

Applying heritage wallpaper

Heritage construction skills



Keystone
TASMANIA

APPLYING HERITAGE WALLPAPER

In this case study, Alan Townsend (Heritage Wallpaper Specialist) describes the process of applying wallpaper to difficult surfaces.

Context

Alan is applying hand-painted wallpaper, which he has replicated from historical data, to rough plaster at a small cottage (circa 1870s) on the Oatlands Commissariat Site.



Alan at the cottage



Challenges

There are two main challenges associated with applying wallpaper in heritage properties:

- The surfaces are rarely smooth (in this instance the walls were covered in very rough plaster)
- The joinery around doors and windows will have moved over time, which means there are no clean edges to work to.



Rough plaster and uneven joinery

Solutions

There are a few handy 'tricks of the trade' when applying wallpaper in heritage properties:

- Always try to apply wallpaper in warm conditions
- When applying wallpaper in cold wintry conditions, 'cook the room' by running a few heaters to increase the temperature
- Apply glue to the wallpaper and to the wall itself, as this will ensure the paper sticks to the porous surface.



Applying wallpaper

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Step 1 - Planning

- Try to find any remaining samples of the original wallpaper (e.g. look behind skirting boards or built-in cupboards)
- If you can't find any original wallpaper, research similar buildings in the area to identify wallpaper from the same period, class and style
- Source or create new wallpaper that matches the confirmed period, class and style.



Replicating the earliest layer of wallpaper

Step 2 - Preparing surfaces for wallpaper

- Photograph walls in their original state for future reference
- Identify key areas of damage (typically at the bottom of walls)
- Cover flooring and fittings with appropriate protections
- Repair or re-plaster the damaged areas, leaving as much of the wall in its original condition
- Do as much as necessary but as little as possible.



Preparing surfaces

Step 3 - Preparing for the hanging process

- Select tools and equipment (including a sharp Stanley knife, metre rule, spirit level, decking brush, glue, smoothing brush, seam roller, dressmaking scissors and heaps of kitchen paper)
- Set up a couple of long tables
- Cut wallpaper to length
- Trim selvage from whichever side is going to overlap, keeping in mind there is no butt joining in heritage wallpapering (everything has to overlap, otherwise it won't stick properly)
- Apply glue to back of wallpaper with a large decking brush
- Fold wallpaper over itself to ensure glue is evenly applied
- Set aside in preparation (up to five minutes).



Cutting wallpaper to length



Applying glue and folding

"The first drop is the most important"

Alan Townsend (Heritage Wallpaper Specialist)

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Step 4 - Applying wallpaper

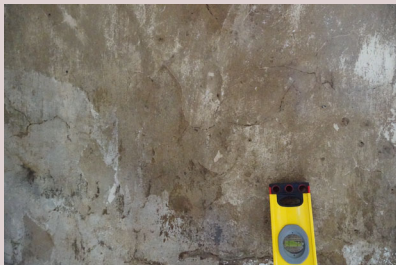
- Carefully measure and mark out first drop
- Cover wall surface with glue using a large decking brush
- Unfold wallpaper and apply to surface
- Mark overhang at ceiling and skirting board with a pencil
- Peel wallpaper back from surface and cut with scissors
- Reapply to surface, touching up glue with a small paintbrush
- Brush out air pockets with a smoothing brush and run a seam-roller over edges to ensure wallpaper is secure
- Continue subsequent drops until all surfaces are covered
- Photograph newly wallpapered surface for future reference.



Cutting and smoothing

Result

- The wallpaper must be straight (relative to the building), bearing in mind the building may not have been square to start with
- The wallpaper surface must look perfectly smooth.



Before



After

Background

This case study supports the development of heritage trade skills in Tasmania. It is part of a broader set of support materials that have been developed by Keystone Tasmania.

Acknowledgements

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Want to learn this heritage trade skill?

If you are interested in learning how to apply heritage wallpaper, contact Keystone Tasmania to register your interest in a training course.

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