



Brief: Commissioning a Bronze Specialist for Sea Piece Fountain, Port Sunlight

1. Introduction

Port Sunlight Village Trust (PSVT) seeks to commission a bronze specialist contract team for the restoration of 'Sea Piece', a bronze fountain located in the Boating Pond, Port Sunlight. The specialist team ideally would be led by an ICON accredited conservator, with previous experience of work of this nature, a patination specialist and an art handling, logistics and transportation company.

The aim of this project is to undertake works to remove the fountain from the site, to clean, repair and stabilise the bronze fountain, to refinish the bronze to match as closely as possible the original finish colour of the bronze, and to coordinate with other contractors to ensure the successful installation and operation of the fountain's waterplay features.

2. Sea Piece Fountain

'Sea Piece' is a bronze fountain depicting a merman and boy riding a sea horse, flanked by dolphins. The fountain is located at the centre of the Boating Pond in Port Sunlight, and it has four jets that were designed for waterplay. The pond is at the northern end of The Diamond, to the south of the Lady Lever Art Gallery. The fountain is set within a low stone-walled pond with an ornate curved and swept plan. The pond, originally designed for sailing toy and model boats, was designed by James Lomax Simson and dates from c.1932. The fountain, by sculptor Sir Charles Wheeler, was added to the pond in 1950 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Lady Lever's birth.

Together, both pond and fountain form part of the setting of the Lady Lever Art Gallery and are an integral element within the Grade II registered formal landscape of The Diamond. The pond and fountain are Grade II listed in their own right.

The whole of Port Sunlight is a Conservation Area in which the vast majority of buildings are also individually listed, making it a place of local, regional and national interest. When the fountain is in operation it is a prominent and lively feature. When the water is still, it acts as a reflecting pool. In both modes, it attracts attention and makes this end of The Diamond a distinct destination.



Image 1: Photograph of Sea Piece, looking towards the Lady Lever Art Gallery. From *The Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight* (1996), The Bluecoat Press: Liverpool. No page number. Found in the collections of Port Sunlight Village Trust. This view shows the bronze before its patina and corrosion products were removed in 2001.

3. About Port Sunlight

Port Sunlight was founded in 1888 by industrialist William Lever. He wanted to provide the employees of his new Lever Brothers soap works and their families with decent and affordable housing and a wide range of facilities, services, policies, and incentives to ensure their well-being and 'betterment'.

Port Sunlight is not the first example of an industrial worker village, but it is one of the finest surviving examples in the world. It was an immediate precursor to and a model for the Garden City movement and influenced the design of planned worker settlements, garden villages and garden suburbs around the world from the turn of the twentieth century to the present day.

Most residential properties, public buildings and monuments are listed at Grade II. Two sections of the landscape are included in Historic England's register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest, including The Diamond landscape where the boating pond and Sea Piece are located. The village, set in 130 acres of parklands and gardens, is protected by conservation area status and covenants.

Today the village is home to just over 2,000 residents, a mixture of owner-occupiers and private tenants, and typically attracts 300,000 domestic and international visitors each year. There are a variety of community organisations and businesses operating in Port Sunlight, from the village school and Grade II* listed church to two pubs, cafes, artist studio, garden centre, and a theatre.

There are other important stakeholders in the village too, namely:

- Wirral Council provides certain statutory services including planning, waste management and highways and transport.
- National Museums Liverpool is responsible for the Lady Lever Art Gallery, which was founded by William Lever and named in memory of his wife Elizabeth Lever, and houses one of the UK's finest collections of fine and decorative art, usually attracting 200,000 visitors each year.
- Port Sunlight is the historic home of Unilever in the UK; Lever Brothers became Unilever in 1929 following a merger with the Dutch margarine company *Margarine Unie*. The company's rich history is documented in extensive and nationally Designated archives held on site in the Unilever campus.

4. About Port Sunlight Village Trust (PSVT)

PSVT is an independent charity founded in 1999 by Unilever Plc. Our vision is to make Port Sunlight “an environmentally conscious and socially vibrant place, where residents are happy and engaged, visitors are captivated, and everyone can learn from its stories.”

Our mission is for PSVT to be “the charity that keeps Port Sunlight relevant, working with village residents and partners to tell stories, care for historic collections, buildings, and landscapes, and create an inviting place for people to live, work and visit.”

