



Royal Borough of Greenwich

The Old Royal Navel College



The **Old Royal Naval College, Greenwich** is the epicentre of the UNESCO World Heritage Site that covers Maritime Greenwich.

History



The history of the Old Royal Naval College dates back to the 1420s, when King Henry VII built Greenwich Palace on the site.

The next notable stage in the site's history was when the celebrated architect Sir Christopher Wren - responsible for such London attractions as **St Paul's Cathedral** and **The Monument to The Great Fire of London** - built Greenwich Hospital between 1696 and 1712. The hospital enjoyed a long, distinguished history, before closing in 1869.

The third phase in the site's history arrived in 1873 when Wren's wonderful building became a training institution for the Royal Navy, with the Royal Naval College delivering more than a century of service, before closing in 1998.

The fourth phase in the history of the Old Royal Naval College came in 2002 when this awesome architectural tribute to the grandiosity of the British Armed Forces became open to the public, giving London tourists the opportunity not only to marvel at Sir Christopher Wren's magnificent twin-domed building, but also to learn a great deal about the history of the Royal Navy and its enormous influence across the globe.



OPENING TIMES

The Old Royal Naval College in Greenwich is open daily. Admission to Discover Greenwich Visitor Centre, Painted Hall and Chapel is free of charge.

Opening Times

Old Royal Naval College grounds	08.00 – 18.00
Cutty Sark Gate open	08.00 – 23.00 Mon to Sat, and 08.00 – 22.30 Sun
Discover Greenwich Visitor Centre	10.00 – 17.00
Painted Hall	10.00 – 17.00
Chapel	10.00 – 17.00

BOOK A GUIDED TOUR

Let our experienced Yeomen guides take you on a 60-minute tour of the Old Royal Naval College (ORNC).

Visit the Discover Greenwich Visitor Centre, the magnificent Painted Hall and neoclassical Chapel. Highlights of the tour include an exclusive visit to the 140-year old Skittle Alley. Learn about the rich history of the site and discover much more about Henry VIII and Elizabeth I's birthplace, Nelson and the Navy, the Greenwich Pensioners and Wren's architecture.

£5 per adult, free for children under 16. Tour runs daily at 14.00, subject to demand and availability, from the Shop in the Discover Greenwich Visitor Centre. For groups of 10 or more, please see our **group visits** section.

Call 020 8269 4799 or email **boxoffice@ornc.org** to check availability on one of these tours.

EAT AND DRINK



The Old Brewery

The Old Brewery, located next to the Discover Greenwich Visitor Centre, is a relaxed café during the day and a lively restaurant in the evening. There is also a cosy bar that serves hand drawn Meantime beers and a large alfresco courtyard.

The café, restaurant and bar are run by the Meantime Brewing Company. The brewery is a fine example of a historic building restored to its original function. There has been a brewhouse near to the site since 1717. It supplied the sailors cared for in the Royal Hospital for Seamen with their daily allowance of four pints of small, or weak, beer.

Opening times: The Old Brewery is open daily

Café	10.00 – 17.00
Restaurant	18.00 – 23.00 Mon to Sat, and 18.00 – 22.30 Sun
Bar	11.00 – 23.00 Mon to Sat, and 12.00 – 22.30 Sun

Evening reservations for up to 6 guests can be made [online](#).

For more information visit www.oldbrewerygreenwich.com

and to book for larger groups call **0203 327 1280** or email reservations@oldbrewerygreenwich.com

TOP 10 MUST SEE DETAILS

There are lots of things to see at the Old Royal Naval College (ORNC). We have chosen ten of our favourite details not to be missed.



1. Wren's twin domes

The twin domes of the ORNC are an iconic Greenwich landmark and house the magnificent Painted Hall and Chapel. One of the best views of Sir Christopher Wren's grand design is from the Water Gate. The domes have gilded weather vanes and feature clock faces; one tells the time while the other indicates the wind direction.



2. The Painted Hall ceiling

At a staggering 2612sqm the Painted Hall is the largest figurative painted interior in the country. The theme of Sir James Thornhill's exuberant lower hall ceiling is the triumph of Peace and Liberty over Tyranny. It pays tribute to King William and Queen Mary, seated in glory in the middle of the central oval, and the importance of naval power to the fortunes of the nation.



