

Elsie Inglis charity refers to Charity Commission for advice

The charity A Statue for Elsie Inglis has come under fire in the last day or so for the U-turn it has made in the process of finding and appointing an artist.

Having set out a clear timeline along with rules about the way the applicants were to make their bids in its Call to Artists at the end of July, the charity stopped the process without warning in September. Then on Monday the appointment of the King's Sculptor in Ordinary, Alexander Stoddart, was [announced](#).

The original plan had been to invite all entries, whittle them down to three and then make an announcement of the winner who would be granted the commission in spring 2023.

In the face of much adverse comment on the charity's Facebook page (which has now been paused and no further comments are allowed there) the trustees issued this statement on Tuesday evening: "“We have read the postings on social media and sympathise with the frustration of the artists involved and have therefore sent a detailed account of the proceedings to the Office of Scottish Charities. We will not be making any further comment.”"

Read more about the background to events [here](#).

OSCR

The charity was [registered](#) with the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) on 23 May 2022 and has the following Object or purpose: “The organisation’s purposes are: To ensure the heritage and history of Dr Elsie Maud Inglis (1864 – 1917) is preserved in Edinburgh; commemorating her life and work at home and abroad, whilst educating children and visitors to the city and ensuring her legacy is remembered by future generations.”

The charity may turn to OSCR for advice, and anyone who has donated money or is otherwise aggrieved by the bidding process being abandoned, or at all worried about a charity may also report their concerns to the regulator.

In terms of the duties which a position of trust brings, a trustee must act in such a way that they are above criticism. OSCR explains that in terms of charity law someone appointed to this position has to act with “care and diligence”. In the event that any of the trustees are found to have behaved improperly then OSCR may take action against them. But in the first place the charity has been preemptive in referring the matter to OSCR.

OPEN LETTER

A flurry of objections to the cancellation of the process to find a sculptor were made openly and publicly on social media. More than 100 people have supported the Open Letter published on the charity’s [Facebook](#) page.

In the letter the artists say: “We do not support the decision of the trustees in hiring Alexander Stoddart. His consultation was sought during the ‘open for entries’ commission period, he had a financial interest and was therefore not objective.

“It is a clear conflict of interest for the board to have

sought him out during this time. He has no clear links with Elsie Inglis or feminism and is very much not in the spirit of the original brief.

“We have no confidence in the trustees’ ability to manage funds raised or their ability to further manage this project.

“No explanations or apologies have been offered. The decisions made have been behind closed doors and without public consultation or scrutiny.”

Natasha Phoenix

Artist Natasha Phoenix who had hoped to submit an entry said on Facebook that it is wrong of the charity to “abort the original process” and questions whether it amounts to discrimination on the grounds of sex that emerging artists have been blocked from making an application.

She also calls the appointment of an established male artist into question. (Stoddart is the creator of the Hume statue on the Royal Mile and the Adam Smith statue there.)

Natasha said: “While the original call to artists was not explicitly limited to women artists, there was certainly mention of encouraging “emerging artists”. Statistically, women artists tend to be underrepresented in established circles.”

Now the artist has created a new [public Facebook group DR ELSIE INGLIS STATUE FOR THE PEOPLE -we will not sit still!](#) where the discussion continues.

Her own work in preparing to make an application to win the commission has been considerable – evidenced here in the heads some of which are now to be placed in the Surgeons Hall museum.

