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# WORLD MONUMENTS FUND

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**HRH PRINCE MICHAEL OF KENT GCVO, THE RIGHT REVEREND RICHARD CHARTRES, THE BISHOP OF  
LONDON,  
AND OFFICIALS FROM THE WORLD MONUMENTS FUND  
CELEBRATE THE RESTORATION OF ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH, BLOOMSBURY,  
HAWKSMOORS ECCLESIASTICAL MASTERPIECE**

**\$15.6/£9.2 MILLION RESTORATION IS ONE OF WMF'S MOST COMPREHENSIVE PROJECTS**

*For Immediate Release—New York, NY, October 5, 2006 . . .* **The World Monuments Fund (WMF) returned a newly restored St. George's Church, Bloomsbury, London, to its parish on October 5 in a special service of thanksgiving led by the Right Reverend Richard Chartres, the current bishop of London, in the presence of HRH Prince Michael of Kent GCVO, Robert Tuttle, US Ambassador to Great Britain, and other distinguished guests. The restoration work, which began in 2002 and cost \$15.6/£9.2 million, is one of WMF's most comprehensive undertakings in its 40 year history.**

Built between 1720 and 1730, the church is considered by many to be famed Baroque architect Nicholas Hawksmoor's ecclesiastical masterpiece. Yet, as recently as 2002, St. George's, Bloomsbury, was cited on the World Monuments Watch list of 100 Most Endangered Sites, following its inclusion in English Heritage's Buildings at Risk Register. The church is also a Grade I listed building (of exceptional interest), but the resources of the small parish were inadequate to address the significant mounting challenges posed by the church's declining physical condition. Thanks to a posthumous gift of \$8.6/£5.4 million from the Paul Mellon Estate, given in recognition of Mr. Mellon's love of British culture, the newly restored St. George's, Bloomsbury, which is located near the British Museum, will reinvigate this formerly rundown area. The Heritage Lottery Fund also contributed a major grant of \$5.2/£2.84 million.

St. George's, Bloomsbury, was consecrated on January 28, 1730, by Edmund Gibson, Bishop of London. During the next 50 years, it underwent several significant interior alterations to accommodate a growing parish, concluding with the complete change of the orientation of the nave from east-west to north-south in 1780. The ornately carved reredos (ornamental screen covering the back wall of the altar) was moved from its east-end chancel to the south wall, and the south gallery was taken down.

WMF's restoration returns the church to its east-west axis, reestablishing the cubic volumes of Hawksmoor's interior spatial plan as well as removing the additions and changes of color scheme that over two and

a half centuries undermined the integrity of Hawksmoor’s design. The radical transformation of the church interior and the replacement of the massive heraldic lions and unicorns at the base of the church tower—hallmarks of the current restoration—were carried out under close scrutiny and a stringent process which required approval from English Heritage, the Parochial Council, and the Heritage Lottery Fund. Thanks to WMF’s restoration, St. George’s will now look the way it did in 1730.

“Once we placed St. George’s, Bloomsbury, on the 2002 Watch list, we recognized the magnitude of the challenges that the small parish was facing in their efforts to preserve this huge and important building,” said **Bonnie Burnham, president of WMF**. “They needed help in determining how to approach the restoration as well as assistance in marshalling the funds necessary to carry it out. WMF in Britain, led by Colin Amery, recognized the urgency of the church’s plight and launched a monumental effort to develop a comprehensive plan to save St. George’s—the project attracted major support from one of the world’s greatest philanthropists, the late Paul Mellon, along with counterpart support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, WMF’s Robert W. Wilson Challenge to Conserve Our Heritage, and other generous donors. Through this extraordinary munificence, St. George’s will once again become a hub of activity centering on the religious and social mission for which it was built, with new means to sustain it as both the center of community life and as a high expression of the community’s faith.”

“Of all the six Hawksmoor churches in London, St. George’s, Bloomsbury, represents the culmination of Hawksmoor’s original Baroque designs,” said **Colin Amery, director of WMF in Britain**. “It utilizes all his archaeological knowledge in a synthesis of pure geometry. There is nothing superfluous in the design of this great temple, which was a brilliant manifestation of 18<sup>th</sup>-century ideas, and our research has enabled the remarkable interior to be seen as Hawksmoor intended. The restoration of St. Georges, Bloomsbury, is a singularly appropriate commemoration of the benefactor Paul Mellon’s love of English cultural heritage of that period. He is rightly described as the ‘galloping anglophile.’ The quality and the extent of the restoration has created a new landmark, not just to help revive its immediate community, but to inspire the whole of London. The power of Hawksmoor’s imagination radiates again.”

### **The Restoration Project**

WMF carried out extensive research to find surviving documents that provided evidence of the original design. Working with a complex network of local partners that included the parochial church council (vestry), the Diocesan Advisory Committee, English Heritage, the Georgian Group, as well as Camden Borough Council planning authorities, WMF and its team developed a technical plan to remove the earlier alterations to the church and were able to convince the parish council of St. George’s, Bloomsbury, to accept the plan in 2003.

The carved wooden reredos has been dramatically re-orientated by 90° and placed back into its original position in the East Apse, which is the traditional liturgical orientation for the altar of a Christian church. Hawksmoor’s original design had created a special apse for the altar with a plaster vault decorated with cherubs and symbols of the Resurrection. Visitors to the church will now enter a tranquil, open, harmonious interior that reinstates Hawksmoor’s unusual cubic nave and be able to marvel at the original symmetry of St. George’s magnificent interior.

