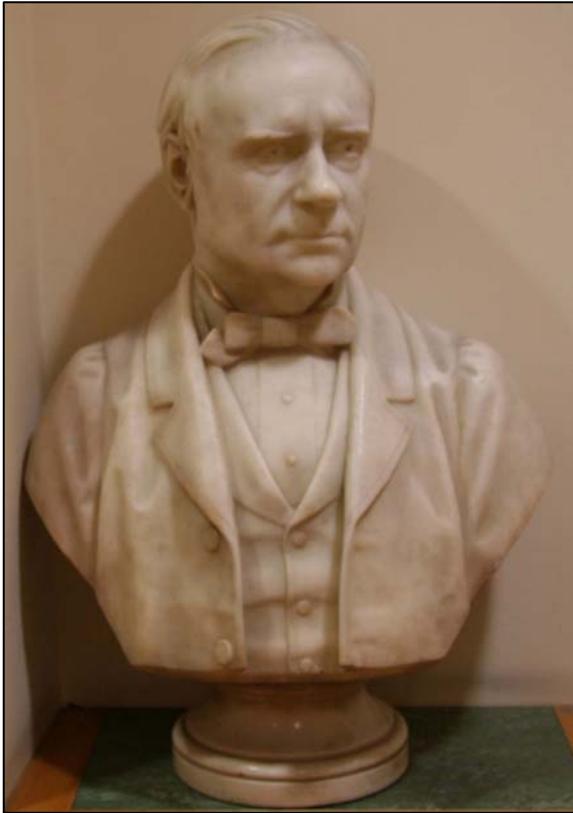


The memorial bust of Timothy Falvey in Southampton Central Library
Richard Preston



Timothy Falvey has vicariously witnessed the ebb and flow of life in Southampton library for over 120 years. The 'Grand Old Man' of Southampton politics, Falvey had been at the heart of Liberalism in the borough since coming to the town in 1848 as the newly-appointed editor of the *Hampshire Independent*. He continued as editor until 1869. He gave over forty years of public service to his adopted town, as town councillor, vice-president (twice) of the Board of Guardians, vice-president of the Polytechnic Institution, member of the Hartley Council and governor of Southampton Grammar School and Taunton's School. In 1887 he was appointed the first deputy-chairman of the Free Libraries Committee: effectively the head of the committee as the mayor was constitutionally the *ex officio* chairman.

Timothy Falvey died on 8 October 1889 at his residence in Windsor Terrace, aged 76 years. He succumbed after a short illness, having been engaged on political business only a week before. Corporation flags were flown at half mast and many shopkeepers closed early as marks of respect. He was buried on 12 October in the family grave in Southampton cemetery. The first - and initially only -

proposal for a permanent testimonial was made at the post-funeral wake in the Audit House. It was made by Alderman Harry Coles, then in the last month of a four-year tenure as mayor. Perhaps inspired by the rather anonymous nature of the grave they had just visited, first used in 1864 on the death of Falvey's wife Eliza and marked only by evergreen bushes, he suggested that the gravespot be marked by a memorial. An upper limit of half-a-crown *per* subscription was imposed: a proscription, which Coles believed would have been in line with the deceased's wishes, intended to give equal weight to all subscribers regardless of class. A Falvey Memorial Committee was established. Subscription lists were to remain open for a little over six weeks, closing on 30 November with 4 December the deadline for receipt of money. The collection was organized with exemplary precision. Secretaries of local societies, clubs, associations and institutions were invited to apply for authorized subscription books - a total of forty were issued. Tradesmen willing to accept donations were supplied with large printed cards to be placed in their shop windows. The Hospital Sunday Fund was approached to supply their collection boxes: a request denied (even though Falvey had been on the general committee) as their rules forbade the use of the boxes for any but their own purposes. The memorial committee included all four Southampton newspaper editors, an encouragement to place advertisements *gratis*. Payment was only charged for the original advertisements. There was a strong corporation element to the fund. The treasurer and secretary were, respectively, Charles Jellicoe, borough treasurer, and Captain Edward Gibbs, a retired army paymaster who acted as assistant to the treasurer in the collection of justices' clerk's fees. The committee decided that the memorial should be a simple affair. George Lungley, chairman of the Shirley and Freemantle Local Board, suggested a plain white marble cross not exceeding £25. Tenders were received from six firms of monumental masons. The work was given in January 1890 to the firm of Baker and Grace of 77 Brinton's Road. Their quotation was £17 for the memorial and 3s.9d. for lettering, slightly under the final cost of £21.15s.7d. The memorial was fixed in place on 22 April 1890. Made of the best Sicilian marble, it consisted of a cross - 3 ft 8 ins high and 2 ft in breadth across the arms - standing on three steps fixed to

a landing 7 ft long by 2 ft 6 ins wide and 6 ins thick. The inscription, decided on by the committee, was apt: 'Journalist and orator, Unselfish, self-sacrificing, warm-hearted. In public recognition of a useful life'.

