



GUIDE TO MAINTAINING SEFTON'S HISTORIC HOMES

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This Guide was developed as part of an internship funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund through Southport Townscape Heritage Project.

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Introduction

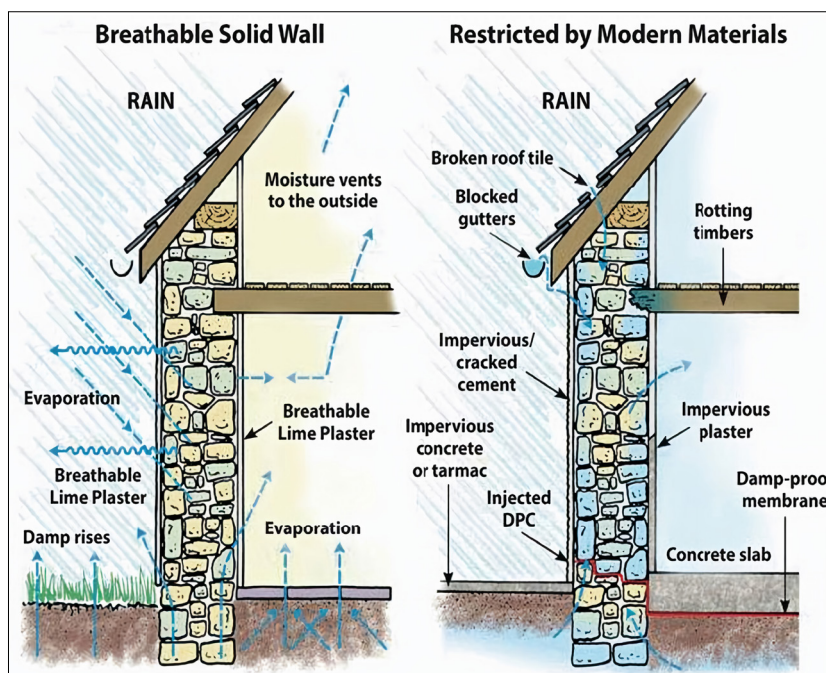
Traditional buildings are generally defined as those built before 1919. Those that survive today, regardless of size or status, uniquely reflect local social and cultural history. Being in ownership of or living in a traditional building offers the opportunity to care for a small but irreplaceable piece of history.

However, knowing how to maintain such a building can be daunting and confusing.

The main difference between a traditional building compared to a modern building is that they have solid walls. Modern construction has cavity walls and uses impermeable materials like cement renders, damp-proof membranes, and synthetic paints. These form a barrier that prevents moisture entering the fabric of the building. Traditional buildings have solid walls that rely on the physical thickness of the walls for insulation and use permeable materials to allow moisture to circulate.

Essentially this means that traditional buildings need to 'breathe' and must be well ventilated. Cutting off this ventilation completely will lead to issues of damp, mould growth and rot.

Preserving a house's historic character while allowing it to be ventilated and comfortable is possible when proper maintenance is carried out.



The importance of 'breathability' in traditional buildings

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Maintenance over Restoration

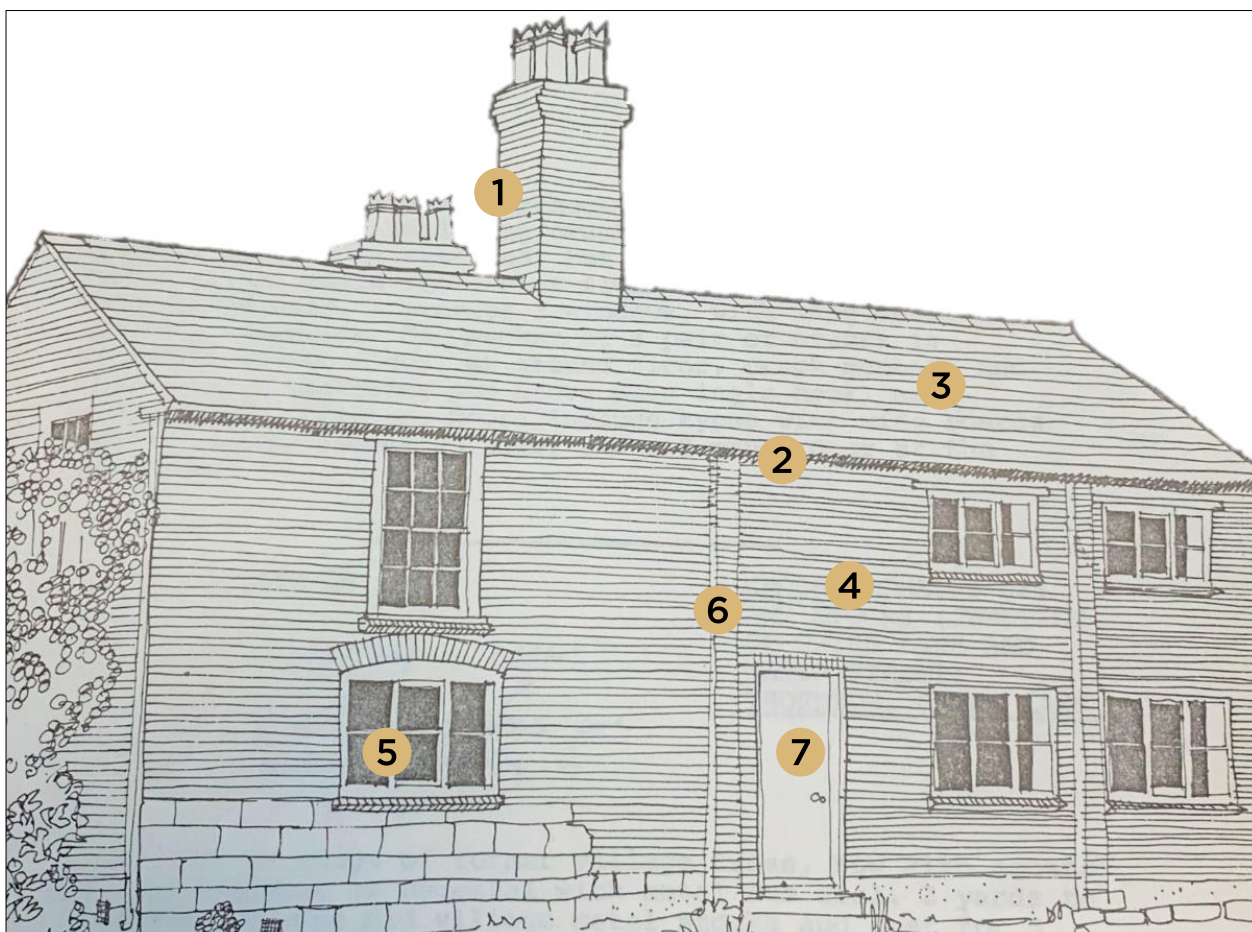
The most time and cost-effective thing you can do to a historic property is to maintain it. Minor problems can quickly escalate if they are not tackled as soon as they are spotted. Proper maintenance will also maintain your property's value and future saleability.

