



OLD ROYAL  
NAVAL COLLEGE  
GREENWICH

# ANNUAL REVIEW 2023 - 2024



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**SIR STUART ETHERINGTON**  
Chair

# FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIR

**As Chair of the Greenwich Foundation, I am proud to reflect on a year of accomplishments that have strengthened our ability to preserve and share the remarkable heritage of the Old Royal Naval College. Through support of our trustees, donors, and partners, we have ensured that this historic site continues to inspire and engage diverse audiences.**

However, the challenges we face in protecting the Old Royal Naval College are significant. Preserving, restoring, and maintaining such a priceless national asset is a privileged and monumental task—one that requires ongoing investment, care, dedication, and resource. All funding and philanthropic support helps us continue the essential work of safeguarding the Old Royal Naval College and keeps our doors open to all.

The Board is deeply committed to the Foundation's financial sustainability and long-term success. Over the past year, we have worked diligently to balance heritage conservation with innovative income-generating activities. I am particularly pleased with the further advances we have made in making the Old Royal Naval College a cultural hub in Greenwich and

a major contributor to the creative economy through our ability to host major film and TV productions and cultural events such as concerts and art exhibitions.

We remain immensely grateful to our donors, whose support allows us to conserve this remarkable site and ensures the Old Royal Naval College thrives for generations to come.

I look forward to working with the trustees, executive and leadership teams, staff and volunteers, and our many partners to further our mission of preserving our heritage and sharing the rich history of this extraordinary site.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Etherington', written in a cursive style.



**MATTHEW MEES**  
Chief Executive

# INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

**As we look back on this remarkable year, I am immensely proud of all that the Greenwich Foundation has accomplished in preserving and showcasing the extraordinary history and significance of the Old Royal Naval College.**

Through our dedicated conservation efforts and innovative public programme, we continue to bring this iconic site to life, ensuring it remains a lasting source of inspiration and wellbeing for generations to come.

The Foundation's events continue to solidify our reputation as a vibrant and sought-after destination, offering diverse experiences for everyone—from leisurely strolls through our grounds to enriching educational and cultural activities.

Some of this year's highlights include the electrifying *Greenwich Summer Sounds* concerts, where renowned artists such as Nile Rodgers & Chic, Tom Jones, Black Eyed Peas, and Kaiser Chiefs performed in our iconic setting.

We also delighted visitors with the immersive *Bridgerton Late* event and the *Greenwich Dog Show*. An exclusive art installation, *Coalescence* by designer Paul Cockshedge, made its London debut in the Painted Hall, leaving a lasting impression on all who experienced it.

As part of the *Wren 300* festival, we introduced special tours. The Secret Dome Tour allows our visitors to ascend the narrow winding stone staircase above the Chapel to discover the dome's stunning architecture up close and find out more about those who have worked up there over the centuries.

Our foundation plays a crucial role in community engagement through our education and outreach programmes, such as our projects with refugees and partnerships with local schools and hospitals. These programmes enrich the community and provide immense social value.

There is no doubt that the wider heritage sector is presently facing financial challenges and economic uncertainty. The Foundation is no different, especially against a backdrop of declining government support, but we will look to contain costs and increase revenues and opportunities to manage this. Apart from long-term rental income we must raise almost all our funds through our commercial income streams such as Painted Hall admissions, on-site filming, venue hire, catering, retail, and fundraising.

Our dedicated team of staff and volunteers carry out over 10,000 hours of conservation work each year to maintain and protect some of the nation's

finest art and architecture. It costs over £3 million per year to conserve our buildings and grounds and keep them open to everyone. I want to acknowledge their resilience, hard work, and dedication to this exceptional place.

As always, I am thankful for all the support we get from every single one of our funders, donors, and supporters, it is much appreciated personally and throughout the Foundation. I look forward to the year ahead and collaborating with our many partners to ensure these buildings and grounds remain a cherished and special place for all.

