

## HUGHBROUGHTONARCHITECTS

## PRESS ENQUIRIES

Claire Curtice Publicists  
claire@clairecurtice.co.uk  
+ 44 (0) 20 7613 1442  
[Download press kit here](#)

## PRESS RELEASE

## THE PAINTED HALL

03/2019

The Painted Hall at the Old Royal Naval College, Greenwich will reopen on 23 March 2019 after a two-year National Lottery Funded conservation project which has brought its magnificent painted interior vividly back to life.

The Painted Hall has been referred to as the 'Sistine Chapel of the UK' – its vast decorated interior, extending to 4,000 square metres, is the masterpiece of English baroque art. The £8.5-million conservation project, supported by a £3.1-million grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, has reversed years of decay and conserved the Painted Hall for generations to come. Its reopening is part of a major transformation project by Hugh Broughton Architects – with conservation advice from the College's Surveyor of the Fabric, Martin Ashley Architects – that will also see the reopening of the King William Undercroft. Situated below the Painted Hall, the newly restored Undercroft space now houses a new café, shop and interpretation gallery, The Sackler Gallery.

The Old Royal Naval College has been shortlisted for the Restoration or Conservation Project of the Year at the Museum + Heritage Awards 2019. Hugh Broughton Architects have also been shortlisted for the RIBA London regional awards 2019 for the Painted Hall Project.

The Painted Hall is the centrepiece of the Old Royal Naval College, Greenwich. Designed by Sir Christopher Wren as a ceremonial dining room for what was then the new Royal Hospital for Seaman, the Painted Hall was completed in 1705. Its vast decorative scheme was painted by Sir James Thornhill, the first British artist to be knighted. Started in 1707, it took 19 years to complete. The paintings celebrate England's naval power and mercantile prosperity, as well as its newly installed protestant monarchy. Successive monarchs William III and Mary II, Anne and George I join a cast of hundreds of figures, mythological, allegorical, historical and contemporary.

The scheme's celebration of the English protestant monarchy was set against the perceived autocracy of predominantly Catholic Europe. The main section of the ceiling (the Lower Hall) features William III taking an olive branch from a figure representing peace and passing the 'cap of liberty' to the kneeling figure of Europe. At the same time the king tramples on a crouched figure representing arbitrary power and tyranny – a thinly veiled portrait of Louis XIV of France.

The late 17th and early 18th centuries were a time of great uncertainty in Europe, with competing powers sparring for control of the continent and grand alliances made between nations to prevent dominance by any one European state. The story presented in the Painted Hall is one of stability and prosperity in Britain, underpinned by the nation's naval power and benign constitutional rule. The other section of the ceiling (the Upper Hall) honours Queen Anne whose reign oversaw the unification of Great Britain.

The ground-breaking project to clean and conserve the paintings started in 2016 under the supervision of specialist conservators Stephen Paine and Sophie Stewart. Since the last campaign of restoration in the 1950s the paintings had deteriorated, with large areas of 'blanching' or whitening covering the surface and obscuring the detail. For two years, a small team of conservators worked to stabilise and rejuvenate the paintings, with spectacular results. The colour, clarity and richness of the paintings can now be enjoyed, illuminated by a new state-of-the-art LED system. Meanwhile a range of new technologies have been introduced to stabilise the Hall's environment and ensure the long-term preservation of the paintings.

The project was also one of the largest open-access conservation projects in Europe. Between 2017 and 2018 an accessible observation deck gave over 80,000 visitors the opportunity to observe the conservators at work. As the painted surfaces were cleaned, new details were uncovered that revealed how Thornhill planned and executed his vast work. Shadows of corrected details appeared behind later paint layers and large areas of beautifully detailed history painting emerged from behind dirt and decay. As many as 30 signatures from previous 'restorers' were studied at close quarters, including one indelicately placed on the bosom of Mary II, revealing 300 years of almost continuous cleaning.

A series of finely carved oak benches, made when the Hall served as an art gallery in the 19th century and removed 100 years ago, have been returned as part of a new collection of elegant furniture which will allow visitors to sit (or lie down) in comfort and experience the beauty and wonder of Thornhill's masterpiece. To enrich the experience, visitors will have the choice of a multimedia guide, a printed guide or a tour by one of an expert team of guides. Two 'treasure chests' containing handling objects related to the ceiling will add a new tactile element to the visitor experience.

The King William Undercroft, a grandly proportioned vaulted space – mirroring the plan of the Painted Hall above and designed by Christopher Wren and his Clerk of Works, Nicholas Hawksmoor – has been lovingly restored to its original form. 20th-century additions, including part of a large modern kitchen, have been removed to reveal the majesty of the space and the beauty of the baroque architectural details. This space, originally used as a day-to-day dining room for the naval pensioners, now houses a shop, café and The Sackler Gallery where visitors will be able to learn about the history and meaning of Thornhill's masterpiece, prior to ascending into the Painted Hall itself.