This guidance provides an annual checklist of when to undertake this to ease the task of maintaining your property, as well as advice on what to do when you spot defects or problems in your property.

This is a general guidance, and it is likely further additions will need to be added to your checklist based on the unique features of your own property. For example, if one elevation of your property is more exposed to the elements than the others, then you may have to inspect this more often. If you have a tree in close proximity to your house, the gutters will need to be cleared more often. Inspections should also be carried out after storms or high winds.

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Property Inspections: What to Look For



1 CHIMNEY

- Leaning and Bulging
- Missing Chimney Pots
- Vegetation
- Missing Mortar

2 GUTTERING

- Plant Growth
- Leaks
- Sloping

3 ROOF TILES

- Moss and plant growth
- Missing Tiles
- Tile Cracks and Splits

4 BRICKWORK

- Repointing
- Salinity
- Bulging and Cracks
- Staining

5 WINDOWS

- Peeling Paint
- Cracks
- Broken Sash Cords
- Soft Timber

6 TIMBERS

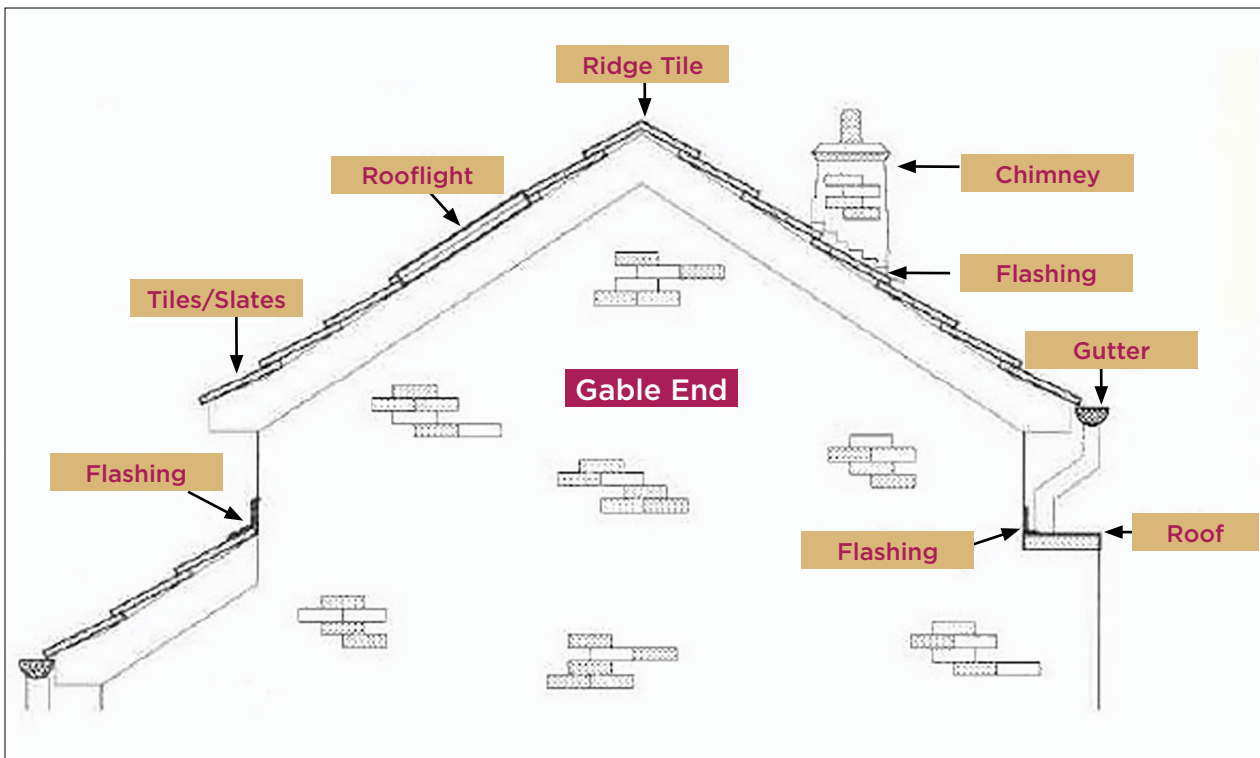
- Mould
- Distortion
- Fractures
- Insect Attacks

7 DOORS

- Paint Peeling
- Splits and Cracks
- Shrinkage
- Soft wood

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Roof Maintenance



Roof: Natural Slate and Stone

Moss and Vegetation Growth – This can be damaging as it can lead to a build-up of moisture and can erode the slate. Moss can be removed with washes that are commonly available at garden centres. Vegetation like ivy should be removed by cutting stems close to the root and pulling them free once they have withered.

