

Owen McIlreavy
McAleer & Rushe
The Printworks
819-829 High Road
Tottenham
London,
N17 8ER

Our Ref: 2607.1987

Your Ref:
14 July 2026

The Printworks - Restoration of four listed buildings (sub-contractor for remedial works: Palliass Ltd)

Regarding Emergency Removal of Lath and Lime Plaster Ceiling, First Floor Bedroom, Building 819, The Printworks, 819-829 High Road, Tottenham, London, N17 8ER

For the attention of: Owen McIlreavy, McAleer & Rushe

Palliass Project Manager: Irmantas Vasiliauskas

1. Introduction and scope

- 1.1 Heritage Unlimited (HUL) has been instructed by Palliass Ltd, sub-contractors to McAleer & Rushe undertaking remedial works at the above site, to provide a written statement explaining the circumstances surrounding the removal of a lath and lime plaster ceiling from a first-floor bedroom within Building 819.
- 1.2 This statement sets out a brief description of the asset, the reasons the ceiling was not salvageable, the safety grounds on which its removal was necessary, and the justification for removal together with our recommendations for remediation. It has been prepared on the basis of the photographic and video records taken by Palliass Ltd before and during the works (a selection of which is enclosed), the account of events provided by the contractor, and desk-based assessment, and draws on HUL's professional experience of historic lath and lime plaster in comparable listed building contexts.

2. Description of the asset

- 2.1 The buildings at 819-821 High Road, Tottenham are early 18th century in date, listed at grade II, with the adjoining buildings of the former Printworks group locally listed by the London Borough of Haringey. The group forms a prominent frontage to Tottenham High Road and is currently undergoing restoration and conversion under the consented Printworks scheme.
- 2.2 The ceiling in question was located within a first-floor bedroom of Building 819 and was of traditional lath and lime plaster construction: riven timber laths nailed with ferrous fixings to the

underside of the floor joists, finished with haired lime plaster applied in coats. A later plasterboard layer had subsequently been fixed with screws to the underside of the original ceiling – a common but unsympathetic modern intervention which conceals the original finish when it has degraded and adds load to fabric it was never designed to carry. As an original internal finish within a grade II listed building, the lath and plaster ceiling formed part of the historic fabric of the asset and contributed to its significance.

- 2.3 The ceiling has had long-term condition issues prior to the over boarding with modern plaster board, which can be seen in Fig.5. The modern timbers visible in the photograph had been fitted alongside and between the historic ceiling joists – using modern joist hangers and threaded bolts and installed with access from the floor above – in order to strengthen the ceiling structure. The fact that such an intervention was considered necessary at some point prior to the recent works is clear evidence that the ceiling had been experiencing structural difficulties over an extended period.
- 2.4 The over-boarding of historic lath and plaster ceilings with plasterboard – as had been carried out here – was typically undertaken to consolidate and enhance the appearance of a ceiling that was failing. The application of plasterboard to this ceiling therefore indicates that it must have been in poor condition prior to the plasterboard being installed. The use of plasterboard in this manner was considered a lesser intervention at the time, on the basis that the historic fabric was retained beneath; however, the likelihood of the original ceiling subsequently being recovered and restored in good condition was low, and the reversibility of the intervention was therefore limited in practice.

3. Reason the ceiling was not salvageable

- 3.1 The ceiling had suffered long-term water ingress, and its poor condition was evident prior to the commencement of remedial works, as recorded in the contractor's photographs. Sustained damp affects lath and lime plaster ceilings in three related ways:
- the lime plaster softens and loses cohesion;
 - the plaster nibs – the keys formed between the laths which hold the ceiling up – fracture and fail; and
 - the ferrous nails securing the laths to the joists corrode, losing their capacity to hold the laths in position.
- 3.2 Each of these mechanisms was present here, and their effect is cumulative and irreversible: once the nibs have sheared and the fixings corroded, the plaster is retained by little more than friction and the later plasterboard beneath it. The enclosed photographs additionally show fractured and displaced laths and widespread dark staining consistent with prolonged saturation of the ceiling structure (Figs 1-4 included below).
- 3.3 The works being undertaken were an attempt to restore the ceiling. During the careful removal of the screws fixing the later plasterboard to the original ceiling, the ceiling partially collapsed. This demonstrates that the plasterboard – and the screws through it – had in effect been supporting the failed historic material above, and that the original plaster had already lost its bond with the

laths across a substantial area. Once partial collapse had occurred, the remaining ceiling was assessed as being in the same condition throughout: softened plaster, failed keys and corroded fixings were pervasive rather than localised. There was no practicable method – mechanical or adhesive – of resecuring the surviving fabric that would have produced a sound or durable repair, and no discrete sound areas that could have been isolated and retained.

