

# Homage to Thomas Browne

by Anne & Patrick Poirier



This statue, by Henry Albert Pegram, of Sir Thomas contemplating an urn was commissioned to celebrate the 300th birthday of Sir Thomas who died on his birthday in 1682 aged 77. It sits at the top of the square and looks down over the activity below.

When it was erected on 19 October 1905, huge crowds turned out to witness its unveiling.



The artist Patrick Poirier with stone craftsman Gianni at the stone yard in Pietrasanta, near Pisa, Italy

Homage to Thomas Browne is site-specific artwork which consists of 20 pieces of sculpture and 22 lights which by internationally-renowned artists Anne & Patrick Poirier.

The sculptures all relate to Sir Thomas Browne who lived in the Hay Hill area in the 17th century, over 400 years ago. The artists' concept was to create a 'living room' for the city where people can sit and relax, think, meet, and discuss right in the centre of Norwich.

The artwork was commissioned by a group representing Arts Council England East, Norwich City Council, Norfolk County Council, Commissions East and visual arts organisations across Norwich. A call for submissions was sent out to local, national and international artists inviting them to apply to produce a piece of public art for the market-place area as part of the renovation of the market. Anne and Patrick Poirier were chosen because of their previous experience of working on large-scale public realm projects.

The artists were asked to make a site-specific piece that related to Hay Hill. After some research, they chose to focus on the life and work of Sir Thomas Browne as an important character in the history of the city that many local people know nothing about.

His house was in Orford Yard, approximately where Prêt à Manger and Primark stand now and he is buried in nearby St Peter Mancroft church. The Hay Hill area was his local 'patch' during his life in Norwich where he practiced as a physician, scientist, philosopher and writer at around the same time as Samuel Pepys was writing in London.

Thomas Browne wrote several important books in his lifetime

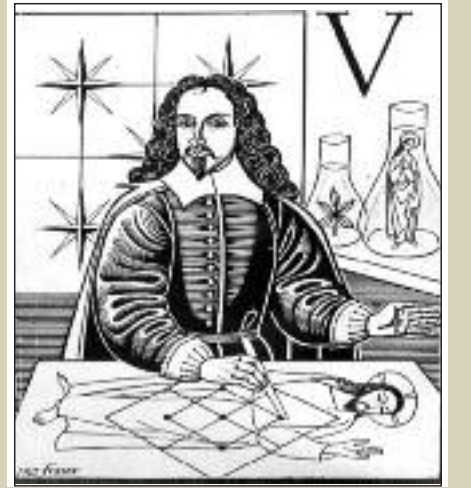
- Religio Medici (1643)
- Pseudodoxia Epidemica (1646–72)
- Hydriotaphia, Urn Burial (1658)
- The Garden of Cyrus (1658)
- A Letter to a Friend (1656; pub. post. 1690)
- Christian Morals (1670s; pub. post. 1716)
- Musaeum Clausum Tract 13 from Miscellaneous Tracts

For more information about Sir Thomas Browne, please visit [www.sirthomasbrowne.org.uk](http://www.sirthomasbrowne.org.uk)

