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Review: A conversation with Ian Rank-Broadley, FRSS

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1 Ian Rank-Broadley, *Licoricia with Asher*, 2017. Maquette of clay on wire armature.
Photograph by Ian Rank-Broadley



A conversation with Ian Rank-Broadley, FRSS

In 2022, the first life-size sculpture of a medieval English Jewish woman, Licoricia of Winchester, striding hand-in-hand with her son Asher, was unveiled in Winchester's city centre. William and Maggie Carver, residents of Winchester, were integral in getting this statue erected, and the two hoped to have Ian Rank-Broadley, Fellow of the Royal Society of Sculptors, be the sculptor who designed and then sculpted the statue. Not only does Rank-Broadley's art appear throughout England, but since 1998, Rank-Broadley's effigy of HM Queen Elizabeth II can be seen on coinage.¹ The following is a gently edited interview with Rank-Broadley, conducted by Asa Simon Mittman and Miriamne Ara Krummel.

Miriamne Ara Krummel: Asa and I are honoured by your willingness to meet with us today. As a Jewish woman, I want to thank you personally for the careful and devoted labour you gave to this sculpture.

1 Ian Rank-Broadley, FRSS, <https://www.ianrank-broadley.co.uk/>.

Ian Rank-Broadley: My father-in-law was a Jew in Vienna, and he made a very courageous and successful attempt to escape. Just getting out before the Nazis came in, he took a train to Switzerland, and at a prearranged signal, threw himself off the moving train to make sure that he ended up in Swiss territory. In doing so, he broke both legs. Most of us would consider that very unsuccessful. But for him, it was the best thing that could have happened because the Swiss authorities were obliged to put him in hospital. And that saved him. While he was in hospital in the 1930s, he wrote to Michael Marks – later the Marks of Marks and Spencer – and explained his plight and that he needed somebody to sponsor him so that he could leave Switzerland and come to England. Marks agreed. A Jew himself, he had that natural empathy. Obviously, this country took a great many Jews, but even so there are very many who didn't manage to get out, and with that there's great shame. This country benefited enormously – Freud came here; Isaiah Berlin came here.² These Jewish refugees immeasurably uplifted England's cultural and scientific life.

My father-in-law's sister tried the same tactic a little while later: she jumped from the train at the pre-arranged spot, but didn't break her legs. She was sent back and, along with his mother, was sent to Mauthausen and perished.

My wife is Jewish, and my children would be seen as Jewish by Israel even though I'm not Jewish. But I felt that great empathy for the dilemmas of a people who just had to get out and had nowhere to go. And for me, I tried to imagine, in very real terms, what that meant, and how I could put that into a statue. I didn't want Licoricia to be in any way sentimental or maudlin or even romantic. I saw, looking at my own daughter, who's quite statuesque, a very strong, independent woman who was capable of actually conducting international banking affairs. She really captured my imagination.

MAK: Now I feel like I wasn't imagining that Licoricia was clutching Asher's hand and that she had a look of worry or fear in her eyes.

IR-B: I always imagine: what if that were my daughter, with a dilemma that Licoricia was faced with, what would it mean? Licoricia must have had such a strong will because even though she was protected as part of the king's estate, she was still vulnerable to all sorts of prejudice and bad actions that other Jewish members of the population had to endure.

2 Isaiah Berlin was one of the early presidents of the Jewish Historical Society of England.



2 Ian Rank-Broadley, *Licoricia holding Asher's hand*, 2017. Maquette of clay on wire armature.

Photograph by Ian Rank-Broadley



3 Ian Rank-Broadley, *Licoricia with loose hair*, 2017. Maquette of clay on wire armature.

Photograph by Ian Rank-Broadley

Asa Simon Mittman: I am wondering about your decisions when you were planning the work, about the way Licoricia is represented – the clothing, the additional items, and so on. Did you look at medieval images? Medieval images of Jewish women are fairly rare, so what kinds of source material did you find on which to base their costuming and the items that Licoricia and Asher are holding?

IR-B: Very early on, William Carver gave me Suzanne Bartlett's book, and of course, that has some illustrations, but mostly I just looked at costume of the period, and the sort of thing one would see in manuscripts, to get an idea.³ In many ways I've taken a bit of artistic licence although not as much as I would wish to, because in my original maquette, Licoricia had hair flowing, which I thought artistically was rather nice. But of course it wasn't factually correct. A medieval woman, particularly of higher rank, would not have gone round with hair undone in public. So obviously, I

3 Suzanne Bartlett, *Licoricia of Winchester: Marriage, Motherhood and Murder in the Medieval Anglo-Jewish Community* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2009).



