledge as to who had already been commemorated such as Nicola Adams, Beryl Burton, Arthur France and others.

Recommendations

1. To recognise that the consultation did not highlight a majority desire to remove any of the existing statues in Leeds.
2. There was a consensus that the current descriptions of the statues (via public-facing plaques) needed an accessible modern refresh to give fuller historical context to be completed by July 2021. The Reference Group offers the versions it developed for the consultation as useful starting points.
3. To address the lack of knowledge of who is already commemorated - and where - across the city by engaging Leeds Beckett students (via their Public History Project module) and the Leeds Civic Trust to map sites and communicate this as part of Leeds tourism strategy and the use of QR codes.
4. To honour those whose lives were blighted by slavery and in recognition of Leeds’s active role in the anti-slavery movement by commemorating the Abolition of Slavery Act on Yorkshire Day 2021. Part of the reason for celebrating Yorkshire Day on 1st August each year is to mark Yorkshire MP William Wilberforce’s role in abolition, but we must also consider the opportunity of including African narratives through <https://heritagecornerleeds.wixsite.com/heritage-corner/>
5. To liaise with the owners of 18 Park Row to request they consider erecting a plaque on the building outlining the history of the building as a former bank with links to the slave trade and the context of the frieze and its degradation of a black man.
6. To consider the opportunities presented by the redevelopment of City Square and in particular the Leeds 2023 Festival’s curating of the square for that year to celebrate inclusion and diversity.
7. To work with the region’s cultural and artistic partners to offer the space for temporary art installations before and after 2023.
8. To commission works of art that commemorate the varied contributions of the diverse citizens of Leeds, including (list not exhaustive) the Irish, Jewish, Asian and African/Caribbean communities of the city, LGBT+ communities and women (see also recommendation 9).
9. To support the current independent proposals for a sculpture garden for the memory of David Oluwale and Pippa Hale’s feminist sculpture commission “Ribbons”
10. To request a formal response to this review and its recommendations.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following for their invaluable contribution to this review:

Dr Simon Morgan

Dr Emily Zobel Marshall

Dr Stephen Basdeo

James Rhodes

Martin Hamilton

Jane Bhoyroo

Joe Williams