4. Safety

- 4.1 Following the partial collapse, the remaining blown ceiling presented an immediate and foreseeable risk of further uncontrolled collapse onto operatives working below. A lath and plaster ceiling in this condition can fail without warning, and sections of damp haired lime plaster are heavy; falling material of this kind is capable of causing serious injury. Confirming the integrity of what remained would itself have required invasive investigation of the fixings and keys across the whole ceiling – an exercise that would in all likelihood have triggered the very collapse it sought to assess. Temporary propping or netting could not adequately manage the risk given the pervasive nature of the deterioration.
- 4.2 Those in control of the site owe duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 to persons working in and subsequently occupying the building. It was not safe to leave the remaining ceiling in place, and it was not safe to attempt its piecemeal salvage. Its complete removal under controlled conditions was the only proportionate and reasonable course of action available to the works team.

5. Justification for removal

- 5.1 It is acknowledged that the removal of original fabric from a Grade II listed building would ordinarily require Listed Building Consent under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. In this instance, however, the removal was not a pre-planned intervention: the works being undertaken were directed at the ceiling's restoration, and its true condition only became fully apparent upon the partial collapse. Section 9(3) of the 1990 Act recognises that works to a listed building may be urgently necessary in the interests of safety or health, and the circumstances described above – a partially collapsed ceiling whose remaining fabric could not be made safe or salvaged – fall squarely within that category.
- 5.2 We would advise that the London Borough of Haringey be notified of the removal at the earliest opportunity, supported by this statement and the contractor's photographic and video records; those records should be retained as part of the building record for the scheme.

6. Recommended remediation

- 6.1 The loss of the lath and plaster ceiling, while regrettable, is capable of full remediation. The appropriate course of action is reinstatement on a like-for-like basis using traditional materials and methods, once the sources of water ingress that caused the original deterioration have been permanently remedied. New plasterwork applied before the building envelope is made weathertight will fail prematurely and will not cure correctly.

- 6.2 The laths exposed by the failed plasterwork were in damp and mouldy condition, with some split about their fixings, which can be seen in the contractor's video, so the contractor took the decision to remove the laths in full, as reinstating lime plaster on laths in such poor condition would not be successful.
- 6.3 New treated softwood laths should be fixed to the joists with non-ferrous fixings – eliminating the corrosion failure mode that contributed to the loss – dimensioned and spaced to match the originals, with joints staggered at approximately 1m intervals to prevent cracking in the plaster coat.
- 6.3 A haired lime plaster should be applied in the traditional manner: a scratch coat of one part lime putty to 2.5 parts sand with the addition of animal hair (2-4kg per cubic metre of mortar), applied with even pressure so the plaster keys between the laths to form sound nibs, provided with a tooled key and allowed to cure fully (which may take up to one month); followed by a finishing coat smoothed flush and decorated with breathable mineral paint – a primer coat of paint plus two top coats, of colour to match the existing decoration as closely as possible.
- 6.4 All work should be carried out by plasterers experienced in traditional lime plaster in listed buildings, with adequate curing time allowed within the programme. A method statement for the proposed repair is included below, and a photographic record of the reinstatement should be kept and made available to the local authority in due course.

7. Method statement for repair

- 7.1 Preconditions: No plastering works are to commence until the structural engineer has confirmed the adequacy of the floor joists above and all sources of water ingress affecting this part of the building have been permanently remediated, with the building envelope confirmed weathertight. The moisture condition of the joists and surrounding fabric is to be verified as suitable before work begins: new lime plaster will not adhere or cure correctly in damp conditions, and repairs carried out before the ingress is resolved will be short-lived.
- 7.2 Protection and competence: The floor, walls, joinery and any adjacent retained finishes (including the cornice) are to be protected prior to any works commencing, and any splashes of fresh plaster cleaned from adjacent surfaces immediately. Lime plaster is a caustic material and is to be handled in a controlled manner by suitably experienced plasterers; the contractor remains responsible for their own risk assessments and compliance with all health and safety requirements.
- 7.3 Laths: Measurements are to be taken from surviving reference laths (retained from the removed ceiling or elsewhere within the building) and the replacement laths matched to these dimensions. New laths are to be of treated softwood for resistance to damp and mould, aligned and spaced to match the original configuration – typically with gaps of approximately 10mm to form sound plaster nibs. Laths are to be secured to the joists with non-ferrous nails, avoiding positions near the edges of the joists to prevent splitting, with lath joints staggered at approximately 1m intervals to prevent cracking in the plaster coat.

