

Lux in Tenebris – Dr Simon Bradley

The key to 'Lux in Tenebris' (ONA Magazine 109) proves to be architect of the RGS's new building, Edwin (later Sir Edwin) Cooper.

The top flight of Edwardian architects tended to work with a favourite sculptor on major commissions. In Cooper's case, the lucky artist was Albert H. Hodge (1875-1917). Born and trained in Glasgow, Hodge initially pursued an architectural career himself, but by the time of the 1901 Glasgow Exhibition was already active as an architectural sculptor. His largest projects for Cooper included the statue groups on Hull Guildhall, in progress while the RGS was under construction, and the giant figures on the Port of London Authority headquarters by the Tower of London.

An image search for works by Hodge soon produced a match for the RGS relief in the 1907 volume of 'Academy Architecture'. This yearbook chiefly showed architectural designs exhibited annually at the Royal Academy in London, together with a selection of new sculpture. What is depicted appears to be the plaster model for the school's relief, which as a work in carved stone would have been problematic to set up in the RA's Piccadilly galleries. It is also likely that the plaster version was on a smaller scale.

In this case the caption gives the title, 'Science', but nothing more. Likewise, the RA's own published catalogue for 1907 merely gives the one-word title against the artist's name. The absence of any further details doubtless helps to explain why the link with Hodge's authorship came to be forgotten. Even the piece in *Novo* for 1908 gets in a muddle, describing the RGS relief as a 'faithful copy of the original'. Rather, the Royal Academy relief can only have been made as the necessary prelude to carving the finished work.

Unlike Cooper, Hodge never reached the topmost ranks of his profession, but he undoubtedly qualifies as a leading sculptor of the period. His other commissions include the statue of Robert Burns in Stirling and the design of the memorial to Scott of the Antarctic at Devonport, Plymouth. There would almost certainly have been more such statues but for his early death. After 1918 the nation's sculptors increasingly turned their attention to war memorials, and there was less appetite for the kind of grand architectural composition represented by the RGS relief.

Perhaps surprisingly, 'Science' also appears to be Newcastle's chief example of this characteristically Edwardian genre. The nearest equivalent, to judge by the Public Monuments and Sculpture Association's survey catalogue for the North East (2000), is the contemporary sequence of figures carved above the portals of the Royal Victoria Infirmary: distinctly minor works by

comparison. The same survey omits the RGS relief entirely. Nor is it included in the Pevsner Architectural Guides' volume on Newcastle and Gateshead, of 2008 (full disclosure: I was the book's editor). So, it is good to shed some light on this area of darkness.

Simon Bradley (1980-3)