# OUR STORY

1439



## GREENWICH PALACE

The site was originally home to Greenwich Palace, the favoured Royal residence of Henry VIII. Despite being one of the most important Tudor residences, the palace fell into disrepair during the English Civil War.

Following the war, King Charles II drew up ambitious plans for a new palace to rival Louis XIV's Palace of Versailles, but as finances and enthusiasm waned only one new wing, King's House (now King Charles building) was built, influencing the scale and style which Sir Christopher Wren adopted in his later designs for the site.

*'Henry VIII', (1950) Hans Eworth. © Wikimedia Commons.*

1696



## GREENWICH HOSPITAL

Founded by Queen Mary II and built between 1696 and 1751, the Royal Hospital for Seamen provided a refuge for elderly and injured Royal Navy sailors. Designed by Sir Christopher Wren, the stunning classical buildings remain one of the world's great architectural treasures. The magnificent Painted Hall, created by Sir James Thornhill between 1707 and 1726, is celebrated as one of Britain's finest Baroque interiors and even housed one of the earliest public art galleries in Britain.

*'Greenwich Hospital', (1750s), Canaletto.*

1873



## ROYAL NAVAL COLLEGE

From 1873–1997 the buildings housed the Royal Naval College, one of the world's foremost naval training establishments for naval officers for over a hundred years. This included the first female members of the Royal Navy in the 1940s, known as the Wrens.

*Skittle Alley, RN Officers, 1948 © Getty Images.*

1997



## GREENWICH FOUNDATION

After the Naval College moved to Shrivenham, an independent charity was established in 1997 called the Greenwich Foundation. The Foundation conserves the magnificent baroque buildings and grounds of the Old Royal Naval College for present and future generations, and provides opportunities for wide and diverse audiences to enjoy and share their significance.

*James Thornhill character actor, Painted Hall, 2019. © Oliver Rudkin.*

2016



## PAINTED HALL RESTORATION PROJECT

Between 2016 and 2019, the Greenwich Foundation spearheaded an award-winning £8.5 million conservation project, which saw the Painted Hall restored to its full glory, and the Tudor foundations of the site excavated. Within the first year the visitor offer was recognised as one of the top tourist attractions in the country.

*Mid restoration, Painted Hall, 2017. © Old Royal Naval College.*

TODAY



## THRIVING DESTINATION OF HISTORY AND CULTURE

Our historic buildings and iconic grounds are vibrant with life. As one of London's most popular attractions, we welcome over 800,000 visitors annually and are recognised as one of the world's most sought-after filming locations.

