



Ronald Pope (1920-1997) Modern Sculpture in the Public Eye

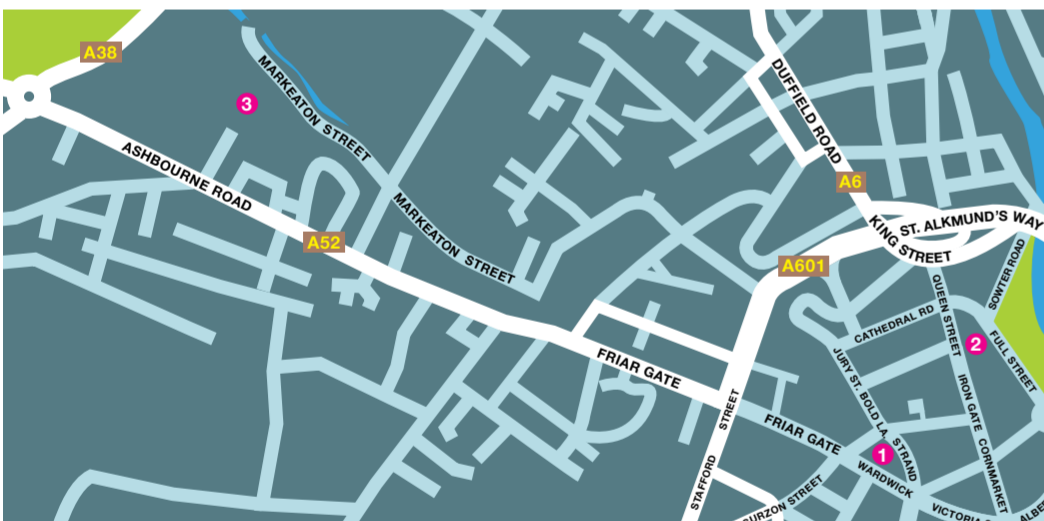
Ronald Pope: Sculptures
Derby Museum and Art Gallery

Ronald Pope: Sculptures for Derby Cathedral and other Churches
Derby Cathedral Centre

Ronald Pope: Sculptures at the University of Derby
Markeaton Street Building
University of Derby

Three of Derby's public institutions which own sculptures by Ronald Pope – the Museum and Art Gallery, the Cathedral and the University – came together in 2007 to commemorate the 10th anniversary of his death. They have each organised an exhibition of Pope's work that will be open to the public in the summer of 2008. Entrance to all of them is free.

Derby city centre



Key

1. Derby Museum & Art Gallery, the Strand, Derby
2. Derby Cathedral
3. University of Derby Markeaton Street Building

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the lenders of works by Ronald Pope to these exhibitions, especially Jane Hubbard, who also generously assisted with research and photography. We also thank Ewan Mathers for photographing Pope's works in Derbyshire churches.

Sponsored and published by the University of Derby. Edited by Robert Burstow, with the assistance of Jayne Falconer.

Designed by Dominic Dyson/typeandline
Printed by Team Impression, Leeds

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The Family of Man, 1964
Derby Museum and Art Gallery

Cover image: Detail of Crucifixion with St Catherine, 1966-7, Church of St Catherine of Siena, Richmond, Sheffield

Introduction

Jane Hubbard and Neil Pope

Our father's deep love of the countryside is inseparable from our childhood. Trees, birds, wild flowers and animals all featured in his life, and he, in turn, taught us how to identify the different species. His love of the landscape – particularly mountains and hills – influenced both his art and his relationship with his family. Walking through woods, going fishing, looking for tadpoles or newts, or building a snowman were all part of family life.

Day to day life at Knowle Hills, Ticknall, was not easy. The house had no mains services – we had oil lamps and water from the well – but we were happy children. 'Blue Orchard' at Melbourne, was a living representation of his ideals, of his need to blend his way of life with his environment. We recall the care with which shrubs and trees were chosen to provide a lovely blend of colour and shape in the garden, the upper part of the garden being cultivated and the lower half left in a semi-wild state.

He was totally dedicated and self-disciplined as far as his work was concerned, but was relaxed, caring and amusing as a father. As a teenager, Neil



remembers how his father's engineering background came to the fore with problems involving bicycles and cars.

Our mother was totally supportive of his work and lifestyle, and in her gentle, quiet way, reinforced his belief in his artistic talent, his approach to his work, his values and his individual and independent view of the world.

