

# PROJECT BLACKJACK

## “BLACK JACK” STEPS DOWN

“Black Jack”, a Cotswold stone statue, made his first move in 500 years yesterday (Thursday).

With the aid of four workmen, a squad of firemen and the largest turntable escape ladder in Gloucestershire he was helped from his niche, 80 feet up on the north-west exterior of the 180 foot high tower of Cirencester parish church.

Two hours earlier a figure of the Blessed Virgin Mary was moved from its niche on the south-west corner of the tower, and lowered to the ground in two halves.

Both statues, weighing half a ton each and standing six and a half feet tall, were removed because they had become dangerous to the public after being severely damaged by the winter weather.

“Black Jack” is actually a statue of St. John the Baptist but he was given the nick-name because of the black grime which covers the head and face.

It is assumed that the statues were incorporated in the tower when it was erected, in the region of 1470. Throughout the years the weather had taken its toll of the soft stone and now the statue of the Virgin Mary is unrecognisable.

Attempts to move the statues met with an early setback. The plan was to bring them down from the tower on the escape ladder, but it was then found that the ladder couldn't get near enough to them because of other protruding stonework.

Consequently workmen Fred Monteith and David Gowan were lowered 100 feet from the top of the tower. They fastened a steel cable round the statues, and then lowered them to the ground.

Both statues will be stored in the church until such time in the future that funds are available to have replicas sculpted and used to replace them.

*Cutting from Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard in 1963*

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Black Jack  
is coming  
back!

## PROJECT BLACKJACK

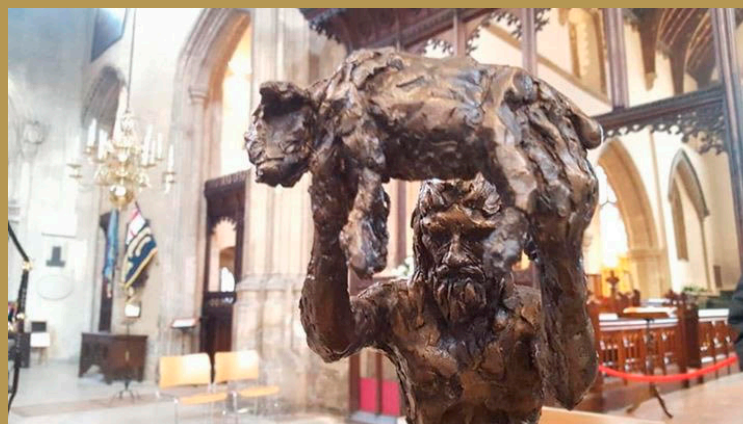
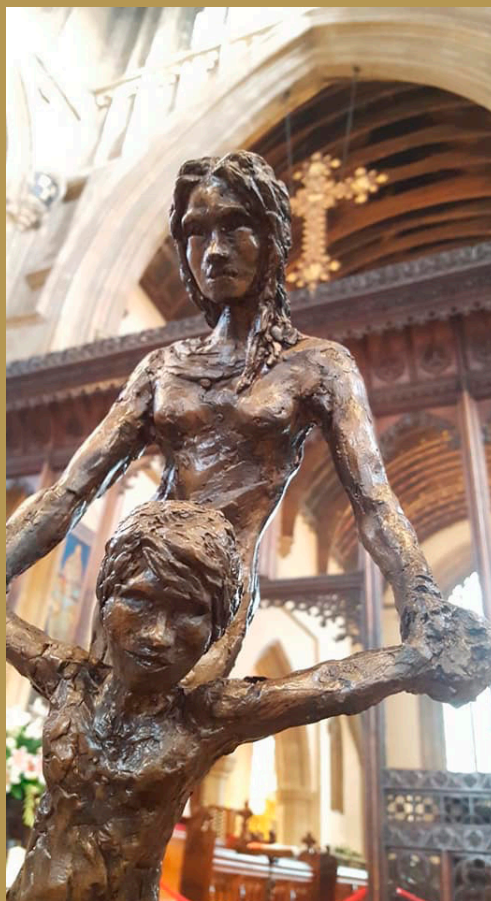
Two new statues are to be commissioned for Cirencester Parish Church. That of John the Baptist, will be placed in the northwest niche of the tower and will face down Black Jack Street. The Virgin and Child will go into the southwest niche and overlook the Market Place.

## Rodney Munday

Rodney Munday has been chosen as the artist to create the two statues. He has chosen to work in bronze because it is a medium that captures movement. His figure of John the Baptist (Black Jack) will be depicted presenting a lamb. This combines the theological idea of "Behold the Lamb" with the importance of Cirencester as a wool town.

The Virgin and child was chosen because it is a timeless image of a mother holding a curious child, in this case one who is looking outward from the church into the Market Place, wanting to engage with what is going on in the world.

Both figures will be leaning forward, looking outwards, something that could not be achieved in stone.



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