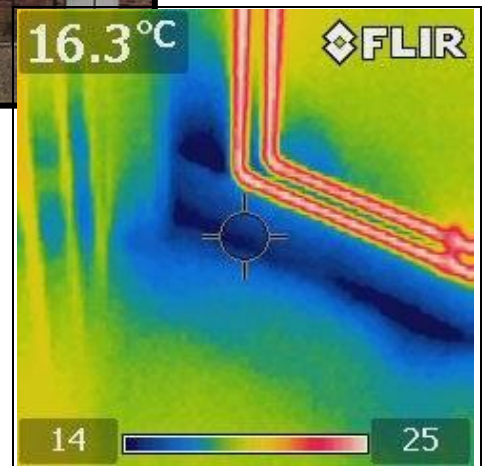


RESIDENTIAL BUILDING SURVEY

CAMBRIDGESHIRE



**Non-traditional
Modern
Semi-detached**



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INTRODUCTION

Firstly, may we thank you for your instructions; we have now undertaken a Building Survey (formerly known as a Structural Survey) of the aforementioned property.

The Building Survey takes the following format; there is an introductory section (which you are currently reading), which includes a synopsis of the building, and a summary of our findings. This report should be read in conjunction with the Specific Defect Report relating to dampness within the property.

We then go through a detailed examination of the property starting with the external areas working from the top of the property down, followed by the internal areas and the buildings services. We conclude with the section for your Legal Advisor and some related articles.

We are aware that a report of this size is somewhat daunting and almost off-putting to the reader because of this.

We recommend that you set aside time to read the report in full, consider the comments, make notes of any areas which you wish to discuss further and phone us.

We obviously expect you to read the entire report but we would suggest that you initially look at the summary, which refers to various sections in the report, which we recommend you read first so that you get a general feel for the way the report is written.

As part of our service we are more than happy to talk through the survey as many times as you wish until you are completely happy to make a decision.

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REPORT FORMAT

To help you understand our Report we utilise various techniques and different styles and types of text, these are as follows:

GENERAL/HISTORICAL INFORMATION

This has been given in the survey where it is considered it will aid understanding of the issues, or be of interest. This is shown in "italics" for clarity.

TECHNICAL TERMS DEFINED

Throughout the Report, we have endeavoured to define any technical terms used. This is shown in "Courier New" typeface for clarity.

A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS



We utilise photographs and sketches to illustrate issues or features. In some photographs a pencil has been used to highlight a specific area. The sketches are not 100% technically accurate; we certainly would not expect you to carry out work based upon the sketches alone.

ORIENTATION

Any reference to left or right is taken from the front of the property, including observations to the rear, which you may not be able to physically see from the front of the property.

ACTION REQUIRED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We have used the term **ACTION REQUIRED** where we believe that there are items that you should carry out action upon or negotiate upon.

Where a problem is identified, we will do our best to offer a solution. However, with most building issues, there are usually many ways to resolve them dependent upon cost, time available and the length of time you wish the repair/replacement to last.

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SYNOPSIS

SITUATION AND DESCRIPTION

This is a modern semi detached two storey property with access to the front and gardens to the rear. It all sits on a shallow sloping site.

It is part of a smallish residential development.

We are advised that the property was built in 2009.

EXTERNAL PHOTOGRAPHS



Front Elevation



Rear View



Left Hand View



Right Hand View

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ACCOMMODATION AND FACILITIES

As you are living at the property we are sure you are familiar with the accommodation and facilities.

Ground Floor

The ground floor accommodation consists of:

1. Through lounge
2. Entrance hall
3. Kitchen/breakfast room area
4. Utility room
5. Cloakroom

First Floor

The first floor accommodation consists of:

1. Three bedrooms
2. Family bathroom

Outside Areas

Rear garden and parking area to the rear.

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INTERNAL PHOTOGRAPHS

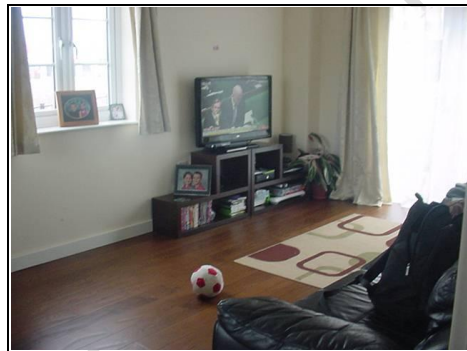
Selection of photographs taken on the day of our survey.



Cloakroom



Kitchen



Lounge



Front left hand bedroom



Bedroom

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SUMMARY OF CONSTRUCTION

External

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Main Roof: | Pitched and clad with concrete tiles with a breathable protective underlayer |
| Gutters and Downpipes: | Plastic |
| Soil and Vent Pipe: | Internal |
| Walls: | Finished in Stretcher Bond brickwork and painted render (assumed) |
| Fascias and Soffits: | Plastic (assumed) |
| Windows and Doors: | Double glazed plastic windows without trickle vents (assumed) |
| Foundations: | Not inspected |

Internal

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Ceilings: | Plasterboard (assumed) |
| Walls: | Timber frame with dry lining (assumed) and plasterboard finish |
| Floors: Ground Floor: | Suspended beam and block concrete (assumed) |
| First Floor: | Joist and floorboards (assumed) |

Services

The heating is electric via a NIBE heat recovery system and controlled domestic ventilation system (assumed). NIBE are a Swedish based company.

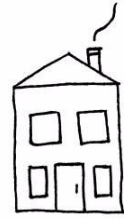
We have used the term ‘assumed’ as we have not opened up the structure.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Summaries are not ideal as they try to précis often quite complex subjects into a few paragraphs. This is particularly so in a summary about someone's home when we are trying to second-guess what their priorities are, so it is important the Report is read in full.

It is inevitable with a report on a building of this nature that some of the issues we have focussed in on you may dismiss as irrelevant and some of the areas that we have decided are part of the 'character' of this property you may think are very important. We have taken in the region of fifty plus photographs during the course of this survey and many pages of notes, so if an issue has not been discussed that you are interested in or concerned about please phone and talk to us as we will more than likely have noted it and be able to comment upon it. If we have not we will happily go back.

Generally we found the property to be in poor condition considering the property's age which is almost brand new.

We have divided the Executive Summary into 'The Good', 'The Bad' and 'The Ugly', to help distinguish what in our mind are the main issues.

The Good

Survey reports often are full of only the faults and general 'doom and gloom', so we thought we would start with some positive comments on the property!

It is built with modern materials albeit that it is the way that it is built that represents part of the problem.

We are sure you are aware of these as you are living in the property.

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The Bad

Problems / issues raised in the 'bad' section are usually solvable, but often need negotiation upon.

1) Cutting Edge Technology

The house has been built using what we would term as cutting edge technology for the residential construction industry and uses a heat recovery system. This technology is relatively new to those in the residential industry in the UK and very new to occupiers of such homes.

As such we feel that good guidance should have been given to you on how to use this type of technology. From what we understand heat recovery systems are best used on low level constantly. To the best of our knowledge they have not been in common use in residential homes in the UK for very long. We are not aware of any one authority based in the UK (that isn't a manufacturer or an installer with a vested interest) other than perhaps the Building Research Establishment which is the old government test centre for building products which have carried out tests on this product.

ACTION REQUIRED: We therefore feel our only option is to advise you to revert back to known and understood technology which would mean the installation of a traditional radiator heating system, modern double glazed windows with trickle vents and mechanical extract systems (ideally humidity thermostat controlled) in the high humidity areas such as the bathroom, the kitchen and the utility room.

We are aware that this is not an ideal solution as we can see how the new technology works, however from the evidence of you living in the building we feel this presently doesn't given an acceptable solution to you.

ANTICIPATED COST: £5,000 - £6,000 for new radiator system including removal of old system. For the windows anything from £4,000 - £10,000 depending upon the quality and style that you require; quotations required. There may be savings on this if trickle vents can be added to the existing windows as it seems a shame to take out almost brand new windows and replace them.

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The remainder of the comments made in this Section relate to specific issues that we have identified which in all cases require further investigation.

2) Dampness/condensation

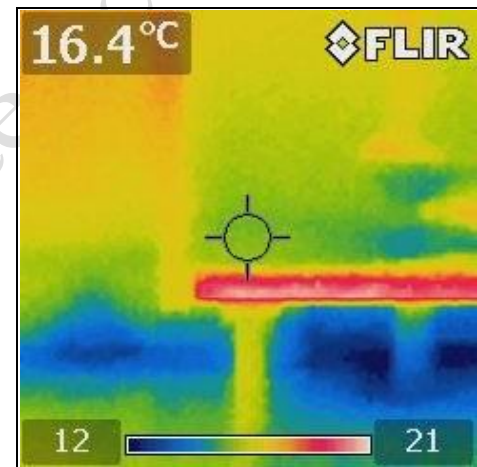
There is dampness evidence to the perimeter of the property. This could in theory come from a water leak in the kitchen (we suggest a chlorine test). However from our inspection on the day of the kitchen and our test in the bathroom we feel it is much more likely to be condensation. We refer you to our comments in the section Humidity generating areas not appropriately ventilated.



Dampness under kitchen unit



Electronic damp meter readings on kitchen floor



Thermal imaging photo showing cold areas underneath the kitchen units with cold water pipes directly above

3) Coldness around the perimeter of the building

We were surprised at the coldness around the perimeter of the building. We feel this may be due to the level of the building as you are aware the internal floor level and the external ground level are very similar, whilst it could also be due to lack of insulation in the area. We have had experience of opening up in properties to find that the problem has been poor workmanship with a lack of insulation. Presuming all things are equal and it has been constructed correctly the base between the floor and the wall is colder than we would expect and may be causing condensation on the pipes at low level.



