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RESEARCHING, PRESERVING AND COLLECTING AUSTRALIA'S HERITAGE



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COVER

Installation view of *1001 Remarkable Objects* at the Powerhouse Sydney, featuring a glass panel painted for Sydney signwriters Althouse & Geiger c 1900 and a lyrebird chair based on a design by Lucien Henry c 1890. Photograph Zan Wimberley.

An enigmatic colonial sculpture

The earliest known free-standing, full-length sculpture created in Australia is a highly detailed sandstone statue of a well-dressed colonial gentleman, urinating. Functionally plumbed, this statue is as extraordinary as it is enigmatic. Chris Tassell speculates on who might have commissioned it, who made it, when it was made, who it represents, and why it was made.

CHRIS TASSELL

Recently a free-standing sandstone sculpture of a well-dressed colonial gentleman was donated to the Maritime Museum of Tasmania. Standing 1.3 metres tall, the painted and highly detailed full-length sculpture has been plumbed internally and depicts the gentleman urinating (**cover & plates 1–2**).

While the known history of the sculpture in Tasmania extends back to about 1870, its earlier provenance and the identity of the subject is more elusive. Anecdotal history suggests the sculpture's origin was near Ross in the Tasmanian Midlands, but was it?

Origin of the stone

The figure is carved from a soft fine-grained, well-sorted sandstone, very light grey to greenish-grey in colour. We wanted to determine that the stone and the sculpture were of Tasmanian origin, and not imported. Tasmania's

Triassic sandstones, widely used in buildings during the 19th century, are notably variable in colour, texture and composition. Deposited by rivers draining western Tasmania and Antarctica and flowing to the south-east, the sandstones have a common origin and a distinctive geochemical signature.¹

XRF (X-ray fluorescence) analysis of the sandstone used for the sculpture reveals a geochemical composition consistent with the lower freshwater sandstones of Tasmania's Triassic Upper Parmeener Supergroup.² These sandstones are characterised by a high abundance of clay minerals with respect to quartz, discriminating them from, for example, their Sydney Basin correlate, the familiar Hawkesbury Sandstone that is compositionally dominated by quartz.³

XRF measurements of the statue show high relative abundances of aluminium, iron and potassium with respect to silicon, consistent with a Tasmanian origin. XRF measurements of samples taken from Ross Quarry have similarly high abundances of elements associated with illite and kaolinite clays, although concentrations are lower than those measured in the statue.⁴ This is likely due to the more advanced state of weathering of the



1.

Attributed to Daniel Herbert (1802–1868), *Lieutenant–Governor George Arthur*, 1835/1836, painted sandstone, h 1.30 m. Collection: Maritime Museum of Tasmania, Hobart.

2.

Attributed to Daniel Herbert (1802–1868), *Lieutenant–Governor George Arthur*, 1835/1836, painted sandstone, detail. Collection: Maritime Museum of Tasmania, Hobart.

3.

Unknown artist, *Major William de Gillern at Rocky Hills Probation Station, 1840s*. Private collection.

4.

Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur, detail of shirt button and seams.

5.

Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur, detail of vest.



loose samples collected from the quarry at Ross, having been exposed directly to the atmosphere for a significant period. This is in contrast to the history of the statue which has been kept under cover for almost its entire known history.

Paint analysis

The analysis undertaken by Professor Sebastien Meffre, head of Earth Sciences at the University of Tasmania, also determined that lead-based paints had been used on the figure. He observed that ‘The white paint is mostly lead oxide

with significant sulphur (likely sulphate), arsenic, tungsten and tin. The black paint is likely to be rich in carbon (not analysed) but also the same elements as the white paint but in much lower concentrations. The green paint is likely to be rich in chromium and vanadium but also the same elements as the white paint but much lower concentrations’ (see table).⁵

The clothing

Images of prominent men in early colonial Tasmanian society wearing



Summary – Paint X-ray Fluorescence Analysis

Element ppm (parts per million)	White Paint	Black Paint	Green Paint
Lead (Pb)	295716	63394	71572
Arsenic (As)	21030	7283	6874
Cadmium (Cd)	5039	454	554
Tin (Sn)	4277	388	536
Vanadium (V)	1740	1039	5641
Tungsten (W)	2166	824	754
Strontium (Sr)	642	245	573
Chromium (Cr)	232	181	2753



informal day wear are uncommon. One of the few is a watercolour sketch by an unknown artist of Major William de Gillern (1787–1857) at Rocky Hills Probation Station in the 1840s (**plate 3**); de Gillern was appointed superintendent at Rocky Hills in 1843.⁶ This sketch shows de Gillern wearing a knee-length frock coat, dark cravat, high collared shirt, prominently buttoned vest and rounded hat.

