

# WINDOW onto the world

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# Working with communities around the world to conserve and safeguard irreplaceable cultural heritage

## Welcome

Welcome to this first edition of *Window onto the World*, the biannual news bulletin of World Monuments Fund Britain. In it, we offer a selection of stories reflecting the breadth of WMF's presence across the globe – currently spanning 51 active projects across six continents.

**2023** was a big year for WMF worldwide: major projects were completed after many years of investment, such as the restoration of the former British Residency in Hyderabad, now Osmania College for Women, and work on the monumental complex of Great Zimbabwe.

Significant projects were started, such as the rehabilitation of Mosul Cultural Museum, where WMF has joined forces with the International alliance for the protection of heritage in conflict areas (ALIPH), the Smithsonian Institution and the Louvre to work with the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage to restore this landmark building and its collections so that they can serve as a symbol for the city's post-conflict recovery.

A strategic affiliation with Global Heritage Fund, announced in October, has brought new expertise and further expanded WMF's global community. WMF's French affiliate re-opened in September, creating new opportunities for expanding our network and visibility across the European continent. This coincided with the announcement of a new five-year partnership with UNESCO to survey Jewish heritage around the world. Meanwhile,

WMF's Crisis Response Program has continued to mobilize in response to threats posed to cultural heritage by war and natural disasters—notably in Ukraine and across the Middle East.

**2024** promises to be another very busy year as we prepare for WMF's 60th anniversary in 2025– and our own 30th anniversary in Britain!

Central on the calendar will be the new World Monuments Watch cycle. Started in 1996, the Watch remains a crucial vehicle to identify and champion exceptional heritage sites that deserve global recognition, enabling communities to harness their potential and secure their future.

Key moments during the early months of the year have already included the handover of three of our four project sites at Angkor Wat, after 35 years of uninterrupted work and the awarding of the biennial WMF/Knoll Modernism Prize, celebrating excellence in the conservation of a landmark modernist building, for the transformation of Casa sobre el Arroyo in Mar de Plata, Argentina.

Meanwhile, here from London, we are preparing to start a new British Council Cultural Protection Fund project in the Old City of Benghazi and are about to commence important work focussing on the legacy of Sri Lankan modernist architect Minnette de Silva (featured in this issue).

At WMF Britain we see our role as twofold:

- Partnering with our UK colleagues across the field of heritage and related disciplines to develop innovative, practical solutions for local projects - and then take these elsewhere and share them.
- Raising awareness of WMF's global work in order to channel both expertise and resources from these shores to support the work of colleagues and partners in the field.

We believe that Britain, with its rich cultural landscape and London's status as a global city, provides significant opportunities on both accounts. We hope you will find our selection of stories inspiring. To us they offer proof that positive, imaginative and forward-looking change can and does occur when people come together in the spirit of genuine collaboration and generous sharing of expertise and resources.

We look forward to seeing this conversation develop, with our partners, and the ever-growing community of likeminded individuals who share our commitment to safeguarding the irreplaceable.

Magnus von  
Wistinghausen  
*Executive Director*

Hélène Marie  
Shafran  
*Chair of Trustees*



# Preparing for the restoration of the Palm House at Kew

In 2020, WMF Britain and Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew identified the Palm House at Kew Gardens as a project with unique potential to demonstrate how the conservation of a nineteenth-century wrought-iron and glass landmark could be achieved while also applying the most advanced technological solutions for decarbonising the glasshouse's heating systems. The project will also provide the opportunity for innovative interpretation of Kew's tropical plants to engage visitors with the significance of rainforest ecosystems, including their unique biodiversity, threats to their survival, and the positive difference which individual and collective action can achieve.

Following initial feasibility work for which WMF provided important seed funding, the project won significant backing from the UK Government's Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in 2023. Over the next two years, this will allow the temporary decant or removal of the plant collections and further testing and development of the geothermal technology to achieve the project's net-zero target.

