DRAWING ON THE PAST

WMF Britain’s public art initiative turns historic sites across the North East into artists’ studios for the whole family.
Strawberry Hill in Twickenham has come a long way since appearing on the 2004 World Monuments Fund Watch List. Re-opened to the public in 2010 after a €9 million, two-year long restoration, it is now one of the most visited historic houses in the UK. On June 16th the Strawberry Hill Trust was awarded the prestigious Grand Prix of Nostra in the Conservation category at a special ceremony in Athens, Greece. The Europa Nostra Grand Prize is awarded to projects that have made significant contributions to the conservation of cultural heritage. The Strawberry Hill Trust was recognized for its impressive restoration of the historic Strawberry Hill house. The awards were celebrated at a special ceremony at Strawberry Hill on July 9th with the unveiling of a Europa Nostra plaque by Baroness Andrews of Southover, OBE, Chair of English Heritage. The recent Heritage Lottery Fund’s grant of £1.5 million, two-year long restoration of Horace Walpole’s house was also celebrated at the event. The grant will enable the restoration of the five private rooms of the house which have seldom been shown to the public. Work will begin in autumn 2013.

I recently wrote a piece in the Financial Times about the paradox behind our great monuments, those which we regard as the world’s patrimony, a uniting force for our species. Of course, many of them are so monumental precisely because they were built by immensely unfair societies, funded by an imbalance of riches and an acceptance of servitude we wouldn’t tolerate today. For most of history, the wealthiest people have poured their fortunes into personal interests: houses, chapels, and memorials without any consultation or democratic mechanisms. The more money they had, the more conspicuously they spent on self-aggrandisement. So what is it about such buildings, that transforms them from symbols of domination and selfishness into a shared cultural heritage? Perhaps it’s that their investment was realised in expensively crafted materials, with a long-term view. The people who commissioned these projects seldom saw the results finished; their saplings became great trees for later generations to admire. The more money they had, the more conspicuously they spent on self-aggrandisement. So what is it about such buildings, that transforms them from symbols of domination and selfishness into a shared cultural heritage?

If that investment would seem wrong today, how do we use personal and public money by comparison? Our drive for efficiency and value makes us quantify everything according to its economic worth. ‘Heritage is central to tourism as the fourth biggest economic sector in the UK’, we hear. But to assess our arts in this way is philistinism. And the denial of poetry in our own contributions to the built environment will leave nothing to celebrate. Until we learn again the responsibility of using our riches to build beautifully with a mind to future generations, we simply have to look after our great historic architecture because its established value remains transcendent. This is just the price of being civilized.
On 9th April, Stowe welcomed back a couple of old friends after an extended holiday in Blackpool. Renewed and refreshed, they are set to welcome visitors to the house for many years to come.

The Stowe Lions are extraordinarily powerful figures, now returned to the plinths they knew in the eighteenth century, ninety years after they were sold in Stowe’s 1921 sale. Their story is a curious one. It is clear that they were based on the ‘Medici Lions’ commissioned by Ferdinando I de’ Medici, and originally set in the Loggia dei Leoni at the Villa Medici, Rome. The basis was an antique Roman marble relief. This was worked up as a full figure looking to its right, by Giovanni di Scherano Fancelli in c.1598, and accompanied by a mirror-image version by the contemporary sculptor Flaminio Vacca (1538-1605).

That original pair remained in Rome until 1789, whereupon they were removed to Loggia dei Lanzi in Florence, and can still be seen there today. The two sculptures were hugely influential in eighteenth-century Europe: copies and versions can be found from landscape gardens to mantelpieces.

The date of purchase of lead versions of the sculptures by Stowe House’s owner Richard Temple-Grenville (owned Stowe 1749-79) is unknown; indeed the attribution of these tool’d casts to John Cheere (1709-87) was only made this year when conservator Rupert Harris visited them at Stanley Park, Blackpool and found evidence of surface tooling characteristic of Cheere’s workshop.
John Cheere was a prodigious sculptor in lead, supplying the figures that adorn Queluz Palace Gardens, Lisbon, purchased from his Piccadilly atelier in 1755. (They were themselves a previous project of World Monuments Fund.) The Stowe Lions may date from slightly later, as they were placed on limestone plinths cut for the steps to the South Front portico of Stowe, completed in the early 1770s to the amended designs of Robert Adam. They were originally painted golden yellow to match the limestone.

