

Objections to the design of the proposed Elsie Inglis statue

The charity, Statue for Elsie Inglis, SC051749, has applied for planning permission for a monument to be erected on the Royal Mile to commemorate Dr Elsie Inglis.

This will, if approved, be placed opposite two plaques which are high on a wall next to 219 High Street.

The site is appropriate as it is where Dr Inglis set up her hospice where she pioneered maternal care.

But the design for the new statue is causing a great deal of [comment](#). So far there have been 262 comments, 158 of which are supportive.



Natasha Phoenix, sculptor

Natasha Phoenix is a sculptor who was both annoyed and disappointed when the [previous call to artists](#) by the trustees was abandoned when they secure the services of the King's Sculptor in Ordinary, Professor Alexander Stoddart.

Design Development

Proposed Statue Description

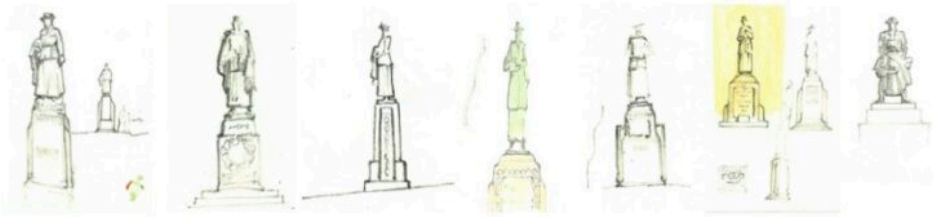
This statue is envisioned to belong in the realist tradition and is designed to form a lasting, fitting and serious monument to the most famous female medic in Scottish history, Dr. Elsie Inglis (Eliza Maud Inglis, 16th August 1864 – 25th November 1917, Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, MBChM, Serbian Order of the White Eagle (First Class), Order of Saint Sava (III Class)).

The proposed monument comprises a statue, a pedestal and a plinth. The statue and pedestal shaft will both be cast in phosphor bronze, the two joined by mechanical and welded means. The bronze assembly (of statue and pedestal shaft) will be mounted on a very low granite plinth.

The statue will be patinated in a gentle *verdigris* and the pedestal will be richly decorated with Celtic knotwork including some enamelled coloured passages evoking the characteristic idiom of architectural and sculptural adornment of the 1920's era, in which the city of Edinburgh excelled. The proposed work, positioned on the Royal Mile, will be stylistically linked to works by the sculptor Charles d'Orville Pilkington-Jackson who was responsible for much of the adornment of Lorimer's Scottish National War Memorial within Edinburgh Castle. The proposed piece depicts the subject in the uniform of her medical field service on various fronts in World War I.

The Location for the proposed monument was chosen through its proximity to the Women's Clinic "The Hospice" she opened and ran at 219 High Street. This work will appear on a stretch of pavement that commences with the Adam Smith monument further up to the west, with both figures facing east (downhill).

Development Sketches



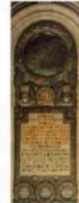
Precedents



Edin' Carol Monument - Sir George Thompson



John of Arrol - Alexander Sholtozh



Scottish National War Memorial - Pilkington-Jackson

Clay Model studies



Paddy War Memorial - Alex Menzies-Welburn



Robert the Bruce - Pilkington-Jackson



Royal Artillery Memorial - Ferguson Charles Jagger



The [design statement](#) written by Jewitt & Wilkie Architects states some of the reasoning behind the design – in particular the desire for a plinth or pedestal.

The statement reads: “The vision for the piece is to erect a lasting testimonial to a deserving subject. The proposed location on the Royal Mile is adjacent to the women’s hospital pioneered by Dr Elsie Inglis and is a prestigious location for an important historical figure, sitting in relation to other notable monuments and respecting the composition of the landmark street. The scale of the monument is determined by the nature of the subject on the one hand, and the durability of the exposed object in a public space on the other. Deciding on these matters is not an

arbitrary,
conceptual exercise, but rather a process involving long
standing
experience and knowledge of the field. Naturally, the need for
high visual
impact requires an increase in scale from the banality of
life-size to
something able to hold its own in the teaming environment of
the Royal
Mile. The pedestal is part and parcel of the process of
securing notice
for the piece. To omit a pedestal would be to demote the
subject in the
context of the other Royal Mile monuments.”

Objections

On Monday The Edinburgh Reporter met Nicholas Oddy who is
critical of the design. He is head of design history and
theory at Glasgow School of Art. He said: “If it was going to
be Alexander Stoddart and his normal ones, it would be in the
neoclassical form and Inglis, would look like a great thinker,
a great physician, a great a war hero. She’d be heroic and not
looking like somebody waiting for a bus, which is what it
looks like.”



Nicholas Oddy

Cllr Margaret Graham told us she thinks it is an “old design”. She said: “The design is very old looking in nature, and I don’t think it is going to enhance or embrace the public space. And I think we’re now at a time where public art should be evoking a lot of discussion, and it should merit that.” Cllr Graham mentioned the statue of [Mary Barbour](#) which depicts the subject “in full flow with other people in the statue”.

Natasha Ingram-Phoenix said she would portray Dr Inglis differently. She said: “I would like to have represented Elsie with a new mother with a baby to her breast under a shawl. And I would like to have represented Edinburgh as well as a city around that so I sort of have a design in mind, but I’d like to have got community feedback before putting that design out.”

Ms Ingram-Phoenix also said if she was chosen to produce the sculpture then it would have to be by a professional body.

Dr Inglis attended school in Edinburgh and then studied at the

medical school in Edinburgh which was opened by Dr Sophia Jex-Blake. By 1892 she had qualifications from the Royal Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons in Edinburgh and the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons in Glasgow.

She returned to Edinburgh in 1894 when she set up the Hospice for poor women to offer maternity care in George Square. Newer premises at 219 High Street were better resourced but this was only a stepping stone to the Elsie Inglis Memorial Maternity Hospital where so many people still living in Edinburgh were born.