With many rare and endangered plant specimens in the Palm House, Kew's world class horticulturists have started the process of planning the move to temporary glasshouses to enable visitors to view them during the renovation works. In addition, new plants for future display will be grown in a temporary Propagation House in the Tropical Nurseries. One such plant

is the *Ravenea moorei* palm, a species considered endangered in its native Comoros Islands off the coast of Africa. At present, one single plant is growing in the Palm House and has reached the height of the building. Knowing the risks in moving such a mature plant, Kew scientists and horticulturists undertook a field trip to the islands to find other wild specimens of this palm with local partners so that seeds could be collected and new specimens grown for the restored building

At Kew, borehole testing is due to commence to assess the subterranean conditions of the site and will confirm whether the flow of groundwater is sufficient to reliably maintain the building at a year-round temperature above ten degrees Celsius. Alongside new heating technology, the project will also explore the use of thermal blinds and solar panels on adjacent structures to manage energy and heat loss. Kew is working with skilled engineers to select some of the most advanced technology available and test the long-term feasibility of these solutions.

While this important work is underway, the team at WMF Britain has embarked on a process to identify comparable buildings and sites in temperate climates around the world, with which to share the pioneering work at Kew.

*The gravitas you brought with your cultural capital means we have become a proud symbol of our history and our future. The Watch helped us to develop a stronger sense of place and pride in what our forefathers built.*

Kieran Lee,  
*Friends of Bennerley Viaduct*



## Starting a new Watch cycle

Last December, we announced the call for nominations to the 2025 World Monuments Watch. The Watch is our biennial programme that puts the spotlight on 25 heritage places across the world, and the people who care for them. Partnering with local communities at select sites, we work to find solutions to a specific issue – whether the damage wrought by climate change, or the complexities of too many visitors (or too few). Each Watch site does not sit in isolation. Because we work globally, WMF can take these local solutions and then share them, linking up with similar places, be they in Africa, Asia or Oceania.

The launch of the new cycle is a good time to look back at some of those sites in the UK, where WMF has made a real difference through the Watch. In 2022, **Hurst Castle** was successfully nominated to the Watch by English Heritage, who manage the site. It is an enlarged Tudor castle which guards the western entrance to the Solent on England's south coast. The site was selected because it testifies to the threat posed to coastal heritage by climate change – a threat which became reality when part of the castle's eastern battery collapsed into the sea in 2021. We are now using Hurst as a living classroom, as part of our Coastal Connections programme. Solutions may not be the same, but by sharing approaches and best practice, we can make a practical difference well beyond the sight of the UK's shores. Interestingly, Hurst Castle first came to our attention at a conference we organised on coastal climate change following the selection of **Blackpool Piers** for the 2018 Watch.

A distinctive characteristic of successful Watch nominations is the way WMF acts as a catalyst for partners who might not initially have a track record of managing heritage or a historic tourist attraction. In 2020, we worked alongside the Friends of **Bennerley Viaduct**, who wanted to restore a magnificent wrought-iron structure dating to 1878 and open it to the public. The railway viaduct spans the border between Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire and had been closed since 1968. Now, with early intervention and the support of WMF, the Viaduct is beautifully conserved and has been open to walkers and cyclists since spring 2022. They can now enjoy a fine mix of history, fresh air and exercise.

Another benefit of the Watch is that it makes people sit up and take notice. In 2016, **Moseley Road Baths** in inner-city Birmingham was placed on the Watch. This ornate Edwardian bathhouse was destined for closure by its owner, Birmingham City Council. The Watch nomination highlighted not just the local but international interest in the site and its importance to the community. We joined the Friends of Moseley Road Baths, and a coalition of other partners, to persuade the City Council to keep it open. Eight years on and with more than £25 million raised, the site is now run by a local charity on behalf of the council and is in the process of being restored for re-opening in 2025.

