

23rd June 2018

Royal Garrison Church of All Saints

Rev. Steve Franklin welcomed a small group of members to what is in fact the Army's cathedral church for a fascinating tour followed by tea and cakes.

He began by explaining that the church could only come into being upon the death of the Duke of Wellington, who had refused to allow large gatherings of soldiers. However, as the Army camp grew, it soon became clear that a church was needed and the first, erected in 1856, was an iron church similar to St Barbara's Church in Deepcut.



With the development of Wellington Lines, work commenced on the church we see today, designed by the architect Mr Hardwicke of London, in the then fashionable neogothic style based on architecture of the 13th and 14th centuries. The church was consecrated by the Bishop of Winchester in 1863, and when King George V visited in 1923, it gained its 'Royal' designation.

Our tour began with an examination of the Great East Window, dedicated to those soldiers of the Hampshire Regiment who fell during the Indian Mutiny. The central panel depicts the Resurrection, with Christ carrying a flag, symbolising His victory over death. The white cross on a red ground is a deliberate reversal of the cross of St George to avoid confusion with the national flag. The two panels to the left depict Joshua, Moses' successor, who led the armies of Israel to victory at the Battle of Jericho, while those on the right show Gideon, victor over the Midianites.

Beneath the Great East Window is the altar, covered at the time of our visit with a green cloth, one of four donated to the church that are changed with the seasons. To the rear of the altar is a painting of St Christopher, St Barbara, St Luke, St George, St Andrew, the Blessed Virgin, St David, St Helena and St Patrick, the patron saints of soldiers and of the four nations of the Union. The two Union Flags framing the altar area also date from WW1. The organ, currently the focus of a £250,000 fundraising campaign for repairs, is to the left and St Michael's Chapel, the 'Warriors' Chapel' is to the right.



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Of particular note is the RACHD Memorial, in the form of a screen of carved oak and alabaster, against the east wall of the sanctuary. It commemorates the 172 Chaplains of all denominations killed in WW1. The reredos is of similar style and, unusually, the cross stands on its gradine or shelf.

There are many memorials along each side of the nave, beneath stained glass windows depicting biblical figures and saints, and flags, standards and colours hang above. Each pew end is carved with the cap-badge and a memorial to individual units of the Airborne Forces who fought in WWII, and Churchwarden staves mark the ends of the front pews to either side. Many of the kneelers are maroon in memory of the Parachute Regiment, so closely associated with Aldershot.

The main window at the west end, a memorial to General Sir John Pennefather, depicts Joshua, St David, St George, and St Alban, Britain's first Christian martyr. Below is a large memorial to General Sir James Scarlett, who commanded the Heavy Brigade at Balaclava. To one side of his bust is a life-size statue of a private of the 18th Hussars and on the other a private of the 5th Dragoon Guards. In the south west corner is the Royal Army Dental Corps Chapel, while in the north west corner is the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps Chapel.



Also at the west end is the font, which is unusual in that it is square rather than octagonal. It is very plain and carved with the symbols of the four Gospel writers.

Exiting the church via the south west porch, we stopped at the Somme Cross, a memorial to the officers and men of the 1st Division, British Expeditionary Force, who fell at High Wood in the Somme in September 1916. Constructed from timbers from the ruins of the village of Bazentin, it was first erected at High Wood before being relocated to the church in 1939. A deeply moving photo shows the cross in its original, battle-scarred, location.

Rev. Franklin then took us to the church hall where he entertained us to tea and joined us for further discussion about the church and its history. We all agreed that The Royal Garrison Church of All Saints is a fascinating place to visit, with plenty of interest both historically and architecturally.