

**MR PITT'S PLINTH**

William Pitt the Younger, seated and clad in Roman fashion outside the Old Library, has been a familiar sight to generations of Pembroke men and women, many of whom have included him in unofficial graduation photographs and other celebrations. But while everyone at Pembroke naturally knows all about Pitt the man and statesman, not everyone knows all about Pitt the statue, and how he came to be where he now is. I described his acquisition and arrival briefly in the October 1969 issue of the *Gazette*, a tale that may however bear repeating for the benefit of those who have forgotten or never knew it. The time may also be ripe to record the previously untold story of his original plinth, since that has had to be demolished and replaced during the Old Library's recent redevelopment.

Pitt the man, as is well known, having invented the National Debt to pay for our wars with France, then invented the National Debt Office to look after it. In 1817, after his death, Pitt the statue was made by public subscription and placed in the entrance to the Debt Office, where he remained until World War II. When, after the war, the Office was rebuilt following bomb damage, there was no room for him, and he was removed to a private part of Hyde Park. There he sat outside a greenhouse, used to grow plants for the Royal parks, until 1968, when a proposal to extend and rebuild the greenhouse found him and some other displaced statues in the way. The problem this posed for the Debt Office was solved when Alex Grant, a Fellow and Director of Studies in Economics, suggested to the Office that they might offer the statue to Pembroke, which they did, not however as a gift but on permanent loan.

When the offer was passed on to me, as the then Chairman of the Buildings Committee, I went to Hyde Park to examine, measure and photograph the statue, to see where in Pembroke it might best be placed. After much debate, and cutting and pasting of photographs to show how the statue would look in various locations, its present site was agreed in the Lent Term of 1969. Then began the practical business of getting him there, a process made easier by the temporary removal of the gate between the Chapel and Red Buildings while the latter was being restored and redeveloped.

However, before Pitt could arrive, we had first to design and make a plinth to place him on. This seemed easy enough in principle. The plinth's dimen-

sions were determined by those of the statue's base and the height to which our photographs suggested it should be raised. Only the material remained to be decided. Hammered concrete was agreed on, and various examples of this were inspected. Eventually we took as our model the charcoal grey pillars that still support the canopy outside the Little Hall at Sidgwick Avenue. This, we then discovered, was made using black sand from Cumbria and black granite chippings from Cornwall. That was where our problems started, since these materials naturally took time to get, and Mr Pitt had to be moved by a date previously agreed, in order to allow the green-



James Austin

house extension in Hyde Park to start on time. It was touch and go, but in the end the plinth was ready just in time for the statue's arrival on Friday the 13th of June 1969. It then took him a couple of days to be trundled to it on rollers, and hoisted into place, where he has since proved to be, as I predicted in my 1969 piece, 'a great adornment to the College'.

Only one problem remained: Mr Pitt did not arrive in one piece. At some time in the past, the forefinger of one hand had become detached, and placed in a cardboard box bearing the following inscription, signed and dated 5 November 1948:

FOREFINGER OF BRONZE STATUE OF  
WILLIAM PITT  
FORMERLY IN ENTRANCE HALL OF  
NATIONAL DEBT OFFICE, 19 OLD JEWRY EC2  
TO BE HANDED TO MINISTRY OF WORKS  
ON REQUEST FOR REATTACHMENT TO  
STATUE

Reattachment, however, was easier said than done. Welding, we were told, would not work with bronze, and a mixture of Araldite and copper filings did not work either. Still, Mr Pitt and his forefinger were eventually reunited, after my time, by some process that has worked well enough so far. Meanwhile, the detached finger did serve one useful purpose, when Mr Pitt's arrival was marked by an improvised ceremony in my rooms in the Old Master's Lodge. As the two-ton statue could not literally be handed over to the College, its boxed finger was – so to speak – handed over instead.

Finally, a postscript about the new plinth. Over the years, its black cement, but not its granite chippings, has been lightened and turned green by rain running off the bronze of the statue. What then should the surface of the new plinth be like? Should it be made to match the original charcoal grey, and allowed to weather like its predecessor, or should the old plinth's final pleasingly mottled green-black finish be reproduced? If the College's present Buildings Committee is anything like its nineteen-sixties ancestor, it will have debated this delicate issue with both passion and principle. And either way, Mr Pitt will once again be worthily upheld.

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## ROGER LONG: TEACHER AND WIT

Roger Long (1680-1770), astronomer, divine and Master of Pembroke Hall, was born on 2 February 1680-1 at Croxton Park, Norfolk, son of Thomas Long. Educated at the public school of Norwich, Long was admitted as sizar at Pembroke Hall on 4 March 1696-7. He matriculated in 1697, graduated B.A. (as eighth Wrangler) 1700-1, was elected Fellow in 1703, and graduated M.A. in 1704.

Long was ordained deacon (Lincoln) 25 September 1716 and priest (Norwich) 23 December 1716. He was Rector of Overton Waterville, Huntingdonshire, 1716-51, became D.D. in 1728, and was appointed Vicar of Cherry Hinton, Cambridgeshire in 1729, the same year he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society.

Elected Master of Pembroke Hall 1733-70, Long served as Vice-Chancellor of the University 1733-4. He was elected the first Lowndes's Professor of Astronomy and Geometry in 1750 and became Rector of Bradwell-near-the-Sea, Essex, in 1751.

'The blessedness of believing' was the title of the sermon preached by Long on Commencement Sunday June 1728. Taking as his text *John XX.v.29*: 'Jesus saith unto him Thomas because Thou hast seen Thou has believed, blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed', Long preached that 'vain therefore are all our attempts to conceive or explain, further than the Scripture will bear us out, the mysteries of faith: as well may we hope to measure the Heavens with a span, as with the short line of human reason to fathom the depths of them.' But his professed faith did not preclude his later astronomical work, some of which did involve measurement. At the beginning of his *Astronomy in Five Books* Long quoted an ancient source, noting that 'it is an observation of a philosopher that mathematical sciences have a tendency to purify the soul'.

The *Astronomy* took some time to be completed. The first volume was published in 1742, part of the second in 1764, the remainder posthumously in 1784, having been prepared for publication by Richard Dunthorne (who served as butler and astronomer at Pembroke under Long) and the astronomer and mathematician William Wales. The Astronomer Royal, Neville Maskelyne, offered his help as well.