



Royal Borough of Greenwich

Ranger's House - the Wernher Collection



The History of Rangers House



The House was built in 1699 by Captain Francis Hosier. Greenwich was a popular area for senior naval figures to build their homes. Greenwich, Deptford and Woolwich being, of course, the centre for maritime activity in the 17th Century, they would have been very familiar with the area. For example James Wolfe's parents lived in the adjacent property.

The escarpment running east to west across Greenwich Park, meant that many houses adjacent to the park had an elevated position, enabling scrutiny of the river from their roofs, which in the days before electronic communications, was an important consideration.

The House was built as a red brick symmetrical Queen Anne property with the façade surrounding the entrance in Portland stone. The key stone over the front door is a stone

mask of Neptune, probably in remembrance of the ship he first served on as a nineteen year old lieutenant in 1692. The villa has a flat roof, surrounded by a stone balustrade. Many of the smaller rooms inside the house retain their original panelling and there is a large entrance hall with a black and white marble chequered floor.

When the house came into the ownership of Philip Stanhope, 4th Earl of Chesterfield (1748-1773), he built a large single storey eastern wing in London stock brick, to house his extensive art collection. This is now called the Chesterfield Gallery. At this period the House became known as Chesterfield House.

During Richard Hulse's period of tenure (1783-1805), he added the western or left hand wing to the front, returning symmetry to the House. This was also built in London stock brick.

Royal Connection

In 1815 the House became a 'Grace and Favour' residence, with Princess Sophia Matilda moving into the House, as the first resident Ranger of Greenwich Park. This was a sinecure in the gift of the King or Queen and the House became known as The Ranger's House. During this period the gallery was divided into three rooms, and a singularly unattractive red brick portico was built to link the front door to Chesterfield Walk. Thankfully this has now been removed. In those days ladies shoes were, of course, far less robust, so perhaps one can be sympathetic.

Twentieth century to the present day

In 1896 the last Ranger left and in 1902 the lease was sold to the London County Council. At the nadir of its existence, the present pink drawing room was the tea room for Greenwich Park and there were also changing rooms and toilet facilities for activities on Blackheath. There are some interesting photographs on display at the House of the drawing room as a self service café.

The House was Requisitioned during the Second World War but between 1959 and 1960 it was restored architecturally after which it was used for local history exhibitions, organised by the Blackheath Society, with the LCC architects' offices upstairs.

In 1974 the Ranger's House re-opened as a gallery for the Suffolk Collection. The House and collection passed into the hands of English Heritage in 1986.

The whole house was completely refurbished in the late 1990s, in order to display 'The Wernher Collection', with some rooms re-decorated to resemble rooms at Bath House, where the collection had originally been displayed.

The Wernher Collection



Sir Julius Wernher, the great diamond Rand-Lord, made his magnificent collection in little more than 25 years, almost all of it after settling in London where he married "Birdie" in 1888. Their home in Porchester Terrace was soon too small for the purpose of display so the couple moved to Bath House in Piccadilly. This was palatial, perfect for showing almost 700 acquisitions from tiny pieces of exquisite jewellery and huge ecclesiastical carvings to a magnificent full length portrait by Reynolds. When the collection came to Ranger's House the curator set out two of the rooms to mirror, as far as possible, the Crimson drawing room, scene of fashionable soirees and the Red Room to which Julius would repair with his friends to enjoy the latest treasures.

Visitors to Ranger's House are greeted first by magnificent portraits of Sir Julius and Lady Wernher, the latter's by John Singer Sargent.

Upstairs there is first a room dedicated to Wernher's life in Africa where he began making his fortune. In it is a piece of French furniture - a gift from Jules Porges who gave it to Wernher in Kimberley. This is surely a clue as to how the collection began! When one enters the Red Room it is hard to know where to look first. Examples of everything in the collection are there - Italian and Flemish paintings, Maiolica, Limoges enamel, ivories, Gothic and Northern European carving, The list is endless.

The small room containing jewellery is a treasure in itself. From a tiny Greek gold earring to the bonnet brooches worn by men and women in the 16th century, the viewer marvels at the intricacy of the works. There is a thumb-nail sized ivory scull which opens up to show a perfectly carved, three dimensional baptism of Christ

A whole room is dedicated to devotional items - carved caskets, intricately worked ivory rosary beads etc.

Across the landing is a room that visitors all love. Here are stunning examples of the Limoges workers' art. They have used the illustrations of Greek and Roman mythology as well as religious subjects, now

available from the printing presses to decorate their work. A case of intricate, decorative pieces of silver etc. including the much loved owl with a coconut body is a great favourite with visitors. Here too is the work of the French polymath Palisay. His huge pottery dish carved with creatures from the rivers is a perfect example of what Wernher and his friend Lord Carmichael described as the "splendidly ugly". The bronzes are generally believed to be the greatest collection in the world outside the major museums.

