

# JAMES WILLIAMS 1798-1888 PROFILE OF A VICTORIAN SCULPTOR

by CYNTHIA BROWN

THE NAME JAMES WILLIAMS may raise no flicker of recognition, but there will be scarcely a person in Suffolk whose glance, at some time, has not passed over an example of stone carving from the hands of this versatile sculptor whose commissions ranged from reredoses, fonts and gable crosses to busts of well-known local men.

The son of a small farmer in Monmouthshire (*I.J.*, 3 Feb. 1888), Williams was one of the thousands of the migrant poor who settled in Ipswich in the early 19th century. With the stimulus of the Oxford Movement there was employment for stone masons in the increasing number of church restorations and, for men with more ability, there was sculpture, which was one of the most popular branches of Victorian art. Williams catered for both requirements. After a few years in Wickham Market where he and his wife kept a 'general shop'<sup>1</sup> on The Hill, he moved to Ipswich where, from 1845, he rented a house, shop and warehouse in Queen Street.<sup>2</sup> A certain degree of determination and strength of character is evinced by his becoming teetotal and so remaining for the rest of his life (*I.J.*, 3 Feb. 1888), not an easy course in an age when beer was still the staple beverage of the average working man - and the bane of his employer!

While his wife, with the help of a niece from Wales, ran an eating house, Williams developed his artistic talents, learning the rudiments of his art on the schooling ground of church restoration. Improved methods of transport brought the possibility of the more frequent use of stone for the furnishings of East Anglian churches, although such articles as stone pulpits and marble reredoses were still a luxury and, as with all luxuries, the manufacturer had to display his wares in order to tempt the purchaser. After restoring thirteen fonts by removing the whitewash and 'amending' the carvings destroyed by the puritans, Williams invited the inspection of a font he had made, a copy of the octagonal Perpendicular example at Newbourne, the compartments filled with four angels bearing black shields alternating with the four Evangelical symbols, illustrating what could be done in imitation of medieval sculpture (*I.J.*, 11 Jan. 1845). Its destination was not specified.

Williams evidently continued to experiment with different subjects and on 29 April 1848 the Suffolk Chronicle reported:

We have had occasion once or twice to speak of some beautiful specimens of carving and modelling which have issued from the atelier of Mr Williams, stone mason and sculptor, Queen St. As an executant of the ornamental parts of church architecture he has already obtained some fame, and we trust profit too. Latterly he has exercised his talents in a far more difficult branch of his profession - that of modelling human busts from living subjects - and in this he has been equally successful. Encouraged by the success of his first effort, the bust of the late J.T. Nottidge, Mr Williams has since produced two others, the size of life, one of Mr James Ransome, and the other of Mr J.E. Sparrowe. They are now on view at his room in Queen St. and we trust all who have an interest in the fine arts, or in the development of genius, will not fail to pay them a visit. It is to be hoped that an artist of so much promise as Mr Williams may meet with the encouragement and reward his talents deserve.

There is no evidence to suggest that Williams had pupils; the 'atelier' is probably a flight of imagination on the part of the reporter. From the 1851 census for Queen Street it is known that Williams employed six men and thirteen labourers. By 1861 he had moved to Spring Road and

apparently employed no-one, which rather implies that he had become an established sculptor but engaged no assistants.

Williams modelled busts in clay;<sup>3</sup> moulds were made and plaster casts produced. Among the early models were popular national figures suitable for the houses of the growing ranks of the middle class; Sir Robert Peel, the Duke of Wellington, Lord John Russell, and as an alternative to politicians, Mrs Stowe's 'Uncle Tom'. By holding exhibitions where local artists could exhibit their work alongside that of London men, the Suffolk Fine Art Society, established in 1850, hoped to engender a general improvement in public taste (*I.J.*, 6 Apr. 1850). In their 1852 exhibition Williams exhibited three busts which were thought to be deserving of high praise; the likenesses were striking and the modelling extremely good. It was hoped that the sculptor would be rewarded with a commission to execute them in a more durable material (*I.J.*, 25 Sept. 1852). Williams donated a bust of Sir Robert Peel for an Art Union prize which was won by the Rev. H.T. Hasted (*I.J.*, 30 Oct. 1852), the chairman of the first quarterly meeting of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology.

