



THE WELSH DRAGON

ARTIST'S COMMENTARY – BY STEVE WINTERBURN

Updated January 2011

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Scale and Level of Detail

When driving past the “Angel of the North” sculpture, which stands at 120 feet (36.6m), the detail of the sculpture is not evident, only the sculpture as a whole. The sheer size of the sculpture takes away any emphasis of detail.

The 23m tall dragon sculpture will be placed upon a 41.5m tall tower structure. The overall image of the dragon will be viewed at such a perspective that any detail would not be easily visible.

The size of the dragon dictates that the bronze plates will be built in sections and welded together. An amount of finishing work will be required to lose the construction seams, however this will be kept to a minimum. The dragon will need to be simple with smooth surfaces to encourage rainwater to run off the sculpture easily. These smooth surfaces will also help the dragon evolve within its environment.



Figure 1: Montage of the dragon and tower from the A5 carriageway
(Refer to Appendix A for further details)

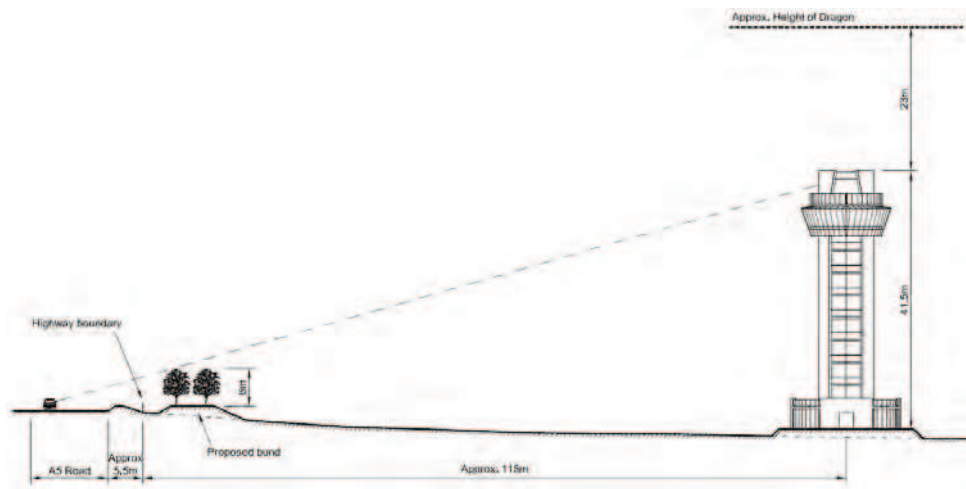


Figure 2: Cross section through the Welsh Dragon site
(Refer to Appendix A for further details)

Weathering and colouring of Bronze Plates

It is possible to produce different patina and subtly different shades on the bronze plates but all of these will mellow and mature when exposed to environmental conditions over time, as occurs does with all bronze sculptures, this results in a darkened and dulling of the surface finish.

We have considered whether it would be appropriate for us to adopt alternatives to a natural bronze patina but over time all of the colours achieved would eventually dull and become dark brown.

Furthermore having discussed this with the Clients design team it is likely that any requirement to make the colour of the dragon more noticeable than the current proposals (eg Red) would result in the significance of the dragon from nearby key areas/locations (such as Offa's Dyke and the canal near the Chirk Marina), in terms of the cultural heritage assessment within the Environmental Impact Assessment, being increased from moderate impact and large significance to **Major impact and Very Large significance** and the team feel that this would simply be unacceptable.

Bronze, like most metals, will oxidize with time and depending on the prevailing conditions and the environment in which the sculpture is sited this often manifests itself as powdery deposits on the surface. With bronze these may range in colour from pale green to turquoise (verdigris). Verdigris is best controlled by careful detailing of a sculpture in the first instance, to limit any ledges and nooks and crannies for plant matter to settle for example, and the risk of this occurring and the speed that it may develop will also be reduced by heat treating the bronze and the application of a cold wax during fabrication. We intend to do this with the Dragon and it will retain its natural colouring as a result.

It should be noted that examples of statues and sculpture that can be seen in Cities around the country that appear green or have green patches have not been designed specifically to avoid this (which we intend to do) and have likely not been treated and waxed in this way.

Specialist advice has been sought on this issue from Zahra Modern Art Foundries, one of the world's leading foundries and the new trading name for Morris Singer which was the oldest established bronze casting foundry in the UK with a history of over 150 years. The managing director Jim Guy gave the following comment:

"We have, as a company been responsible for the casting of more than 80% of the most prestigious cast bronze public artworks in London if not the whole country. Most notable among them being the lions in Trafalgar Square, The Women of World War 2 memorial in Whitehall, The Meeting Place (embracing couple) at St Pancras and HRH The Queen Mother on the Mall, along with The Trinity at Old Trafford (George Best, Bobby Charlton and Dennis Law)..... I can assure you and your client that the requirement for any maintenance or cleaning of any cast bronze work, when waxed sufficiently should not be required for a substantial number of years".

The 'substantial number of years' is considered by the specialists to be in excess of 25 years as far as the examples quoted are concerned and these statues (pictured below) are all in a more extreme environment than the dragon in environmental terms. What's more this maintenance referred to would be in the form of no more than a simple wash and a re-application of a cold applied wax which (if considered necessary) would be easily achieved at the dragon using vertical access techniques. Having said that I believe that the natural weathering of the dragon and the dulling of the surface that we will see is in fact something that we would be very comfortable with as it would simply indicate the dragon settling gently into its rural environment.



Figure 3: The Lions in Trafalgar Square



Figure 4: The Women of World War II



Figure 5: The Meeting Place, St Pancras



Figure 6: HRH The Queen Mother

Below are photos of two contrasting bronze pieces which are indicated in the figures below. The bronze piece indicated in Figure 7 is fresh from the foundry and can be compared against the piece in Figure 8 which is an eight year old sample that has been exposed to the environment, resulting in a darkened and dull surface finish. This weathering process will serve to soften the detailing of the dragon.



Figure 7: Foundry fresh bronze sample



Figure 8: Eight year old bronze sample



Figure 9: Comparison of new and aged bronze samples

A further 6" square of bronze has been delivered to the Planning office and a 12" square, which has received the full heat treatment and wax proposed has also now been produced in readiness for the next committee meeting.

Simplification of the Dragon Style

To accommodate comments made by the Local Authority, the dragon has been re-styled to simplify the design. I have re-drawn a simplified dragon head at 50% scale in my studio to enable the reduced level of detailing to be visualised. Figures 10 and 12 below show the new dragon style. The new dragon comprises softer lines and an overall reduction in detail around all parts of the face and neck, which is evident when comparing the previous dragon design against the current drawing (see figures 11 & 12). This simplification will continue throughout the body of the dragon.

The shading within the drawing has been added to depict the reflection of light and not the detail. The black and white drawing gives an enhanced impression of detail due to the stark contrast between the black outline and the white body. However, the sculpture will be formed in bronze and will therefore have a uniform colour into which the sharp contrasts will be lost.

The ultimate goal is that the dragon will be as simple as possible whilst maintaining a recognisable representation of the dragon portrayed on the Welsh flag.



Figure 10: Simplified 1:2 drawing of dragon head



Figure 11: Original dragon maquette



Figure 12: Simplified 1:2 scale drawing of dragon head

APPENDIX A
Additional Montage from A5

