

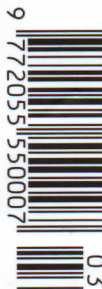
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Stand out in Style this Spring with Si Belle
Name officially revealed for Blackpool's first ever museum
Poulton's Best Kept Secret - The Feathered Nest
Sian Reeves in By The Waters of Liverpool
The Sound Of Music
Our Top Ten Follies and Public Sculptures

Our Top Ten Follies and Public Sculptures

By Andrew Harris



The Monton Lighthouse on the Bridgewater Canal near Eccles



White Nancy which overlooks Bollington in Cheshire

The North West needs schools, hospitals, factories and offices and many other functional buildings. But without outdoor art and functionless buildings only created for their appearance and interest our communities would be soulless – defined as lacking character and individuality. We need them.

A Folly is defined as an ornamental building with no practical purpose – especially a tower or mock-Gothic ruin in a large garden or park.’ There are 153 such buildings or structures in our region. Many – especially in Cheshire – are obelisks but most have an interesting story to tell. Your columnist set out, with help, to select the top ten follies but public sculptures fulfil a similar role although it is difficult to compare follies with such sculptures – like trying to compare apples and oranges - so we have taken the top five of each. We are rich in follies, which we take first, but poor in such public sculptures which follow.

THE 5TH BEST FOLLY is the Monton Lighthouse on the Bridgewater Canal where the B5231 is underneath the M602 in Manchester 28. In the best tradition of follies, canal boater ‘Barnacle’ Phil Austin acquired a small plot of land next to the canal but couldn’t think what to do with it. He decided to build an entirely unnecessary lighthouse – they normally alert seagoing ships of hazards - which is 14 feet in diameter and 40 feet high. It certainly looks the part but canal boats are only a few feet from land and must go no faster than 4 mph! Phil’s only explanation is that building the Monton ‘Lighthouse’ seemed a good idea at the time! It is now, however, a local feature and visitor attraction.

THE 4TH BEST FOLLY is ‘White Nancy’ – a unique structure on the top of a hill which overlooks the Cheshire

Mow Cop Castle near Mow Cop on the border of Cheshire and Staffordshire



The Jubilee or Darwen Tower which overlooks Darwen near Blackburn



town of Bollington. It was built by John Gaskell of North End Farm in 1817 to commemorate the victory at the Battle of Waterloo. White Nancy is constructed in rendered and painted sandstone rubble, is 18 feet high and surrounded by stone paving inscribed with the points of the compass. At various times it has been embellished to mark occasions – a Jubilee crown in 2012, a gold medal, wreath and number 29 to celebrate GB Olympic victories, as a remembrance day poppy and even as a Christmas pudding. In 2015 it was painted to mark the 200th Anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo – with silhouettes of soldiers of that time - and in 2017 it was used to express solidarity with the people of Manchester after the Manchester Arena bombing. There is no better way to mark these and other occasions.

THE 3RD BEST FOLLY is Mow Cop Castle on the border of Cheshire and Staffordshire. It is said to be the most famous folly in Cheshire if not in all England. It is a small round machicolated tower with an attached arch. It is the original Sham ruin which has been copied nearly everywhere. It was built in 1754 for Randle Baker Wilbraham as

an eyecatcher for the nearby Rode Hall. In 1807 it became a place of pilgrimage for Methodism – and in 1812 when Primitive Methodism was founded. On the centenary of the first assembly more than 70,000 people climbed the hill to Mow Cop Castle. This folly is now managed by the National Trust and is on the route of the Cheshire Gritstone Trail.

“A Folly is defined as an ornamental building with no practical purpose”

THE 2ND BEST FOLLY is the Jubilee Tower which is better known as the Darwen Tower. It was completed in 1898 to commemorate Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee and local people winning the right to access the moor. Darwen Hill is 1,220 feet above sea level and dominates the town – now part of Blackburn. The original wood-

en turret was blown away by a gale in 1947. Although replaced in 1971 it was not deemed to be safe until 2002 but the dome of the tower was again blown away in 2010. A replacement powder-coated stainless steel dome costing £35,000 was made by the WEC Group of Darwen and lifted into place by a helicopter in 2012 since when walkers can climb the 85 foot tower via an internal staircase and – on a clear day – see Morecambe Bay, Blackpool Tower, the Isle of Man, North Wales, parts of Yorkshire and much of Lancashire from the top. The Darwen Tower is prominent and has much history.

