

## ROUBILIAC: SOME UNRECORDED DETAILS CONNECTED WITH HIS LIFE AND WORK

By MRS. ARUNDELL ESDAILE

The publication of any biography of an obscure figure leads inevitably to the discovery, after publication, of imperfections and omissions. That of Louis François Roubiliac was no exception; nor can I, on one point, wholly divest myself of the charge of carelessness: considering what sources I did ransack in search of information, the Catalogue of Casts issued by the Department for the Supply of Casts at the Victoria and Albert Museum was an easy one and an obvious. The other matters here dealt with might not, however, have been put on record had not Roubiliac's name been before the public: all have come to light in the fifteen months since the publication of the *Life*.

To the Editor of *The Times* I am indebted for leave to reprint the article on the sculptor's Lay Figure which appeared on October 2nd, 1929, with the additional information as to Richard French supplied by Dr. Paget Toynbee a couple of days later; to the governors of the Robert Gordon Hospital, Aberdeen, for leave to reproduce their model; to the Rev. F. G. Cautley, for the tradition relating to the noble Dormer monument which he had taken much pains to have satisfactorily photographed for the *Life*; to the owners of the Edward VI and the terra cotta bust which we shall see reason to identify as Roubiliac's wife. The mask of Inigo Jones was an accidental discovery, and Mr. Paul Ryan has told me what is known of it, whilst to Mr. Iolo Williams I owe the gift of an unknown document in the sculptor's own hand, regarding a work as yet unknown to history. He came upon it at a Midland bookseller's, and was good enough to think that it ought to be in my possession.

### I. ROUBILIAC'S LAY FIGURE (Pls. i and ii).

There is something curiously personal about an artist's tools. Hogarth's mahlstick, Constable's palette, Reynolds's



ROUBILIAC'S LAY-FIGURE, WITH ORIGINAL CLOTHES AND BOX  
(London Museum)



ROUBILJAC'S LAY-FIGURE, WITH SOME OF THE ORIGINAL CLOTHES

(Scale of inches)

sitters' chair interest every visitor to the Diploma Gallery, as Dr. Johnson's armchair and tea-cup—for the tea-cup surely was his tool in the art of conversation—thrill all good Boswellians at Lichfield. Relics of our sculptors are, however, strangely to seek, and all lovers of art must learn with satisfaction that the London Museum at Lancaster House, through the generosity of Mr. Ernest S. Makower, has just acquired not only a lay figure made by Roubiliac, the 'small lay-man,' no. 88 in his Sale Catalogue, beyond a doubt, but also a part of the lay figure's wardrobe, as well as various garments belonging to some similar but smaller property.

The figure, whose scale is given by the 6 in. measure at its side, is exquisitely modelled out of cork, covered with silk stockinette of extraordinary fineness; the fingers end in metal tips, from which the covering has worn away, revealing finely modelled nails like those still visible beneath the stockinette which hides the metal toes; the head is of carved and painted wood, of a type suited, as the photographs will show, to either sex. Some of the most interesting of the garments, the uniform coat of George II's army, for instance, with its braiding and gold lace, which, with the leather gaiters buttoning to the knee, was doubtless used for the figure of Viscount Shannon on his monument at Walton-on-Thames, belong unfortunately to the lost smaller figure, along with the low strap shoes, another military item perhaps, the quilted stays and elbow gloves, the thistle-clocked silk stockings of a fairy fineness, the last two items being mentioned in the accompanying letter; even so, the available wardrobe is abundant enough.

One of the illustrations (Pl. ii) shows the lay figure in male costume, a black felt hat, which could, by the help of pins, be worn cocked both then and now, a short wig, a frilled shirt of the finest cambric, a square-cut snuff-coloured George II coat with braided button-holes and minute lead buttons, of a pattern familiar in portraits of the time, and black velvet breeches—that costume which Scott, at the beginning of *Waverley*, declares that nothing could make picturesque.

Another illustration (Pl. ii) shows portions of the female wardrobe, a black silk hat trimmed with faded pink ribbon, long hair, a cambric smock, a holland skirt, a hooded cloak

of red flannel, and one of those large pockets tied round the waist in front, such as that from which Leigh Hunt's Old Lady, in the delightful essay of that name, could produce, 'a pocket-book, a bunch of keys, a needle-case, a spectacle-case, crumbs of biscuit, a nutmeg and grater, a smelling bottle, and, according to the season, an orange or apple, which after many days she draws out, warm and glossy, to give to some little child that has well behaved itself.'

