



# Rotunda Trust

A vision for the Woolwich Rotunda

John Nash, 1814. Grade II\* listed. Heritage at Risk since 2007.

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Building Preservation Trust | Company 17115816 | V1.0

[rotundatrust.org.uk](http://rotundatrust.org.uk)



*Aerial photograph of 1975 showing the newly restored Rotunda, in its wider setting. © Historic England Archive, EAC303114.*

## The building

In 1814, John Nash built a 116-foot timber ballroom in ten weeks for the Prince Regent. Two thousand five hundred guests danced under it on the night of the Wellington Fete, 21 July 1814. It was meant to come down afterwards. It did not.

The structure was too good. In 1818 the entire thing was dismantled, carted across London, and re-erected on Woolwich Common. Nash enclosed it in a brick drum. It became the Royal Artillery Museum and served the Gunners for 181 years.

The museum closed in 2001. The building has stood empty for a quarter of a century. The roof leaks. Nine of the 24 original trusses are propped with scaffolding. Historic England lists its condition as “very bad”. It has been on the Heritage at Risk Register since 2007.

The Ministry of Defence is marketing the site for disposal. A charitable Building Preservation Trust can acquire it, secure heritage grant funding unavailable to commercial buyers, and bring the building back into public use.

# Our vision

The Rotunda was built as a place for people to gather. For 181 years it served as one of London's most distinctive public buildings. We want to return it to that role.

Rotunda Trust exists to repair and conserve this building and to ensure it is open, accessible, and in active use. The trust aspires to acquire the building freehold or hold a long-term (50+ years) full repairing lease. A commercial operating company is best placed to manage the venue under a binding lease covenant, paying a fixed percentage of revenue to the trust from day one. That money goes to one place: heritage conservation of the building.

Trust funds are spent on repairing the Rotunda. Not on programming. Not on the operating company. Not on any other purpose. The conservation of this Grade II\* structure is the trust's sole obligation and its reason for being.

The building's commercial use is what makes this possible. A well-run venue would generate the income that funds ongoing maintenance, removes reliance on periodic grant funding, and ensures the Rotunda has a permanent custodian.



*The Rotunda at Woolwich, 1820. Officers and cannon in the foreground. The canvas roof is visible. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain.*

# A venue for everyone

The Rotunda is 35 metres across. It is one of the largest and most atmospheric interior spaces in south-east London. The events programme would balance community access with commercial income, because both are necessary: community use gives the building its purpose, and commercial use pays for its repair.

## Community — *Subsidised or free*

Schools and youth groups. Heritage open days. Local charity fundraisers. Remembrance services. Community assemblies and public meetings. Military heritage visits for enthusiasts who have been locked out of this building for 25 years. The people of Woolwich should be able to walk into this building, see the 1814 timber roof above them, and feel that it belongs to them.

## Cultural — *Affordable hire*

Theatre, dance, spoken word, art installations, exhibitions. A 35-metre circular space under a conoid timber ceiling is unlike any other performance space in London. Promenade theatre, in-the-round staging, and gallery exhibitions all work naturally with the geometry.

## Music, weddings, and private hire — *Commercial rates*

Live bands, weddings, celebrations, private receptions. 500+ seated or 1,000+ standing. The building's scale and character, brick walls, timber roof, natural light, make it unlike any other venue in south-east London. Commercial hire at market rates generates the income that funds conservation.



*The colonnade interior. Cast iron columns, arched windows, artillery rope. FennecMedia. CC BY 4.0.*

# How it works

Rotunda Trust is a charitable Building Preservation Trust, incorporated in March 2026 as a company limited by guarantee (17115816). Its charitable objects are the conservation of the Woolwich Rotunda and the advancement of heritage education.

The trust would acquire a freehold or long-term (50+ years) full repairing lease. It would set the conservation priorities, govern the building's future, and ensure that the historic fabric is maintained to the standard its Grade II\* listing demands.

A commercial operating company would hold a long lease from the trust and run the venue. The lease would contain a binding covenant requiring the company to pay 10% of revenue or 30% of profit, whichever is greater, to the trust. This would not be a donation. It would be a contractual obligation running with the lease, binding on any future owner of the company.

This structure is what unlocks heritage grant funding. The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Historic England, and the Architectural Heritage Fund all require a not-for-profit applicant. A commercial company cannot apply. The trust can. Heritage repair grants typically fund 70–90% of eligible conservation costs.

If the company were to fail, the trust would retain its interest in the building. The building would not revert to the Ministry of Defence or to a developer. It would remain in charitable ownership, protected by its governing documents and by charity law.



*Iron strap connection at a principal rafter node. Mechanically fastened throughout. FennecMedia. CC BY 4.0.*



## Get involved

Rotunda Trust is looking for founding trustees with experience in heritage conservation, property, grant funding, military heritage, or community engagement in south-east London.

We are also looking for supporters who share our belief that this building should be repaired, reopened, and returned to the community it has served since 1820.

If you would like to know more, or if you can help, please get in touch.

[rotundatrust.org.uk](https://rotundatrust.org.uk)

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*Rotunda Trust Limited. Company number 17115816.*

*Registered in England and Wales. Charity Commission registration pending.*