

Martin Luther show rolls into Britain to heal 500 years of hurt

A German 'storymobile' has arrived on these shores to commemorate the Reformation. It heralds a series of events, **Ian Bradley** writes

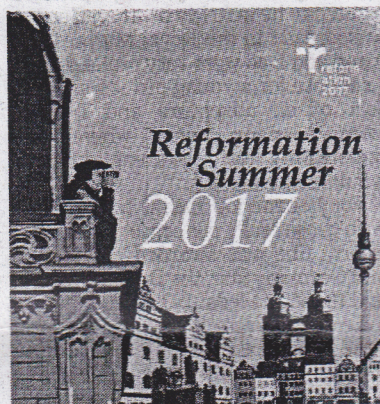
This year is the 500th anniversary of the event marking the start of the Protestant Reformation — Martin Luther's action in nailing up the 95 theses attacking some of the practices and doctrines of the late-medieval Catholic church, especially the sale of indulgences, on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg.

Since November a Protestant "storymobile" (an HGV that transforms itself into a pop-up presentation suite with an exhibition, musical performances and storytelling) has been trundling through Europe, on a quest to visit 68 cities and be a hub for events commemorating the Reformation. This week the storymobile is rolling into Britain and will be stopping at Liverpool on Tuesday, Cambridge on Thursday and London next Saturday.

The European Reformation Roadmap initiative, organised by the German Protestant churches, is part of a number of special services, lectures, exhibitions and other events taking place throughout the year across Britain to commemorate the legacy of the Reformation and its significance for the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches, and wider society, today.

Given the pan-European origins of the Reformation, it is appropriate that many of the events involve continental congregations in the UK. A series of monthly talks and concerts will be hosted by the Swiss, German, Dutch, French, Danish, Norwegian and Finnish Protestant churches in London, as well as by Anglican, Baptist, Quaker, United Reformed Church and Church of Scotland venues in the capital. The year-long venture, entitled *Still Reforming: Reformation on London's Doorsteps*, will end in December with a service of remembrance and fellowship at The Most Holy Trinity Roman Catholic church in Bermondsey that traces its origins back to the early 8th century.

Many of the events have a noticeably



ecumenical feel and it is hoped that the anniversary will bring Protestants and Catholics closer together. The archbishops of Canterbury and York issued a statement last month acknowledging that the Reformation brought both great blessings and lasting damage, and calling for reflection and repentance for all that has divided Christians.

A joint Catholic-Lutheran service of commemoration will take place in St George's Roman Catholic Cathedral, Southwark, on March 26, led by the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Birmingham, Bernard Longley, and the Bishop of the Lutheran Church in Great Britain, Martin Lind. The Christian Unity Commission of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark is organising a study day in April on Luther's aims and what they might mean today.

In the meantime, when the Reformation Roadmap tour arrives in Liverpool on Tuesday it will collect stories from the city's strong Lutheran community — a legacy of the settlement of German sailors in the city. On Thursday it will be stationed in Parker's Piece common in the centre of Cambridge, where a local historian will be on hand to talk about the city's Protestant history.

On Saturday the storymobile will park in Trafalgar Square and on the



Joseph Fiennes plays Martin Luther in a 2003 film. Left, The German Protestant churches are organising many events this year to mark the Reformation

same day there will be an Anglican Lutheran service at St George's Lutheran Church in east London.

The storymobile will return to Wittenburg in May, having collected hundreds of stories tracing the Reformation's history. Many of them will be featured in the World Reformation Exhibition in Wittenburg, which will run from May to September.

As part of a summer-long Reformation festival in the town in Saxony-Anhalt, northeast Germany, there will be an art exhibition, a parade of ships on the Elbe and youth camps.

In the UK, several churches will be reflecting on what needs reforming in the church today. The Warwick Team Ministry is holding a series of Lent addresses throughout March in St Mary's Church on the theme "New Reformations? Luther 500: Challenges to the Church Now", covering science, feminism, prayer, virtue and wisdom.

The culmination of the anniversary will come on October 31, the day on which Luther nailed up his theses in Wittenburg. Westminster Abbey will host an ecumenical service at noon, with participation by church leaders

from all denominations. It will be followed by a symposium on the theme "Liberated by Grace".

There will be a particular focus in October on St Andrews in Scotland. It can claim to be the birthplace of the Scottish Reformation, with four men having been put to death in the town for their reforming zeal, including Scotland's first Protestant martyr, 24-year-old Patrick Hamilton, in 1527, and its last, 82-year-old Walter Milne, in 1558. The university's Reformation Studies Institute is hosting open lectures on "Luther and the Media", "The Theologies of the Reformation" and "Luther and the Arts". There will also be an exhibition of illustrated Reformation books and pamphlets, a concert of 16th and 17th-century Lutheran music and a lecture on the legacy of the Reformation in Scotland and Britain on October 28-29.

Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, will preach at an ecumenical service on Reformation Day itself, October 31, at the town's Holy Trinity Parish Church.

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