Painted Hall secures Heritage Lottery Fund support for west wall conservation

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The grant will also support the delivery of conservation skills training and a programme of associated public, community and learning events.

Created in the early 18th century by Sir James Thornhill for Sir Christopher Wren's Royal Hospital, for seamen, the spectacular, Grade 1 Listed, Painted Hall is the jewel in the crown of the ORNC. Open to the public daily, and free of charge, it has contributed to the Old Royal Naval College's popularity as a heritage visitor attraction (the ORNC was the country's 11th most popular attraction in 2011 with over 1.7 million visitors), and is a highlight of the Maritime Greenwich World Heritage Site.

It is almost sixty years since the last major conservation work in the Painted Hall. The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant will enable the ORNC to carry out work on the west wall, the first phase of a longer term conservation programme, which includes consolidation of plaster and paint layers, and repair of old water damage, paint flaking and varnish blanching.

Sue Bowers, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund for London, said: "With so much of British and world history in one astonishing view and palatial buildings set in London's oldest designed landscape, Greenwich is prodigious, inspiring and endlessly fascinating. The Heritage Lottery Fund has invested some £75 million in the royal borough, and now added to the list of projects is the Painted Hall Project which is considered to be one of the UK's finest baroque interiors, situated as it is within the heart of the UNESCO Maritime Greenwich World Heritage Site.

"We're delighted to support the restoration of the west wall with a confirmed grant and look forward to its original beauty being revealed for all to enjoy."

"When the Greenwich Foundation took over management of the Old Royal Naval College it committed to look after Sir Christopher Wren's masterpiece for the nation for generations to come," says CEO, Brendan McCarthy. "The support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, together with that of all those who have given to our continuing appeal, is enabling us to carry out long overdue work on this very important interior.

"The grant also means that we can run a programme of events and activities during the conservation work to enable visitors and our local community alike to enjoy what is going to be a fascinating project – including getting up close and high on our specially designed scaffolding. That's a once in a lifetime opportunity!

"It will enable number of recent graduates to work closely with the conservators and we will also deliver a programme of formal education workshops."

The programme of events includes behind the scenes tours on scaffolding; conservation and building skills taster workshops for secondary school pupils; a conference on painting conservation; taster activities with local residents' associations and ESOL students on Greenwich Community College courses; a west wall highlights handling table facilitated by volunteers for drop-in visitors; and development of a new character (Nicholas Hawksmoor) to add to the popular characters who bring the history of the Old Royal Naval College to life.

The cost of the west wall conservation programme will be £475,000 with the ORNC raising the balance from a variety of other sources. It is envisaged that the long-term conservation plan for the whole of the Painted Hall will be delivered over a number of years with an estimated total cost in excess of £2 million. Subsequent work will focus on the large ceiling painting and window reveals in the lower hall, the smaller ceiling painting and remaining walls in the upper hall, and the main entrance vestibule and cupola.

For further details about the Painted Hall conservation work and how to support the appeal visit the ORNC website.

Notes to editors

Old Royal Naval College
Sir Christopher Wren's twin-domed riverside masterpiece is one of London's most iconic buildings. It was built three hundred years ago as the royal hospital for seamen, a refuge for injured and impoverished sailors of the Royal Navy. In the 19th century it became the Royal Naval College, where the navy's officers were trained. In 1998 the Royal Naval College moved to Shrivenham, and the Greenwich Foundation took over management of the site to conserve the buildings and open them to the public. By 2010 the site, which includes the Painted Hall, Chapel and Discover Greenwich visitor centre, and stages a year-round programme of events, had become the 15th most popular visitor attraction in the UK.

10 key facts about the Painted Hall

1. The Painted Hall is the largest continuous figurative scheme in the UK with over 2600 sqm of allegorical wall paintings.
2. It took James Thornhill over 19 years (from 1708 to 1727) to complete the paintings in Sir Christopher Wren's maritime masterpiece.
3. The commission was partly paid for by the booty of notorious pirate, Captain Kidd, which had been confiscated by the crown.
4. In the 18th century the Painted Hall became a celebrated visitor attraction instead of being used for its original purpose – a refectory for naval pensioners.
5. The body of Admiral Nelson lay in state in the Painted Hall in 1806 before his funeral up river at St Paul's Cathedral, and the Old Royal Naval College now hosts an annual Trafalgar Dinner in this historic setting.
6. For over a century, from 1824, the Painted Hall was the National Gallery of Naval Art , while for almost 60 years, from 1939, it served its original purpose as the dining hall of the Royal Naval College.
7. The public has had free access to the Painted Hall for up to 363 days a year since 2002, following the Greenwich Foundation taking over management of the Old Royal Naval College in 1999.
8. There were 1.7m visits to the attractions making up the Old Royal Naval College last year, making it the UK's 11th most popular visitor attraction in 2011.
9. From time to time the Painted Hall is used as a location for filming, including the opening scenes of The Pirates of the Caribbean – On Stranger Tides starring Johnny Depp, Guy Ritchie's second Sherlock Holmes movie starring Robert Downey Jr and Jude Law and the Iron Lady starring Meryl Streep.
10. The Painted Hall is becoming an increasingly popular wedding venue.

Further information

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