



Research Article

Gateshead's identity, the relationship of the “Angel of The North” sculpture with the region and its impact on regional change

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Article Info

Received: 10 November 2024
Accepted: 15 February 2025
Available online: 30 March 2025

Keywords

Angel of the North
Gateshead
Sculpture
Urban identity

Abstract

This study aims to investigate the process of identity formation and symbolization of the “Angel of the North” sculpture, a public artwork, and its effects on the region. The Angel of the North sculpture by sculptor Antony Gormley has served as a catalyst for the cultural regeneration of Gateshead, England. Like the statue of “Liberty”, which is part of the identity of New York City, and “Christ the Redeemer”, the symbol of Rio de Janeiro, the Angel has become a symbol of Gateshead and one of the most talked about sculptures in the world. Such artworks created in cities are transformers of space that occupy their surroundings, transforming and interacting the society both culturally and economically. The purpose of artistic forms that affect the imagination of the society is to activate the space as well as to ensure the continuity of sensory sensation. In order for artificial components, which have an important role in the identity formation of cities, to be in harmony with the natural structure, it is important that they establish a connection with the cultural and historical past of the environment, for example; it is important that a sculpture is inspired by that region in order to be inscribed in the history of that city and also to be internalized and understood by the people of the region. The Angel of the North has also established a historical and cultural connection with its surroundings and has become a work of art that can be taken as an example to discuss the contribution of a sculpture to its surroundings in creating a city identity. The sculpture aims to appreciate the services of miners in the area, which was used as a coal mine for many years and then abandoned, to represent the transition from the industrial age to the information age and to be a focal point for hopes. In cities, a work of art designed in harmony with its surroundings creates meanings and memories for people, affects the concept of urban identity in social, cultural and economic terms, and creates a difference in the degree of recall with its distinctive features, and places with character like people are needed.

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To cite this article

Kaya, I., and Zengin, M.H. (2025). Gateshead's identity, the relationship of the “Angel of The North” sculpture with the region and its impact on regional change. *Journal for the Interdisciplinary Art and Education*, 6(1), 11-21. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15074846>

Introduction

Just like in ancient cities, in today's cities, one of the distinguishing features of places where artificial elements are public spaces where people can express themselves, where a sense of individual and collective belonging develops and which are the source of urban memory formation is the monument or sculpture areas located in city squares or important points of the city. Therefore, sculptures, like architectural structures, are among the most important elements necessary for

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cities to take on character. Such structures also give the city an advantage over other cities in terms of recognition and recognition. Today, cities undergoing urban renewal face the danger of weakening collective memory. For this problem, experts argue that regeneration should be thought and developed together with the elements that make up the city identity. Art forms, which are among the most important of these elements, are thought to have an effective role in the development processes of society and in the renewed areas of cities. Despite the phenomenon of globalization, societies should be aware of the importance of their own culture and the role of their own art forms in renewal. This determines the importance of cultural accumulation and past memory as an indispensable reference area for societies.

Especially after the 1980s, public space forms have witnessed a renaissance. Increasingly, regeneration and development around the world are being used and perceived as part of public spaces (Corbett, 2004). The social spaces we use and pass through daily are part of our reality where we intersect with others. Spatial behaviors, which are an integral part of us, are defined by and define spaces. We therefore perceive space and spatial relations as we do other ways of living in society. The truth is that what can be said about our cities is that their spaces are made up of a collection of objects and people. These spaces and objects contain meanings created by people. The physical presence of roads and buildings does not make them meaningful; it is people's attribution of meanings and symbols to these objects beyond their actual function that gives them place identity and makes them part of real life (Madanipour, 1999). Place identity is strongly associated with a sense of belonging and is an important dimension of cultural and social life in urban areas. It is thought that humans psychologically strive to develop a sense of connectedness to a place in relation to the environment. The effort to establish an emotional and cognitive connection with a place strengthens the sense of belonging and guarantees safety with the commonality of the community (Kaymaz, 2013). Cities, where culture is shaped and continues, find the opportunity to develop and renew themselves through art. Therefore, cities actually reflect the people living in them like a mirror and resemble the people living there. One of the important functions of cities is to have spaces that will ensure the continuity of cultural memory and the expression of art through artistic elements. While public spaces create suitable grounds for art and artists, art will need cities and cities will need art for the development and continuation of cities (Akengin, 2021). Art is one of the most important factors for innovation and cultural identity in cities. Artistic spaces are seen as spaces that nurture social communication, offer creative ideas and provide social integration for a knowledge-oriented society. In cities that want to develop, it is also very important for contemporary art forms to meet with society in public spaces and contribute to society. New urban projects, which aim to develop economically and become a center, increase the density of the population and increase the interest of cities in artistic activities. In addition, artistic practices that emphasize the human-environment relationship have a positive impact on environmental awareness. It is seen that people who spend time in the artworks created in public spaces are happier and more peaceful. Due to the visual aesthetics in these places, public communication increases and psychological relaxation occurs. It will cause the art that meets with the masses in open spaces to spread socially and increase the number of institutions and organizations that contribute to the development of the cultural fabric of the city (Parlakalay, 2020).