Ground levels have very little difference from outside to inside, a small ramp would have been sufficient to deal with the difference and still allow access to the property under the Building Regulations

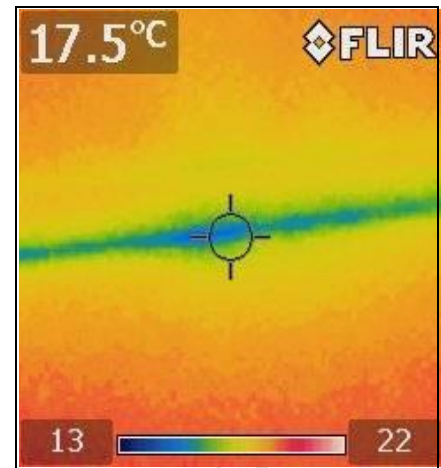
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This shows dampness where the floor meets the wall



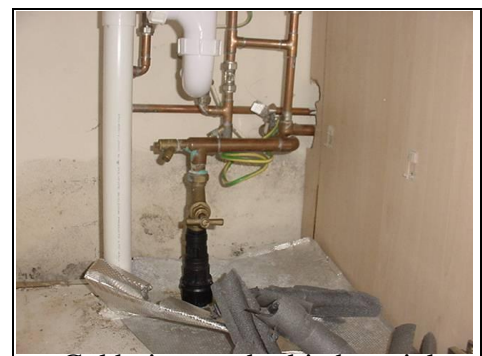
This shows the coldness where the floor meets the wall

ACTION REQUIRED: We are unsure how to deal with this problem as the coldness at the extremities of the property is affecting the cold pipes at the extremities of the property which in turn when it comes into contact with the air is causing condensation as far as we can see.

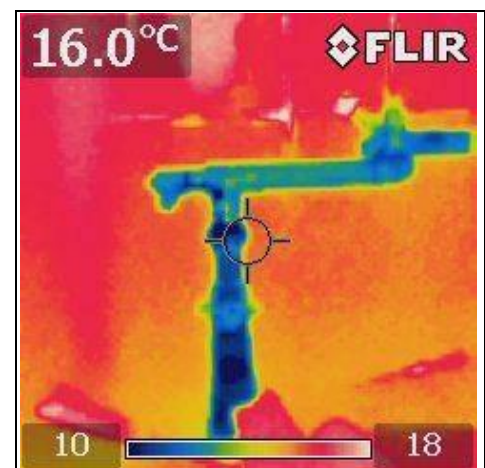
4) Possible leaks to pipes

We believe the owners have been advised that there may be a leak to their plumbing system in the kitchen. A way to check this would be to have a chlorine test. Whilst it is feasible that it is a pipe leak we would refer you to the adjacent photos where you will see the coldness of the pipes under the sink which when they meet the warmness of the air and the relative humidity, condensation will occur.

ACTION REQUIRED: Take a sample of the moisture to the floor and chlorine test to check whether it is a leak from the pipes.



Cold pipes under kitchen sink



Cold pipes under sink

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5) **Humidity generating areas not appropriately ventilated?**

We have run the shower for fifteen minutes and found that condensation occurs within the bathroom (as recommended the bathroom door and the windows were left shut). Condensation was visible to:

- a) Tiled surface
- b) Window
- c) Door
- d) Mirror
- e) Plasterboard was damp to touch



Condensation to mirror

We are aware that the NIBE manufacturers have reviewed your system and consider it to be appropriately ventilated. We would however ask them for further feedback on this and the investigations they have carried out.

ACTION REQUIRED: General investigation of a lack of suitable ventilation within the humidity generating areas, i.e. when in use the bathroom does produce condensation and we would assume this is the same in the kitchen and possibly the utility room.



Condensation to window

We would specifically highlight our concern to parties involved that there is not sufficient insulation and this within this type of building construction will lead to long term defects occurring such as mould growth and possibly deterioration damage to the timber framed structure.

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6) NIBE Heat recovery system and heating bills

You advised us that the NIBE had been back to look at the recovery system and advised that it is running correctly. We are equally aware that you are unhappy obviously due to the dampness and also due to the bills that you consider high and that you will be forwarding data to us of your monthly bills in the near future.



NIBE heating system

ACTION REQUIRED: We would ask NIBE to revisit and double check that they are happy the system is running correctly and advise them of the problems you are having.

We would also recommend data logging of the environment to see how the temperatures and the relative humidity are within the property. We feel that generally the air temperature and the relative humidity temperature may be acceptable. It is times of peak use of the kitchen and bathroom and utility room (areas that we have called humidity generating areas) that problems occur and the repeating of their use that leaves the damp/condensation situation that you have.

We would be interested to see long term data that NIBE have of their systems working successfully in the UK within timber framed structures.

We would also comment that this is a specialist piece of equipment and therefore heating engineers who are versed in this type of installation are not as common as those with traditional items and therefore may come at a premium. This needs to be included in the costs of running such a system.

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Life cycle costing

We would be interested to see life cycle costing relating to this heat recovery system taking into consideration not only the capital cost but the cost in use together with maintenance costs. The latter which you are responsible for, tends to be approximately eighty percent of the overall price of the unit when looking at life cycle costing so it is very important.

7) **Further information on the heat recovery system**

We would comment generally that heat recovery systems require them to be in use at a low level all day, twenty four hours a day seven days a week. They are a sealed system meaning that the windows are best left shut so internally can become balanced. We appreciate this isn't an intuitive way of living in a house; unfortunately this means that when the kitchens and bathrooms are used generating greater humidity, from what we can see the system can't handle this.

Ironically within a sealed house you then create an internal pressure. By a pressurised house we mean a house that has pressure within the house which is slightly less or more than that outside very similar to an aeroplane situation where you can't open the windows! though far greater forces are in play in this situation. It does mean for example today which is 31st March that if you open the windows there is a 30% higher humidity outside than inside so you would actually increase your humidity problems by opening the windows. This is all information and education that should have been explained to you when you were purchasing this property with this type of system.

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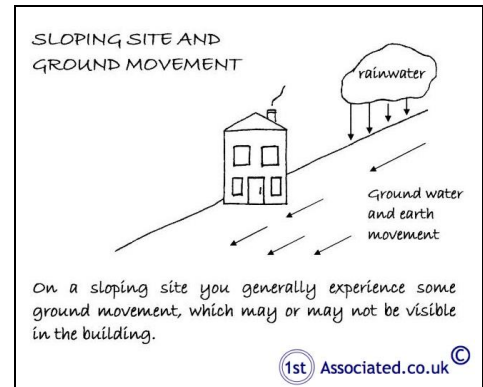
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8) Ground levels/clay soils/damp proof courses

We believe the property sits on a clay soil which is relatively common in the area and will retain water. Please see the appendices for information on clay soils. There is the additional problem of the sloping site that falls towards the property with the land drains that don't appear to be channelling the water around the property and the further problem of the inside and outside ground levels being very similar and finally you have the unusual issue of the damp proof course not being to the building regulations requirements of 150mm. We are aware also that there is a double damp proof course which is unusual.



The green line represents damp proof course and the air brick is acting as gutter at ground level/below ground level

ACTION REQUIRED: A formal letter to Building Control Department to ask them does the building conform to building regulations specifically relating to:

Part C- Site Preparation and Damp Proofing which relates to floors preventing moisture passing inside the building and provision to prevent condensation occurring.

Part F – Ventilation which relates to the property having adequate ventilation.

For your information, there is a list of the Building Regulation Sections within the Appendices.

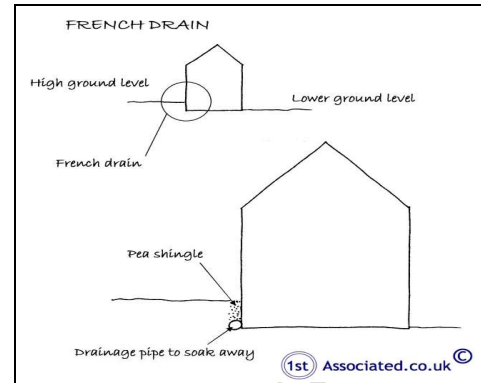
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9) Land Drainage

There are French drains around part of the property, that from our investigations have not been constructed correctly.



Digging up French drain to front left hand side



The exposed French Drain which hasn't been traditionally constructed



French Drain needed to the rear of the property?

On a broader development view we would also ask what land drains have been put in to ensure the rainwater and surface water has a path around the property as this is a sloping site. The land drains that we could see were damaged and do not appear to be functioning correctly.



Broken running drain to the rear of the property

Please see the Appendices of this report for further information on French Drains

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ACTION REQUIRED: We believe that a French Drain is required around this property that is drained to the main drainage system. Before we can be conclusive on this we do need to see the original design drawings and speak to the original designers and understand their overall concept.

ANTICIPATED COST: To put in a French Drain would cost in the region of £5,000 - £7,000 to marry it up with main drains; quotations required.

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The Ugly

We normally put here things that we feel will be difficult to resolve and will need serious consideration.

1) **Affect on market value of the property**

We have mentioned within our Specific Defects Report that we are concerned that these issues may affect the value of the property. Here is a copy of the paragraph that we wrote within that document.

We are concerned that the value of this property on the market will be affected by the above issues and possibly other issues that are yet to come to light. In our experience of valuing eco housing / sustainable housing / green housing market, is that the customer is not prepared to pay more for equivalent housing and may in our experience discount the value based upon the usual aspects:

i.e. a heat recovery system/

the windows not being recommended to be opened.

They could discount the value of putting a replacement heating system in and the inconvenience cost as a minimum as cost of work doesn't represent the loss of value.

ACTION REQUIRED: Evidence from the developers that this type of non traditional construction doesn't lose value over and above traditional construction.

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2) **Building in Use Information**

We are also concerned that as the property is timber framed it may well affect it in the long term in use; here is the paragraph from the report:

We would be very interested to see any in use information you have in relation to this system of building, specifically over the building's lifecycle.

ACTION REQUIRED: Information to be provided on the overview of how this type of property works in the long term in this environment.

3) **The court option**

We would stress that negotiation/mediation should take place to resolve this but it does need to be resolved within a reasonable time, you should set this timescale.

We have found from personal experience that the NHBC resolution method didn't work for us and ultimately we prepared for and were willing to take court action before getting the result we required.

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SUMMARY UPON REFLECTION



The Summary Upon Reflection is a second summary so to speak, which is carried out when we are doing the second or third draft a few days after the initial survey when we have had time to reflect upon our thoughts on the property. We would add the following in this instance:

1. Cutting Edge Technology

It would have been of benefit to you and other occupiers of these properties if you had known about the technology that you were moving in with in the form of the heat recovery system before you decided to purchase the properties.