It is unclear on what basis John Cheere designed his versions of the lions. But details such as the teeth differ, so more work is needed to ascertain whether any casting was involved, and to what extent Cheere worked more interpretively from drawings or engravings.

When Stowe House and its grounds were parcelled up for auction in 1921, and its applied arts were sold off, the lions began their journey to Stanley Park, Blackpool, where they arrived in 1926. They were accompanied by other figures from Stowe such as shepherds and shepherdesses (probably from the Grecian Valley, after 1749), several of which were stolen by metal thieves in August 2011. Having been sawn off at the ankles, these were probably melted down for scrap value. The lions were subsequently deemed to be at severe risk.

World Monuments Fund Britain and Stowe House entered into negotiations with Blackpool Council to safeguard the lions by repatriating them to Stowe, in return for providing casts for Blackpool which will be reinforced to prevent their theft from new stone plinths.

Dismantling at Blackpool revealed that the lions’ iron fixing pins into the stone plinths were in poor condition and had rusted away, about to snap. This could easily have led to a lethal collapse, and would also have facilitated their theft, so the exchange was particularly timely.

Once in Rupert Harris’ studio in Bow, East London, it was clear that the lions had suffered from graffiti scratches, and the more serious effects of wear and compression from children sitting on their backs. This had deformed the internal iron framework. Rupert replaced the frames in stainless steel, and sections of the sculptures were removed and re-welded to allow this. The surface was re-tooled with an authentic finish. Casts were made, and replicas produced for Blackpool - with substantial stainless steel pins through the ankles.

On 3rd April, to make way for the Cheere lions at Stowe, the malnourished stone lions of 1927 by John Bickerdike were removed from the plinths in a steel cage design by the Morton Partnership, calculated to spread the load and avoid splitting. After careful consideration, they were to be re-set by the Chapel, a contemporary building. On 9th April, the Cheere lions were craned into position and fixed to the original reinstated Northamptonshire stone plinths.

Since settling back in, the lions have reclaimed their place as the majestic guardians of Stowe House. Keeping watch at the South Portico, they are poised to welcome the 150,000 annual visitors who approach the mansion from the National Trust’s New Inn entrance.
June 2013 saw the launch of our Drawn Together: Making Art in Historic Buildings initiative in the North East of England. The project celebrated the rich built heritage of this region of the UK through public art and drawing and ultimately aimed to establish a culture of care through engaging families, young adults and children and encouraging them to really look at their historic surroundings.

Drawn Together contributed to a year of landmark cultural events throughout the North East. During June the Festival of the North East hosted a vast array of events showcasing the area’s creativity, innovation and heritage. To coincide with the celebrated exhibition of the Lindisfarne Gospels in Durham Palace Green Library, and to spur tourism and encourage cultural investment in heritage in one of the most economically deprived yet architecturally rich regions of the UK, WMF Britain hosted a varied programme of family-focused events in collaboration with three of the North East’s most impressive historic buildings: Hexham Abbey, Auckland Castle and Durham Cathedral.

For the first stage of the initiative, four weekends of art activities were held at Auckland Castle and Hexham Abbey. Each venue played host to two full days of activities across two weekends, inviting visitors to draw in their historic spaces using an array of art materials provided by WMF. With children at the heart of Drawn Together, our portable Art Carts proved a huge success – wooden craft boxes filled with art materials, ideal for small hands to wheel around and lean on whilst working.

Each weekend also had its own Artist in Residence local to, and inspired by, the North East and its rich heritage. Jen Westcott, Judith Hurst, Chris Bowen and Helen Schell all worked in different media, using varying influences to each produce two works of art. Encouraging public participation, explaining techniques and offering hands-on demonstrations, our artists gave those taking part in Drawn Together the chance to experience the creative process first hand.
Everyone participating in Drawn Together was invited to enter their artwork into our competition for a chance to see it displayed alongside the Artists in Residence’s pieces at an exhibition in Durham Cathedral. Our panel of judges selected 40 artworks for display from well over 100 submitted. The selected pieces were chosen on their individuality and interpretation as well as artistic merit. With over 250,000 visitors expected at the Lindisfarne Gospels exhibition nearby, it is hoped that many visitors will also enjoy our celebration of the very latest art inspired by the region’s heritage in the Galilee Chapel, open to all until September 30th 2013.