Method

In the research, the visuals of the “angel of the north” in the public open space and the evaluations regarding the bond it establishes with its surroundings were utilized. Academic articles, books and discussions on the socio-economic and cultural structure of the region, urban distribution and the impact of social transformation on the public system were examined. Published articles and news about the history, construction process and reflections of the “Angel of the North” sculpture in the region were analyzed. The study also considers open space sculptures as artistic constructions that encompass sociological transformations and public fabric inspired by cultural symbols of urban memory. In this context, British sculptor Anthony Gormley's sculpture, Angel of the North, which will intuitively respond to the unique history of Gateshead and northern England, which won the Turner Prize, Britain's highest contemporary art prize, was investigated. Qualitative research method was used, reliable sources were reviewed and reported. Document analysis was

used as a qualitative method in the research. With this method, the research was tried to be supported on the basis of scientific ethical principles.

Findings

Art in Public Space

Public space is defined as open spaces belonging to every individual of the society, which develops from the free mind and thought of human beings and where freedoms can be freely used and practiced in accordance with the laws (Demir & Sesli, 2007). Although there is variability in the definition of public space in different disciplines, it is generally expressed as areas where citizens have individual common rights in the relations between people and space and where every individual can easily access (Mehta, 2014; Meral & Çelen Öztürk, 2023). In this process, the artist who will create artistic applications for public spaces focuses on the history, culture and natural structure of that place and produces the work of art by taking these values into account (Yılmaz, 2018). Artistic structures in the public space make the conditions and possibilities more livable for people together with their surroundings. The artwork that makes its presence felt in the city finds the opportunity to spread beyond its borders. It will only be possible for people living in the city to leave the unconscious mass and gain cultural accumulation and development through art (Çakar, 2016). While showing the definition of the public space through art, it protects the city with all its power against deterioration and damage by mobilizing people's emotions in order not to spoil its nature. It becomes a preventive force against the pressures of modern thought as well as historical areas (Verlag, 1997; Shahhosseini, 2015). Consciously designed and created sculpture in urban areas has important aspects such as changing people's perspective, providing cultural interaction, playing the role of uniting and integrating people with each other, creating an aesthetic and more livable environment (Kurtaslan, 2005). Public sculptures are important physical elements for urban landscape designers to support the thoughts and ideas of the society. Feeding these sculptures from different perspectives and ideas will benefit cities in terms of supporting social manifestation. Sculptures or artistic structures made with this idea in mind mean that human values are cared for and kept alive. For the orientation of the society towards modern art, the importance of memories, social values and beliefs leads to positive results in society. Art in public perception should be considered as a part of modernization in general. It should present the identity of the society as modernity associated with traditional values (Shahhosseini, 2015). Sculptures placed in urban areas form a part of the collective memory of the past and the future. Artistic structures built in the public space, which include various concepts, emphasize the sense of identity-identity and contribute to the continuity of cultural values (Özkul & Küçükşen Öner, 2021). Sculptures made in public spaces are talked about in society and become remarkable. In a study, it was concluded that sculptures and artistic practices in public space created awareness beyond expectations in various age and class groups; however, a longer period of time is required for the development of sustainable attitudes (Bailey et al, 2004). We should not only look at sculptures as remarkable structures with their physical appearance in cities; they also have the ability to change the region where they are located, add meaning, communicate with their surroundings, affect people's lives, and have educational and instructive features (Bulat & Bulat, 2021).