4 Head of the Norwich Tallage Roll, 1233. Issues of the Exchequer, E. 401/1565, m. 1.

Public Record Office, The National Archives.

Photograph by Asa Simon Mittman

had to change that. But the sculpture is as I first envisaged it: of this resolute woman striding forward. I wasn't particularly concerned with costume because, to me, the most important thing was to get the feeling right, producing a commanding presence in the sculpture. We can be very pedantic about things, in terms of getting the right stitch here and the right stitch there, and then the work can fail in its prime objective in some ways.

ASM: Since we don't have any images of her or records that actually describe Jewish women's clothing, we must resort to our imagination. But I am glad that that her hair wound up covered. She would have been ashamed to be seen in public with her hair flowing. Getting that right seems important for honouring Licoricia and her legacy.

MAK: Licoricia's headdress resembles an image that we believe is our first of a Jewish woman, an image of the head of a 1233 Norwich Tallage Roll. Had you any idea that the hat you were putting on top of Licoricia's head was so accurate?

5 Ian Rank-Broadley,
Licoricia, detail, 2017.
Maquette of clay on wire
armature.
Photograph by
Ian Rank-Broadley



IR-B: I was given some sources of information. I think that my ideas about the headgear came from the Victoria and Albert Museum's costume collection. I got the gist of it, except I think that the hair would have been probably done up a bit more in a bun. From this illustration, though, it looks like the hair flows down her back. So I wonder about that.

MAK: The Norwich Tallage Roll represents a period piece, but we don't know whether "Avegaye" is a construction of the scribe, who at the time was supposed to be taking records for Henry III and not adding a scribal doodle. Still, the similarity between Avegaye's and Licoricia's headdresses is startling and works to take back the image of a medieval Jewish woman from an evil representation. What were your thoughts about the construction of the image of Asher?

IR-B: I think Maggie and William Carver very much wanted Asher to appear. They thought that Asher's presence would connect the statue with the public at large who pass through Winchester on a daily basis. In truth, once the statue was unveiled, there were a lot of young mothers who came with children to see it. From that point of view, Asher's presence works rather well and was a subject they could immediately relate to, rather than Licoricia standing alone on a plinth. The presence of Asher makes her very

6 Ian Rank-Broadley, *Licoricia*, 2022, view showing the figure striding purposefully. Photograph by Iona Wolff, reproduced with permission of the *Licoricia of Winchester Appeal*



accessible and more meaningful to the present public, to many young mothers and fathers. *Licoricia*'s striding forward very purposely; Asher's seen something else that he'd rather do; his mother's dragging him in the right direction. I thought that rather than just limply following behind, the boy's attention is turned somewhere else as a realistic touch. It doesn't matter whether you're medieval or you're contemporary. I said, "Well, it crosses all the boundaries. This is not just a Jewish woman; this is every woman who seeks independence, who seeks to operate in a man's world where everything's loaded against her." It's really only fairly recently that the majority of women achieved any sort of emancipation. And, as we well know, in some parts of the world, in different religions, they haven't. And in fact, if anything, their emancipation is being taken away from them.

MAK: Yes.

IR-B: The sculpture is about the Jewish community, but you can transpose it into other situations.

MAK: Absolutely. *Licoricia*, recently widowed by her second husband's death, was raising a child, basically alone, while running a serious financial business. But *Licoricia* definitely remained Jewish. There were a lot of Jews who became *conversi* [converts] and moved into the Domus

7 Ian Rank-Broadley, *Licoricia*, 2022, view showing Asher pulling Licoricia. Photograph by Iona Wolff, reproduced with permission of the Licoricia of Winchester Appeal



Conversorum [House of the Converted] in London.⁴ The presence of the dreidel [a top children play with at Hanukkah] indicates that importance of Jewishness to her and Asher. I also noticed, clutched in her other hand, a roll in the maquette that is then transformed into a book in the statue. Were these all your choices? Was it you who decided to put the dreidel in Asher's hand?

IR-B: I must confess: the dreidel was suggested. The committee who commissioned the statue wanted Asher and Licoricia to carry something of significance.⁵ Licoricia needed to carry something which indicated the sort of work that she would do. These small things give meaning and purpose.

ASM: What kind of feedback have you had now that the piece has been on view?