3. The Chapel rope and anchor

Naval motifs are depicted throughout the Chapel, reflecting the building's original purpose as a place of worship for the inhabitants of the Royal Hospital for Seamen. In the centre of the black and white marble floor there is a ship's anchor. A rope design runs along the edge of the pews which is said to match exactly the diameter of an anchor cable of a first-rate ship of the line.



4. Objects from Greenwich Palace

The remains of Henry's VIII palace lie just a few feet below the ORNC site. More than 30 objects excavated on site are on display in the Discover Greenwich Visitor Centre, allowing us to picture the splendour of the Tudor palace. There is a reconstruction of the Chapel Royal where Henry VIII married Anne of Cleves, discovered in 2005.



5. The Nelson Pediment

The most splendid reminder of Nelson at the ORNC is the Nelson Pediment, which overlooks the King William Courtyard. Designed by Benjamin West and made of Coade stone, an artificial ceramic, it is 12m long. Erected in 1812, it pays tribute to Britain's great naval hero, Admiral Lord Nelson. His body, surrounded by symbols of battles at sea, is being delivered into the care of Britannia by a figure representing Victory.



6. Thornhill's self-portrait

Sir James Thornhill took 19 years to decorate the Painted Hall, often described as 'the finest dining hall in Europe'. He was knighted in 1729 – the first English artist to receive this honour – and you can see him on the west wall in the upper hall gesturing towards his great composition. Next to him lie the tools of his trade; a palette, scroll and paintbrushes.



7. The Chapel ceiling

The ceiling of the Chapel is a wonderful piece of craftsmanship and is almost certainly responsible for the superb acoustics of the space. It was designed by the master plasterer John Papworth in a neo-classical design of squares and octagons. The intricate central ornaments were carved, rather than cast in moulds. It is plastered in light blue and cream following a Wedgewood-inspired colour scheme.



8. The Old Brewery wellhead

The Old Brewery wellhead is 77m deep and it was discovered during building work in 2008. It supplied water to the brewery of the Royal Hospital for Seamen, which stood on the site of today's Old Brewery. On your visit throw a coin down the well and make a wish. All donations go towards the upkeep of the buildings.



9. Franklin Memorial

Take a look to your right when you enter the Chapel vestibule. An imposing marble memorial commemorates Sir John Franklin and the crews of the ships Erebus and Terror who lost their lives in the ill-fated expedition of 1845 to search for the North West Passage. It was created by Richard Westmacott Junior.



10. Central Model of Greenwich

The best place to start your visit to the ORNC is at the spectacular central model in the Discover Greenwich Visitor Centre. Screens surrounding the 3-d scale model of Maritime Greenwich show episodes from the site's amazing history from the Romans to the present day.

GATES

West Gate

Step inside the railings of the Old Royal Naval College through one of the eight impressive gates dating from 1849 to 1859.



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The West Gate is the closest gate to Greenwich town centre and is an instant landmark when you exit the Docklands Light Railway and head along College Approach.

The most striking features are two large globes which adorn each of the gate piers. These were placed here to commemorate Admiral George Anson and his epic four year journey (1740 – 1744) to circumnavigate the world.

Water Gate



If you approach the ORNC from the Thames river path, you will probably enter through the Water Gate. This gate, which frames the twin domes of the ORNC, was erected to replace a rather more modest 18th century design. It completed the landscaping scheme of the 1850s.

The gates give a clue about the original inhabitants of the site, when it was the Royal Hospital for Seamen. The coat of arms of the Royal Hospital for Seamen is set in the middle, its crest made up of four anchors with a central crown and a rope around the edge. Above the gate is gilded naval crown and there are tridents on the piers.



GEORGE II STATUE



The statue in the middle of Grand Square is of King George II. It was sculpted by Michael Rysbrack in 1735 and is made of a single piece of marble weighing 11 tons. The king wears the military clothes of a Roman Emperor and holds a sceptre and orb.

The statue was commissioned to please the king so that he would look more favourably upon the Royal Hospital for Seamen, today's ORNC, and donate money for its maintenance.