City Identity

One of the negative effects of globalization on cities is the gradual loss of their historical identity. Mostly historical places in cities contribute significantly to the concept of place identity. Cities are places that live as a whole with their natural structure and artificially created spaces. Among the important determinants of urban identity are historical sites, archaeological sites, original and traditional settlements, as well as abstract values and spiritual values of that place and images formed in people's minds (Perihan & Aşur, 2020). Buttner; "City symbols play an important role in the socialization process. It brings a sense of familiarity and safety to the environment" (Firat, 2002; Meral & Çelen Öztürk, 2023). Place is defined as something occupying a space or a part of a space. One of the most important artistic structures that contribute to the recognition and recognition of cities is sculptures that are place markers and symbols. Urban sculptures add spirit to the place where they are located and develop a sense of place and belonging. Sculptures that are in harmony with their surroundings are elements that visually support the integrity of the environment, create a sense

of place in people and develop a sense of comfort. Urban identity is an important part of contemporary structuring. Identity represents certain boundaries in the city and the individual who uses these boundaries creates a distinctive personality space. Therefore, it can be said that sculptures with unique artistic designs will make significant contributions to the formation of the identity of cities (Shahhosseini, 2015). Reaching an international value in the formation of local and regional identity is an important factor for cultural-oriented renewal and a successful outcome. One of the important points here is to add something to cultural assets instead of taking something away from them (Bailey et al, 2004). The contribution of art is very important in creating cultural identity and strengthening social communication, and it reveals the commonalities of different ideas (Bastaban, 2024).

History of the City of Gateshead

Gateshead is a town on the south bank of the River Tyne in Tyne and Wear, England. For a long time, Gateshead has been an industrial town in its own right with a rich and proud history. It was first settled along the River Tyne at the site of the current Tyne and Swing bridges. In the 1300s it was known for coal mining and was an important place where docks were built to transport the coal across the river. In the 1600s the town declined due to civil war and the rich coal deposits were left behind in hard-to-reach areas. Later, with the development of technology, the coal mines were reused and the town became prosperous again. Coal mining also influenced and led to the development of other industries such as shipbuilding, pottery, iron and brick making and chemical factories. With the impact of these developments, the population of the town increased significantly in the 1800s and caused the people to live in unhealthy areas. People living under poor conditions, for example, faced sad consequences in the cholera epidemic (Neave, 2012).



Figure 1. 244-252 High Street, Gateshead, Photographer: Dodds Edwin, 1886

During this turbulent period, the working classes of society suffered the most severe deprivations (Mackenzie, 1827, p:81). In the 1860s, land was expropriated from both the south and north for housing construction and the city's built-up area gradually expanded. In 1909 the Housing Act led to the clearance of nightshanty areas, which were converted into housing estates for the wealthy. In the 1920s Gateshead's heavy industry declined and failed. In the 1930s steps were taken to improve the town with the establishment of the Team Valley Trading Estate. The closure of the mines for political reasons during World War II led to increased unemployment and a gradual decline in the population (Neave, 2012).



Figure 2. View of Gateshead Dock from High Level Bridge, 1925

The construction of the Metro Center in 1986 and the start of the National Garden Festival in 1990 increased development in the city, and more recent structures such as the Millennium Bridge and the statue of the Angel of the North have led to increased urban pride (Neave, 2012).

The Story of the Angel of the North

The city council decided to build a landmark to promote the city of Gateshead as a solution to culture-led urban regeneration. The city council commissioned British sculptor Anthony Gormley, winner of the Turner Prize, Britain's highest contemporary art prize at the time. Upon receiving the commission, Gormley conducted extensive research into the local area and felt that the 'Angel' sculpture would intuitively respond to the unique history of Gateshead and the north of England. Aware that coal miners worked for hours in the dark beneath this site, Gormley wanted his angel to act as a meaningful reminder of their steadfast endurance, creating what he called a "poetic echo". "The angel resists post-industrial amnesia and bears witness to the hundreds and thousands of miners who have spent the last three hundred years mining coal beneath the surface," Gormley said. Gormley used corten steel with a rust-red exterior to associate the Angel of the North with the land where coal mines once stood. It is also a reference to steel itself and its labor, once the most important industrial resource in the north of England. Initially, the design of the sculpture was not liked because it reminded the Nazis of their favorite works of art, and petitions were made to cancel its construction due to lightning strikes, interference with television signals, the possibility of traffic accidents, and the high cost. After long negotiations, Gormley designed this sculpture that reflects the history of the town and at the same time looks to the future. As you cross the A1 national highway from London to northern Scotland, you can see the huge statue of the "Angel of the North", the symbol of northern England. This huge steel sculpture in the shape of a winged human (angel) is a public artwork erected in Gateshead in 1998 by artist Antony Gormley (Lesso, 2022).