His intense love of work was softened by his dry, playful, often spontaneous sense of humour. He loved to play with words, numbers and shapes – when playing the recorder or the clarinet, he would describe the notes as tea leaves, and if the music became too difficult he would simply dismiss the problem by complaining that the composer had put "too many tea leaves" on the page! He eschewed modern writing aids – ball pens and the like – and wrote in large italic handwriting, in brown ink, mixed at home. And when one of us bought a house at 187 Watson Street, he immediately renamed it and addressed letters to 187 3/16 Watson Street – 0.187 being 3/16" (a throw back to his engineering days)!



Above: At Kings Lynn Arts Festival
Left: Ronald Pope in studio



Blue Orchard

Ronald Pope: Chronology

Born: Westbury-on-Severn, Gloucestershire, 16 August 1920

Lived Littleover, Derby, 1920-43

Apprenticeship as jig and tool draughtsman, Rolls-Royce Ltd, Derby, 1937-45

Amateur painter (informal oil painting advice from colleague at Rolls-Royce, John Spencer, a former miner and student of the Royal College of Art), 1939-45

Awarded Engineering Degree, Derby College of Technology, 1941

Married Joan in 1943; birth of son, Neil, and daughter, Jane, in 1950s

Made sculpture and pottery while living at Knowle Hills, near Ticknall, south Derbyshire, 1943-58

Attended life drawing & painting evening-classes, Derby School of Art, 1943-45

Studied Sculpture (main) & Painting (subsidi), Slade School of Fine Art, University of London, 1945-48 (awarded Diploma in Fine Art and Prize for Stone Carving, 1948)

Studied ceramics (part time), Woolwich Polytechnic, under Heber Mathews (exponent of 'modern studio pottery'), 1946-48

Taught Derby Teacher Training College, 1948-50, and Repton School in the 1950s

Designed and built 'Blue Orchard', single-storey family house & studio/workshop, at Melbourne, south Derbyshire, 1958

Showed in group exhibitions at Midland Group Gallery, Nottingham (1950-60), *Young Midland Artists*, Zwemmer Gallery, London (1955) and Yew Tree Cottage Gallery, Ingleby, south Derbyshire (c.1973/5)

Sculptures and pottery collected by Arnold

Ronald Pope – Derbyshire modernist

The sculptor must come out into the open, into the church and the market place, the town hall and the public park

Herbert Read (1949)¹

Ronald Pope lived in Derbyshire for most of his life, working as a professional artist for almost fifty years, from 1948 until his death in 1997. During that period he was the county's most prolific sculptor, executing numerous commissions for public buildings, including schools, colleges, hospitals, churches, law courts and a civic centre. His accomplishments were recognized outside Derbyshire, bringing commissions from surrounding counties and further afield. As well as making sculpture, Pope painted and photographed the landscape, made pottery, built furniture and wrote poetry. He also worked as a part-time tutor in sculpture and ceramics at Derby school of art (in its various institutional incarnations prior to acquiring university status) and as a Workers' Education Association tutor for Nottingham University's extra-mural department.

After studying painting at Derby School of Art during the war, Pope attended the Slade School of Fine Art in London between 1945 and 1948. Finding the painting tuition too 'academic', he transferred to the sculpture department, which had a fast growing reputation – by 1951, the percentage of students taking diplomas in sculpture had doubled since the 1930s.² Although the diploma was assessed on modelled life-studies and lettering incised into stone or wood, Pope's later sculptural carvings reveal the influence of his tutor Professor F.E. McWilliam, a prominent surrealist sculptor and close friend of Henry Moore. Another of Pope's tutors was A.H. Gerrard, who became Slade Professor of Sculpture in Pope's final year. 'Gerry' had worked alongside Moore, Jacob Epstein, and Eric Gill in the 1930s, and like them practised the modernist method of 'direct-carving'. The career-changing significance that Pope later attributed to the discovery of a lump of Hoptonwood stone at the Slade, during his first year, can only have been enhanced by knowledge that McWilliam, Gerrard and Moore had visited this quarry in his home county ten years earlier. By the time he returned to full-time living in Derbyshire in 1948, Pope was familiar with the work of the most celebrated (or infamous) modern sculptors in Britain, and their Parisian exemplars, above all Constantin Brancusi. Thereafter, he represented the human body in abstract terms, and carved wood and stone 'directly'.



