

HOMEOWNER MAINTENANCE SERIES

AN ACTION OF THE HERITAGE COUNCIL'S TRADITIONAL
BUILDING SKILLS INITIATIVE AND SPAB IRELAND

RENDER AND MORTAR

WHY?

Mortar is a building material used to bond bricks or stone. Traditionally, mortar was made by mixing lime or sometimes clay with sand and water. Render refers to a wall covered (i.e. plastered) in mortar.

Mortar between bricks/stone on the face of buildings (i.e. pointing) is a sacrificial part of the wall. Its role is to protect the stone and brick underneath and to help keep the building dry. Over time, it will erode and crumble away. It should be replaced when it starts to fail. This will stop moisture from entering the building and vegetation from growing. Repoint joints using lime mortar, flush with the wall when this happens.

Similarly, external render is a sacrificial layer which should be repaired/replaced as required with an appropriate lime-based mix. The use of cement as a mortar only became common in the last 100 years or so and it is not compatible with solid stone wall buildings. It is harder than lime mortar and will damage the softer traditional building materials like bricks and stone if used for redering or pointing. Cement is also highly likely to eventually crack and allow moisture into the building.



Inappropriate, and now cracking cement mortar being used on a stone wall will ultimately make a bad problem worse.



Although this image is of an early 20th century building, the hard cement pointing and render has forced the moisture in the wall to go through the softer brick rather than the supposedly sacrificial mortar and render.

HOW?

1. Old buildings weren't generally built with synthetic materials, so beware of using ready-mixed/bagged mortars or renders, especially if they promise waterproof qualities. Unless you are replacing cement pointing or render, the mortar/render should be like-for-like, matching the original material. Failing cement pointing or render should be replaced with an appropriate lime-based mortar.
2. If you notice a new crack in render it is a good idea to monitor it over a number of months, especially if it is wider than 5mm. Simply put a thin piece of masking tape neatly across the crack. If a tear appears, it is a sign that the crack is growing and you may need to contact an engineer to address the problem. If there is no tear and no movement, the crack should be sealed with an appropriate mortar to keep moisture out and prevent future damage.

For video on managing mortar and render scan the QR code or visit: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ekzqQ6C5SLg&list=PLIKz_D-MJSUkEcOQp2zhltIS885a1Tfy1&index=5&t=0s



Unless originally built using cement, never ever use cement in an old building. Instead, use traditional mortar such as lime mortar, hot lime mix or clay mortar. There are many short courses available which will equip you with the basic skills needed to repoint masonry and mix suitable mortars on a small scale.



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INTRODUCTION

The maintenance series is a collection of five sheets providing the owners of older homes (i.e. built before World War II) with basic guidance on essential maintenance.



1

Wood and ironwork



2

Render and mortar



3

Roofs



4

Vegetation



5

Rainwater goods

Each maintenance sheet is complemented by a short explanatory video. The videos are available to view on the YouTube channels of both the Heritage Council and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings Ireland (SPAB).

www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLIKz_D-MJSUkEcOQp2zhltIS885a1Tfy1

WHY MAINTAIN YOUR OLD BUILDING?

Well-maintained buildings improve the quality of life of their occupants and the community in general. Beyond preserving the intrinsic heritage value of these buildings, carrying out regular maintenance to your building has strong economic benefits:

1. Conducting regular maintenance costs significantly less than waiting for problems to grow and resolving later. Over time, as building problems worsen, the cost of repair tends to grow not at a constant pace but at an ever-increasing rate.
2. Maintenance will extend the life of your building and thereby support the preservation of its resale value.
3. Communities that maintain their buildings, improve the property values of all.

FURTHER READING

An excellent document to read on building maintenance is *Maintenance: a guide to the care of older buildings* (Donnelly, 2007).

www.chg.gov.ie/app/uploads/2015/07/Maintenance-A-Guide-to-the-Care-of-Older-Buildings-2007.pdf

A full resource webpage on the repair and maintenance of historic buildings has been created by the Heritage Council. There are specific sections on mortar, brick and stone in the webpage.

www.heritagecouncil.ie/news/news-features/how-historic-buildings-can-be-repaired-and-maintained

There is also advice on maintenance and building repair available on SPAB's website and by contacting their Technical Advice Line:

www.spab.org.uk/advice

USEFUL CONTACTS

Almost every local authority has either a Heritage Officer or Architectural Conservation Officer, many have both. They can provide you with very helpful advice on caring for your historic building.

To find your local Architectural Conservation Officer visit: www.buildingsofireland.ie/app/uploads/2020/07/Architectural-Conservation-Officers-01.07.2020.pdf

To find your local Heritage Officer visit:

www.heritagecouncil.ie/our-work-with-others/county-heritage-officers