Figure 3. Antony Gormley, Angel of the North, 1998, Gateshead, via PM Today

Open space sculptures are mostly artistic structures that cover sociological transformations and public fabric inspired by cultural symbols of urban memory (Oto, 2024). The presence of a sculpture designed in the right place to create

special meanings and beautiful memories for people is important for urban life. Urban sculptures should have features that can meet the principles and principles of art in terms of visual and aesthetic values suitable for the cultural environment (Meral & Çelen Öztürk, 2023). Urban sculptures can sometimes appear as a symbol. Symbol sculptures usually dominate their surroundings with their large size. Therefore, they can also exist as an important point as signs that can be used in all directions. Such marker sculptures or artistic constructions also become permanent as unique and unforgettable memories and reminders for people. If things that are symbols have a distinctive form that affects their space, they are remarkable as places that are recognized and known (Lynch, 1960; Shahhosseini, 2015).

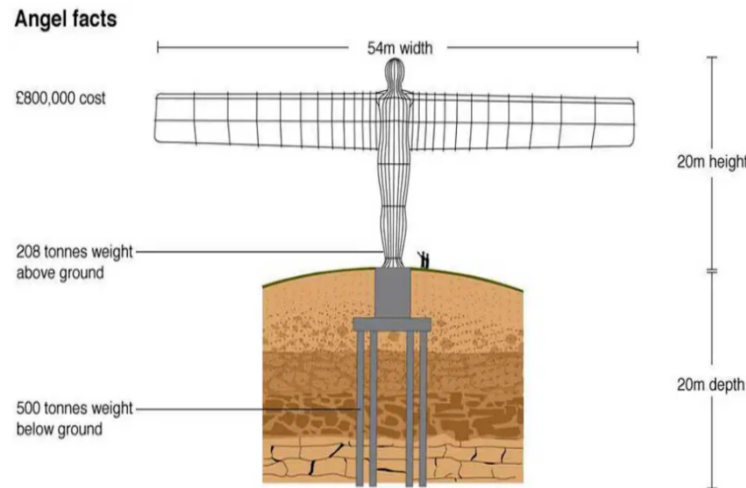


Figure 4. Antony Gormley's Angel of the North site plan, via Gateshead Council

Twenty-two (22) meters high, with a wingspan of 54 meters and weighing 208 tons, the sculpture is made of corten steel. It is often cited as an example of the positive function of public art. It is said that millions of tourists visit the sculpture every year to see its splendor. Costing around £800,000 (equivalent to around £1,780,000 in 2023), it has become a landmark in north-east England and Gateshead, an icon of England. The Angel of the North is a symbol of the desire to revitalize the area and is now considered one of the most successful public art projects in the UK (Lesso, 2022).

The Angel of the North sculpture was developed from Gormley's "A Case for an Angel" sculpture series, which he began producing in 1989. For the first model sculpture, Gormley used a mold of his own body. The original sculpture was made of corten steel, a material that does not need painting or maintenance, and is resistant to natural factors with a rust-colored layer that fixes the surface of steel indefinitely, thus achieving a more industrial appearance. When you enter Gateshead from the south, the statue welcomes you with open arms as if inviting you. When you look at the statue from the north, it looks like an angel with outstretched wings protecting the land from the enemy. The hill on which the statue stands is similar to the hill on which the Norman castle stands, 17 kilometers away, which reinforces the sense of protection. And the fact that this mound is in the area where the mines used to be located has created a strong connection with the past. In order to place the sculpture in the former mining area, an area of about 100 square meters was filled and the 5.3-meter-high concrete base was reinforced with 20-meter steel-reinforced piles (Nicholson, 2018).

