



HOMAGE TO THOMAS BROWNE

AN ARTWORK
FOR HAY HILL
BY
ANNE & PATRICK POIRIER



The marble eye

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE

The public artwork proposed for Hay Hill consists of 20 pieces of sculpture and 22 lights which together make up the sculpture known as 'Homage to Thomas Browne'

The sculptures are made of a combination of marble and granite, some polished and shiny, some rough and matt. They are very strong and able to be sat on and touched - in fact they are intended to be used as furniture. They are inscribed with quotes from Sir Thomas Browne's works

They are arranged in a pattern known as a 'quinconce' or 'quincunx', a five-pointed diamond shape which Thomas Browne believed existed throughout nature (he was born just before microscopes were invented).

The stones are very high-quality and beautifully sculpted by traditional craftsmen in Italy who have been working stone for years. Norwich has a history of importing stone for the cathedral and castle, and marble from the same area was used in the famous Marble Hall, Surrey House – the headquarters of Norwich Union in Surrey Street.

The stones are various sizes and will be securely pinned to the ground. They will not be a hazard as they have a good contrast of colour visibility and are clustered in an area together. It will be obvious that they are a group of pieces and people can choose to move between them or around the space if they prefer.

The stones will be lit at night by subtle uplighters which will illuminate the stone pieces but also create a mystical glow. These lights are part of the work. They are set into the ground and will use as little power as possible to illuminate the stones.

There will still be stalls on Hay Hill and the traders on those stalls will have information about the work.

The artists intended the space to be used as a meeting place and somewhere to sit and reflect and watch the busy world go by.



The largest pieces are a marble brain and eye sculpted in a very classical manner which refer to Thomas Browne's approach to philosophy, religion and science as well as his home in Orford Yard and his burial in St Peter Mancroft church.

He was deeply spiritual and innately curious throughout his long life in Norwich. In his day he would have been like Stephen Hawking or Robert Winston – a knowledgeable man in many areas whose opinions and ideas were very well respected. He was very 'brainy' and his brain and skull were studied after his death and buried separately. A replica of his skull can be viewed at St Peter Mancroft Church nearby.

The brain and eye are large sculptures which can be touched and sat on and used in the same way as the other pieces.

Images of the overall layout and other pieces are shown in the following pages.

For more information on the project please email culture@norwich.gov.uk or call 01603 212521



SIR THOMAS BROWNE

Sir Thomas Browne was a physician, philosopher and writer, arguably one of the greatest scholars and thinkers of his day, who lived for most of his adult life in Norwich from 1636 until his death in 1682. His house was approximately where the cafe 'Prêt à Manger' is now on Gentleman's Walk and he was buried in St Peter Mancroft Church, so Hay Hill is very much 'his patch'.

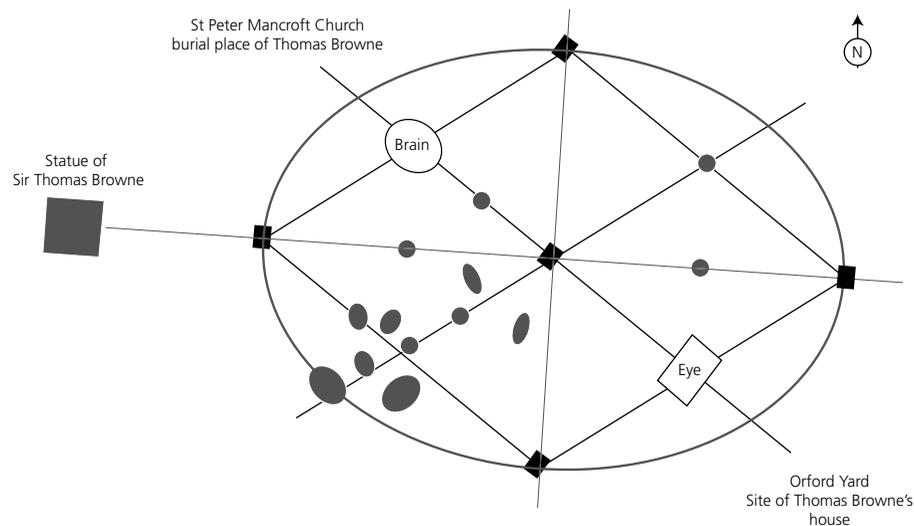
He was born in London and educated in France, Italy and Holland before settling in Norwich. He was a keen botanist and had a herb garden in Norwich cathedral grounds. He was born about 30 years before the invention of the microscope and believed that all natural life was underpinned by a 5 pointed grid called a 'quincunx'. Possibly, he was making an early observation of plant and human cell structure.