The clothing on the sculpture is rendered in great detail with, for example, the buttons on the shirt, vest and coat (**plates 4–5**) and the braided hat band being clearly visible (**plate 6**). The subject of the sculpture is depicted wearing clothing quite similar to that of Major de Gillern, including:

- A knee-length frock coat, a style that became increasingly popular from the first decades of the 19th

century. By the 1830s black, blue and green were considered the most popular colours. The figure's coat has been finished in green paint.

- Waistcoat, typically a single solid colour, in this case black.
- White shirt with very high collar
- Black cravat tied into a flat bow.
- 'Wide-awake' hat (wide-brimmed, rounded crown hat)

The figure has trousers with a fly-front, a style which began to appear in the 1820s (**plate 7**), and distinctive square-toed shoes/boots which became fashionable in the 1820s (**plate 8**). Such boots are known to have been worn in Tasmania by 1825 with examples being present in archaeological material recently recovered from Anglesea Barracks and dated to c 1826 (**plate 9**). The figure's costume suggests a date from the late 1820s onwards but is more probably from the 1830s or 1840s.

Sculpture in Van Diemen's Land

During the administration of Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur (1784–1854) from 1824 until 1836, the colony of Van Diemen's Land experienced strong economic growth and the colonial government commenced a major capital works program. Undoubtedly among the greatest manifestations of this was the Ross Bridge, considered internationally unique because of its prolific carved stone decoration⁷ and as Eric Ratcliffe observed 'As a work of Colonial art, it has no peer in Australia'.⁸

Ross Bridge, designed by John Lee Archer (1791–1852), was completed in July 1836 and formally opened by Governor Arthur in October 1836, immediately before his return to Britain. The role of the two convict overseers Daniel Herbert and James Colbeck, both stonemasons who had worked on the bridge since early 1835, was widely acknowledged at the time. Both Herbert and Colbeck were to receive tickets of leave within months of the bridge's completion and then a free pardon in late 1841 (Colbeck)⁹ and early 1842 (Herbert).¹⁰

Mystifyingly, despite their being impossible to ignore, there was no contemporary commentary on the



6.
Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur, detail of braided hat band.

7.
Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur, detail of buttoned trousers fly.



8.
Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur, detail of square-toed boots or shoes.

9.
Square-toed boot or shoe sole from the archaeological site beneath the current Officers' Mess, Anglesea Barracks, Hobart built in 1827. Collection: Army Museum of Tasmania, Hobart.



10–11.

Sculptured *sandstone heads* forming the bosses at the end of moulding over the main doors of St Luke's Church, Bothwell, 1831, attributed to the convict James Colbeck who worked on the building of the church.



bridge's decorative stone carvings nor on who was responsible for their creation. Similarly, there was no formal explanation of the carvings either at the time or during the lifetime of Daniel Herbert, to whom the work has generally been attributed and who remained in the Ross district until his death in 1868.¹¹

Two small stone sculptures either side of the main entrance of St Luke's Church, Bothwell dating from 1831 are currently the earliest recognised sculptures in the western tradition to be created in Australia (**plates 10–11**). Although attributed by some to the convict Daniel Herbert, it is far more probable that they were created by the convict stonemason James Colbeck. He is known to have worked on the construction of the church, while at that time Daniel Herbert is known to have been working in Hobart.

