

Institute of Physics

LONDON AND SOUTH EASTERN BRANCH REMS SECTION

Visit to Old Royal Naval College & Ranger's House, Maritime Greenwich World Heritage Site, Tuesday 27th May 2003

This visit has been organised by Geoff Cockett

The Old Royal Naval College occupies an ancient site on which had been located the Royal Palace of Placentia, where Henry VIII was born. Established as Greenwich Hospital by William III in 1694, it was a reward for the loyalty of his pensioned and disabled naval war veterans. Sir Christopher Wren designed this, his baroque masterpiece, in 1695. Flanking an open vista, which led up to the Queen's House in Greenwich Park about 400m away, the twin domed blocks named King William and Queen Mary were erected. The first contains the Great Dining Hall, and the second, the Chapel. The interior decoration of the Great Hall, soon known as the "Painted Hall" with its elaborate ceiling and wall paintings by Sir James Thornhill took 19 years to complete. It is one of the finest dining rooms in the Western world.

After a fire, the chapel was restored by James "Athenian" Stuart and is a Georgian period piece virtually as when opened in 1789. The magnificent organ by Samuel Green is the UK's largest and best-preserved Baroque organ still in its original site and mostly to its original specification. The chapel has fine acoustics and is often used for concerts.

Opened in 1707, the Painted Hall was too small to accommodate all the pensioners and was scarcely used until the early 1800s when it became a naval museum. The hospital closed in 1869 and then reopened as the Royal Naval College; officers from all over the world came here to train in the naval sciences and higher defence skills. In the 1930s when the museum moved to the new Maritime Museum nearby, the Painted Hall once again became a dining room. Vacated in 1998, responsibility for looking after the site passed to the Greenwich Foundation, a charity. Most of the buildings are now occupied by The University of Greenwich and The Trinity College of Music

Ranger's House, a handsome Grade 1 listed villa in Greenwich Park, has recently become the new home of the Wernher Collection - a magnificent collection of international importance bringing together an interesting array of paintings and works of art. They were purchased by the self-made millionaire Sir Julius Wernher, who amassed a large personal fortune through dealing in the gold and diamond market in the late 19th century. The collection was largely purchased whilst he lived in London, before moving to his country house, Luton Hoo. After his death in 1912, his collection and Luton Hoo passed down the family line until the late 1990s when English Heritage undertook to display the collection at Ranger's House. This is the core of his collection plus a few works of art from the period at Luton Hoo. More than 650 works of Art are on view with paintings from Lippi to Reynolds, fine French furniture, porcelain and one of the largest collections of Renaissance jewellery.

Programme:

10:30-11:00	Meet at Greenwich Gateway Visitors Centre
11:00-12:10	Walk to Painted Hall & Chapel; informal tour led by Elizabeth Cockett.
12:10-13:20	Self-service lunch at Maritime Museum Restaurant (reserved tables)
13.30	Bus to Ranger's House
14:00-15:30	Exclusive Guided Tour of Rangers House
15.30	End of Visit Bus back to Cutty Sark Station

The CUTTY SARK station (Docklands Light Railway) is within 200m. Maps will be provided. Party limited to 24. Entry fees, guide at Ranger's House and Bus will be £10.50. For English Heritage members producing their card there, the cost will be £7.50.