2. Opinion of the owner/occupiers

We recommend that the owners/occupiers of all the properties that have been built in this way on the estate are asked to comment on how they are finding the situation. We would recommend that you set up a work site forum to carry this out and carry out your own informal survey as we feel this would be of use to you later on with this case.

We would ask that you read the Report and contact us on any issues that you require further clarification on.

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MORE ABOUT THE REPORT FORMAT

Just a few more comments about the Report format before you read the actual main body of the Report.

SOLICITOR/LEGAL ADVISOR

To carry out your legal work you can use a solicitor or a legal advisor. We have used both terms within the report.

TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT/LIMITATIONS

This report is being carried out under our terms of engagement for Residential Building Surveys, as agreed to and signed by yourselves. If you have not seen and signed a copy of our terms of engagement please phone immediately.

OUR AIM IS ONE HUNDRED PERCENT SATISFACTION

Our aim is for you to be completely happy with the service we provide, and we will try and help you in whatever way possible - just phone us.

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THE DETAILED PART OF THE REPORT FOLLOWS, WORKING FROM THE TOP OF THE PROPERTY DOWNWARDS

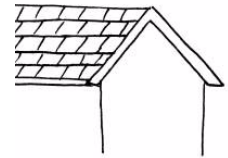
This is what we would term a non traditionally constructed house using modern techniques; in our experience there have been no long term in use information readily available to chartered surveyors for this type of construction.



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ROOF COVERINGS AND UNDERLAYERS



The Roof Coverings and Underlayers section considers the condition of the outer covering of the roof. Such coverings usually endure the extremes of climate and temperatures. They are susceptible to deterioration, which ultimately leads to water penetration.

The underlayer's function is to minimise wind and water damage. Dependent upon the age of your property this may or may not be present, please read on:

Main Roof

The roof is pitched and clad in a large interlocking concrete tile in a pantile style. From what we could see the concrete tiles are lying level and true and look in average condition although as they are relatively new this is what we would expect.



View of the concrete tile roof

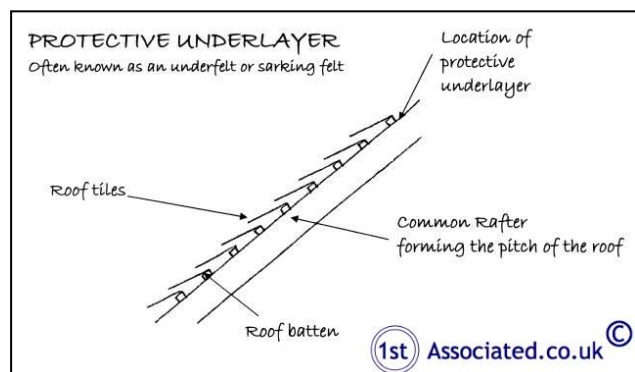
Sometimes over the years we find deterioration occurs to the ridges and the perimeter, so you should periodically check these areas.

Concrete tiles - some more information

Concrete tiles have been used en masse since the 1950/60s, they are relatively cheap to produce and can be manufactured to a reasonably standard size and quality.

Protective Underlayer (Often known as the sarking felt or underfelt)

From the 1940s onwards felts were used underneath tiles/slates to stop wind damage and water penetration, these in more recent years have been replaced with plastic equivalents. These are commonly known as underfelts but now the name is not really appropriate, as felt is not the only material used.



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When we inspected the loft space we found a modern breathable underlayer. This type of sarking felt, as far as we are aware, has been used since 2002. It allows air flow in the loft to help prevent condensation.



This photo shows the common rafters (the ones that form the pitch of the roof) and the dark area between is the underlayer.

Front bay window roof

There is a small bay window roof to the front that looks to be lead which we feel is one of the better materials for a flat roof although it is rarely used on modern constructions so we were surprised to see it. We were pleased to see it has guttering around it.



Finally, all the roofs were inspected from ground level with the aid of a x16 zoom lens on a digital camera. The bay window roof has been inspected from upper floor windows and/or ground level.

Unfortunately we were only able to see approximately ninety five percent of the main roof from ground level via our ladder or via any other vantage point that we managed to gain. We have made our best conclusions based upon what we could see, however a closer inspection may reveal other defects.

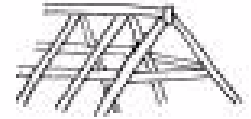
For further comments with regard to ventilation please see the Roof Structure and Loft Section.

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ROOF STRUCTURE AND LOFT



(ALSO KNOWN AS ROOF SPACE OR ATTIC SPACE)

The roof structure or framework must be built in a manner which is able to give adequate strength to carry its own weight together with that of the roof covering discussed in the previous section and any superimposed loads such as snow, wind, foot traffic etc.

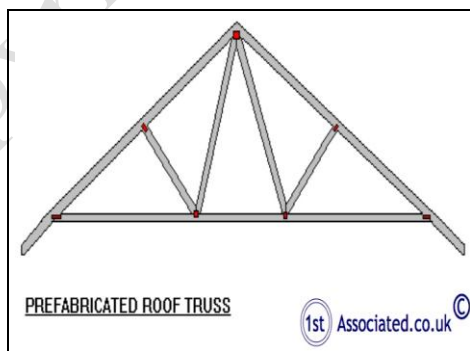
Main Roof

Roof Access

The main roof is accessed via the loft hatch located on the landing. There is no loft ladder, electric light or secured floorboards. We recommend that these be added, as it will make the loft space safer and easier to use. The loft has been viewed by a head and shoulders only view with a torch light.

Roof Structure

The roof structure is a pre-fabricated fan trussed roof rafter which looks like a "W". These are made in a factory and transported to site and then lifted into place. Without the manufacturer's calculations and installation details we cannot comment categorically on the roof structure although it is in line with what we typically see.



View of roof

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Roof Timbers

We found the roof timbers generally in average condition; they were slightly soft when pressurised indicating there may be condensation in the roof. We have inspected the roof structure for:



- Serious active woodworm
- Structurally significant defects to the timbers
- Structurally significant dry rot
- Structurally significant wet rot

Our examination was limited by the general configuration of the roof, the mass of insulation and the vent pipes. The air vent pipes were an unusual feature of this property which we rarely come across. As mentioned the roof from what we could see was generally found to be in average condition, with what we believe to be minor condensation. It is feasible that there are problems in the roof that are hidden by the mass of insulation.

ACTION REQUIRED: The only way to be 100 per cent certain is to have the roof cleared and checked. We would normally recommend to add further ventilation to the roof at the gable end but given this unusual type of non traditional construction this may not be appropriate, we would have to have the design as a whole explained to us by the original designers to be certain of this recommendation.

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Fire Walls

We can see fire walls to one side of the property and timber cladding to the other side. The timber cladding is a sterling board which is a pressed reconstituted timber board. The fire wall is formed in a fireboard.

Firewalls defined

Firewalls help prevent the spread of fire through roofs from one building to the next and are a relatively recent Building Regulation requirement.



Firewalls

Ventilation

The property is vented in the form of a breathable membrane but there are also vent pipes within the roof.



Air vents to roof

Insulation

Please see the Thermal Efficiency Section of this Report.

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Electrical Cables

We can often identify the age of an electrical installation by the age of wiring found in the roof. In this case we couldn't see the electrical cables due to the mass of insulation in the roof.

Please see our further comments in the Services Section of this Report.

Finally, we would ask you to note that this is a general inspection of the roof, i.e. we have not examined every single piece of timber. We have offered a general overview of the condition and structural integrity of the area.

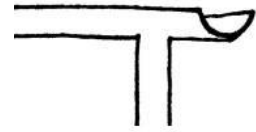
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GUTTERS AND DOWNPIPES



The function of the gutters and downpipes is to carry rainwater from the roof to the ground keeping the main structure as dry as possible.

Defective gutters and downpipes are a common cause of dampness that can, in turn, lead to the development of rot in timbers. Regular inspection and adequate maintenance are therefore essential if serious problems are to be avoided.

Gutters and Downpipes

From ground level the gutters and downpipes looked to be plastic and appeared in reasonable condition. There may be a few repairs, but we feel that most people would be happy with getting these carried out.



Gutters and downpipes

ACTION REQUIRED: We would always recommend that the gutters and downpipes are cleaned out, the joints are checked and the alignment checked to ensure that the gutters fall towards the downpipes.

French Drain

We don't believe that the French Drains have been constructed correctly.

ACTION REQUIRED: Please see our comments in the Executive Summary.



Superficial French drain

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Soil and Vent Pipe

The soil and vent pipes are internal, they are visible at roof level and plastic.

Finally, gutters and downpipes and soil and vent pipes have been inspected from ground level. As it was not raining at the time of the inspection it is not possible to confirm 100 per cent that the rainwater installation is free from blockage, leakage etc. or that it is capable of coping with long periods of heavy rainfall. Our comments have therefore been based on our best assumptions.

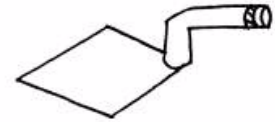
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WALLS



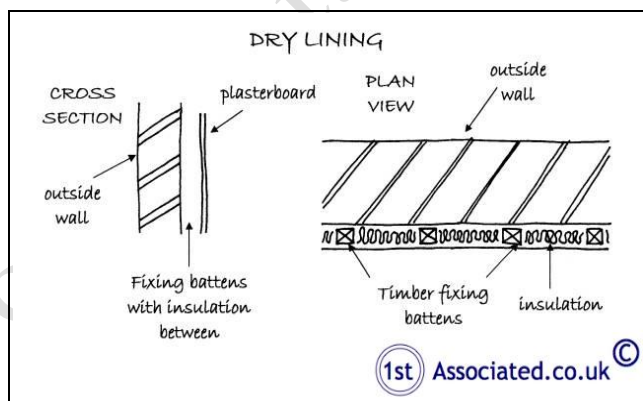
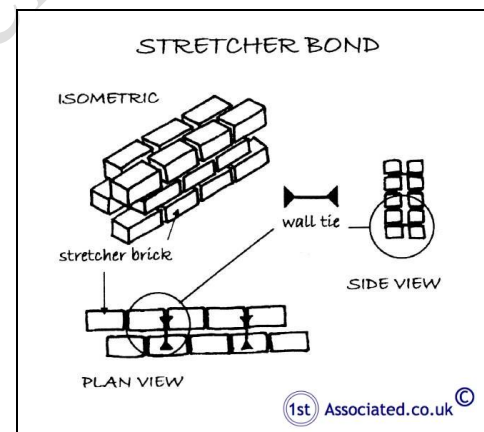
External walls need to perform a variety of functions. These include supporting upper floors and the roof structure, resisting dampness, providing adequate thermal and sound insulation, offering resistance to fire and being aesthetically presentable.

