

Royal Artillery Memorial Wall, Larkhill

Challenge:

As a contemporary, functioning military memorial, accessible to military personnel and the wider public and embodying very significant regimental and, more generally, military heritage, the project was required to meet a variety of complex design challenges, both with respect to the architectural vernacular of both regimental churches, its setting and to its own implicit architectural-historical sub-text.

Solution:

Located beyond the military perimeter at the entrance to the Larkhill Camp, Salisbury Plain, the Royal Artillery Tercentenary Chapel and Cloister sits beyond the southern elevation of the church of St. Alban the Martyr, as a monumental commission in commemoration of the 300th anniversary of the creation of the Royal Artillery. The project by John Simpson Architects was led by the consecration of the red-brick Grade II-listed church as the Regimental Church for the Royal Artillery in 2011. Designed by William Ross and itself a military commission completed in 1937, the church of St. Alban adopted the role formerly held by the mid-19th century church of St. George within the original regimental base at Woolwich, destroyed during an air raid in 1944, and has incorporated many of the same design principles. The use of brick has proved fundamental to the successful completion of the build. The cloister wall has been consciously designed to evoke the surviving perimeter wall of St. George's at Woolwich and the southern elevation of St. Alban's. Its southern elevation utilises a trio of our bricks – Ibstock Brick Sandfaced Berkshire Orange, Buff Southwark Multi Stock and Staffordshire Blue Brindle Dragface, in a Flemish bond, separated at mid-height by a portland stone plinth, carried around the chapel and referenced throughout in the use of a recessed ivory mortar. The monumental blocking of red over blue, both apt and evocative, reflects the colours of the regimental tactical recognition flash after the original Woolwich design by T.H.Wyatt, while the projecting piers, incorporating plinth courses of buff brick, divide the wall into seven equal bays in explicit reference to the elevations of both regimental churches. Across the northern elevation of the wall, framed below by a foundation of Staffordshire Blue Brindle and above by a decorative double course of offset headers in alternating hues and cutstone capping elements, are a series of metal and stone plaques; a selection from more than 100 salvaged from St. George's following its destruction and only recently rediscovered. Together they record the births and deaths of members of the Royal Artillery over more than 300 years, with Ibstock Brick's sandfaced Berkshire Orange specially selected in order to provide a backdrop matching their original setting at Woolwich. Brickwork textures and hues are carried through onto the chapel itself, where additional interest is introduced by the presence of bullseye and segmental archwork at voids within both north and south elevations. At the west, a striking series of three semi-circular arches above stone columns manipulate space and perspective from the threshold through the depth of the structure. Of varying size and repeating the polychromy of regimental colours within larger and smaller brickwork courses, they serve at once to draw focus toward a central memorial to regimental recipients of the Victoria Cross, set against a panel of sandfaced Berkshire orange, and echoing the arrangement above the altar within St. Alban's itself. The choice of our bricks has enabled the client to successfully realise a space which effortlessly balances the weight of some 300 years of regimental history with modern architectural design and functionality.

Architect: John Simpson Architects

Brick:



Ibstock
At the heart of building

CASE STUDY

Berkshire Orange, Southwark Multi and Staffordshire Blue Brindle Dragface