THE BEST FOLLY is the Ashton Memorial in Lancaster’s Williamson Park. It was built by the millionaire industrialist Lord Ashton in memory of his second wife Jessy. It was constructed between 1907 and 1909 and cost £87,000 which is nearly £9 million in today’s money. It is a true but sad love story. The Ashton Memorial has amazing views of Lancaster and Morecambe Bay and has been described as ‘England’s Grandest Folly’ and the ‘Taj Mahal of the North.’ The building is 150 feet high, designed by John Belcher, has a copper-clad roof and

The Statue of Eric Morecambe on Morecambe Promenade

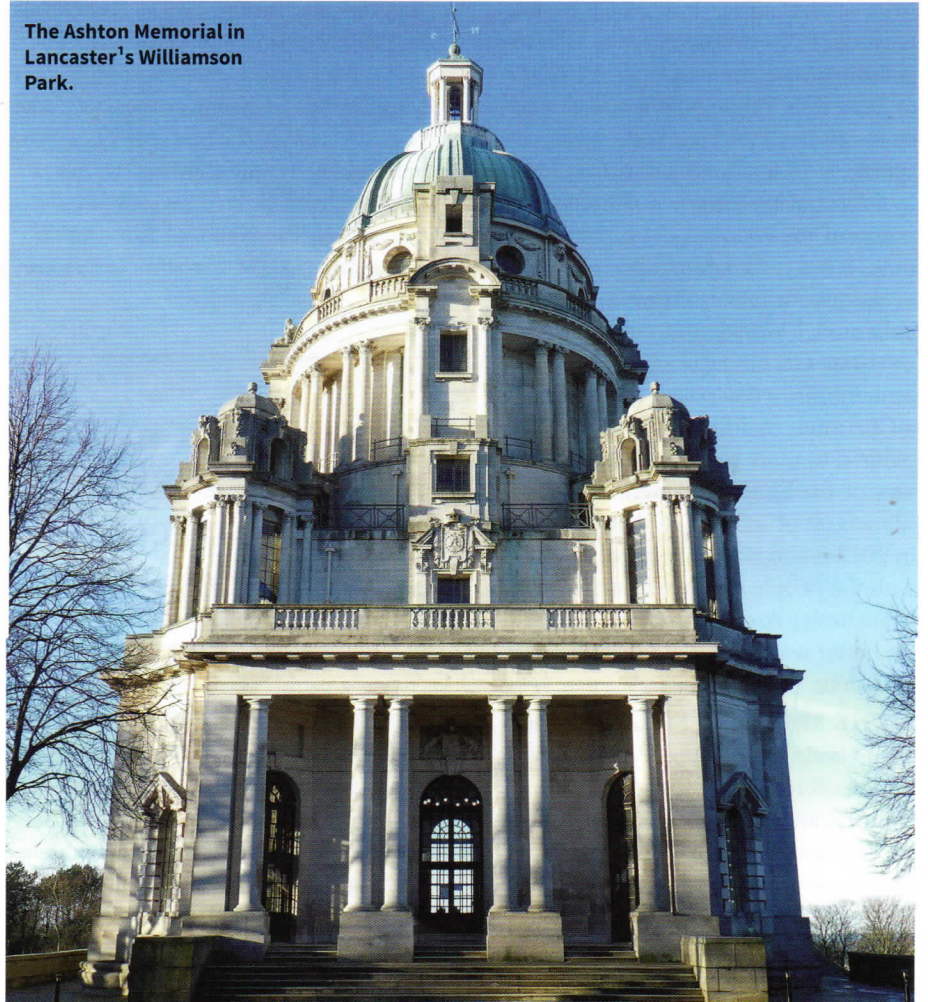


is built in Portland Stone and hard-wearing granite steps from Cornwall. Although built more than 100 years ago the structure is surprisingly modern – with stonework which is not loadbearing hung from a steel frame. The interior is stunning with paintings by George Murray depicting art, commerce and history with a floor of red, black and white marble. Although intended as a memorial without any other function, the Ashton Memorial now hosts exhibitions, concerts and weddings. There is a nearby Butterfly House.

This is where follies and public sculptures part company as we cannot compare them and have to judge them separately. The latter are in a wonderful category of their own.

THE 5TH BEST SCULPTURE is the 'Face of Wigan.' It is an exciting example of public art that has taken pride of place in Wigan Town Centre and is destined to become an iconic image of the borough. Sculptor Rick Kirby explains "The sculptured portrait is intended to represent not a single celebrity but all the inhabitants of the area – the very people of Wigan. These are the people who make the place what it is today and have the power to deter-

The Ashton Memorial in Lancaster's Williamson Park.