Joining the exhibition in Durham are the Art Carts, which have taken up residence in the Cathedral’s magnificent Great Kitchen over the summer alongside our stained glass activity window and work tables.

An accompanying leaflet produced as part of the initiative – Visions in Stone: A Guide to Inspirational Historic Buildings in the North East – offers tourists further encouragement for exploring the North East’s heritage. It showcases a number of lesser-known historic sites in the area within easy reach of Durham and Newcastle, including Prudhoe Castle and Tynemouth Priory.

With thanks to the Paul Mellon Estate for their generous support for the initiative; the Festival of the North East, Auckland Castle Trust, Hexham Abbey, Durham Cathedral, our Artists in Residence, and to everyone who has joined in.

If you would like more details about the auction, please email info@wmf.org.uk to register your interest. If you would like a copy of our Visions in Stone: A Guide to Inspirational Historic Buildings in the North East leaflet, please contact Sophie Buchanan, sophie@wmf.org.uk

PIERRE VALENTIN

With the departure of James Hervey-Bathurst after four years as Chairman, WMF Britain is delighted to introduce a new Chairman, Mr Pierre Valentin.

Pierre Valentin is a founding partner of Constantine Cannon LLP, a law firm recently established in London. His distinguished career in international art law offers a constant source of engagement with the heritage sector all over the world. With clients including museums, commercial art galleries, art dealers, art collectors, auction houses, artists and art investment funds, Pierre brings a wealth of expertise to WMF Britain. Prior to establishing Constantine Cannon, he was a senior director of Sotheby’s, and more recently, a partner of Withers LLP, the international private client law firm. He has been a committed and proactive trustee of WMF Britain for over 8 years.

WMF Britain’s new Chairman

Pierre Valentin.

Helen Schell, artist in residence at Hexham Abbey during the final weekend in June, with one of her pieces The Moonship Hexham Abbey
In our last issue we featured Knill’s Monument in St Ives as a new project for 2013. We are pleased to announce that essential conservation work is now underway on-site in Cornwall.

Steeped in local tradition dating back for over two centuries, this 50ft high granite pyramid stands on Worvas Hill in the Steeple Woodland area and was the last work of the important architect John Wood the Younger of Bath-easton, designer of the Royal Crescent in Bath. It was built in 1782 as a mausoleum and memorial for Cornishman and mayor of St Ives, John Knill, who built the town’s first pier. A folk ceremony has been enacted here every five years since 1801.

Since discussing the conservation needs of Knill’s Monument in 2011 on BBC One’s Inside Out programme, WMF Britain has been working on a conservation project in partnership with St Ives Town Council to secure the future of this historic monument.

Local architect Jeremy Chadburn assessed the monument and produced both a condition survey report and subsequent specification for repairs in summer 2012. After tendering for the contractor, conservation work on the Grade II* Listed structure started on July 29th 2013. The first job in week one was to erect the scaffold, which now allows essential works to take place over the next six weeks. This includes removing the old pointing, repointing in lime, removing the vegetation growing on the monument and repainting the shield.

The shield is proving to be a particularly interesting aspect of the repair work. With local firm McNeilage Conservation commissioned to work on the project, Ruth McNeilage took samples from the painted shield on the elevation of the monument. Closer inspection has revealed it to be in a poorer state of repair than originally anticipated – parts of the swag have deteriorated, there are holes in the structure and elements of the decoration have been poorly consolidated over the years. There is also a missing ‘M’ on the Latin motto NIL DESPERANDUM (never despair).

It was a surprise to learn that the lion, text and crosses are metal – possibly bronze – with one such cross at some point refitted using a timber replacement. Current research also indicates that the body of the shield might be made from a type of Portland cement, although this – and the original paint schemes of the shield – will become clearer when analysis is completed. Work is due to complete in October.

The project is generously supported by St Ives Town Council, The Paul Mellon Estate, The Tanner Trust and many other kind individuals, trusts and foundations. Recent developments in the repair work required on the elevation mean that we are still seeking to raise a further £15,500. If you would like to help return Knill’s shield to its former glory, please contact us on +44 (0) 207 251 8142 to make a donation.