In the course of works to the Undercroft, two rooms from Henry VIII's long-lost Greenwich Palace were unearthed beneath a concrete floor, including a cellar containing a series of unusual niches, which archaeologists believe may be 'bee boles' for the keeping of skeps (hive baskets) during the winter months when bee colonies hibernate. These remarkable finds have been incorporated into the interpretation area and will be on permanent display to visitors when the Painted Hall reopens. Greenwich Palace was the favoured royal palace of Henry VIII, who was born at Greenwich along with his daughters Mary I and Elizabeth I.

The conservation of the Painted Hall and the restoration of the Undercroft have been made possible thanks to generous funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, The Gosling Foundation Ltd, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, The Sackler Trust, Tony Hales CBE, Garfield Weston Foundation, The Foyle Foundation, Old Royal Naval College Chapel Fund, Celia and Edward Atkin CBE, City Bridge Trust, The Charles Skey Charitable Trust, Waring and Carmen Partridge Foundation and Natalie and Malcolm Pray, as well as a number of other generous individuals.

Angela McConville, Chief Executive of the Old Royal Naval College, has said: 'We are hugely excited to be able to reveal the beautifully conserved Painted Hall to the public. We care for the greatest ensemble of baroque buildings and landscape in the UK

and we welcome over one million visitors and students to this special place every year. We passionately believe that the story of Greenwich starts here, on this magnificent site, and so it is a great delight that through this epic project, below and above the ground, we are revealing 500 years of history. Our new visitor experience will, we believe, bring delight and stimulate curiosity for many more visitors and be a place for locals to enjoy again and again.'

William Palin, Painted Hall Project Director and Conservation Director at the Old Royal Naval College, has said:

'This project has been an epic undertaking and represents a huge collaborative effort. The sheer scale and complexity of the project meant that we were constantly seeking innovative solutions – from the carefully developed conservation techniques to the design of the vast internal scaffolding, which had to be fully accessible for the visiting public. The transformation of the Undercroft space below has brought one of Britain's great historic spaces back into use, providing a beautiful prelude to the wonder of the Painted Hall above.'

Ros Kerslake, Chief Executive of The National Lottery Heritage Fund, has said:

'We are delighted that National Lottery funding has enabled the Painted Hall, with its extraordinary ceiling – the 'Sistine Chapel of the UK' – to be conserved for future generations to enjoy. Our investment has supported this complex and extensive project by the Old Royal Naval College to successfully restore one of the lesser-known treasures of the Greenwich World Heritage Site.'

#### **Listings information**

Tickets are available at [www.ornc.org](http://www.ornc.org). Adults £12 / Children (16 and under) Free / UK Students & Concessions £8.50. 'Pay as you wish' every first Wednesday of the month. All tickets are valid for unlimited re-entry up to a year after purchase.

The Old Royal Naval College

King William Walk

London

SE10 9NN

Opening times (from 23 March 2019):

Old Royal Naval College, 10am – 5pm daily

Grounds, 8am – 11pm daily

#### **Visitor information**

The reopening of the Painted Hall sees the introduction of a new visitor experience at the Old Royal Naval College. Visitors will be able to enjoy a guided or self-guided tour of the extensive site, setting off from the newly refreshed Visitor Centre. The tour will take in all aspects of Wren's riverside masterpiece including the famous Water Gate, Grand Square and Chapel, and will include access into the Skittle Alley (a normally 'limited access' area of the site). From there visitors will enter the newly refurbished King William Undercroft and be able to access the new Sackler Gallery, which houses new interpretation materials explaining the history of the Painted Hall and how Thornhill created his masterpiece. From the Undercroft, visitors will be able to pick up a new multimedia guide for the Painted Hall, voiced by Tara Fitzgerald, which will provide an informative introduction to the paintings with 60 minutes of content available.

Live talks in the Painted Hall, led by an expert team of staff and volunteers throughout the day, will also help to bring the paintings to life, alongside a collection of exquisite touch objects (inspired by characters and items depicted on the ceiling) that visitors will be able to get up close to and try on. The touch objects are housed in two new specially made 'treasure chests' and include a replica of George I's cloak, William III's crown, the 'Red Cap of Liberty' that he holds in his hand, symbolic of freedom, and the classical goddess Athena's shield, depicting Medusa. For younger visitors a family trail has been developed, alongside Sea



Explorer bags full of sensory objects. An audio-described tour will also be available for partially sighted and blind visitors and digital tablets will be available, loaded up with a virtual tour of the hall, allowing visitors to zoom in to details on the ceiling.

