



VILLAGE STATUARY

Are the statue busts seen in various Prisoner episodes all that they seem? The silent watchers make citizens feel that they are being observed and so a simple face carved in stone can bring about obedience, conformity and even submissiveness among the Villagers, save for one individual.

Statues in any city, town or community can represent an implicit political statement; celebrating a political or a military figure. On the other hand, an effigy can be of a living ruler, a reminder to the subjects not to challenge or question the person's power or authority. Statues can even implant a feeling of longevity, giving an impression of a perpetual regime, such as the 'Party' in George Orwell's novel 'Nineteen Eighty-four'. So do the stone figures in the Village subtly convey any warning to the citizens, particularly Number Six? Or are the sculptures merely a device for housing cameras? In the Village there is no memorial to any past or present Number Two and even the Appreciation monument in It's Your Funeral is only a featureless rectangular slab.

In Arrival, Number Six encounters several statuettes on plinths, set out beyond the main settlement in parallel rows. The flashing eyes of one stone head suggest surveillance, while the other figures create an alien feel, disorientating anyone straying into that sector. Of course the production set dressers wanted props to replicate the feel of Portmeirion, the resort having its own statues, no doubt intended to create a classical Italian feel. And yet in the Prisoner the busts are hardly pleasing to the eye. In Arrival, one suggests a historical bearded figure, an inventor maybe, while others seem to have the countenance of a displeased god, even a sinister-looking elder.



One eavesdropping head appears in a trio of stories, as shown below: in Checkmate, The Chimes of Big Ben and The General, and its eyes, when flashing on and off, reveal its spying capability.





In the Village, the statue busts dotted about give a confused picture of the particular time, as if the Village could be from any era, in any part of the world. The stone structures might suggest the place having been there a very long time, or equally they could be removed suddenly, or located elsewhere in the Village, further to perplex the citizens.



Only indoors do we see a modelled likeness of a Village leader, or even Number Six himself. In *The Chimes of Big Ben* there is a selection of Number Two busts within the arts and crafts exhibition hall. Later, in *The General*, Number Six trespasses inside the home of the Professor, whose wife is found to have sculpted busts as a pastime, including the head of the present intruder and also the current Village leader.



It might be argued that when there are non-exterior Portmeirion scenes, statues on view as part of studio interiors were put there mainly to 'Village-up' the sets. Interestingly, given the mid-Sixties period in which *The Prisoner* was produced, the set design might well have included some examples of modern art, as many towns and cities were newly adorned with abstract sculptures. However, the Village stone heads and bronze busts (below ones from *Dance of the Dead*) kept to a general pattern of unknown men and women of the past, or gods, thus creating one more enigmatic theme running through *Prisoner* episodes. Only one person was treated to a life-size mannequin of himself, in *Fall Out*, the executive producer!



Of course, that man also wrote the script and so was able to include the line, "We thought you would feel happier as yourself."



Roger Langley

