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St George's Chapel, Woolwich – a beautiful ruin

Diana Beattie, FSA, Director, [Heritage of London Trust](#), describes this largely undiscovered, ruined but still beautiful building and the plans to bring it back into use.



St George's Chapel Woolwich

As you drive round the South Circular (here called Grand Depot Road) down towards the Woolwich Ferry your eyes are drawn inevitably to the left – to the extraordinary façade of [Woolwich Barracks](#), the longest and most splendid Georgian building in the world. Constructed between 1774 and 1803 the barracks were until very recently the home of the Royal Artillery.



Woolwich barracks

But over on the right side of the road, tucked away among the trees is another gem that most people never see – the ruins of [St George's Chapel](#), the Garrison Church of the Royal Artillery. The Chapel was hit by a V1 flying bomb in 1944, the interior was burned out and the roof collapsed and apart from a temporary roof fitted back in the 1970s it has been left like that ever since.

Recent research by English Heritage has revealed that the mosaics were added in 1903 by Messrs Burke & Co of Newman Street in London – they include a wonderful peacock, the symbol of the Resurrection, and a phoenix, the symbol of immortality.

In March this year the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment will be moving into the refurbished Woolwich Barracks and the enormous parade ground will once more echo to the sound of Sergeant Majors and the stamp of boots, but this will do nothing for St George's.



peacock mosaic, St George's chapel

However in 2012 the Shooting Olympics are coming to Woolwich and will be held on the Common next to the Barracks and so very close to St George's. The Heritage of London Trust is in discussion with Defence Estates with the aim of replacing the old temporary roof – which blew off a couple of years ago – and restoring the damaged mosaics of what remains a major War Memorial. A local committee is being formed to take over the management of the site and to encourage its use for concerts and other events.

We aim to secure the future of this important record of our history and to bring it back into more active community use.

If you would like to know more about the plans to rescue this important national war memorial, please get in touch with the [Heritage of London Trust](http://www.heritageoflondon.com) at info@heritageoflondon.com or at their office at 34 Grosvenor Gardens, London, SW1W 0DH.