

Context

Sir Guy and the Dun Cow



Figure 1 - Current location of the relief



Figure 2 - Close up of Sir Guy

Assessment – Discussion

Submitted for consideration of inclusion on the local list, Sir Guy and the Dun Cow sculptured relief was installed in 1952 and was first mounted on the north side of Broadgate House – the first building completed as part of the redevelopment. As part of the Gibson City Centre plan, Sir Guy and Dun Cow relief was the first piece of art commissioned by Donald Gibson as part of the redevelopment (along with the Lady Godiva clock and Coventry People statue both by Trevor Tenant, the Martyrs Mosaic by Hugh Richard Hosking and many carved designs by John Skelton on the stone pillars facing Broadgate).

The artist of this piece was Alma Ramsey, an artist also commissioned by Sir Basil Spence to make the Nativity Figures for the New Cathedral. The relief was first displayed on the north side of Broadgate House on the inside wall above the stairwell, visible when proceeding down the steps from the balcony. However, the relief was removed and relocated when further redevelopment happened, and the stairs were changed to ramps. The relief currently sits mounted on the archway above the pavement between Bull Yard and Shelton Square. The relief depicts Sir Guy and the Dun Cow monster, which terrorised the inhabitants of Warwickshire, observed by Felice, the daughter of the Earl of Warwick. Sir Guy of Warwick was a 10th-century English hero who travelled the world on a series of daring adventures in order to impress the Earl of Warwick's daughter – Lady Felice – and win her hand in marriage.

Made of painted plaster of Paris, it was restored in 1984 by Gillian Irving, conservator at the Herbert Art Gallery, before being relocated to its present position.

Assessment – Criteria

Assessing the heritage asset against the Local List criteria; the piece is valued locally for the following:

Historic: The first piece of artwork commissioned by Donald Gibson as part of the city centre post-war redevelopment to help connect Coventry's citizens with the history and literature of their region.

Artistic: Alma Ramsey was one of the leading sculptors in the region and one of the very few women to be commissioned to produce a work of public art immediately after the Second World War. Sir Basil Spence also commissioned Alma Ramsey to make the Nativity Figures for the New Cathedral.

Sir Guy & Dun Cow's humorousness and faux-medieval character contributed to its popular appeal. This sculptor, along with the Martyrs Mosaic by Dick Hosking and the Godiva clock by Trevor Tennant, formed a group of public artworks designed to animate Broadgate and the entrance to the Upper Precinct. This consideration of public art was an integral element of Gibson's vision for the new city to create points of interest and humanise the new environment. In addition, he attempted to ground Coventry's citizens in the local region and its history by these means.

Community: The Sir Guy and Dun Cow sculpture, the Coventry Martyrs mosaic, the Godiva statue and the Peeping Tom clock on Broadgate House could be considered to enrich and humanise the post-war townscape of Coventry City Centre. This is particularly important in an environment which was entirely made up of new buildings.

Evidence: This relief is mounted today in the city centre.

Age: Circa 1953, sculptured and installed after Broadgate House was completed. One of the first works of public art commissioned for the re-built city centre.

Rarity: The relief sculpture defines/represents the period of the redevelopment of the Coventry City Centre and the aspirations of making more public art available.

Integrity: It is complete and was carefully restored in the 1980s at the Council's expense prior to its relocation to its present site.

Coventry's identity: The story of the Dun Cow and of Sir Guy's defence of the inhabitants of Warwickshire is a popular subject in folk art and local legend. Building this into the fabric of the new city reveals Gibson's sensitivity to local tradition and his concern for informing newcomers to the city about the history of their new home.

Conclusion

The application for local listing is valid, and therefore, the proposal may be promoted for public consultation. Further to the public consultation findings, the CCC conservation officer will finalise the recommendation for a future Cabinet Member Meeting.

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