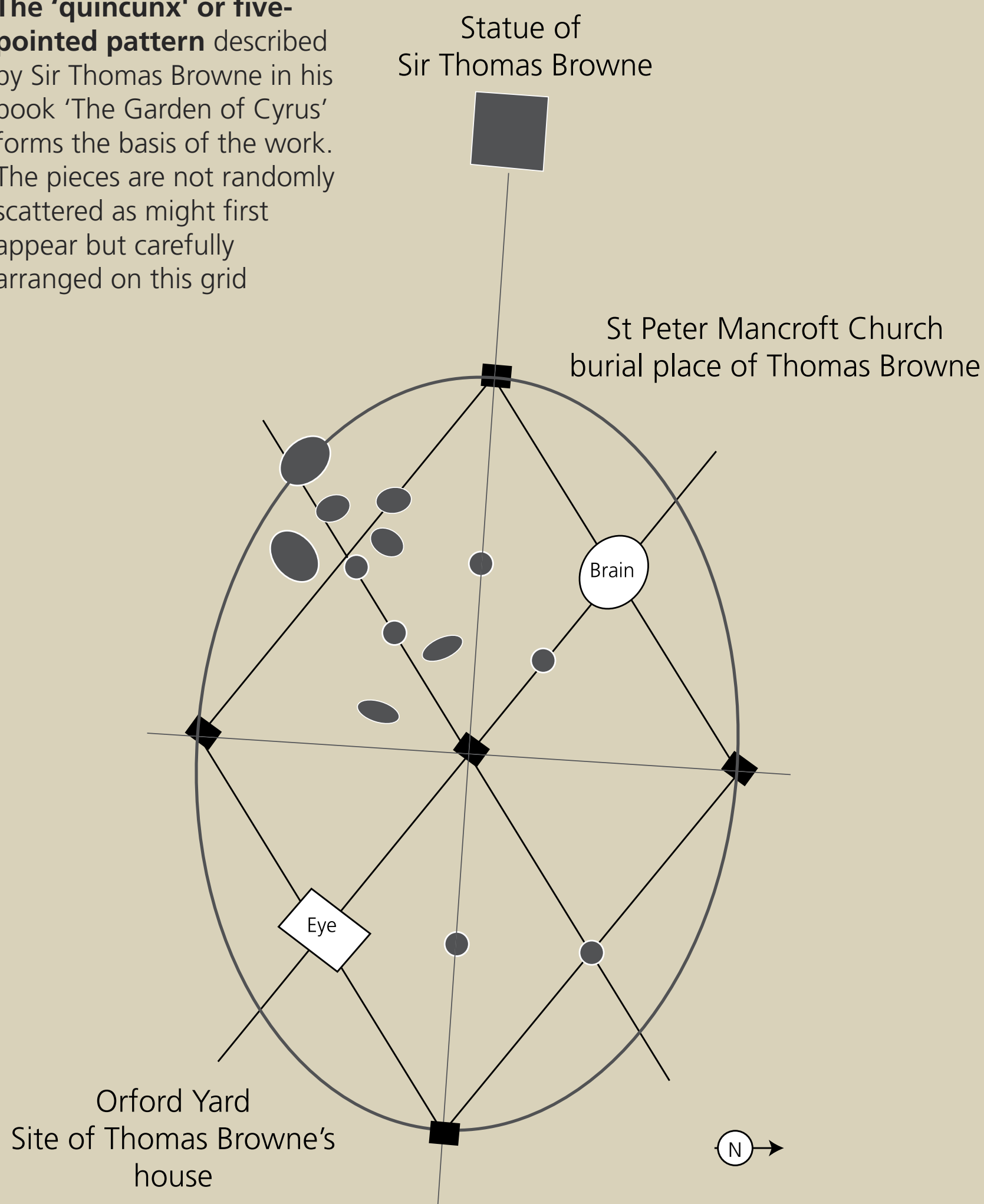
The artwork is funded by Arts Council England East, Norwich City Council and Norfolk County Council

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The 'quincunx' or five-pointed pattern described by Sir Thomas Browne in his book 'The Garden of Cyrus' forms the basis of the work. The pieces are not randomly scattered as might first appear but carefully arranged on this grid



Sir Thomas Browne lived in Norwich from 1636 until his death in 1682. He was a physician, philosopher, scientist, botanist and writer and was very important in England at the time. He pioneered scientific experimentation, invented many words and de-bunked myths. The statue on a pedestal on Hay Hill honours Sir Thomas and was erected on 19 October 1905 to celebrate the 300th anniversary of his birth.

The set of marble and granite sculptures - Homage to Thomas Browne were installed in 2007. They are a kind of living room for the city, intended to be sat on, climbed on, touched and used as street furniture. The artists wanted the space to be used as a meeting place – somewhere to sit and watch the busy world go by.

The sculptures are arranged in a pattern known as a 'quincunx', a five-pointed diamond shape which Thomas Browne believed existed throughout nature. Many of the pieces are inscribed with quotes from Sir Thomas Browne's writings, with original spellings.

At night, the sculptures are lit to create a mystical glow. The coloured lights set into the ground are part of the artwork.

The largest pieces are a marble brain and eye carved in a classical manner. These pieces refer to Thomas Browne as a thinker and his approach to philosophy, religion and science. They are arranged in line with his home in Orford Yard and his grave in nearby St Peter Mancroft church.

There are also five granite chairs, two benches, three tables, six conical seats and two smaller 'pod' seats which represent Thomas Browne's interest in botany. The gold design on the back of some of the seats is the artists' interpretation of the rooms of the brain – memory, creativity, intellect and the way they are linked together.

Please sit on and touch the sculptures. They are meant to be used by the people of Norwich and their guests and visitors. But please look after them, and take your rubbish away when you leave.

For more information about Sir Thomas Browne, please visit [www.sirthomasbrowne.org.uk](http://www.sirthomasbrowne.org.uk)

## SOME FACTS

- Artists Anne & Patrick Poirier work all over the world and have been a working artistic partnership as well as husband and wife for over 40 years since meeting at art school.
- The sculptures were made by craftsmen in Pietrasanta, Italy where Michelangelo used buy stone for his work. The marble is Italian from Carrara and the granite from Zimbabwe.
- The work was commissioned and funded in 2004 by Arts Council England East, Norwich City Council and Norfolk County Council through Commissions East.
- Sir Thomas Browne's skull was re-buried at St Peter Mancroft 75 years ago on 4 July 1922, after being accidentally dug up by workmen in 1840. A replica skull is kept in the church as well as a portrait and other artefacts.
- The brain and eye weigh about 5 tons each and the benches and table weigh 3-4 tons. Black granite was chosen because of the stones in the floor of the church
- The work contains many references to Browne, Hay Hill and surrounding area. You can find out more about Sir Thomas Browne by visiting nearby St Peter Mancroft church or the website [www.sirthomasbrowne.org.uk](http://www.sirthomasbrowne.org.uk)

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