The garments, unfortunately, are too frail to bear cleaning, the wigs less convincing than they would be if curled to suit their wearer. The rest of the figure's wardrobe consists of brown canvas breeches and a cream canvas smock for a man, two flat straw hats of Hogarth's Shrimp Girl's type, a brown cambric wrapper, a grey-green cotton smock for a woman, and there is a piece of unshaped brownish cotton, obviously used as drapery, which could be arranged to suit many of the sculptor's portrait busts.

The entire collection came to the Museum in the original heavy, dark-oak box re-lined, as we shall see, with chamois leather in 1793, the year in which the letter accompanying it was written. The writer, an artist's colourman near Golden Square, is unfortunately not to be found in the very imperfect London Directory of the year, but Richard French, to whom the letter was addressed, appears in the third volume of Dr. Paget Toynbee's *Supplementary Letters of Horace Walpole* as a friend both of his and of Erasmus Darwin's, and the terms of the long letter to Walpole of October 13, 1791, prove that he was interested both in ancient and in modern sculpture.

The colourman's letter to him runs as follows :—

London, Octobr ye 21, 1793.

Sir. I write according to Order to inform you, that I have Sent by the waggon, which set out this Day from the White horse, Cripplegate, the Box Containing the Lay figure. I am exceeding Unhappy, in trespassing so Long on your patience. But as (*sic*) the delay has not Originated, from any Neglect, but intirely by Unforseen, and Unavoidable Events, the Consideration of which, I hope, Sir, will incline, you to pardon me in this particular. But altho' this figure, is the performance of so Great an Artist, as Mr. Roubelack, and I make no Doubt but it Cost, him tho a Small One, as much as I, now get, for one as Large as Life, yet, upon a Close inspection, of this Curious piece of workmanship, I Greatly wish, for an Opportunity, Sir, of Consulting you, in many Respects, first as to the Shape of the figure,

which should have been formed, as much of Elastick Composition as possible, I found to be made of Cork, which greatly incumbers the joints (and that without the least Stay, to prevent the Substances from being Loose on the Body and turning Round on the arms and thighs, of the Skeleton) in the next place it appears, that all the Socket, Tho Exceeding good work, have Originally Been made so deep, that the Screws Could not draw the joints any closer, and thirdly the Swivel on which the figure turns, which should have been put, as much in the Buttox, as possible, is plac'd to the front. But this I could not alter and youl pleas Sir to observe, that the Square End of the iron, that Rises from the Stand, gos into the Socket of this Ball, and notwithstanding there is some Objections to the Elbows, and Standing of the Body joints, yet, I think the figure, will be found to be a very Useful Apparatus, for I have done Everything to make it as Compleat as the Condition and Manner of Construction, will admit, and I hope my Endeavours will meet with your Approbation, which will be a great satisfaction to

Sir, yr most Obedient

humble servant

JOHN WRAGG.

P.S.—I must Beg the favour Sir of a line from you that I may know the Box Come Safe to hand. The top of the Box is Screwed down, with two screws, in from Six inches and a quarter from the end, and the heads filled up the Stockings and Gloves are in the Coat pockets—

please sir to Lay your finger on the Shoulder to keep down the scapula, when the Arm is Raised—

and Something should always be put under the thighs of the figure, when it Lays in the Box to keep the weight, from pressing Down the Buttox) the Box is new Lined with Shamy Leather, which Douth not Engender Moths like woolen Cloth.

Direct to

No 25 Denmark Street near Soho Square.

Roubiliac, in the spelling of whose name Mr. Wragg follows the rate-collector of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, was, as family tradition declared, exceedingly particular about the quality of his materials, and the extraordinarily life-like character of the modelling, the remarkable adaptability of the head to very different costumes and characters, bears out all that has been said about his passion for perfection. The figure was never meant to be seen outside his studio, but it is wrought with the care of an anatomist, the treatment of muscles and joints, the possible varieties of posture, which only those who have handled it can fully appreciate, being nothing short of amazing. A lay-figure is a small thing in itself; but the day of small things is not to be despised when they help towards the perfecting of a work of art.