The initial decisions of the committee were taken unanimously. But there was a feeling amongst many that the cemetery memorial alone was inadequate. A suggestion, floated by T W Shore with the prompting of Alderman W H Rogers in the November meeting of the Free Libraries Committee, was that a Falvey Scholarship be established at the Hartley Institution. To be held by 'a poor boy of Southampton', the estimated cost was £300. Shore was the executive officer of the institution and its representative on the committee. This failed to materialize when committee members decided that the proposal lay outside their competence. A letter from Jonas Nichols, Liberal councillor, political manipulator, builder and developer, published in the *Hampshire Independent* of 11 November 1890, was politically more realistic. It addressed the fundamental flaws of the original scheme: the artificial cap on subscriptions and the meanness of the proposed memorial. Finding that he could not conscientiously act on the half-a-crown limit, Nichols very publicly subscribed a guinea:

"I admit it [the upper limit] was put forward in the best of faith, but I hope, indeed I feel almost sure, many are of the same opinion as myself - that if a memorial is to be provided at all worthy of him who has gone from us, something more must be done, and that those among the legion of friends who mourn Mr Falvey must give something more than half-a-crown. I have heard in several quarters an expression of regret that the subscription was not left to the liberality and the conscience of the individual, and I fear that if the fund is not kept open for some time longer, in order to enable a vigorous effort to be made, the memorial, as such, will be a very sorry affair indeed.... As to the form of the memorial, I should like to see a suitable monument over his grave in the Cemetery, a portrait in the Council Chamber, and a portrait or bust in the Free Library, he having been the first chairman [*sic*] of the Free Libraries Committee."

The editor of the *Hampshire Independent* felt that ten times more could have been raised had no limit been imposed.

Each of Nichols' proposals came to pass. A large oil painting of Councillor Falvey - undated and artist unknown - in the possession of John James Burnett, head of a large firm of public accountants of Guildhall Chambers, 2 High Street, was presented to the Town Council in March 1890, to display in the council chamber. It is today in Southampton City Art Gallery (viewable online at www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/). The cemetery cross was erected the following month. And there was already extant a maquette of the library effigy. The London-based sculpture James Milo Griffith was by chance in Southampton at the time of Falvey's death. Acting on the suggestion of a friend, and no doubt with the acquiescence of the undertaker, he took a cast of Falvey's face. From this, and aided by photographs, Griffith produced, "on his own responsibility", a life-size plaster of Paris model. It was displayed at the municipal offices in February 1890. This enterprising speculation - a tribute to the competitive world of monumental sculpture - paid dividends. The memorial committee, on the recommendation of the borough surveyor, W G B Bennett, and the borough librarian, O T Hopwood, commissioned the marble bust at a meeting in April 1890. The only outstanding issue was cost. There was a balance in hand, after payment of Baker and Grace's bill, of £45, well short of Griffith's estimate of £100. Nevertheless, the sculptor (who was present at the meeting) agreed to "go on with the work" even without a guarantee of full payment. The subscription lists were re-opened, with no upper limit. Hopwood - appointed to the sub-committee for the first time- was charged with raising the additional funds. It was a thankless task. There was little appetite to rescue the committee, dominated as it was by corporators, from the consequences of its original mistakes. The response to a begging letter sent in June by Hopwood to the Board of Guardians was typical: board members had already subscribed. Thirty guineas were still owing when the completed marble bust was presented to the memorial committee in July 1890. The bust was quietly placed in the reading room of the Free Library, then in its original St Mary's Hall location. A work of art, finely chiselled out of an unblemished piece of pure Carrera marble, in perhaps the worst-ventilated, insalubrious and overcrowded public building in the town. A public unveiling was unthinkable

whilst the full amount was unpaid. There was still a shortfall at the end of December and an analysis of the fund's final accounts suggests that Griffith was paid only £80, one-fifth under the original estimate. In July 1890 the plaster cast model had been offered, at Hopwood's suggestion, to the Hartley Institution. It was donated at a Council meeting the following December.

