

Audio-Described Guide.



Christopher Wren: What Legacy Now?

Hamish MacPherson

The Old Royal Naval College

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1. Introduction: 2 minutes

This is an audio description of several key works in a photography exhibition by artist Hamish MacPherson. The exhibition commemorates the 300th anniversary of Sir Christopher Wren's death in 1723.

It is taking place at the Old Royal Naval College, a building complex designed by Wren. This exhibition features nine colour photographs, each A0 sized: 120cm in height and 84cm in width, including a 2cm white border.

The exhibit focuses on Christopher Wren and draws attention to eight people living today who are continuing his different interests and achievements. They are arranged from his earliest interests to his latest.

The photographs in this exhibition were created using a modified flatbed scanner, similar to the type used for scanning letters or documents. The subject's faces fill the frame, are often very dimly lit and reveal nothing of what they are wearing or where they are.

This technique imparts an intriguing and enigmatic quality to the images, as if the subjects are appearing or disappearing. When viewed up-close, the pixels and lines of the scanning process become visible.

The exhibition is on display in a 30-metre tunnel that runs underground from west to east. The tunnel is 180cm high and wide, with a vaulted ceiling. The walls are painted light grey with peeling layers revealing white and beige underneath. The floor is made of worn brown flagstones.

In this audio-description we will be travelling down the tunnel from west to east with the nine evenly-placed portraits on the right-hand side. Each one is displayed in an alcove that reaches from the middle of the wall to the ceiling.



2. Sir Christopher Wren: 3 minutes

The first alcove contains a large photograph of a small bronze sculpture of Sir Christopher Wren. The image shows Wren's head and shoulders above an ornamental plinth, all against a pitch-black background. Like all the photos in the exhibition, it is mounted on a light grey backboard that fills the alcove. The photo is almost as tall as the alcove.

Please feel free to touch the rough stone ledge that marks the base of the alcove. It is made of Portland, a type of limestone that has a mottled colour resembling an old map, with patches of dusty yellow, ochre, and charcoal grey.

The sculpture depicted in the photograph is only 13cm high, but it has been enlarged to appear like a full-size bust almost as if we were face to face with Wren.

In the image, Wren is looking to the left, with his nose sharply in focus while the rest of his face is slightly blurred and covered in shadows. His face is framed by long curly hair that falls over his shoulders. He wears an open collar, and a folded neck scarf spills down to the plinth on which he is mounted. The plinth features miniature representations of some of the buildings designed by Wren, including St. Paul's Cathedral.

Christopher Wren is widely recognised as England's greatest architect, but he was more than that. Like many of his peers, he had a diverse range of interests and actively explored various scientific and social questions throughout his life.

Wren possessed exceptional talent and lived during a time of great collaboration and research opportunities. He was born in 1632 and experienced significant historical events such as the Restoration of the English Monarchy in 1660 and the emergence of the European Enlightenment.

Wren's interests varied in intensity and duration. Some were fleeting, some he passed on to others to pursue, and some he fully mastered.

In addition to his architectural achievements, Wren also left behind a lasting legacy of ideas and interests that have endured for centuries and influenced countless individuals. This exhibition features eight individuals who have been influenced by Wren's legacy, and we will now meet three of them.

The next stopping place is an alcove two metres further along the corridor, where we will explore a photograph of Fahima Hussain.



3: Fahima Hussain: 2.5 minutes

This alcove contains a colour photograph of Fahima Hussain – a British Sign Language teacher from London. The photograph is the same size as the previous one and fills the alcove.

The image shows Fahima's face, much larger than life. She is a young woman wearing glasses and looking directly forward. The photo captures Fahima shrouded in darkness, lending her a mysterious ghostly quality but it is still possible to make out her expression which appears serious and calm.

In the mid-1600s, when Christopher Wren was a teenager, he created two fingerspelling alphabets specifically for deaf people. It remains uncertain whether these alphabets were ever used by deaf people or what motivated Wren to develop them. However, during that time, many natural philosophers, who we would now refer to as scientists, were intrigued by communication and cognition in deaf people

Deaf people have always used signs to communicate. However, it wasn't until the late 1700s that children in deaf schools began signing collectively, which eventually led to the development of British Sign Language, commonly known as BSL.

Today, Fahima teaches BSL at Remark!, an organisation led by Deaf people and based in London. More than 150,000 people in the UK currently use BSL, and in 2022, it became a legally recognised language in Great Britain.