4 Henry III established the Domus Conversorum in 1232 with the intention of converting the Jews; see Lauren Fogle, *The King's Converts: Jewish Conversion in Medieval London* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019).

5 Rank-Broadley, email to Krummel, 24 Nov. 2024, provided the dates for the creation of the sculpture: "Dec. 2016 – Approached by Laurence Wolff, Master at Winchester College, inviting my participation in competition for Licoricia; 5 July 2017 – Formally offered commission for Licoricia; June 2017 – 1st Maquette; Sept. 2017 – Final Maquette; Jan 2021 – Full scale work started; May 2021 – Finished clay full scale clay sculpture; Jan 2022 – Bronze cast."

IR-B: I hear a lot from the Carvers, who are local in Winchester and tell me that there's been nothing but good said about Licoricia. The only thing that I consider slightly derogatory was when the statue was first unveiled, somebody put a drinks can on Asher's hands, obviously as a joke. But I've not heard of anybody acting in any derogatory or defamatory way about the sculpture. I think that is really good. Nobody's dogged it with inappropriate slogans or anything like that.⁶

ASM: I was thinking, while looking at the piece, about the memorial to Emmett Till, who had a prominent role in sparking a lot of the activism around anti-Black racism in the US. That site has been vandalized and shot numerous times. The current monument is in a bulletproof case – a reminder that a lot of the prejudices in history remain vividly alive. One of the things that stood out is the commissioning and creation of this sculpture now, in a time when antisemitism seems to be resurgent in England and globally. The panic about Jews worries me a great deal, so I write books and articles because that's what I do: write. What role do you think artists, and creative people in general, can have in the face of these alarming trends?

IR-B: That's not an easy question. Sometimes, good politics doesn't necessarily make good art. You can start with great intentions and end up with something that really doesn't work at all. One wants to say something but in a way that people will say more positive rather than derogatory things. In my realization of Licoricia, I wanted to try and give a touch of film star quality. I wanted her to look good. I didn't want the image of middle age, a little wizened, a little lined, probably missing a few teeth. I wanted this image of this incredibly dynamic, forceful, heroine in any sort of big Hollywood film: she's got everything. I wanted the public to connect with her – to want to be her. I wanted to create an image that I knew women would go, "Yeah, I'd like to be like that." I think when you can get your public to do that, they're less inclined to discriminate against it. So that's the way I approach the statue – to show what is good about this individual or the things they've done in their life. I think most people around Winchester are entirely ignorant of the Jews even though

6 For an incident of vandalism, see <https://www.thejc.com/news/fears-of-antisemitic-vandal-attack-on-licoricia-statue-in-winchester-t2p3q2kk>, 12 May 2022 (accessed 14 Nov. 2024). Both William Carver and IR-B said that the damage to Asher's face was overblown, not unusual for public sculptures; email correspondence with Miriamne Krummel, 22 April 2024.

there is a street named Jewry Street. The Jews were a very positive thing to the wellbeing – and certainly the financial wellbeing – of this country in that time. So, yeah, artists can play a part as long as that part doesn't become overtly political. I think you've got to be a bit more subtle. You've got to show your character in such a good light that people want to be that character. Say one wanted to get away from any, perhaps, stereotypes of what a Jewish woman should be.

ASM: It's a difficult thing to try to find ways of speaking to larger political concerns without getting people's hackles up over positions that they are already locked into. How do you get people to see afresh a subject that they might come to with a set of preconceptions?

IR-B: If you can break a stereotype, it really does help. And I realize how ridiculous all these prejudices are. Prejudice is obviously gross ignorance. And probably these prejudiced people have never met anyone Jewish. And I think that's a great sadness.

ASM: Many laws passed in the Middle Ages to regulate Jewish-Christian interaction were likely driven by exactly that basic fact: getting to know people, you come to realize they're actually full-fledged, three-dimensional human beings, rather than basic, racist stereotypes. Laws were passed to try to stop communication, interaction, relationships. There was a big scandal in Hereford because there was a Jewish wedding to which all the prominent Christians of the town were invited.⁷ This drew the attention of the bishop and king because they did not want cheerful breaking of bread between these communities under any circumstances, because of course, then people would wind up friends, rather than merely instrumentally making use of one another.