Brickwork / Render

The property is built in a timber frame construction with a cladding of brickwork and painted render to the upper parts.

Brickwork

The stretcher bond brickwork and pointing is in average condition. The brickwork is likely to be cladding on a timber structural frame. The inner walls are likely to be formed in timber and bonded to the brickwork outer walls with wall ties. This gives the impression of a traditional brick built property externally with the timber structure invisible beneath



Weep hole

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Render

To the upper parts the property is rendered, this we believe will be onto the timber framework. We have found that in dry lining the render panels can deteriorate relatively quickly compared with older rendering.



Render

Timber frame construction

We need to draw to your attention that timber framed construction when used in years gone by had a poor reputation particularly after a World In Action programme which effectively closed the industry down which focused on the bad practices within the timber framing industry. Interestingly we have also read research that the Building Research Establishment carried out which advised that much of the comments on timber frame construction were not substantiated.

Finally, the external walls have been inspected visually from ground level and/or randomly via a ladder. Where the window and door lintels are concealed by brickwork / painted render / plasterwork we cannot comment on their construction or condition. In buildings of this age metal lintels are common, which can be susceptible to deterioration that is unseen, particularly if in contact with dampness.

Our comments have been based upon how the brickwork / painted render / plasterwork has been finished. We have made various assumptions based upon what we could see and how we think the brickwork / painted render / plasterwork would be if it were opened up for this age, style and type of construction. We are however aware that all is not always as it seems in the building industry and often short cuts are taken. Without opening up the structure we have no way of establishing this.

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FOUNDATIONS



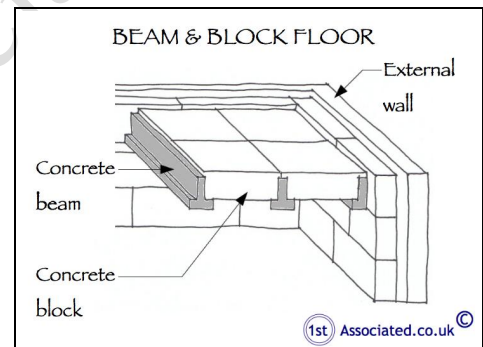
The foundations function is, if suitably designed and constructed, to transfer the weight of the property through the soil. As a general comment, many properties prior to the 19th Century have little or no foundations, as we think of them today, and typically a two-storey property would have one metre deep foundations.

Foundations

Our knowledge of the area indicates that the subsoil is likely to be clay, which is susceptible to shrinkage and heave.

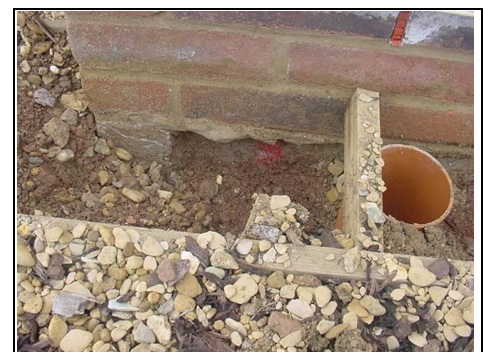
Given the air vents, the property is likely to have a beam and block floor.

Given the properties age and type, we would expect the foundation to be a strip concrete foundation built up with blockwork. We were concerned when we dug up the French Drain the brickwork didn't seem to be sitting wholly onto the blockwork beneath.



ACTION . REQUIRED: We would recommend further investigation around the foundations to see how the brickwork sits on the blockwork.

Please refer to our article in the Appendices on Clay Soils.



Brickwork isn't sitting wholly onto the blockwork beneath

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A bit more about clay

Clay is an amazing soil although your insurance company may not think so if you get subsidence or settlement from the Clays amazing properties! Firstly let us explain what settlement and subsidence is this is when the Soil expands and/or contracts and moves the building usually via the foundations, clay has the amazing ability to expand and contract substantially based on its water content.

Building Insurance Policy

You should ensure that the Building Insurance Policy contains adequate provision against any possibility of damage arising through subsidence, landslip, heave etc.

Finally, we have not excavated the foundations but we have drawn conclusions from our inspection and our general knowledge of this type, age and style of property.

As no excavation has been carried out we cannot be 100 percent certain as to how the foundation has been constructed and we can only offer our best assumptions and an educated guess, which we have duly done.

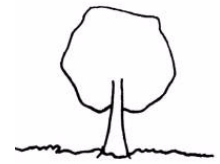
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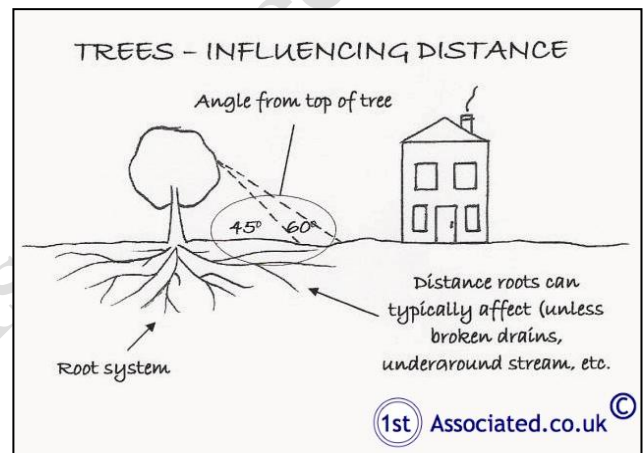
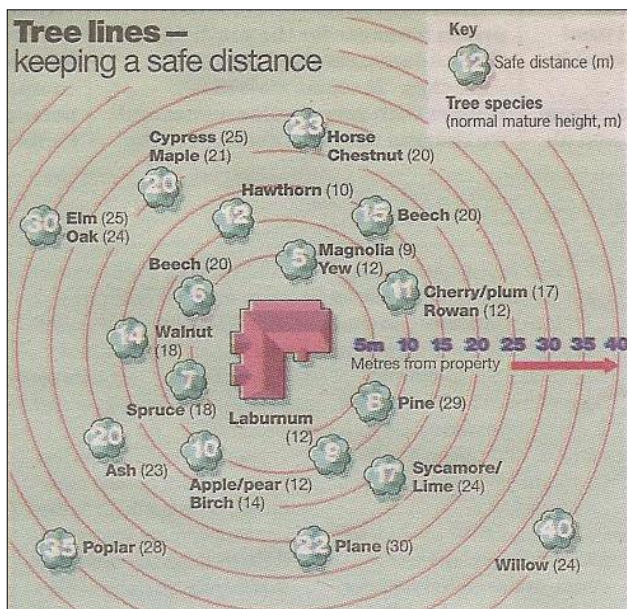
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TREES



Trees within influencing distance of a property can affect the foundations by affecting the moisture content of the soil.

There are no trees within your garden that are within influencing distance of the main house.



Influencing Distance Defined

This is the distance in which a tree may be able to cause damage to the subject property. It is not quite as simple as our sketch; it depends on the tree, its maturity, the soil type etc., etc.

Please also refer to the External Areas Section.

DAMP PROOF COURSE



The Building Act of 1878 required a damp proof course to be added to all newly built properties within the London area. It also required various other basic standards. These requirements were gradually taken up (or should that be grudgingly taken up) throughout London and then the country as a whole, although this took many years for it to become standard practice.

All modern properties should incorporate a damp proof course (DPC) and good building practice dictates that a differential of 150mm (6 inches) should be maintained between the damp proof course and ground levels. In this case, the property seemed to have two damp proof courses. We have spoken to you about this and you advised that it is due to the Building Regulation requirement to meet the Disability Requirements of Part M of the Building Regulations. We have not come across a double damp proof course before in all the surveys that we have carried out.



The green line represents damp proof course

ACTION REQUIRED: We would like a further explanation with regards to this and the levels.

Please see the Dampness Section of this report.

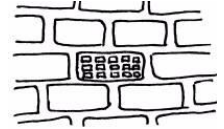
Finally, sometimes it is difficult for us to identify if there is a damp proof course in a property. We have made our best assumptions based upon our general knowledge of the age, type and style of this property.

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AIRBRICKS



In properties with suspended floors you need to have an airflow beneath to stop deterioration. The air is allowed to pass under the property by the use of airbricks. Generally the rule of thumb is that airbricks are spaced every metre and a half approximately, but this depends upon the specific circumstances of the property.

The property has airbricks; some of these are acting as gutters, this can cause deterioration to the floors. The airbricks need protecting.

ACTION REQUIRED: We would recommend a French Drain is added down the side of the property and the airbricks are guarded to stop water getting into them.

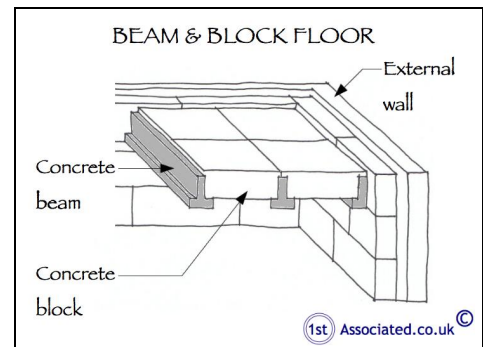


Airbrick acting as a gutter

We are not absolutely sure of the floor construction; this property is more likely to have a concrete beam and block floor with a timber floating floor over the top of it, however we cannot be certain without opening it up.

Beam and Block Flooring Construction Defined

This form of construction uses concrete beams to span the floor in between which blocks are fitted. The floor was not opened up. The floor void was not accessed.



Finally, we have made our best assumptions based upon our visual inspection of the outside of the property and our general knowledge of this age, type and style of construction. We have not opened up the floor, unless we have specifically stated so in this section.