John Darlington  
*Director of Projects*



Left: Hitis (water fountains) Kathmandu Valley, Nepal Right: Bell Tower, Yanacancha-Huaquis Cultural Landscape, Peru

### Coastal Connections sites (at Dec 2023)

Hurst Castle (Hampshire, UK)  
Bude Watchtower (Cornwall, UK)  
Tintagel Castle (Cornwall, UK)  
Piel Castle (Cumbria, UK)  
Mussenden Temple (Antrim, UK)  
Skara Brae (Orkney, UK)  
Nelson's Dockyard (Antigua and Barbuda)  
Fort Berkeley (Antigua and Barbuda)  
Kilwa Kisiwani (Tanzania)

Rapa Nui (Chile)  
Methoni Castle (Greece)  
Venice (Italy)  
Cape Coast Castle (Ghana)  
Scott's Explorers' Huts (Antarctica)  
Herschel Island Trading Post (Canada)  
Port Arthur (Australia)  
Cape Hatteras National Seashore (North Carolina, USA)  
Koagannu Cemetery (Maldives)

“Placing Hurst Castle on the World Monument Watch has significantly raised the profile of the challenges we face here in the UK and around the globe from climate change and sea level rise. Working with the World Monuments Fund has brought new perspectives and opportunities to connect with others and I hope the Coastal Connections project can be a model for further collaboration.”

Rob Woodside  
*Estates Director, English Heritage*



# Coastal Connections

A global network of sites from the Solent to the Maldives

Built on the end of a shingle spit by Henry VIII in the 1540s, Hurst Castle has stood guard for centuries over the Solent, the narrow strait between the Isle of Wight and mainland Britain that leads to the strategic naval base at Portsmouth. The castle was expanded in the 1860s with huge gun batteries to counter the threat of French ironclad warships and was used to garrison troops in the Second World War. Today, Hurst Castle is maintained by English Heritage.

For some time the castle has been vulnerable to processes of coastal erosion, now exacerbated by climate change. Part of its eastern Victorian battery wall collapsed as powerful waves undercut its foundations during a heavy storm in February 2021. A revetment of boulders was placed in the sea to protect the damaged section, but the longer-term future of the castle raises questions of sustainability and potentially loss.

Given the site's significance and vulnerability, English Heritage successfully nominated Hurst Castle to WMF's 2022 Watch. The partnership with World Monuments Fund Britain brought the opportunity for the site to be the catalyst for a joint global initiative called Coastal Connections to support the conservation of other heritage sites facing the challenges of the coastal environment. The aim is simple: to create a network of coastal heritage sites around the world for sharing knowledge and expertise.

Since its launch last year, the project has mapped coastal heritage sites at risk, predicting the impacts of sea level rise and coastal flooding. Connecting with the people who manage these sites - places from Methoni Castle in Greece to slave castles in Ghana - has revealed the common issues they face. Eighteen sites now form a coalition keen to contribute and learn from each other's expertise.

Starting in early 2024, a series of online seminars will allow network partners and professionals in heritage and related fields to start a conversation on topics including sustainable engineering solutions, mapping technology, intergenerational stewardship and storytelling with intangible and Indigenous heritage. These discussions will be the first stage in developing a global classroom, offering case studies, practical tools and resources. An international conference which will share findings and discuss joined up action for the future is planned for autumn 2024.

Coastal Connections encourages site managers and others to act locally and think globally. By sharing practical solutions and perspectives, the project will empower them and their stakeholders to address the complex challenges of conserving their own coastal heritage sites within a wider community of peers around the world.

Alex Kent  
*Coastal Connections Lead*



# A new affiliation bringing new opportunities

On 17 October last year, World Monuments Fund and Global Heritage Fund (GHF) announced a strategic affiliation to grow their impact in protecting cultural heritage. Founded in 2002, GHF has been active at 30 sites in 20 countries around the world, through creative collaborations and grassroots partnerships.

A legacy of GHF's founding in Palo Alto, California, is GHF's experimentation at the intersection of heritage and technology - now to be continued under the auspices of WMF.