PSVT is responsible for:

- A diverse group of monuments (listed and unlisted), the museum collection, and the village archive.
- The landscape within the Conservation Area (except individual back gardens of houses).
- 292 of the Grade II-listed houses, 323 garages and 22 commercial and community buildings.
- Port Sunlight Museum & Gift Shop, including the Edwardian Worker’s Cottage and learning experience SoapWorks.
- The Gallery at Bridge Cottage
- Tackling social issues and promoting community cohesion.
- Managing the visitor destination and raising its profile through partnership working, marketing activities, visitor services, product development, and events.

PSVT employs 50 members of staff to discharge its charitable objectives and works with 18 volunteers across all areas of our operations from landscape gardening to building conservation. We are governed by a Board of Trustees with expertise in housing, surveying, finance, conservation, landscape, planning, museums, and heritage.

A [Conservation Management Plan \(CMP\)](#) was adopted for the village in 2019. Since then, the organisation has been working hard to lay solid foundations to realise its vision and ambitions for the site.

In 2025, PSVT launched its new, ambitious 5-year strategic plan. The plan includes a range of projects focused on embedding a new resident engagement strategy, building environmental resilience, developing new audiences, growing partnerships, and championing sustainable commercial development. More about the plan can be found here: [Our Strategic Plan 2025-28 | Port Sunlight Village](#)

5. Condition of the Fountain Pond

The Boating Pond and Sea Piece fountain have been repaired or treated several times since the fountain was installed. Investigations commissioned by PSVT since 2020 have identified serious structural issues with the pond's concrete basin and stone walls, resulting in significant water leakage. Additional safety concerns and potential environmental contamination led to the pond being emptied in 2021.

Sea Piece fountain is in situ but is currently not in use. The bronze is in a relatively stable condition. Corrosion products and the extant patina were completely removed in 2001. After this was done, the sculpture was finished with a dark brown patina. There is only a thin layer of corrosion on the bronze sculpture. To our knowledge, the brown patina colour was specified without archival or physical evidence.



Figure 2: View of Sea Piece showing the dark brown patina applied in 2001. Photograph is credited to Paul Thompson, 2015.

The colour and profile of the current corrosion suggests the deposits are stable. There is a possibility that there are some very small spots of active corrosion on the seahorse's hooves. Some limescale deposits are present, particularly on the lowest areas of the monument where the pond water was in direct contact with the bronze for long periods.

The previous treatment to remove the original patina and corrosion products completed in 2001 is legible through exposed patches of bronze (where the original patina and corrosion products had been removed and then not properly patinated). These areas are identifiable as bright patches. There are several areas which show run marks in the dark brown patina which was applied during the 2001 scope of work. There are some cracks in the casting and some patches of the surface which show flaws. Though they need sealing, none of the cracks are significant enough to affect physical integrity.

6. Bronze Finish Colour

Although the fountain is in fairly good condition, a significant concern regarding this bronze is its presentation. Historic evidence confirms that the bronze was originally green.

Contemporary news reports, twentieth century photographs and the Public Monuments and Sculpture Association (PMSA) describe the finish colour as green. In addition, a film created by Unilever in 1953 (“A Portrait of a Man”) shows the fountain with a green finish. The film shows the bronze (at approximately 1:30 minutes) with a finish that closely resembles Wheeler’s “Beatty and Jellicoe” Fountain Statuary in London’s Trafalgar Square. This film is held in the collections of Unilever Archives and can be viewed at [Explore | Search | Portrait of a Man | Unilever Archives](#) (See Figure 1 for the late 20th century appearance of Sea Piece and Figure 3 for a 1960s photograph of Wheeler’s Merman fountain from Trafalgar Square.)

Based on this evidence, we do not believe that the current brown finish for the bronze represents either the artist’s intent, or a naturally occurring patina. Working with stakeholders and an ICON Accredited conservator, PSVT has decided to remove the brown patina and refinish the bronze to match the original green finish as closely as possible.



Figure 3: A colour photograph of the Merman, August 1964. Held in the collections of the Henry-Moore Institute, Charles Wheeler Collections, Reference: [1999/11](#) Box 1, Sleeve LEE/93/1.2.

A history of information on the past treatment of the bronzes can be found in a report by Antique Bronze 2025 and in the Port Sunlight Village Trust CMP, Appendix 6 (Monuments and Memorials Survey, February 2017) as well as PSVT records. Information about previous work should be consulted during the preparation of detailed specifications for this work.

