

OZZY THE BULL (AREA C)

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Whilst Ozzy The Bull is not your average Landmark, who can not be drawn to this massive semi mobile creature that now occupies the concourse of Grand Central Station in Birmingham? Surely, the formerly Raging Bull captured the hearts and minds of the thousands and probably millions who saw his stunning entrance on to the Alexander Stadium on the opening of the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games on July 28th became a landmark, as soon as his job at the start of the games, Centenary Square.

The significance of the bull and the ladies pulling the bull are historical, where The Raging bull is an echo of Birmingham's Bull Ring Market, where bulls were once held before slaughter and the workers of the industrial revolution. Fifty women pulled the chains and dragged the bull across the arena to highlight the hidden history of Birmingham's women chain-makers who produced the chains during the Industrial Revolution that were used in the Slave Trade. The rusted metal surface of the bull poetically mirrored the decay and rot of the British Empire, and the chains coiled around the bull metaphorically represented the Slave Trade where millions of African people were shackled by chains made in Birmingham's metal workshops and transported to the New World to suffer the inhuman barbarism of slavery.

The Birmingham bull was not an object of idol worship but a potent symbol of the working class, the downtrodden, the exploited and the enslaved, even the tail of the bull was a dangling ship's chain, with an anchor with jagged teeth of a slave ship.

Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games organisers, said the raging bull was led into the games' opening ceremony by "underpaid, overworked female chain-makers of the Industrial Revolution, trapped by their own circumstances as they produce the bonds that hold others in the slave trade." The performance from the bull and its dancers was said to signify how women broke free during a minimum wage strike in 1910.

After the ceremony, the bull was transported along the city's roads with a police escort to Centenary Square where he had been attracting crowds of tens of thousands of people who watched live shows on the hour.

It was only due to remain on public view for the duration of the games, However a vigorous campaign was waged to find it a permanent home. Mike, one of the people who created the bull said the beast was too big to easily store anywhere.

Of course, the bull couldn't have been sent to the knacker's yard for all moving toys. Such was the immediate response from far and wide as thousands signed a petition to save him for posterity. Not that, it was going to be easy, but if he was to be reincarnated he had to be more than just the 'Raging Bull', folk were very keen to give a name. Out of the possible names, among which were "Bostin", 'Brummie' or 'Boulton', he was properly named as Ozzy' after the Birmingham born Black Sabbath legend Ozzy Osbourne. When 'Ozzy' won the poll in June and Ozzy Osbourne said in a video message: "I can't believe it, I'm absolutely blown away. Thank you for all your votes. I don't know what to say anymore, I'm just thrilled to bits!" What's more the opening ceremony of his arrival in his new home, who better than his wife to unveil the heavy metal icon @MrsSOsbourne. It was amazing to have Sharon Osbourne as she gushed to the BBC, "It's like breath-taking, this is mammoth, huge, but it's just brilliant isn't it".

Raging Bull was commissioned by Birmingham Ceremonies Ltd, a joint venture between GBA and Done+Dusted, for the Opening Ceremony under the artistic direction of Iqbal Khan. The original creative concept for the Bull was created by Misty Buckley and the structure fabricated by Artem. The Raging Bull and its Intellectual Property was formally handed over to Network Rail on 7 February 2023.

The original Bull was 10 metres high, weighed 2.5 tonnes and it was designed, built and mechanised by a team of more than 50 people by UK based special effects company Artem. They have been behind the rebuild of the bull so it could be permanently displayed inside Birmingham New Street station, Britain's busiest railway station outside of London. The Bull was originally constructed of lightweight aluminium tubing but has now almost been completely rebuilt in lightweight fire-retardant glass-reinforced plastic moulds to meet fire regulations.

Approximately 50% of the original bull was retained with the other half remade, new mechanisms were installed so the bull can move its mouth, head, eyes, eyelids, and tail, and speakers to make it roar. The opportunity was taken to rebuild the legs and underside which now mean he can be seen in full 360 degrees. The bull was painstakingly dismantled, trucked to the station and rebuilt. Over 7,000 hours of work to make all of this happen.

Peter, Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill, and Network Rail chair said: they were really proud to have given Ozzy a new home at Birmingham New Street for thousands of people to enjoy, right at the heart of Britain's railway network. "A huge amount of work has gone into making this happen, by many, many people over many months. Ozzy will now not only be a reminder of last year's unforgettable summer of sport, but also a new icon for the City and its future."

Andy Street, Mayor of the West Midlands, said, “It’s wonderful to see Ozzy the Bull make its triumphant return to Birmingham – taking pride of place in New Street Station. “Ozzy was the iconic and quite simply unforgettable centrepiece of the 2022 Commonwealth Games Opening Ceremony. One year on from the Games, it’s a brilliant reminder of the pride we all felt, perfectly captures the spirit of the Games and will be enjoyed by locals and tourists alike. My thanks to Network Rail for providing a base fit for this hometown hero.”

Gary Beestone, Birmingham 2022 Opening Ceremony technical director, said: “I’m delighted that the Bull that captured the imagination of so many in last summer’s show now has found a permanent home in the heart of the city creating an iconic meeting point which will capture people’s attention.”

Mike Kelt, Artem Special Effects CEO, said: “It has been a delightful challenge to rebuild the Bull for the people of Birmingham, who reacted to it with such emotion during and after the Games. I feel that part of my soul now belongs to the city and hope to visit often to see how Ozzy is getting on.”

So, there you have it, it’s not just an icon, it’s a Landmark.

Credits for most of this piece, from various websites, local television and radio stations and interviews with those involved. I am grateful that so much has been shared about Ozzy the Bull and even now 2 to 3 months after his installation he still attracts attention from train passengers passing by through the station.