

JOHN, Sir WILLIAM GOSCOMBE (1860 - 1952), sculptor and medallist

Name: William Goscombe John
Date of birth: 1860
Date of death: 1952
Spouse: Martha John (née Weiss)
Parent: Elizabeth John (née Smith)
Parent: Thomas John
Gender: Male
Occupation: sculptor and medallist
Area of activity: Art and Architecture
Author: Paul Joyner

Born in Cardiff on 21 February 1860, the son of Thomas John of Llantrithyd, Glamorganshire and Elizabeth (née Smith) of Randwick, Gloucestershire. His father was a woodcarver to the **third Marquis of Bute** and William assisted him with carvings at Cardiff Castle from 1874. He attended Cardiff Art School 1871-1881 and was taught anatomy from 1876 by the local coach painter James Philpotts. John was influenced by the variety of excellent craftsmen working in Cardiff at this period and retained an interest in native Welsh artefacts. In 1913 he proposed that the National Museum of Wales collect 'peasant art and crafts'. He moved to London in 1881 working under Thomas Nicolls until 1886. John studied at Lambeth Art School and entered the Royal Academy school in 1884. In 1886 he began exhibiting at the Royal Academy annually until 1948. He won a gold medal in 1889 which provided funds for an extended tour to Europe and north Africa (c. 1890-91). He remained in Paris in 1891 where he studied in the studio of August Rodin. The Paris Salon honoured him with gold medals in 1892 and 1901. In 1899 he became A.R.A. and R.A. in 1909. He married Martha Weiss in 1891 and they had one daughter. He died 15 December 1952.

After his return to London John was quickly established as an important figure in the New Sculpture Movement. He became a sculptor of national and international fame, executing numerous important commissions, receiving an honorary LL.D. from the University of Wales, the Cymmrodorion medal, H.A.R.I.B.A. and he was a member of various European academies. His important Welsh commissions included the altarpiece of St. John's, Cardiff, completed in October 1891. In 1892 the **third Marquis of Bute** commissioned 'St. John the Baptist' for Regent's Park, which was completed in 1894. The Hirlas Horn was designed for the National Eisteddfod in 1898. Undoubtedly his two most important Welsh projects were the investiture regalia and medals of 1911 and the seal, trowel, mallet and level for the foundation of the National Museum of Wales. He was knighted in 1911 and in 1913-16 was given the pre-eminent position of Welsh sculptors which was the commission to sculpt St. David for the City Hall, Cardiff. His fluent, brilliant style reflected his passion and vigour. He could execute designs for portraits, figures and emblematic subjects in Rodinesque Romanticism, Neo-Baroque and careful balanced classicism, Neo-Gothic and Celtic Revival styles. John was a truly national artist who seized the opportunity of a reawakening of Welsh identity to create a style and mood fit for the new capital, institutions and heroes of Wales. The National Museum of Wales and National Library of Wales have numerous pieces of his work and others are at the Royal Academy, Tate Gallery and the Imperial War Museum.

Author

Paul Joyner

Sources

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The Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, 1928-29, 202

See *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 1951-60

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Cardiff Manuscript 3.365

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [William Goscombe John](#)

Additional Links

VIAF: [13622688](#)

Wikidata: [Q3069617](#)

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