

A Guide
to Painting Stucco Rendered Façades
in the Britannia Square Conservation Area

Britannia Square Residents' Association
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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. Are there guidelines regarding appropriate colours with which to paint houses in the Britannia Square area?

Yes, planning and conservation guidelines require that previously painted facades be repainted a 'stone colour' (for the origins of this requirement, see **Notes, section 2** below). Muted 'stony' or 'earthy' colours, reflecting the period of the development, are recommended. 'Foreign' colours, such as those distinctive to East Anglia, Essex and Kent, should be avoided. Vivid colours should also be avoided.

The use of brilliant white, being inappropriate for houses of this period (see more in **Notes, section 2** below), should be avoided entirely.

Whilst not recommending specific colours or manufacturers, a list of period appropriate colours is given below (see **Notes, section 1** below). For convenience of reference only, these are drawn from Farrow & Ball's range of well-researched period colours.

A choice of colours within a limited palette is encouraged, acknowledging the variety in size, scale, type, design and detail of the houses, their orientation and setting.

2. Are standard 'off-the-shelf' masonry paint colours acceptable?

Whilst some off-white masonry paint colours may be acceptable, colour matching to a stone-coloured reference, or use of a masonry paint from one of the manufacturers of period colour appropriate paint, such as Farrow & Ball, is recommended.

3. Are any particular types or brands of paint recommended?

Where lime-wash has previously been used, the same treatment is recommended. Where surfaces have been painted with masonry paint, 'breathable' (microporous) masonry paints, which help to prevent moisture becoming trapped between the paint and a stucco/rendered surface, should be used (see more in **Notes, section 4** below).

4. Should brickwork be painted in the same way as stucco/render?

Planning and conservation guidelines generally prohibit the painting of brick surfaces. It is strongly recommended that unpainted brickwork remains unpainted in order to:

- avoid compromising the original design aesthetic, which deliberately included the use of rendered and non-rendered areas
- avoid compromising the brickwork's capacity to 'breathe' and dry

Previously painted brickwork may be repainted but, where possible, it may be preferable not to do so (see more below in **Notes, section 5**).

5. For terraces and semi-detached houses, is it more important to paint my house the same colour as my neighbour, or to adhere to the recommendations?

Where houses form a terrace or are semi-detached, a paint of matching colour, texture and reflective quality should be used throughout each group or pair, acknowledging the unity of the building group.

Notes

1. Stone-coloured paint references – (Farrow & Ball)

- Slipper Satin
- Lime White
- Off-White
- Shaded White
- Old White
- Skimming Stone
- Strong White
- Great White
- Ammonite
- Cornforth White
- Purbeck Stone
- Light Stone
- Fawn
- Stone White

2. Notes on the origins of Britannia Square area façade colours

- 2.1 Original deeds and documents relating to Britannia Square require that houses be faced with 'Roman Cement' (Stucco).
- 2.2 'Stucco' originated with the Romans. It is essentially an imitative material, with repeated coats of lime render applied to masonry to give the appearance of expensive dressed ashlar. N.B. if re-rendering part or the whole of a façade, it should be remembered to 'iron in' the fake ashlar block lines, in a believable manner, to simulate stone blocks. Reference should be made to the original stucco block lines, avoiding anything which would result in less than half a block length or half a course width.
- 2.3 Popularised by early Palladian architects in 1720s, Stucco referred to any type of internal or external plasterwork. By late C18th the term came specifically to signify exterior rendering of masonry to suggest fine stonework.
- 2.4 First patented in 1794, Roman Cements are quick-setting renders based on hydraulic lime, made from limestone and clay. There were variants on this patent, many of which have a pink-brown colour. Combined with water or reactive materials such as pulverised fuel ash, Roman Cement produces a quick-setting render and was used on the types of houses and terraces designed by James Wyatt and John Nash.
- 2.5 Most stucco applications were designed to be painted, although in some cases they were used self-coloured. The earliest forms were often colour washed to mimic darker yellow, brown or grey stone. Lighter, cream tones were used from mid C19th. Natural earth pigments were often used, which produced a gentle semi-muted appearance.
- 2.6 Brilliant White is 'historically highly inappropriate'. It is only very recently that a pure white colour could be achieved. It was the use of titanium dioxide in the 1940s which allowed the creation of a brilliant white. White lead and the addition of blue were also used to make the paint appear whiter, which also had the effect of adding a bluish or grey tone.
- 2.7 Traditional lime-wash can be used on previously lime-washed surfaces. Its natural colour is an off-white, pale cream or pale grey.
- 2.8 In addition to being applied as self-coloured finish, lime-washes were sometimes also coloured locally by tradesmen.
- 2.9 Local stone colour was sometimes used as a reference for colouring lime-wash.

3. Where does the recommendation for 'Stone colour' paint derive from?

- 3.1 In the 1950s the Georgian Society developed guidelines offering advice to householders on the external painting of buildings. This included the advice for stucco to be painted 'off-white or light cream'.
- 3.2 Whilst remaining a widely used reference, these guidelines are now regarded to have little to do with actual C18th practice and perhaps less to do with the variety of paint treatments used during the late Georgian and Regency periods (1714-1830) and early Victorian period (1837-1901).
- 3.3 The guidelines were updated in 2011 to include a recommended Stucco colour of 'pale stone colours, off-white'. This remains a somewhat general description and care should be taken to avoid pinks and yellows, which could possibly be regarded as 'off-white'.

4. Protecting Stucco

- 4.1 Breathability for a stucco surface is important in order to avoid water being held against it, causing it to deteriorate.
- 4.2 Lime-wash-based finishes are breathable (or 'microporous').
- 4.3 Some modern masonry paints also claim to be microporous.
- 4.4 If surfaces have previously been painted with non-microporous paint, it is arguable that repainting with a microporous paint has no benefit. However, if the old paint surface is broken or missing in patches, it may be helpful.

5. Brickwork

- 5.1 It is always better to leave brickwork unpainted, both for visual reasons, to avoid destroying the historical surfaces and in order to ensure that water does not penetrate flaking paint and become trapped behind it, causing the brickwork to deteriorate.
- 5.2 Where brickwork has faded paint on it, it may be preferable to allow it to continue to fade away, or even to carefully remove the paint. 'Peelaway' or similar chemical poultice remover or a gentle abrasive power wash may be used. However, extreme care is needed to avoid permanently damaging the brickwork. Leaving it alone to weather away may be the best course of action.