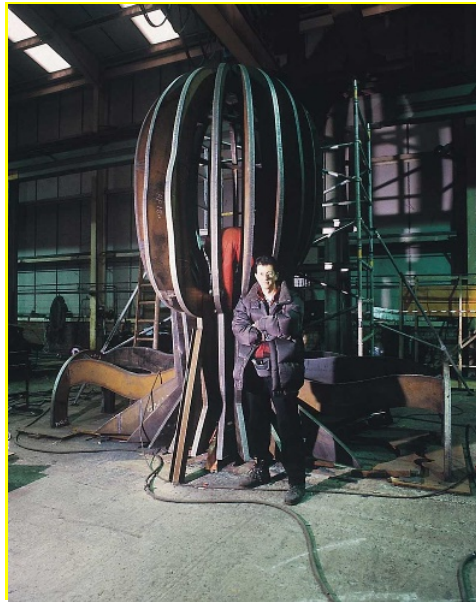


Figure 5. Antony Gormley with the head of the Angel of the North, 1998, via Chronicle Live

It should be noted that it is possible that the renewal of cities under the leadership of culture, together with local conditions, will make an exemplary difference. This is because Gateshead stands as the best example both in the world and in Europe where the contribution of arts and cultural regeneration to cities is clearly visible. The lesson here is how the conditions for achieving this developed and how it was achieved. Peter Palumbo, then the city council's director for the arts, stated that a festival would be organized in a different city and in a different art form every year for a period of 10 years. The northern region's visual artists, who were able to operate in the LADA network, had a distribution system that they could utilize powerfully. The presence of small galleries in the region at this time, its reputation for art in the public realm, and the implementation of one of the boldest projects to date, the Angel of the North sculpture on the A1 motorway, was an important turning point for Gateshead. The sculpture is a testament to the success of Gateshead Town Council and a reassurance of what funders can do. It is quite unique to achieve such successes with regional and local means. The impact of such work on cultural globalization needs to be discussed. We need to look closely at the achievements of these pioneers of cultural regeneration in the north east, not forgetting that these are the kinds of developments that could not have been achieved without the mindset shifts symbolized by the Year of Visual Arts in Gateshead (Bailey et al, 2004).



Figure 6. Angel of the North under construction in 1998, via Chronicle Live

Urban designers and planners can guide people towards a meaningful environment. Urban planners should not ignore informing people about the characteristics of the environment and how to use it more effectively. Human values should be the primary aim of all designers for a successful environmental design. Therefore, the first thing an urban designer should know is the social life of people, their beliefs, their values, what they like and celebrate; these important

things are related to the cultural, historical and symbolic meanings of urban spaces (Bahraini, 2008; Shahhosseini, 2015). The most important feature of an outdoor sculpture is that it is displayed outside an exhibition hall and people can pass by and see it in their routine daily lives, for example, on their way to school or work. In this way, the sculpture has played an active role in conveying the desired message while creating awareness by communicating with the society. Due to the opportunity to easily access and touch outdoor sculptures, the bond and communication between art and people has strengthened (Armağan Benek, 2023).

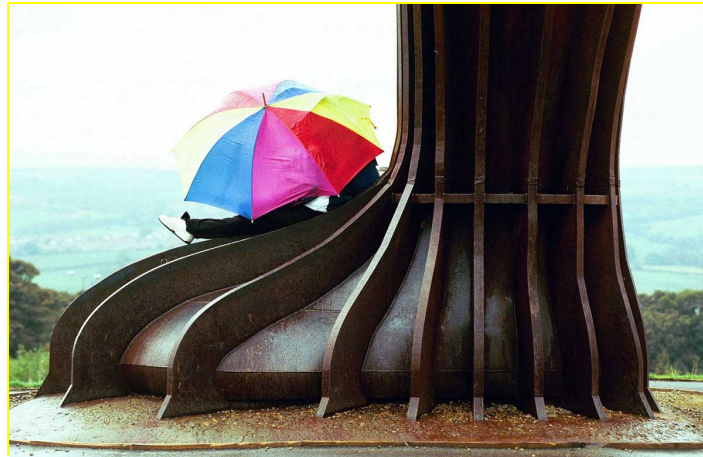


Figure 7. Visitors at the foot of Melek, via Chronicle Live

Creating the new by adopting the cultural richness of the society is one of the duties of art. The dynamic perceptions that pass through life are constantly focused on discussion and reflection in public spaces. This dialectical interaction develops the formal and intellectual side of sculpture. Sculptures that become symbolic in this way also perpetuate a flow of human knowledge and contribute to the progress of society. Artistic actions always appear as a developing and unifying force in societies (Yağmur, 2018).



