



The jacarandas have showered their flowers in front of Wits' Great Hall as spring arrived in South Africa. Though the cool weather of autumn is upon the UK, the warmest of wishes from UK alumni, partners and friends of Wits greeted us as we announced a joint doctoral programme with a top UK university and when a Wits Deputy Vice-Chancellor visited the UK recently. Thank you for remembering your roots and for the warm welcome.

In this issue,

- find out how **Ruth Leas**, Chief Executive Officer of Investec Bank plc, keeps conscious of her own roots at Wits whilst she keeps growing in her career
- read why the eminent architect **Denise Scott Brown** should come to mind whenever you think of Trafalgar Square
- see the report of how **Andy Kuper's** crucial climate work came to the attention not just of King Charles III but also of USA President Joe Biden
- and if you saw the compelling puppetry in 'Life & Times of Michael K' at the Edinburgh Fringe, you may not have realised that **Lara Foot** adapted the novel for the stage.

These Witsies and many others share their roots with you. Thank you to all our UK alumni and friends for keeping Wits in your hearts and a special word of thanks to those who donate so generously to Wits - thank you for making a difference!

Witsies in the UK
Witsies making a difference in the UK

Witsies all over the world are making a difference and the UK is no exception. Some of you living there

may have crossed paths with graduates who have embarked on interesting careers. [Reach out and tell us.](#)



Ruth Leas and Prof. Zebulon Vilakazi at Investec's London office

Banking CEO Ruth Leas: Nurturing Growth, Climate Consciousness, and Resilience in Uncertain Times

It might seem like the CEO of a bank that has the ninth largest revenue of banking groups in the UK has better things to do with her time than to mentor young people or to think about climate change. But for **Ruth Leas**, understanding the world a little more is the way to build resilience in uncertain times.

Ruth is a proud South African and Witsie. She's been responsible for growing the South African brand in the UK market and securing its footing in the British banking and finance landscape.

It's now been 22 years since she moved to the United Kingdom. But her roots in South Africa still ground her. So too does the enduring impact of having had excellent lecturers at Wits 30 years ago. She remembers them as lecturers invested in not just her academic achievements but also her growth as a person. She says it gave her a very particular lens through which to view the world and hone her skills to lead in a banking world with modern demands. There will always be hard decisions to make, but making them with some grace under pressure, empathy and some authenticity makes all the difference.

[Click here to read more](#)



Andy Kuper with US President Joe Biden at Windsor Castle

Wits Alum Makes Royal Impact: \$750M Climate Initiative Announced in Historic Meeting with King and President

It's not every day that a Wits-educated entrepreneur finds himself meeting both a King and a President to unveil an ambitious climate change initiative. However, **Dr Andrew "Andy" Kuper**, a successful Witsie, is far from ordinary. Already recognised by royalty given his 2022 Queen's Birthday Honours , Andy, the co-founder and CEO of Australian-based LeapFrog Investments, had a historic encounter at Windsor Castle in July of this year, where he proudly announced an impressive \$750 million (R13.4 billion) investment plan dedicated to combating climate change.

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Lara Foot, image courtesy of the Baxter Theatre

South African Theatre Triumph Takes Europe by Storm

Lara Foot's acclaimed adaptation of 'Life & Times of Michael K,' a co-production between Cape Town's Baxter Theatre and Germany's Düsseldorfer Schauspielhaus, has captivated audiences on a global scale. After wowing crowds in Ireland at the Galway International Arts Festival, and gracing the prestigious Edinburgh Fringe in Scotland, this groundbreaking adaptation of JM Coetzee's novel has garnered international praise. Wits alumna Lara Foot's artistic brilliance transcends borders, portraying the poignant story of Michael K through an innovative blend of puppetry, live performance, and multimedia—a masterpiece applauded across continents."

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Senior DVC of Wits Prof. Ruksana Osman, with Prof James Smith, Vice-Principal International of the University of Edinburgh, in the background

Wits & the University of Edinburgh Commence Pioneering WESAF Doctoral Programme for African Scholars

In a groundbreaking initiative, Wits and the University of Edinburgh inaugurated their joint Wits-Edinburgh Sustainable African Futures (WESAF) Doctoral Programme in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation on 4 September. The celebration coincided with the commencement of a weeklong orientation at Wits for the diverse cohort of 50 academic scholars from 11 African nations. The WESAF Doctoral Programme is set to propel these scholars towards innovative research, creating a wave of change to address Africa's pressing sustainability challenges. This also marks a step-change in the Wits-Edinburgh partnership, from one with a network of research links across all disciplines, now to include joint supervision.

