

CELESTIAL SPHERE

Artist: Brian Connolly

(Made by McConnell & Sons, Kilkeel)



The sculpture was commissioned by Armagh City & District Council as part of its City Centre Public Art Strategy and was installed in November 2010. The main feature of the work is a large two-metre diameter sphere made from solid polished grey granite, onto which the brightest stars and other features of the night sky have been mapped. The sphere with its gold stars is aligned to the north with the stars correctly orientated towards the pole star. In this way the star sphere functions like a kind of fixed Armillary model of the celestial sphere. The star map over the surface of the sphere was created with the help of Emeritus Professor John Oliver from the Department of Astronomy, University of Florida.

The Celestial Sphere is set on top of the largest of four granite base stones. Imagery, text, diagrams and other data engraved into the surfaces of these base stones has been derived from the history of Astronomy from earliest times up to the present, spanning some five millennia.

A significant part of this data was sourced during the artist's research with staff, and the archives, of the Armagh Observatory.

The first stone is the 'ancient' stone with imagery and information from ancient stone carvings in Ireland, the Middle East, Far East, as well as Egypt, Greece, and Rome. The second stone, which supports the sphere has images representing the Zodiac from Ancient times up to the Renaissance period. This surface also maps out the sunrise and sunsets as seen in Armagh at the Summer & Winter Solstices. The imagery around the vertical facets of this stone reflects the history of Astronomy from the medieval period up to the Renaissance.

The third stone depicts aspects of astronomical history from the Renaissance period up to the eighteenth century including astronomers and physicists such as Hevelius, Herschel, Halley, and Sir Isaac Newton. The fourth stone refers to key discoveries and scientists up to the present including Hubble and Einstein as well as key elements from the history of contemporary research at Armagh Observatory.

Within the artwork are several 'Anamorphic Projections' - images which appear distorted and out of shape until the viewer finds a certain perspective after which they come into view. Several of the stone slabs have curved cuts, referring to the negative space occupied by the sphere and alludes to possible hidden dimensions, or other space(s) beyond our Universe, or beyond what we can see or currently understand.

Take a trip around the universe at Armagh Planetarium's Star Theatre or walk through the outdoor scale model of the universe at Armagh Observatory. Both are located a short distance from the sculpture at College Hill, Armagh.

**Armagh Planetarium: 028 3752 6187
Armagh Observatory: 028 3752 2928**