Reimagining the heartland of the Order of St John
Our history

St John’s Gate is the historic home of our Order of St John. The roots of our humanitarian work across the world have their foundations in St John’s Clerkenwell Estate.

The Priory in London’s Clerkenwell was established as the English headquarters of the Order in the 1140s. Under the reign of King Henry VIII, the Order in England was dissolved and all it’s lands and wealth were seized by the Crown. The Order was restored briefly by Henry’s Catholic daughter, Queen Mary, who granted it a Royal Charter. However, on the accession of her Protestant sister, Queen Elizabeth I, the Order in England was dissolved for good.

The buildings in Clerkenwell were put to different uses in the years that followed. During the sixteenth century, they were used as the offices of the Master of the Revels. Thirty of Shakespeare’s plays were licensed here.
In the eighteenth century, St John’s Gate was briefly used as a coffee house, run by Richard Hogarth, father of the artist William Hogarth. Dr. Samuel Johnson was given his first job in London at St John’s Gate, writing reports for The Gentleman’s Magazine. At the end of the eighteenth century, the Gate was used as a pub, The Old Jerusalem Tavern, where artists and writers, including Charles Dickens, used to meet.

The modern Order of St John in England was granted a Royal Charter by Queen Victoria in 1888. Humanitarian in its aims and purpose, the modern Order recognised the need for public first aid and ambulance transport services, as no such system existed in newly industrialised England.

Today St John’s Gate is the guardian of the Order’s heritage; an historic estate with a rich history committed to caring for our communities, nestled next to the City of London, one of the UK’s busiest and most influential districts.
The need

St John’s Gate underwent significant work at the end of the 19th Century when it came back under the ownership of the Order thanks to Sir Edmund Lechmere in the 1870s. This project was instrumental and now is the time to further evolve St John’s Gate to make it fit for purpose for today.

We know that people still simply do not know that St John’s Gate exists nor of it’s rich history. Furthermore, there are vital works required to ensure that our buildings are fit for purpose for the future, such as ensuring disability access to our buildings, the provision of exemplary conditions for our collections and raising our profile in the community, nationally and internationally.

Important in this context is that the Museum of London, an attraction with approximately over 700,000 visitors annually, is undergoing a seismic move in the coming years to a new site in Smithfield a few minutes’ walk from our Museum.

As such, this poses an opportunity for St John to capitalise upon the increased frequency of visitors in the area whilst it also poses a risk that the new positioning of the Museum of London could eclipse our presence in the area if we are not able to leverage our local impact.

The current reality of the St John’s Gate estate, which encompasses our historic buildings and The Order Museum, is that there is more that can and must be done both to make our Priory estate fit for purpose whilst improving the role and engagement that we have within our community.
Our vision

At St John’s Gate we are very proud of our wonderful Museum and the history steeped in the buildings and roads around us.

However, to evolve and keep apace in a competitive market, we must increase our visibility and community impact as well as position ourselves as a unique and ‘must-see’ attraction by delivering an exceptional experience to visitors.

Our vision includes such things as:

• making our historic buildings more accessible for wheelchair users

• becoming a world class centre for historical collections which are fully digitised

• crucial conservation of key buildings and artefacts

• increasing our presence in the local community so that we are no longer a ‘hidden gem’ but a major player of London’s attractions.
Photograph of St John's Gate c. 1850.
The foundations for the future

We are at the beginning of the journey to realise our ambition and get work in motion. Our estimation is that this project will be a multi-million pound venture over approximately 5 years and as such it is imperative that our plans are both ambitious and detailed.

However, we cannot do this alone and the success and scale of the project relies upon the support and enthusiasm of donors to fund this work.

Currently dedicated work is beginning to create a comprehensive plan and multi-year timeline in order to realise the overarching ambition for the future of the Priory of England and its buildings.

2020 will be a pivotal year.
To reimagine the future of the St John’s Gate, we are seeking $146,000 to enable crucial work in 2020 including the following:

- **Specialist consultation** on the historic buildings in order to produce a comprehensive development plan for a multi-million pound, multi year transformational project

- **Audience Development.** Consultation to evaluate and advise on how a project of this scale will have a positive impact on the local community and visitors and to instruct on how we shape the project in order to broaden our audiences and strengthen access to our collections and historical relevance

- **Architects** to develop the findings from the specialist consultation alongside the conservation management plan, soon to be completed this year, into detailed plans

- **Quantity Surveyor** to ensure realistic costs as plans develop

- **Design vision consultation** with a nationwide remit to develop our exhibition across more of our historic buildings and to enable greater public access to collections.
Recent survey demonstrating significance and age of our historic estate
It would be a pleasure to discuss our ambitions with you in more detail.
If you are interested to find out how you can support, please contact Charlotte on charlotte.reichwald@sja.org.uk / +44 207 7324 4171