Sitter

**Edmund Burke statue, Bristol: bronze, by James Havard Thomas, 1893/4**

In June 1892 Bristol City Council considered an offer dated 28 May from Mr (from 1893 Sir) William Henry Wills, the local tobacco magnate and arts benefactor, to present a statue of Burke (1729–97) to the city, for which he had been MP, 1774–1780 (*Western Daily Press*, 15 June). Wills proposed to fund a bronze copy, cast from the marble of 1858 by William Theed the Younger in St Stephen’s Hall, Westminster, and for it to stand by the bridge over St Augustine’s Back in the city centre to complement a marble one already in place there of Samuel Morley (1809–86), Liberal MP for Bristol, 1868–85. The latter was carved by the Bristol-born sculptor James Havard Thomas, was funded by subscription from 5000 citizens of Bristol and set up in 1887. Wills’s offer was welcomed and accepted but HM Office of Works raised practical objections (specifically the risk of staining) to moulds being taken from the Westminster marble, supported by aesthetic ones from Sir Frederick (later Lord) Leighton PRA, on the principle of replicating a marble in bronze.

With that of Morley as precedent, Wills instead approached Thomas to model an original bronze statue, subject to acceptance by the City which quickly agreed (*Bristol Times and Mirror* 24 September 1892). Thomas was by then based in Italy, on Capri, but on 8 November 1892 the *Bristol Times* reported that he had brought the ‘statuette model’ of his proposed Burke statue to Bristol where it had been ‘approved by Mr Wills’s friends’. He probably modelled the likeness on the small head-and-shoulders portrait of Burke by Reynolds, widely considered the best, which was first engraved by James Watson in 1770. He added the raised-arm pose characteristic of the sitter when speaking publicly.

On 5 March 1894, the *Western Daily Press* published an informative note by Thomas Protheroe of Bristol, then travelling in Italy, who had gone to Capri hoping to see the full-size clay maquette. He instead discovered Thomas had already taken it to the Fonderia Sommer in Naples for casting, where Protheroe caught up and saw him and his assistants well advanced in finishing work on the final bronze, which had been temporarily set up in Sommer’s yard at its intended display height. The *Illustrated London News* report of its unveiling confirmed that it had been modelled on Capri, then cast by Sommer as ‘the largest and most ambitious example of “*cire perdue*” bronze … in this country’ at the time; also that Thomas and his team had spent ‘several months’ working on the surface finish after casting.

On 26 April 1894 the *Bristol Mercury* reported that the statue would arrive from Naples on 15 July but that difficulty in obtaining the Scottish granite for the plinth would delay the proposed unveiling by Lord Rosebery (then briefly Liberal Prime Minister, 1894–95) until later in the year. Rosebery unveiled it at Bristol on 30 October (*ILN*, 3 November 1894, inc. a wood-engraved illustration).

In 1922 H.H. Martyn of Cheltenham took new moulds from it in Bristol and made a bronze copy for setting up on Massachusetts Avenue, Washington D.C. That remains where placed: Thomas’s original is still in Bristol city centre, though slightly re-sited owing to later changes there. That of Morley has been moved four times for the same reason and now stands in Lewins Mead, Bristol.

*From information supplied in Art UK discussion of the Burke statue as focus for discovering more on its founder Giorgio Sommer, May 2022.* PvdM 28.5.22