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**Museum of the
Second World War**
Kwadrat

ERIC PARRY ARCHITECTS | THE CHARTERHOUSE

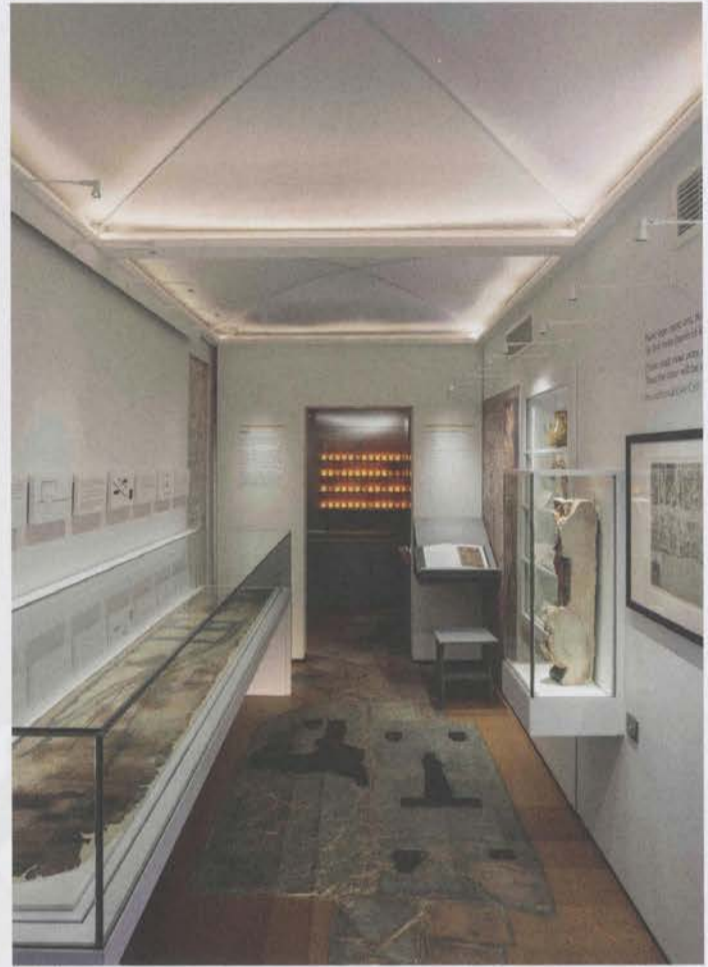
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The Charterhouse, London

Eric Parry Architects

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A tucked-away charitable sanctuary is putting on a public face with a new entrance and rooms by **Eric Parry Architects**. After 400 years, the **Charterhouse**, which sits on the eponymous London square, has decided it is time to invest **£4.2m** in its future and welcome visitors to its medieval almshouse complex. By befriending the public, it hopes to sign up more 'friends'. Or as **Ann Kenrick, Master of the Charterhouse**, puts it: 'We are trying to spread the net and get more supporters, so that it will be through legacies and donations that the Charterhouse will thrive and survive.'

The institution is home to 40 Brothers — elderly gentlemen and women who are selected based on their needy circumstances and good behaviour. They inhabit a network of structures that date back to the **Black Death**. In 1348, the area became a burial ground, and 33 years later a Carthusian monastery was established there. It was turned into a charitable foundation by Thomas Sutton, late-Tudor England's wealthiest commoner, who in 1611 set up Charterhouse school and an almshouse for the old. The boys' (and now girls') school was relocated to Surrey in 1872.

Parry's changes are about 'revealing' rather than 'reinventing', he says. He has demoted the old medieval collegiate entrance with its porter's lodge to a private access because, 'you can't thrust schoolchildren and tourists through that little aperture'. Instead there are new wrought-iron gates and railings, with lettering along the top spelling out the Latin mottos of the Charterhouse's former owners.

Interestingly, Parry's first design for this new entrance was rejected by **Prince Charles**, who is a royal governor of the institution. A final design was agreed, and inside Parry has reworked not the Charterhouse's most recent building — a 1,030 sqm, £2.4m brick accommodation block by **Michael**

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Hopkins & Partners — but a post-Second World War wing by **John Seely and Paul Paget** that replaced bomb damage. It's now become a bright learning centre for children.

The practice has also turned a narrow room off to the right of the new foyer into a museum. It's a space that has seen many incarnations. Previously it had been a meeting room, archive store and billiard room for the Brothers, a staff room for the Charterhouse school, a passageway in the Tudor mansions, and possibly a bowling alley. Before 1538, it was part of the Great Cloister of the Carthusian monastery. **Studio GuM** has designed the exhibition itself, which includes a skeletal victim of the Black Death. The square was once a plague mass grave, a fact that was only discovered in 2014 during **Crossrail** excavations.

Throughout Parry's reworking, cork flooring is ubiquitous. This is for reasons of continuity and practicality, Parry explains: 'The Charterhouse had existing cork flooring in these and other areas. The desire was for the public areas to be part of the rest of the fabric of the residential areas. For conservation reasons, we could not dig out the existing floor slabs and were limited to floor materials that would fit within a depth of 8mm, so sticking with cork seemed like a good solution!'

Outside, landscape architect **Todd Longstaffe-Gowan** has redesigned the half-hectare square, reinstating the early 18th-century layout of two diagonal pathways. Having previously been open only to key-holding square residents, it now gives access to the Crossrail station on the south side of the square. The square also has a pavilion designed by Longstaffe-Gowan.

With the arrival of the **Museum of London** in neighbouring Smithfield in 2022, this corner of the city will be firmly on the culture map. Whether that will suit the Brothers remains to be seen.

1 A new entrance replaces the former gate with porter's lodge to allow access for greater numbers

2 Cork flooring proved an obvious material for ease of use and continuity

Words by **Clare Dowdy**