



# Advice from the brick face

by Clive Fewins

**P**aul Sargeantson is a house restorer, builder and brick specialist, who is never happier than when he is called upon to match brickwork in an old listed property that is in need of love and attention.

His work is mainly on his doorstep, in the Oxford and Buckinghamshire Chilterns, where he is an expert on the old brickworks that used to exist in the area and on how best to match some of the hugely varied colours that traditionally occurred in the bricks made in this area.

More often than not, if it is a small patch that has to be matched – say round a window or doorway that is being altered – he will have some bricks that will do the job in his own yard.

If not he always enjoys the hunt finding the best possible match for the job in hand.

“You really get bricks of all colours in this area,” says Paul, showing me a few of the extensive collection in one of his barns. “Most famous of all were the renowned Chilterns ‘blue headers’ mainly made in the extensive small brickworks that used to exist in the wooded area surrounding the village



Paul Sargeantson with some of his brick collection. He loves to admire the colours, some of which he says will never be repeated

of Nettlebed. Although modern brickworks on the other side of the Chilterns try to reproduce these today in my view their products are too dark and lack the sparkle of the 19th and early 20th century bricks.” Nettlebed brickworks finally closed in 1938.

If Paul has difficulty finding a match from one of his usual sources he is aware that a number of brick manufacturers today produce ‘reclaim looklikes’ that have the appearance of reclaimed bricks but are in fact new.

“The important thing is to get the blend right and then to pay great attention to the mortar, which should use a good hydraulic lime and generally a pretty sharp sand,” he says.

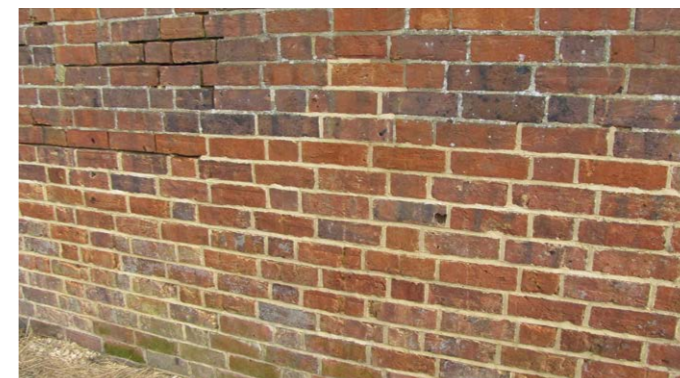
“When I am working with my bricklayer colleague Steve Mansfield, for the bigger joints we generally use two of sharp to one of soft, and the other way round for the tighter joints. I find it quite amazing the number of people who opt for complete repointing of their listed brick houses when all that is needed are some judicious patches. Unless the work is done extremely skilfully with a perfect mortar match a complete repointing can completely alter – and often ruin – the look of a lovely old brick house. Far better to do sections when they really need repointing – and that will usually be abundantly obvious.”

Paul Sargeantson: 01491 613381



**Top:** This old brick Chilterns farmhouse has gone through many additions and alterations

**Bottom:** These old reclaims lying in a yard will one day be used to bring an unloved section of an old brick building to life again



This old brick wall on a listed building has been pointed in sections, as and when the need arose. Simon Hay says: “The true conservationist will want to see the difference between new and old. This particularly applies to areas of repointing because it is repairs like this that tell the enduring story of the building. Paul Sargeantson agrees. He hates to see complete repointing of an old brick house when all that is needed is sympathetic repair.”