Mother and Child, 1950, Derby Museum & Art Gallery

Pope's construction of metal sculptures in the early 1950s is more unexpected, especially for an artist living outside London, though he may already have been aware of Julio González's and Picasso's iron sculptures from the 1930s, if not those made by Reg Butler in the late 1940s. Cutting, beating, braising or welding copper, aluminium, steel and bronze, Pope's 'direct' use of metals was facilitated by his pre-war engineering apprenticeship at Rolls Royce in Derby, rather as David Smith's early experiments with welded-steel sculpture in 1930s America were encouraged by working at the Studebaker motor plant. Just as modernist precedent legitimized Pope's unconventional sculptural materials and methods, so it licensed his sculptural subjects. His reclining female figures, mothers and children, family groups, and interlocking male and female figures follow the lead of McWilliam, Moore and Brancusi, while his later subjects of crowds and walking figures owe a debt to Alberto Giacometti and Raymond Mason. While founded in intensely-felt personal preoccupations, it is the diversity of the treatment of his subjects that is most remarkable. A gradual change is discernable across the decades, reflecting to some extent broader trends in modern sculpture, from the linear, elongated figuration of the 1950s, through the abstraction of the 1960s, to the stylistic pluralism of the 1970s and 1980s. Whatever their form, their underlying humanism aligns them with post-war social-realist art: where Giacometti identifies the anxious isolation of the Parisian streetwalker and *flâneur*, Pope suggests familial intimacy and social cohesion.



Two Figures, c. 1978-1983 (private collection)

Despite his optimistic view of humanity, Pope was drawn early on, like many post-war modernists, to Jean-Paul Sartre's Existentialist philosophy that conceived of Man (especially the creative artist) as a solitary outsider struggling to give shape and meaning to a meaningless universe.³ Interest in Sartrean philosophy was shared by some of Pope's contemporaries at the Slade, such as Eduardo Paolozzi and William Turnbull, and invoked by critics like Herbert Read and David Sylvester to explain their sculptures. Of more lasting significance to Pope was an associated perception of the affinities between modern and 'primitive' forms of culture, a mainstay of modernist thinking that was especially promoted by Read, the critic whom Pope most respected.⁴ That Pope shared such attitudes is clear from his interest in African tribal carvings and bronzes, which, as a student, he admired in the British Museum (like Moore in the 1920s) and later collected (including two that had previously belonged to Epstein). Pope had a particular regard for primitivizing modernists like Brancusi and Paul Klee, and 'studio potters' like Bernard Leach and his own former ceramics tutor Heber Mathews. Identifying with the modernist rhetoric that rejected Western 'civilised' values, Pope embraced simpler more 'authentic' forms of culture and belief, and was drawn to Eastern and Jewish forms of mysticism.⁵ One of his

poems alludes to the 'despair' of the artist and the danger of chasing 'notoriety', proposing that 'the real reward' of art comes not from 'material gain' but from 'inner satisfaction', while another decries 'the man' (one suspects the artist) who is 'Lauded by pushers/To conceal the fact/That all this cant/Is in reality/The cover for/A hollow sham.'⁶



Pope's romanticism and love of nature, as well as his distaste for the commercialisation of art and cult of personality, were the values behind his return to rural Derbyshire. His departure from the capital brings to mind the exodus of Moore, Hepworth and Read to new homes in the country. But whereas these older modernists had established reputations and ongoing contact with the metropolis, Pope had neither. However, despite having few opportunities to exhibit in Derbyshire, Pope sold an impressive number of sculptures. An important early supporter was Arnold F. Thompson, a Nottingham-based collector of Epstein's sculptures and African carvings (from whom Pope purchased his own small collection). Another early collector was his near neighbour Lady Paget, who commissioned the *Standing Figures* of 1957-8 for King's Newton Hall, giving Pope his only opportunity to carve a pair of almost life-size, free-standing figures. Although he undertook occasional commissions for bronze portrait busts and works of applied art, such as altar furniture, lecterns, font covers, trophies, and so on, Pope's reputation and income depended mainly on his work as a public sculptor.

