

# 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 | V1.2
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. Between 1818 and 1820 it was dismantled, carted across London, and re-erected on Woolwich Common, enclosed 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 selling the Rotunda ahead of the rest of Woolwich Barracks. A charitable Building Preservation Trust can buy it, raise heritage grants no commercial buyer can, and bring it 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 this building and keep it open and in use. The trust would own it as a charity. An operator, chosen by an open process, would run the venue under a lease at an open market rent. The trust keeps control of the building, and the rent goes first to its repair.

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

Commercial use makes this possible. A well-run venue pays for maintenance, ends the reliance on grants, and gives the Rotunda 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 35.4 metres across. It is one of the largest interior spaces in south-east London. The programme would balance community use and commercial hire: 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 35.4-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 up to about 1,000 standing. Brick walls, a timber roof and natural light give it a character no other venue in south-east London has. Commercial hire at market rates pays for conservation.



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

# How it works

Rotunda Trust is a Building Preservation Trust with charitable objects, incorporated in March 2026 as a company limited by guarantee (17115816). Its objects are the conservation of the Rotunda and other heritage at risk, the reuse of historic buildings for arts, culture and heritage, and education in their history and in military and maritime history and heritage.

The trust would hold the building in charitable ownership. It would set the conservation priorities, govern the building's future, and carry out the heritage repair of the structure, roof and historic fabric to the standard its Grade II* listing demands.

An operator would lease the venue and run it, at an open market rent set by independent valuation. The operator pays for its own fit-out and running costs. Any licensing of the Rotunda's name, image or content pays a royalty to the trust. Both obligations bind any future operator.

This structure makes heritage grants possible. 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 an operator fails, the building stays with the trust. It cannot revert to the Ministry of Defence or pass to a developer. Its governing documents and charity law protect it.



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



# Get involved

Rotunda Trust is looking for further trustees, and a treasurer, 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.

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*Rotunda Trust Limited. Company number 17115816.*
*Registered in England and Wales. Charity Commission registration pending.*

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