The next photograph I will be describing is seventh in the series. It is of Giles Harrison, a professor of meteorology. The photo is about 20 metres further along the corridor.

On the way there we will be passing photo's of four other individuals: Rob Gow, a beehive designer; Jaideep Pandit, a Professor of Anaesthesia at the University of Oxford; Professor Katherine Blundell OBE, a Professor of Astrophysics at the University of Oxford; and Dr. Lucy Collinson, the Head of Electron Microscopy at The Francis Crick Institute.



4: Giles Harrison: 3 minutes

Our next description is of a photograph of Giles Harrison, a professor of meteorology; another of Wren's interests.

Gile's head and shoulder fill the frame. He is a middle-aged man and wears rectangular rimless glasses. The light catches one corner of his glasses, and he has a slight stubble on his face. As he gazes thoughtfully towards the left, his mouth carries the beginnings of a smile, although the subject of his focus lies just outside the frame. Behind him is a foggy grey background,

In 1662, when Wren was 30 years old, he designed a weather clock that had the capability to record air pressure, rainfall, wind, and temperature every fifteen minutes.

He presented his design to the Royal Society, which is the oldest society in the world dedicated to scientific research. The Royal Society had been established just two years prior in 1660, following a lecture delivered by Christopher Wren at Gresham College in London.

Although Wren did not personally construct his weather clock, he entrusted the task to his associate Robert Hooke, who completed the project.

Five years after Wren's presentation, Hooke successfully built the very first automatic weather recording system.

While these automatic recordings remain integral to the field of meteorology, they are now carried out using electronic instruments.

At Reading University, Professor Giles Harrison, focuses on developing methods for recording atmospheric properties both at the Earth's surface and with the aid of weather balloons. His research involves investigating cloud electrification, studying space weather, and exploring ways to enhance air temperature measurements.

The next and last photograph to be described is of architect Lyndsey-Jane Lupton. On the way to this next stopping place we pass a photo of Sarah Coutts, who works as the Head of Design and Planning at Barking Riverside Limited. This company is responsible for the development of over 10,000 new homes, and facilities in East London.

In doing so it is facing a distinct housing challenge, quite different from the one Christopher Wren encountered when he presented his plans for rebuilding London after the Great Fire of 1666.



5: Lyndsey-Jane Lupton: 2 minutes

This photograph features architect Lyndsey-Jane Lupton who, like Wren, designed a care home for navy veterans. It is at the east end of the tunnel and is the final photograph in the exhibition.

Lyndsey-Jane is a young woman wearing glasses. Her hair is pulled back from her face and falls out of frame on the left of the photo. Her gaze is fixed intently towards the upper right corner, and the limited light in the image softly illuminates her chin and left cheek. She appears slightly obscured in the dimness, reminiscent of twilight, with a subtle reddish hue washing over her skin.

One of Christopher Wren's notable architectural achievements was the Royal Hospital for Seamen in Greenwich, which is now known as the Old Royal Naval College and where this exhibition is located.

Wren passed away in 1723 at the age of 90, and the construction of these buildings was only halfway complete at the time.

From 1705 to 1869, these buildings served as a home for disabled and elderly naval veterans, with nearly 3,000 men residing here during the early 1800s.

In the present day, various charities offer care facilities for navy veterans, including the Royal Naval Benevolent Trust. In 2022, the Trust unveiled a new care home called Admiral Jellicoe House in Portsmouth, designed by Lyndsey-Jane Lupton for LNT Care Developments.

This care home accommodates 66 veterans and their dependents, providing residential, nursing, and dementia support. It proudly displays a ceremonial flagpole which flies the White Ensign, the flag worn on British Royal Navy ships and shore establishments.

6: Conclusion: 1 minute

This concludes the audio-description.

Thank you for joining us at Christopher Wren: What Legacy Now?

If you're interested in learning about the subjects that were not included in the tour, you can find brief descriptions of them in our general freesheet, and the large print version which can be downloaded from the QR code on the front of this guide.

In addition to this exhibition, the Old Royal Naval College is hosting a series of events to commemorate the 300th anniversary of Christopher Wren's passing and celebrate his remarkable legacy.

The Old Royal Naval College also offers other audio-described tours led by trained staff and volunteers who have received audio description training from Vocaleyes.

To stay updated on upcoming events and access-enhanced experiences, please visit our website's events page at ornc.org/whats-on

Thank you, once again, for joining us.