Following Pope's first public commission in 1952 from Derbyshire County Council's Education Committee, he fulfilled numerous commissions for free-standing sculptures, 'water sculptures', and reliefs for the exteriors or interiors of buildings devoted to civic, educational, ecclesiastical, health and business purposes. Prestigious commissions for Derby Cathedral and Derby Museum and Art Gallery enhanced his reputation in the 1960s, encouraging commissions from architectural practices in the East Midlands, and, most prestigiously,



from Sir Basil Spence, architect of the new Coventry Cathedral, who commissioned a large bronze relief for the exterior of a new church in Sheffield. Such opportunities reflect the upsurge of interest in public sculpture after the war, borne on a tide of social optimism and reform. Legislative change that enabled local authorities to spend unprecedented sums on new public buildings was accompanied by growing institutional acceptance of modern art. Influential critics like Read championed the role of the sculptor as 'essentially a public artist'.⁷ Like Read, Pope had a keen sense of the social role and responsibility of the artist. And although some of his public sculptures, like many post-war public sculptures, may be faulted for compromising expression and invention for monumentality and populism, it is disheartening to find how many have been damaged, stolen, removed or destroyed. Of nearly sixty public sculptural works installed by Pope, almost half are now lost. The attrition rate has been no better in his home county, where only about twenty of forty public works survive. If more losses are to be prevented, their institutional owners urgently need to attend to their restoration and conservation. While it is timely for the current exhibitions to bring Pope's public sculpture to popular attention, there is a fear that this might lead to further thefts.

Ronald Pope's life offers a salutary reminder of how determined and versatile the modern artist must be to live away from metropolitan sources of critical and economic support. While Pope's London-based modernist contemporaries were more likely to have critics to champion them, dealers to support them, and state-funded bodies like the Arts Council or British Council to patronise them, regional artists like Pope had to rely on the patronage of local authorities and far fewer private and corporate collectors. Yet despite occasional concessions to public function and popular taste, the quality, creativity and longevity of Ronald Pope's practice as a sculptor, makes his accomplishment a remarkable one.

Robert Burstow

Curator of *Ronald Pope: Sculptures at the University of Derby*
Regional Organiser of the Public Monuments and Sculpture Association's *National Recording Project*
Reader in History and Theory of Art, University of Derby

- 1 Read, 'Henry Moore', reprinted in *The Philosophy of Art* (London, 1964 [1951]), p. 215.
- 2 A.D.B. Sylvester, 'Contemporary Sculpture', *The Listener*, 23 August 1951, p. 295.
- 3 Pope owned a copy of Paul Foulquié's *Existentialism* (London, 1948), and refers to Sartre's *La Nausée*, and Colin Wilson's *The Outsider* in unpublished notes.
- 4 Pope owned a copy of Read's *The Grass Roots of Art* (London, 1955).
- 5 Pope owned books on Zen Buddhism and refers to Martin Buber's *The Way* (London, 1957) in unpublished notes.
- 6 *Ronald Pope: Poems*, c.2000, pp. 26 & 27.
- 7 'Henry Moore', in *The Philosophy of Art* (London, 1964 [1951]), p. 215.

Ronald Pope: Sculptures Derby Museum and Art Gallery

9-11 Cheapside
Derby DE1 1BR
Tel: 01332 716654/9
1 June – 10 August 2008
Opening times: Mon 1100-1700;
Tues-Sat 0900-1700; Sun: 1300-1600

Derby Museum and Art Gallery holds a substantial collection of Ronald Pope's sculptures and drawings. This exhibition highlights five large public works produced by Pope for four of the city's schools, Curzon Primary School, Normanton Junior School, Derby Moor Community Sports College and Derby School for the Deaf, together with a work owned by the University of Derby. We are exhibiting a small number of sculptures which relate to the public art works depicted.

Maggie Cullen (Curator)



Wall Sculpture, 1969
Normanton Junior School, Derby



Water Sculpture, 1966
Derby Moor Community Sports College,
Littleover, Derby

Ronald Pope: Sculptures at the University of Derby University of Derby

Faculty of Arts, Design & Technology
Markeaton Street
Derby DE22 3AW
Tel: 01332 593216
18 June – 10 August 2008
Opening times: Mon-Thurs 0900-1700;
Fri 0900-1630; Sat & Sun closed;

The University exhibition, on the ground and first floors of the new Markeaton Street building, is based around four of Ronald Pope's works that are owned by, or on long-term loan to, the University.

Standing Figures, 1957-8, Hadene stone
Commissioned by Lady Paget in 1957 for the forecourt of King's Newton Hall, King's Newton, near Melbourne; bequeathed to the artist upon her death in 1978; presented by the artist to Derby Lonsdale College of Higher Education in 1979 and installed outdoors at the Micklover site until 2006; moved at the University of Derby's new Markeaton Street building in May 2008.