Slate Slippage – Tingles (a metal hook) can be a temporary solution to securing slates that have slipped. Avoid using sticky bitumen-coated fabric or spray-on fabric on the roof as this makes it difficult to trace leaks and stops tiles being re-used. Any additional materials used on the roof should still allow the property to ‘breathe’.

Cracks, Splits or Discolouration – Slates are highly durable and can last hundreds of years. Discolouration or small cracks do not mean they need replacing but is just a natural sign of aging. If there are significant cracks however, then replacement slates should be like-for-like. Artificial slates made from concrete or resin should be avoided due to their difference in weight having the potential to damage the roof and aesthetic difference harming the buildings historic appearance.

Roof: Clay Tiles

Moss and Vegetation Growth – This can be damaging as it leads to a build-up of moisture and can erode the tile. Moss can be removed with washes that are commonly available at garden centres. Vegetation like ivy should be removed by cutting stems close to the root and pulling them free once they have withered.

Slippage – Unlike slate some clay tiles are not often nailed in, but instead have nibs in the back of them which clip onto the roof. Slipped tiles can be reinstated by slotting them back or securing a suitable replacement with mortar or nails. Foam or artificial repair treatments should be avoided due to reducing ventilation, harming the surrounding tiles and preventing future inspections.

Cracks, Splits or Discolouration – Clay tiles are highly durable and can last hundreds of years. Discolouration or small cracks do not mean they need replacing but is just a natural sign of aging. There is a significant difference in the durability of manmade and machine-made clay tiles, as well as in their weight and appearance. Replacement tiles should be the colour of the existing when they were first laid and will weather over time to match.



Missing or shifted tiles can allow water ingress causing damp inside the home

Roof: Thatch Roof

Holes – In some cases patch repairs are sufficient maintenance rather than replacing the whole roof. All work should be undertaken by a reputable thatcher and walking on the roof must be avoided by all contractors to prevent dents.

Moss Build Up – Excessive moss should be removed as soon as possible to avoid moisture being trapped underneath.

Pests – Plastic netting may be required to prevent further problems and infestation.

Insulation – In most cases additional insulation should not be added as thatch roofs already offer very good insulation. Further insulation can be costly and can lead to waterlogging and rot.

Roof: Metal Roof

Splits and Pitting – This can be caused through age, sheets being installed too tightly, or through thermal changes causing the metal to expand and contract. Repair tape is a short-lived measure to stop water ingress and splits can be fixed by ‘burning’ in a new piece. However, these works require an experienced contractor.

Debris - Keep the roof free of debris and prevent moss build up due to the damage this can cause from the additional weight.

Sloping – Even a ‘flat’ roof should have a slight fall to allow water to drain away and prevent a build-up of pools of water, that could cause damp issues. If water is pooling seek specialist advice

Rust – Some roofs made out of lead can rust and corrode if they are not properly ventilated or pre-treated. Specialist advice should be sought to repair this.



Patch repairs can be used to maintain thatch roofs

Roof Flashings

Loose Flashing – This can be caused through age or poor installation. Repair tape is a short-lived measure to stop water ingress and splits can be fixed by ‘burning’ in a new piece. However, these works require an experienced contractor.

Rust – Some flashings made out of lead can rust and corrode if they are not properly ventilated or pre-treated. Specialist advice should be sought to repair this.



Splits in metal roofs or flashings should be repaired as soon as possible to prevent water ingress

Roof Ridges

Dislodged Tiles – The top of the roof is commonly made from zinc, lead, fired clay or sometimes natural stone. Ridge fastenings can become loose from exposure to the elements or through thermal changes that lift the nails securing the ridge. Ridge fastenings should be refastened or re-bedded with a suitable mortar to prevent water ingress.



Broken or Missing Tiles – These should be replaced as soon as possible to prevent water ingress and in turn, structural damage. The same materials and suitable mortar should be used to prevent disturbances in the roof's weight.

Missing Mortar – Due to the high exposure missing mortar is a common occurrence. Repairs should be carried out with a lime-based mortar for older buildings.



Cracked ridge tiles and missing mortar can lead to damp ingress

Chimney Stack

Leaning – Leaning does not necessarily indicate a danger, but professional advice should be sought.

Missing Mortar – Erosion to mortar is common due to sulphur gasses released from the flue. Missing mortar should be replaced with a lime-based mortar for older buildings to protect the structure.

Bulging – Professional advice should be sought as this could be a result of structural movement.

Broken Pots – These should be replaced with traditional patterns, which are still widely available.

Vegetation – This would need to be removed to prevent further damage to the mortar.



Plant growth should be removed to prevent moisture build-up

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Wall Maintenance



External Brickwork

Repointing/Mortar Repair – Professional advice should be sought before repointing and should only be done when necessary. For older buildings it is essential that a softer lime-based mortar is used rather than cement. This prevents the bricks corroding due to a lack of ‘breathability’, which can be costly in the long-term and cause serious structural problems.

Cracks – These need urgent attention as they can occur because of structural movement and allow water ingress. Professional advice should be sought.

