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Speeches, Remarks & Events

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Ambassador Tuttle honors last surviving 'Monuments Woman'



Left to right: Robert Edsel, author of *Rescuing Da Vinci*, Mrs. Anne Olivier Bell, Ambassador Robert H. Tuttle
(Embassy photo)

In a ceremony at Winfield House, Ambassador Robert H. Tuttle today honored Mrs. Anne Olivier Bell, thought to be the last surviving British member of the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives program (MFAA).

Along with her colleagues, Mrs. Bell was employed at the end of the Second World War to locate and return millions of priceless artworks and cultural treasures which had been stolen by Nazi Germany and its World War II allies. The works recovered included masterpieces by Da Vinci, Rembrandt, Michelangelo, Vermeer, and many more.

The work of the MFAA was relatively unknown until this year, when they were honored by the U.S. Senate in Resolution 223 which was passed on the 60th anniversary of D-Day, June 7, 2007. Mrs. Bell was today presented with a framed copy of the Resolution wording and a flag that had flown over the U.S. Capitol Building that day.

The MFAA was a U.S. Government program founded by the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas, set up in 1943 to coordinate the rescue of artworks in countries occupied by the Allies. Other Allied countries followed this example, and the MFAA became a multilateral effort, made up of men and women, both commissioned officers and civilians. The MFAA often joined frontline military forces, and some even lost their lives in combat.

Ambassador Tuttle said: "My wife, Maria, and I are keen lovers of art and cannot conceive of a world bereft of so many famous artworks. It is due to the hard work and bravery of the men and women of the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives program, some of whom paid the ultimate price and died in the process, that so many treasures were safely returned to their rightful places at the end of World War II for future generations to enjoy. I am delighted to honor Mrs. Bell today, and through her, the entire work of the MFAA."

Mrs. Bell is thought to be one of 12 surviving, 'Monuments Men and Women' (former employees of the MFAA) in the world, not only the last remaining British member, but also the last woman.

Author Robert Edsel, whose book *Rescuing Da Vinci* did much to bring the world of the MFAA to public recognition, was also present at the ceremony, along with members of Mrs. Bell's family.

Mrs. Bell lives in Lewes, Sussex. She is related by marriage to novelist Virginia Woolf and Clive and Vanessa Bell, central figures in the Bloomsbury Group of artists.