The Splash at the Preston North End stadium. Picture by Sonia Bashir Photography



mine what will be the future.” The people of Wigan and visitors were consulted about the ‘Face of Wigan’ in 2007 when they were asked to give their thoughts about a number of designs. At the end of the process the ‘Face of Wigan’ which we see today was the clear winner. The plan is to place the 18 foot sculpture in different locations around the borough in the coming years. A Council spokesman said “Public art can be controversial and be seen as a bit of an easy target but it can also play a huge role in enhancing the environment and improving our public open spaces. This piece was chosen by the people of Wigan and we are delighted with their choice.”

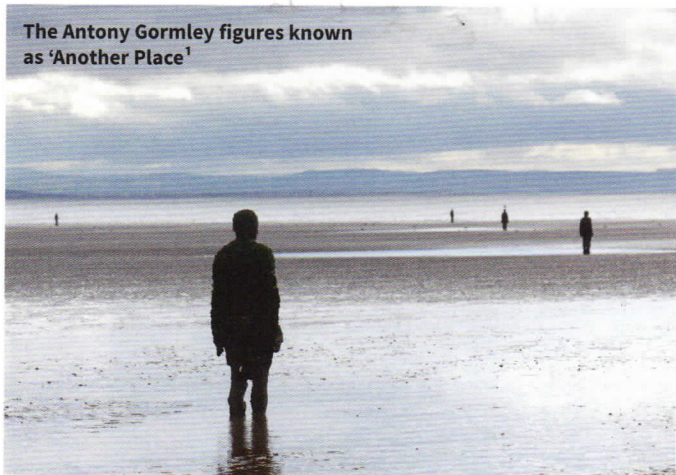
THE 4TH BEST SCULPTURE is the bronze statue of Eric Morecambe in his classic Bring Me Sunshine pose. It is located on the promenade of Eric’s home town which he – born John Eric Bartholomew in 1926 – took as his stage name. In partnership with Ernie Wise from 1941 until his death aged just 58 in 1984, Eric Morecambe was one of our country’s most popular comedians. In a BBC poll in 2002 he was named one of the 100 Greatest Britons. Eric Morecambe was larger than life – and so is his statue. Eric was 5 feet 10 inches tall but his statue is 6 feet 6 inches! The area around the statue features many of his catchphrases and the names of every guest that appeared on the Morecambe and Wise Show. The statue was designed by Graham Young and bronze seagulls by Shona Kinloch are perched on the surrounding rocks.

THE 3RD BEST SCULPTURE is the ‘Splash’ outside the Preston North End Football Club stadium in Deepdale, Preston. It was inspired by the 1956 Sports Photograph of the Year – by John Horton - which showed Tom Finney of Preston North End defeating two Chelsea defenders at the waterlogged ground at Stamford Bridge that August. It was created by Preston sculptor Peter Hodgkinson and unveiled by the footballer (Sir Tom Finney since 1998) on the 31st July 2004. Tom Finney died aged 91 in 2014 but will remain a legend because of 433 appearances over 14 years for his only club – Preston NE – and 76 appearances