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Teresa Kutala Firmino
Owners of the Earth IV Oct 13 – Nov 4, 2023 © [Everard Read Gallery](#)

Teresa Kutala Firmino exhibits again in London

Five years after finishing a fine arts degree at Wits, **Teresa Kutala Firmino** travelled to the UK for her

second solo exhibition in London in October. A multimedia artist using paint, printed materials, and performance, she has attracted attention with her work that draws from her upbringing and that tells tales of trauma and women. Born in 1993 in Pomfret in South Africa's North-West province on the cusp of South Africa's transition to democracy, her work bears testimony to the turbulence before and after apartheid, given that Pomfret became home to former 32 battalion soldiers like her Angolan father and Congolese mother, who resettled there after the Border War.

[Click here for more details.](#)

Book Review

Denise Scott Brown: Pioneering Architectural Visionary and Educator



The Sainsbury Wing, north-west corner of Trafalgar Square, shown background left of centre



Stand in London's Trafalgar Square and any South African will point to South Africa House. But turn 180 degrees to look at the Sainsbury Wing, and few people will know that **Denise Scott Brown**, a Wits-educated distinguished architect, designed this postmodern addition to the National Gallery together with her husband Robert Venturi and their associates. Besides her recognition as an architect, she is

also known as an urban planner, theorist, writer, and educator. Denise, in the month of her 92nd birthday, is the keynote speaker at the 2023 Australian Architecture Conference scheduled from 29 to 31 October in Canberra. Her influential promotion of "messy vitality" has transformed our understanding of urban landscapes, from the vibrant streets of Johannesburg to the dazzling spectacle of Las Vegas. In honour of the 50th anniversary of her groundbreaking work, "Learning from Las Vegas," the anthology "Denise Scott Brown: In Other Eyes" offers an engrossing portrayal of her enduring legacy, featuring insights from esteemed architectural historians and practitioners. This collection serves as a testament to her lasting impact on the architectural sphere, solidifying Denise Scott Brown as a trailblazing figure in contemporary architecture and one of the most influential women architects on the global stage. [Clicker here to purchase her book.](#)

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Prof Taole Mokoena, Dr Makobetsa Khati, Prof Wim de Villiers, Prof Lynn Morris – all South Africans supervised whilst at Oxford by Prof Siamon Gordon

Wits Deputy Vice-Chancellor strengthens ties with top UK universities

Four decades have passed since **Professor Lynn Morris**, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Innovation visited the Oxford laboratory in which she had completed her PhD supervised by Prof Siamon Gordon. In September, Morris, an A-rated researcher, who dedicated her research career to HIV/AIDS research, attended the 40th reunion of her class at Oxford University. Whilst in London Professor Morris met with her counterpart at University College London (UCL), Professor Geraint Rees, to plan the extension of the already-active Wits-UCL partnership. During Prof Morris' visit, she was also a guest at a lunch hosted by Dr Fiona Perrott-Humphrey at Rothschild and Co., and met with Professor Colin Bundy, a Trustee of Wits Foundation UK and former Wits Vice-Chancellor.

[Read more about Prof Morris here](#)



Doreen Mantle and Richard Wilson in an episode of One Foot in the Grave, 1994.

[Photograph: Radio Times/Getty Images](#)

Iconic Actress Doreen Mantle, known for ‘One Foot in the Grave’ Role, Passes Away at 97

Doreen Mantle, a Wits educated actress who captivated audiences as Mrs. Warboys in the sitcom “One Foot in the Grave,” passed away at 97. Born in Johannesburg to English parents, she moved to the UK at a young age, returning to SA before pursuing a social studies degree at Wits. Her passion for acting blossomed in SA, where she performed on stage and radio. She later settled in Britain, dedicating her life to acting, earning acclaim for various roles on stage and screen, notably as Mrs. Warboys. She is survived by her two sons and brother

[Click here to read more](#)



Andrew Mlangeni, the longest surviving Rivonia trial defendant, on stage with Nick Stadlen in Wits Great Hall, March 2015