## II. THE STATUE OF ROBERT GORDON

In the year 1753, the governors of the Robert Gordon Hospital, Aberdeen, decided to erect a statue of their founder, who had died one and twenty years before, and applied to John Cheere, then the head of the Hyde Park Corner business usually associated with his better-known brother Sir Henry, to send them a design. There is an ancient tradition that the real author of the statue was Roubiliac, and as information was desired by the College in connection with its recent bi-centenary, a photograph of the work was sent me by the Secretary. The scheme so closely recalls the statue of Sir Thomas Molyneux at Armagh of the previous year 1752, that I had no hesitation in saying that it was designed, and I thought carved, by Roubiliac; and some snapshots of the model (Pl. iii A), which is preserved at the College, confirmed the theory. The work, sensitive and finely conceived, is a notable addition to our knowledge; it seems certain that John Cheere delegated the work to the great artist who had worked for his brother Sir Henry, and through him had obtained the commission which first made his name, the statue of Handel in Vauxhall Gardens.

It may not be out of place to say a word as to the dress. Roubiliac's known statues, those of Handel, Cass, Forbes, Newton, Shakespeare, were represented in the dress of daily life; Sir Thomas Molyneux and Gordon were exceptions—idealised statues of the dead, for which, according to the ideas of the day, the element of heroisation involved the use of classical dress. The sacrifice of realism may cause us regret, but it is useless to blame the sculptor for following the conventions of a time when Rysback represented John Howard in the costume of a Roman senator over twenty years before that philanthropist's death; and that Roubiliac's management of drapery is incomparably more skilful than Rysback's, both this work and the Molyneux bear witness. The relief of Charity upon the pedestal recalls that of the Good Physician upon Molyneux; the scroll is the deed commemorating the foundation of the College which bears his name; and the richness of the treatment is singularly well suited to the plain architectural niche in which the statue stands.



A. MODEL FOR A STATUE OF ROBERT GORDON, HERE  
ASCRIBED TO ROUBILIAC

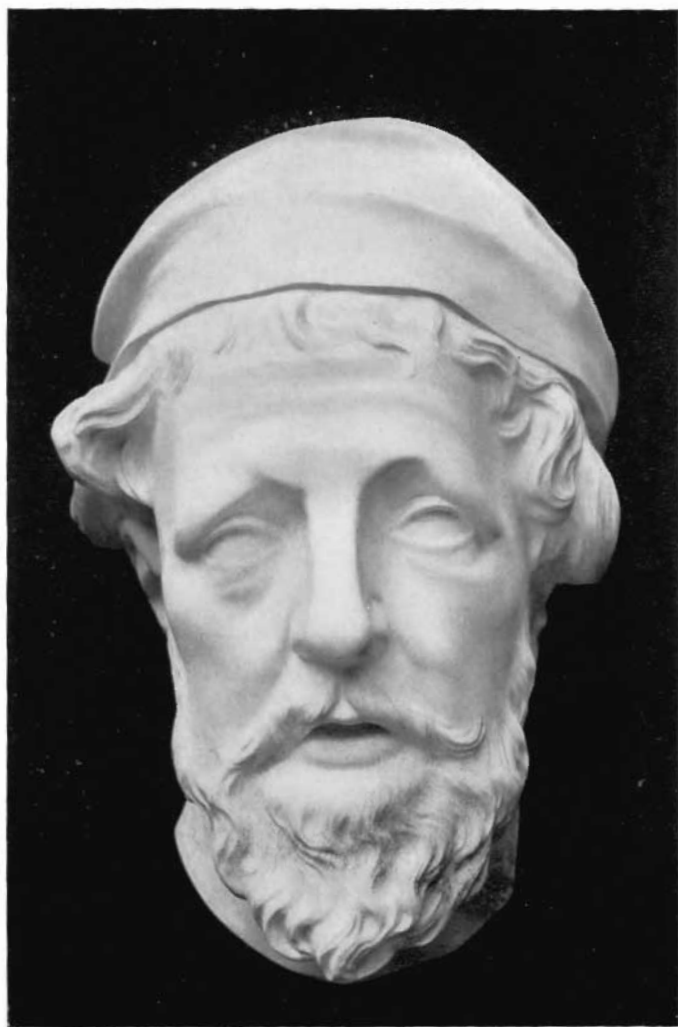


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B. TERRA-COTTA BUST, HERE IDENTIFIED AS A PORTRAIT  
BY ROUBILIAC OF HIS SECOND WIFE

PLATE III.