In every room there are fine paintings.

The rooms downstairs give a flavour of the London life of the Wernhers. We see Sevres and Meissen on the French furniture, fine clocks everywhere. This is not the usual stately home. The family never actually lived here. There are few family portraits but there are splendid paintings by great Renaissance, 18th and 19th century artists. Filippino Lippi, Memling, Metsu and Reynolds are all to be seen.

Finally, Lord Chesterfield's splendid gallery has been transformed to give a picture of life at Bath House and at Luton Hoo where some of the collection moved in later years. Here there are wonderful Emperor of China, Beauvais tapestries, still bright and full of fun to look at despite being made in the 17th Century.

There is something for everyone to enjoy in The Wernher Collection.



Visiting the Ranger's House

House Open

1st April to 26th September 2012

Sun - Wed. Entry by guided tours only

11.30 and 14.00

Tour last about 1.5 hours

The property may close at short notice, please ring in advance for details on 020 8294 2548

Thursdays by arrangement (pre-booked groups)

(please ring 020 8853 0035 or 020 8294 2548)

Entry fees 2012:

Adults: £6.30 Concessions: £5.70 Child: £3.80

Friends of Ranger's House: FREE

1 Oct-31 Mar. Available for group tours-please call for details- see above

Closed Fridays and Saturdays

For weddings and functions

NEW GLITZ AND GLAMOUR PACKAGE FOR LONDON GROUPS

New Tour and Lunch Day Package available at top Greenwich historic sites Eltham Palace and Ranger's House

Groups can now enjoy a combined day visit to two top London attractions - stunning Art Deco mansion Eltham Palace & Gardens and nearby Ranger's House, home to the glittering Wernher Collection amassed by diamond magnate Sir Julius Wernher.

The full day itinerary begins with a 90 minute guided tour around Eltham Palace. Oozing glamour and the allure of the Art Deco period, highlights of the tour include the spectacular domed entrance hall, luxurious gold mosaic-tiled bathroom of 1930s owner Virginia Courtauld and stunning pink, black and silver dining room - contrasted by the Great Hall of Medieval Eltham Palace which was once the childhood home of King Henry VIII and that is separated from the Art Deco house by just a sliding door.

After the tour group members have an hour to explore the 19 acres of beautiful and peaceful gardens - featuring a rock garden sloping down to the water-filled moat, a medieval bridge, herbaceous borders, a sunken rose garden and offering stunning views over London.

The package also includes a quality buffet lunch served on arrival at Ranger's House - located conveniently near Greenwich Coach Park where groups can leave their coach - with a choice of cold meat or cheese platters, with a variety of salads, fruit, cake and tea or coffee with the optional extra of white wine by arrangement.

Lunch is followed by a 90 minute tour around the house which stands on the edge of Greenwich Park, taking in the 700 works of art on display including early religious paintings and Dutch Old Masters, minute carved Gothic ivories, fine Renaissance bronzes and silver treasures. Groups then have a further half an hour to take a last look around before departure.

Groups may want to step over the Meridian Line before heading home in their own coach.

Admission & Group Sizes: Packages cost just £29.00 per person and £14.00 for English Heritage members and tour leader which includes entry fees and guided tours of both sites and lunch at Ranger's House. Minimum group size 11; maximum group size 50. Package price does not include transport.

Availability: Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 1 March 2011 until the last week of December 2011.

Location: Eltham Palace & Gardens Court Yard, off Court Road, Eltham SE9 5QE. Ranger's House, Chesterfield Walk, Blackheath, London, SE10 8QX. Ranger's House is a 15-minute drive from Eltham Palace - map plus directions will be provided.

Coach Parking and Transport: Transport between the sites is not included. Eltham Palace has parking for one coach on site. Ranger's House has no coach parking facilities but drivers can drop clients at Ranger's House, return to Eltham Palace to park and pick up the group at the end of their visit.

For more information call 020 8294 2548 or email greenwich@english-heritage.org.uk

RANGER'S HOUSE - THE WERNHER COLLECTION, LONDON

We all wonder what we would buy if we had a million pounds or more to spend.

See what Sir Julius Wernher, self-made millionaire with a passion for collecting, chose to splash out on.

Learn about this impressive and unusual collection with the state-of-the-art audio tour.



Ranger's House - The Wernher Collection



Ranger's House is a Georgian villa gracing the top of Greenwich Park. Hidden inside is a sumptuous collection of silver, porcelain, paintings, ivories and a glittering spectacle of fine jewels.

Admission: Adult £6.50. Child £3.90

Opening times vary. Please call or visit the website for details.