Thanks to the Ipswich and Suffolk Freehold Land Society, Williams was able to build his own premises. The Society was formed with the aim of improving the moral integrity of the Common Man by enabling him to achieve the means to vote. With accumulated funds freehold estates were purchased, divided into plots of sufficient value to confer the right of voting, and sold to members at cost price. During its first year the Society bought 98 acres of the Cauldwell Hall Estate and divided it into 282 allotments, which were sold at £21 10s. each (Malster 1978, 23-26). Property was a major investment; mortgages could be procured from a building society or a solicitor seeking an investment for a client. It was possible for a builder to raise a mortgage on one floor of a house in order to finance the next, then assign the lease at a premium which would pay off the mortgage and give interest on the capital involved (Burnett 1980, 24). Williams saw the potential of this land which was then a mere bog, its springs feeding the lower parts of the town (*I.J.*, 3 Feb. 1888). He became one of the first 'settlers', buying plots in Freehold Road, Crabbe Street and Spring Road. By 1854 he owned seven properties<sup>4</sup> which, not being occupied by his own workmen, brought him an income independent of his profession. In 1856 he moved to Tintern Villa,<sup>5</sup> the pretty pebble-walled house amid spacious grounds adjoining Crabbe Street, which he built for himself in Spring Road. Williams received as much admiration for his courage as if he had travelled to California, the state after which the district was named. Bought by the Society in 1849, the year of the gold rush, the Cauldwell Hall land provided as rich a harvest for the early pioneers as that envisaged by those who travelled to the western world. Williams lived to see a new town grow around him and the land increase in value accordingly (*I.J.*, 3 Feb. 1888). After he died in 1888 Tintern Villa was demolished and the land re-developed. 'Tintern Terrace 1890', cut in stone on a row of terraced houses in Spring Road, is all that evokes the memory of the former speculator.

Concurrent with the busts, the ecclesiastical work was continuing. In 1857 Williams was to be found making a most ambitious stone reredos, designed by himself, for the exhibition of 'Treasures of Art' to be held at Old Trafford, Manchester. A central 'Crucifixion' was flanked by 'The Prayer in the Garden' and the 'Resurrection', with the Lord's Prayer, Commandments, etc., completing the piece.<sup>6</sup> When the Exhibition Committee informed him that 'works in stone were not anticipated' the Ipswich Journal was most indignant on his behalf; 'if this is not a mistake, it is a heartless trifling with a most industrious man' (*I.J.*, 2 May 1857). The only compensation was that it effectively advertised Williams's ability to execute a reredos. When it is recalled that there was no direct rail or water link with Manchester, and the subsequent difficulties and cost involved in the transportation of a large piece of stone for a struggling artisan, there is a lingering suspicion that Williams may have deliberately misread some small print; with an elaborate reredos commanding approximately £150, the market was worth competing for, while the photograph of the completed work, taken by Mr Leverett (*I.J.*, 20 Aug. 1857), was of value for sending to potential customers.

The following year the Rev. G.M. Paterson, rector of St Mary's, Brome, bought a reredos (Pl. IV,

Va) from Williams which, from the agreement signed on 30 August 1858, sounds very much like the ill-fated one intended for Manchester. For £150 Williams undertook 'to execute and erect the altar piece or reredos now in my showroom in Brome church' as a memorial to the rector's late father, describing it as

Adoration, Agony, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Christ's appearing to his disciples, with decalogue and creed in church text, the ends finished with Buttresses, and Inscription in Raised letters each side of communion table...

