

Institute of Physics

LONDON AND SOUTH EASTERN BRANCH REMS SECTION Tour of the Royal Hospital Chelsea Tuesday 1 April 2008

This visit has been arranged by Robert Thorne

Until the 17th century, the state made no provision for old and injured soldiers. In general, care for the poor and sick was provided by the religious foundations. These provisions ended following the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536.

During the reign of Elizabeth I, parish funded support was introduced and this led to an Act of Parliament, which made state funded aid available for the relief of soldiers and sailors.

The restoration of Charles II in 1660, the disbandment of the Parliamentary Army and the return of the Royalist forces identified flaws in the support given to the welfare of the military. Charles took up this challenge and issued a Royal Warrant authorising the building of the Royal Hospital. Its location was chosen to be adjacent to the River Thames in the pastoral setting of Chelsea on the site of the former 'Chelsey College', a theological college founded by James I in 1610. Sir Christopher Wren was commissioned to design and erect the buildings. Work was started in 1682 and completed in 1692.

The boundaries have varied over the years and currently the Royal Site covers a total of 66 acres. There is still land outside the perimeter owned by the hospital.

Parts of the hospital were damaged, with some loss of life, by enemy bombing in 1918. Reconstruction work was carried out but further damage was caused by air raids during the World War II, thus necessitating further rebuilding work, which had to be consistent with the original features.

There are both 'IN' and 'OUT' Pensioners. The former membership, currently about 400, is limited to non-commissioned service personnel without partner commitments and they live within the hospital. The latter live out but can make use of the services provided. Although membership is currently limited to the male sex, provision is being made to allow the admission of females.

The management of the Hospital has been vested, from its earliest days, in a board of Commissioners appointed directly by the Crown, some by virtue of their occupying certain posts in the Government and crown services, others as individuals. After many earlier difficulties in financing the hospital, it has since 1847 been supported by Parliamentary votes supplemented by income derived from its own property and bequests.

In addition, the 'IN's surrender their service pensions to the hospital and are allowed to keep their state pensions for pocket money. Each resident member is allowed a single room 9' X 9'; sanitary arrangements are at present unsatisfactory; the WCs and bathrooms are at the end of corridors. Currently there is an upgrading programme, which will provide en-suite facilities and improvements in access arrangements for 'IN' Pensioners with disabilities. As part of this programme, an IT suite has already been opened.

The REMS tour, lasting about 2½ hours will be taken by an experienced 'IN' guide. A request has been made for Paddy, an Irish character full of blarney, to provide the service to us. The tour will include the Great Hall, the Chapel (Lady Thatcher is a regular member of the congregation), the museum, the statue of Charles II, a 9' X 9' 'IN' pensioners cubicle, the extensive grounds which since 1913 have been the venue of the world famous Chelsea Flower Show.

Members may be interested, either before or after the tour, to visit the National Army Museum, located immediately next door to the Chelsea Gate of the Hospital. Opening time is 10am to 5pm.

The cost of the tour is £4 per person with numbers limited to 25.

Programme

- 12.30 - 13.30 Meet in the restaurant of the National Army Museum (Chelsea Gate)
- 13.30 - 16.00 Tour of the Chelsea Hospital