The first sculpture that can at present be confidently identified as the work of a particular sculptor in Australia is the sundial pedestal by Daniel Herbert (**plate 12**), commissioned by William Davidson, Superintendent of the Government Gardens, Hobart in 1833.¹² The sandstone pedestal still sits outside at the Royal Tasmanian Botanic Gardens, Hobart where it remains exposed to the elements and is now quite eroded. Despite this, it is notable for the detailed rendering of the clothing of William and Elizabeth Davidson and their family (**plate 13**).

Several other sculptors were active in colonial Tasmania from the mid-1830s. Benjamin Law and Benjamin Duterrau both worked in plaster, while Theresa Walker worked in wax. The next sculptor known to have worked in sandstone is the anonymous 'Hospital Sculptor' who created the pair of busts of Hippocrates installed on the hospital at Port Arthur in 1842 (**plate 14**).

Although the 186 stone carvings on the Ross Bridge have been generally attributed to Daniel Herbert and the inscriptions on the bridge specifically to him,⁸ it is clear on stylistic grounds that more than one hand was engaged in the creation of the carvings. This is hardly surprising given the scale of the work and the speed with which it was completed.

The lack of any contemporary explanation of the meaning of the carvings or the identities of those featured has over the years generated a great amount of speculation, with many of the portraits being identified as different personalities. Among the few for which there is widespread consensus is that considered to be the head of Daniel Herbert (**plate 15**). This confidence rests upon the strong similarity between the sculptured head and a photograph of Herbert taken in later life (**plate 16**).

Stylistically the portrait of Daniel Herbert on the Ross Bridge is the most similar to the figures on St Luke's Church at Bothwell, attributed to James Colbeck. It is hardly surprising that

Herbert and Colbeck would include portraits of themselves among the many on the bridge and equally reasonable that each would have carved the portrait of the other. There is not the same level of consensus about which portrait (if any) is that of Colbeck but Jackson's suggestion¹³ that the figure wearing the convict leather hat is that of Colbeck seems plausible (**plate 17**). This portrait is stylistically similar to the majority of the portraits on the bridge as is the enigmatic urinating fountain figure (**plates 1–2**).

As discussed, the clothing of the fountain figure suggests that it was sculpted in the 1830s or 1840s. Several skilled stonemasons, such as Hugh Kean who arrived in late 1838, were working in Tasmania during this time but only three sculptors are currently known to have been working in this medium and at this scale, namely Daniel Herbert, James Colbeck and the 'Hospital Sculptor'.

The fountain figure is by far the best-preserved sculpture from this period surviving in Tasmania. The detailing of the clothing and facial features is extremely fine. Although the sun dial is much more weathered, it is clear that Daniel Herbert rendered the clothing of the Davidson family members in considerable detail (**plates 12–13**).

Ratliffe considers that Herbert was responsible for the precise distinctive Egyptian style lettering that appears both on the Ross Bridge and a few other buildings in Ross at this time.⁸



12.

Daniel Herbert (1802–1868), *Davidson Sundial Plinth*, 1833, sandstone. Collection: Royal Tasmanian Botanic Gardens, Hobart.

13.

Daniel Herbert (1802–1868), *Davidson Sundial Plinth*, 1833 detail of William Davidson and Elizabeth Davidson. Collection: Royal Tasmanian Botanic Gardens, Hobart.

Herbert was known as an accomplished draftsman and capable of precise lettering in both relief and incised forms. This suggests he would have been capable of the fine detail found in the fountain figure.

Given the dating of the work to the 1830s or 1840s on the basis of the clothing, and that Daniel Herbert is:

- generally considered to have been responsible for most of the important sculptures on the Ross Bridge,
 - known to have accepted private commissions even when a convict, and
 - demonstrably capable of fine and precise stone carving including the detailed rendering of clothing,
- there are reasonable grounds to attribute the fountain figure to Daniel Herbert.

Waterworks

The Tasmanian statue is plumbed internally, with the only external evidence for plumbing being a penetration in the stone base where the lead pipe is still present. This suggests that the statue was conceived as a fountain from the beginning.