Bulging – Professional advice should be sought as in some cases this could be a result of structural movement.

Salinity – Salinity is the concentration of salt, and it appears as white staining on brickwork. It can cause erosion to the brickwork as a result of problems such as poor drainage. However, salts are water soluble and can be easily removed with diluted vinegar, careful brushing, or pressurised water.

Stains – The necessity of any cleaning should be balanced with the harm it could cause to brickwork. Weathering is a natural process and can be an aesthetically pleasing aspect of a historic property. Painting the exterior of a listed building would usually require Listed Building Consent, even if it is to remove unsuitable paint, because it is changing the appearance of the property.

Graffiti – How easy it is to remove will depend on how porous the bricks are and how long the vandalism has been on the wall. Professional guidance should be sought before removal to avoid further damage to the bricks by using abrasive techniques.

Vegetation – Plants, moss, lichens, debris at the base of walls or creepers like ivy can create persistently damp walls. They can also blocking roof valleys and guttering. They should be carefully removed due to the further damage they can cause to masonry and mortar joints.



Using cement mortar can cause traditional bricks to corrode

External Stonework

Repointing/Mortar Repair – Professional advice should be sought before repointing and this should only be done when necessary. For older buildings it is essential that a softer lime-based mortar is used rather than cement. This prevents the bricks from corroding long-term which is costly and could cause total collapse.

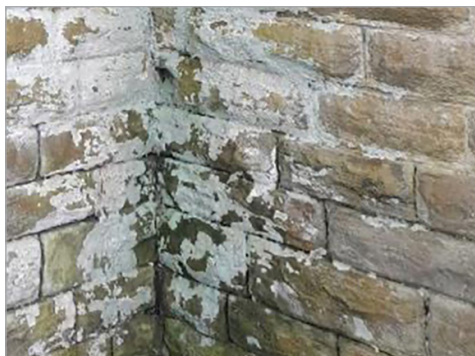
Cracks – New cracks need urgent attention as they can occur because of structural movement and allow water ingress. Professional advice should be sought.

Bulging – Professional advice should be sought as this could be a result of structural movement. However, in some cases it can still be structurally sound.

Stains and Graffiti – Cleaning can be done with water and bristles, jet streams, steam, or appropriate chemicals. However, the more delicate the stone the less abrasive a technique should be used. Before undertaking any cleaning, the method should be tested

in an inconspicuous place. However, it is usually better not to clean stonework because it may harm the stone. This ‘patina of time’ should be protected as part of the building’s historic character. Therefore, advice should be sought from professionals or the council. If it is a listed building, then Listed Building Consent should be requested as it may change the appearance of the building.

Vegetation – Plants, moss, lichens, debris at the base or creepers like ivy can create persistently damp walls as well as blocking roof valleys and guttering. These should be carefully removed due to the further damage they can cause to masonry and mortar joints.



Moss and lichen build-up leads to consistently damp masonry



Missing mortar can lead to structural issues and water ingress if not maintained.

External Render

Cracks – Traditional renders were lime-based which is far softer than many materials used today. They are flexible and allow the building to ‘breathe’.

Cracks in renders can allow moisture to penetrate the wall and can lead to render falling off through frost action. Cracks should be patched appropriately as soon as possible.

Smooth lime render known as ‘stucco’ should be repainted every 5 to 8 years.

Areas or elevations of the property that experience strong winds or heavy rain should have the stucco repainted every year.

Timbers

Mould or Rot – Structural timber can last indefinitely with proper maintenance. To prevent decay, routine repainting is essential to protect the wood. However, in a listed building the colour of the timber cannot significantly change without consulting the Local Authority Conservation Team for Listed Building Consent. For sections of timbers which are already rotten they must be replaced ‘like for like’, or with an additional reinforcement such as a metal strap.

Distortion – This does not indicate a sign of weakness as timbers are naturally crooked with age and can contribute to the building’s character. However, if significant changes occur within a short space of time, then professional input should be sought.

Fractures – Failure often occurs at the joints, especially after being exposed to bad weather. They can also occur from carrying additional weight, such as from



Cracks in render must be patched appropriately to prevent water ingress

a new wall or materials being used. It is recommended to add sympathetic reinforcement or supplementary structures for support.

Insect Attacks – This most commonly occurs in damp hardwoods like Oak or Chestnut and detection can be difficult. If holes are dark and dirty the attack is most likely historic and no action is required. However, if holes are clean, light coloured or if there is a fine dust then this may indicate an active infestation and professional advice should be sought.



Round and dark holes indicate historic beetle attacks, whereas active infestations have sharper and lighter holes



Blocked gutters cause water to overflow and can lead to issues with damp

Gutters and Down Pipes

Blockages – Leaves should be cleared annually to prevent blockages and leaks in guttering. Vegetation, particularly in autumn with heavy leaf fall, should be managed to prevent high build-up. Neglecting this can lead to damp problems which are expensive and time-consuming to sort later down the line. Stained brickwork or stone can give an indication of where water is spilling over and potential damp problems.

