

DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER

Internal redecoration of churches: Renders, mortars and wall coatings

The majority of churches and certainly those built before 1914 will almost certainly have solid masonry walls and many of those built before the mid-19th century will have no damp course. The result of such construction is that damp from the ground is drawn up through the walls and evaporates off, normally within 1m of the floor. This is a natural feature and needs to be accommodated when considering repair and redecoration of such churches.

Repair and redecoration materials should be chosen in order to ensure the porosity of the coatings to allow the evaporation of moisture. The traditional ingredient is lime, in several forms such as lime/hair plaster, renders, mortars and limewash.

Increasingly the attention of the Archdeacons and the DAC has been drawn to the fact that churches have been repaired using cement render or redecorated using emulsion paint. Other treatments such as sealing the lower section of the wall have also been used in an attempt to prevent damp coming through. The result of these treatments is that moisture builds up behind the paint, resulting in the degeneration of the plaster which eventually breaks through the paintwork.

The use of inappropriate materials, both mortar mixes and colour choice, extends to external pointing and rendering, with detrimental effect to both the fabric and appearance of the building.

In serious instances of damp, improving ventilation, especially during the summer months by leaving the main door open, can help.

It is vitally important for the continued well-being of our older and ancient parish churches that only appropriate materials are used. No repair work, however small, nor redecoration, however innocent, should be contemplated without first seeking experienced, professional advice. The Advisory Committee has members and consultants who are able to give guidance to parishes in dealing appropriately with problems concerning the building. There are a number of leaflets and booklets available which are very helpful in explaining the historical construction of ancient buildings and how they should be maintained. Parishes are encouraged to acquire copies for their own reference.

Bibliography

Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, 37 Spital Square, London E1 6DY (020 7377 1644).

Technical Pamphlets.

14/5 - Pointing stone and brick walling

14/8 - The control of damp in old buildings

Information sheets.

IN1 - Basic limewash

IN4 - The need for old buildings to breathe

IN5 - Removing paint from old buildings

IN9 - An introduction to building limes

General information and advice from your quinquennial inspection architect or surveyor and the DAC Administrator, St. Nicholas Church, Rochester ME1 1SL. (01634 560000).