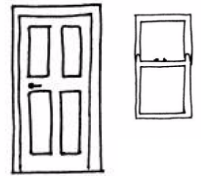
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FASCIAS AND SOFFITS AND WINDOWS AND DOORS



This section covers fascias, soffits and bargeboards, windows and doors, and any detailing such as brick corbelling etc.

Fascias and soffits offer protection to the rafter feet and also allow the securing of the guttering. Windows primary functions are to admit light and air, but they also have thermal and sound properties. The doors allow access and egress within the property.

Fascias and Soffits

The fascias and soffits are plastic and are in reasonable condition.



Fascias and soffits

Windows and Doors

The property has plastic, double glazed windows, which generally look to be of an average quality for the year made. We were aware they had no trickle vents which is the normal requirement. Please see our comments in the Executive Summary about this property having a sealed system where the windows shouldn't be opened, which all relates to the air recovery system.



We would draw your attention to the fact that sealed double glazed units can fail, particularly as a result of poor workmanship during installation. Failure of the seal leads to condensation between the two panes of glass and simply replacing the affected units may not provide a satisfactory long-term solution. In this case they are in average condition.

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Enquiries should be made as to the existence of any transferable guarantees. Generally it is considered that double glazed units have a life of about ten years

Trickle vents defined

Trickle vents allow a trickle of air through, therefore stopping/reducing the likelihood of condensation occurring within the property.

Finally, we have carried out a general and random inspection of the fascias and soffits and windows and doors. In the case of the fascias and soffits it is typically a visual inspection from ground level. With the windows and doors we have usually opened a random selection of these during the course of the survey. In this section we are aiming to give a general overview of the condition of the fascias and soffits and windows and doors. Please also see the Internal Joinery section.

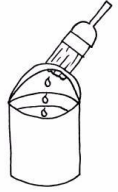
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EXTERNAL DECORATIONS



The external decorations act as a protective coat for the building from the elements. Where this protective covering has failed, such as with flaking paintwork, the elements will infiltrate the structure. This is of particular concern as water is one of the major factors in damage to any structure.

There is some external redecoration to the render panels, these looked in average condition. Other than that there is very little external redecoration on the property.

Finally, ideally external redecoration is recommended every four to five years dependent upon the original age of the paint, its exposure to the elements and the materials properties. Where painting takes place outside this maintenance cycle repairs should be expected. Ideally redecoration should be carried out during the better weather between mid-April and mid-September.

Please see our comments in the Fascias and Soffits and Windows and Doors section.

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INTERNAL

CEILINGS, WALLS, PARTITIONS AND FINISHES



In this section we look at the finish applied to the structural elements such as the plasterwork applied to the ceiling joists, walls or partitions, together with the construction of the internal walls and partitions.

Ceilings

From our visual inspection of the ceilings and our general knowledge of this age and type of construction we believe the ceilings to be plasterboard (assumed).

Plasterboard Defined

The usual name for Gypsum plasterboard, which is building board with a core of aerated gypsum, usually enclosed between two sheets of heavy paper, used as a dry lining.

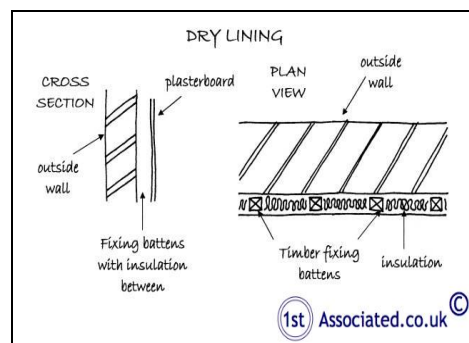
Internal Walls and Partitions

From a tap test these appeared to be studwork.

Perimeter Walls

From a tap test these appeared to be dry lined. Unfortunately this stopped us from carrying out the electronic damp meter readings we would normally carry out.

Finally, ceilings, walls and partitions have been inspected from floor level and no opening up has been undertaken (unless permission has been obtained by yourselves). In some cases the materials employed cannot be ascertained without samples being taken and damage being caused.



We cannot comment upon the condition of the structure hidden behind plaster, dry lining, other applied finishes, heavy furniture, fittings and kitchen units with fitted back panels.

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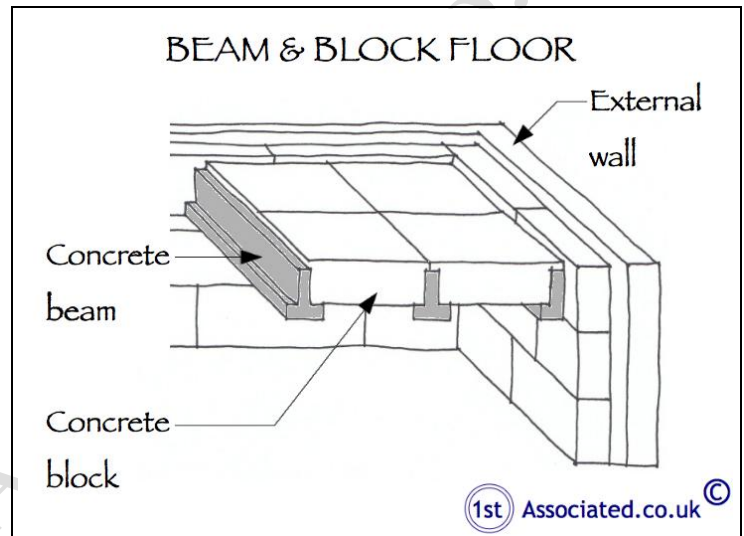
FLOORS



Functionally floors should be capable of withstanding appropriate loading, preventing dampness, have thermal properties and durability. In addition to this upper floors should offer support for ceilings, resistance to fire and resistance to sound transfer.

Ground Floor

The floor has a suspended 'beam and block' floor, which is fairly common in newer properties (1980s onwards). This may have been used as there is a clay subsoil underneath to allow the earth to expand (known as heave) and contract (known as subsidence) without affecting the property or alternatively it may have been used as a quicker building technique without any drying time. Please note we have not opened up the floors.



Please refer to our comments in the Executive Summary where we show the dampness in the ground floor kitchen area. Equally this could be occurring in other areas.

Beam and Block Flooring Construction Defined.

This form of construction uses concrete beams to span the floor in between which blocks are fitted. The floor was not opened up and the floor void was not accessed.

First Floor

We have assumed that the first floor construction is joist and floorboard sheets, as this is typical in this age of property. Alternatively they could have used what is known as an engineered flooring system which uses a sterling board type eye beam rather than a traditional joist. We would comment that this type of joist have not actually been in use in buildings for that long therefore we have not got feedback to comment upon them.

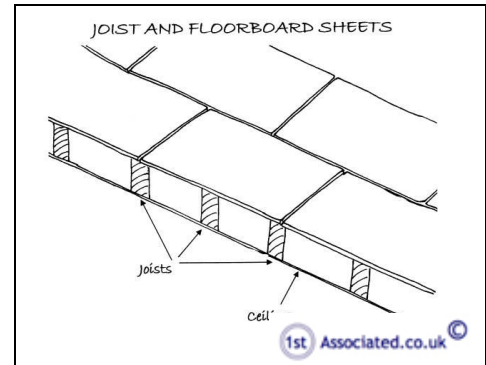
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Joist and Floorboard sheets Construction Defined

These are usually at first floor level or above, consisting of a joist supported from the external walls, either built-in or, in more modern times, sitting upon joist hangers, sometimes taking additional support from internal walls, with floorboard sheets fixed down upon it.



Finally, we have not been able to view the actual floors themselves due to them being covered with fitted carpets, floor coverings, etc. The comments we have made are based upon our experience and knowledge of this type of construction. We would emphasise that we have not opened up the floors in any way or lifted any floorboards.

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DAMPNESS

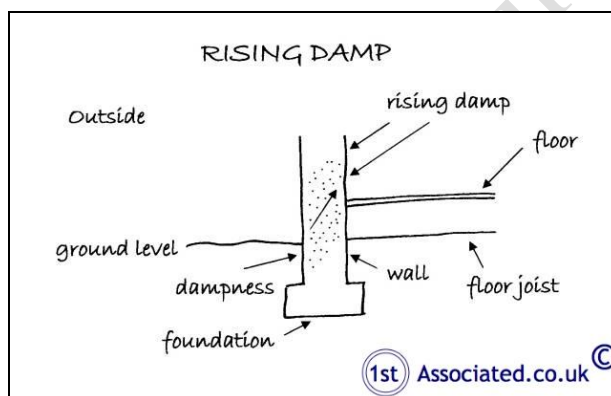


In this section we look at any problems that are being caused by dampness. It is therefore essential to diagnose the source of the dampness and to treat the actual cause and not the effect of the dampness.

Rising Damp

Rising damp depends upon various components including the porosity of the structure, the supply of water and the rate of evaporation of the material, amongst other things. Rising damp can come from the ground, drawn by capillary action, to varying degrees of intensity and height into the materials above.

There is now much debate over whether true rising damp does exist after research over a 10 year period.



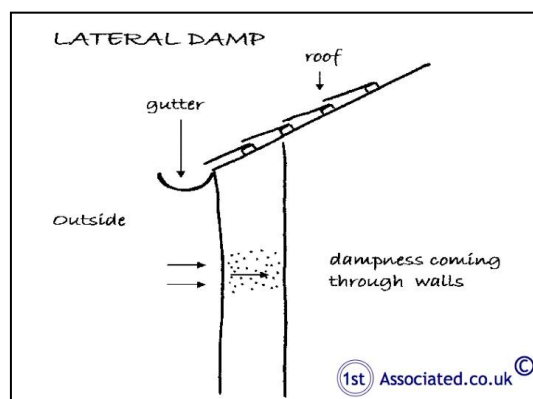
The property has a damp proof course but this is lower than we would expect.

ACTION REQUIRED: We would like to see Building Regulation approval certificates in relation to the way this building has been constructed.

We would refer you to our comments in the executive summary about dampness in the property.

Lateral or Penetrating Dampness

This is where water ingress occurs through the walls. This can be for various reasons such as poor pointing or wall materials or inadequate gutters and downpipes, such as poorly jointed gutters.