Over the next two years Williams continued to provide sculpture for the restoration of Brome church, resulting in a building which today probably contains the largest collection of his work. Besides the reredos there were the altar rail (which cost £15), sedilia (£15), font (£20),<sup>8</sup> and pulpit and desk combined (£75), as well as work on the south window and circular window. Finally there were the corbels. The ones for the porch were to be modelled on Sir Edward and Lady Caroline Kerrison, the patron and his wife, who had contributed handsomely towards the restoration. Replying on 7 December 1860 to Mr Paterson's request for an estimate, Williams's letter, with its liberal underlining, gives his method of work and an inkling of his personality.

I beg to say I think you know how difficult it is to give a price for such as the *porch corbels* because they *must be likenesses* and therefore no definite time can be given.

There is nothing shall induce me to put up corbels as likeness mere charatures (*sic*) or to fit them before they are modelled in clay from sittings by the person they are to represent, and I think you must see how unfair it would be to require a likeness without sittings.

After requesting an appointment to model busts of Sir Edward and Lady Caroline, Williams added that he thought the rest of the corbels, approximately 96, would cost about £26 *exclusive of stone*. These were to be "cheap, effective and bold" and as you *almost say* none can do it like me!!! why of course I shall do them'.<sup>9</sup>

Nineteenth-century methods of payment did not favour the craftsman. Williams was paid in instalments varying from £15 to £20 and, according to the agreement for the reredos, was to receive £75 on completion and £75 'at any time convenient to the purchaser' within the following twelve months.

Williams was evidently regarded with a certain amount of respect by the local community. He was a member of the committee (which included R.M. Phipson, Henry Ringham and firms such as Ransomes and Sims and Richard Garrett and Son) formed to help Suffolk people who wished to exhibit at the International Exhibition to be held in London in 1862 (*I.J.*, 18 May 1861). Undaunted by the disappointment of the Manchester exhibition, Williams began another stone reredos carved in relief. The subject - 'The Lord's Supper' - was popular, but after Raphael rather than the more usual Leonardo version. The main section was finished in time for the exhibition organised by the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology which was held at the Atheneum, Bury St Edmunds, in 1861, where it was exhibited together with three good busts: Sir Robert Peel, the Duke of Wellington and Lord John Russell. They were no longer in the height of fashion but demonstrated the sculptor's skill in that field. The object of this two-week event was to raise money for the purchase of the Dennis collection of British birds and the Acton collection of local antiquities, and to promote the extension of the museum at Bury.<sup>10</sup>

'The Lord's Supper' was in a prime position at the head of the room immediately facing the

entrance, where it attracted universal attention. In his opening address the president, the Hon. and Rev. Lord Arthur Hervey, singled out this showpiece for especial mention.

I would invite your special notice to the considerable effort behind me – the work of a Suffolk artist, and a portion of a larger work not yet executed, but intended to be completed for the exhibition of 1862. It is for the reredos of a church and is the work of Mr Williams of Ipswich. I think you will agree with me in according to it the meed of your praise (*Bury Free Press*, 24 Aug. 1861).

The reredos, exhibited alongside an impressive collection of works of art, brought Williams to the notice of their owners, many of whom were rectors or patrons of their parish churches.

This reredos reached its goal – the International Exhibition of 1862. The sculptured portion was exhibited in the south-east transept, just as one passed from under the east dome. Since it was exhibited in Bury St Edmunds, Williams had ‘added a good many of those trifling touches, which have been said to result in that perfection which is no trifle’ (*I.J.*, 2 Aug. 1862).

It can be no surprise to find that Williams produced a plaster bust of the man who may be considered as his best advertising agent, the President of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology, now elevated, the Venerable Archdeacon Lord Arthur Hervey. This bust was to be copied in marble (*I.J.*, 17 Sept. 1864).