DOLPHIN FOUNTAINS





installed.

Take a closer look at the two dolphin fountains on the King Charles and William lawns. Each fountain has four dolphin heads, one facing in each direction, and just above these four sea serpents look out from ships' prows.

Philip Hardwick, the architect and surveyor of the site, designed these fountains as part of his formal landscaping scheme for the Royal Hospital for Seamen in 1850. Today the lamps on top of the fountains are run with electricity, but would have been powered by gas when they were first

PAINTED HALL *The finest dining hall in Europe*



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Experience the splendour of the Painted Hall, often described as 'the finest dining hall in Europe'. Sir James Thornhill spent 19 years painting its ceilings and walls, decorating them with allegorical scenes celebrating the British monarchy and maritime power. It was here in 1806 that the body of Admiral Lord Nelson lay in state following his death at the Battle of Trafalgar.



The Painted Hall is often described as the 'finest dining hall in Europe'. Designed by Sir Christopher Wren and Nicholas Hawksmoor, it was originally intended as an eating space for the naval veterans who lived here at the Royal Hospital for Seamen. Its exuberant wall and ceiling decorations are by James Thornhill and pay tribute to British maritime power.

The Painted Hall sits within the King William Court. Wren submitted designs in 1698 and the roof and dome were in place five years later. When in 1708 James Thornhill began decorating the interior, he was instructed

to include as many references as possible to the importance of the navy in Britain's fortunes. His 'great and laborious undertaking' was finally completed after 19 years, by which time the Painted Hall was felt to be far too grand for its original purpose. Respectable visitors were allowed admittance, after paying a small fee, and the residents of the Royal Hospital – Greenwich Pensioners – acted as tour guides. Thornhill was paid only £3 per square yard (about one square metre) for the ceiling, and just £1 per square yard for the walls. However, he did receive a knighthood in 1720 and his legacy is the finest painted architectural interior by an English artist.

In 1806, three months after the Battle of Trafalgar the previous October, the body of Horatio Nelson was brought to lie in state in the Painted Hall. A plaque marks the spot where his coffin was placed before it was taken for burial in the crypt of St Paul's Cathedral.

Between 1824 and 1936, the Painted Hall was known as the National Gallery of Naval Art, with over 300 naval-themed paintings on display. These paintings, together with portrait busts, drawings, ship models and relics of Nelson, formed the basis of the National Maritime Museum's art collection.

In 1939, following extensive restoration, the Painted Hall was used for dining (including breakfast) by the officers of the Royal Naval College. It was also the venue for many grand dinners including in 1946 a banquet to celebrate the formation of the United Nations.

The Painted Hall today

Today the magnificent Painted Hall is open to visitors free of charge. It is also still used for the purpose for which it was originally built; as a venue for prestigious dinners and formal occasions such as weddings. For details visit www.ornc.org/venuehire or our events calendar

www.ornc.org/events

If you are interesting in finding out more about the Painted Hall, join on of our knowledgeable Yeomen guides on a daily talk or guided tour. You can also explore the Painted Hall by downloading our interpretation guide:









CHAPEL *A glorious neoclassical Chapel*



Enjoy the calm of the neo-classical Chapel, the last major part of the Royal Hospital for Seamen to be completed in 1751.

In 1779 the Chapel survived a devastating fire. James ‘Athenian’ Stuart was appointed to re-design its interior and it has remained unaltered ever since.

Admire the Chapel’s intricate plasterwork ceiling and take a closer look at the Samuel Green organ. Its superb acoustics make the Chapel an ideal space for concerts, services and recitals.

Read more or see our **events calendar** for latest events in the Chapel.

The Chapel, constructed by Thomas Ripley to the designs of Sir Christopher Wren, was the last major part of the Royal Hospital for Seamen to be built. Following a disastrous fire in 1779, it was redecorated by James ‘Athenian’ Stuart in the Greek revival style, and today is a wonderful example of a complete neoclassical interior.