*"WMF and GHF bring together complementary regional and programmatic experience while sharing the same mission"*

Bénédicte de Montlaur  
WMF President and CEO

As a result of the affiliation, several GHF colleagues joined the WMF team, bringing two active projects to WMF's portfolio; **Dali Dong Village** in Guizhou Province, China, and **Ciudad Perdida** in Colombia which we feature in more detail. In the UK, former GHF trustee Patrick Franco has joined the board of WMF in Britain.

*"Together we can better serve local communities around the world saving their precious heritage and generating sustainable economic benefits while doing so"*

Patrick Franco  
WMFB Trustee

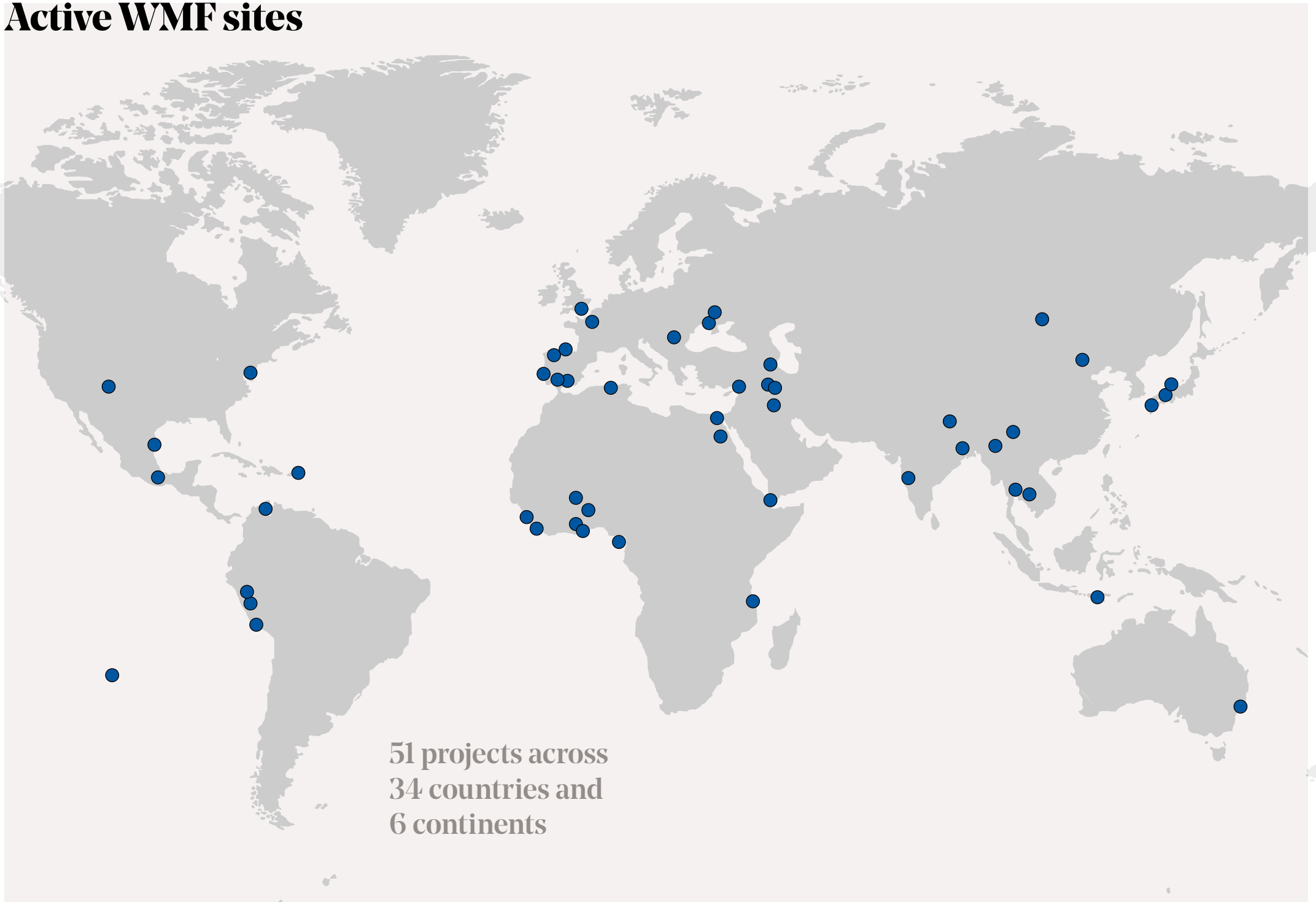
**The Ciudad Perdida** project started in 2009 in one of the highest and most ecologically diverse coastal mountain regions on Earth: the Sierra Nevada in Northern Colombia. Here, the Tayrona people built over 200 distinct settlements, of which Ciudad Perdida was the largest and grew to more than 250 buildings until the civilisation disappeared mysteriously in the sixteenth century. Hidden by thick jungle for over 400 years, this magnificent 'lost city' was only rediscovered in 1975.