Williams’s exertions were rewarded; he was commissioned to make a reredos for his previous parish, St Lawrence, Ipswich. In a considerable number of churches the reredos and east window have jostled for priority to the detriment of the latter. In this instance the reredos is subordinate. Viewed in isolation the design by Williams, who was advised by the Rector, the Rev. J.C. Aldrich, is unremarkable. Beneath the window the floriated head is interspersed with gold ballflowers; on the panel beneath, the inordinate length of blue scroll, inscribed in gold, is held by four robust angels. On either side the tablets are supported by columns which run into pinnacles terminated by finials. The lower panels contain the apocalyptic emblems of the Evangelists with pertinent inscriptions and quatrefoils with sacred monograms. The lettering on the tablets and the inscriptions were painted by Henry Day (*I.J.*, 2 Aug. 1862), the Ipswich church decorator who was the local master of this meticulous art. The reredos, sounding intricate in design, forms a simple foundation for the very fine window by Charles Gibbs. The deep blue of the scroll, stark against the white stone, balances the rich colours in the glass.

Sir William Middleton, who had been President of the Suffolk Fine Art Society, commissioned two figures in Caen stone, ‘Summer’ and ‘Winter’, for his home, Shrubland Park, which had been considerably altered to the designs of Sir Charles Barry in 1848. Sir William died before the statues were completed and they were subsequently bought by Mr P.C. Burrell to grace Stoke Park, with the addition of ‘Spring’ and ‘Autumn’ to complete the quartet (*I.J.*, 16 Apr. 1864). On the accession of Queen Victoria, Burrell had been appointed Lord Great Chamberlain, an office he held until he succeeded to the peerage on the death of his cousin, Lord Gwydyr. Stoke Park continued to be a source of patronage for Williams. A bust was commissioned by the tenant, Lieutenant General Sir Stephen Lakeman who, with his wife, the Roumanian Princess Marie de Phillipesco, brought a breath of cosmopolitan life to Ipswich during the three years that they rented the property from the fourth Lord Gwydyr. Sir Stephen had been knighted for his services in the Kaffir War when in command of the Lakeman Waterkloof Rangers. Attached to the Turkish army during the Crimean War, this veteran campaigner was depicted in the uniform undress of a Turkish Pasha, his chest covered in medals. The criticism of the finished piece was complimentary:

It only has to be seen by those to whom Sir Stephen is known, to be at once recognised. The likeness is as perfect as it is possible to obtain in marble, the expression exactly caught, and the features most carefully and exactly represented... the skilful manipulation observable in head and face, is also traceable in the shoulders (*I.J.*, 9 Sept. 1871).

The utilisation of steam power for cutting blocks of marble brought down the price of this material so favoured by sculptors (*I.J.*, 5 May 1871), probably accounting for the increasing number of marble busts. For Mrs Ogilvie of Sizewell House, Leiston, Williams had the good fortune to obtain a piece of Carrara marble without a speck in it, a rarity in a piece so large. This is his only female model recorded; the hair and drapery were attractively arranged, a plain collar fastened by a brooch completing this charming piece of work (*I.J.*, 30 Apr. 1870).

In the following year, 1871, Williams sculpted the man who must rank as the most famous personality he portrayed: Cardinal Wolsey (Pl. Vb). It occurred to the sculptor that Ipswich had no bust of her most famous son and he decided to remedy the deficiency. Sculpting a recognisable likeness of a distinguished person, with no-one knowing what he looked like, presented previously unencountered problems. There was no bust extant. The only authentic portrait he could find was a profile in the withdrawing room at the end of the Great Hall in Hampton Court Palace, so he was forced to rely on the recognisable trappings for further identification. When it was finished the newspaper reporter had equal difficulties as he freely acknowledged. He could not, as on previous occasions, say that the likeness to the sitter was perfect. He therefore compromised; the bust had an 'admirable face, with the features and expression of a man of considerable power', adding that the Cardinal was represented in his hat, and 'wears a sort of tippet, and over the shoulders lie the folds of a hood'. The head and face were proportional to a full figure 7ft 6ins in height. The finished marble bust was placed on the landing at the top of the first flight of the Town Hall stairs, where 'it admirably fills the vacant space' (*I.J.*, 7 Nov. 1871). The bust has ascended a further flight of stairs and now stands outside the Council Chamber. It may not be a great work of art, but there it remains, a testimony to a hard-working man.

