

Henry Weekes was considered, during his lifetime, to be one of the leading portrait sculptors of the nineteenth century.

He was born in Canterbury, Kent, and baptised at St Andrews Church, Canterbury, in February 1807. His parents were Capon Weekes, a bank employee, and his wife Mary Pearson. Following an education at King's School in Canterbury, his father sent him to France. On his return he was apprenticed to the distinguished sculptor, William Behnes, in London, between the years 1822 and 1827. In 1823, he enrolled as an evening student at the Royal Academy Schools, where he won a silver medal for sculpture in 1826.

When his apprenticeship finished, he became an assistant to Sir Francis Chantrey and remained with him until Chantrey's death in 1841. Sir Francis provided a small studio and accommodation for Weekes near to his own studio, which allowed Weekes to undertake independent commissions. Sir Francis Chantrey's will shows that he left £1,000 to his employee on the understanding that Weekes completed the works in progress within Chantrey's studio. This included a bronze statue of the Duke of Wellington on horseback, which is now situated outside the Royal Exchange in London. This legacy allowed Weekes to purchase Chantrey's studio.

Henry Weekes married twice, firstly to Susan Hammond, on 19 May 1829, at St George's Church, Hanover Square in London. Sadly she died in October 1846. They had six children, Julia (1830), Henry (1832), Frederick, Mary Susan (1835), Charles Edward (1839) and Herbert (1841). He remarried on 23 June 1849 to Eliza Alice Burrows, she was 21 and he was 42. They had four further children, John Ernest (1853), Laura (1857), Alice Eliza (1855) and Percy (1860).

He produced a large amount of work during his life¹, covering politicians, clergy, poets, surgeons and ambassadors, several pieces being designed for overseas venues, but perhaps the two most important pieces linked to his name were in respect of royalty. Firstly, in 1838, he was commissioned by Queen Victoria to create a sculpture of herself as a gift to her mother, Duchess of Kent (Princess Victoria of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld). This was the first sculptured portrait of Queen Victoria following her accession. Secondly, after Prince Albert died, it was decided to build a monument in his honour. Sir George Gilbert Scott designed the whole monument. The four corners below the seated figure of Prince Albert represent Manufactures, Agriculture, Commerce and Engineering. Weekes was responsible for the execution of the Manufactures corner (Figure 1). The hoardings around the memorial were removed in July 1872, but the statue of the Prince was not finished until the following year.

Although having moved away from Canterbury whilst still young, he retained links with the city. He made a sundial base (Figure 2), which used to stand in the Dane John Gardens,

¹ <http://217.204.55.158/henrymoore/works/recordlist.php?-skip=32667&-max=25>

Canterbury². The 1851 census³, shows a man called, John Pauley (together with his daughter Jane), both from Canterbury, living with and being employed by Henry Weekes.

Weekes was an Associate of the Royal Academy from 1851, and was elected a Royal Academician in 1863. In 1851, he won a gold medal from the Royal Society of Arts for an essay on the Great Exhibition. He was the Academy's professor of sculpture from 1868 until 1876. In this role Weekes delivered a series of eighteen lectures which were published posthumously as *Lectures on Art*, with a biographical introduction by his son, John Ernest Weekes. Weekes exhibited 124 works at the Royal Academy between 1828 and his death, with over a hundred being portraits.

In 1876 his health declined and he spent some time at Ramsgate, Kent. However, at the beginning of 1877 he returned to his home in London and from that time was confined to his room. He died on 28th May 1877 at the age of seventy, at 96 Buckingham Palace Road, London. He was buried at Kensal Green Cemetery, London. The probate for his will showed that he left more than £25,000. Yet despite the considerable success he enjoyed during his life, the change in sculpture style shortly after his death meant that much of his work was forgotten.

In the biography at the beginning of the *Lectures of Art* book, his son describes his father as'

'Upright and true in thought, word and deed, he expressed his opinions fearlessly and with decision on all subjects within the scope of his experience; while his simple, kindly manner, remarkable powers of conversation, and freshness of idea gave a charm to his society, rare as it was delightful. Merit alone was a sufficient pass to his friendship, securing at all times a hearty welcome to those who sought it, and ready assistance to young students struggling to tread in his footsteps'.⁴

Visitors to Canterbury can see some of Weekes' work within the city. In Canterbury Cathedral three pieces of work are on view. On the north side of the nave is a recumbent figure representing Archbishop John Bird Sumner and to the right of this memorial is a plaque to The Reverend William Welfitt, 1769-1833, who had been prebendary of the Cathedral. Above this plaque is a bust of William Welfitt. On the other side of the nave is a marble bust of Lt. Col. Sir George Gipps.

Smaller pieces can be seen in the Beaney House of Art and Knowledge. These include Luna – the figure of a lady with an owl and dog at her feet, a bust of an unidentified man and a bust of William Masters, JP and Mayor of Canterbury.

² A copy by Tim Lees replaced this base in 1999.

³ HO107/1478/254/44 at Belgrave Place, London.

⁴ <https://archive.org/stream/lecturesonart01weekgoog#page/n2/mode/2up> p.10



Figure 1 Albert Memorial, Kensington Gardens, London



Figure 2 Sun dial in Dane John Gardens

Gardeners' Chronicle 1900 page 245