

LONDON: PLANS UNVEILED FOR MEMORIAL TO PRE-REFORMATION SHRINES

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Plans for a memorial to the medieval shrines destroyed during the Reformation, were unveiled yesterday at Charterhouse.

The sculpture by Paul Day, commissioned by the Art and Reconciliation Trust, (ART) will be placed close to the site of Chelsea Manor, once home of St Thomas More and his family. After More was executed for his faith in 1535, his house was given to the Lord Chamberlain, Sir William Sandys. In 1538 Sir Thomas Cromwell moved there in order to avoid the plague that was raging in central London. Cromwell was masterminding the dissolution of the monasteries and destruction of monastic churches and shrines at that time. In order to make sure that all the looted statues were destroyed, Cromwell ordered that they should all be brought to Chelsea Manor and burnt in a huge bonfire that he could personally witness. Among the statues lost was Our Lady of Walsingham, a shrine which ranked fourth after Rome. Jerusalem and Compostella, the Black Madonna of Willesden and Our Lady of Grace of Ipswich.

Outlining how the project had come about, Frances Scarr, chairman of the Trust told guests that in 2003, a group of Catholics and Anglicans had decided to pray together for reparation and atonement at each of the 84 shrines dedicated to Our Lady. After the final Mass in 2005, Frances proposed the idea of the statue and found sculptor Paul Day, whose work includes the Battle of Britain memorial and 'The Meeting Place' at the newly-restored St Pancras station.

Paul Day described how his work will take the form of a bronze triptych, on a granite plinth with the Virgin and Child at the centre, iconoclasts mocking the crucifix on one side and the destruction of statues on the other. There will also be information on the history of the Reformation, and the worlds 'Mary Most Holy' in different languages.

"These images go beyond the English Reformation" he said, explaining that they have poignant resonances around the world. "Acts of iconoclasm seem to surface regularly throughout history" he said. "Even today, notably in Iraq, Afghanistan and Tibet images and sacred places are being defiled and destroyed."

"The sculpture is to create a place for reflection on the theme of reconciliation between faith communities; a contemporary shrine to replace those lost during that troubled period of English history. Reconciliation requires confrontation with the truth of the past. An appreciation of the past, recent or distant can be a fertile source for finding common ground, especially when knowledge of a shared misfortune comes to light."

Mrs Scarr said: "This monument is not just about reparation but it is also very much about reconciliation. I hope that when we come before this monument we will ask for God's forgiveness and through the intercession of Mary Most Holy we will pray that she will help us put behind our turbulent past and lead us forward in unity, peace and reconciliation"

A £1,250,000 fundraising appeal was launched to cover the costs of the project. A list of donors and benefactors will be enclosed in a time capsule buried beneath the monument.

The unveiling of the memorial is due to take place on 13 October 2009, the feast of Edward the Confessor. This will be preceded by an ecumenical service in Westminster Cathedral.

For more information, or to make a donation, visit: www.artandreconciliation.org