Historic buildings take a great deal of care and upkeep, and only experts can do the work properly. Maintaining a twelfth-century structure, such as the Canterbury Cathedral, which is open year-round and receives approximately one million visitors a year, is a daunting task. Even a relative newcomer, like George Washington’s Mount Vernon, built in 1674, is in constant need of maintenance. Luckily, Kent County, England, and Virginia are home to a number of masters of the building arts who are up to the task.

The Price family runs the Virginia Lime Works in Monroe, Virginia. To restore Montpelier, James Madison’s home, and Poplar Forest, Thomas Jefferson’s retreat near Lynchburg, the Prices researched historic mortar types and brickwork. They transform oyster shells and lime, as if by magic, into historically accurate mortar through a process of kiln firing, grinding, and adding water.

The twelve stonemasons and conservators of Canterbury Cathedral pursue an ancient craft. Despite the availability of machine tools, such as pneumatic chisels and disc cutters, they use many tools that are the same or similar to those used by their medieval predecessors. They finish all of their work in the traditional manner with hand tools. To redo restoration work from the Victorian period, they now use mortars that are kinder to the French limestone of the Cathedral.