

Fulfillment of a Dream

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In 1972 while in London, I looked for the statue of St. Thomas More on the Chelsea Bank near Beaufort Street and was overjoyed when I found it. The dream began -- if only we could duplicate it in Rochester.

No other one would do. This had the character of the man and I was enamored of it. Since then I have been trying, generally without success, to make that dream come true.

I corresponded with the sculptor, Cubitt Bevis, who finally settled on a price. But I was disappointed when told that it would be impossible -- the molds stored under the Thames were destroyed accidentally. That finished that.

I visited Cubitt Bevis in his studio in London in 1977 (he was in his 87th year and a delight). While looking around his studio I discovered under a cloth a maquette which turned out to be the original design of the Chelsea statue. It would be possible to enlarge it and have an exact copy. When I got back I corresponded with the Tallix Corp. in Peekskill. They have a pointing machine and a fine reputation for enlarging and reproducing bronze works of art. They were at the time recasting the Rockefeller collection.

Arrangements were made and the maquette air-freighted here. But I am getting ahead of myself. In June of 1977, I celebrated my 40th anniversary as a priest and the people of the parish very generously gave me the money for the statue. The only person who knew of my dream was Frank Wolfe who must have told the other members of the committee, Mr. and Mrs. John Glavin, Mr. and Mrs. James Ryan, Mr. and Mrs. William Quinlisk, Father Helfrich, Mr. and Mrs. Maura Schiffino, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Reddington and Sister Mary Dorothy.

I took the maquette to Peekskill in May of 1978 and they have been working on it ever since. A young sculptor, Jerry Tobin, who received his training at Pratt Institute and the Art Students League, had charge of the work. (He has had several private showings of his own work in New York City.) He studied sculpture under John Hovannas and Jose DeCreft, and anatomy under Robert Beverly Hale.

Mr. and Mrs. Sam Vasile have donated all the work in erecting the pedestal of sandstone. These plans are the original ones sent from London.

A man who was a tremendous help was Elliott Horton, a lawyer for Rank-Xerox in London. He took over all

negotiations and with a skill and charm only he has, obtained all copyrights. He negotiated the copyrights with Cubitt Bevis and then permission from the City of London, and the boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea. The only stipulation: "That the original is in London, England" was to be inscribed on the base of the statue.

The long road which began in 1972 is now coming to an end. The men and women of Tallix Corp. are very proud of their work. They think it is one of the finest.

The Statue

On July 29, 1969, a bronze statue of St. Thomas More, one of England's greatest statesmen, scholars, and saints, was unveiled on the River Thames embankment at Chelsea.

Cardinal John Heenan of Westminster was there with the Anglican primate, Archbishop Michael Ramsey of Canterbury; the moderator of the Free Church Federal Council, the Very Rev. A. C. Neil; politicians, foreign enthusiasts and a crowd of the saint's admirers.

The statue, bigger than life-size, based on the famous portrait by Holbein, shows the saint seated and looking over the river with his head turned slightly downstream in the direction of his last journey to the Tower of London and martyrdom. His face and clasped hands are bright gold, contrasting with the dull brown of his lord chancellor's robes and Tudor cap.

Around his neck is a crucifix, such as the one he wore at his beheading, and across his knees is the broken chain of his office given to him by King Henry VIII and taken from him in the tower.

At his feet in gold is the reproduction of his signature -- which would have saved his life if he had agreed to accept the king as the head of the Church -- and around the pedestal in tall gilt letters are the words, "Scholar -- Statesman -- Saint." The family arms in heraldic colors are on the back of the statue.

The statue, which becomes yet another link with London's Catholic past, stands a few yards from his home against the background of Chelsea Old Church, now Anglican, which he and his family attended.

St. Thomas More's successor as speaker (chairman) in the House of Commons, Dr. Horace King, unveiled the statue to the drone of airliners overhead and the bustle of traffic on the nearby main road.

Dr. King said St. Thomas was "the greatest man who ever became speaker. He was a man who looked forward to the tolerant society in an age when religion was closely tied to statecraft and prayer, one of those many Englishmen who had died that we may worship God in our own way and be free men and women."

Cardinal Heenan said: "The important thing about Sir Thomas More is not his martyrdom but his holiness. Men do not become saints on the scaffold any more than they do on their death bed."

For the first time in the universal calendar, St. Thomas More has his place. He had been regarded as a man for all seasons. Now he is recognized by his own Church as a man for all nations.

Archbishop Ramsey said Thomas More was a man who believed that "conscience matters more than expediency, that the Christian Church is a divine society, wider than states and nations, that duty to king yields place to duty to God."