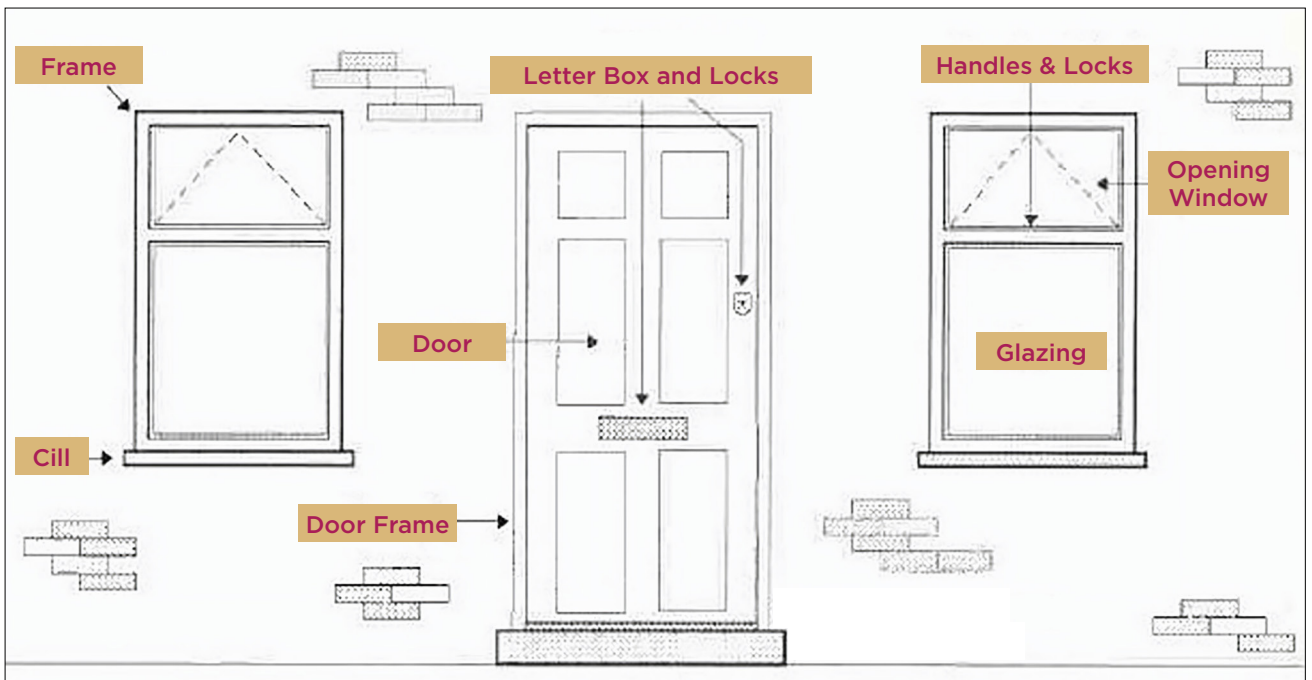
Leaks and Fixings – A clue that guttering and down pipes are not secured correctly is if there is water-staining or algae growth on the wall behind. They need to be secured as soon as possible to avoid further damp problems.

Sloping – Gutters should also be adjusted if necessary so they slope correctly and do not cause a build-up of pools of water that could cause damp issues. For ironwork, repairing paintwork and redecoration prevents corrosion while temporary tape can be used for short-term fixes prior to full repairs. For a full replacement, gutters should be replaced 'like for like' or with cast aluminium.

Painting – Re-painting cast iron down pipes and guttering is recommended to prevent rusting and aids their longevity. This should be done every 3 years.

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Door and Window Maintenance



Windows

Cracks and Holes – These can be repaired with an appropriate filler and cleaned up using a damp sponge and mild detergent.

Paint Peeling – Sash windows are usually made of soft wood and regular painting helps protect them from decaying. For effective painting, the topmost layers of heavy paint build-up can be removed with paint strippers. Repainting should be done every 7 years and excessive thick coats must be avoided due to causing jamming and damage to the frame.

Opening Issues – Avoid forcing the window open. Rubbing beeswax, candlewax and soap along the sash edges can ease opening. Seasonal and humidity changes can induce swelling which should be tolerated unless prolonged, indicating further works are needed. Locks and handles should also be checked to make sure they are in working order.

Broken Sash Cords – These must be fixed as soon as possible to avoid further damage to the sliding mechanism which would cause further problems and

costs. Once one cord breaks it is worth replacing them all. Re-cording requires the sash window to be removed and the opportunity should be taken to clean the window of debris.

Cracks in the Glass – Damaged glass must be replaced as soon as possible by a reputable contractor. Any lead or stained glass should be repaired or replaced 'like for like' to protect the aesthetic value. Surrounding putty should also be checked to make sure it is secured.

Timber Decay – If spotted then the affected area must be cleaned and resealed. If damage is more extensive the timber can be replaced through a 'splicing' technique done by a reputable contractor. If necessary, window replacements should be 'like for like' and not replaced with uPVC.



Timber windows should be repainted every 7 years to protect the wood from decaying

External Doors

Rotten or Soft Wood – It is cost-effective in the long-term to repair faults in a door as soon as possible rather than replacing the whole door.

Splicing is a technique that maintains the solid part of the original door and replaces only the damaged section. Doors should never be replaced for uPVC or metallic equivalents due to the differences in finishes, and if a listed building you should seek Listed Building Consent.

Shrinkage – Due to exposure to the elements or overuse of paint, it is common for wooden doors to swell. Sanding the edges can help smooth the opening and closing mechanism. Excessive paint build-up can be removed using a hook scraper, with care taken not to scar the timber.

Splitting – Split panels can be fixed by loosening and re-gluing the broken pieces in situ.

Loose or Worn Joints – Hinges should be kept lightly oiled and inserting new wedges can aid loose joints. Original latches should be maintained due to their historic value.