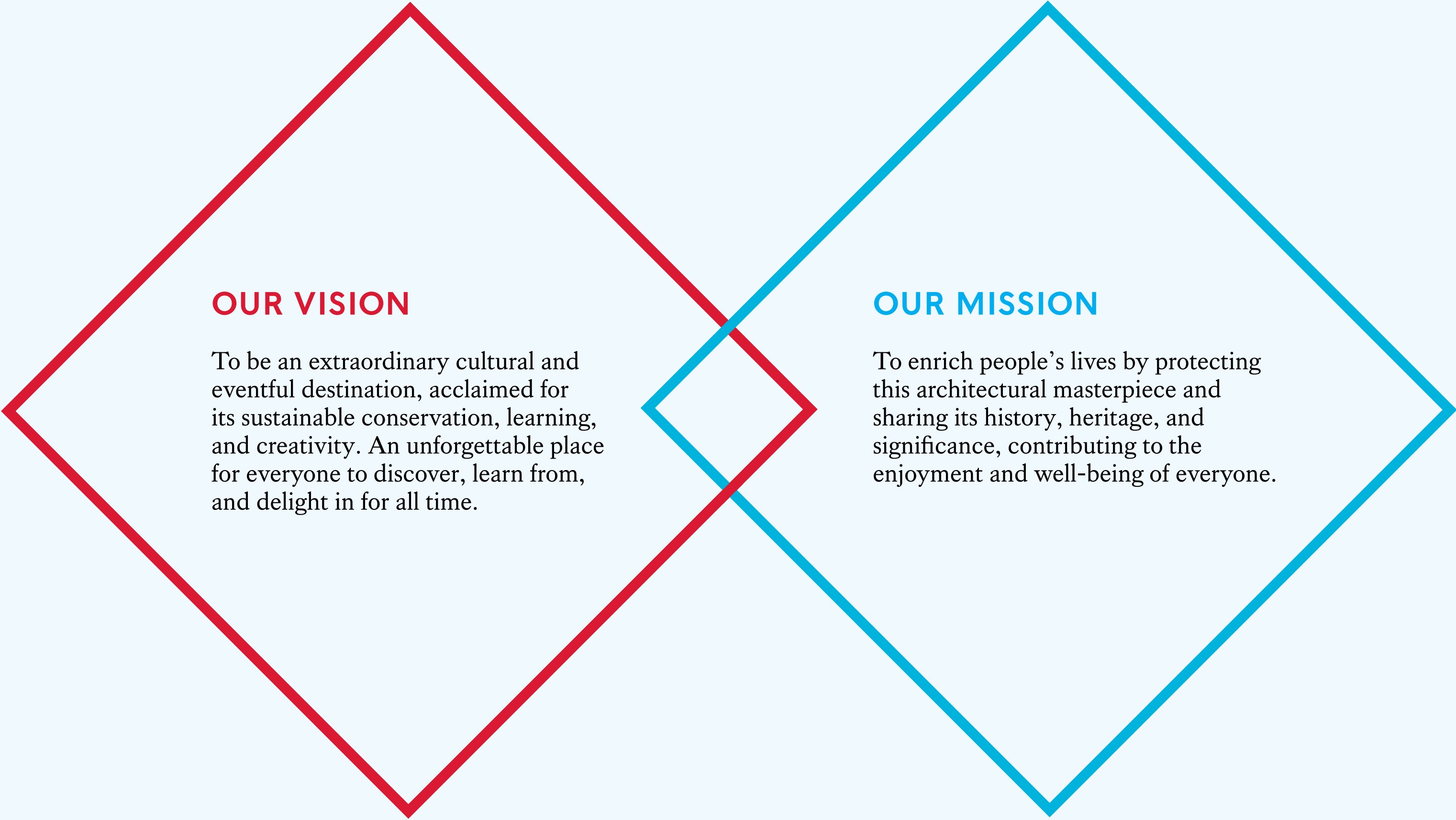
*Greenwich Summer Sounds, 2023. © Joshua Atkins.*

# OUR VISION AND MISSION

The Greenwich Foundation for the Old Royal Naval College has two charitable purposes, to conserve and protect the historic site and to educate the public about the heritage of the site.

Today we are a visitor destination, a historic landmark open to the public and one of London’s most popular venues and filming locations with over 800,000 visitors through our buildings and many more onto our grounds during the last year.

The green, 17-acre riverside estate is a source of public enjoyment and local pride, being at the centre of the community in South-East London and providing a free and bustling public realm that serves many including 10,000 students from our principal site partners, University of Greenwich and Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance.



# OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Through our strategic objectives, we are committed to creating a welcoming and accessible space that enriches the lives of our visitors, supports the local community, and secures the site’s legacy for generations to come. These underpin everything we do.





# THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

We exceeded our target for 2023-2024 to welcome more visitors to our buildings and grounds (2022-2023: 733,000) plus additional programmes for school children, ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) learners, and families.