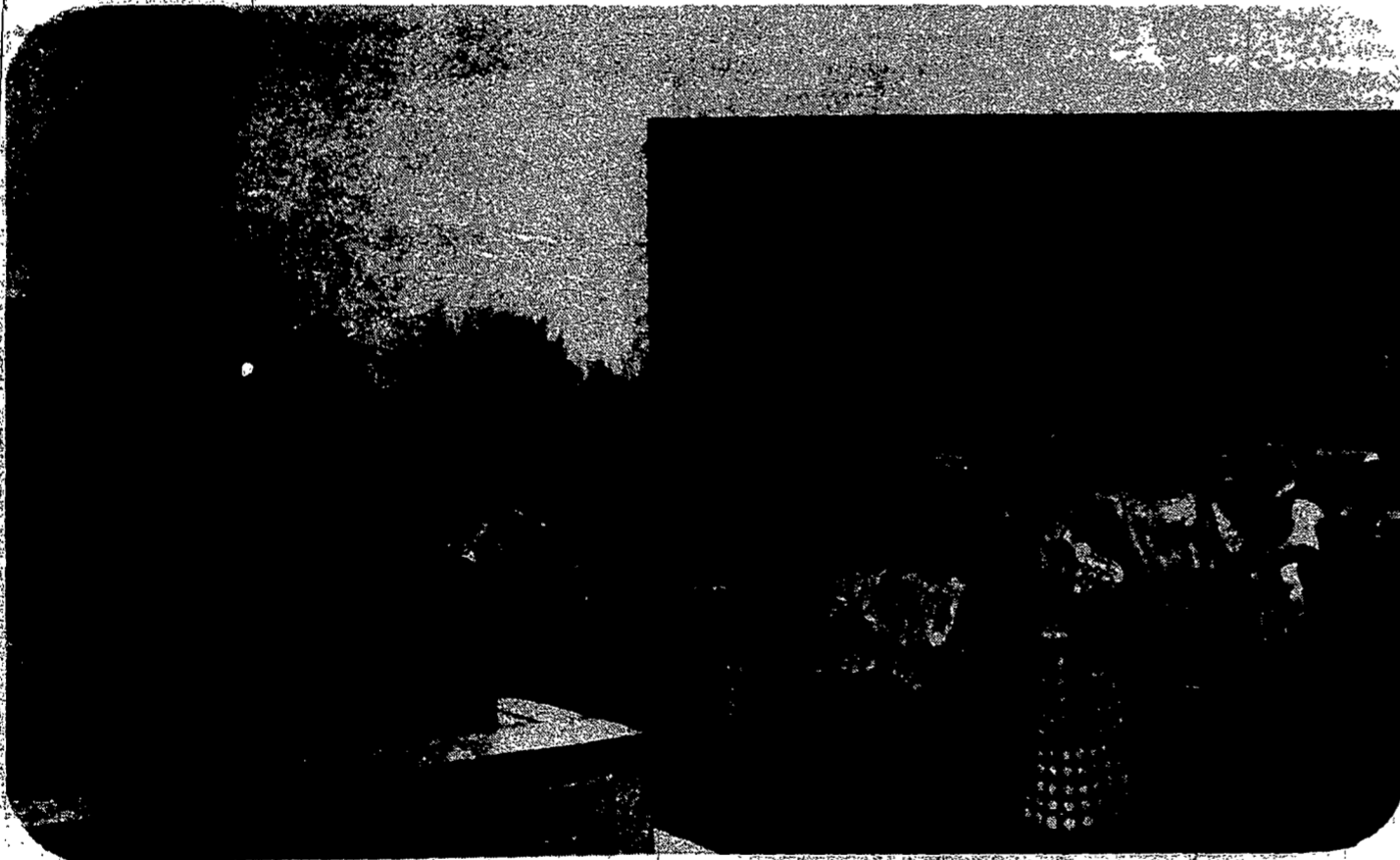
Moderator Neil said, "The gentle, happy friend of Erasmus and of the new learning, the man of conscience, faithful to death, belongs to all."

Prayers composed by St. Thomas More while he was in the Tower of London were read by the local Catholic pastor and the Anglican vicar.

The unveiling was the culmination of four years work by a special committee set up by the Chelsea mayor. More than 1,000 people from all parts of the world had subscribed to the cost. One of them, present at the local ceremony, had come from Japan.



The statue of St. Thomas More which was dedicated on Thanksgiving day.



Auxiliary Bishop Dennis W. Hickey blessed the statue before a good-sized crowd on a rainy Thanksgiving morning.



Father Pegnam and Frank Wolfe, who was in on the pastor's dream.



Father Francis Pegnam and 5-year old Thomas More Salameda join in cutting the rope to uncover the statue in dedication ceremonies Thanksgiving morning.