



# PASSING THE TORCH

A distinguished architectural critic and writer, ICON contributing editor **Colin Amery** has been director of WMF in Britain for nearly a decade. Now, as he hands over the reins of chief executive of our British affiliate to noted architectural historian and host of the popular BBC archaeology program *Time Team*, **Jonathan Foyle**, we thought it an opportune time to have Amery—who will remain a senior advisor to our organization—introduce his hand-picked successor and explore the future of WMF in Britain.

**CA:** Welcome aboard the WMF ship. As an architectural historian and archaeologist as well as someone who has been taking groups on cultural tours for some years, you sound like just the man for WMF. How did your passion for the heritage first begin?

**JF:** I was raised in the country, in Lincolnshire, and as a teenager I started to go on long solo cycle rides across the flat Fen country and into Northamptonshire. What strikes a visitor to that part of England are the churches rising out of the landscape and the superb quality of the local stone. I realized that when you just walk inside the door of an ancient parish church the whole perspective of the centuries opens up for you. I felt transported into a different time zone and that sense of wonder and history, once you have felt it, never leaves you.

**CA:** Were you directed by anyone at that time?

**JF:** No, I was on my own, but I was inevitably influenced by Nikolaus Pevsner's incredible guides to the buildings of England and his impenetrable texts did make me curious to understand chronology and architectural style.

**CA:** So was it history that made you want to become an architect?

**JF:** Well, not just that I loved to draw and paint and so on; it was also visual and aesthetic pleasure. I realized that I could always draw and paint in my spare time but that I wanted to train as an architect and so I took myself off to the College of Art in Lincoln, where I studied under the shadow of my favorite building, Lincoln Cathedral. I was gripped daily by the scale and detailed beauty of that great cathedral.

**CA:** *Were you keen on Modern architecture?*

**JF:** No, not really. I found it disappointing, and my passion for history took me on to the School of Architecture at the University of Kent at Canterbury where I could again study close to a medieval masterpiece. I preferred to work with my pencil and a box of watercolors rather than learn to draw with CAD [computer-aided design] systems. There was also an inspiring teacher of architectural history at Canterbury, Christopher Tadgell—who, incidentally, is now a Trustee of WMF in Britain—and he told us the thrilling story of the history of architecture.

**CA:** *You strike me as very English in your appreciation of history and architecture.*

**JF:** I was pretty convinced in my youth that England was the center of the world. But I soon traveled to Italy. When I was 18, I did my own version of the Grand Tour on a bicycle! England's influence has always interested me, from Georgian Colonial buildings in the U.S. to the products of the Industrial Revolution that we exported globally. But it is a two-way trade, and the Chinese Pagoda at Kew Gardens and the Indian domes at Brighton's Royal Pavilion show how we absorbed international influences. Italy, I think, convinced me that historic buildings were going to be my life's work and my love of the medieval world.

Beyond architecture, I have always been interested in the development of cultures. In North America, I was fascinated to see how Native American sites in Arizona were developed at the same time as we were building Salisbury Cathedral. Parallels across continents in always instructive. So I went to the Courtauld Institute in London for a year to learn much more, while working on my thesis, about the methods of historical research.

**CA:** *So WMF looks as though it will suit you well! You have spent some time working with the agency that cares for Historic Royal Palaces and wrote your Ph.D. on aspects of Hampton Court. Was it the commercialization of the palaces that made you move into the world of freelance consulting and teaching?*

**JF:** In some ways yes, but I am a fervent believer in making history accessible and I see an important educational role for WMF. I also like the way WMF in Britain is not a bureaucracy, like English Heritage. I was staggered to find how few people work for WMF in Britain and how much it has achieved in the last decade.

**CA:** *How do you think you can convey your passion for seeing and learning under the WMF umbrella?*

**JF:** Historic buildings and monuments contain clues and information that connect all types of people to the qualities of the past. Archaeology is really about discovery, and that generates enthusiasm to conserve the artifacts of the human story. For me and for the general public who don't live in palaces, the archaeology of everyday life is often very eloquent. Historic places are part of the mosaic of human memory, I'd like to see 10,000 members of WMF in the UK and the strength of an international outfit like WMF is that it is not government. It can speak for everyone and WMF and its affiliates in Europe can learn so much by cooperating with each other and sharing knowledge.

**CA:** *Is it too early to ask for a mission statement for WMF in Britain?*

**JF:** No, it's a good moment. I'd like to see that WMF in Britain aims to leave every building in its care in better condition, better understood, and better valued so that the legacy of the world's historic environment is enhanced for present and future generations. ■



COLIN AMERY, LEFT, AND JONATHAN FOYLE MIMIC GARGOYLES AT LONDON'S FAMED TEMPLE CHURCH, FOUNDED BY THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY. THE TWO CHAT ALONG THE THAMES RIVER, FACING PAGE.