- 7.4 Scratch coat: The base coat is to be a traditional haired lime plaster of one part lime putty to 2.5 parts sharp sand, with the addition of cow, horse or goat hair at 2-4kg per cubic metre of mortar. The plaster is to be applied with even pressure to a thickness of approximately 10mm, ensuring the mix engages fully with the spaces between the laths to form strong nibs, and provided with a tooled key to receive the following coat. The scratch coat may take up to one month to dry out and must be allowed to cure fully before the finishing coat is applied.
- 7.5 Finishing coat and decoration: The finishing coat is to be one part lime putty to one part fine sand (or two parts lime putty to three parts fine sand), applied to a thickness of 2-5mm and smoothed flush. Once fully cured, breathable mineral paints are to be applied – a primer coat plus two top coats – to maintain the breathability of the ceiling, with the top coat colour matched to the existing decoration as closely as possible.
- 7.6 Programme: Adequate time for the complete curing of the lime plaster and paint finishes is to be allowed within the programme, with a contingency for environmental conditions: lime work should only be undertaken when temperature and humidity are suitable, and must be protected from frost and from drying too rapidly.
- 7.7 Unexpected discoveries and records: Should anything unexpected be uncovered during the works that requires an alternative approach, works in the affected area are to be paused and Heritage Unlimited (or the local authority, as appropriate) consulted before proceeding. A photographic record of the reinstatement is to be maintained throughout and made available to the project team on completion.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 The ceiling was beyond salvage as a consequence of long-term water ingress that had destroyed the bond between plaster and laths and corroded the fixings; its partial collapse during careful restoration works confirmed this condition; it was not safe to retain or attempt to salvage the remaining plaster fabric; and its removal was a necessary and proportionate response to an immediate risk, capable of full and appropriate remediation through like-for-like reinstatement as set out in Sections 6 and 7 above.
- 8.2 Should you require any further information, or any clarification of the method statement set out above, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Frances Woodgate MA (Hons) Architectural Design MArch ADPPA
Associate | Heritage Unlimited

Encs. Site photographs

Site photographs taken by Palliass Ltd, July 2026

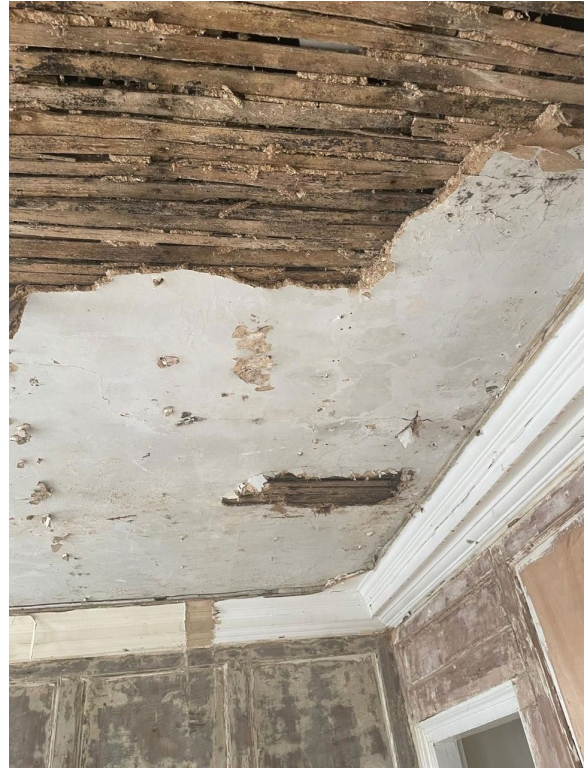


Fig.3 (left): Fractured and displaced laths with extensive dark staining consistent with prolonged water saturation of the ceiling structure. Fig.4 (right): Openings through the ceiling exposing the laths, with perforations from fixings across the plaster surface (Source: Palliass Ltd, July 2026).



Fig.5 (right): The ceiling as existing with the laths fully removed and the structure cleaned ready for the ceiling reinstatement. Note the modern timbers fitted alongside and between the historic ceiling joists (fitted before the recent works with access from the floor above) using modern joist hangers and threaded bolts to strengthen the structure, evidencing the ceiling required strengthening and stabilisation works.