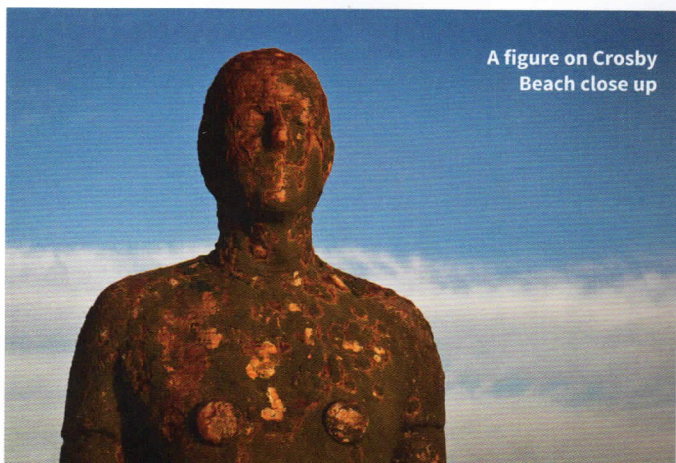


The Face of Wigan

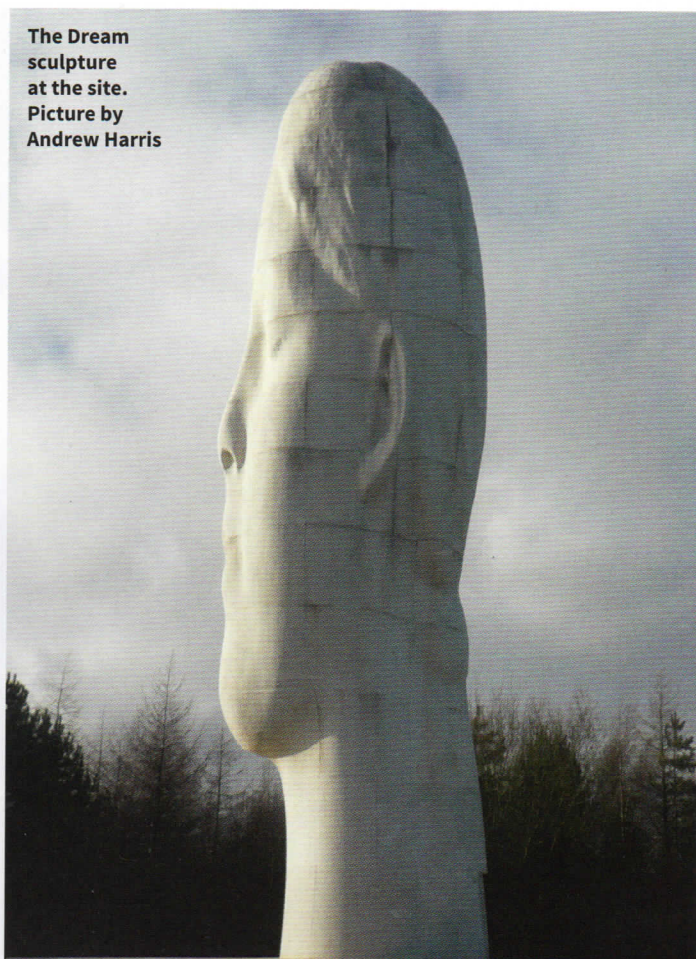
The Antony Gormley figures known as 'Another Place'¹



A figure on Crosby Beach close up



The Dream sculpture at the site. Picture by Andrew Harris



for the English first team. Playing as outside right and centre forward he scored 187 goals for Preston and 30 for England. Above all he will be remembered as a true gentleman who did not hesitate to provide generous support to all those who needed it. Your columnist asked him again and again to help desperate causes and he always did. This sculpture is his memorial and it does him proud.

THE 2ND BEST SCULPTURE is known as 'Another Place' by (now) Sir Anthony Gormley. It consists of up to 100 cast iron figures facing out to sea from Crosby Beach in Merseyside. After being exhibited elsewhere it was displayed at Crosby Beach in July 2005. Despite being daring and controversial Sefton Council decided in 2007 that they should be permanent. Each figure is modelled on the artist's naked body and they are displayed over 2 miles from Waterloo to Blundellsands. Tides submerge and reveal the figures. They have proved controversial as they impede some watersports and some tourists – attracted by the figures – can be caught out and endangered by the incoming tide. On the other hand art lovers and local businesses lobbied for the statues to remain – and Gormley

argued that the location was ideal. For less lofty reasons, Sefton Council declared that 'Another Place' had 'aroused national and international public and media support and that the Iron Men had placed Crosby and Sefton firmly in the spotlight and the benefits should be felt for years to come.' 'Another Place' had been accepted as their place.

THE BEST SCULPTURE is the 'Dream' in St Helens which overlooks the M62 from the site of the former Sutton Manor colliery which closed in 1991. It is an elongated white structure which is modelled on the head and neck of a 9-year old girl with closed eyes and dreaming. It was created by the Catalan sculptor Jaume Plensa whose client was St Helens Council and local residents including 15 former miners from the former colliery. They rejected the more obvious symbol of a huge sculpture of a miner's lamp and – to their credit - wanted something more visionary. Funding – about £2.5 million at current values – was provided by the Big Art Project in association with the Arts Council England, the Art Fund and Channel 4. The resulting 'Dream' is fifty times life size, 66 feet high, weighs 373 tonnes, has supporting piles 125 feet deep and is made from brilliant

white pre-cast concrete with Spanish dolomite which is the whitest of marble. It is estimated that the Dream is seen by an estimated 55 million vehicles using the M62 motorway each year. The Dream is imaginative, prominent and iconic – and the nearest thing our region has to the world-famous 'Angel of the North' in Gateshead.

Many may disagree with this selection. Other follies and public sculptures from the Peel Tower near Ramsbottom to the bust of Jimmy Armfield outside Blackpool's football stadium have great merit but the winners can claim to be unique, prominent and have strong local roots. They give our region its character and individuality.



Andrew E. Harris is grateful to Heritage Ebooks for an overview of our follies, other members of the judging panel who wish to remain anonymous and his friend Tom Lemmon who suggested this topic. The pictures are procured from Shutterstock unless otherwise attributed. Previous topics can be viewed at www.andreweharris.co.uk

The dominant view of the Dream. The best sculpture. Picture by Andrew Harris