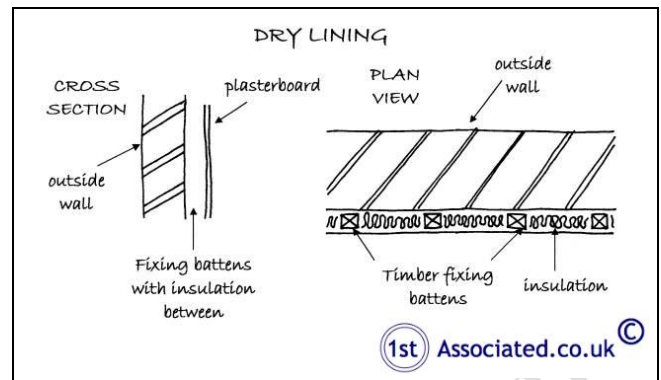
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No lateral dampness has been found however the property has dry lined walls which means that we cannot take our usual electronic damp meter readings.



Condensation

This is where the humidity held within the air meets a cold surface causing condensation.

Please refer to our comments within the Executive Summary with regards to condensation.

Finally, effective testing was prevented in areas concealed by heavy furniture, fixtures such as kitchen fittings with backboards, wall tiles and wall panelling. We have not carried out tests to BRE Digest 245, but only carried out a visual inspection.

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INTERNAL JOINERY



This section looks at the doors, the stairway, the skirting boards and the kitchen to give a general overview of the internal joinery's condition.

Doors

The property has hollow core doors (sometimes referred to as egg box doors, as this is what the internal of them looks like when they are opened up), they have a paint finish and are slightly marked.

Kitchen

From our cursory visual inspection, generally the kitchen looked in generally average condition although obviously there are problems with the dampness to the base of the kitchen which you can see in the photo.



Please note we have not tested any of the kitchen appliances.

Kitchen unit affected by dampness

ACTION REQUIRED: Please see our comments in the Dampness section of this report.

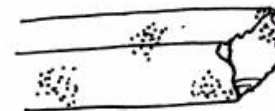
Finally, it should be noted that not all joinery has been inspected. We have viewed a random sample and visually inspected these to give a general overview of the condition. Please also see the External Fascias and Soffits and Windows and Doors Section.

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TIMBER DEFECTS



This section considers dry rot, wet rot and woodworm. Wet and Dry rot are species of fungi, both need moisture to develop and both can be very expensive to correct. We would also add that in our experience they are also often wrongly diagnosed.

Dry Rot

*Dry rot is also sometimes known by its Latin name *Serpula lacrymans*. Dry rot requires constant dampness together with a warmish atmosphere and can lead to extensive decay in timber.*

In the areas visually inspected no evidence was found of any significant dry rot. Please note we have not opened up the floors and the roof inspection was limited to a head and shoulders view.

Wet Rot

*Wet rot, also known by its Latin name *Contiophora puteana*, is far more common than dry rot. Wet rot darkens and softens the wood and is most commonly seen in window and doorframes, where it can relatively easily be remedied. Where wet rot affects the structural timbers in a property, which are those in the roof and the floor areas, it is more serious.*

There does appear to be some slight condensation in the roof which may ultimately lead to wet rot but this is a long way down the line. Please note we have not opened up the floors and the roof inspection was limited to a head and shoulders view.

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Woodworm



Active woodworm can cause significant damage to timber. There are a variety of woodworm that cause different levels of damage with probably the worst of the most well known being the Death Watch Beetle. Many older properties have woodworm that is no longer active; this can often be considered as part of the overall character of the property.

The roof is the main area that we look for woodworm. Within the roof we found no obvious visual signs of woodworm activity or indeed signs of past woodworm activity that has caused what we would term ‘structurally significant’ damage, we wouldn’t expect it in a roof of this age as the timbers are usually pre-treated. Our inspection was restricted by insulation covering some of the timbers.

Finally, we would also comment that any work carried out should have an insurance backed guarantee to ensure that if the company does not exist, or for whatever reason, the guarantee is still valid. More importantly it is essential to ensure that any work carried out is carried out correctly.

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INTERNAL DECORATIONS



With paints it should be remembered that up to 1992 lead could be used within paint and prior to this most textured paints (commonly known as Artex) contained an element of asbestos up to 1984, so care should be taken if the paintwork looks old and dated.

The decoration is in average condition.

Finally, we would draw your attention to the fact that removal of existing decorative finishes may cause damage to the underlying plasterwork necessitating repairs and making good prior to redecoration.

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THERMAL EFFICIENCY



Up until the mid 1940s we did not really consider insulation in properties, for example it was only in the 1960s that we started putting insulation in the roof and then it was about 50mm, in the 1970s this was upgraded to 100mm. Then we started to think about double glazing and cavity wall insulation. Since then insulation standards have increased considerably and today we are looking at typically using insulation not only in the roof but also in the walls, floors and windows and more recently considerable work has been carried out on how efficient boilers are within properties. Care has to be taken that properties are not insulated disproportionately to the ventilation as this can cause condensation and you should be aware that you need to ventilate any property that is insulated.

HIPs (Home Information Packs) Report

We understand that HIPs were suspended from 20th May 2010. Energy Performance Certificates are required before a sale completes.

Roof Insulation

Roof insulation is present and looks to be to the current building regulation standard of 300mm. With this level of insulation it is important to ensure the roof is suitably ventilated to minimise condensation. A breathable protective membrane has been used in the roof however we are not sure with this sort of design whether this is sufficient.

ACTION REQUIRED: We need to see information relating to the condensation levels expected in these properties.

Walls

The property has a non traditional timber dry lined construction.

Windows

The windows are double glazed and therefore have reasonable thermal properties. Windows have no trickle vents to aid the ventilation balance. This is in theory carried out by the internal vents however as you are aware this isn't working.

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Services

Service records should be obtained. It is essential for the services to be regularly maintained to run efficiently.

Summary

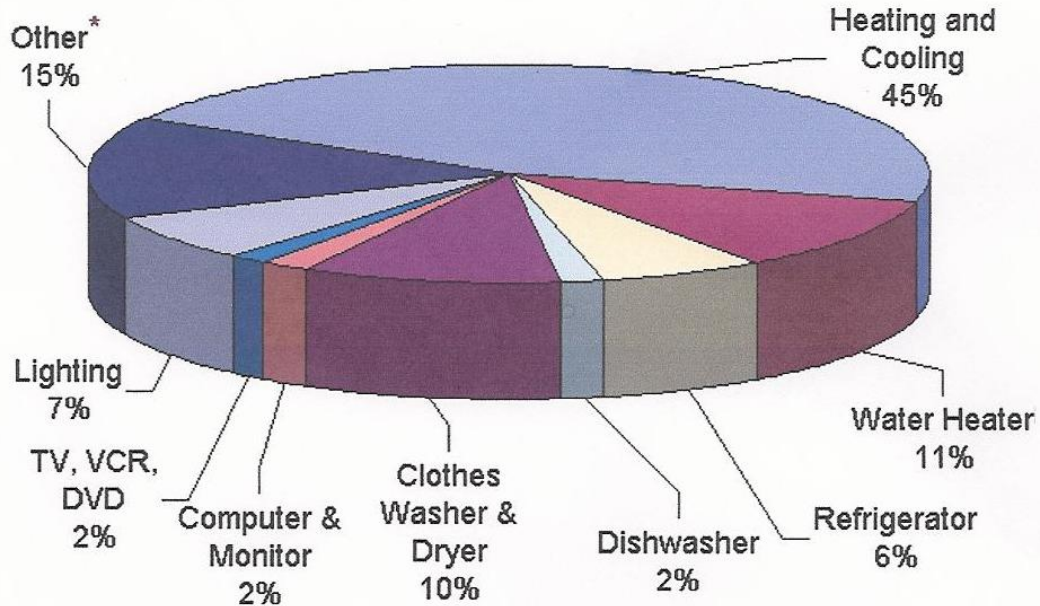
The property is insulated as you would expect for this age of property.

Further information can be obtained with regard to energy saving via the Internet on the following pages:

*HTTP//www.est.org.uk, which is by the Energy Saving Trust and includes a section on grant aid.
or alternatively www.cat.org.uk
or www.ecocentre.org.uk for an alternative technological view.*

Finally, we would advise that an energy rating is required for future house sales.

What does my energy bill pay for?



*"Other" represents an array of household products, including stoves, ovens, microwaves, and small appliances. Individually, these products account for no more than about 2% of a household's energy bills.

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OTHER MATTERS



In this section we put any other matters that do not fit under our usual headings.

Security System

No security system was noted. It is a personal decision as to whether you feel one is necessary. We are not experts in this field and therefore cannot comment further. We suggest you contact a member of NACOSS (National Approval Council for Security Services), obtainable through directory enquiries, or your local Police Force for advice on a security system.

Fire Systems and Smoke Alarms

Some smoke detectors were noted, these were integral within the building as far as we could see.

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SERVICES

This survey does not include any specialist reports on the electricity supply and circuits, heating or drainage, as they were not requested. The comments that follow are based upon a visual inspection carried out as part of the overall Building Survey.

Services and specialist installations have been visually inspected. It is impossible to examine every detail of these installations without partially dismantling the structure. Tests have not been applied. Conclusive tests can only be undertaken by suitably qualified contractors.

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ELECTRICITY



It is strange to think that electricity only started to be used in domestic properties at the turn of the 19th century with gas lighting still being the norm for a good many years after.

As the property is relatively new we assume that it was carried out to the latest Institute of Electrical Engineers standards.

ACTION REQUIRED: Obtain an Institute of Electrical Engineers test and certificate from the original builders. It should have been carried out by a competent NICEIC registered electrician.

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PLUMBING AND HEATING



In this section we do our best from a visual inspection to look at how the water is supplied to the property, how the supply is distributed around the property, how it is used to heat the property and how it is discharged from the property.

Water Supply

The stopcock and other controlling valves have not been inspected or tested for operational effectiveness.

Water Pressure

When the taps were run to carry out the drainage test we checked the pressure literally by putting a finger over the tap and this seemed average.

The Water Board have to guarantee a certain pressure of water to ensure that things like boilers, particularly the instantaneous ones have a constant supply of pressured water (they would blow up if they didn't!).

We have not used a listening stick to check for leaks.

Cold Water Cistern

We have not found a water tank. We can only assume that the water is directly fed to the taps. The original idea behind a water tank was to help water pressure and to give an emergency supply of water.