[Read more on our expenditure and income in the Trustees' Report & Financial Statements here.](#)

809K+

Visitors through our buildings and many more onto our grounds

15,500

School, family, and adult learners through learning sessions

4,646

School children for curriculum-based learning workshops

6,192

Community visitors that included ESOL learners, d/Deaf, visually impaired, outreach, students, and others

27,000

Visitors participated in our guided tours

1,972

Families who visited Father Christmas and The Doorstep Elves

669

People attended yoga sessions in the Painted Hall

7,675

Hours donated by our 112 volunteers

# CONSERVING OUR NATIONAL HISTORY



**The Greenwich Foundation conservation team, in partnership with Surveyor to the Fabric Martin Ashley, work tirelessly to conserve and restore the buildings and features that make up the site and open up our buildings and grounds to as many people as possible. In 2023-24, we completed several major historic projects relating to the conservation of our beautiful site.**

Sir Christopher Wren was a renowned architect, mathematician, astronomer, and scientist who designed the beautiful Baroque buildings which stand here today. His domes are an iconic part of the London skyline, and this year we completed a key project to open one of our domes to public access for the very first time. Visitors can now discover Wren's architecture up close and see the inner workings of the turret clock above the Chapel.

A long-awaited upgrade to the lighting scheme in the Chapel of St Peter & St Paul was completed, following a major project to conserve the Benjamin West altarpiece. The new lighting scheme allows for greater appreciation of the painting, the largest piece by West still in-situ, while greatly improving the environmental impact of the Chapel's lighting.

This year we celebrated five years since the Painted Hall reopened following a major conservation project. It was an opportune time to invite conservation specialists Paine & Stewart back for a periodic review to re-inspect the ceilings and walls. The installation of a full height tower scaffolding allowed for a focused survey to be conducted, and some minor remedial work undertaken. Each year, we carry out over 10,000 hours of conservation on hundreds of windows and doors, miles of stonework, railings, gates, lanterns and lightwells, and much more.

It costs the Greenwich Foundation £10,000 a day to maintain and protect some of the nation's finest art and architecture. Our conservation efforts ensure that the site's historic buildings are protected and well-preserved for future generations.

**'The work we do is a delicate balance of art and science, a constant process of investigations and surveys; from stabilisation and cleaning, monitoring environmental factors to the skilled work of restoration and conservation itself.'**

*- Mark Hosea, Director of Estates & Conservation*



After lighting upgrade, Chapel of St Peter & St Paul, 2023. © Old Royal Naval College.

# COLLECTIONS: REVEALING OUR STORIES

The Old Royal Naval College is home to a collection of historic artefacts of national and local significance. This year, one of the rarest and most unusual objects in our collection was loaned to the State Museum of Prehistory in Halle, Germany. The object is a 17th-century witch bottle, which was placed on display as part of the museum's *Magic – Forcing Fate* exhibition.



Left: Witch bottle. © Old Royal Naval College.  
Above: Contents found in witch bottle. © Old Royal Naval College.

'It was found within the local area and [...] provides an insight into the superstitions of the time. The bottle itself is not unique, but the contents inside were, and that's what makes it quite rare.'

We were able to do some analysis on the contents and discovered that it consisted of human hair, fingernail clippings and urine, as well as bent iron nails. [...] at the time it was believed that when a witch cursed you, they transferred a part of themselves to you. And so, to counteract the curse, you could use parts of yourself to throw the curse back at the witch. And the nails that the witch bottle contained would have caused the witch pain, and therefore that would have been enough to make the witch want to break the curse. Whether this practice was widespread at the time is something that we are looking forward to exploring in a bit more detail.'

- Natalie Conboy, *Collections Manager*

# WARTIME GRAFFITI IN THE CHAPEL DOME

Through launching the Secret Dome Tours, we are now able to showcase fascinating stories that bring the past to life like never before for our visitors.

The Chapel dome holds traces of the young servicemen once stationed at the Royal Naval College. Among them were two midshipmen, Mervyn Payne and Alexander Mitchell, who left their mark—quite literally—by etching their names into the dome's surface during World War II.

