

The Statuette of Joseph Priestley at Priestley House

by Tom Bresenhan, Friends of Joseph Priestley House



Statuette of Joseph Priestley
(PH 80.6)
Francis John Williamson (1833-1920)

This statuette is painted plaster produced between 1874 and 1920 in Esher, England at the studio of sculptor Francis John Williamson. It was created from a cast from a mold of the modello (small scale model) used to guide carving of a large marble statue of Joseph Priestley. The marble statue was unveiled outside Town Hall in Birmingham, England on August 1, 1874 during ceremonies celebrating the 100th anniversary of the discovery of oxygen. The statuette is a gift to the Priestley Museum by Edgar Fahs Smith in 1926

Priestley statuette
in new display case

Display card for Priestley Statuette at Priestley House

This article reports the results of the search for information to write the display card for the new exhibit case for the statuette of Joseph Priestley at Joseph Priestley House Museum.



Edgar Fahs Smith
(1854-1928)

The Priestley statuette was given to the Priestley Museum in 1926 by Edgar Fahs Smith, professor of chemistry at the University of Pennsylvania. Smith wrote the short book, "Priestley in America". In 1922 Smith gave a statuette to the Chemistry Department at Dickinson College and later another to the Chemists Club of New York, now displayed at the Chemical Heritage Foundation in Philadelphia. A fourth statuette (the 2nd one at Dickinson) may be a re-gift. Marion Hutchinson Button (Mrs. Temple Fay) gave many objects of her father, Joseph Priestley Button – a Priestley descendant, to the Archives Department at Dickinson. The statuette is not recoded among the gifts, but it is likely that Smith gave a statuette to Button who collected Priestley items.

Display of Priestley Statuettes in 2015



Chemistry Dept
Dickinson College



Chemical Heritage Foundation
Philadelphia, PA



Archives &
Special Collections
Dickinson College



**FJ Williamson
Sculptor
(1833-1920)**

Source of the Statuettes of Joseph Priestley and Fate of Statues

The plaster statuettes of Joseph Priestley were made from a cast from a mold of the modello (model) created by sculptor Francis John Williamson to guide carving of the marble sculpture of Joseph Priestley. The statuettes were probably made in the years 1874-1920 in Williamson's studio in Esher, England near London. The marble statue was unveiled in Birmingham in 1874 to celebrate the centenary of the discovery of oxygen by Priestley. This marble statue was moved to Chamberlain Square in 1913 and in 1951 removed and destroyed. The Williamson modello is in British Museum in London. A bronze statue based on Williamson's design was created by William Bloye. The statue was erected in 1980 in Chamberlain Square. The Boyle modello is kept in storage in the Birmingham Museums Trust. In 2015 the bronze statue of Priestley was removed for construction of two office buildings and transported for storage to Birmingham Museums Trust's.



**William Bloye
Sculptor
(1890-1975)**



Williamson modello



Bloye modello

Timeline

Joseph Priestley Modellos, Statues and Statuettes of Birmingham, England,

- 1871 - Priestley Memorial Committee formed in Birmingham, England
- 1871 - FJ Williamson commissioned for marble statue of Joseph Priestley
- 1874 - Priestley statue unveiled August 1, at Town Hall, Birmingham
- 1874 - Simultaneous ceremonies held in Northumberland, PA
- 1874-1920 Mold made of the Williamson modello/ plaster statuettes cast
- 1880 - Statuette from Williamson sculpture presented by Dr. Aubrey Brown (Priestley descendant) to National Gallery of Victoria, Australia,
- 1913 - Priestley marble statue moved to Chamberlain Square
- 1920 - Mrs. Bedford McNeill gives Royal Institute of Chemistry a painted statuette (bronze) of Priestley -displayed at R. Soc. Chemistry in London
- 1922 - Statuette given by Edgar Fahs Smith to Dickinson Chemistry Dept.
- 1923 - Statuette given by Edgar Fahs Smith to Chemist's Club NYC.
- 1926 - Statuette given by Edgar Fahs Smith to Priestley Museum
- 1932 - Statuette listed in Priestley Exhibition, Birmingham Art Gallery, current location of statuette unknown
- 1950s -Statuette acquired by Archives Department, Dickinson College
- 1951 - Priestley statue in Birmingham removed and destroyed.
- 1960 - PHMC acquires Priestley House and Penn State transfers statuette.
- 1980 - Priestley bronze statue erected in Chamberlain Square.
- 1988 - Chemical Heritage Foundation formed with statuette in collection
- 2014 - New display case for Priestley statuette installed at Priestley House
- 2015 - Priestley statue moved to storage in Birmingham Museums Trust.



**Priestley Statue in Marble – Erected 1874
Victoria Square, Birmingham, England
(Destroyed 1951)**



**Priestley Statue in Bronze- Erected 1980
Chamberlain Square, Birmingham, England
(Moved to storage 2015)**

Photo credits (Photos not listed were obtained from on line sources)

Statuettes: Samantha Moyer and James Gerencser at Dickinson College, Mary Ellen Bowden at Chemical Heritage Foundation
Modellos: Williamson - Peter Morris; Bloye - Birmingham Museums
Williamson photo - Mark Stocker; Bronze statue in Birmingham – Jim Birch

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