Under the direction of GHF, archaeologists completed LiDAR mapping of Ciudad Perdida in 2019, locating more than 200 vernacular structures across 30 hectares (80 acres). GHF also partnered with the Colombian Institute of Anthropology and History (ICANH) to develop a site management plan to address the destabilising vegetation growth and to engage the Indigenous community in the preservation work.

To strengthen the social fabric through increased economic activity, an educational programme has focused on developing locally owned eco-tourism lodges along with training courses for guides and basic infrastructure improvements. Now integrated within the WMF project portfolio, the project will be heading into a new phase, continuing to build local conservation capacity.



# Active WMF sites



51 projects across  
34 countries and  
6 continents

# Putting the spotlight on Minnette de Silva

*Minnette was invested in working with vernacular traditions from Sri Lankan architecture and interpreting them in contemporary architectural forms. This was the first time we would have encountered this idea, which was taken up and developed by many others of her time.*

Sumayya Vally  
WMFB Trustee

*She was witness to the “rebirth” of her country in a post colonial landscape with the attendant excitement and possibilities of that moment. Her work was visionary in that she married modernism learned in India and London with “place and culture”, working with local Sri Lankan artists, artisans and craftspeople.*

Sonali Wijeyaratne  
WMFB Trustee



In October, I visited Sri Lanka for the first time. I did not go to Anuradhapura, the magnificent former capital from the fourth century BCE, or the charming sixteenth-century town of Galle (each of which will have to await another time!), but to meet with new partners who share a passion for the work of the architect Minnette de Silva.

Sadly, too few people have heard of her, and yet her name deserves celebration, not just in her native Sri Lanka, but across the globe.

Minnette de Silva was born in Kandy in 1918 and died 70 years later in the same city. She was Sri Lanka’s first woman architect; the first Asian woman to be admitted to Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), and one of only two women in the world to have their own practice in 1948. Minnette was a true pioneer who was ahead of her time in her approach to architecture, introducing new ideas that blended a modernist approach with local traditions, and developed innovative and inclusive approaches to community consultation.

World Monuments Fund has a particular interest in Minnette de Silva; one of our international programmes focuses on modern architecture (often vulnerable because it is not considered to be ‘heritage’). She was an important figure in the development of the modernist movement, leaving a small but vulnerable legacy of buildings. We also wish to champion heritage

that represents a more diverse and representative community, including women in architecture as well as sites, people and places from the Global South, themes which Minnette’s work embody so eloquently.