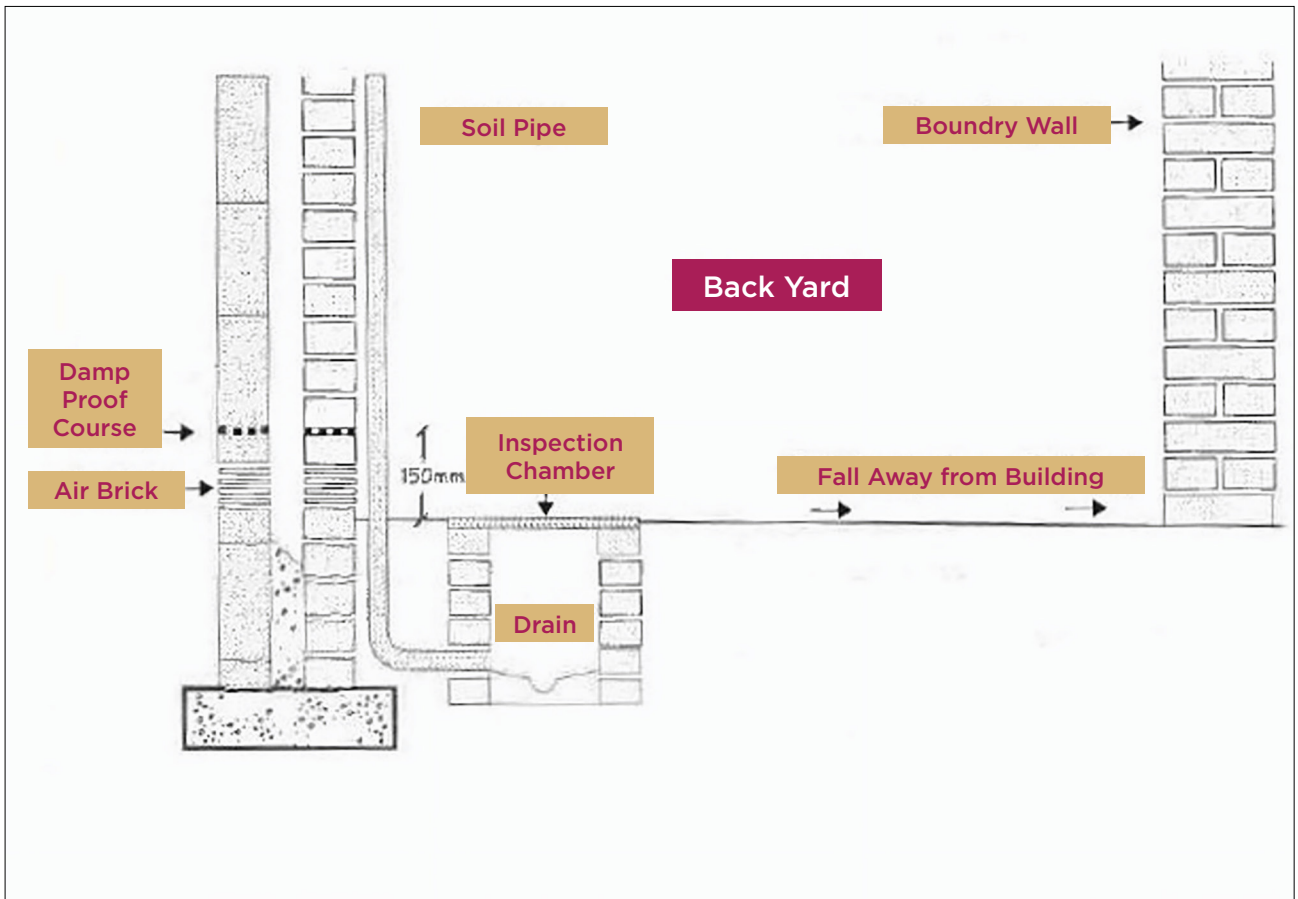
Paint Peeling – Repainting should be done every 7 years, sooner if it is exposed to the elements.



Repairing cracks or splits in door will also help reduce heat loss

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Other External Maintenance



Drains

Blockages - Blockages within drains should be cleared with rodding and hosing down. Blockages can also be identified if there is an unpleasant smell surrounding them.

Water Flow - Water should be flowing into drains and away from the external walls to avoid damp build-up.

Air Bricks

Blockages - Air bricks provide a good flow of ventilation beneath the floors of your property. Therefore, it is essential these are cleared of debris and are not blocked up.