The practical operation of fountains requires a pressurised supply of water. In Hobart the first reticulated water supply was constructed in 1831, initially to serve Anglesea Barracks. Public demand saw it extended to the town and the New Wharf. Although it was the first piped water supply system in Australia, the actual supply of water from the Hobart Rivulet was problematic, made all the more so by Peter Degraives extending his water intake to above the government intake.¹⁴

It was not until much later, in the second half of the 19th century, that fountains began to appear in private gardens in Hobart – although the most spectacular fountain in the colony was the 7-metre high Val d’ Osne fountain installed in 1859 by the Launceston City Council to mark the completion of the city’s water supply system in 1857.⁸

The 1830s did see some large landowners in the Derwent Valley, Clyde Valley and Midlands establish irrigation schemes that would have been capable of providing a sufficient supply of pressurised water to allow the operation of a fountain. Among these was William Kermode whose early irrigation works were regarded as being showpieces of the colony. Lt-Col. Mundy in 1851 considered that Kermode ‘carried irrigation to a greater level of perfection than any other person perhaps in the Australian colonies.’¹⁵

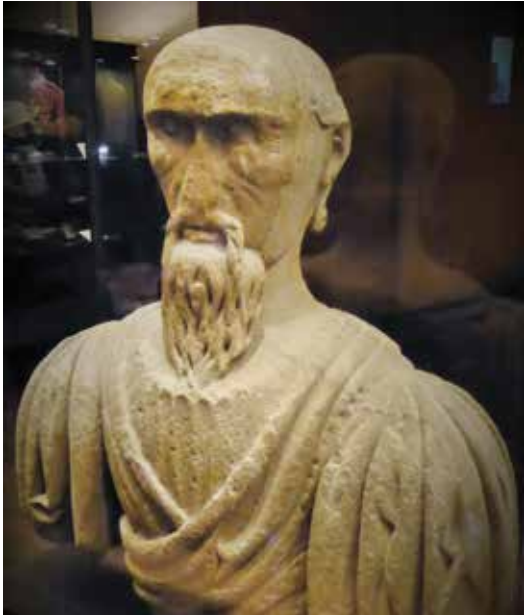
Statues of urinating male figures have long been a feature of the western

art tradition with *Hercules mingens* (‘Hercules pees’) statues being quite common in Roman times, reflecting the consequences of euphoric celebration or unambiguous masculine virility. Functioning statues which are perhaps best exemplified by the Brussels *Manneken Pis*; the current bronze statue of a young boy urinating dates from the about 1618 and has been copied many times since. Not surprisingly, urinating male statues have become more common as public art during the 20th century, with some having clear political intent, such as that of Lenin installed in the Polish city of Nowa Huta in 2014.¹⁶

Identifying the statue

The Tasmanian fountain figure is clearly neither euphoric nor a young boy and is discrete in portraying its undoubted virility. There is no evidence at present as to whether this figure was commissioned as a work of mischievous fun or as a political statement or indeed both. Nor is there any information on the identity of the subject.

The accuracy with which the clothing is depicted allows that the figure could be any prominent male in colonial Tasmania during the 1830s and 1840s. Given the nature of the statue and the clear implication that as a fountain it was intended to be displayed prominently, if not publicly, it is reasonable to assume that:



- considerable antipathy existed between whoever commissioned the work and the subject
- the sculptor was already sufficiently familiar with the subject to be able to produce a reasonable likeness when commissioned to undertake this work (it being unlikely that the subject would have agreed to sit (stand) for such a purpose). Undoubtedly the most polarising figure in colonial Tasmania before 1850 was Lieutenant–Governor George Arthur (1784–1854). On 28 May 1836, on the news that Governor Arthur had been recalled, Launceston’s *Cornwall Chronicle* declared:¹⁷

... TO-MORROW OUGHT TO BE A Day of General Thanksgiving! For the deliverance from the iron-hand of Governor Arthur. We have now a prospect of breathing. The accursed gang of bloodsuckers will be destroyed. Boys will be seen no more upon Police Benches to insult respectable Men. Perjury will cease to be countenanced, and a gang of Felons will be no longer permitted to violate the LAWS OF CIVILIZED SOCIETY.... REJOICE! FOR THE DAY OF RETRIBUTION HAS ARRIVED!

The political opposition to Governor Arthur was led by prominent lawyers, merchants and landowners whose views were widely expressed in some newspapers in Hobart and Launceston.