The sheer size of the busts limited their sale: only a house of generous proportions could absorb a model approximately 33 inches high. Gradually the efforts of the societies formed with the aim of improving the conditions, interests and tastes of the new Ipswich men began to bear fruit, which was evidently noticed by the sculptor who, when James Allen Ransome died in 1875, made a half-sized bust of this well-loved man. Besides being the senior partner in the firm now known as Ransomes, Sims and Jefferies, he was one of the first members of the Royal Agricultural Society, bringing him friends far beyond Suffolk. This smaller bust was copied from a full size model produced several years earlier. As usual, it had 'only to be seen to be recognised', and

its size will enable the occupants of comparatively small houses to find room for the old and familiar face, while the price at which facsimiles of the bust will be sold will, if we mistake not, bring it within the range of all who have a desire to make this interesting addition to their household furniture. The relatives of the deceased gentleman very highly approve of the work, and the public may surely take this as a guarantee of the ability with which Mr Williams has handled his subject (*I.J.*, 8 May, 1875).

Advancing years and failing sight stemmed the flow. Williams died on 23 January 1888 aged 89 and was survived by his third wife. The lengthy obituary described his life and occupation, concluding:

His studio was a 'study'. At every turn you met with the faces of Suffolk and Ipswich men who occupied prominent positions and were highly esteemed in their day, and here and there were to be seen the 'mortal remains' of some of his bolder ventures, such as a marble reredos with saintly figures, mythological subjects and a good deal of other work, which showed that the late Mr Williams was a man of culture, and an ornament to and an ardent follower of his profession... By his death Suffolk loses a sculptor of great skill. He leaves a widow, whose tender care smoothed her aged partner's life as he tottered along with the burden of over four score years upon his shoulders (*I.J.*, 3 Feb. 1888).

Inevitably there are the questions 'what merit did Williams's work have?' and 'what did the Victorians really think of his sculpture?' Contemporary reporters often seemed to wield a two-edged sword – the reredos of the Last Supper: 'some of the figures are beautifully finished' (*I.J.*, 2 Aug. 1862); the bust of Mrs Ogilvie: 'as a work of art the bust is almost without a fault, and is one of Mr Williams best efforts' (*I.J.*, 30 Apr. 1870). For an assessment of his technique, ability and position amongst the other sculptors of his day I am indebted to Bernard Reynolds, the well-known Suffolk sculptor, and Benedict Read, the art historian, of the Courtauld Institute of Art, who have kindly submitted their opinions on the examples that have been found. The years have not been kind to the busts; fashion, the break-up of large homes, the merging of old established firms and two world wars have caused their identity to be forgotten and their disappearance to go unremarked. There are six anonymous plaster busts in Christchurch Mansion, but to date the only authenticated representative is 'Cardinal Wolsey'. Immovable without considerable premeditation, the majority of the ecclesiastical works remain.

James Williams should not be judged by his art alone. As an example of a man who used his talents to the utmost, attaining a position of respect in the competitive business world of Victorian Ipswich, he deserves to stand on the highest pedestal.

#### A 20TH-CENTURY SCULPTOR'S APPRAISAL

by Bernard Reynolds

We have no need to make apologies or excuses for James Williams because he came from a humble background and was thereby limited in his achievements, for in fact he was a very fine craftsman in stone. The 'weaknesses' in his work as seen from a 20th-century standpoint were those of Victorian sculpture as a whole. His portrait busts, if we take it that the Christchurch Mansion six are his, show a very thorough knowledge of facial structure which makes them appear convincing as portraits, but whether there is any trace of that vital quality which comes from a close personal response to a living sitter I somewhat doubt. Would these eminent people have sat for Williams? There seems little differentiation between personalities, rather a family likeness throughout. In these busts the artist readily adopted the convention of sloping their shoulders and rendering the robes of their office or profession so as to resemble Roman togas – a style introduced by Nollekens and Rysbrack from Holland a century earlier.