CAST OF A LOST MASK, HERE IDENTIFIED AS THAT OF INIGO JONES BY ROUBILIAC  
(*Victoria and Albert Museum*)

## III. A MEMORY OF THE DORMER MONUMENT

When the Rev. P. T. Cautley was visiting a very aged parishioner in the summer of 1929, the conversation fell upon the Dormer monument. The old lady remarked that she, as a girl, had been told by a very old lady that Fleetwood Dormer, the only son, whose death is said by tradition to have killed his father, died from having his chair pulled away from under him. The rector objected that he was said by tradition to have died of consumption. 'Yes, he did,' said the old lady; 'he went into a decline through the injury.'

There is every trace of consumption on the pathetic face of the dead youth whose monument was erected, three years after his death, in 1731; but this is surely a very remarkable case of folk-memory, this piece of horse-play with its tragic consequences, which incidentally gave Roubiliac his first great opportunity and thereby placed Quanton high in the ranks of village churches which enshrine works of art. The work is illustrated in my *Life and Works of Roubiliac*, Pl. iii.

## IV. A NEW HISTORICAL PORTRAIT

The marble head of Edward VI, in private possession, found in a shop in Devonshire some years ago, is signed but not dated, and is, like Scheemaker's rather earlier statue at St. Thomas' Hospital, a careful study from Holbein's portrait, with a little superfluous embroidery. The type, which is recorded as Roubiliac's neither in literature nor in the Sale Catalogue, adds another to the long series of historical portraits executed by the sculptor, which range from Shakespeare to Philip of Spain, and which, wherever we contest them, are founded on the best authorities and executed with spirit and truth. But the features of Edward VI are not inspiring, and the work is not among the sculptor's most successful efforts.

## V. A PORTRAIT MASK (Pl. iv)

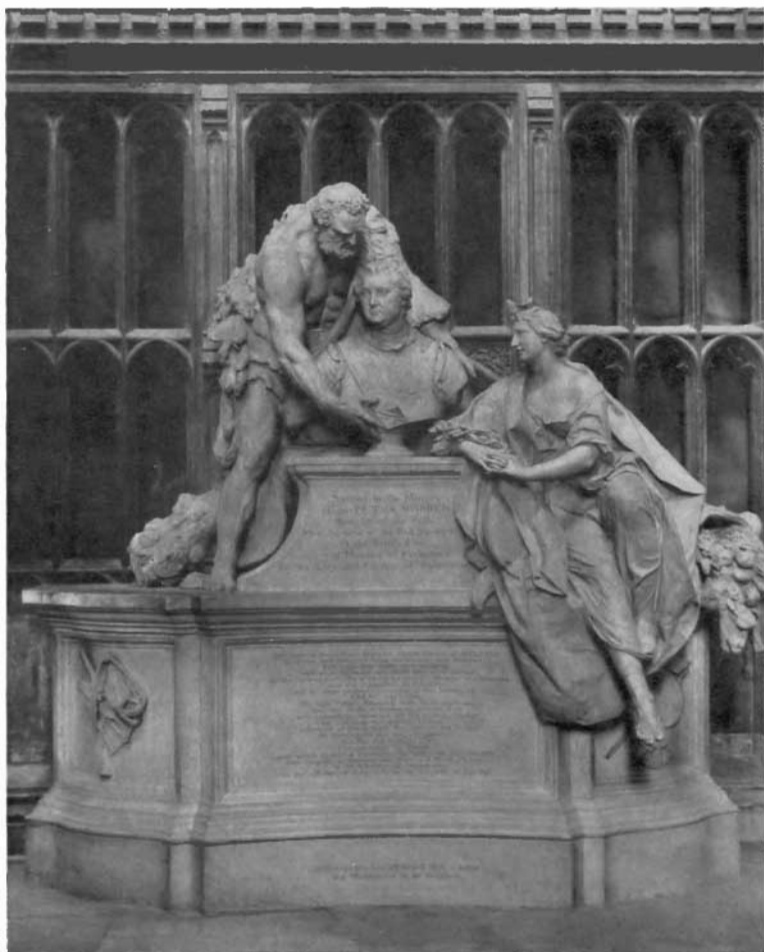
The mask of Inigo Jones, which I came across by accident, is another work of the same class—the re-interpretation of a known portrait. Rysback had popularised

Inigo Jones, representing him (at Chiswick in the ivory version by Verskovis at South Kensington, and in the often-copied model at the R.I.B.A.) as the inspired artist, even his dress partaking of this character. Few portrait heads, indeed,—for Vandyck's famous picture, once at Houghton, was the root of all the eighteenth century versions—have inspired more or better sculpture. The attribution is conjectural, but, I think, convincing, and as medallions are mentioned in the Sale Catalogue, this is probably another essay of the same nature.