On the trip, I was able to see her first commission, the Karunaratne House in Kandy (1949), where she hired Sri Lankan artisans to weave Dumbara mats as panelling for internal doors and fire clay tiles along ancient patterns, as well as commissioning celebrated local artist George Keyt to paint a mural, which she set into the length of the living-room wall. I also saw two of her later works: bigger schemes built for multiple families rather than single homes, such as the Watapuluwa Housing Scheme in Kandy (1958) and the Senanayake Flats in Colombo (1954). But these places are vulnerable, and Minnette de Silva’s legacy is poorly protected and understood. That’s where WMF is hoping to make a difference. Working with students and local partners, we want to put the spotlight onto her work, creating a digital archive accessible to all and publicising her story. In the future, we would like to develop architectural interventions that highlight her achievements and inspire people in the future.

John Darlington  
Director of Projects



# Heritage, training and livelihoods



Way back in 2017, World Monuments Fund set up a programme in Mafraq, Jordan, on the border with war-torn Syria. The idea was simple – train Syrian refugees and local Jordanians in the art of traditional stonemasonry, building local capacity to repair the extraordinary stone-built heritage of the region, and at the same time give them skills to improve their livelihoods. The programme was so successful that we ran an advanced course in Mafraq in 2018-9, and rolled out the same initial training in Tripoli, Lebanon, in 2021/22. By the end of 2022, we had up-skilled nearly 100 men and women, with the support of the British Council’s Cultural Protection Fund, and in-country partners, Petra National Trust and the Lebanese Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM).

We’ve had the pleasure of visiting the students on several occasions and returned once more last autumn to see how they were getting on after the programme had concluded. Had they found jobs? Had the programme made a difference in their lives?

The answer, was an emphatic ‘yes’. In Jordan, for example, we caught up with four former trainees who were working out of the corner of a stonemasonry yard on the edge of Mafraq. Here Mohammad N., Saqr, Muhanna and Mohammad D. are producing beautiful stone items for the charity Turquoise Mountain – small bowls, dishes and candleholders made in a variety of stone. They were also rightly proud of recent commissions, one of an ornamental birdbath for King Charles, the other work

on a war memorial for the Australian Ambassador to Jordan. And they were creating still larger monumental pieces too – while we were there, Mohammad D. was working on the capital of a huge column, and the team were in discussion about the conservation needs of nearby Umm el-Jimal, an important Byzantine and early Islamic town, with Roman origins. They still need help to move their embryonic business onto a sustainable footing, but the talent and enthusiasm was self-evident.

The story in Tripoli was similar, if not even more entrepreneurial. Eminah Sleiman has used her experience with us to move to the Gulf, where she is now a curator. Abdul Aziz Chawakh took the geometry skills that underpin all stonemasonry, and translated them into wood carving. He now makes delightful pierced wooden boxes. Others have moved into further education in the region or across the world. We shall leave the last words to Mahmoud Serhan, a Syrian student, who is now self-employed (and earning more than his former teachers!):

“Honestly, when I first got [to Lebanon]... It left me feeling deflated, without identity, without anything to do. I drew a little bit. I did some minor decorating jobs. When I came [to the stonemasonry programme,] my life took a 180-degree turn. I was nothing. I became something.”

John Darlington  
*Director of Projects*

Emma Sweeney  
*Projects Manager*

Above: Stonemasonry training in Tripoli, Lebanon. Below: Alumni stonemasons in Mafraq, Jordan, summer 2023



St. Paul's Church, Antakya, Türkiye

# Crisis response

## Focus on Antakya

Crisis response has been part of World Monuments Fund's DNA since the beginning, going all the way back to the restoration campaigns following the Venice floods of 1966. Today, this ability remains central to our mission. Through our Crisis Response Programme, we typically provide resources for early measures to assist the recovery process and help build community resilience. WMF steps in once the immediate humanitarian needs have been addressed, assessing damage and working with local partners to develop plans for longer term rehabilitation. WMF's often privileged access to disaster zones builds upon years of accumulated experience and successful collaborations.

When a powerful earthquake hit Türkiye and Syria on 6 February 2023, claiming tens of thousands of lives, the city of Antakya (known as Antioch in the ancient world) was amongst those places that suffered the worst damage. Once bustling streets were largely reduced to rubble. The Orthodox Church of St. Paul's, named after the apostle and located at the heart of the city's commercial and historic centre, was severely affected.