The reredos at St Lawrence Church, Ipswich, is a clever design for a rather unusually proportioned situation, and flawlessly executed, if wholly within the conventions of the time.

His finest and most ambitious work must be his reredos at Brome. With five panels and thirty-seven figures it must have been an exacting task. The fact that the modern sculptor tends to mock this kind of work is no fault of Williams. To our taste we see not so much sculpture with its attention to form, mass and shape, as illustration. The panels are Sunday school pictures of the Holy Land with its occupants carved much too small to 'read' from the distance of the congregation. Yet, examined from a range of 2ft we see that if some of the individual characters were isolated and enlarged we would appreciate them as approaching fine sculpture. We see that the figures are often grouped well,

occasionally not very convincingly posed, their heads are well characterised, their drapes beautifully executed. The muscular anatomy of the bodies of Christ and the robbers in the Crucifixion scene is exemplary. Perhaps the backgrounds with their rocks, skies complete with cirrus clouds, sun or moon, are rather flat and the middle ground is less of a compositional support to the figures than it might have been. But Williams's skills and knowledge were very considerable.

The factor which makes Victorian sculpture as a whole, whether neo-classical or neo-gothic, so boring was its very correctness. Personal quirks on the part of the sculptor were frowned upon. Nowadays we look for the personal imagination even to the extent of admiring the primitive, the quaint, the unschooled image.

Williams was striving desperately against great odds to do as well as his competitors in the field. Had he developed the confidence, the conceit even, to be derisive of this fashionable, run of the mill, approach and gone his own way he would have become a real artist. The period was one in which a few true visionaries, financially independent in most cases, could achieve great heights. But none did so in the sculpture field to my knowledge. Until our times, sculpture has been earthbound and tied to solid facts. On the other hand few living sculptors could do Williams's job – simply because they are not asked to do so, for, as the Victorians would have said, only 'practice makes perfect'.

#### A SCULPTURE HISTORIAN'S ASSESSMENT

*by Benedict Read*

Early in his career the Scottish Victorian sculptor Sir John Steell was urged by no less famous a figure than Sir Francis Chantrey to abandon his work as a sculptor in Edinburgh and to come to London to practise. Steell however stayed in Edinburgh to become the Queen's Sculptor for Scotland, a knight, and responsible for a large number of the public statues that still adorn Edinburgh (Sir Walter Scott, the Duke of Wellington, Prince Albert) as well as many busts and statues elsewhere in the country, thus demonstrating that it was not essential for a sculptor to base himself in London. And while he may not quite have achieved Steell's status, James Williams also certainly shows that a Victorian sculptor could establish himself quite satisfactorily on a local base, with the means by which he did this paralleling much that was characteristic of the sculpture world elsewhere at the time.

His starting off as a stone mason and sculptor working in the context of the rapidly expanding world of church restoration and building is a typical feature of Victorian sculpture – prominent national figures such as John Thomas (Prince Albert's favourite sculptor) and John Birnie Philip began in much the same way. One should note particularly how the work Williams did was not simply ornamental but included figure work as well. If a sculptor needed only to carve tracery or vegetal ornament, then he remained simply a carver, a craftsman. But as soon as he needed to do figure work – even if only angels or symbols of the Evangelists – he became a sculptor, and a much wider dimension could enter into his career. Williams's work at Brome perhaps illustrates this. The execution of corbels for a church is fairly humdrum business, and even the incorporation of likenesses to actual people in these could remain the province of a gifted craftsman. But Williams wanted more than this – the likenesses were not to be mere caricatures, they had to be modelled in clay from sittings by the person they were to represent. With the reredos too, this was not simply a design of local impact, it may well have been planned originally for showing at the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857, a major national occasion, and this wider context of Williams's artistic intentions is confirmed by his 'The Lord's Supper' reredos, whose completion was envisaged for the 1862 International Exhibition in London.