Robert Burstow (Curator)



Far left:
Two Figures, 1952
Djanogly Art Gallery,
University of Nottingham

Left:
Wall Relief, 1967
Markeaton St Building,
University of Derby

The exhibition also includes drawings and smaller sculptures by Pope that relate to the University's works, either as preparatory works or as works that are similar, thematically, stylistically or materially. In addition, the exhibition includes photographs of the University-owned sculptures, in progress of being made or *in situ* at their former locations, and a selection of archival materials relating to the University's sculptures.

Large Cross and *Small Cross*, 1979, beaten and welded mild steel and copper
Commissioned by Derby Lonsdale College of Higher Education in 1979 for the Repton Room (used as a chapel for religious services) at the Micklover site; installed at the University of Derby's new Markeaton Street building in May 2008.

Further viewing and reading

Galleries and museums holding Ronald Pope's works

Derby Museum and Art Gallery
Djanogly Gallery, University of Nottingham
Watford Museum

Writings on Ronald Pope

Anon., 'Derbyshire Personalities: Ronald Pope', *Derbyshire Life*, vol. 30, no. 9, September 1965, p. 26
Anon., 'Derbyshire Artist: Ronald Pope – Sculptor and painter', *Derbyshire Life*, vol. 57, no. 10, October 1992, pp. 30-1
Anon [Jane Wallis?] & R. Erskine, *Ronald Pope: Sculptor and Artist, 1920-1997* (exh. leaflet), Derby Museum & Art Gallery, [1998]
T. Cavanagh & A. Yarrington, *Public Sculpture of Leicestershire and Rutland*, Liverpool University Press, 2000
M. Craven, *Derbeians of Distinction*, Derby, 1998
J. Fineran, *An Illustrated Who's Who of Artists in Derbyshire*, Derby, 2004
'MWK', 'Ronald Pope', *Orbis Magazine*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1970, pp. 23, 27 & 28

Writings on post-war British sculpture

R. Calvocoressi, 'Public Sculpture in the 1950s', in S. Nairne & N. Serota (eds), *British Sculpture in the Twentieth Century* (exh. cat.), Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 1981, pp. 134-53
M. Garlake, *New Art New World: British Art in Postwar Society*, New Haven & London, 1998
W.J. Strachan, *Open-Air Sculpture in Britain*, London, 1984



Far left:
Reclining Figure, 1949
Djanogly Art Gallery,
University of Nottingham

Left:
Duo, 1975
Djanogly Art Gallery,
University of Nottingham

Right:
Sculpture, 1981-88
Derby Museum and
Art Gallery

Far right:
Duo, 1973
(private collection)

Websites

www.ronaldpope.com
www.derby.gov.uk/museums
www.derby.ac.uk/openstudio
www.lakesidearts.org.uk
www.watfordmuseum.org.uk
www.pmsa.org.uk



Ronald Pope: Sculptures for Derby Cathedral and other Churches Derby Cathedral Centre

Sir Richard Morris Room (below Coffee Shop)
Iron Gate
Derby DE1 3GP
Coffee Shop, Tel: 01332 381685; Cathedral Office, Tel: 01332 341201
2 June – 31 July 2008
Opening times: Mon-Sat 0930-1700; Sun closed



Above: Cross, 1972

Left: *The Family*, 1957-9
Derby Cathedral

Ronald Pope received several important commissions for places of worship. The resultant works ranged from a large external crucifixion scene with figures to a small ceramic relief. The exhibition at Derby Cathedral Centre features photographs of these religious works, selected to illustrate the different media the artist used as well as a style which included abstract metal sculpture based on the theme of the cross

and three dimensional figures in bronze and wood. In particular, his beech carving, *The Family*, made for Derby Cathedral can be seen alongside a maquette for an outdoor sculpture on Hertford Civic Centre to commemorate the 1300th anniversary of the Synod of Hertford.

Geoff Robson (curator)



Standing Figures, 1957-8
Markeaton Street Building, University of Derby

Public Sculptures by Ronald Pope in England



Wall Sculpture, 1965
All Saints' Primary School, Leek



Relief Sculpture, 1956
Weaver's Close Primary School,
Earl Shilton



Mother and Child with Bird, 1958
St Augustine's School, Worksop



Crucifixion with St Catherine, 1966-7
Church of St Catherine of Siena,
Richmond, Sheffield



Sculpture for a Wall, 1955
Abington High School
Wigston Magna



Four Bishops, 1974, Hertford Civic Centre, Hertford



Wall Sculpture, 1952, Brook House Junior School, Beighton, Sheffield