

Frank Ridley's Cabin: Repairing & Chinking the Exterior Logs

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To help protect the exterior of the logs from weather and wood-boring insects, Frank Ridley would periodically apply a thick whitewash over the exterior of the logs including the cement chinking. However, with the passage of time, the weather, insects and the lack of regular maintenance, the logs deteriorated, particularly those closer to the ground which were exposed to backsplash when it rained. Successive owners of the log cabin, of whom there were two before us, tried to address the deterioration of the logs by applying steel mesh and stucco on the damaged sides of the cabin (*Figure 1*). When we purchased the cottage, I carefully removed both the stucco and mesh (*Figure 2*) and thereupon began the lengthy "labour of love" restoration of the cabin logs.

Before starting the log restoration, I sought the advice of a log construction consultant who came on site, inspected the entire cabin and, in the end, suggested that the logs were, in fact, salvageable. He suggested replacing the more rotten logs, near the ground, applying an insecticide and fungicide to all of the logs to deal with the problem of wood-boring insects, and then cleaning, sanding and staining the logs and finally chinking the logs with flexible chinking. This process turned out to be much more involved than I had first envisioned. In fact, it has taken five summers to do the work; the last section of the cabin will hopefully be completed this fall.

Prior to starting the restorations, I also did some research on the restoration of log homes and found that we could order the required tools and materials from **Canadian Log Home Supply** in Eganville, Ontario (*Figure 3*). From them, we purchased multiple pails of "Perma-Chink" (light gray), a chinking gun, "Shell-Guard" (insecticide and fungicide), "Log End Seal", and "Chink Paint". For the stain, we eventually chose Cabot products, specifically the Pro-V.T. Acrylic Solid Stains: Dune Gray for the logs, Nantucket White for the trim and Barn Red (as an accent), for the doors. To ensure better adhesion, we also decided to use their oil-based primer on the logs before applying the stains - Problem Solver- oil primer.



In dealing with the more severely damaged logs closer to the ground, I first chiseled out the rotted portions of the logs and then, depending on the amount of solid log left, I decided either to replace the entire log and apply a surface "half-log" or to incorporate the remaining portion of the damaged log into the existing concrete footing. Figures 4-6 show the actual conditions of the logs before and after I addressed those different conditions.

To restore the rest of the logs, I first removed the loose whitewash and broken chunks of cement chinking with an assortment of putty knives and chisels. I then caulked all the cracks between the logs and the cement chinking to prevent possible water penetration when pressure washing the logs to remove the remaining whitewash and accumulated dirt. After the logs were fully dried, I used a chisel and "Exacto" knife to cut away the opposite side of any remaining broadax cuts, which resulted from the initial squaring of the logs, thereby creating a "V" cut, which would facilitate direct contact of the primer and stain with the logs. Next, I injected, with a syringe, the Shell-Guard into all of the holes made by wood-boring insects (*Figure 7*). After that step I used compressed air to blow the insecticide/fungicide deep into the tiny holes. After the logs were fully dried, I caulked all the insect holes along with any remaining cracks to prepare the logs for the planing and sanding of any rough spots before applying the primer.

As I patiently continue working on repairing and restoring the cabin logs, I often reflect on the stories that we have heard and read about Mr. Ridley and the log cabin. Finding myself thus immersed in the history of the area and the life of an exceptional man who played a significant role in bringing this history to us, I feel energized and motivated to continue my time-consuming restoration work.

After successfully replacing the damaged logs and after, cleaning, planing, sanding and caulking all of the logs, I was now ready to apply the primer followed by two coats of the solid stain. Once the stain had fully dried, I then applied the flexible chinking. Before doing so, I covered, as was recommended, the old cement chinking with aluminum (sheet metal) tape so that the new flexible chinking, placed on top of the tape, would en-



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counter less friction when expanding or contracting between the logs. This tape would also accommodate any future movement between the upper and lower logs (*Figure 8*). Also, before applying the chinking material, I used painting tape to cover the edge of the logs, thereby ensuring a continuous strip of contact with the finished logs and, at the same time, preventing any accidental spillage of chinking material onto the finished log surfaces.

The final step in the log restoration process involved applying the flexible chinking- “Perma-Chink”, between the logs by first loading the chinking material into the gun and then sequentially spreading and shaping a 3/8 to 1/2 inch chinking strip between the logs, fully covering the aluminum tape underneath and finally creating that finished log cabin look (*Figure 9*). Some of the tools that I used to spread and shape the Perma-Chink were small putty knives as well as some wooden tools, which I fashioned from various sizes of cedar branches. The shaping tools, particularly the wooden ones, were frequently dipped in a container of water with a few drops of dish soap so that the chinking material would spread easier and it would not stick to the tools as I worked with the Perma-Chink (*Figure 10*).