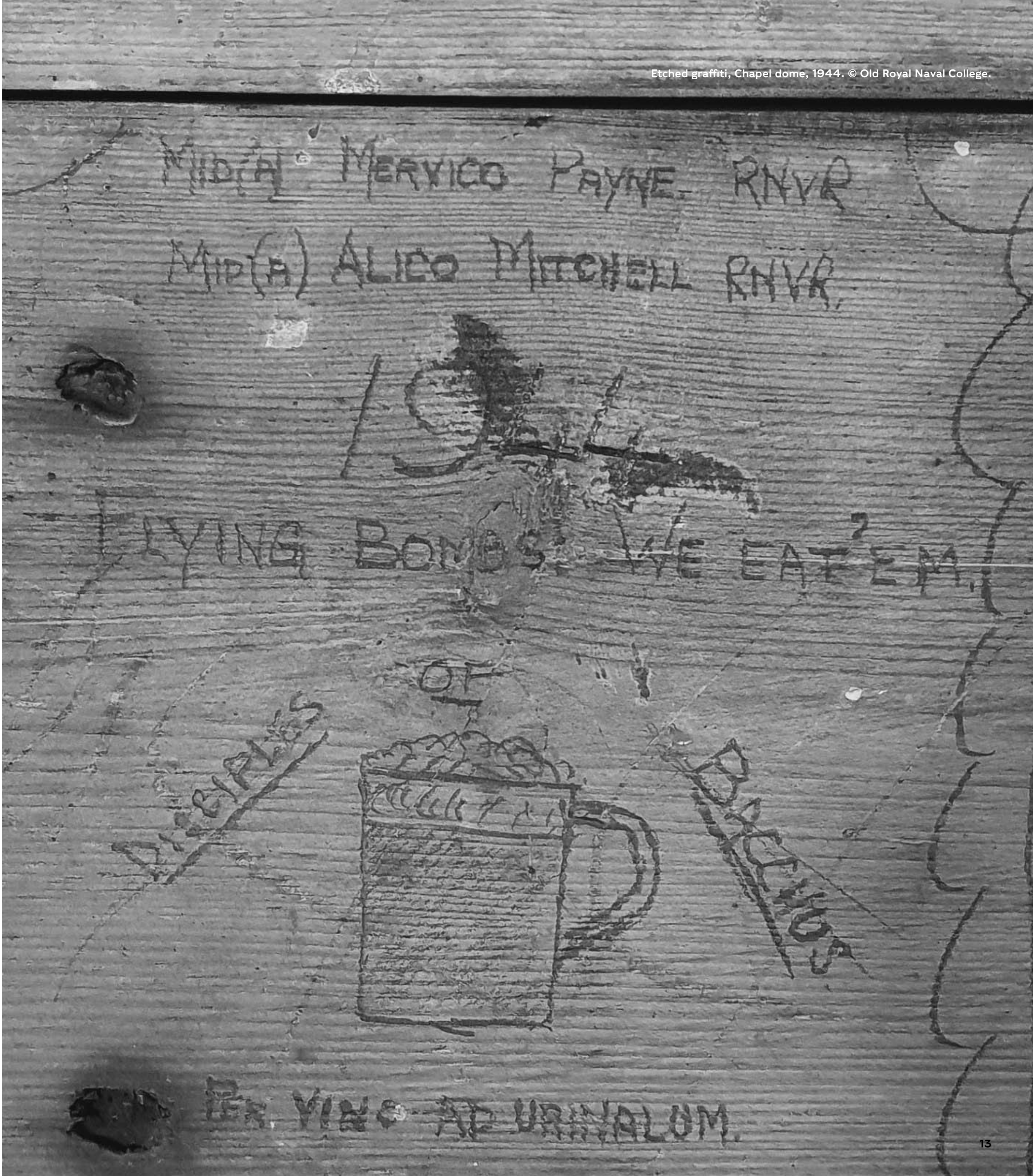
Fire watchers were posted on all the rooftops, including in the dome of the Chapel of St Peter & St Paul, from where the Chapel bell was rung as a warning. While the task may have seemed tedious to some, it provided ample opportunities for a bit of mischief.

