

Brick pointing

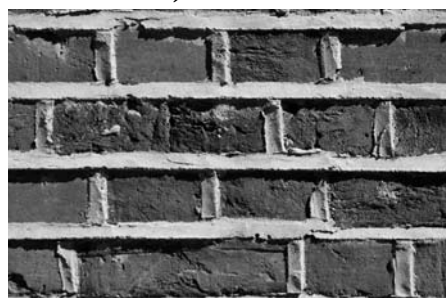
Every house on the Garden Suburb is built of brick. Even where the brick has been covered with pebbledash there will be elements such as plinths, arches, external chimney breasts and virtually every chimney stack, which are exposed brickwork. It is absolutely essential therefore, when carrying out repairs and maintenance which include brick repointing, that it is done properly.

If plastic windows or otherwise incorrect windows are inserted into a house, for example, the work can be fairly easily reversed by reinstating new work which matches the original. However, incorrect repointing, including the preparatory raking out, is often not reversible and can ruin the appearance of a house for the remainder of its life. There are some examples on the Suburb of wholesale inappropriate repointing where the only way of reversing it would be to entirely replace the external skin of brick at enormous cost.

Repointing brickwork with inappropriate materials, usually hard cement mortar, will in time, and sometimes quite rapidly, cause damage to the bricks. It is important to be aware of four very important basic requirements for any brick wall:

- Brickwork should be allowed to 'breathe', that is, it should be able to

Very poor pointing with a heavy weather struck joint



take up moisture in wet weather and then allow that moisture to evaporate readily out of both the brick and mortar. If moisture is trapped in brickwork because of impermeable hard cement mortar then there will inevitably be problems.

- In a brick wall the brick must always be considered permanent and the mortar sacrificial. There should therefore be cycles of repointing at about 50 year intervals where the brick remains the permanent feature and the mortar is the element that is replaced. Using inappropriate hard cement mortar will reverse this process.
- The brick in a wall should always be mechanically stronger and denser than the mortar which, should be slightly weaker.
- Visually the mortar should always be subservient to the brick, it should be to the eye a wall of bricks rather than a wall of mortar.

When embarking on a programme of repointing, however small, always seek professional advice. The Trust architectural advisers are always willing to give free advice on these

Damage caused by inappropriate hard cement pointing



matters. Avoid taking advice from builders unless you trust them implicitly through long experience. Bricklayers are not necessarily the best people to advise, or indeed carry out the work. You will require a specialist. Good repointing is necessarily expensive. Do not go for cheap options; they may ruin your house and devalue it. If cost is a factor it is best to leave the pointing for another year or two until you have sufficient funds. Repointing is very often undertaken unnecessarily anyway – if in doubt leave it alone. What looks like weak mortar will often have several years life left.

Some years ago it became fashionable amongst bricklayers and builders to build and repoint brickwork using a heavy weather struck joint. This type of joint has no historical precedent and should not be used on Suburb houses. However, if you have recent poor pointing, it may be better to leave it because removing it may cause further damage to the bricks.

Finally, never never let anyone rake out old mortar using an angle grinder. In the wrong hands they cause irreparable and extensive damage.

An example of good pointing carried out with care and skill

