

# Belsky's milestones for the 20th century

**S**culptor Franta Belsky who died on July 5, at the age of 71, spanned English and Czech history and culture. He was an artist whose sculptures are like the milestones of 20th century history.

His last major work, a commission won in an international competition, was a monument to Czech airmen in the RAF who died in the battles of World War II.

Belsky himself held the rank of Colonel in the Czech army and was awarded the Presidential Medal of Merit by Vaclav Havel in 1999. His memorial, very un-militaristic, includes broken wings which symbolise the fallen heroes and also those who survived but whose wartime contribution and sacrifice were not recognised at home.

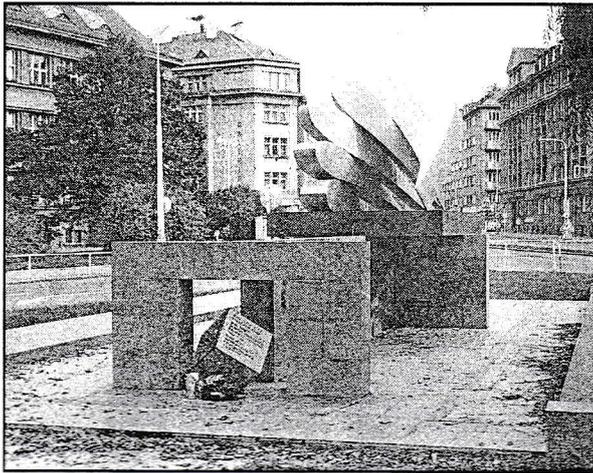
It was unveiled by General Frantisek Fajtl, himself one of the persecuted RAF airmen, in May 1995 at Freedom Square in the Dejvice district of Prague.

In 1940, five weeks after the Dunkirk evacuation, the remnant of the Czechoslovak army which had been formed in France arrived in England and was inspected by Winston Churchill. The prime minister stopped in front of one of the younger soldiers, 19-year-old Franta Belsky, who had been operating with the horse-drawn artillery battery.

Belsky recalled, that Churchill looked him in the eye for what seemed an age, chin thrust out, hat in hand, leaning on his stick. "You wait," Belsky said to himself, "one day I shall model a statue of you, just like this."

The day came in 1968 when Belsky completed his statue of Churchill for Fulton, Missouri, where the statesman had made his 'iron curtain' speech in 1946.

Belsky was born in Brno, but the *Guardian* obituary, calls him a major force in British sculpture.



**The memorial to fallen airmen in the city of Prague by Belsky**



**Belsky at work on a statue of Winson Churchill ... the two met during the dark days of war. The statue stands in Fulton, Missouri where Sir Winston made his 'iron curtain' speech**

He sculpted portrait busts of four generations of royalty from the Queen Mother to Prince William but he wasn't a society artist.

His sculptures, be it a carved memorial stone at Cholmondeley Park, Cheshire, marking the Czech fighting presence in Britain, or a mother carrying her child in Town Square, Stevenage, the Shell Fountain on the South Bank, now listed as a Grade II memorial, Triga in Knightsbridge as well as a cat on the wall of an infant school in Baldock, Herts, all demonstrate Belsky's conviction that sculpture was not for the elite but for the delight of everyone.

A fit, distinguished-looking man with a streak of daring in him, Belsky was an expert skier and inveterate traveller. He had an informed passion for classical sculpture and extensive knowledge of the sites of the ancient world, wrote the *Independent*. It also told the following story: Once, in a sitting with the Duke of Edinburgh, he was on one knee looking up, studying the forms of the face from underneath.

"Why are you doing that?" asked Prince Philip.

"It keeps me humble, Sir," Belsky replied.