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AN ENGLISH PORTLAND STONE PLAQUE

By Sir Charles Wheeler, President of The Royal Academy of Art 1956-1966, for The Headquarters of Barclays Bank, Lombard St, City of London

The relief carved heads of The Three Kings, respectively facing forward, to sinister and dexter, framed in a knotted rope, with a royal orb to the left and a star to the right. This tablet was originally part of the frieze that overlooked Lombard Street,

DIMENSIONS: 152.5cm (60") High, 122cm (48") Wide, 14cm (5½") Deep

PRICE: £3,000.00

STOCK CODE: 40487

LOCATION: LASSCO Three Pigeons

HISTORY

This plaque was is part of a suite of sculpture and architectural ornament carved by Sir Charles Wheeler PRA (1892-1974) between 1956 and 1964 for the Headquarters of Barclays Bank, Lombard Street, City of London,

Before the war, Wheeler had famously executed the stone carving work for Herbert Baker's new Bank of England where he had chiseled the new "*Old Lady of Threadneedle Street*" in the triangular pediment, the six "*Telemons*" beneath her and the gilt bronze figure of "*Ariel*" atop the dome of the sub-treasury amongst much other work.



Baker's next major bank project was the new headquarters for Barclays, delayed by the outbreak of war. Wheeler was again given the job of producing the sculptural series that would grace the building. Like the Bank of England series, it was to occupy Wheeler for about twelve years during which time he became President of The Royal Academy (PRA) – the only sculptor to ever hold the post.

The commission was to adorn the otherwise austere principle frontages with a series of relief plaques in Portland stone emblematic of the Signs of The City; Lombard Street was famous for its hanging signs. These were complimented by colossal bronze entrance doors akin to those he had cast for The Bank of England - only a stone's throw away - as well as numerous relief-carved keystones each pertaining to arts and industries that, historically, the bank had invested in. These are the stone tablets that LASSCO has acquired, together with a selection of the keystones and some other items. LASSCO acquired the doors and sold them to a private buyer. The doors remain in England.

Sarah Crellin in her recent monograph "The Sculpture of Charles Wheeler", catalogues Wheeler's known works and summarises the Barclays project:

"The building was commissioned from Sir Herbert Baker in 1946, the year of his death. From 1956 to 1964 Baker's partner A.T.Scott, with V. Helbing, designed and built the bank on a large site between Gracechurch Street, Lombard Street and George Yard. Wheeler's large sculptural ensemble deployed many symbols expressing wealth, security, financial probity and the City of London, and included huge bronze doors, numerous stone relief panels and keystones and bronze groups for the roof. A later Poseidon fountain group was commissioned for George Yard in 1969, and donated to the City Corporation. The site was redeveloped for Barclays from 1986 to 1994, and much of the sculpture was stored – although some of it was re-used as internal and external decoration to keep the link with the past. In 1995 Wheeler's colossal bronze main entrance doors were suspended as an artwork in the new glass atrium"

On demolition in 1986. Most of Wheeler's carvings were retained and re-used in the new building but some were removed to the Stock Exchange. Only now, with Barclays having moved from Lombard Street in the first time in 300years have the stone tablets been disposed of. They are documented in The Conway Library at The Courtauld Institute and at The Henry Moore Foundation in Leeds.

See: Sarah Crellin, "The Sculpture of Charles Wheeler", Lund Humphries, 2012 pp182-3

Also: Watch Sir Charles Wheeler in his Kensington studio - a Pathe News report as he is being photographed by Ida Kar in June 1960: [click here](#).