7. The Boating Pond Restoration Project

The Boating Pond and the pathways surrounding it are undergoing major capital works (by others). The concrete basin will be completely removed and rebuilt with modern materials to replicate the original design. The stonework will be dismantled, safely stored and reused to rebuild the pond walls and features.

The Boating Pond Restoration project involves many different skilled trades or conservation disciplines, and the bronze specialist's team will need to coordinate with their work.

The Boating Pond Restoration Project work will be delivered across several phases, which are listed below. The removal of Sea Piece from the Boating Pond is scheduled to be the first phase of work for the Boating Pond restoration project (early Spring 2026). The targeted completion date for the bronze conservation work is Spring 2026, with the fountain to be stored until it is reinstalled in the pond in Summer 2026.

Removal, packing, transportation, and reinstallation of the fountain are included in this contract. The bronze specialist contract team will be expected to appoint and manage the removal, transportation, and reinstallation contractors.

8. Phases of Work for the Boating Pond Restoration Project

Some of the work described below (such as repairs to the internal pipework of Sea Piece) may need to take place at the bronze specialist's conservation studio:

1. Remove Sea Piece fountain and plinth from site for restoration.
2. Document, dismantle and store stonework for reuse. (by others).
3. Remove the existing concrete pond basin and replace with a modern equivalent designed to match all original aesthetic details and dimensions (by others).
4. The 'crazy paving' around the Boating Pond will be replaced with resin bound gravel to improve accessibility to and across the site (by others).
5. The pumping and filtration systems will be replaced and new chambers built for safe, efficient access (by others).
6. Reinstall and reconnect the restored Sea Piece fountain (with in-person coordination with bronze specialist).

9. Scope of Works for Bronze Fountain

Below is a summary of the scope of work for the bronze specialist contract team which is subject to this tender document. A list of works to be priced is included in the spreadsheet "**Tender Response Form: Sea Piece Bronze**". The methodology you develop as part of your tender submission should address the scope outlined below:

The contract work includes:

Removal of Sea Piece

- Allow for a stone mason (with experience of working with historic masonry) to carefully remove Sea Piece from its base. If you do not have a stone mason within your project team, please state this in the Tender Response Form so that PSVT can provide a recommended contractor. Ensure steps are taken to minimise damage to the bronze and stone plinth during removal.
- Disconnect pipes from base of Sea Piece and pond.
- Once Sea Piece has been removed, carefully inspect base (or any previously inaccessible area) for any evidence of original patina and surface finish which may inform the specification for the new surface patina.
- It is believed that Sea Piece is fixed to its base with metal dowels. Photograph and record the size and spacing of the dowels for the project engineer. Check condition of the dowels.
- Allow for minor cleaning and any repairs required to the dowels believed to fix the bronze to the stone plinth.
- Assess condition of lead flashing between the stone plinth and base of bronze. Repair if possible and replace if required.

Packing and transportation (three journeys) of Sea Piece

- Provide sufficient protection to Sea Piece to protect it in transit.
- Transport Sea Piece from Port Sunlight to the conservation studio
- Transport Sea Piece from the conservation studio to storage (if required)
- Transport Sea Piece from storage to Port Sunlight
- Please note Port Sunlight Village Trust aims to meet the following best practice guidelines when commissioning transportation for its collection pieces (such as Sea Piece): Annex E: Transport conditions which apply under the Government Indemnity Scheme (see link: [Government Indemnity Scheme: guidelines for non-national organisations | Arts Council England](#))

Cleaning

- Remove all dirt and grime from the statue (including the nozzles), with DOFF or an equivalent superheated water system. Alternative methods will be considered.

External Screws

- Replace missing screw from face of bronze dolphin: provide two additional spare screws. Ensure new screws replicate current screws in material and design, and that they are patinated to match final finish of bronze.

Pipework

- Ensure that the existing internal pipe fixings and supports are solid and in good condition.
- Provide PSVT with a summary assessment of the condition of the internal plates and brackets (when undertaking your inspection) and suggest any further treatment required.
- Note that the internal pipework itself will be repaired/replaced by others, but with the support of the bronze specialist. This work may need to take place at your studio.
- Note that due to the age of the pond and its pipework, asbestos may be present in any pipe joints within the pond. Please be aware of this in relation to Sea Piece.

