

Dawesleigh Restoration

By John Dunn.

Just over ten years ago Margaret and I moved into Dawesleigh, a crumbling 1833 Dawes Point townhouse in the shadows of the Harbour Bridge.



Its restoration has soaked up hundreds of thousands of dollars more than we could have imagined possible, taken far longer than expected, and sent us to research everything from the stories of the young merchants who built our house and captured most of the China trade for a decade; to learning about traditional joinery and masonry; to tracing the history of the maritime community that lived in our neighbourhood from the early years of the Colony until recently.

We are not heritage experts, but like others before us, while working on our home we have acquired skills and knowledge about repairing and restoring heritage houses, and we have recorded our progress as we focus on one area after another. Currently we are working outside at the rear of the house where we were preparing to repaint the back wall with breathable mineral silicate paint until discovering it had at been unpainted for a period, with both stone and brickwork being pointed.

Should we repoint instead of painting? If we repoint instead of painting, should we then protect the wall with an application of clear mineral silicate paint? We have an outstanding heritage architect overseeing our works program, but we also wanted to discuss these issues with friends and neighbours before making a decision about what we wanted to do, and we cast around to see what advice was available.

Repointing is now underway and appears to be going well. We remain undecided about the matt clear mineral silicate paint and agree with advice that we should be careful about introducing new materials.



Former member of the HHA Properties Committee Anne Warr provided some excellent advice about repointing and directed us to a paper by David Young delivered at an Australia ICOMOS Conference:

Traditional walls of porous masonry are not just piles of stone and brick; they are systems in which permeable lime mortars allow the walls to dry rapidly after rain...such walls 'breathe' through their joints. The longevity of walls made of low-fired bricks or soft porous stones is critically dependent on the maintenance of a permeable joint system.

'Repointing mortar joints: some important points' (2015)

