

Mary Ward

Sculpture



Study Guide

Front



side

Mary Ward—Who was she?

Mary Ward, founder of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, was born into a Yorkshire Catholic family in 1585. The English Reformation resulted in the persecution of Catholics who were forbidden to practise their religion publicly.

In 1606 Mary Ward left England to pursue her vocation to religious life. After some time with the Poor Clare Sisters in Flanders, in May 1609 it became clear to Mary that she was called to *some other thing* as yet undefined. After a short stay in England, she returned with a small group of friends to St Omer where they opened a school for girls.

Inspired by God, Mary Ward laid the foundation of an Institute of women modelled on the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). She sought to establish an Institute characterised by mobility, availability, no distinctive religious dress and governed by one of their group rather than under the control of a Bishop. In 1611 she determined to take the constitutions of the Society of Jesus in so far as these were appropriate for women.

Despite local support, criticisms of Mary and her Sisters were directed to Rome; so in 1621 Mary set out on her first 2,400km walk to Rome to submit a proposal to the Pope. Her plan was not endorsed but it was not rejected. She opened a small school for girls in Rome and opened similar schools in Bavaria.

Mary Ward was convinced that her educational endeavours were of God, so it was devastating when in 1631 Pope Urban VIII issued a Papal Bull condemning the works of the 'Jesuitesses' as harmful to the Church. For their apparent disobedience, Mary was imprisoned for six weeks in the Anger Convent in Munich and her companion, Winifred Wigmore, was confined in Liège.

While both Mary and Winifred were absolved from all charges, only the foundation convents in Munich and Rome were allowed to remain open. Mary eventually returned to London and then to Hewarth near York where she died in 1645.

Following Mary Ward's death her story continued to inspire. She is now recognised as the founder of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Loreto Sisters).

In 1875, at the invitation of Bishop O'Connor of Ballarat, six Sisters headed by Mother Gonzaga Barry left Dublin and came to Ballarat, Australia. Further foundations and schools followed in other states.

While our times are vastly different from those of Mary Ward's, there remains a call for us to make a difference to our world. Mary Ward's attitude of calm certitude, faith and intelligent trust in the face of very real struggles will help us make that difference.

Mary Ward was a woman of

- *deep and strong faith – a contemplative in action*
- *spirituality and intellect – ready to grapple with the realities of her day*
- *integrity and the capacity to see practical solutions to complex problems*
- *hard work – travelling long distances on foot across Europe*
- *competence – she was an educator and an organiser*
- *determination – to integrate women into the active work of the church in response to very real needs*

Why a Sculptural Portrait?

The beautiful sculpture of Mary Ward, a woman of our times, was commissioned by the Loreto Schools Australia Committee (LSAC), a national committee whose mission it is to work to nurture, enrich, enliven and ensure the continuation and strengthening of the Loreto charism in all our Australian Loreto schools.

The commissioning of a sculpture of our founder, common to all our schools, is one way that our shared heritage, mission and purpose as Loreto schools will be marked symbolically into the future. This image of a young Mary Ward, walking purposefully forward, leading us on, gives generations of Loreto students a beautiful symbol of her person and all that she represents still.

The remarkable power and beauty of this work of art is testament to the research process of the artist, Meliesa Judge. Pablo Picasso maintained that “sculpture is the art of the intelligence”; as generations of Loreto students enjoy and remember this beautiful image, they will appreciate the science behind the balance, the crafting of proportions, the forging, the structure, the process of joining and manufacturing. More importantly, they will forever remember the strength of the image, and as they gaze upon it will recall our Loreto values of Justice, Sincerity, Freedom, Verity and Felicity, themselves enduring and strong.

Between 2006 and 2009 sculptures were installed in each of the Australian Loreto schools, John XXIII College and the Loreto Province Office.

Adelaide sculptor, Meliesa Judge, was selected to depict the remarkable woman, Mary Ward. Ms Judge attributed the work of the sculpture to the work of an entire community: “So many people contributed ideas, insights, research and enthusiasm. They brought me their vision and I became their inspired hands.”

What are the symbols?

The figure

Mary is captured in unimpeded stride, as she steps forward strongly, reflecting her basic premise of spirituality in action. It is the walking step of someone who has a distance to walk and has already travelled far. While it is a direct comment on her extensive travels on foot through Europe, it is also an opportunity to show her as strong, independent and focussed. This is enhanced by having her hands and arms free with her bag and hat securely and comfortably worn around her person.

The shoes and hat

The original shoes and hat are held in the museum at Altotting, Germany, as tangible evidence of Mary Ward's journeying. The leather shoes had thick leather soles made for distance walking and the soft, black, broad-brimmed hat was typical of those used by pilgrims.

The dress

Mary Ward did not intend that the Sisters would wear a religious habit, only the clothing commonly worn by virtuous ladies of the local district. In this sculptural portrait Mary is wearing everyday domestic wear, which would not have drawn particular attention to her as she went about her business. She wears a simple jacket, with unstiffened bodice, over a plain skirt.

Mary's left hand

This hand is empty and open, balancing her stride. It may also be a gesture, reaching for the hand of a child.

Mary's right hand

'Faith held close' is expressed in the simple small cross in Mary's hand with the rosary beads looped casually around her wrist. Mary Ward would have prayed as she walked. Another meaning is concealment. The regime in England forced Catholics to conceal their faith and forbade the carrying of rosaries. When Mary was taken before authorities in England to answer for her work, she carried rosary beads in her hand in defiance of the law.

The Backpack

In this modern sculpture Mary Ward's journey is represented by a backpack.

The lemon

While imprisoned in the Anger Poor Clare Convent in Munich, Mary was isolated and had limited contact with her Sisters. When they arrived with food wrapped in paper, Mary used this paper to write invisible messages in lemon juice which they took out of the Convent unnoticed. Her Sisters would use a candle to reveal the messages written in lemon juice.

The paw prints

In a particularly difficult crossing of the Alps on her way to Rome, guides to Mary's group lost their way in the snow, but were re-directed and indebted to the instinct of a little dog for recovering it and reaching their destination safely.

The map

The map records significant places in Mary Ward's journey and locations of foundations during Mary Ward's lifetime including:

- York – 1585 Mary Ward's birth
- St Omer – 1609
- London – 1613
- Liège – 1616
- Cologne – 1616
- Trier/Trèves – 1621
- Rome – 1621
- Naples – 1623
- Perugia – 1625
- Pressburg – 1627
- Vienna – 1627
- Munich – 1627, 1631
- Prague – 1628
- York – 1645 Mary Ward's death

The village of Loreto in Italy was a special place of pilgrimage for Mary Ward throughout her life.

The book

The book symbolises scholarship and education. Our schools today bear witness to the education Mary Ward prized.

Mary Ward quotations

The following quotations inscribed on the base of the sculpture were chosen by the schools:

- *The ways of virtue endure no standing still; she who does not go forward goes back.*
- *If anyone gives you trouble, meet her with friendly words, for so you will soften both yourself and her.*
- *Work with great tranquility, joy and magnanimity.*
- *Jesus ever bless you and keep you and yours.*
- *This is verity – to do what we have to do well.*
- *Women in time to come will do much.*
- *Half women are not for these times.*
- *Be such as we appear and appear such as we are.*
- *Be seekers of truth and doers of justice.*
- *Glory, glory, glory.*

Notes



Notes





Loreto Schools Australia

*Loreto Ballarat
Loreto Coorparoo
Loreto Kirribilli
Loreto Marryatville
Loreto Nedlands
Loreto Normanhurst
Loreto Toorak
John XXIII College (associated)*

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