

Royal visitor does honours as Theodore House opens

Simon Caldwell

Catholic royal Lord Nicholas Windsor has opened a new centre for Christian renewal at Stonyhurst College, near Clitheroe, Lancashire.

The great-grandson of King George V, and youngest son of the Duke and Duchess of Kent, opened Theodore House on Friday, 15th February. He unveiled a plaque on the site of the converted corn mill in the presence of Lord Shuttleworth, the Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire, and more than 200 dignitaries and invited guests.

The event marks the culmination of a £4 million project of the Christian Heritage Centre, a charity, to convert the Grade II-listed disused mill into a centre for study, retreats, Christian renewal and for the training the laity in Christian leadership.

Lord Nicholas, who became a Catholic in 2001, is a Royal Patron of Theodore House along with his wife, Lady Paola Windsor.

The opening ceremony also involved the blessing of Theodore House by the Rt Rev. John Arnold, the Bishop of Salford, and the Rt Rev. Julian Henderson, the Anglican Bishop of Blackburn.

Theodore House has 39 beds and will offer accommodation to visitors, retreatants and scholars. Aid to the Church In Need, the Catholic charity that helps persecuted Christians and others, will be among the groups that will provide retreats for primary school children and other groups.

The house will also allow greater access to the magnificent collection of historical and religious artefacts and relics amassed by the Society and Jesus and held by Stonyhurst

College on behalf of the Catholic community of Great Britain.

The collection includes, among many other exhibits, the prayer book that Mary, Queen of Scots took to the scaffold at Fotheringhay Castle when she was beheaded; the rope that bound the Jesuit martyr St Edmund Campion to the hurdle to Tyburn; a cope made for the coronation of King Henry VII; and a pearl-laden crucifix given by St Thomas More to his wife, Lady Alice, as well as two hats worn the former Lord Chancellor of England and martyr.

Theodore House sits within a site frequented by such literary figures as Gerard Manley Hopkins, the Jesuit poet; JRR Tolkien, author of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes, who, as a Stonyhurst pupil, carved his name on a desk at the school, very close to the engraving of a contemporary called Moriarty.

The centre is named after St Theodore of Tarsus, a 7th century Archbishop of Canterbury who worked for Christian unity within the British Isles.

Lord Nicholas Windsor said: "It is a very exciting moment. Theodore House will be a centre of excellence in the fields of formation, study and retreats. It should be known about by schools, parishes and universities as a place where people can visit. It would be the purpose – squarely and fully – of the centre to be part of the 'New Evangelisation' and I think that is the mission."

Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster, said: "Theodore House, with it is pro-



Lord Nicholas Windsor opens Theodore House
Photo: Simon Caldwell

grammes for people of all ages and cultures, creates an ecumenical environment, which will promote dialogue, cherish diversity and encourage respect, as well as tolerance.

"I pray that this initiative will enrich spiritually all those who spend time in these beautiful surroundings and may they, like St Theodore, be inspired to become a powerful force for reconciliation and healing within a divided Church."

Words of encouragement for the new centre's future also came from Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, who said: "I send my best wishes and prayers at the opening of Theodore House as a place of retreat, study and training."

His support was echoed by Archbishop Angaelos, Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London, who reminded attendees that: "As we enjoy our freedom to worship and freedom to live out our Christian Faith, we must never forget the suffering of those who, even in our own times, have none of those same privileges. Coming from the ancient Coptic Orthodox Church, founded by St Mark, and with a centuries-old relationship with the Church of Syria, I hope and pray that Theodore House will deepen the understanding of our rich Christian heritage, and help to form a new generation of Christian leaders who spread the Gospel and serve the nation."

Lord Alton of Liverpool, Chairman of the Christian Heritage Centre at Stonyhurst, said: "Whether for groups preparing for Confirmation of First Communion, or for parish or school retreats, Theodore House and the Christian Heritage Centre should be a 'must-visit' destination.

"Set in stunning countryside, at the heart of the Tolkien Trail, it will also be the perfect place for families and individuals wanting to spend a few days recharging their batteries. With tailor-made facilities for disabled people, a family annexe, self-catering or fully-catered stays, and with accommodation for up to 39 people, it is a versatile and beautiful venue.

"The name Theodore means 'gift from God' and hopefully time spent at Theodore House will prove to be a gift to anyone who is searching for

Him, or wanting to know God better."

Lord Alton also thanked the many donors and supporters who helped bring the project to fruition. A special thank you was also made to Mr Clive W. Leach CBE, KSG, chairman of The Universe Media Group Ltd, which has supported the project throughout. Staff from The Catholic Universe attended the event to provide attendees with the latest edition of the UK's leading Catholic newspaper, and to promote the *Official Catholic Directory of England and Wales 2019*, which The Universe Media Group publishes on behalf of the Bishops' Conference of England

and Wales.

Stefan Kaminski, Director of the Christian Heritage Centre, said: "The centre, inspired by the testimony of the Stonyhurst College collection, will witness to the flourishing and authenticity of a human culture that is informed by faith. The centre will seek to engage people, intellectually and spiritually, with the truth and beauty of Christianity. It will aim to inspire and educate in order to form a culture that is built on the full revelation, found in Jesus Christ, of what it means to be human."

See more at: www.christianheritagecentre.com/theodore-house/



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Catholic Universe staff, Michelle Jones and Conor Rosevere, attended the event.