

Kitty stands as a memorial to playwright



MUSE: Kitty the Marlowe Theatre statue is variously described as naked, semi-clad or in diaphanous wrap

MEMORIAL: Stained glass in Poets' Corner in Westminster

Way we were



David Lewis
Canterbury
Historical and
Archaeological
Society

NEXT month, the city's best-known street figure – a striking memorial to the Canterbury-bred playwright Christopher Marlowe – will mark her 20th year standing in front of the Marlowe Theatre.

The life-sized bronze statue, formally named as the Lyric Muse when she was first unveiled in the Buttermarket by the actor Henry Irving in 1891, has since been known by locals simply as Kitty.

She was the work of Victorian sculptor Edward Onslow Ford, who also created the large statue of Lord Gordon on a camel, now in the Brompton Barracks in Chatham.

Kitty was variously described as naked, semi-clad or in diaphanous wrap, and many objected to her presence so close to the main cathedral entrance. The council's response, the addition of an evergreen shrub surround, did little to cover up the basic problem.

In 1921, Kitty was moved to Dane John Gardens to make room in the Buttermarket for the new First World War memorial. Kitty suffered Second World War bomb blast damage in 1941, was put in storage for the remainder of the war, and then re-erected in 1948.

But when members of the prestigious Marlowe Society arrived to lay a commemorative wreath in 1957, they found that the statue had been placed the wrong way round.

Their wreath, laid solemnly against Marlowe's name, then appeared to be paying homage to Kitty's thinly veiled backside!

The comic potential of the moment was not lost on the correspondent of the London Times who started his piece: "Goings-on



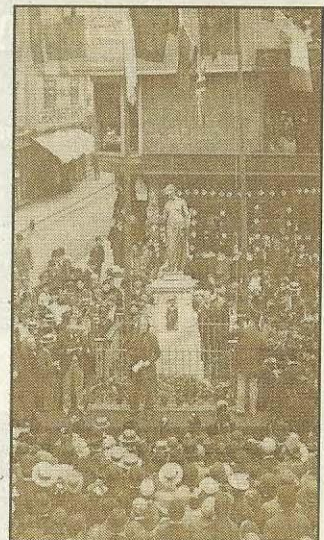
PERMANENT HOME: The statue has stood in front of the Marlowe Theatre for 20 years

behind the Muse".

The memorial, now the right way round, was moved for a second time in 1993, to stand appropriately by the Marlowe Theatre. Here it gained a new backdrop with the rebuilding of the theatre, which opened in October 2011.

Recent years have brought two additions to the Marlowe memorabilia – a stained-glass window at Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey (2002) and a plaque to mark the 410th anniversary of Marlowe's death, on the access lane to the Marlowe Theatre off St Peter's Lane (2003).

Unfortunately the Canterbury plaque is now nowhere to be seen – we hope it's not lost?



UNVEILING: Kitty was first revealed in the city in the Buttermarket in 1891

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