

# PRESS RELEASE

## Charity Cycle Ride for the Homeless Launches 2019 Event.

**A weekend of challenge, fundraising, fun, and lots about the history  
of the Queen Eleanor Crosses**

Take part in the 11th Anniversary Queen Eleanor Cycle Ride and raise funds to support the work of The Connection at St Martin's with homeless and vulnerable people in central London. The 4-day Ride takes place over the August Bank Holiday, Friday 23 to Monday 26 August. All cyclists are welcome. Accommodation is in church halls, all food (including a great deal of cake!), and back up transport for luggage and emergencies is provided. Last year was a special year, the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary raising a record £28,500. This year the aim is to top a grand total £200,000 since the very first bike ride.

A group of 30 cyclists, the team is divided up into smaller groups of riders who travel at similar speeds cycling 210 miles from near Lincoln to Westminster Abbey. The cyclists set off from the church in Harby - just over the border in Nottinghamshire, near where Edward 1's Queen Eleanor of Castile died in 1290. King Edward 1 arranged for his dead wife's body to be carried to London with crosses bearing statues of the Queen - the Queen Eleanor Crosses - to be erected at places where the procession stopped overnight. Retracing the route of the funeral cortege, the ride pays a visit to Eleanor's tomb in Lincoln Cathedral with a fine tea at Brant Broughton Quaker Meeting House.

The first overnight stop is in Grantham, staying at Harrowby Lane Methodist Church, visiting the site of the Eleanor Cross, now occupied by a statue of Isaac Newton. Hopefully by the end of this summer Grantham Civic Society will have pinpointed the exact location of the base of the Eleanor Cross on St Peter's Hill Green. They have been awarded a grant of £2,000 by InvestSK through South

Kesteven's Heritage Alive! Fund to carry out a community archaeological geophysics investigation of the site.

Saturday's route takes in Stamford (where all that remains of the original cross is a stone rose in the local museum). Then it's onwards to Fotheringhay and Geddington, where one of the three surviving Crosses still stands proudly in the centre of the village. There's a grand arrival in style, flanked by 'Queen Eleanor', a 1953 vintage fire engine maintained by the Geddington Volunteer Fire Brigade.

Last year, the team made a special visit to the Delapre Abbey in Northampton where centuries ago Queen Eleanor's body rested overnight. Then up the hill, we met with part of the team campaigning for the restoration of Hardingstone's Eleanor Cross. How we await the start of the work on April 1<sup>st</sup> to preserve this monument of national importance.

There's the customary generous hospitality of the Methodist Church in Stony Stratford (the site of another Cross, long gone thanks to Oliver Cromwell), then the route follows Milton Keynes' excellent cycle paths. There's the challenge of cycling up Bow Brickhill, not for faint hearted, the steepest climb of the trip and on to Woburn passing the site of the Woburn Cross. Sunday night is spent resting aching limbs sleeping on the floor of Dunstable Methodist Church, across the road from the site of yet another Cross and a shopping centre named after Queen Eleanor.

Monday's itinerary includes St Albans, where the Clocktower stands on the site of the Cross and Waltham Cross, which after heavy restoration the Queen Eleanor Cross now adorns the shopping precinct. It's great to know that Broxbourne Borough Council is putting the Eleanor Cross at the heart the regeneration of the New Town Square project.

And so on down the Lea Valley Navigation tow path to Westminster Abbey, with a short service by Eleanor's tomb in the shrine of St Edward the Confessor. The final leg is via the last of the 12 Eleanor Crosses, Charing Cross, a Victorian replica built

in the nineteenth century to market a new hotel, and into The Connection at St Martin-in-the-Fields, the object of the fundraising.

Each personal story of a homeless person brings its own tale of heartache. Charles Woodd, Chair of the Friends of the Connection, sets the scene: “The number of people sleeping rough in central London every night sadly keeps growing. It’s doubled in just 5 years. The Connection at St Martin’s provides a range of vital services to help homeless and vulnerable people take the steps they need to in order to get back into society.”

Keith Busfield from Stamford simply puts it: “As someone who doesn’t need to worry about having a roof over my head nor food to eat, I am very proud to be able to support those who go out and help homeless people to rebuild their lives.”

For every £100 raised it gives someone homeless two nights in the warmth and safety of an emergency Night Centre, with showers, hot nutritious food, and a 1-2-1 support session with a keyworker.

Anybody who would like to take part in this year’s cycle ride can register by visiting [www.queeneleanorcycleride.org.uk](http://www.queeneleanorcycleride.org.uk) .

#### **EDITOR’S NOTE**

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For more information on The Connection visit: [www.connection-at-stmartins.org.uk](http://www.connection-at-stmartins.org.uk)