Forever etched on the dome’s clock casing is a piece of graffiti that continues to captivate the imagination. Featuring cod Latin, the inscription, dated 1944, by the self-styled 'Disciples of Bacchus,' Mid (A) Mervico Payne RNVR and Mid (A) Alico Mitchell RNVR, proudly proclaimed, 'Flying bombs we eat 'em,' accompanied by what appears to be a frothy mug of beer. The subtitle, 'per vino ad urinalum,' which translates to ‘from wine to urine,' hints at their cheeky mockery of the strict naval decorum that surrounded them.

Today, their graffiti remains a reminder of those who served, and of the lighter moments that existed even in the darkest of times.

Research by Judith Scott (*Team Leader*).

[Read more about Mervyn Payne and Alexander Mitchell here.](#)



# LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT



## Inspiring people with the history of the Old Royal Naval College is at the heart of what we do.

We are situated in a vibrant and diverse part of London, though one that has significant variations in outcomes between different communities. In response, we have developed a wide-ranging and accessible free learning programme for local schools, innovative outreach work for children in local hospitals, and many other community programmes.

Our free year-round learning programme provides opportunities for people to discover something new every day. Alongside a thriving primary and secondary school programme, we run regular tours and workshops for community groups, BSL and Audio-Described tours, and a lively and varied programme of free activities for families. In 2023-24 we welcomed thousands of children, families, and adult learners to our site for enriching and accessible experiences.

The team extended its reach through hospital outreach, partnering with Royal Marsden Hospital and our local Queen Elizabeth Hospital. These sessions, which included activities like mindful painting and creating Treasure Jars, provide therapeutic, educational experiences for children in hospital settings.

We continue to engage school children, including students from special educational needs schools like Drumbeat, with tailored workshops such as the Painted Ceiling Investigators programme. This allows students of all abilities to participate in learning about the site's history.

As part of Family Sundays, we welcomed families to our site for regular free programming activities such as early years messy play sessions, historical

and site-inspired craft activities, storytelling, and music making. Many continue to join us on our monthly First Sunday to get all the benefits of the Painted Hall for only £5.

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# 5,900

**Visitors on First Sundays accessing  
the Painted Hall for just £5**



Hugh Fox. © Old Royal Naval College.



Left: Chapel of St Peter & St Paul, 2024. Hugh Fox.  
© Old Royal Naval College.  
Above: Wren 300 concert, Chapel of St Peter & St Paul, 2023.  
© Old Royal Naval College.

# CHAPEL OF ST PETER AND ST PAUL

The Chapel of St Peter and St Paul is a neo-classical masterpiece, boasting one of the country’s finest 18th-century ecclesiastical interiors. It is Grade I Listed, and a Scheduled Monument. It is also open daily to everyone from 10am to 5pm as a place of meditation and prayer. As an active site of Christian worship, it hosts regular services, as well as recitals, concerts, and other special events.

In 2023 highlights included a festive service to mark the coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla, and a special concert of Baroque music in celebration of Wren’s legacy as part of the Wren 300 festival. Featuring compositions by Wren’s contemporaries Henry Purcell and G.F. Handel, the concert brought together the Chapel Choir and the Brandenburg Symphonia under the direction of Director of Music Ralph Allwood.

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# 170

People who received their British citizenship in a ceremony in the Chapel

# CULTURAL PROGRAMME



The Old Royal Naval College continues to strengthen its reputation as an extraordinary cultural destination. The Greenwich Foundation has reimagined the spaces here as a venue for arresting and exciting cultural events, including bold, large-scale art installations that transform visitors’ perceptions of these historic buildings. The use of the site as one of the most sought-after filming locations in the UK has also been critical to sustaining our charitable work.

To celebrate the **Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla**, over 400 Sea Cadets from Greenwich, Deptford, and Rotherhithe, alongside Army, RAF, Fire, Police Cadets, St John Ambulance, and the Scouts, came together for a grand parade in Lower Grand Square that comprised pageantry, marching bands, and drill performances.