Ground Level

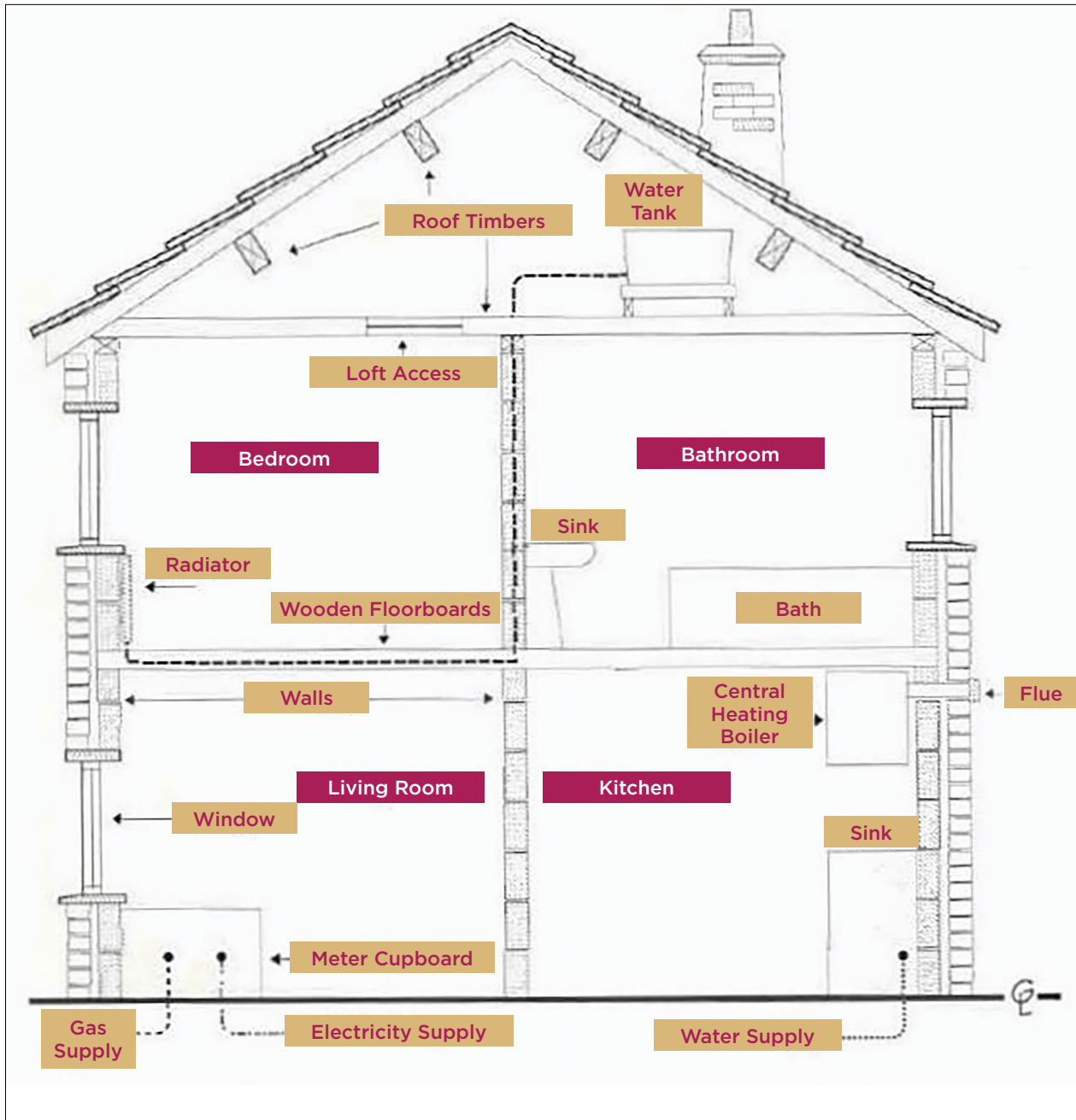
Flat Ground Level - The ground level should be 150mm (or 6 inches) below the damp proof course level and sloping away from your property. This prevents a build-up of damp to the base of the property.



Moss and algae are an indication of dampness on external walls. Pipes should be extended to prevent this

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Internal Maintenance



Internal Walls and Ceilings

Damp – It is important that the cause of the problem is identified rather than it being covered up with paint, plaster, or paper, as this can cause further issues long term.

Where there is evidence of moisture in the fabric of the building then appropriate ventilation measures should be taken. Dehumidifiers can be a temporary solution to dry out rooms and are widely available.

Bulging – Professional advice should be sought as this could be a result of structural movement, leaks or rising damp.

Mould Growth – Black mould can be wiped off with a damp towel. Moving furniture away from walls can help aid moisture flow and prevent build-up, in addition to appropriate ventilation measures.



Water stains on internal walls indicate dampness in your property

Plumbing

Leaks – Leaking pipes can lead to severe damp problems if left undetected. Pipes should be inspected for leaks and washers replaced if necessary. Common places for leaks are under sinks and baths.

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Summary

A lack of management of moisture movement and general negligence of a property's condition will inevitably lead to damp issues. Damp can not only decay your building and cause costly structural issues, but it can also lead to respiratory problems due to high humidity and potential mould growth.

As a summary, here are the best ways to avoid damp in a traditional building.

- Regularly inspect your building and act on any problems identified at an early stage.
- Completing minor jobs such as clearing gutters and downpipes annually or after a storm, fixing loose slates or holes to a thatched roof, and clearing debris from the base of walls, will prevent long term financial cost and complex structural issues.
- Keeping a property ventilated on dry days will prevent damp build-up, in rooms like kitchens and bathrooms, which experience high moisture. Further methods like fitting extractor fans (may require Listed Building Consent) and ensuring existing vents are functional can also help ventilate a building.
- Use appropriate materials such as lime-mortar or lime render when carrying out more intrusive works to traditional properties. This will allow your property to 'breathe'. Cement must be avoided as it traps moisture, eroding the building's fabric, and causing problems with damp.
- Major works or changing the character or appearance of your property may require Listed Building Consent and/or Planning Permission. Please seek the advice of the Local Authority's Conservation Team before undertaking these works to your property.

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Maintenance Guidance

It is recommended that the maintenance checklist is printed off annually and details of any alterations are recorded.

This information is not only useful for you, but to any professionals who will carry out work on the property and for any future owners



YEAR COMPLETED:

ADDRESS:

Month	Maintenance Task	Responsibility	Complete	Notes
January				
February	<p>Roof Inspection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Look for any damage (loose tiles, holes).• Remove any moss, leaves or other debris.	Inspection and basic works done by householder.		
March	<p>External Walls Inspection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• General inspection of the walls' condition and note any new signs of damage or movement.• Check that roofs and windows are bird-proof before nesting, without disturbing any bats that may be present• Inspect putty, glass, and timber around windows.• Fix hinges and bolts, and lubricate, if necessary, as well checking the security of locks.	Inspection and basic works done by householder.		
	<p>External Wall Inspection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure ventilation grilles are secure and free from obstruction.• Inspect windows and make sure essential minor repairs are carried out relation to the glazing.	Inspection by householder. Necessary works to be done by reputable contractor.		
	<p>Internal Structure Inspection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inspect roof voids and internal spaces for roof or gutter leaks.• Inspect internal timbers for structural movement, dam, dry rot, or fungal growth.• Inspect woodworks for beetle infestation of or wood dust.	Inspection by householder. Necessary works to be done by reputable contractor.		