Corrosion

- Take corrosion samples where active corrosion is suspected.
- If found, these samples need to be analysed by RAMAN spectroscopy. Please specify in your tender response if you can undertake this analysis or if you need the analysis to be completed by PSVT client advisor, Lucy Branch ACR. If you can undertake the analysis, please itemise the cost for undertaking this service separately from sampling itself.
- All corrosion and limescale deposits should be removed by peening with a fine-grade aggregate, wet abrasion and the surface patina removed in readiness for repatination. Alternative methods will also be considered.
- The statue should stand post-peening for 7 days to see if any active corrosion deposits develop.
- During this time, any large holes can be filled with epoxy-resin putty
- Assuming there is no active corrosion, repatination can commence after 7 days
- Any active corrosion should be treated.

Repatination

The work involves a comprehensive studio restoration of the sculpture's intended finish colour. As noted above, sufficient archival evidence confirms that the original finish of the sculpture was light green and that the extant brown patina is the result of an inappropriate patina being applied in the statue's recent past.

- As noted above, once Sea Piece has been removed, carefully inspect base (or any previously inaccessible area) for any evidence of original patina and surface finish which may inform the specification for the new surface patina.
- If evidence of original patina found, take samples for analysis
- Repatinate the bronze to match the original colour of Sea Piece, as closely as possible, and as evidenced by archival records
- Prepare up to three (x3) test samples of the proposed patina to be approved by PSVT representatives and the local authority conservation officer. The bronze specialist must have written sign-off from PSVT for the patina samples before Sea Piece is repatinated. The sample should be protected and available for review throughout the project.
- Any epoxy-resin fills should be touched in to blend with the patina's shade using acrylics to match the patina as closely as possible

Protective wax coating

- Apply two coats of micro-crystalline wax, hot, as a protective coating.
- Hard wax can be used to fill shallow cracks and holes

Samples

- Provide a sample of your proposed work, to include:
 - Cleaning (by DOFF or alternative methods)
 - removal of corrosion and brown patina in readiness for repatination
- The samples must be approved by PSVT and relevant consultants before further works begin. As part of the review and approval process, the PSVT team and consultants may require a visit the studio to view the samples in person.

Record keeping and reports

- Provide conservation report documenting all works carried out, including before/after images of works.
- Photographs of each stage of the works are required (before the bronze is moved from its base or plinth in the pond, before cleaning, after cleaning but before repatination, samples, after repatination, after waxing and after installation).

Mounts and Storage

- Provide cost for storing the bronze at your studio for up to 12 weeks if project over runs. If this is not possible, please state this in your application.
- Create a mount to hold Sea Piece so that you can safely work around the bronze and fully access all areas of the piece.

Reinstallation of Sea Piece

- Allow costs for two additional days on site after the restoration works are complete.
- The first will be to coordinate reinstallation of Sea Piece and reanimation of its waterplay features.
- The second visit to site will be after all construction work to the pond is completed to provide a light clean and attention to any localised areas where the wider project works might have compromised the protective wax coating.

Tender Response Form

- You are invited to tender for these works using the enclosed tender response form. We strongly recommend that you visit the site to ascertain the full scope of the works.
- Your Tender should include all labour, plant and materials including storage (please see below under 'Budget' for more details).
- Please also confirm your availability for 2026, and any restrictions on your time or availability that we may need to be aware of.

10. Skills and Experience

We believe that to deliver this piece of work successfully you (and/or your subcontractors) will require the following skills and experience:

- ICON Accreditation or significant equivalent experience. Please note that ICON Accreditation will be favourably considered in the application process.
- Training in the conservation and treatment of bronze works
- Experience of recreating patinated finishes on bronzes.
- Experience in conservation work to historic bronzes
- Experience of removing, packing and transporting historic objects.
- Awareness of recognised standards, guidelines and regulations for heritage assets
- Project management skills, including organisation of project schedule, deliverables and team
- Strong communication skills
- Demonstrable methods for creating and maintaining records
- Evidence of appropriate insurance, including Public Liability Insurance

11. Equality Diversity and Inclusion

PSVT is actively working to be a diverse and inclusive organisation. As part of PSVT's commissioning practice, we strongly encourage applicant submissions from people who are from the Global Ethnic Majority, Disabled, Neurodiverse, D/deaf, LGBTQ+, and/or from working-class backgrounds.

