

## Jonathan Sells – Local Sculptor and Stone Carver

Corfe Castle-based stone carver and sculptor Jonathan Sells has just completed an amazing commission for one of his most challenging projects.



*Jonathan with his panel showing quarrymen at work*

It meant he had to work non-stop for almost five months, often twelve hours a day, including working outdoors to midnight on the coldest nights of the year, and only taking a handful of days of over Christmas.

Jonathan is a highly-acclaimed award-winning stone carver and sculptor with over 40 years' experience in both figurative and abstract

work. He has lived in Corfe Castle since 1985, is part of the Boilerhouse Gallery, which used to be called the Old Milk Factory, across the line from the town's railway station, and teaches at Burngate Stone Centre at Langton Matravers.

Jonathan is well-known for his humorous, often quirky, figurative sculpture. His work ranges from small pieces like Purbeck marble leaves, lovingly polished to bring out their natural beauty to reveal shells and fossils, to off-the-wall-quirky figurines, to large public sculptures.



*Jonathan with two of his panels on the building*

Among his work are the 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary piece at Christchurch Priory Gardens, the Tregonwell/Creek statue outside the Bournemouth International Centre, and the 700<sup>th</sup> Wareham Market anniversary piece at Cottes Auctioneers in Wareham.

Another of his recent – yet barely publicised - works is the 6-foot Primordial Sculpture outside the Heritage Centre in Lulworth, depicting life that evolved during the Cretaceous, Jurassic and Triassic periods 250 million years ago.

Late last July Jonathan was commissioned to carve four large wall panels for a major project, named Genesis, in the Stonehouse area of Plymouth. Genesis would be the name of a new £5 million block housing affordable offices and storage units.

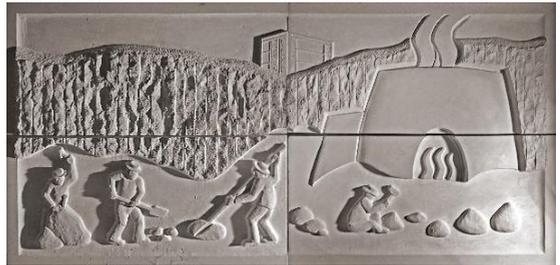


*Plymouth Stonehouse quarrymen working with and loading stone onto horses.*

The panels would depict historic trades of Stonehouse, such as stone quarrying and boat-building. Each of the four panels would be around 6ft by 3ft., which would be challenging enough anyway. Except .... Each large panel would comprise four smaller quarter panels, all interconnecting, with the design actually running across the quarter panels. So

as well as everything, the carving had to be pinpoint accurate.

The panels had been designed by Stonehouse historian and artist Richard Fisher. Jonathan's role was to turn Richard's design into what is known as a relief – a type of carving or sculpture in which the figures are raised a few inches from a flat background to give a three-dimensional effect - using Portland stone.



*Quarrymen breaking and preparing stone to place in a kiln*

The schedule was daunting;

Jonathan had just four months to complete the actual carving. "Before even seeing any of the plans," he recalls, "I knew that 16 weeks for effectively 16 stones was a tall order."

There was also the problem of weight and size. Each smaller quarter stone measured approximately 3ft by 18in by 5in thick, and weighed just under two hundredweight.



*Tinkies floating logs to be worked by wood workers*

To meet the schedule, Jonathan would regularly not put down his tools until midnight – working outside under a marquee, because of the dust, and with

winter coming on.

The first task was creating 100-odd templates from artist Richard's designs, as rough guides, then transferring the images on to the flat surface of the stones themselves. Jonathan didn't actually begin carving until early September. He finished the first panel on 20<sup>th</sup> October – he kept a daily diary of his progress. The good news was that the clients had seen photos of the panels – and liked them.



*Boat builders using the wood prepared by wood workers.*

“I breathed a sigh of relief at this stage,” he says, “but there was still a lot of work to do before I would see the light at the end of the tunnel and the finished result.”

Mid-November the second panel was taken away, but the weather had changed and Jonathan was already wearing thermals.

Incredibly, he finished the third panel on 16<sup>th</sup> December, so was able to take a week off for Christmas to be with his family. When he returned to work on the 2<sup>nd</sup> January the cold was extreme and he had to double up on the coats.

The good news was that the construction work was slightly behind schedule and he was given a two-week extension

The final panel was taken away on 26<sup>th</sup> January; incredibly, Jonathan had met the deadline.

Now he's looking forward to his next big project – as yet unknown - and enjoying himself designing and working on a range of local commissions.

To see Jonathan's work go to: [www.jonathan-sells.com](http://www.jonathan-sells.com)