



Above: Working on the Toynbee drinking fountain in Wimbledon

THE FUTURE SET IN STONE

London Stone Conservation is preserving historic buildings and monuments for future generations

When asked about his company's ethos, director Florian Kirchert talks passionately about the importance of preserving historic stone structures for hundreds of years into the future. His business, London Stone Conservation Limited, specialises in the conservation and restoration of London's built heritage, including Victorian water fountains, statues, monuments, historic buildings and churches, working with household names like the Tower of London and charities like the Heritage of London Trust (HOLT). 'I have a passion for history,' says Florian. 'When you do work to restore or conserve stone, you are creating something that is still going to be there hundreds of years from now.' He says it's a responsibility he and his skilled team 'take very seriously', adding: 'Future generations will not know who carried out the work, but they will look at it and hopefully think that somebody did a very good job safeguarding that piece of history.'

LONDON-BOUND

Florian moved to London from his hometown of Göttingen, near Hanover, Germany, in 1996, to study architectural stonemasonry at City & Guilds of London Art School. He did a foundation course, followed by a three-year diploma, originally with the idea of taking his skills back to Germany, but then cupid's arrow struck and he met his wife, who studied ornamental woodcarving and gilding, in college. The couple married in 1999, with Florian joking that he 'got married in the last millennium' and after graduating in 2000 he and a stonemason friend began working for the National Trust. 'It was a great experience; we travelled all over the UK, from the Lake District to Dover, and there was huge variety in the restorations,' Florian tells us.

That work led to an offer of a contract with the Tower of London, so the friends founded their limited company London Stone

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PHOTOGRAPH (RIGHT/OPPOSITE) BY HOLT - LONDON STONE (FARRIGHT) LSC - LONDON STONE



Above: (left): Florian repairs a bronze statue by Gillian Brett on the water fountain in Coronation Gardens in Leyton, East London
(Right): Working on a stone indent at All Saints Church in Edmonton, North London

Conservation in 2003. Florian then bought his co-founder out of the business in 2006, although the pair remain friends to this day.

SPECIALIST SKILLS

Over the past two decades, Florian has grown London Stone Conservation into a highly specialised business capable of restoring and conserving listed buildings and irreplaceable monuments. Known for his unorthodox sense of humour, he quipped during a project to restore war monuments that 'it's ironic that you have hired a German to do this' – but at the core of his company is Florian's absolute dedication to preserving and protecting London's historic stone structures. The firm is now based in Tottenham, with a warehouse, yard and office space, and has 12 employees – three in the office and nine on-site. 'Everybody specialises in a certain specific area,' explains Florian. 'We have conservators, masons, bricklayers, carvers and gilders. There's a lot of experience in our company and that's reflected by the average age of the workforce. I celebrated my 50th birthday in 2025.' London Stone Conservation has been accredited by the Guild of Master Craftsmen for around two decades and Florian says: 'We are master craftsmen – every single one of us in this company.'

Florian's passion for British historic stone structures also extends to the raw materials he chooses to work with. 'I always say that Britain has got a wealth of beautiful natural stones and so much variety,' he says. 'We try to source all our stone from the UK, to match the

materials at the sites we're working on, although in reality it's about 90% because sometimes it's just not possible.' Florian cites the example of trying to match the Aberdeen granite used by the original Victorian craftsmen in a recent project, but the quarry has since closed, so it had to be matched with granite from Norway. 'It was a shame, but we had to go with the closest match possible,' he adds.

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

Florian explains that more recently, the company has been so busy with enquiries and commissions that he has been able to focus increasingly on 'quality over quantity', with an eye to work-life balance for himself and his staff, prioritising jobs of real historic significance or social worth. The work taken on by London Stone Conservation falls into three broad categories: building conservation and masonry, monuments and sculptures, and drinking fountains. Much of the building conservation work is maintenance and has included projects at the City of London Cemetery, Historical Royal Palaces, Lord's Cricket Ground and the Tower of London, as well as railway and underground stations, churches and schools. The work on monuments and sculptures is often in parks and public spaces, and can include conservation of stone statues, archways and fountains. One memorable recent project was the restoration of the statue by the controversial artist Eric Gill outside the BBC's London headquarters after it was vandalised. Florian says: 'Whatever you think of the historic figure,





Above: City of London Cemetery. **Opposite (top):** Site engagement at All Saints Church, Edmonton **Opposite: (bottom left):** Community engagement at Riversdale Primary School. **Opposite (bottom right):** Work on Guilford Place drinking fountain

it is a Grade II listed statue and our job was to restore it. Unfortunately, towards the end of the project, the vandal climbed up our scaffolding and smashed it up, damaging about 80% of our work, so we had to do the restoration all over again!

SOCIAL VALUE

An ongoing project that particularly excites Florian is the restoration of some of London's Victorian drinking fountains, bringing them back into use for the public. The work is part-funded by HOLT and part by local councils. 'We restore the stonework, but also install new plumbing,' he says. 'It's really special because it is about bringing a historic structure back into use, giving free drinking water to all.' Through the HOLT Proud Places Programme, London Stone Conservation invites members of the public, stakeholders and local schools to attend the sites of the water fountain restorations to learn about the history behind them, as well as the techniques and materials used to restore them. 'It's a chance for local schoolkids and youth groups to learn more about the work that goes on behind the scenes, and a sense of pride in their landmarks,' says Florian. 'We usually set up a small workshop on-site, to let them physically engage with the materials, and a senior mason or conservator is on hand to answer questions. We've had visits from college students and child refugee groups, too.'

AN EYE ON THE FUTURE

The restorations aren't the only things London Stone Conservation is trying to preserve for the future. Florian likes to think that some of the schoolchildren attending the water fountain projects could be the

stone masons and carvers of tomorrow. 'Doing hard work with your hands is a beautiful and fulfilling job,' he says. 'Not everybody has to sit behind a computer for a living – there's huge satisfaction in working with tools and learning a skilled craft.' He also wants to advocate for the importance of historic stone structures. 'It's about raising awareness that if you buy a listed building, it comes with a certain responsibility and you need to treat it with respect so that it will be preserved for the future,' says Florian. 'You shouldn't just use cement mortar on these buildings because it's easier and cheaper. I think we're coming full-circle now in recognising that traditional materials have value and stand the test of time.'

In the meantime, the team of specialists at London Stone Conservation will continue their work as caretakers of historic structures. 'When we are long gone and everybody has forgotten about us, our work will hopefully still be here,' Florian concludes. 'We have a real passion for this sector, every member of staff takes pride in their work and every single person adds value to the company. About 90% of our customers are repeat business – that speaks for itself.'

LONDON STONE CONSERVATION LTD
0208 8850400
londonstoneconservation.co.uk
LSC@londonstoneconservation.co.uk
Instagram: @londonstoneconservation