IR-B: It's quite interesting that, at the unveiling, where the Prince of Wales came along, were all the leaders of various communities – Jewish and others. There was somebody from the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England, the Sikh community . . . It was very diverse. They could all see themselves in it because each community could be a victim of discrimination. The event showed us that we can have faith in our communities, and we can have our own identities, but we still need to mix with each other and understand each other. And this is why I think the king has been very good, because even on his coronation, he made sure

7 See Joe and Caroline Hillaby, "The English Medieval Jewry, c. 1075–1290: An Introduction", in *The Palgrave Dictionary of Medieval Anglo-Jewish History*, ed. Joe and Caroline Hillaby (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 1–15, 164.

that he met all the heads of all the major churches. He even had the Chief Rabbi come and stay overnight at the palace because he couldn't come on Saturday.

MAK: It was very good that the then-Prince Charles was able to return for another unveiling of the statue after he recovered from Covid. And the Chief Rabbi's words on the Licoricia of Winchester website are very powerful.⁸ On your website, you explained that the making of images has been central to your life: how has the making of the Licoricia and Asher statue figured in your creative life as an artist, as a sculptor?

IR-B: It was important because although I was making Licoricia and Asher, I was also making my daughter, Viola, and her son, Simeon. That was a very powerful connection. If my father-in-law hadn't escaped, my wife wouldn't have been around. He would have been shuffled off to the gas chambers along with the rest. And you see, just by chance, this bit of bad luck of two broken legs allows another generation. It's such a fragile thing that could easily have gone the wrong way that I felt needed to be celebrated. Although it is Licoricia and Asher, it is also my child and my grandson. The statue also belongs to everyone else out there, as well. They can superimpose themselves on it. For me, that's very important. It's the feeling; all the time it's the feeling. I think, sometimes, men are very good at imparting information, but not very good at imparting feeling. I work in a very intuitive and emotional way. I've got to have this response, or else I don't think I could make the art very good. I felt strongly connected to the subject of Licoricia and Asher on this deep, personal level. That's what made it work. I didn't say, "Well, I just need to put a woman there and a boy there and they happen to be Jewish." I felt it. I felt the importance of it. I'm actually amazed that this is the first life-size statue of a Jewish woman. And there are generations of Jewish women that have contributed so much to this small country, let alone the United States of America or Israel or elsewhere in the world. I think they need to be recognized for what they've done.

MAK: I feel so lucky as a medievalist to have available the statue of an English Jewish woman, especially because I've been thinking about Licoricia for many years. When Suzanne Bartlett's book came out, I was so excited. We finally get to read a biography of an English Jewish woman!

⁸ Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, speech, unveiling ceremony, Winchester, 10 Feb. 2022, <https://licoricia.org/visit/> (accessed 14 Nov. 2024).

History had always focused on the medieval men who were important writers of poetry, fables, *siddurim* [prayer books]. Not only have you done a really great favour to medievalists everywhere, but yes, this is the first public representation of a Jewish woman that is not antisemitic. I love hearing about the feeling and the deep, personal emotional attachment you have invested in this sculpture, the intuitive emotional way that you did this work. We were told as graduate students not to get emotionally involved in our writing, and your work resists that dictum.

ASM: Absolutely. We were supposed to be the “voice from nowhere”, which I have rejected.

MAK: And we have both resisted.⁹ Ian, I’m wondering about your sculpting process. Was there an initial drawing that was made?

IR-B: A lot of people think that you design something two dimensionally, and then you go and make it. I don’t work that way at all. I do drawing, but to me drawing is a parallel activity. If I’m working on a sculpture, I make a small model, which is known as a maquette, and I might make several of these [see plates 1–3, 5]. I might even make half a dozen, all different positions. Because actually, if you’re making sculpture, you must always consider three dimensions. If you draw something, that is only one view, so that doesn’t really help. I start off with the maquette, and that might only be 12 inches [30 centimetres] to start with, and then I make them bigger once I’ve had a dialogue with the client. Very often, the client doesn’t really know quite what they want, so I try to give them a series of options. I might do three or half a dozen maquettes. Then gradually, they’ll say, “Oh, I like that. I don’t like that. I think this is a good one.” I listen very carefully to what they’re saying. Then I put together what I think is the definitive maquette that expresses everyone’s ideas, and see whether that’s acceptable, and that’s what I did with *Licoricia*. I showed a series of alternatives, and we gradually whittled it down.

MAK: How did your daughter and your grandson respond to being models for this?

9 Asa Simon Mittman, “Introduction: The Impact of Monsters and Monster Studies”, in *Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman, with Peter Dendle (London: Ashgate, 2012), 1–14; Miriamne Ara Krummel, “Fables, Facts, and Fiction: Jewishness in the English Middle Ages” (Ph.D. diss., Lehigh University, 2002).