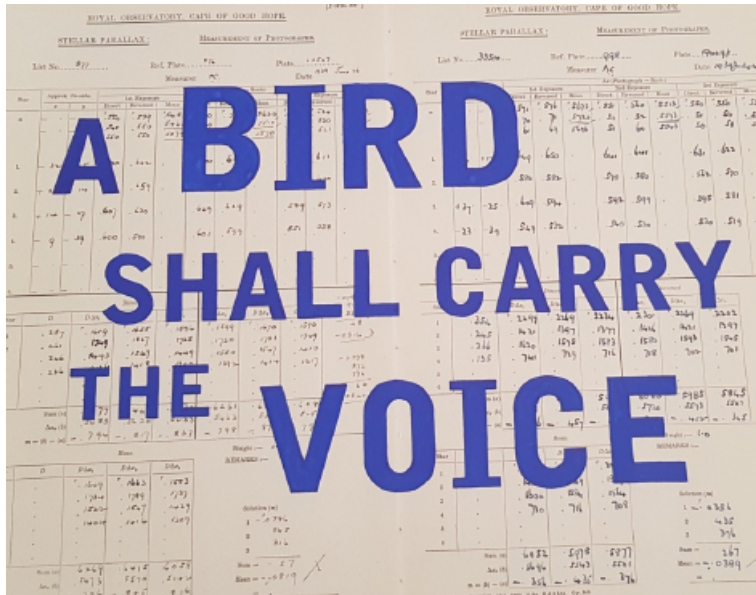
“Life is Wonderful”: Wits remembers the life of Sir Nick Stadlen

Sir Nicholas (Nick) Stadlen, a regular visitor to Wits in the last decade of his life, passed away on 5 October 2023 at the age of 73. A retired judge of the English High Court, Stadlen was captivated by the bravery and devotion to justice of Nelson Mandela and his co-defendants in the Rivonia trial as well as of their lawyers. He learnt of Wits since so many of those involved had been associated with Wits: Mandela had studied Law at Wits, as had several of the lawyers: Joel Joffe, Arthur Chaskalson, George Bizos and Denis Kuny. Stadlen spent many hours researching their stories in the precious collections

entrusted to Wits Historical Papers Research Archive. Following this research, he chaired a colloquium in March 2015 in Wits' Great Hall which commemorated Bram Fischer, the deceased leader of the Rivonia Trial defence team, on the day that Wits conferred a posthumous honorary doctorate on Fischer. Driven to bring the story of the Rivonia trial to a wider audience, Stadlen went on to create his award-winning 2018 documentary "Life is Wonderful: Mandela's Unsung Heroes" which now stands as a cherished record of the last survivors of the Rivonia Trial – including Andrew Mlangeni, Ahmed Kathrada and Denis Goldberg to name just the co-defendants. Stadlen personally welcomed Wits students, staff and alumni to several screenings of his film in London and at Wits. Prior to his appointment to the bench, Stadlen had been one of the best commercial barristers at the London Bar, famous for giving the longest opening speech in a trial, a speech in the famous so-called Three Rivers case which lasted 119 days. Stadlen is survived by his wife, their three sons, and his brother.

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Kentridge: Oh to Believe in Another World



William Kentridge's African premier of *Oh to Believe in Another World* film which was accompanied by Shostakovich's *Symphony No 10*, and hosted by Wits University in celebration of its Centenary, was a magical evening that surpassed all our expectations. Wits University is immensely grateful for the support from William Kentridge and his team during our centennial anniversary.

An additional contribution from William Kentridge is the gift of the limited edition of 50 signed prints of *A Bird Shall Carry The Voice* from the variable original that was on display at the Wits Art Museum as part of the special exhibition. The proceeds from the sale of these digital prints will go towards the fees of 50 Wits art students, over 10 years.

By supporting this worthy cause, you will acquire an exceptional signed artwork by one of the world's greatest artists and help to change a life...for good.

[Purchase Now](#)



Give the Gift of Graduation

A Wits graduation is joyous, but hundreds of hard-working students cannot graduate because they struggle to pay fees. These students are often the first in their families to attend university, and typically

have no assets to secure a loan. Instead, they diligently pay back their debt to Wits – but it takes them years. You could give them the gift of graduation so they can celebrate their success with their classmates and are not left behind once again. Join us to assist these diligent students.

Donate Today

Visit wits-uk.org for more about Wits Foundation UK,
which acts for the benefit of Wits University.