The first chapel

The interior of the original chapel was much plainer than today, with a flat panelled ceiling, an apse (alcove) at the east end, and much smaller galleries. For many years there were no pews, and the injured sailors had to stand during their daily service. At 6am on 2 January 1779, a tremendous fire gutted the building, leaving only a shell. It was thought to have started in a tailors’ workshop in the adjacent building and there are various theories about how it started. It is possible that a candle was knocked over during an uproarious party. Others believe it was arson, with the fire started by a sailor recently expelled from the Royal Hospital.

James Athenian Stuart

James Stuart, as Surveyor at the Royal Hospital for Seamen, was appointed to re-design the Chapel in 1781. He acquired his name following a visit to Athens when he became fascinated by ancient Greek architecture and design. The Chapel reflects these influences and Greek style and patterns are used throughout. Stuart left much of the work to his Clerks of Works, Robert Mylne and William Newton who deserve much of the credit for the way the Chapel looks.

The Chapel is dedicated to St Peter and St Paul, both of whom have connections with water and the sea. The chapel is full of naval symbols, intended to remind the residents of the Royal Hospital for Seamen, who had to worship there daily, of their former lives.

Features that merit a special mention include the vast altarpiece painting by Benjamin West, the Samuel Green organ (the only one of its kind to remain in situ) and the outstanding examples of craftsmanship, including numerous items made from Coade stone.

The Chapel today

Following extensive restoration in the 1950s, the Chapel today looks much as it did in 1798 when it re-opened after the fire. There are regular services throughout the week and on Sunday mornings – all welcome.

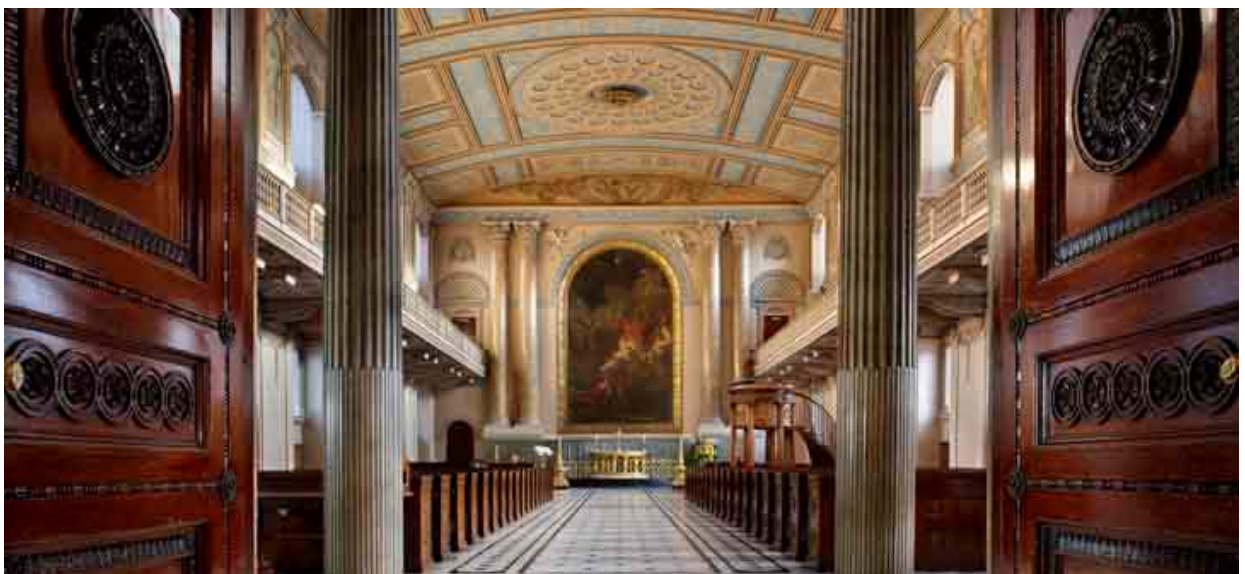
Sun 11.00 - Choral Eucharist

Mon 18.30 - Choral Evensong (term time)

Wed 13.05 - Holy Communion (term time)

Thu 13.05 - Lunchtime Christian Prayers (term time)

The excellent acoustics of the curved ceiling mean it is often used for concerts. Students from our on-site partner, Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance hold regular performance classes and recitals. Particular care is taken to feature music by composers contemporary with the age of the building.







Chapel ceiling





