

Design matters: Berwick-upon-Tweed, Spittal and Tweedmouth

Masonry and mortar in the historic environment

‘The principal local walling material is a pinky-grey natural sandstone, which gives the area its warm, textured and well-matured appearance. This stone is still quarried locally in Doddington....’





Render is also common (mainly smooth, though with some roughcast), but in most areas, stone tends to dominate the street scene. Brick is used as a main walling material in only a few places and in some areas, such as the historic core of Tweedmouth, it is almost completely absent.

Main stones are often snecked (a rough, rusticated

finish), sometimes with margins; others are rock-faced. Dressings are more smoothly finished, notably creating margins around window and door openings.



Exposed stone – particularly details and dressings – would originally be unpainted.

The random rubble stone of many of the earliest buildings would have been covered by a variety of smooth renders and rougher harlings, both lime-rich to allow the building to ‘breathe’. Some such finishes survive, but exposed stone has

been much the preferred aesthetic since the mid-nineteenth century.

Brick was commonly used

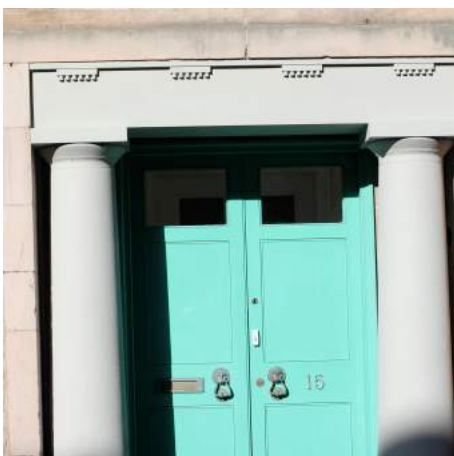


for repairs and additions to stone buildings in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, notably for chimney stacks, for raising or rebuilding gable-ends and for adding offshots and cottages. In these cases, bricks are small and handmade. They are dark red-brown or purple-brown with a rough, mottled texture, and have stained with warm, uneven tones.

Timber is used in only one or two places as a walling material.

Expertly moulded dressings are key to the high quality of much of the area's domestic and institutional architecture. Larger institutional and landmark buildings use more vigorously moulded sandstone to emphasise quality and status, some of it quite delicate and elaborate.

Carved and moulded dressings are abundant as window and door surrounds. The detailing of plinths, string courses, eaves, watertabling, quoins (corner stones) and arches all demonstrate the fine quality of our local architecture. Such high quality, well-executed masonry and detailing defines most of the area's buildings and is key to their textured appearance.



New constructions and repair: points to consider



Some areas are characterised by particular treatments. Render dominates areas such as Marygate , Walkergate and Bridge Street, but there is relatively little in The Greenses and almost none on the Pier Road and Quayside. In most areas, there is a balance between render and stone, the latter tending to dominate. Render is more

common on side and rear elevations.

Unpainted stone should be kept unpainted to retain its character. Render is best used in buildings designed for it, rather than being applied later.



Most render is painted in light, pastel shades or earthy tones. Colours tend to be flat, muted and pale. There are a few characterful exceptions, the most obvious being Bridge Street with its lively mix of colours. In principle, render that is unpainted should generally remain so to retain its character.

Lime mortar mixes, whether for pointing, harling or rendering have characteristics which have a natural



ability to hold and evaporate moisture from the walls – thus enabling the building to ‘breathe’. They are an essential component of a traditional



building system that is prevalent throughout the conservation areas. Lime mortar mixes should be retained and used in conjunction with traditional materials. These mortars are available in variety of shades, and sometimes crushed shell is added to give the building sparkle.

Doddington Stone is a locally quarried stone that has been used to repair historic buildings but also used in redevelopment schemes and new buildings in the conservation area.



The innovative application of locally sourced traditional materials ensures the character of the area is retained whilst enabling sustainable new buildings to be constructed.

Berwick’s Public Realm Strategy specifies a palette of suitable paint colours help guide colour choices in the conservation areas the. The Tweed and Silk document has suggestions as to texture and colour.



Pitfalls to avoid



The wrong shade of natural stone erodes the unique sense of place which the pinkish-grey Doddington stone provides.

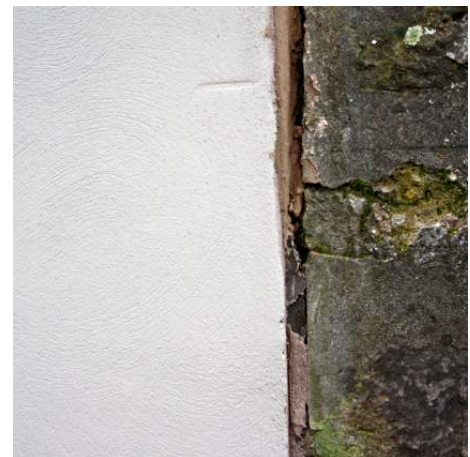
Less characterful brick (e.g. an engineering brick) tends to be intrusive when used for modern repairs, alterations and additions. The same goes for repairs and alterations which use brick or blockwork instead of stone. Poorly matched colour, size, texture and bonding of stone is equally damaging.



Artificial blockwork does not have the texture of natural stone.

Some bright paint colours (especially

blues) and 'chocolate box' pastel shades don't marry well with bare sandstone. Very light, whitish tones tend to stand out among buildings dominated by darker stone, to the detriment of the group.



The use of corporate paint colours and livery applied over existing render to make buildings stand out can harm the street scene. Picking out architectural detailing in boldly contrasting colours also tends to look out of place and is rarely historically accurate.

Cement render, pebbledash or masonry paint to main elevations can conceal the historic stonework that defines the character of the



area's buildings and make individual buildings stand out visually to the detriment of a group (as well as possibly harming the fabric of the building in the long term). Some modern cement renders can look flat and dull against weathered natural stone.



Painting sandstone detailing, particularly door and window surrounds, destroys the rich historic patina of time that characterises mature unpainted sandstone and, depending on the use of colour, can give the building an over-elaborate appearance inappropriate for the area's often understated architecture.



Cement-rich pointing can significantly alter the appearance of stone buildings by making the pointing more visually prominent – especially if poorly executed by smearing it across the face of the stones or raising it into ribbons.

This also harms the fabric of the building in the long term because the stone is softer than the mortar and will erode faster.



It is a misconception that hard pointing will prevent water ingress. Impermeable cement mortars actually accelerate stone decay and damp as well as have a negative visual impact. Wherever possible, mortar should be carefully matched with existing pointing.

Find out more from

The Conservation Area Character Appraisals for Berwick, Tweedmouth and Spittal.

Guides on technical issues and traditional skills from English Heritage and Historic Scotland.

Northumberland County Council's Conservation Team

This is one of a series of guides to help designers, builders and homeowners. It is based on the official Conservation Area Character Appraisals for Berwick, Tweedmouth and Spittal.

There are other leaflets available or planned on
Doors and windows
Roofs and Chimneys
Shopfronts
Conservation areas and listed buildings
New builds and extensions in the conservation areas.

This leaflet was prepared with the co-operation of

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