Historian Henry Reynolds observed ‘The seven local newspapers were the main vehicle for political comment and they conducted their campaign with a raw, crude vigour revelling in invective and vituperation.’¹⁸

The exaggerated features and oversized head suggest a caricature. Comparisons of the sculpture with images of Governor Arthur reveal considerable similarities, most notably the prominent eyes and eyebrows, thick hair, long nose and narrow elongated face (**plates 18–19**).

While in Tasmania, Arthur was depicted as having an abundance of hair but there is no record of him having hair as long as that depicted on the fountain sculpture; perhaps this mocks his habit of combing his hair forward at the sides to make it look more abundant (**plate 20**). Interestingly, Greener and Laird considered the caricatured figure on the Ross Bridge with similar length hair to represent George Arthur (**plate 21**).¹¹ Their attribution was based particularly on the general similarity of the bridge sculpture with the Thomas Bock drawing in the Mitchell Library (**plate 18**).

Although on current evidence there can be no certainty about the identity of the fountain figure, there is a strong probability that it is Lieutenant–Governor George Arthur. After serving longer than any other Australian colonial governor, George Arthur was recalled abruptly in 1836, leaving the

14.

‘Hospital Sculptor’, *Hippocrates*, 1842, sandstone. Collection: Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority.

15.

Attributed to James Colbeck, *Daniel Herbert (?)* 1835–1836, sandstone. South façade Ross Bridge.

16.

Daniel Herbert, photograph, Tasmanian Archive & Heritage Office, Hobart, PH30-1-263.

colony in October that year soon after the opening of the Ross Bridge. It is probable that Daniel Herbert would have been familiar with Arthur, having been in Hobart since the end of 1827. Significantly Herbert worked on several major Government building projects in the town during that time, including as overseer of the stonemasons working on the new Customs House.

The question remains: who might have commissioned such a provocative work? The anecdotal history associated with this figure is that it was removed from Askin Morrison’s property St Peter’s Pass, north of Oatlands, to his property Runnymede, north-east of Sorell, sometime before 1870 and that it was known to Edward Chandler,



17.

Attributed to Daniel Herbert, James Colbeck (?), 1835–1836, sandstone. North façade Ross Bridge.

Morrison's estate manager. The statue remained discretely housed (beneath the stairs) at Runnymede until the property was sold the year before Morrison's death in 1876.

Askin Morrison was a very successful merchant who, soon after arriving in Hobart in 1829, was able to take up the land at St Peter's Pass.¹⁹ Morrison's initial success came from his owning and chartering ships for whaling, exporting wool and whale oil and importing Chinese tea and Mauritius sugar. His success enabled him to purchase the property Runnymede in 1844. Morrison was involved in public affairs to some extent, being appointed by Governor Denison to the Legislative Council in 1851 and representing Sorell in the House of Assembly between 1856 and 1860.

His obituary in the *Launceston Examiner* noted 'Though never having been conspicuous in public affairs ... he has done perhaps more than any man to advance the commercial interests of the colony.'²⁰ Although it seems totally improbable that Askin Morrison was responsible for commissioning the fountain figure, there can be no doubt that he was responsible for its preservation at his property Runnymede.

Among the many in colonial Tasmania who were outspoken about Governor Arthur, few if any had the undoubted

animosity, resources and opportunity of William Kermode to commission such a contemptuous political statement as the fountain figure.

An extremely successful merchant in the colony, Kermode was also noted for his success in developing his property Mona Vale near Ross. Here he established major merino and working horse (Suffolk Punch) studs and through the effective use of irrigation was able to undertake extensive cropping. As a result, between 1830 and 1834 he was able to have built a substantial brick house, although as Alison Alexander observes 'best not to ask where the stone came from.'²¹ During this time, James Colbeck then at Ross was known to have done work for the Kermode family.⁹

Kermode's new house featured extensive gardens and grounds and a crenellated folly built on the hill overlooking the house and gardens. Both the irrigated garden and grounds and the crenellated folly are clearly visible in Scott's January 1836 view of the house (**plate 22**).