Although he was very eminent man and important to Norwich in the 17th century, nowadays not many people know who he is or anything about him. He is honoured by the statue in Hay Hill, which was erected in 1905 on the tercentenary of his birth.

In 2004, international artists Anne and Patrick Poirier, were commissioned to create a new 'Homage to Thomas Browne' incorporating his ideas and words, creating a place to rest and think, a cultural place for people to meet and ponder as Thomas Browne may have done in Hay Hill centuries before. He was a very spiritual and thoughtful man.

Their concept is to create a 'salon' or room, defined by light, a new spirit and a place to dream, a place that changes in character by day and by night, is ethereal but also comfortable, stimulating and restful, with stone 'furniture' for the use of those who may pass by and stop.

Homage to Thomas Browne is their first commission in the UK.



THE COMMISSION

In 2002, the Arts Council offered funding to the Forum Trust to commission a permanent public art piece for the Forum. The Forum Trust found it couldn't make use of this opportunity and so the Arts Council offered the money to Norwich City Council instead for a piece of work to complement the refurbishment of the marketplace. When this was also problematic because of changes to the design of the market, the artists were offered Hay Hill as a new site and the resulting work is their response.

Through Commissions East, an organisation that exists to help councils, organisations and developers to commission public art, a call for artists was sent out. The brief was devised by Commissions East, Norwich City Council, Arts Council England East, Norfolk County Council, The Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library, Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery and Norwich School of Art and Design who all formed a steering group to oversee the commissioning.

In particular, the panel was looking for artists who had a lot of experience working in the public domain. 6 artists were shortlisted and from those, the Poiriers were chosen because of their international reputation, proven track record and artistic approach which is both classical and contemporary as well as site-specific so that it takes into account the surroundings and the place that the work will be sited.

The Poiriers researched Sir Thomas Browne and visited Norwich several times before submitting their final design.



THE ARTISTS

Anne and Patrick Poirier were both born in 1942. They met at art school and have been married and working together for almost 40 years.

In that time they have worked around the world and are in constant demand for commissions of their work. Some are in the public domain, many are private, working in large houses and gardens.

Norwich is fortunate to have the first British commission by Anne and Patrick who have visited Norwich several times over the last two or three years to research their work here.

Because they work in the context of the place, it is important for them to know it very well and to make work that fits the life of the city rather than making something that could be seen anywhere in any town. This work is distinctive for Norwich and Hay Hill - it does not belong anywhere else.

Anne and Patrick Poirier have been exhibiting internationally since the 1960s, during which time they have been commissioned to produce major works for a number of cities world-wide, including New York, Toronto, Seattle, Paris and Munich.

The Poiriers have works in many public collections including Tate Gallery, Australian National Gallery, the Guggenheim Collection (New York) and the Smithsonian Collection (Washington DC).

They are interested in archaeology and art history and are keen to explore these issues in the context and usage of the locations. Their work embodies classicism but in a contemporary way. 'Homage to Thomas Browne' will be the first major permanent work that they have undertaken in Great Britain.

Commissions East 2005



Hay Hill as it is now



This image is a computer modelled visual showing how the sculptures will be laid out.

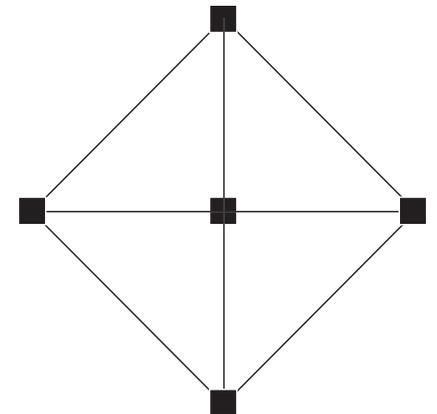
The diamond shaped 'quinconce' has been added to show the layout but it won't be visible on Hay Hill



A computer simulated view from Gentleman's Walk at night.
Low-level coloured lighting will complete the work, giving Hay Hill an ethereal glow after dark
NB the position of the market stall is for illustration purposes only and is not finalised



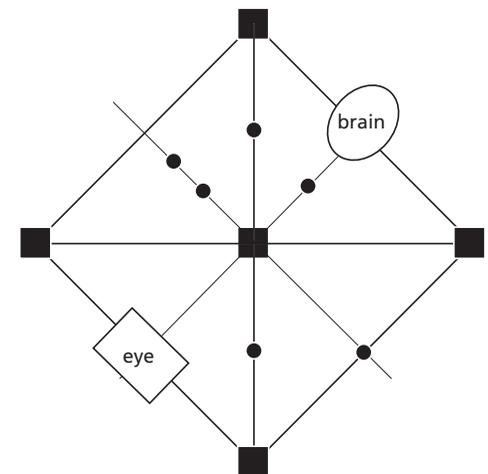
Black granite seats -
there will be five of
these placed on the
five points of the
quinconce





Grey granite stools –
there will be 6 of these.