#### **About the Old Royal Naval College**

Old Royal Naval College is the centrepiece of Maritime Greenwich, a UNESCO World Heritage Site with a long and celebrated 500-year history. Today it is a diverse cultural destination and one of London's most popular venues and visitor attractions, a site that attracts over 1.2 million visitors every year.

The classical buildings that adorn the site today were built as the Royal Hospital for Seamen between 1696 and 1751. Designed by England's greatest architects, including Sir Christopher Wren, the buildings are considered amongst the finest in Europe, featuring the sumptuous Painted Hall and the neo-classical Chapel. Prior to that the site was home to the celebrated Greenwich Palace, the favoured Royal residence of Henry VIII. A small part of the excavated palace, revealed during recent conservation works, can be viewed in The Sackler Gallery in the King William Undercroft.

The rich maritime history of the site continued after the departure of the Royal Hospital in the 1860s. From 1873 to 1997 the buildings housed the Royal Naval College, one of the world's foremost naval training establishments. After the departure of the Naval College an independent charity was established in 1997 to conserve the magnificent baroque buildings and grounds for present and future generations and to provide opportunities for wide and diverse audiences to enjoy and share their significance. Today this historic landmark is open to the public.

The Painted Hall, built as a ceremonial dining room, has the greatest grand-scale decorative painting in England and has been described as 'the Sistine Chapel of the UK'. The abundant and complex painting scheme covers some 4,000 square metres and was designed and executed by Sir James Thornhill between 1707 and 1726. An extensive National Lottery Funded renovation project was completed in 2019. The Chapel of St Peter and St Paul is a neo-classical masterpiece by James 'Athenian' Stuart. Featuring a Samuel Green organ and an altarpiece painted by Benjamin West, it is one of the country's finest 18th-century interiors.

**[www.ornc.org](http://www.ornc.org)**

**Instagram [@oldroyalnavalcollege](https://www.instagram.com/oldroyalnavalcollege)**

**Twitter [@orncgreenwich](https://twitter.com/orncgreenwich)**

#### **About Hugh Broughton Architects**

Hugh Broughton Architects was founded in 1996 and has a reputation for producing carefully crafted contemporary architecture. The practice has won awards from numerous organisations including the RIBA, American Institute of Architects (AIA UK), Civic Trust, The Architects' Journal, amongst many others.

Success in international design competitions has led to the design of a new gallery for The Portland Collection, Maidstone Museum's East Wing and, most notably, a series of remote projects including Halley VI Antarctic Research Station, Juan Carlos 1 Spanish Antarctic Base, Camogli Healthcare Centre on Tristan da Cunha, the world's most remote inhabited island and Scott Base for Antarctica New Zealand, won in partnership with Jasmx. As a result, Hugh Broughton Architects is now considered the world's leading designer of research facilities in the Polar Regions. Through this work Hugh has collaborated with NASA's Behavioural Health and Performance Team at Johnson Space Center Houston, helping to establish the acceptable net habitable volume for future long duration exploration class missions.



It is, however, projects in sensitive locations which have been the mainstay of the practice with projects for many high-profile clients including English Heritage, the Henry Moore Foundation, the Trades Union Congress, the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple, and Sheerness Dockyard Preservation Trust.

**[www.hbarchitects.co.uk](http://www.hbarchitects.co.uk)**

**@HBA\_London**

**About Martin Ashley Architects**

Martin Ashley Architects provides a full range of architectural and surveying services to assist owners, occupiers and custodians of historic buildings and estates towards the conservation, repair, adaptation, alteration, change and development for ongoing beneficial use in the 21st century. The practice takes great pride in encouraging close collaboration with others such as conservationists and specialist trades, an approach that allows project partners to learn from each other and bring their best to each project. Clients include the Greenwich Foundation (where Martin Ashley has served as Surveyor of the Fabric since 2008), Historic Royal Palaces, the Dean and Canons of Windsor and the English Heritage Trust.

**[www.ma-arch.co.uk](http://www.ma-arch.co.uk)**

**Instagram @martin\_ashley\_architects**

**Twitter @martinashleyarc**

**About The National Lottery Heritage Fund**

Using money raised by the National Lottery, we inspire, lead and resource the UK's heritage to create positive and lasting change for people and communities, now and in the future.

**[www.HeritageFund.org.uk](http://www.HeritageFund.org.uk)**

**Follow @HeritageFundUK on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and use**

**#NationalLotteryHeritageFund**

**About Merrell Publishers**

A specially commissioned book on the Painted Hall will be published in November 2019 by Merrell Publishers.

**[www.merrellpublishers.com](http://www.merrellpublishers.com)**

**Instagram @merrellpublishers**

**Twitter @Hugh\_Merrell**



Photo © James Brittain