

Plastering, Rendering and Natural Finishes for new and old buildings
Consultation · Conservation & Repairs

14th August 2026

To: Jocelyn Sage, Conservation Consultant,
Wiltshire Council

The Old Rectory, Church St., Mere
Owner and Client: Dr. and Mrs. Middleton

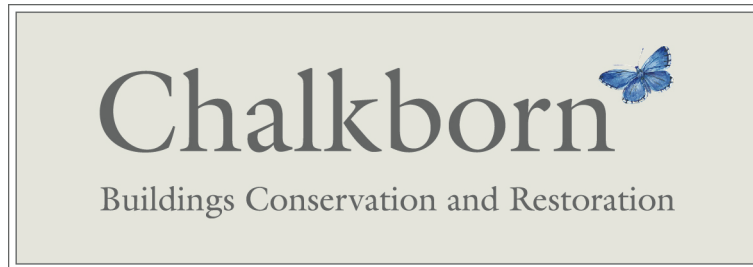
Dear Jocelyn Sage,

In 2023, I was the contractor responsible for lime mortar repointing and damp mitigation work to the Middleton's property, a vernacular cottage in St. James St. Shaftesbury. I am informed the work has eradicated the damp.

Last July I was asked to visit the Old Rectory in Mere to advise, guide and instruct their chosen builder to the use of and confident with a more sympathetic lime mortar mix for pointing than that suggested by the project architect. I was also asked to make a time/cost assessment for the restoration of the degraded and water damaged internal plasterwork and the proposed new kitchen walls and ceiling.

“In respect of the proposed kitchen, 8.9 of the heritage report says:

‘The removal of economic C20 ceiling tiles (and modern construction material above) and internal stud partition walls. The ceiling comprises aged fabric including lathe and plaster with a C20 fibreboard and plasterboard finish with tiles affixed. The ceiling is in a degraded state, with localised failure and loss of integrity. It is intended to remove any damaged sections of ceiling and insert a new plasterboard ceiling on the existing joists, retaining the wattle and daub in order to retain historic fabric. It is also intended to lay 300mm mineral wool insulation to improve the thermal efficiency of the range’



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A justification for the removal of existing ceiling material

To this end, may I firstly and respectfully establish that the method used for the binding of the ceiling plaster is not as described above as “wattles” but by lathes and the plaster is a chalk and earth based, haired lime plaster and not a “daub” which is commonly a clay rich earth and animal hair render. Both of which materials have been irreparably damaged and degraded by water ingress and rot.

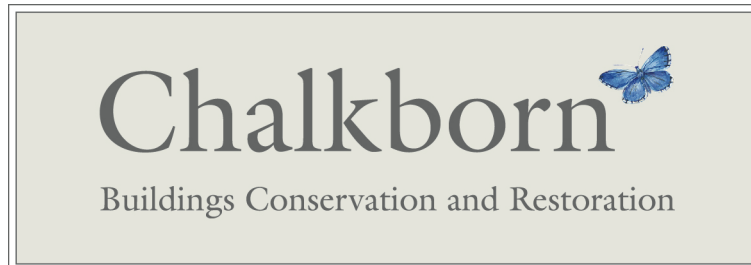
Moreover, and further to the restoration of the Kitchen ceiling; there is scant justification to retain any part of the fabric of this ceiling on the grounds of its historic provenance, since both the ceiling plaster and the beams to which the lathes are nailed, the lathes, the nails and the plaster ‘nibs’ upon which the integrity of the ceiling mass depends, all are therefore unviable, having lost structural integrity by the effects of insect infestation and water over time.

Conclusion:

To affect the restoration of this ceiling, a thorough inspection of the timber beams in the roof space above is essential. In order to gain a meaningful condition assessment above the present ceiling, the decayed lathes and plaster must be allowed to fall and be completely removed.

After a thorough investigation and assessment of the structural integrity and capability of the roof timbers to support a new ceiling, it may be necessary to replace a number of timbers or to repair existing functional timber by scarfing additional sections to some of the beams where water has caused rot.

After it has been established that the timbers above the ceiling is capable of supporting the ceiling and the insulating material has been installed between the joists above, a thorough cleaning of debris and the removal of iron lathe fixing nails in all the original timber is strongly recommended before the replacement of the ceiling can be started.



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A proposal for the replacement of the Lathe and Plaster ceiling:

Firstly, it must be said that at no point has there been an intention to install plasterboard to form a new ceiling, nor has this ever been discussed by me with my clients. What was proposed was using ‘Savolit’ Woodwool boards to replace the function of the Lathes –

<https://www.limestuff.co.uk/woodwool-boards/savolit-plus-woodwool-boards>

Since it is with the greatest respect to the author of the Heritage Report (Section 8.9) – that the historic fabric is retained, it must be stated that this has always been my guiding principle in the conservation of old houses.

However, for the reasons stated above, the vestigial remains of the original ceiling must be removed and replaced with sympathetic materials. By the use of Woodwool boards which are fire retardant and damp resistant.

When plastered with a lightweight lime/hemp plaster the ceiling retains the pleasing visual texture and vapour permeable dynamics of the original material, is sympathetic and appropriate to its historic context.

Hemp Lime plaster:

<https://www.lime.org.uk/toplime-hemp-fine-plaster-non-hydraulic.html>

Final Conclusion:

In my experience as a lime plasterer having repaired and replaced many historic lathe and plaster ceilings, of the two possible options/methods for repair, I recommend using Savolit ‘wood wool’ boards as a replacement for lathes. Though these have no historic precedence, hemp-lime plastered woodwool boards will restore the ceiling to a texture and appearance by using materials that are functionally unchanged and have been available since the original ceiling was installed.

David Tabberer – Traditional Lime Plaster specialist/practitioner
Trading as ‘Chalkborn Conservation’