Plumbing

The plumbing, where visible, comprises copper pipework. No significant leakage was noted on the surface, although most of the pipework is concealed in ducts and floors.

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Heating

The property has a NIBE Air Heat Recovery System which is located in the utility room.

From our understanding of the system it runs a traditional style radiator system with heat recovery via a series of vents set within the rooms of the property

This is a specialist installation.

Ten Minute Heating Test

The heating was on at the time of the survey, the rooms were warm.

Finally, it should be noted that the supply pipe from the Water Company stopcock to the internal stop tap is the responsibility of the property owner.

We cannot comment on the condition of the water service pipe to the building. It should be appreciated that leaks can occur for some time before signs are apparent on the surface.

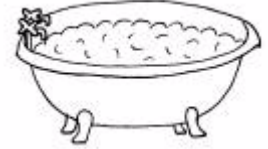
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BATHROOM



In this section we consider the overall condition of the sanitary fittings such as the bathroom, the kitchen, the utility room and the cloakroom.

Family bathroom

The family bathroom suite looks in average condition. Please refer to our Executive Summary where we carried out a small test in the bathroom.

Cloakroom

This consists of a w.c. and wash hand basin and is located off the kitchen.

Finally, although we may have already mentioned it above we would reiterate that it is important to ensure that seals are properly made and maintained at the junctions between wall surfaces and baths and showers etc. We normally recommend that it is one of the first jobs that you carry out as part of your DIY on the property, as water getting behind sanitary fittings can lead to unseen deterioration that can be costly, inconvenient and difficult to repair.

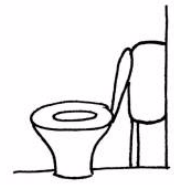
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MAIN DRAINS



The sanitary system, as we know it now, came into being some 100 years ago during the Victorian era and works so successfully today it is often taken for granted. It is only in recent years that re-investment has taken place to upgrade the original drainage systems.

It is assumed that the property has mains drainage and that the foul drains discharge into a public sewer; this should be confirmed by your Legal Advisor who should also provide information in respect of any common or shared drains including liability for the maintenance and upkeep of the same.

Inspection Chambers / Manholes

For your information, inspection chambers / manholes are required to be provided in the current Building Regulations at each change of direction or where drainage runs join the main run.

We haven't in this instance lifted any manholes. If there are any problems with the drainage we would suggest that a close circuit TV report is carried out as soon as possible to the property to check the drains are running correctly.

Rainwater/Surface Water Drainage

Whilst very innocent looking rainwater downpipes can cause lots of problems. If they discharge directly onto the ground they can affect the foundations and even if they are taken away to soak-aways they can attract nearby tree roots or again affect foundations.

Some rainwater drains are taken into the main drainage system, which is now illegal (as we simply do not have the capacity to cope with it), and can cause blockages to the main drains! Here we have done our best from a visual inspection to advise of any particular problems.

We have been unable to determine the ultimate means of rain/surface water disposal. In this age of property it is likely to be into a soakaway.

Finally, rain/surface water drains have not been tested and their condition or effectiveness is not known. Similarly, the adequacy of soak-aways has not been established although you are advised that they tend to silt up and become less effective with time.

Please also see our comments within the Gutters and Downpipes section.

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OUTSIDE AREAS

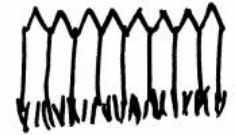
PARKING



We assume parking is to the rear of the property and a space has been allocated.



EXTERNAL AREAS



Rear Garden

There is a small front garden area and a rear garden on a slightly sloping site.

Boundaries: The left hand boundary (all directions given as you face the property) is usually the responsibility of the subject property.

Finally, whilst we note the boundaries, these may not be the legal boundaries. Your Legal Advisor should make further enquiries on this point and advise you of your potential liability with regard to any shared structures, boundary walls and fences.

Right Hand Neighbours

We spoke briefly to your right hand neighbour with regards to the problems but would recommend a more in-depth discussion with them and surrounding neighbours. We feel that if action is to be taken on this property you need to have proper questionnaires sent to all the occupiers of the estate. We have mentioned earlier that we would recommend a forum is set up as well.

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POINTS FOR YOUR LEGAL ADVISOR

We feel that this should be put in the hands of a suitably qualified and experienced solicitor as soon as possible. By suitably qualified and experienced we mean one that has experience of case actions against developers and housing associations as they would be in the best position having had past experience to assess your case.

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LOCAL AUTHORITY ENQUIRIES

Your Legal Advisor should have carried out Local Authority searches when you purchased the property to ascertain whether the property is a Listed Building and whether it is situated in a Conservation Area. They should also find out any information available with regard to Planning Applications and Building Control. We have not made any formal or informal Local Authority enquiries.

Finally, your Legal Advisor should carry out any additional enquiries they feel necessary and if they find anything unusual or onerous then we ask that they contact us immediately for our further comments.

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It is our policy not to offer a conclusion to ensure that the Building Survey is read in full and the comments are taken in context.

If you would like any further advice on any of the issues discussed (or indeed any that have not been discussed!) then please do not hesitate to contact us on **0800 298 5424**.

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REFERENCES

The repair and maintenance of houses
Published by Estates Gazette Limited

Life expectancies of building components
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Surveying buildings
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House Builders Bible
By Mark Brinkley, Published by Burlington Press

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APPENDICES

1. French Drains
2. Condensation and Damp Walls
3. Subsidence and Heave

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French Drains

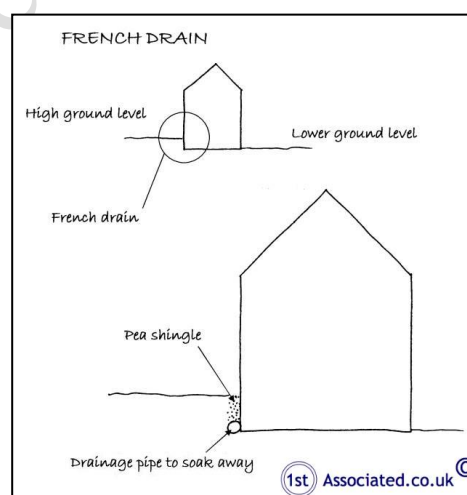
"If you need help and advice with regard to structural surveys, building surveys, engineers reports, special defects reports, dampness issues, dilapidations, home buyers reports or any other property matters please call 0800 298 5424 for a friendly chat."

Using a French Drain to resolve a Damp Problem

We are finding where we are asked to look at damp problems in general (i.e. damp walls and floors) that commonly it is due to the external ground level being higher than the internal ground level. It could also be that air bricks have been blocked, or simply paving slabs, decking or briquettes have been used to form a patio area which then discharges any rainwater against the building. Quite often the solution is to add a French drain. Whilst French drains are quite simple and are basically nothing more than trenches filled with gravel (although there is a little bit more to them as we will explain), they are almost a DIY job for most people and they are relatively easy to install and are for the most part low cost. You do however need some care and attention when installing them. You could install what we have heard referred to as the "French pond".

What use is a French Drain?

A French drain is a trench of approximately 6" or 150mm wide (or the width of your spade), approximately twice the depth (i.e. 12" or 300mm). In most cases this will suffice however where there is a large amount of ground water, you may wish to make the trench wider and deeper. A French drain acts as an area where water soaks away quickly. We often recommend them close to the building and not next to the building as this helps to reduce the ground level and it will take any water that is directed at that area away (for example as mentioned where a patio has been placed which aims any rainwater to part of the wall). As mentioned, whilst a French drain is a DIY job it does need some understand of how it works.



French Drains must be on a slope

The pipe that is at the base of a French drain should be perforated or as we did years ago for land drains, there should be gaps between each pipe which should be set onto a bed of firm ground and the pipes should be on a fall to the drain. Whilst you should be able to ensure that there is enough fall by site, we always like the idea of rolling a marble from one end to the other! You will then need to place the pipes down and fill the trench with 0.5" (7.5mm) to 1" (15mm) sized gravel. You can leave it at that, or in addition you can cover this with sand and then turf over it. This is how a basic French drain is carried out.

The French Drain System which we would recommend

The French drain system which we would recommend would be as described although we would add to the base an inch or two of gravel onto which the perforated drainage pipe would rest (the drainage pipe should be 4" (100mm) to 6" (150mm). We would then wrap around that drainage pipe a filter fabric. This is to stop the holes in the perforated pipe from blocking up! We would then add gravel around this and further fill with gravel. In addition to this, we would add a silt trap. This is added in the run of the pipe

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and is very similar to a road gully (not that this is of much use if you don't understand how a road gully works!). The silt trap is a rectangular box with a pipe opening at each end. The drain water passes into this. Any particles sink to the bottom of the box and then the water travels on to the other side of the box, enabling it to feed into a drain. These are usually made of glass reinforced polyester (it being available in this form since the mid 1980's) and then normally reinforced with a steel frame for additional strength and bedded in concrete.

The French Pond!

French drains will over time clog up, which is why we recommend using a filter fabric however even with this, they will eventually clog up. Unfortunately there is no Dyno Rod equivalent and it is normally fine sand organic matter or clay which clogs up the French drain. In this case it will have to be dug up and the pipe work will require cleaning (or it may be quicker to just replace it) adding a filter fabric and refilling the gravel.

You may also be interested in these other articles about dampness issues:

"If you truly do want an independent expert opinion from a chartered surveyor with regard to structural surveys, building surveys, structural reports, engineers reports, specific defects report, dampness issues, dilapidations, home buyers reports or any other property matters please contact **0800 298 5424** for a chartered surveyor to give you a call back.

If you have a commercial property, be it leasehold or freehold, then you may wish to look at our Dilapidations Website at www.DilapsHelp.com and for Disputes go to our Disputes Help site www.DisputesHelp.com.

We hope you found the article of use and if you have any experiences that you feel should be added to this article that would benefit others, or you feel that some of the information that we have put is wrong then please do not hesitate to contact us (we are only human).

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Condensation and Damp Walls

Help on your property problems from chartered surveyors

If you need help and advice with regard to structural surveys and specific defects reports on things such as dampness, cracking to the property, condensation problems, etc, please free call 0800 298 5424 for a friendly no cost chat, what have you got to lose.

