

Factsheet

Kew Palace Limewashing

- We discovered historic layers of paint dating from the 18th and 19th centuries on the palace façade hidden behind a rainwater hopper. Paint analysis revealed the brickwork had been treated with a limewash pigmented with red brick dust, a practice that we revived in 1998.
- Kew Palace is remarkable for its brick facade and early example of Flemish bond brickwork.
- The brickwork was never designed to be seen in its 'naked' state which, with various bricks of non-standard sizes, appeared uneven. The pattern of the Flemish bonded brickwork is in the 'penny-struck pointing' style which can only really be appreciated beneath a limewash.
- Evidence found on the palace's exterior tells us that a coloured limewash was used in 1631 and at least 4 more times into the 19th century. The building had this colour scheme for almost 75% of its 366-year history. It is a tradition that only died out in the 20th century.
- The limewashing provides a sacrificial weathering coat which preserves the brickwork and mortar, as well as important historical evidence. Although it was not originally used for conservation purposes, nowadays it is the least damaging option for conserving the building's facade.