



## PRESS RELEASE

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### Medieval Abbey to host Gormley's Modern Masterpiece

Antony Gormley's *Field for the British Isles* will be the centrepiece of a year of contemporary art in the ancient setting of Torre Abbey in Torquay. Built in 1196 by the 'White Canons' the Abbey is Torquay's oldest building and its recent restoration will provide an unusual backdrop for Gormley's thought-provoking installation.

Although more famous for his giant sculpture, *Angel of the North*, Gormley's *Field for the British Isles* was instrumental in his winning the Turner Prize in 1993. Comprising of 40,000 small unglazed, fired clay figures standing closely together and all staring towards the viewer, it is a startling and arresting sight. *Field for the British Isles* will fill much of the Abbey's huge Spanish Barn and will be open to the public free of charge from 27<sup>th</sup> June to 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2009.

The Spanish Barn, venue for *Field*, is a mediaeval Tithe Barn originally built to store taxes paid to the Abbey in the form of grain, hay and other farm produce. The barn's unexpected name, and its place in the history books, was firmly established at the time of the Spanish Armada, when 397 prisoners were captured and held in the barn for a fortnight.

*Field*'s figures were made by a community of families in St Helens, Merseyside, under Gormley's direction, using brick clay and was first shown at Tate Liverpool in 1993-94. Other versions of *Field* have been made by families of brick makers in Mexico, by children in the Amazon basin and by families in Guangzhou, China.

Witness to eight centuries of English life, Torre Abbey first took shape in 1196 when it was founded as a Premonstratensian Monastery. Following an extensive £6million restoration project, the property now offers its visitors the chance to explore one of the most fascinating areas of the property never previously seen by the general public – the evocative medieval undercrofts. New exhibition areas provide a clear insight into the life and times of the Canons who - governed by the strict rules of the order - led a life of great austerity.

Able to boast the third largest permanent art collection in Devon, Torre Abbey is now part-gallery, part-museum, and part-historic house. The Abbey is open daily and, during the *Field* exhibition, will be hosting its annual exhibition *TACO – Torre Abbey Contemporary Open*.

Keeper of Art, Amelia Marriette: "The exhibiting of Antony Gormley's *Field for the British Isles* is the start of a new era for Torre Abbey as a major centre for contemporary arts in the region. I guarantee that *Field* will create a very strong impression on all that come to see it and experience its silent message. Gormley is one of Britain's best known living artists and we know that visitors will travel far and wide to see his work. With the Torre Abbey Contemporary Open running alongside we can also make this event a fantastic opportunity for artists in the South West to showcase their work. It really is the beginning of something much bigger for Torre Abbey and for Torbay."

Ends.

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