The official ceremony had to await the opening of the new library in London Road on 29 July 1893. Sir Frederick Perkins, five-times mayor of Southampton, MP for the borough 1874-80, sheriff of London and Middlesex 1873 and an old political ally and friend of Falvey, was the original choice to perform the unveiling. He had already donated Falvey's library of 275 books - many heavily scored - , which he had purchased at auction in November 1887, to the free library "in memory of an honest man". Shortly before the ceremony, however, the organisers learnt that Perkins was about to set off on his family holiday. At a few minutes notice he was replaced by Alfred James Dyer, junior bailiff, president of Southampton Radical Association and a newspaperman through and through, serving for over fifty years successively as reporter, publisher and manager of the *Hampshire Independent*. He was, with Henry Pond, the sole surviving staff member from the days of Falvey's appointment as editor: indeed he had received the manuscript of Falvey's first leader. Dyer quoted part of Mark Antony's eulogy to Brutus from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* as he removed the cover:

The elements so mixed in him
That nature might stand up and say to the world
"This was a man!"

The bust incorporated several improvements to the plaster model. It was admired as a true representation of Falvey, a figure caught faithfully in repose although lacking, as would be expected in a work created from a death mask, "the merry curves that were wont to linger around the mouth" (*Hampshire Advertiser*). The bust was exhibited on a black pedestal in the large entrance hall of the library. With a daily footfall in the first year of 1,800 to the reading and news rooms alone, the representation would have been seen by a fair percentage of the local population. It followed the library into the Civic Centre in 1939. Here it remained at the top of the Reference Library stairs until, after remodelling of the library in 1992, it was removed to its present position next to the library entrance, supervising the first contact area.

The story of Falvey's bust interplays with an abortive attempt to commemorate Charles Dibdin, the Southampton-born composer of sea songs, by a statue by James Milo Griffith in one of the town's parks: a counterpart to the 1861 statue of Isaac Watts by Richard Cockle Lucas. The campaign was the child of Henry George Thorn, founder of the Ordnance Society Art Association, secretary of the Southampton Art Society and an accomplished musician himself. Efforts to interest the Town Council in early 1888 came to nought. A revival of the agitation in late 1889 attracted support from both local and national figures. These included Edwin Jones, JP, Sir Frederick Perkins (who telegraphed Thorn in November 1889 that "Southampton men should be more faithful to her wise and patriotic sons"), Lord Charles Beresford (a maverick, popularity-seeking naval officer and parliamentarian; to many the personification of John Bull) and Mrs Lovat Ashe, granddaughter of Charles Dibdin and, with her two sons and daughters, his only surviving lineal descendants. It was through Thorn that Mrs Ashe presented the fine portrait of her grandfather by Thomas Kearsley, c.1800, to the borough in August 1890, expressing "her pleasure at his suggestion that it should be given to the town as a link in the chain of events which he hoped would lead to their wishes being realized": viz, a memorial to Dibdin in his native town. The portrait is now with Southampton City Museums. It was all a damp squib. The one tangible result was a model of the proposed statue by Milo Griffith. Exhibited at the Chelsea Royal Naval Exhibition on 2 May 1891, it was presented to the Free Library Committee on the sculptor's behalf by Henry Thorn on 31 August 1893: the first committee meeting after the unveiling of his bust of Falvey. The statuette was reported in *Notes and Queries*, 16 January 1915 as standing forlorn, and a little broken, in what is now Tudor House Museum, opened three years earlier. The statuette (reproduced below) is still in the museum.



James ap Milo Griffith - or James Milo Griffith in its Anglicized form - was born in 1843 in the north Pembrokeshire village of Pontseli. He was brought up in a Welsh-speaking, puritanical, farming family. Griffith was originally a mason, apprenticed to a prominent local stone carver. He worked on the restoration of Llandaff Cathedral, responsible for many of the stone capitals. In his twenties he turned to sculpture, working in bronze, terracotta, plaster and marble. First coming to public notice at the Fine Art and Industrial Exhibition held at Cardiff in 1870, he came to be regarded as amongst the best contemporary Welsh sculptors. A "child of the Eisteddfod", he was a contributor, prizewinner, publicist, committee member and adjudicator for two decades. In 1883, at the National Eisteddfod at Cardiff, he was awarded the gold medal for the best work in the fine art competition (with Alma Tadema one of the two judges) and £30 for the piece of best sculpture. To quote the Reverend Cynddylan Jones at the presentation ceremony: "The success of Mr J Milo Griffith would not have surprised any of them; he was a sculptor of eminence". Griffith was a council member of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, and a member of both the Royal Cambrian Academy of Art (entitled to the designation RCA) and the South

Wales Art Society. He found a sponsor in the industrialist and parliamentarian Christopher Rice Mansel Talbot, founder and developer of Port Talbot. His work 'Summer Flowers' - exhibited at the three Royal Academy exhibitions - was purchased by Talbot for his residence, Margam Castle near Swansea, in 1875. It was a rare accolade to be chosen as designer of the silver shield presented from South Wales to the Prince and Princess of Wales on their marriage in 1888.