IR-B: My daughter has always been very reluctant. She said, “No, no, I’m not standing still for all that length of time.” I think she grudgingly let me take some photographs in a position, but that was all. At that point, my grandson Simeon was such a live wire, we couldn’t have nailed him down, really. So it was just a sort of remembered image of him, and occasionally some photographs to refer to, but they were constantly at the forefront of my mind because, obviously, the medieval period is a long time ago. I was fortunate that my daughter and grandson were about the right age; the emotional content came very much from that.

MAK: So, now your grandson and your daughter are famous, too. Do they know that they are famous?

IR-B: They take it all with a pinch of salt. They sometimes pretend they don’t know me. My daughter now has a different surname, so, of course, she says, “it has nothing to do with me.” My son has the same surname, so anything I do reflects on him. He works as an economist for the London Stock Exchange, and a colleague said, “Oh, I think your father’s famous.” And he said, “Oh, yes, I think he might be.” And so, the guy said, “am I right in thinking your father’s a clown?” And my son goes, “Yes, he’s a clown!”

MAK: In 1998, you created a royal effigy of Queen Elizabeth II for coinage, and then in 2012, you created a five-pound silver coin to mark the queen’s Diamond Jubilee, so, yes, you’re famous!

IR-B: I hope that I won’t be too much of a celebrity. But the thing about the coinage was, I put my initials on there. And I was the first artist to do it for a hundred or so years. There was a letter to *The Times* newspaper, suggesting that I.R.B. stood for the Irish Republican Brotherhood, which is a precursor of the IRA [Irish Republican Army], and they didn’t think it was a good idea at all!

ASM: Since you began working on the sculpture, there have been many articles talking about the commission, the history of Jews in England, and the design of your piece. Is there something that the current record has missed?

IR-B: I would always caution people, with art, don’t take what the artist says too seriously. I find that there are some artists who are very good at loads and loads of words, which acts as a sort of camouflage. And really, truthfully, I don’t want my work to have an explanation. I want people to look at it, if they can, to be in the presence of it, and I want them to feel

it. Because that is the thing, this emotional connection, this feeling, this sensitivity to the subject. I mean, we're all very literate today. The problem today is we glance at things and think we've seen it. I would say, "just look at it", particularly if you're able to come back to look at it time and time again. Then you get something else from it. Sometimes what we need is to forget about the words and actually just use our eyes. I spent the last hour spouting lots of words . . . don't take it too literally! It's the sculpture that matters the most. Even if you were to find it and not know who did it, I think it would still have its meaning.

ASM: I very much appreciate that. I'm reminded of an old friend, Éamonn Ó Carragáin, a medievalist at University College Cork [Ireland].¹⁰ He gave a talk years ago about the Bewcastle Monument [in Cumbria], a very tall early English work. He began by saying, "I've been working on this for 40 years, I think I finally figured it out." The talk was his experience of going to see it at all the stages of his life: as a young man and in his mature prime, then as an older man. In every season—at dawn, noon, and dusk. Every time he found other things lurking inside it. His theory is that that's actually what you're supposed to do with a work of art. You're not supposed to go to an exhibition, see the thing once, and take away a singular experience, but rather, to return, and return, and return. This is one of the things that public sculpture facilitates for the people of the town. They will keep passing her. They won't notice her every time—they'll be late and hurrying to get home for dinner, but she'll still be there each and every time they go down the street. They will accumulate a collective experience over this span of time rather than one singular, fixed interpretation.

IR-B: I think that's quite right. You know, we need to use our eyes more. I should mention one other thing: very often for public sculpture, one is required to make things larger than life size, very often one and a quarter times life size, or even in an exception, one and a half. And sometimes I'm reluctant to increase the scale because I think although Licoricia, the sculpture, is bigger than the actual medieval Jewish woman, I still wanted her to be relatable. The sculpture is just about six feet tall, which, for a medieval woman, obviously was extremely tall. But my daughter is just under six foot, so in many ways, one is playing with this idea: do I reproduce the medieval person whom I don't know or the modern person whom I do know? This is a dilemma.

10 Professor Ó Carragáin died on 18 Oct. 2024.

MAK: When I look at Licoricia, I put myself in the space she occupies.

IR-B: I'm so glad because that's exactly what I wanted, for you or anyone else looking at her to put themselves into there.

ASM: For what it's worth, I put myself in the place of Asher, there, being dragged along by his mother!

IR-B: It's been a great pleasure talking to you both.

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