YEAR COMPLETED:**ADDRESS:**

April	<p>General Roof Inspection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look for any damaged or loose slates on tiled roofs. For flat, cladded or metal sheet roofs inspect condition of panels, joints or clips. Inspect ridge tiles for missing tiles and mortar. Inspect condition of any lead flashings and repair minor weatherings. Replace tiles to match and make temporary repairs to cracks or splits on flat roof if required. 	<p>Inspection by householder.</p> <p>Necessary works to be done by reputable contractor.</p>		
	<p>Rainwater Inspection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inspect from ground level of the rainwater goods and guttering. 	<p>Inspection by householder.</p>		

May	<p>Rainwater Inspection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear drainage channels of debris and vegetation. Inspect drainage for cracks, leaks and open joints. If needed seal with appropriate sealant 	<p>Initial inspection by householder.</p>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check gullies and gratings are free from silt and that water discharges freely into sewage system. 	<p>Necessary works to be done by reputable contractor.</p>		
	<p>External Wall Inspection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check trees and shrubs close to the property, or near the base of the building. Remove dead branches and get professional advice on decay, root damage or drainage issues in relation to the trees. 	<p>Inspection and basic works done by the householder.</p>		
	<p>Internal Structure Inspection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ventilate on dry days. 	<p>Basic works done by householder.</p>		

June	<p>Rainwater Inspection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear drainage channel of debris and vegetation. Clear rainwater goods of debris to prevent overflow. Check gutter guards are secure. 	<p>Inspection and basic works done by householder.</p>		
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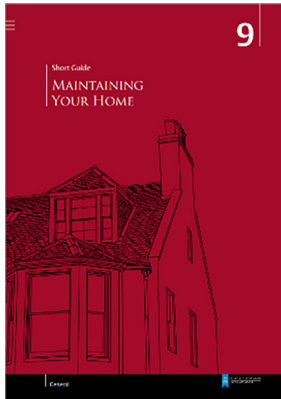
YEAR COMPLETED:				
ADDRESS:				
	Internal Structure Inspection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ventilate on dry days. Check pipework for leaks. 	Basic works done by householder.		
July	Rainwater Inspection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear drainage channels and guttering of debris and vegetation. 	Inspection and basic work done by householder.		
	Internal Structure Inspection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ventilate on dry days. 	Inspection and basic work done by householder.		
August	Rainwater Inspection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear drainage channel of debris and vegetation. 	Inspection and basic work done by householder.		
	Internal Structure Inspection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sweep open chimney flues. Ventilate on dry days. 	Ventilation should be undertaken by the householder. Necessary works to the chimney should be done by reputable contractor.		
September	External Wall Inspection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure ventilation grilles, air bricks, louvres are secure and free from obstruction. Fix any hinges and bolts and lubricate if necessary. Check the security of locks. 	Inspections should be undertaken by householder. Works to vents should be undertaken by a reputable contractor.		
	Internal Structure Inspection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check roof and floor voids for signs of vermin and remove. Avoid poison while bats are roosting. Ventilate the building on dry days. 	Inspection and basic work done by householder.		
October	Building Service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure all exposed water tanks, water pipes and heating pipes are protected against frost. 	Inspection and basic work done by householder.		

YEAR COMPLETED:**ADDRESS:**

November	<p>General Roof Inspection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look for any damaged or loose slates on tiled roofs. For flat, cladded or metal sheet roofs inspect condition of panels, joints or clips. Replace tiles to match or make temporary repairs to cracks or splits on flat roofs if required. 	<p>Inspection by householder.</p> <p>Necessary works to be done by reputable contractor.</p>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> External Wall Inspection Inspect windows and make sure essential minor repairs are carried out in relation to the glazing. Remove vegetation and ivy from walls to prevent moisture build-up. 	<p>Initial inspection by householder.</p> <p>Necessary works to be done by reputable contractor.</p>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rainwater Inspection Clear drainage channel of debris and vegetation. 	<p>Initial inspection by householder.</p>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inspect drainage for cracks, leaks and open joints and if needed seal with appropriate sealant. Check gullies and gratings are free from silt and that water discharges freely into sewage system. 	<p>Initial inspection by householder.</p> <p>Necessary works to be done by reputable contractor.</p>		
December				

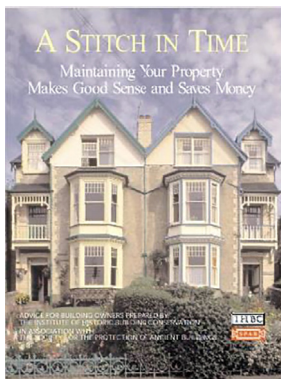
11

For More Information



Maintaining Your Home: Short Guide

By Historic Scotland



A Stitch In Time: Maintaining Your Property Makes Good Sense and Saves Money

By IHBC and SPAB



Maintenance Matters (Website)

By SPAB

<https://www.spab.org.uk/campaigning/maintenance-matters>



Maintaining an Older Home (Website)

By Historic England

<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/your-home/owning-historic-property/your-historic-building/>

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