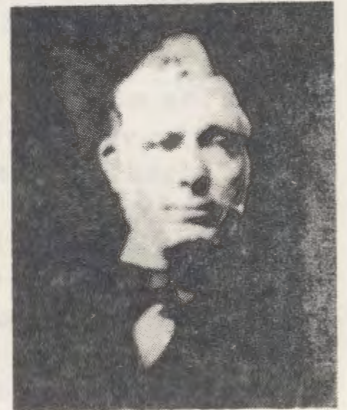


## SWINNERTON - CHARLES

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Born on 19th October 1813 in Liverpool, Charles was the fifth son of Joseph Swinnerton and Hannah Dod. His father was born at Betley where for a time he was Master of The Charity School, moving to Chester on his marriage and then to Liverpool where he subsequently died.



As a small boy Charles witnessed the first steam boat to sail in the Mersey and the first railway train between Liverpool and Manchester. In his mid-teens he travelled to London to work with the intention of proceeding to Rome to improve himself as a sculptor. Instead fate was to direct him across the Irish Sea to the Isle of Man where he was to work initially dressing stone during the erection of King William's College (1830-33). He arrived in Douglas after a voyage from Liverpool lasting two weeks due to headwinds and heavy seas.

He took lodgings in Castletown, where the College was being built, there he met Mary Callister who kept a small school near the country hamlet of St. Marks. They married on 13th August 1834 in St. Mary's Castletown, but subsequently moved to Douglas where he took up employment with Messrs. W. & R. Quiggin who were timber, slate and general merchants. His talent was soon to be recognised by the general public; firstly for a Grecian urn carved on a local tomb, and later a bust of one of his children carved in stone 'direct from nature'.

By 1843 he had entered into partnership with Daniel Creer, a fellow stone-cutter, with whom he purchased several building plots and erected terraced houses in the developing town. By 1852 their partnership had dissolved and the two had gone their separate ways. Charles moved to Fort Street where his wife advertised 'Desirable Lodgings'. His stone yard, in which he employed 2 stone cutters and 5 labourers, was immediately opposite the house and backed directly onto the shore. Years later his son Mark recalled how his father had attempted to raise a pig in the yard. The pig was very fond of seaweed, but never grew to be any bigger than a good sized 'Tom Cat'.

Charles was a man of many parts; he was the maker of the first steam engine ever made in the Isle of Man which drew crowds of country people to his house on Saturdays after Market. He took a great interest in things antiquarian and due to his initiative, several runic crosses and other historic objects were collected for the local museum.

One of his most ingenious works was a beautifully sculptured sundial enriched by Gothic ornamentation, a figure of Old Father Time and several grotesque heads; the unique feature was that 'it had sixteen dials all giving a different time for a different place in the world. The intricate calculations

were all undertaken entirely by Charles. Sir Roger Swynnerton has in his possession a book in manuscript form entitled "Problems in Dialling - As Worked Out and Figured by Charles Swinnerton", Douglas 1840. The book was bound in Sienna by the Rev. C. Swinnerton to whom it was given by his father in 1905.

The mainstay of Charles' business was in monumental carving, which ranged from very straightforward headstones to the best examples to be found on the Island. His ecclesiastical work included gargoyles, angels, pulpits, fonts and reredos. Charles was a worshipper at St. Thomas' in Douglas and when they decided in 1875 to erect a school, he entered the open competition for the design of the building. His plan won first prize, but he offered his services as architect free of charge. He also undertook some carving on the building, and at the foundation stone laying ceremony, the vicar's wife who performed the ceremony, was presented with an engraved silver trowel which had been made and supplied by Robert Swinnerton, Charles' 28 year old watchmaker and jeweller son.

Charles took an active part in the affairs of the town, having been elected to the Town Commissioners (Council) in May 1867. He topped the poll of six candidates with 124 votes; the last candidate gaining only 10. He retired from his work in 1882 at the age of 69 and realised his ambition by travelling to Italy for three months, nine weeks of which he spent in Rome.

Six years later he had a house cum studio built at Gansey in the south of the Island which was used also from time to time by his sons Joseph (the internationally known sculptor) and Frederick, the artist. Charles died on the evening of St. Georges Day 1907 aged 93 years 6 months and 4 days, not having shown any signs of illness before. He was buried in St. Peter's Churchyard, Onchan (near Douglas) where his wife had been laid 33 years before (died 1st January 1874).

He had in fact carved the plain headstone for this family grave including on it his own name, leaving a blank for the date, but including the figures 18 for the year of his death. He obviously had not bargained to live well into the twentieth century, and consequently following his burial, the whole reference to the date had to be carved out and a new date inscribed in a recessed panel.

Charles and his wife are further commemorated in St. Matthews' Church which is only a few yards away from their first home on the quayside at Douglas. The memorial which was provided by their son, Rev. Charles Swinnerton (1843-1928) is a stained glass window depicting St. Matthew and forms a fitting memorial to the man who spent his lifetime creating memorials to others.

Richard Kelly

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