



14 August 2024

SOANE STABLE YARD AT ROYAL HOSPITAL CHELSEA OPENS TO THE PUBLIC THIS AUTUMN FOLLOWING A MAJOR REFURBISHMENT

The Soane Stable Yard opens to the public on Tuesday 1 October, following a major £12.2 million refurbishment project. This is the first time since the Royal Hospital Chelsea opened in 1692 that this unique historic site will be accessible to the public seven days a week. This three-year project has been made possible thanks to a £3.2 million grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, and support from other benefactors and charitable trusts.

The Soane Stable Yard includes the Chelsea Pensioners' Museum, a free, permanent, interactive display on the rich history of the Royal Hospital and the lives of Chelsea Pensioners through the centuries; a cafe, gift shop, Post Office, and activity room. Visitors who want to experience other parts of the site will be able to book tours, led by one of the Chelsea Pensioners. Tickets for the Museum and tours from 1 October can be booked online at: chelsea-pensioners.co.uk/museum from Monday 2 September. Special previews and tours are also available as part of the Chelsea History Festival from 25–29 September and tickets can be booked online at chelseaheritagequarter.co.uk

A key part of the Soane Stable Yard is the launch of a heritage, health and wellbeing activity programme for local communities including people living with dementia and military veterans. Building on the Royal Hospital's heritage and expert care experience, the programme will engage audiences with the history of the site by uniting visitor, volunteering and community outreach services for the first time in the Soane Stable Yard. These events will take place in the new activity room and the new Veterans Outreach centre where military veterans can meet Chelsea Pensioners, access support where needed and participate in a range of activities to help reduce social isolation.

The Soane Stable Yard, a Grade II* listed building, was designed and built by eminent architect, Sir John Soane in 1814–17, when he was the Clerk of Works at the Royal Hospital from 1807 until his death in 1837. Lauded by architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner as a ‘miracle of abstract design’, the Soane Stable Yard stands on the site of the original stables designed by Sir Christopher Wren.

David Richmond CBE, CEO of Royal Hospital Chelsea, said: “We are excited to open the Soane Stable Yard this autumn, thanks to the significant grant we’ve received from The National Lottery Heritage Fund as well as other supporters. Following this major transformation, we will be able to welcome visitors to experience our extraordinary history and engage with many more local communities, including offering comradeship and support to non-resident military veterans. This project will also help us to generate income so we can continue to care for the Chelsea Pensioners who live here, as well as maintain the site for generations to come.”

Stuart McLeod, Director of England – London & South at The National Lottery Heritage Fund, said: “We are delighted to have supported the restoration of this previously hidden architectural gem, and the activity programme that will enable many more people to appreciate the richness of over 300 years of Chelsea Pensioner history. Heritage has an essential role to play in making our communities better places to live. Through funding projects such as this, we can help to make heritage more accessible to a wider range of people and this is one of our key priorities.”

The Chelsea Pensioners’ Museum includes stories of the Pensioners past and present through film and photography, and interactive displays showing how they live and have lived through the centuries. Artefacts from the Royal Hospital’s collection include an 18th-century table, a pipe lighter and pewter table service. These items were all once used in the Grade I listed Great Hall, the dining hall designed by Sir Christopher Wren, where Pensioners still dine today. There will also be examples of Pensioner uniforms, including the iconic Scarlet coat. Guided tours of the site, led by Chelsea Pensioners, which include the Great Hall and the Wren Chapel, will start and end at the Soane Stable Yard.

During the restoration, the conservation architects Peregrine Bryant Architects, discovered that Soane reclaimed many of Wren’s original materials, and this sustainable approach to the project has continued as much as possible. The Hospital has focused on restoring many of the architectural features and much of the original fabric of Sir John Soane’s design, including the wooden ceiling structures. The original cobbles have been re-laid in the courtyard, and to help make the site accessible, flatter ones have also been introduced in some areas. The distinctive chimneys, which were removed after they were damaged in the

Second World War have been recreated. To ensure the building's successful conversion from a working stable yard to a welcoming cultural venue, the coach house doors have been replaced by elegant bronze framed windows creating an attractive light-filled space in the cafe.

The new cafe will be run by Heidi Bakery and will serve handmade pastries, cakes, savouries and salads – complemented by speciality coffee and artisan teas. The cafe has tables and seating inside and in the beautiful external courtyard, adding a fantastic, new space to the Chelsea food and coffee scene. The cafe, courtyard and other parts of the Soane Stable Yard will be available to hire for private events. The new shop will sell a range of gifts exclusive to the Royal Hospital Chelsea and includes the Post Office, relocated from its current site on East Road.