The white marble brain
is shown in the
background

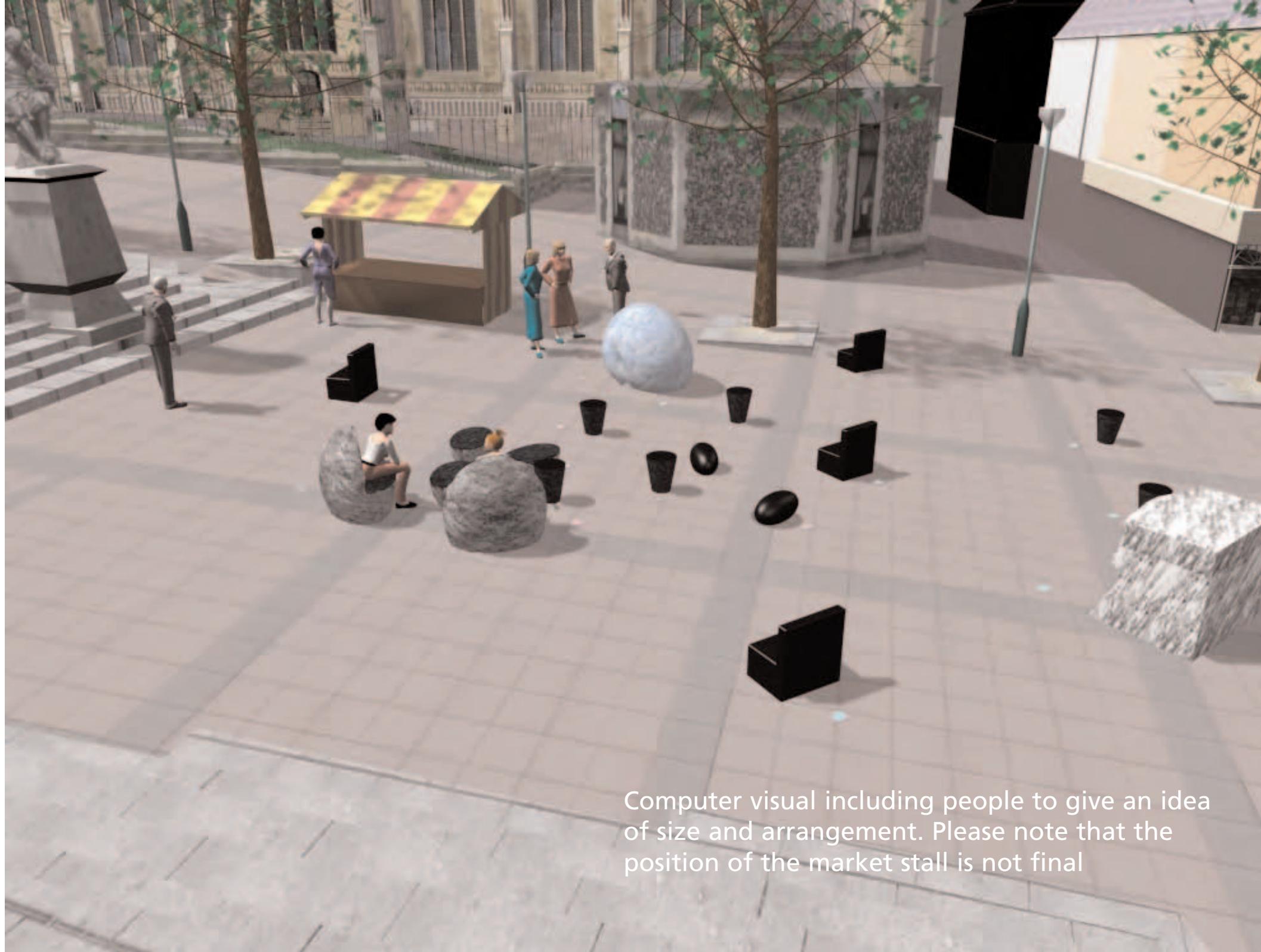




Polished granite table with rough exterior – there will be three of these. Two polished granite 'bean' shapes are also shown