**A highlight of the restoration is the re-installation of the four massive heraldic beasts**—two lions and two unicorns fighting for the crown of England—re-created from contemporary drawings by noted sculptor and master stonemason Tim Crawley, of Fairhaven of Anglesey Abbey Ltd. Above the beasts resides the original statue of George I dressed in Roman manner. Considered to be too frivolous for Victorian taste as well as being potentially unsafe—Horace Walpole described them as a “masterpiece of absurdity,” the “beasts” were removed from the tower in the 1870s and have since been lost. WMF’s restoration project called for the re-creation of these fantastical beasts and, in October 2002, WMF in Britain held a competition, which was won by Crawley, who also carved the acclaimed “Modern Martyrs” in 1998 for the front of Westminster Abbey. Each of the four creatures is over ten feet tall and weighs eight tons. The original sculptures were intended as a symbolic comment on the Hanoverian succession, with the lions representing England and the unicorns Scotland. The new sculptures, now clearly visible from the ground, are once again part of the London skyline.

### **St. George’s, Bloomsbury, and Nicholas Hawksmoor**

Nicholas Hawksmoor (1661-1736) was the protégé of Sir Christopher Wren and a master of the English Baroque style, a tempered version of the flamboyant, repetitious, and highly decorated European Baroque. Hawksmoor, whose illustrious colleagues included John Vanbrugh, Thomas Archer, and James Gibbs, was made a Commissioner under Queen Anne’s New Churches Act of 1711 that stipulated: “Fifty new churches [were to be built] of stone and other proper materials, with Towers or Steeples to each of them.” Of the 50, only 12 were built, and six of those were designed by Hawksmoor. The other five are Christ Church, Spitalfields; St. Mary’s, Woolnoth; St. George’s in the East, Wapping; St. Anne’s, Limehouse; and St. Alfege, Greenwich.

Hawksmoor’s designs incorporated complex internal plans with a dramatic play of space and light. The striking, monumental exteriors of his churches in London present both movement and classical gravity within their urban settings. St. George’s, Bloomsbury, is an eclectic building featuring a large Corinthian portico as its entrance façade, thought to be inspired by the temple of Bacchus at Baalbek, Lebanon, and a stepped pyramidal steeple designed according to ancient descriptions of the Tomb of Mausolus at Halicarnassus.

The fictional setting for Charles Dickens’ “A Bloomsbury Christening” in *Sketches by Boz* and the actual setting for Victorian novelist Anthony Trollope’s baptism, St. George’s was also featured in William Hogarth’s *Gin Lane* (1751). In illustrating the abuse of spirits by the working classes and the poor, *Gin Lane* revealed the depths of London’s inner-city degradation, exacerbated by the recent arrival of gin which effectively caused the intoxication of a generation. St. George’s, which hovers in the background of the engraving, represents the struggle of enlightened order over the chaos of London’s streets below, a grander spiritual ambition. History seemed to repeat itself in the late 1990s with an explosion of drug use in the Bloomsbury area, contributing to the general decline of St. George’s. A shrinking congregation and the subsequent lack of funds led to such decay and damage that the church, despite its designation as a Grade I listed building, was placed on WMF’s 2002 Watch list.

The last major repairs to St. George’s were carried out more than a century ago and since then the church’s stone façades have become badly weathered, the roof has continued to deteriorate, and the church’s interior has suffered from unsympathetic alterations and neglect. WMF began preliminary work on the church’s restoration in

mid-2002 and has since replaced St. George's roof; repaired its original decorative plaster ceiling, windows, railings, floors, and furnishings; and upgraded the electrical and heating systems.

### **Support**

The restoration of St. George's, Bloomsbury, by the World Monuments Fund has been made possible through the generous support of the Paul Mellon Estate, which gave \$8.6 million/£5.4 million. Additional major support has been provided by the Heritage Lottery Fund (\$5.2 million/£2.84 million), and WMF's Robert W. Wilson Challenge to Conserve Our Heritage (\$937,500/£513,400). Additional funding was given by English Heritage/HLF Joint Places of Worship Scheme, the Bridge House Trust, the Garfield Weston Foundation, William Shelton's Educational Foundation, the 29<sup>th</sup> May 1961 Charitable Trust, the Leche Trust, the Stuart Heath Charitable Settlement, the Historic Churches Preservation Trust, and the Heritage of London Trust.

### **Restoration Work**

The restoration work was overseen by WMF in Britain and involved a number of different contractors. The project architect was Molyneux Kerr, management services were provided by Gardiner & Theobald, and the main contractor was the special projects division of Wallis, part of the Kier Group plc. Other specialist contractors included Tankerdale Ltd, Fairhaven of Anglesey Abbey, Cliveden Conservation Workshop Ltd, St Blaise Ltd, and David Ball Restoration Limited.

### **World Monuments Fund**

The World Monuments Fund (WMF) is the foremost private, nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation of endangered architectural and cultural sites around the world. Since 1965, WMF has worked tirelessly to stem the loss of historic structures at more than more than 400 sites in over 80 countries. WMF's work spans a wide range of sites, including the vast temple complexes at Angkor, Cambodia; the historic center of Mexico City; the iconic modernist A. Conger Goodyear house in Old Westbury, New York; and the extraordinary 18th-century Qianlong Garden complex in Beijing's Forbidden City.

From its headquarters in New York City—and offices and affiliates in London, Paris, Madrid and Lisbon—WMF works with local partners and communities to identify and save important heritage through innovative programs of project planning, fieldwork, advocacy, grant-making, education, and on-site training. Every two years, WMF issues its World Monuments Watch list of *100 Most Endangered Sites*, a global call to action on behalf of sites in need of immediate intervention.

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