By this date Williams's career had taken another major step in its significant and nationally typical development. By graduating from architectural sculpture (at whatever level) to producing portrait busts, Williams was unequivocally setting himself up as a fully-fledged fine art sculptor. His work in this field may have remained local: 'at every turn (*sc.* in his studio) you met with the faces of Suffolk and Ipswich men who occupied prominent positions and were highly esteemed in their day',

but this is no more than repeating locally what was a major national industry and a crucial means of support for almost every Victorian sculptor, the execution of portrait busts. Another Suffolk sculptor, Thomas Woolner (who operated nationally from London) occasionally complained about doing portrait busts, but he had to admit it was the only way he could earn a living on a day to day basis.

In extending this area of his work to cover popular national figures such as Peel and Wellington for a local clientele, Williams once again fits in with an important national sculptural trend. Both public and private memorialisations in sculpture of (in particular) Peel and Wellington provided a major boost to sculpture production in the Victorian era, and these two might almost be cast as the principal progenitors of the host of figures inhabiting public squares and streets all over Britain. Certainly this particular species of population explosion reflected a class interest on the part of a new enfranchised middle class who quite apart from the public, outdoor demonstrations of their hero worship wanted their own, private images as well, which Williams was able to supply. The 'Cardinal Wolsey' perhaps reflects a final stage in this cultural movement so characteristic of the Victorian Age. It was the private gift by the sculptor himself of a portrait bust of a local, historic figure. Williams's donation demonstrates that a sculptor considered himself able to make such a public-spirited gesture, and that the climate was right for an historic image to take its place in the public and official environment of the Town Hall.

It is impossible to establish (since suitable historic prototypes do not exist) that the Wolsey is 'like', certainly in the sense that Williams insisted that the Brome corbels should be. One could claim though that the Wolsey certainly exhibits 'character' rather than likeness, and I think this an aesthetic criterion that was certainly quite acceptable in the Victorian period. In fact I suspect that there was a range of perceptual criteria valid in that age which, though we may not accept them for art now, we ignore with regard to art then to our considerable peril. Certainly to the present-day eye, Williams's work in general may seem bland, even characterless, and this to some may be equivalent to downright ugliness.

But it seems to me that the entire structure, certainly of sculpture, then, was so different from what we know or are conditioned by today. The whole idea of the artist's individual imprint (if you like, his very thumbprint in the modelling) being apparent over every inch of his work is wholly inappropriate to sculpture before a certain date in recent history – quite apart from whole areas earlier such as the medieval. The early-to-mid-Victorian sculptor was not aiming at an individual and personal expression of his own, unique artistic ego. There were all-pervasive notions of a generalised style or styles which it was inconceivable for an artist to dissociate himself from. He could not even think in these terms: the very nature of sculptural execution in those days played down the rôle of the individual, since most work could only be done via studio production, with assistants (that is, someone other than the originator) doing much of the executant work. This depersonalised manner of execution has been in fact very common, particularly in sculpture in other ages, and it is possibly only the misleading myth-making of such as Ruskin and Morris (excellent Victorians though they may be) that stops us from appreciating that the apparently 'dead' art of the Victorian sculptor is conceptually no more so than the sculpture of the Middle Ages. Chartres and all that is really every bit as stylistically hide-bound and executively hypocritical or 'dishonest' as the work (so we might be told) of James Williams of Ipswich!

Williams it seems to me was a competent, solid, honest Victorian sculptor. His career mirrors at a local scale that of national figures and his art reflects the age in which he lived. There is surely no reason why this should not be a compliment to any artist.