Figure 8. Objects hung on the trees around the statue

The Angel quickly became a major tourist attraction and marked Gateshead's place on the map. Flowers, painted stones, signs, messages and poems have been hung by visitors on the tree branches around the statue, often in memory of loved ones, and almost everywhere else. Clearly, the Angel seems to have entered the hearts and minds of the local people. The statue is often surrounded by people climbing up to its feet, taking photographs, children chasing each other around it and couples holding hands (The Garden Trust, 2023).

Conclusion and Discussion

Artificial and natural areas formed by the harmonious unity of urban areas with all their elements can give a city a distinctive identity that distinguishes it from other cities. One of the most important structures that contribute to the formation of a city's identity is artistic formations, the most prominent of which are sculptures. While artistic designs offer an innovative approach to cities, they influence citizens to develop new concepts in uniquely designed spaces. Since ancient times, sculptures in cities have been seen as important reminders and signaling symbols for cities. Based on these past experiences, it is also important for artists to adopt a participatory model that develops a culture of design and thought-provoking new experiences. In our modern age, there are many cities where sculptures are at the forefront in the identity formation of cities, and there are even many cities known for sculptures. The most important of these are the statue of “Liberty”, which is part of the identity of New York City, and the statue of “Christ the Redeemer”, the symbol of the city of Rio de Janeiro. When artists and designers create artworks or public spaces that care about the culture and values of the people living in cities, they are also investing in the sustainability of values. For example, sculptures in open spaces can play an important role in creating both tangible and intangible values by linking cultural values, historical past and modernity in today's societies. A well-planned and constructed sculpture in a public space has a great visual impact to reveal the hidden identity of a place and a community. In addition, we can see how such important works of art have an economic impact on the region where they are located, create areas of attraction and contribute to tourism from case studies in many places around the world. The Angel of the North, which is the subject of this research, has created an artistic scene beyond its iconic features and has shown that it can transform the region. The sculpture acted as a key to unlocking the potential of Gateshead, as a precursor to some other artistic activities. It is also important that cities are expressed and commemorated through images, and that the sociological impact of relationships with places is important, markable and recognizable to people. It is concluded that sculpture applications in urban space planning can affect and transform elements of many different qualities. As a result, the effect of a sculpture on the city is seen very clearly in the example of the “Angel of the North”, which has become the symbol of Gateshead.

Acknowledgment

This research does not require ethical committee approval. No funding was used. The authors contributed equally.

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Current Exhibitions and Awards Received by The Artist

Solo Exhibitions: 2023, “Memories and Stones”, Kafkas University Congress and Culture Center – Kars.

2024, “On The Trail of the Past”, Kafkas University Congress and Culture Center – Kars.

Current Exhibitions and Awards Received by The Artist

2025, “Erciyes Snow Sculpture Symposium”, Kayseri. 2024 “Terrace Exhibition On the Trail of a Thought” 16th Terrace Exhibition, Elgiz Museum, Istanbul, 202., “Her Şeye Rağmen” 12. Teras Sergisi, Elgiz Müzesi, İstanbul. 2019, Is There Life on Earth? 11th Terrace Exhibition, Elgiz Museum, Istanbul.

Awards: . 2021, 75th State Painting and Sculpture Competition, Success Award. 2016, “Yunus Emre Memorial Sculpture” Honorable Mention Award. 2016, “Mailart Mail Art Competition”, Honor Award, 2018. “Foundation Participation Birdhouses Design Competition” Special Jury Award. **E-mail:** muhammethanzengin@hotmail.com

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Visual Resources

Figure 1,2. <http://www.gatesheadhistory.com/construction.html>

Figure 3,4,5,6,7. <https://www.thecollector.com/why-was-the-angel-of-the-north-built/>

Figure 8. <https://thegardenstrust.blog/2023/10/14/the-angel-of-the-north/>

