

Institute of Physics

LONDON AND SOUTH EASTERN BRANCH REMS SECTION

Visit to Armoury House (Finsbury Barracks) Thursday 13th March 2003

This visit has been organised by Robert Thorne

Armoury House is the home of the Honourable Artillery Company and a magnificent collection of military memorabilia. Built to replace a smaller 17th century Armoury it was designed by Thomas Stribbs, a Company member, and was completed in 1735 at a cost of £1690, including the furniture. It is an oasis located in the heart of the City of London with 5.5 acres of Lawns surrounded by high-rise buildings. Although much of the decoration of the impressive interior date from the construction period some alterations to the layout have been effected. The original main interior on the ground floor consisted of the Great Room, used for drill, and is now split into ground and upper floor components. The former is divided into an entrance hall and two rooms, the Queen's Room and the Museum. The latter is the sumptuous panelled Long Room, incorporating a music gallery installed in 1787 and running the length of the original 1735 building; it is used for Company dinners and other social gatherings. Dating from the construction of the building the Court Room has been the hub of the Company's activities, accommodating the Court of Assistants, the governing body. Within the West Wing, added in 1828, the Drum Room was originally used to display the company's collection of regimental drums. It is now a recreational area and retains its name because a bass drum has been adapted to serve as a coffee table. Attached to the rear is the Albert Room, a Victorian drill hall completed in 1842. The Company's medal collection is displayed on the walls of the Medal Room.

The site has hosted a diverse range of events. The Company's records show that club cricket was played in the grounds as far back as 1725, a date 15 years earlier than the rival claim of the Hampshire Hambledon Club. Amongst the early games it is recorded that in 1730 London beat Surrey by six 'notches' with a prize of 20 guineas. In 1784 Vincenzo Lunardi launched the first British balloon flight from the grounds. Currently the site's facilities are available for a wide spectrum of events, catering for very modest numbers to some 3000 being accommodated in an enormous marquee.

The Honourable Artillery Company is the oldest regiment in the British Army and was established as a charity in 1537 by charter granted by Henry VIII from an existing Guild of Saint George. The courtesy prefix of 'Honourable' was first used in 1685 and officially confirmed by Queen Victoria in 1860.

Over the years, then HAC has been subjected to a number of reorganisations and has served with distinction in many areas. It now forms part of the Territorial Army with a current role of providing surveillance and target acquisition patrols for the NATO Allied Rapid Reaction Corps; this involves seeking out targets and relaying vital information to direct strike weaponry.

The company values and sustains a close working relationship with the City of London. A body of Pikemen and Musketeers provide the Lord Mayor's Bodyguard in the City and these with other units play an important role in the Lord Mayor's Show. On state occasions the Regiment fires gun salutes at the Tower and provides Guards of Honour for the state visits at Guildhall.

It is also a club with a membership of 2500 offering a wide variety of sports and social activities. On completing their first stage of training new recruits receive automatic membership.

Armoury House is on the West side of City Road. The nearest tube stations are Old Street and Moorgate.

The programme is:

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| 14.00 to 14.30 | Report to Gate House and follow instructions to an assembly point. |
| 14.30 to 16.30 | Talk on Amoury House and HAC incorporating a site tour by Peter Patrick |
| 16.30 to 17.00 | Tea or Coffee and biscuits |

The total cost per person is £9. The number for the visit is limited to 20 (min 12).