In June 2023, a scientific mission comprising WMF Programme Manager Hungshi Chao, international colleagues and local experts were finally able to survey the city's historic sites – supported by prior research on the city's seismic history - and create a complete list damaged heritage sites accompanied by drone photography. Fitted out with heavy protective gear, the

delegation was able to conduct structural assessments of key sites, including St. Paul's, Ahmediye Mosque and Antakya Synagogue, the spiritual centre of the city's remaining Jewish community. The team also built connections with professionals, community leaders and senior officials.

The visit laid the foundation for WMF's disaster recovery efforts, starting with emergency stabilisation and site protection at St Paul's. This is to be followed by work at the synagogue, echoing Antakya's long history of diversity and peaceful coexistence of religions. Geotechnical investigation will include soil and liquefaction analysis to inform future conservation and reconstruction plans. A training course in post-earthquake and crisis response will be delivered in collaboration with ICOMOS International and ICORP, providing key skills to local professionals and frontline public servants and building competence for the future. There is a long road ahead, but Antakya is known for their resilience. As emphasised by our local partners, they want to continue living in their city and see it come back to life.

*WMF's work at Antakya's earthquake heritage sites is being funded by the U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP) and the U.S. Embassy, Ankara.*

# WMF Community

Meet Junior Board Co-Chair Ege Gürmeriçliler



The Junior Board of World Monuments Fund is a group of committed young advocates passionate about advancing the mission to protect heritage around the world. Newly elected Co-Chair Ege Gürmeriçliler has recently relocated to London from New York. Along with fellow Europe-based Junior Board members, Ege looks forward to building the WMF community on this side of the Atlantic. Still a freshly baked Londoner, we asked him about his first impressions, motivations and plans for the future.

**Tell us about your interest in cultural heritage and why you decided to join the WMF global community.**

I've always been fascinated by how cultural heritage connects us to our past. Exploring culturally significant sites often feels like stepping through a time portal, offering a glimpse of history. Joining the WMF global community allows me to contribute to the preservation of these irreplaceable portals and engage with something greater than myself.

**Is there any particular aspect of WMF's work that you feel particularly drawn to?**

I am drawn to WMF's cultural advocacy, especially in crisis situations where prompt action is crucial. WMF's global outreach is a key driver for mobilising protection efforts worldwide. The significance of cultural advocacy resonates with every member of the Junior Board, and we have expressed this sentiment by honouring prominent advocates like Kateryna Chuyeva, Zeynep Gül Ünal, and Marwa Al-Sabouni in our past events.

**You have recently been elected as one of three new Co-Chairs of our Junior Board. What are your ambitions for the coming years in this role?**

One of my primary ambitions is to expand our presence in Europe by cultivating a vibrant community of young cultural enthusiasts. The success of the Junior Board since its inception underscores the importance of incorporating young voices, ensuring that our fresh perspectives and energy complement and enhance WMF's efforts.

**Being new to London, what are your initial impressions of living in this city, and what are you most looking forward to in the years to come?**

London's wealth of cultural landmarks has been a thrill to explore. In the five months since my move, I've made it a routine to explore the city's various galleries, museums and sites, yet there is still so much to uncover. It's exciting to

be in a city where history is around every corner, and other cultural hubs are just a short trip away (in fact, I am writing this shortly after returning from a WMF trip to Venice!)

**Is there a current WMF project that is particularly close to your heart (and why)?**

I have a particular interest in intangible heritage, such as the mastery of regional craftsmanship. These cultural expressions deserve as much protection and cultivation as physical monuments, since they can be equally exposed to the risk of extinction. WMF is actively involved in this space too, for example with the Kanazawa Haku project. Another example is Telkâri, the ancient art of crafting ornaments with thin silver threads from Midyat in Türkiye, dating back to 3000 BCE.



Kanazawa gold leaf

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