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Notes to Editors

Press Contact

For further information and images please contact: media@chelsea-pensioners.org.uk

Royal Hospital Chelsea

The Royal Hospital Chelsea is the home of the iconic veterans of the British Army, the Chelsea Pensioners. We offer excellent accommodation, comradeship and the highest standards of care in recognition of their loyal service to the nation. Any former soldier of the British Army over the age of 66, who is facing spending their advanced years alone, can apply for residence as a Chelsea Pensioner. Some 300 army veterans live at the Royal Hospital today, including those who have served in World War II, Korea, the Falkland Islands, Cyprus, Northern Ireland, and the more recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Others may not have served in campaigns, but all understand what it means to be a soldier and the sacrifice that it entails. The Royal Hospital is a Grade I and II* listed site, a beautiful architectural legacy left to us by Charles II and Sir Christopher Wren. Maintenance of the site continues today with ongoing restoration work to ensure that this legacy lives on into the future.

The Royal Hospital Chelsea depends on financial support from the public to care for our unique community of British Army veterans. All donations help to provide the Chelsea Pensioners with the best care and quality of life and protects the Royal Hospital's architectural heritage and grounds for future generations.

chelsea-pensioners.co.uk

The National Lottery Heritage Fund

As the largest dedicated funder of the UK's heritage, The National Lottery Heritage Fund's vision is for heritage to be valued, cared for and sustained for everyone, now and in the future as set out in our strategic plan, [Heritage 2033](#).

Over the next ten years, we aim to invest £3.6 billion raised for good causes by National Lottery players to bring about benefits for people, places and the natural environment.

We help protect, transform and share the things from the past that people care about, from popular museums and historic places, our natural environment and fragile species, to the languages and cultural traditions that celebrate who we are.

We are passionate about heritage and committed to driving innovation and collaboration to make a positive difference to people's lives today, while leaving a lasting legacy for future generations to enjoy. heritagefund.org.uk

Follow @HeritageFundUK on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)

Lead Project Consultants

Conservation architect: Peregrine Bryant Architects

Building conservation: Messenger BCR

Exhibition design and build: Ima-makers

The Chelsea Pensioners' Museum

From 1 October, the Museum is open Tuesdays to Sundays from 9am to 5pm, last admissions 4.30pm. Closed on Mondays.

Entry is free and booking in advance is strongly recommended.

Tickets are available to book at chelsea-pensioners.co.uk/museum from Monday 2 September

Tours of the site by Chelsea Pensioners

Tours take place throughout the year. Please visit the website for dates and times.

From 1 October, the tour price is £25.

Tickets must be booked in advance.

Tickets are available to book at chelsea-pensioners.co.uk/tours from Monday 2 September

Shop and Post Office

The shop and Post Office will be open from Tuesday 3 September.

The shop will be closed on Saturday 7, Sunday 8, Saturday 21 and Sunday 22 September.

Opening hours for the shop: 9am to 5pm 7 days a week

Opening hours for the Post Office: 9am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday

Visit our online shop at shop.chelsea-pensioners.co.uk/collections

Heidi Bakery Cafe

Opening hours from 25 September: 8am to 5pm Monday–Saturday and 9am to 5pm

Sunday heidibakery.co.uk

Veterans Outreach

From Thursday 19 September, there will be a weekly Veterans' Drop-In facility, open from 10am to 12.30pm and 2pm to 4.30pm. At least once a month the Drop-In event will feature a themed activity, and at other times, delivery partners such as the Armed Forces charity SSAFA will be available to offer advice. Information about the events will be published on the Royal Hospital Chelsea website.

Activity Programme

There will be a regular programme of visitor events advertised on the website.

Private hire

The Soane Stable Yard including the cafe space is available as an events space for private and corporate hire as well as a filming location. For more information, please visit: chelsea-pensioners.co.uk/rhc_venuehire or email the events team at: RHCEvents@chelsea-pensioners.org.uk

Volunteer opportunities

There are a variety of volunteer opportunities at the Royal Hospital Chelsea. For more information, please visit: chelsea-pensioners.co.uk/volunteer

Chelsea Heritage Quarter

The Chelsea Heritage Quarter is London's new heritage destination and brings together four remarkable institutions – the Royal Hospital Chelsea, Chelsea Physic Garden, National Army Museum and Cadogan – to tell a unique story of London and Britain from 1660 to the present day. The partners of the Chelsea Heritage Quarter co-programme activities and events for visitors throughout the year and contribute to a Chelsea that is creative, vibrant and enjoyable for all. The Chelsea History Festival is the flagship annual programme of the Chelsea Heritage Quarter each September.

This year's festival takes place from 25 to 29 September and includes special previews of the Soane Stable Yard. Tickets are available to book at chelseaheritagequarter.co.uk