12. Budget

The total cost of the works presented to PSVT as part of the tender process should include all costs of project delivery such as removal, packing, transport, storage, mounting the sculpture, labour, plant, materials, security measures, documentation, meetings and travel/accommodation. The Tender Response Form should be used to document your costings.

Please separate out the storage costs from the rest of the works.

PSVT can provide welfare facilities in PSVT offices which are located a short walk from the Boating Pond. A small area will also be available for tools and equipment to be left at your own risk.

13. Reporting relationships

You will report directly to Catherine Downey (PSVT Collections Care Manager), with overall reporting to Jean Milton, Director of Heritage. You will also need to liaise with the wider project team and our client advisor, Lucy Branch ACR, who will be involved to help and assist all parties as required.

14. Application method

You are invited to submit a proposal that must demonstrate the following:

- Your proposed approach and programme schedule to deliver the scope of work described above, including a method statement for the works (60%)
- Examples of previous relevant projects, the names of two referees who have experience of working with you on similar projects, CVs for your team and ICON accreditation (where achieved) (20%). Please note PSVT will not contact references unless your application is likely to be shortlisted.
- Breakdown of costs by scope of work (20%)

Proposals will be evaluated on a quality-and cost basis.

15. Timescales

The brief will be issued on 19th December 2025, and responses must be submitted to Port Sunlight Village Trust in accordance with the guidance below by **1pm on 23rd January 2026**. Interviews for short-listed parties will be conducted on **29th and 30th January 2026**. The target date for completing the works to the bronze is **Spring 2026**. The provisional timeframe for the bronze to be reinstalled in the pond is **Summer 2026**.

Please note that there a busy events calendar in the village from Easter to late June, and so removal and reinstallation of the bronze will need to be co-ordinated around these activities. Reinstallation of the bronze is also dependent on the wider capital works for the Boating Pond Restoration Project.

16. Guidance for submitting tender response:

Your tender response must be received in accordance with the following format and conditions:

1. Prices must be provided for each stage of works using the **Tender Response Form**. Tenders returned not fully completed may be treated as void.
2. The completed Tender Response Form and any additional supporting information should be emailed to Catherine Downey, Collections Care Manager on tenders@portsunlightvillage.com. The email should have the subject heading '**Tender: Sea Piece Bronze**'.
3. Hard copy to be submitted in a sealed envelope which does not mention the name or can be used to identify the Tenderer, can also be used as an alternative to email. Envelopes for tenders can be supplied by Port Sunlight Village Trust if needed. Tenders should be addressed to:
Catherine Downey
Port Sunlight Village Trust
23 King George's Drive, Port Sunlight
CH62 5DX
4. Your return tender must be received at the email address or postal address above on **1pm on 23rd January 2026**..
5. Failure to meet the closing date will mean that the tender application is considered void.

You are recommended to visit the site prior to submitting your tender to fully understand the works to be completed.

Timescales

Event	Date
Tender process opens	19 th December 2025
Tenders due	1pm 23 rd January 2026
Interviews	29 th & 30 th January 2026
Target date for bronze works to be completed by	Spring 2026
Target date for Sea Piece to be reinstalled in the Boating Pond	Summer 2026

17. Further Information

Please contact Catherine Downey, Collections Care Manager, by calling 0151 644 4800 or emailing admin@portsunlightvillage.com. Any email enquiries should have the subject heading '**Tender: Sea Piece Bronze**'.

PSVT's 5-year strategic plan and 10-year Conservation Management Plan are available to download from PSVT's website www.portsunlightvillage.com

Please note the Conservation Management Plan includes a summary of past treatments to Sea Piece in Appendix 6 (Monuments and Memorials Survey, February 2017).

A link to the Historic England entry for the Boating Pond (located at the end of the Diamond), is below:

[THE DELL, THE DIAMOND AND THE CAUSEWAY, PORT SUNLIGHT, Non Civil Parish - 1001637 | Historic England](#)

PSVT has commissioned reports, including those listed below which will be made available on request:

- ***Sea Piece Conservation Report by Antique Bronze, 2019 (reviewed 2025)***
- ***Design and Access Statement by Chambers Conservation, May 2025***
- ***Justification for changing the finish colour of Sea Piece Fountain, by Heather Alcock (PSVT), October 2025***