Although Kermode had enjoyed good relations with Governor Sorell, he very quickly developed an antagonistic relationship with Colonel Arthur and this continued to be exacerbated over the years of Arthur's administration. Kermode was a persistent and highly vocal critic of Arthur and even offered

a piece of land at Battery Point for the erection of 'a substantial public memorial of the joy of the Colonists at the recall of Colonel Arthur.'²²

Given the depth of ill-feeling between Kermode and Arthur, it is feasible to consider that Kermode might commission a functioning statue of Governor Arthur urinating over the people of the colony, particularly when he had ready access to the most accomplished stone masons of the day, Daniel Herbert and James Colbeck, and a reliable supply of water.

The Tasmanian carved and polychrome painted sandstone sculpture of a well-dressed colonial gentleman urinating is unique in colonial Australian art. The controversial nature of the work has resulted in it being housed discretely and for the most part out of the elements for much of its history. As a result, it is the best-preserved colonial sandstone sculpture known. The work was conceived as a functioning fountain in the form of a urinating adult male and is plumbed accordingly, with some of the lead pipe remaining in-situ.

On the basis of the clothing worn by the figure, it can be dated to the 1830s or 1840s. Of the three known stonemason/sculptors active in Tasmania at that time, it can be attributed on reasonable stylistic grounds to Daniel Herbert, generally considered responsible for the majority of sculptures on the internationally unique Ross Bridge.

The nature of the work – a well-dressed man urinating – suggests that it was conceived as a political statement of contempt rather than a mischievous garden feature: contempt on the part of the subject for the people of the colony, and contempt about the subject on the part of whomever commissioned the work.

While the identity of the figure is not known, it is likely that it is Governor George Arthur, one of the most controversial figures in Tasmanian history and certainly the most polarising person in the colony up until his recall in 1836. Supporting this identification is the appearance of the figure, which is consistent with the few surviving images of Arthur.

On the basis that the figure is intended to represent Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur, it is

18.

Thomas Bock (c 1793–1855), *Lieutenant–Governor George Arthur*, c 1830. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW ML PXD 221 <https://collection.sl.nsw.gov.au/digital/qKgA3M6LaQrQE>



reasonable to assume that the work was commissioned during the period when Daniel Herbert was working at Ross from May 1835 and the time of Arthur’s departure in October 1836. That the figure was moved from Askin Morrison’s property St Peter’s Pass to Runnymede also supports a Midland origin for the work, as does the origin of the stone used for the sculpture.

19.

Unknown artist, *Sir George Arthur*, c 1840 miniature painting on ivory, 9.2 x 8 cm. A similar lithographed portrait of *Sir George Arthur Bart KCH* by Richard James Lane in the National Portrait Gallery, London, is dated 1842, NPG D21898. Dixson Library, State Library of NSW, DL Pa 19.

20.

Unknown artist, *Major-General Sir George Arthur, Bart., KCH* (Lieutenant–Governor of Upper Canada 1838–41), posthumous portrait after Smart c 1887, oil on canvas. Collection: Archives of Ontario 693137.

21.

Attributed to Daniel Herbert, *Lieutenant–Governor George Arthur* (?), 1835–36, sandstone. North facade Ross Bridge.





22.

Thomas Scott,
*East View of
 "Mona Vale"- the
 residence of Wm.
 Kermode Esq 28th
 January 1836
 on Macquarie
 River. V.D. Land.*
 Watercolour and
 ink on paper.
 Mitchell Library,
 State Library of
 NSW PXB 216.

The identity of the agent who commissioned the work is not known. Arthur had many political opponents. However, among the most sustained was William Kermode who also had the resources to commission such a work, the water supply to allow it to function and a public record of almost obsessive angst about Arthur reflected in both his public statements and his actions.

William Kermode is tentatively considered to have commissioned the figure from Daniel Herbert in late 1835 or early 1836 before Arthur was recalled. The enigmatic Tasmanian sculpture is now on display at the Maritime Museum of Tasmania, Hobart.

Acknowledgements

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was Director of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery and more recently the first Managing Director of the National

Trust of Australia (Tasmania). He continues to be actively involved in Tasmanian cultural heritage including through his consultancy activities and as President of the Maritime Museum of Tasmania.