



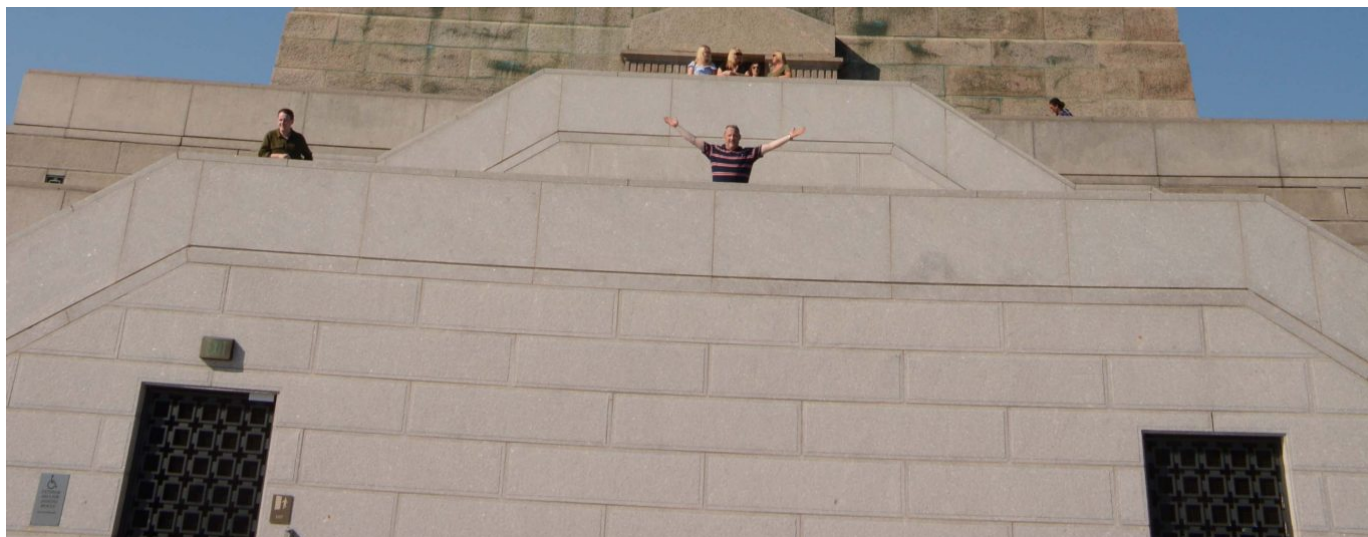
Dumfries & Galloway! What's Going On?

ARTS

Was Sandstone From Dumfries & Galloway Used To Build The Statue Of Liberty? Find Out The Truth At Kirkcudbright Galleries

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RB at The Statue of Liberty, Credit DGWGO

There is a rich history and connection between New York and Dumfriesshire.

Hugh Bryden of Roncadora Press and Maddy Rosenberg of CENTRAL BOOKING, have launched The Sandstone Steps Project, which will culminate in a series of events and collaborations between visual artists, musicians and poets from Dumfries and Galloway and New York, producing a prestigious editioned artist's book, commissioned music, poetry pamphlets and artists print portfolios – along with exhibitions and performances on both sides of the Atlantic.



The exhibition, which is on show now at Kirkcudbright Galleries until 24 September, gives visitors a taster of what Roncadora Press and CENTRAL BOOKING are already producing as companies.

The exhibition then leads on to explain the Sandstone Steps wooden box that will be made as part of the project. In order to raise funds, they have created a Crowdfunder page, alongside selling books and artworks from Roncadora Press and CENTRAL BOOKING of which the sales will go to support the project.

The contributions that they raise will help towards publishing the poetry, recording the music, facilitating the production of artists' prints, producing the wooden boxes, paying for travel and accommodation and for participating artists for the Sandstone Steps events programme in Dumfries & Galloway from April to September 2024.

Speaking on the Sandstone Steps Project and Exhibition, Chair of Dumfries and Galloway Council's Communities Committee Ian Blake comments: "This project helps to show the unique transatlantic connections that Dumfries and Galloway has, and the project itself is an excellent way to celebrate the many forms of culture through the production of poetry, literature, art and music events that the region will enjoy."

Vice Chair of Communities Committee Jackie McCamon added: "It's great to see Kirkcudbright Galleries and the Museums Service supporting a project relating to local history with such fascinating historic roots to Annan's Coreshill quarry, and through this project bringing it forward into the modern day and celebrating artists' and makers living in Dumfries and Galloway and in New York in bringing cultural events to the area."

The history.

Though the often-repeated story of local folklore that sandstone was transported as ballast from the port of Annan to form part of the base of the Statue of Liberty has been laid to rest, the reality is much more interesting, revealing important links between Dumfriesshire and New York.

With the expansion in the 1850s of the Cumbrian ports of Silloth, Maryport and Whitehaven, and the development subsequently of the railway links, large amounts of sandstone were transported from Annan's Corsehill quarry to New York. Records show that during that period, Corsehill quarry alone shipped an average of 250 tons per week to New York.

Corsehill sandstone was particularly prized, as when first quarried it is soft and was found to be easily carved. But upon exposure to the air, it hardens slowly and feels like polished wood when rubbed down. This New Red Triassic stone was used for fine details in the brownstones in New York City and then extensively in the construction of the New York State Capitol in Albany, started in 1868 and completed in 1896.

The Million Dollar Staircase.

In Albany, the state capitol of New York, the grand Great Western Staircase, also known as the Million Dollar Staircase due to its eventual cost, was begun. Designed by Henry Hobson Richardson and built by Isaac Perry, the staircase contains 444 steps and reaches a height of 119 feet high. It is renowned as an outstanding example of architectural stone carving excellence.

Made of sandstone from Corsehill, the massive staircase is most notably known for the intricate carvings that decorate the stairs. Over 500 stone cutters and carvers were employed at various times. Many had mastered their trade here in Scotland, stone carvers from Lochmaben Creca and Brydekirk, all in the Corsehill area worked there. Using only ladders and scaffolding, often in very uncomfortable positions, these stone artists spent years, at a salary of five dollars a day, sculpting some of the finest stonework found anywhere in the world. Their main task was carving portraits of various prominent people into the stone, as ordered by chief architect Isaac Perry. Among the 77 famous faces beautifully carved are George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Walt Whitman and Susan B. Anthony.

With the famous Americans completed, Perry decided to allow his elite group of carvers to sculpt the faces of friends, relatives and people they knew. These are referred to as the Capitol's Unknowns and comprise over 400 portraits.

Surrounded by United States notables, we find these Dumfriesshire people inspiring and celebrate them, along with the artisans who carved them and the journeys that brought them from small rural Dumfriesshire villages across the Atlantic.