**Greenwich Summer Sounds** was a summer music festival that featured well-known acts like Nile Rodgers & Chic, Tom Jones, Black Eyed Peas, and Kaiser Chiefs. With 20,000 attendees across five days, the festival introduced new audiences to the site, showcasing music entertainment against the striking backdrop of Wren’s iconic twin domes.



Right: Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla, Lower Grand Square, 2023. © Old Royal Naval College.  
Above: Greenwich Summer Sounds, Old Royal Naval College, 2023. © Joshua Atkins.



20,000

Concertgoers across five days  
for Greenwich Summer Sounds



Both: Chapel Dome, 2023. Photo: Annabel Moeller. © Old Royal Naval College.



# CELEBRATING WREN'S LEGACY

2023 marked 300 years since the death of Britain’s most famed architect, Sir Christopher Wren. Wren designed the twin domes and the other beautiful buildings that make up the Old Royal Naval College. **Wren 300** was a UK-wide festival celebrating Wren, his work, and his impact on Britain’s architecture. The Old Royal Naval College hosted a programme of events including tours and talks to celebrate Britain’s towering architectural figure. In May half term, gWRENwich: 300 Years of Wren explored architecture through play, design, and photography with workshops for teens and play sessions for young children.

This included the popular **Secret Dome Tours** – small, exclusive tours that provide an intimate, in-depth experience, inviting visitors to ascend the Chapel dome while offering unique insight into Wren’s architectural design and breathtaking views of London.

Led by an expert guide, the tours provide a comprehensive exploration of Wren’s architectural design, including the remarkable turret clock, alongside the fascinating stories woven into its history.

# COALESCENCE BY PAUL COCKSEDE

Following the success of Luke Jerram's *Gaia* and *Museum of the Moon*, we hosted Paul Cocksedge's *Coalescence*. The eight-week installation captivated visitors in the Painted Hall, demonstrating the Foundation's commitment to art programming. The thought-provoking installation is a six-metre diameter artwork made from over 2,500 pieces of coal with a combined weight of over half a tonne – the amount of coal consumed by a single 200W light bulb in a year. *Coalescence* was developed by the designer to question our relationship with, and dependence on, fossil fuels. The large-scale sculpture was suspended in the Painted Hall and illuminated to create a captivating sparkle and shadow play against the backdrop of painted walls and ceilings in the Painted Hall.



Both: *Coalescence*, Painted Hall, 2023. Photo: Hugh Fox. © Old Royal Naval College.



34,775

Visitors came to see *Coalescence*

# SNAPSHOT OF OUR CULTURAL PROGRAMME

Clockwise: Yoga in the Painted Hall, 2023.  
The Elves and the Magic Bear, Admiral's House, 2023.  
*What Legacy Now* exhibition by Hamish Macpherson, Ripley Tunnel.  
Dining Under *Coalescence*, 2024.  
Greenwich Dog Show, 2023. © Ed Simmons Photography.  
Guests at Briderton Late, 2023.  
Mother's Day in the Painted Hall, 2024.



# OUR SUPPORTERS



The Greenwich Foundation relies on and is grateful for the generosity of many individuals, our Patrons, trusts & foundations, public bodies, and the American Friends of the Old Royal Naval College in order to fulfil our charitable mission. This support enables us to protect this site for future generations and engage the public with the stunning art, heritage, and history of this place. We thank all our supporters who make this possible.

Finally, we wish to thank our team of dedicated volunteers who inspire many of our visitors each day.

MAJOR BENEFACTORS

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

SUPPORTERS

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Tony Hales CBE  
Jonathan and Marjorie Ouvry  
E F Shawyer CBE  
Chris and Tracey Springett

*And all those who prefer to remain anonymous.*

† Legacy donation



Old Royal Naval College, 2023. Photo: Hugh Fox. © Old Royal Naval College.



OLD ROYAL  
NAVAL COLLEGE  

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GREENWICH

To learn more about the Old Royal Naval College,  
visit [ornc.org](https://ornc.org) or follow us [@oldroyalnavalcollege](https://twitter.com/oldroyalnavalcollege)

# THANK YOU