

Horgan & Webb

Restoration & Conservation

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REPOINTING

Before starting work remove any wall plants, and clear the footings. An old carpet or tarpaulin laid on the ground will collect falling rubble and mortar (which can be scraped up and reused). It is worth spending some time looking over each wall, checking how the wall is built. Are the bold quoin stones at the edges of the wall and around window and doorways secure? Check places where water may have flowed from a leaking gutter. Check any lintels for cracks, or ironwork that may be causing damage to the mortar or stones.

Rake out any loose or decayed mortar and chisel out any hard cement mortar. Only rake out lime mortar that is obviously damaged from excessive water action. Do not remove so much that the structure becomes unsafe. If necessary do small sections at a time and re-point before continuing.

Keep any small stones inserted into the joints for reuse. Many stone walls will use chipped or broken pieces as wedges – called ‘snecks’ or ‘gallets’ – between the courses. These should not be removed, and if they fall out or seem to be missing in places, then they can be replaced with new matching broken pieces of stone.

They should not be hammered in like nails as this could dislodge the structure, but just pushed firmly enough to secure the courses. Generally the use of wedged galleting stones will secure a wall whilst raking out.

Wash and brush out the area to be re-mortared, so remove any loose material, then lift protective cloths, and remove all debris. Relay the cloths to collect excess mortar. Any clean dropped mortar can be reused.

Samples of the old mortar should be used as a guide to the composition and texture to be aimed at. Most old mortars are a mix of lime putty, lime sand, and grit. Generally a greater proportion of lime is used for sandstone or sedimentary rocks and a harder mortar use for granite or impervious rocks. The standard mix is one part lime to three parts aggregate.

The sort of building sand commonly available from builders' merchants today was not used. Often rough sand would have been cut from a local source, and a great saving can be achieved by exploring the locality to discover where sand was obtained. In non-clay areas, subsoils can often be sieved to provide a workable aggregate. If you do use builder's sand, make sure it's sharp sand rather than the fine sand used for bricklaying mortars or modern plastering.

Keep the mixture too dry rather than too wet as it is easy to add water but impossible to remove it. The addition of a small amount of fine ash from a stove will make the mortar

sticky and easier to use. If you use a mixing box or bucket and measure each mix carefully then a consistent texture can be achieved over the whole wall.

Apply new mortar, using a hawk to support the mortar as it is pushed into the joints. Push it well home to make sure there are no air spaces and to ensure the mortar goes right to the back of the joint. Leave the mortar surface just within the stone face to begin with. Keep the wall damp whilst the mortar dries for the first 24 hours, by hanging a wet sack against the wall. Dampen if necessary with a fine spray gun.

When the mortar is touch dry (after 24 hours), remove excess mortar from the joints with a stiff brush and insert additional snecks or finer galleting stones where needed. Finally wash down with a hose spray and brush to wash any mortar from the stone face.

The style of pointing chosen is very important. Mortars used in fine stone work should end up slightly recessed from the stone face by about 3mm to 7mm. Aim to leave the mortar surface about 5mm behind the exposed surface of the stones. On rougher stone and undressed slate the mortar can be brought flush to the surface to create what was called a 'slobbered' finish.

Raised and trowelled pointing (sometimes called ribbon pointing) should not be used. Very often it is a mistake to copy a pointing style that has been used for a different type of work. Care should also be taken not to create thin feathered edges as shown in the diagram.