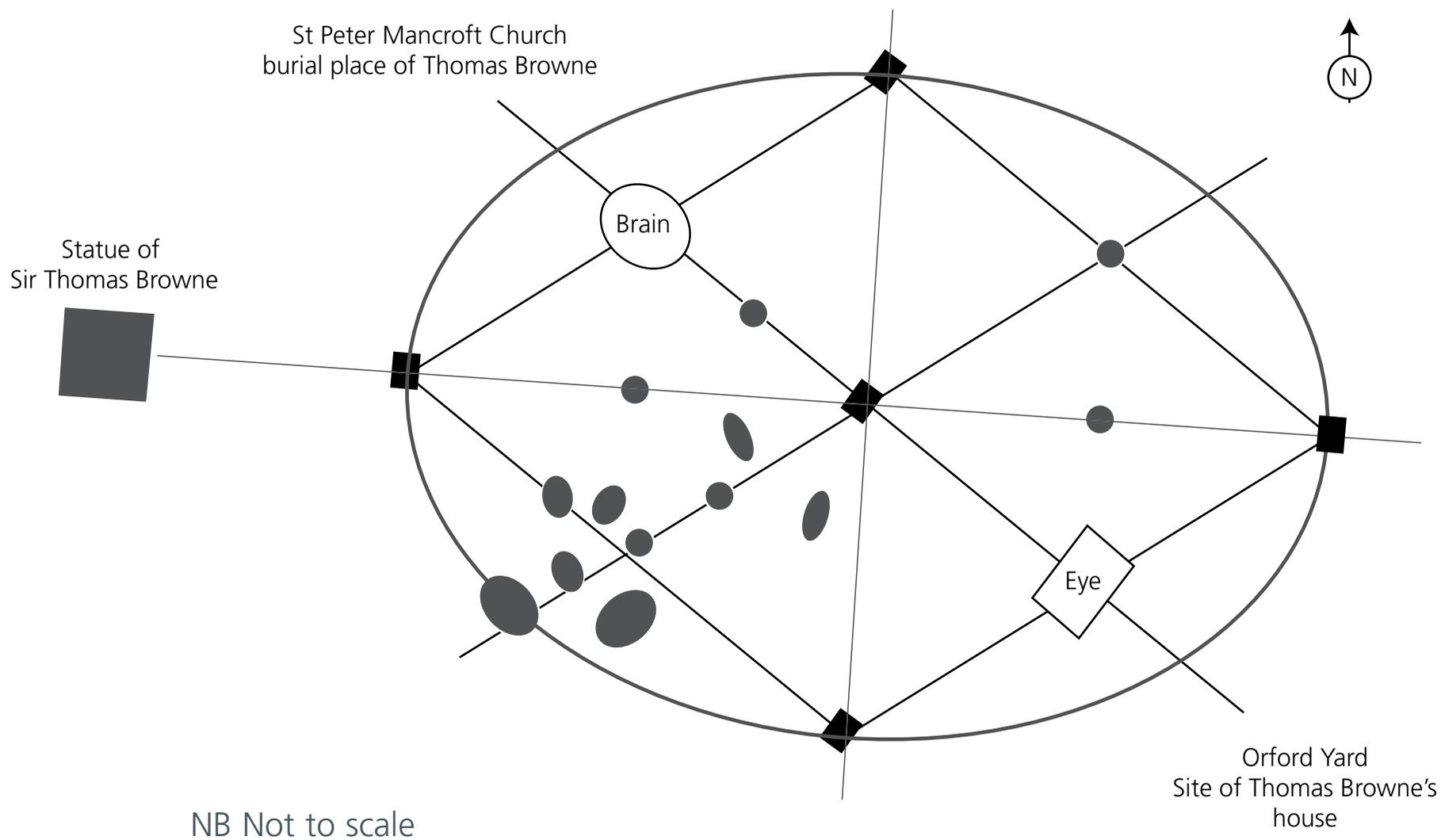


Polished granite benches with rough exterior – there will be two of these.



Computer visual including people to give an idea of size and arrangement. Please note that the position of the market stall is not final

A plan showing the arrangement of 20 pieces of stone – 5 polished granite seats, 6 granite stools, 2 granite benches, 3 granite tables and 2 granite 'beans' as well as the marble brain and eye connecting St Peter Mancroft church and the site of Sir Thomas Browne's home in Orford Yard, just off Gentleman's Walk.





A Homage to Sir Thomas Browne is a major site-specific artwork for the City of Norwich commissioned through Commissions East and funded by Arts Council England East, Norwich City Council, Norfolk County Council in consultation with Norfolk & Norwich Millennium Library, Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery, Norwich School of Art & Design, HEART and the Forum Trust.