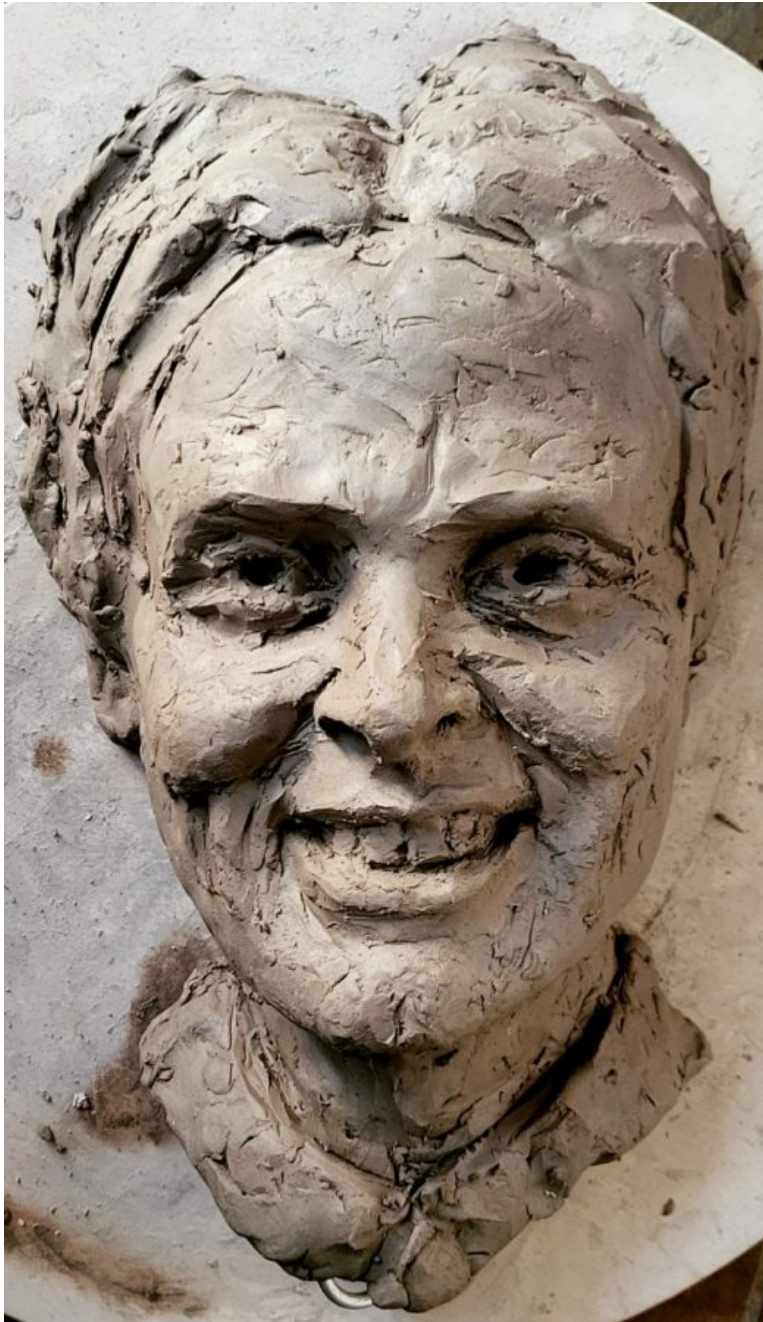


Photo courtesy of the artist



One of the many heads which Natasha Ingram-Phoenix has made during her preparation. PHOTO the artist
We have asked Mr Stoddart for comment but have not heard in reply. On his appointment he said: "I am very pleased and honoured to be asked to undertake this important task in a way befitting the renown of the subject.

“There is something of a dearth of commemorative statuary of historical figures from the last century, owing to the decline, during the postwar period, of the understanding of the noble art of sculpture – and in particular the special challenges, disciplines and matters of aesthetic etiquette inherent in the special field of monument-making. The figure of Dr. Elsie Inglis is to be the first statue of a woman on the Royal Mile. This is of great interest, no doubt.

“But I am most concerned that something distinguished arises to honour this estimable person and to preserve the seriousness of the High Street as a place of immense historical import.”

The City of Edinburgh Council declined to comment saying this was a matter for the charity. The process of setting up the charity has gradually gathered strength in the last five years with a registration achieved earlier this year.

Cllr Frank Ross, when he was Lord Provost, enabled the Lord Provost’s charity the OneCity Trust to be a conduit for gathering funds to turn the dream into reality from 2017 onwards. The importance of 2017 was that it marked 100 years after Dr Inglis died in Newcastle and a large funeral for her was held at St Giles Cathedral. At that point the campaign to erect a statue was not yet

It was Cllr Ross who lodged a motion at the council meeting of 28 October 2021 to get support from the whole council for the fundraising campaign. Councillors agreed “to give full and unequivocal support to all of these [fundraising] activities to raise funds, enabling the life and work of Dr Elsie Inglis to be commemorated in the form of a statue, to be bequeathed to the citizens of Edinburgh.” We believe Cllr Ross is one of the trustees along with Thea Laurie and Fiona Garwood, but OSCR does not maintain a list of trustees, and we have asked the charity for confirmation.

The current Lord Provost, Cllr Robert Aldridge, has also been associated with the campaign and was at the official launch of the call to artists in August at Powderhall Bronze.

Others involved in fundraising events earlier this year have included Edinburgh author Sara Sheridan who wrote the book *Where are the women?*, and the Governor of Edinburgh Castle, Major-General Alastair Bruce.

More than £60,000 has been donated or raised and the charity explained earlier this year that their earlier target of £50,000 will have to be doubled due to rising costs. The honorarium for the artist is in the region of £30,000.

Dr Elsie Inglis is best described as a pioneering doctor, setting up The Scottish Women's Hospitals during the First World War when she had famously been told to "go home and sit down". Inglis was educated at a private school in Edinburgh on the family's return from India where her father worked in the East India Company. She studied at the University of Edinburgh when it opened its medical faculty to women and set up a medical practice in the capital. She then opened a maternity hospital called The Hospice at 219 High Street, and it is outside that building that the charity hopes to site the new statue.

While the trustees await guidance from OSCR the artists have formed a cohesive group saying in the words of Dr Inglis that they "will not sit still". Their hope is to "ensure that we get a sculpture of Dr Elsie Inglis on the Royal Mile through a fair commission process and consultation with the public".