#### VI. 'THE BEAUTIFUL MISS CROSBY'

A charming terra-cotta bust of a woman, naked save for a scarf knotted round the hair, in the possession of Mr. E. G. Hoyer Millar, has also no history, having been found in a dealer's shop some years ago and bought for its beauty (Pl. iii B). It is almost certainly the model for one of the pairs of Small Naked Busts, no. 20 in the second day's sale of the contents of the artist's studio, and no. 21 on the fourth day's sale; the models being sold as no. 46 on the first day. All these, however, were of plaster, and this terra-cotta was not included in the sale at all; the question arises, Why was this apparently unimportant subject reproduced so often? The answer, I think, can be given, and is not a little interesting.

When I saw the work, I was perplexed by its apparent familiarity, though I had never seen anything like it before; the Britannia on the Warren monument (Pl. v) in Westminster Abbey soon suggested itself, and comparison with a photograph of that work not only proved that the likeness was not imaginary but accounted for the curiously iconic character of the bust, since the Britannia is said by Roubiliac family tradition to be a portrait of Roubiliac's second wife, 'the beautiful Miss Crosby.' The fact also explains the absence of the terra-cotta from the Sale Catalogue, since we know that certain works, including some of family interest, were withheld from the auction of May 12th, and sold on the 11th of June (*Life and Works of L. F. Roubiliac*, pp. 19-70); this terra-cotta model might well be among them, though the casts and mould would go in with the mass of his work on May 12th. We know Elizabeth Crosby; we



THE WARREN MONUMENT BY ROUBILIAC IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY



know the notable third wife, Celeste ; shall we ever recover the features of Caroline Hélot, that Huguenot first wife who is but the shadow of a shade, and whose daughter was the godchild of Nicolas Sprimont of the Cheslea Factory ?

# VII. AN UNKNOWN ROUBILIAC DOCUMENT (Fig. 1)

Dr. William Bedford, F.R.C.P., was a notable figure in his own day. He entered St. John's College, Cambridge, in 1721, took his M.A. in 1725, his M.D. (after much wire-pulling and correspondence with Dr. Zachary Grey) in 1737 ; became Fellow, Censor and Registrar of the Royal College of Physicians, and died on May 14th, 1747, being buried in St. Nicholas, Cole Abbey. His father had been chaplain to Bishop Ken, and in 1742 was head of the non-signing clergy (Nichols, *Lit. Anec.* I, 168-9), keeping 'a boarding-house for young gentlemen in Westminster' (*Lit. History*, 248, note), and his second wife, Elizabeth, the mother of one daughter, must have been a notable woman, for the only fact hitherto recorded about her—the only one, at least, that I can trace—is that Thomas Hearne bequeathed her his *Diaries*, which Dr. Rawlinson subsequently bought from her to present to the University of Oxford. Now, however, she appears in a new light, as a sitter to Roubiliac :—

'25 Aug. 1744. Recd of Dr. William Bedford ten guineas for Mrs. Bedford's bust in clay and I promise for thirty guineas more to do the same in Marble upon demand witness my hand, L. F. Roubiliac.

Lewis Francis Roubiliac.'

25 Aug. 1744 Recd of Dr. William Bedford ten guineas for Mrs Bedford's Bust in clay & I promise for thirty guineas more to do the same in Marble upon demand witness my hand L F Roubiliac

Lewis Francis Roubiliac.

FIG. 1

So runs the document which Mr. John Williams found at a bookseller's and generously presented to myself; and, unfortunately, it is all we know of the matter. The work is not mentioned in the Sale Catalogue, unless it is the terra-cotta bust of a lady, no. 82 on the second day's sale; and this seems improbable, since the terra-cotta was in Dr. Bedford's possession. It is possible, however, that the work was executed in marble and the model returned to Roubiliac; but as we have no proof that it was so executed, the works were probably unconnected. Documents connected with the sculptor are very few, and not one in his writing has the name written again in the English form used by the rate-collectors of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields. Let us hope that the work may one day be identified, that we may one day have the satisfaction of possessing a portrait by him with documentary evidence in his own hand to back it. So far, no such thing has been discovered, but if, within fifteen months of publication, a book which was nine years in the writing has produced so much, a decade may see our knowledge on another footing altogether.