A "Welshman pure bred" but, like so many of his gifted contemporaries, Griffith was an emigree to England. He had a variety of London addresses between 1862 and c.1891: Coleshill Street, Devonshire Street and Charlotte Street (Portland Place), Clipstone Street (Fitzroy Square), Lady Margaret Road (Kentish Town), Granby Street (St Pancras), Mornington Road, Woronzow Terrace (St Marylebone) and - during the period in which he was involved in Southampton - Stanhope Street in Regent's Park. He had moved to London in 1862 to become a student at the Lambeth School of Art. The following year he enrolled in the Royal Academy School in Trafalgar Square. His public work during the next thirty years includes the bronze statue of Fine Arts on Holborn Viaduct, the Four Evangelists in the north porch of Bristol Cathedral and a memorial drinking fountain in the castle gardens at Bridgnorth to Henry Whitmore, MP for the borough 1852-70. He was *proxime accessit* in a field of thirty nine entrants for the design of panels in St George's Hall, Liverpool in 1882, completing the building opened forty years earlier. This attracted a prize of £100 and welcome national publicity. He was also considered for the new sculpture of Queen Victoria in the centre of the Exchange courtyard in London, a commission awarded to William Hamo Thornycroft. Impressive full-size statues to John Batchelor in the Hayes, Cardiff (October 1886) and to Sir Hugh Owen in the main square at Carnarvon with the castle as a backdrop (October 1888) are still standing. An almost annual exhibitor at the Royal Academy between 1863 and 1889, Griffith had six exhibits - the maximum allowed to an individual - in 1884. The Glasgow University website *Mapping the practice and profession of sculpture in Britain and Ireland 1851-1951* <http://sculpture.gla.ac.uk> shows how prolific Griffith was as a contributor to provincial art exhibitions,

notably at the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool, the Royal Manchester Institution (becoming the Corporation of Manchester Art Gallery in 1882), the Cardiff Art Society and Nottingham Castle Museum. His subjects are in the mainstream of late Victorian sentimentality: allegorical, religious, historical, romantic and commemorative. The latter included busts to Sir John Fox Burgoyne, C R M Talbot ('The Father of the House of Commons'), Sir Hugh Owen (complementing the statue), Dean Henry Edwards of Bangor, the Reverend Dr Thomas Thomas, principal of Pontypool College and Lord Aberdare (Home Secretary as Henry Austin Bruce 1868-73 and Lord President of the Council 1873-4). The latter, a commission from the University of South Wales, was his last exhibit at the Royal Academy, and is contemporary with the Falvey memorial. His wife, Emily Griffith, was also a sculptor.

Griffith was in Chicago at the time of the unveiling of his bust to Timothy Falvey, having recently emigrated to the United States. He was an exhibitor at the Chicago's World Fair in 1893 and an entrant in the competition to design an equestrian statue to General Philip Sheridan in one of the city's parks. Griffith later moved to San Francisco, where he became a college professor of art. He returned to England in 1896 and died in September 1897 at his residence in Gunter Grove, Chelsea. There is a collection of his works in the National Museum of Wales at Cardiff.

We can end this essay in no better way than to quote the encomium on Timothy Falvey from Sir Frederick Perkins read to the guests assembled in the newly-opened free library in July 1893:

"It is with a deep sense of gratitude I thank you for the honour you pay in inviting me to unveil the bust of my old friend Falvey - a man after my own heart, strictly upright and child-like in character, and honourable in every action of his life. I knew him well, for I summered and wintered with him as a chosen friend for the best part of my life, and never found him swerve to the right or left, but ever sailed a straight course.... May his intellectual and life-like face stimulate many a rising Southamptonian to strive his utmost to imitate and draw near to 'Honest Tim Falvey'."

The photograph of the statuette of Charles Dibdin in Tudor House Museum is reproduced with permission of Southampton City Heritage Services.