

MEMO (Mass Extinction Memorial Observatory) is a project to build a sublimely beautiful, ongoing memorial commemorating all the species to have perished in the Earth's ongoing sixth mass extinction, on the Isle of Portland in Dorset. It has the rarely bestowed official endorsement of the Royal Society.

The MEMO Project, according to the project's principal advisor, Tim Smit of the Eden Project, is not a building, not a church, not quite a monument – it's "all of those things, bringing together sculptures of the species who have gone extinct".

MEMO will "mount the biggest bell in Europe in the middle of it... when any species goes to the wall from now on, the bell will sound and that will be a mark of what has happened. The reason it is important is that our civilisation has been so obsessed to prove that we are *apart* from nature rather than *a part* of nature; this is possibly the first construction ever that is, if you like, a humbling of us, it is a moment to remember that we are part of the earth, we are connected and we have to work with the grain of it for if we do not all will be lost and our claims to be Homo Sapiens will ring very, very hollow. I think it will... mark a change in the psychology of our species."

65 million years ago the dinosaurs died out in the Earth's fifth mass extinction. Today, due to human impact, species are being lost at a comparable rate. If the current rate of loss continues unabated, the fifth mass extinction will have been superseded in scale within the lifetime of our grandchildren.

At the moment no comprehensive record of the images and stories of historically extinct creatures exists in one place, in any medium. MEMO will redress the balance. It will be a circular stone enclosure carved on the inside with images of all plant and animal species known to have gone extinct in modern times.

"MEMO will be built along the UNESCO World Heritage Jurassic coastline on the island of Portland in Dorset," said project founder Sebastian Brooke. "It is a uniquely meaningful place to build it. In the aftermath of the Great Fire of London, it was the giant ammonite fossils commonly found in Portland stone which led Wren's architectural collaborator, the scientist Robert Hooke, to put forward the concept of extinction for the first time. Unbeknownst to Hooke, this was just as the last of the dodos were dying out in Mauritius.

"There is a certain poetry to using Portland stone, which is made up of the fossils of millions of extinct creatures and which was used to build many of London's most famous landmarks, to build a monument that will commemorate all the species that no longer exist. The MEMO project seeks to follow in the footsteps of Wren and Hooke and bring together the sciences and the arts in the sober but magnificent purpose of commemorating the species lost in modern times."

A bell will also be incorporated in MEMO. To make a big noise about species loss it will be the same size of the UK's biggest bell, Great Paul in St Paul's Cathedral. The stone for St. Paul's was quarried from the very cliffs on which a site has been offered for MEMO. It will ring out over the English Channel on 22nd May each year, the International Day of Biodiversity.

A remarkable groundswell of support for MEMO has already emerged in the worlds of both art and science, ranging from the local authorities in Dorset to the United Nations, from the Royal Society to the Eden Project. Philip Pullman and James Lovelock are both patrons of MEMO. The Eden Project's Tim Smit is acting as principal advisor to MEMO and the building is being designed by sculptors Peter Randall-Page and Glynn Williams and architect David Adjaye.

"The involvement of David Adjaye has been fantastic," said Sebastian Brooke. "David has been helping us behind the scenes for some time now and then in April it was announced that the team he heads had

been selected to design the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C. for the Smithsonian – a massively important and prestigious project. David's team got the commission despite competition from some seriously big names in architecture, such as Norman Foster.”

The outside of the MEMO monument will be decorated with patterned friezes based on the forms of micro-organisms, which will be carved by several thousand school children and the public. The Inside surface will bear the carved images of the 850 species of plants and animals assessed to have become extinct since the Dodo. They will all be carved by professional sculptors.

“The building will be roofless,” said Sebastian. “It will be perpetually unfinished: as species perish more carvings will be added. Increasing size will mean increasing loss. Obviously, we hope that the more awareness we raise with the project, the slower the rate of additions will become. The success of MEMO will be measured by how small it can be kept. We want to commemorate what has been lost in order to raise awareness about preserving the incredible range of plants and animals that remain. 850 species are listed as extinct - but 16,000 are threatened.”

QUOTES:

“This timely initiative will contribute to raising awareness about global environmental problems.” Achim Steiner, Exec Dir UN Environmental Programme

“I was deeply moved on learning of this brilliant, profound and ultimately humanitarian enterprise. It does the UK proud. I hope the US and others will follow suit.” Professor E.O. Wilson (Pulitzer prize-winning American biologist and Patron of MEMO) 21st January 2009

NOTES TO EDITORS:

FACTS:

When: To open in 2012

Where: Portland

How much: £5 million to build

Significance of 2010 - 12

2010: 350th Anniversary of Royal Society

2010: focus of the ‘Countdown 2010’ - International Year of Biodiversity by UN – world wide pledge, like Kyoto

2012: Olympic sailing events off Portland and the 350th anniversary of the last sighting of live dodos on Mauritius.

Patrons:

Prof James Lovelock

Philip Pullman

Sir Crispin Tickell

Lord May, former chief govt. scientist and President of the Royal Society

Sir David Read, former VP and Biological Secretary of the Royal Society

EO Wilson, Pulitzer prize winning biologist

Principal Advisor:

Tim Smit, Eden Project

Trustees:

Daniel Brooke
Peter Cruttwell
Prof Richard Fortey
Prof Sir Ghillean Prance
Maryann Woodrow

Design:

David Adjaye
Peter Randall-Page
Prof Glyn Williams

EDUCATION PLANS & EVENTS:

16-17 May: BOWER'S QUARRY, PORTLAND

Stone-carving and bell-founding festival. The work of the project, carving the images of the extinct, continues in the spectacular setting of Bower's Quarry, a working quarry overlooking the coast path, Lyme Bay and the full sweep of Chesil Beach beyond. Everyone welcome to come and help carve Peter Randall-Page's 'Unique Tessellations'. No experience necessary. Free entry between 10 am and 6 pm. Barbeque and bell casting on Saturday night.

21-31 May: HAY ON WYE:

Carving events at the Hay Festival

21 May-21 June: ST PAULS CATHEDRAL, LONDON:

Exhibition of carvings for MEMO created at the Portland Festival of stone-carving and bell-founding. A new image - of the Great Auk which used to nest on Portland - will be carved on Mondays and Tuesdays at the Cathedral

22 May: International Biodiversity Day: Taking the new bell into Royal Manor School on Portland to toll for the extinct; and the bell we cast on the clifftop last year to be at St. Paul's as part of the exhibition: all welcome to come and toll it at lunchtime - 1.15-2.15pm.

23-24 May: LYME REGIS

Carving activities - professional sculptors carving the images of the extinct and the public helping to carve Peter Randall-Page's 'Unique Tessellations' at the Lyme Regis Fossil Festival