As the first step towards creating a new Friends of Newstead group, WMF Britain arranged a seminar on Saturday 16th March to bring together those who care most about the abbey. The aim was to form a committed group who would be able to help Nottingham City Council make the most of this rich historic asset.

Newstead Abbey was Watch Listed in 2012 due to the deterioration of the building fabric and an acute reduction in the building’s public opening hours. Since the Listing Nottingham City Council has taken steps to address these issues and visitor numbers were increased in 2012.

More than 60 people joined the seminar at the abbey to hear talks from previous recipients of WMF support, Elaine Griffiths from Gorton Monastery in Manchester and Carole Patey from Strawberry Hill House. The seminar provided a useful opportunity for relationships to form and bridges to be built. The wealth of expertise within the group was encouraging and a host of creative ideas were put forward which could improve visitor’s experience of the site. A follow up meeting took place on Monday 6th August and a founding committee has been created.
AUTUMN 2013
Supporters enjoy priority, everyone is welcome

Through her witty and often controversial writing, numerous broadcasts and popular blog, Mary Beard has established herself as a ‘Britain’s best known Classicist.’ Professor of Classics and fellow of Newnham College, Cambridge, Mary is the Classics editor for the Times Literary Supplement, presenter of BBC Two’s Meet the Romans series and author of books such as Pompeii: The Life of a Roman Town. She lectures widely on all aspects of the ancient world and regularly contributes to outreach initiatives, including the recent Pompeii Live cinema screenings from the British Museum’s current Life and Death in Pompeii and Herculaneum exhibition.

We are delighted to welcome Mary to the Royal Geographical Society for our annual autumn lecture, where she will slice through the stereotypes to discuss the realities of living in the ancient Roman era. In conversation with WMF Britain trustee and fellow academic Peter Frankopan, Senior Research Fellow at Worcester College, Oxford and Director of the Oxford Centre for Byzantine Research, Mary will lift the lid on everyday life in the Roman world.

Doors open, and bar available, from 6.30pm
Royal Geographical Society, 1 Kensington Gore, London SW7 2AR
Members / supporters: £10
Non-members: £15
Supported by

Kevin McCloud is Britain’s principal broadcaster on architecture, a prominent advocate for craftsmanship and environmentally-sensitive design. This evening Kevin will discuss some of the hot topics associated with the built environment, including the changing London skyline, Thames-side development and the value of putting people at the forefront of architectural thinking. In conversation with Jonathan Foyle, Kevin will invite questions from the audience and debate will be actively encouraged.

7.30pm for complimentary drinks. Event starts at 7.45pm
The Screening Room, The May Fair Hotel, Stratton Street, London W1J 8LT
Members / supporters: £20
Non-members: £30
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ABOUT WORLD MONUMENTS FUND BRITAIN

World Monuments Fund Britain is a leading charity which conserves vulnerable buildings in the UK and abroad. We build partnerships with people committed to protecting sites in their care and create long-term public value for the community, whilst preserving built heritage for future generations to enjoy.

We have worked in the UK since 1995 and raised in excess of £18m to safeguard threatened architecture. But our impact goes far beyond this thanks to the biennial World Monuments Watch. The Watch draws attention to important historic buildings across the world which are facing a variety of challenges and have an uncertain future.

Today, as industrialised development, more extreme weather and a poor economy continue to threaten fragile historic sites, the work of World Monuments Fund Britain is more vital than ever.

You can help us build on our past successes by joining us as a Supporter.

WHY SHOULD YOU BECOME A SUPPORTER?

Like us, you love old buildings but you’re concerned that some still don’t receive the help they need. World Monuments Fund Britain stands up for these important, and sometimes forgotten, buildings and gives them a better future. If we didn’t have support from people like you we’d be less able to help.

WE DO MORE THAN JUST RESTORE OLD BUILDINGS

We believe that our distinctive architecture is a national asset, so it’s important that communities are able to benefit from their restoration. When we get involved with new projects we make sure visitor centres, charitable partnerships and on-site training programmes are built into the plans right from the start. Every penny you give helps to secure the future of historic buildings for everyone’s enjoyment.

HOW WE THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING US

- Behind-the-scenes access
- Unique opportunities for learning
- Meet like-minded people

TO FIND OUT MORE GO TO WWW.WMF.ORG.UK/INVOLVED OR CALL US ON +44 (0)20 7251 8142