APPENDIX

BUSTS KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN MADE BY WILLIAMS  
(The dates refer to reports in the Ipswich Journal)

- 1848, 29 April: J.T. Nottidge 1776-1847; rector of St Helen and St Clement, Ipswich 1821-47, 'deservedly called the father of the clergy at Ipswich'.
- 1848, 29 April: James Ransome 1782-1849; a partner of J. & R. & A. Ransome; eldest son of the founder; installed the first steam engine used in Ipswich. (Life-size bust.)
- 1848, 29 April: J.E. Sparrowe 1790-1860; attorney, of the Ancient House.
- 1863, 27 June: H.A. Holden, M.A., LL.D., 1822-96; Headmaster, Ipswich School 1858-83. (Plaster bust, marble commissioned.)
- 1864, 17 September: The Rev. Archdeacon Lord Arthur Hervey 1808-94; President, Suffolk Institute of Archaeology 1853-70. (Plaster bust, to be copied in marble.)
- 1865, 8 July: The Rev. Edwin Sidney, d. 1872; rector of Little Cornard 1847-72; lecturer on scientific subjects during early years of Ipswich Museum; President of the Literary Institute of Sudbury, Hon. Secretary to the Sudbury Agricultural Society and many others.
- 1865, 8 July: Robert Garrod 1792-1877; elected directly to the Ipswich aldermanic bench without having been elected as a councillor.
- 1868, 1 August: Sir Fitzroy Kelly 1796-1880, of The Chauntrey; M.P. for the Eastern Division of Suffolk from 1852 until raised to the Bench; Lord Chief Baron of the Exchequer 1866.
- 1870, 30 April: Mrs Margaret Ogilvie 1820-1908, of Sizewell House, Leiston; local philanthropist. (Marble bust.)
- 1871, 9 September: Lieut-Gen. Sir Stephen Lakeman 1823-c.1906.
- 1871, 7 November: Cardinal Wolsey. (Marble bust.)
- 1874, 4 April: J.E. Taylor 1837-95; eminent geologist and popular science writer; Curator and Lecturer, Ipswich Museum 1872-93.
- 1875, 8 May: J.A. Ransome 1806-75; senior partner of the firm that is now Ransomes, Sims and Jefferies, 1864-75. (Half-size bust.)
- [pre-1852]: Sir Robert Peel.
- [pre-1861]: The Duke of Wellington and Lord John Russell.

NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Wickham Market church rates 1838, S.R.O.I., FC 103/A1/3.
- <sup>2</sup> St Lawrence, Ipswich church rates 1845, S.R.O.I., FB 106/A2/4.
- <sup>3</sup> Brome parish records, S.R.O.I., FB 127/A1/2.
- <sup>4</sup> St Margaret, Ipswich, poor rate book 1854, S.R.O.I., unnumbered.
- <sup>5</sup> St Margaret, Ipswich, poor rate book 1856, S.R.O.I., unnumbered.
- <sup>6</sup> *LL*, 21 Mar. 1857. This report continues: 'It will be remembered that Mr Williams was a successful exhibitor at the Great Exhibition of 1851'. Williams's name does not appear in the official catalogue of the Exhibition, nor in the local newspaper lists of exhibitors.
- <sup>7</sup> Brome parish records, S.R.O.I., FB 127/A1/2, p. 141; cf Elvin 1938, 10, where the reredos is attributed to 'an Ipswich carver named Wright'; the documents from Brome were evidently not available. George Wright of Ipswich submitted an estimate for the benching (S.R.O.I., FB 127/E3/1).
- <sup>8</sup> S.R.O.I., FB 127/A1/2.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 145.
- <sup>10</sup> In 1853 the Atheneum had been established by amalgamating the Young Men's Institute, the Museum and the Archaeological Institute.

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*Abbreviations*

- I.J.*                    *Ipswich Journal*.  
S.R.O.I.                Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich branch.