Why are my walls damp?

Damp walls occur for many reasons. They can be very inconvenient, not only damaging the wall paper or the paint finish; also mould can occur on clothing and can also be bad for your health. We have seen dampness at high level, it can be leaking roofs, gutters or hopper heads. These tend to occur around the top of the wall and the ceiling. At mid-level to the property it could be the central wall, this is often caused by leaking downpipes or defective pointing, or poorly fitted windows or a missing damp proof course to the windows, and at ground level rising damp tends to get blamed for all problems, but as you will see from reading this article and contacting us on our free phone number, 0800 298 5424, dampness at ground level can be for many reasons, everything from drains and gutters and gullies blocking, to downpipes discharging against the wall, or a high water table level. Whatever the reason, it can cause a situation that is very unpleasant to live in.

Dampness put simply

To establish exactly why a wall is damp you do need to consider many possibilities. Some of these you can effect by altering how you use the property and some of them you cannot. So, it makes sense to look at the damp problems that you can resolve.



Dampness that you can help to solve

Probably the most common cause of dampness is condensation and this can be resolved or reduced considerably by changing the way that you use the property.

Identifying condensation

Tell tale signs of condensation are mould on the walls and furniture and on clothes and literally windows that are dripping wet. Condensation is where the moisture content of the air meets a cold surface, such as a window, and then the dampness occurs. This is very easy to see if it is on a window where it causes a misting effect, but it can be virtually detectable at first if it is onto a papered wall and often the first signs are when the mould occurs. It tends to occur more within the corners of the property in areas that are colder.

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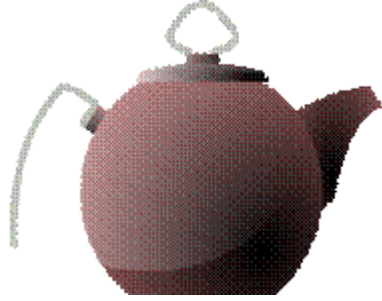
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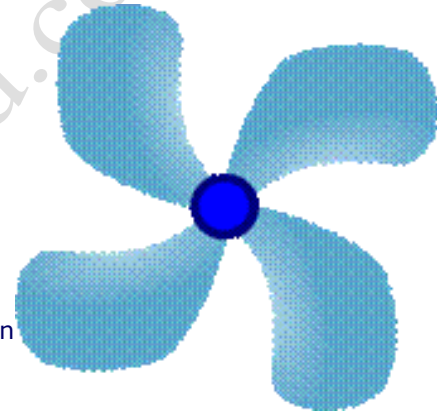
So what can I do about condensation?

To reduce condensation you need to increase the flow of air in the property. This can be as simple as opening the windows or using the trickle vents that are on the windows (small vents that open, often set at the top of windows) or using any vents that are set in the walls.



Condensation has become more common as we have made our houses more airtight. This was never a problem in years gone by, when we had rattley old sliding sash windows and wooden casement windows that didn't fit properly and also there was less things causing condensation. Today we have many items such as showers, washing machines, kettles, steam cooking, etc, to add to the moisture content of the air.

It really can be as simple as opening the windows to bring in some fresh air that has less moisture content. We do appreciate that this is easier said than done during the winter months when it is freezing cold outside and the last thing you want to do, having warmed up a room, is to allow cold air into it. In such a case as this, if you haven't got trickle vents on the windows or a vent into the house, then you need to add them. If the problem is in an area such as the kitchen or the bathroom then you need to add extractor fans. Remember the key to using condensation is to have air that doesn't have much moisture in it.



An example of condensation that we are coming across more and more is where an extractor fan is installed to the bathroom to take away the excess moisture, but unfortunately where ceiling extractor fans are fitted and these are very popular where a light is fitted, and if they are fitted directly over the shower it makes sense to have one fitted, then the extract flue is left to discharge into the roof space or attic, rather than taking it to a vent to outside air.

The reason this is the case is because it is much harder to get it vented to outside air. We have been into a roof where literally it was like a rain forest. You could tap the underside of the felt in the roof and get covered with water. Fortunately, we only see this once every five to ten years but we can only imagine it is going to become more common with the general increase in thermal efficiency of houses. Whilst we feel thought has been given to the air change in properties there is a big human factor in having to use the extract fans in the bathroom and kitchen and having to maintain them once they are broken.

You may be interested in these other articles about dampness and condensation:

Independent Expert Opinion

If you truly do want an independent expert opinion from a chartered surveyor with regard to structural surveys, building surveys, structural reports, engineers reports, specific defects report, dampness issues, dilapidations, home buyers reports or any other property matters please contact 0800 298 5424 for a chartered surveyor to give you a call back.

If you have a commercial property, be it leasehold or freehold, then you may wish to look at our Dilapidations Website at www.DilapsHelp.com and for Disputes go to our Disputes Help site www.DisputesHelp.com.

We hope you found the article of use and if you have any experiences that you feel should be added to this article that would benefit others, or you feel that some of the information that we have put is wrong then please do not hesitate to contact us (we are only human).

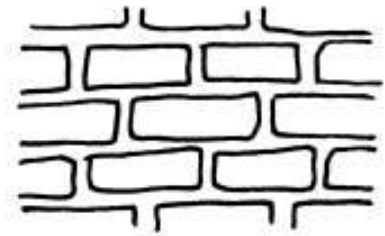
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Settlement, subsidence and heave and the part clay soils play in this

If you would like further advice on any then please phone 0800 298 5424 for a friendly chat. If you need help and advice with regard to a structural survey (or building survey, as it is now commonly known; structural survey being the old term for it) or a structural problem or an engineer's report, or you need a report specifically tailoring to your requirements please do not hesitate to call us for a friendly chat on 0800 298 5424.

The magical properties of clay

Clay has several unique properties. It can both cause problems when it is a clay soil that your house is built upon and be useful when it is used for the bricks that your house is made of.



Clay expands and contracts, depending upon its moisture content. It is at its bulkiest at 40% to 60%, however, it changes form if it gets wetter or dryer. It is this change of its bulk that causes problems. When the clay soil gets too wet the clays bulk becomes larger and almost pushes the property out of the ground. This is known as heave. When the clay dries out it becomes dust like, then we get settlement of foundations and subsidence of the building, as its bulkiness has reduced considerably.

Its ability to change size wouldn't be such a problem if it weren't that most London properties are built on clay, and there are many areas of clay throughout the country, such as Bedfordshire and Peterborough, which, interestingly enough, are also known for brick making.

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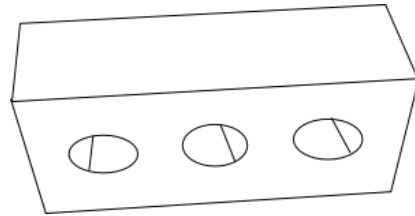
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Finding out if your property is built on clay soil

There are several ways of finding out if your property is built on clay soil.



Cracks

If the property has historic cracks it may be that it is built upon clay. It is best to check before you panic. You can do this by looking at maps geological maps or ringing up your friendly insurance broker, as they have a postcode index as to what areas are considered high risk with clay and which aren't. However, we must add that these maps are quite general and that when we were on a course many years ago we asked how these maps were originally made. We were advised that students were employed during their summer holidays, so the reliability of them, it could be argued, is limited for the purposes of identifying if clay is under your building, as they were originally produced to help farmers.

Clay test

This is what a good surveyor would do if they had come to investigate problems with your foundations and the owner of the property was happy for them to dig up the garden! We take a lump of soil from the garden; this should be approximately the depth of the foundations. If it is Victorian or Edwardian property it may be a lot less, in a modern property it is likely to be 1 metre to 1.2 metres, to even 1.4 metres deep.

On a summer's day you can leave the lump of soil in the garden for it to dry out in the sun. When it dries out if it becomes powdery and much lower in volume then it is clay. Equally, if it rains and it becomes a larger volume then it is clay. Also, if it not warm you can leave it inside on the radiator. We believe (although we would need to check it) that a growth or reduction of approximately 30% (for some reason 28% is ringing bells). This type of clay is known as shrinkable clay.

Not all clay expands and contracts

We would add that not all clay expands and contracts. The deeper clay tends to be the more stable and harder clay and therefore doesn't expand to the same extent.

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Clay that is used for brick making

We thought we would just add something about clay that is made for the use of brick making.

Old soft red bricks

The older bricks, were possibly even sun baked rather than fired, used a softer red clay. They have their own oil so they can affectively cook themselves.

You will also notice that it is the softer red clay bricks, even up the post-war era, that tend to be affected first by spalling.

Blue clay

Blue clay is fairly well known. This type of clay tends to be the harder clay and produces harder bricks and you may find bricks made out of this clay. A classic brick, and generally considered the hardest brick, is the Accrington brick and you would have to dig deep for this clay, i.e. normal clay would be dug at about 30 feet, or the metric equivalent!

Yellow or white clay

A yellow or white clay, that is used in a London stock brick, is harder than the soft red bricks but not as hard as the blue clay bricks.

Fletton brick

The one thing that used to confuse us for many years is what is the difference between a Fletton brick, a stock brick and a common brick. A Fletton brick, we believe, has its origins in Fletton near Peterborough, where bricks are produced in such quantities that it became the common name. Stock bricks tend also to be a common brick, but it specifically relates to bricks that don't have their own oils to fire, they would typically have to have methane today and years gone by coal dust to fire them, where as the soft red bricks tend to have their own oil that they can fire in. Therefore, you tend to find many of the older properties have a red brick as they were fired in the "sun. The term common brick is a generic name.

Silicone brick

This isn't a brick at all, but, we believe, is made from concrete.

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If you have a commercial property, be it leasehold or freehold, then you may wish to look at our Dilapidations Website at www.DilapsHelp.com and for Disputes go to our Disputes Help site www.DisputesHelp.com.

We hope you found the article of use and if you have any experiences that you feel should be added to this article that would benefit others, or you feel that some of the information that we have put is wrong then please do not hesitate to contact us (we are only human).

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BUILDING REGULATION SECTIONS

The way the Building Regulations are written is that they are not material specific but cover features a property should have. Building Regulations approved documents are made up of the following:-

Part A - Structural Safety

Part B - Fire Safety

Part C - Site preparation and damp proofing

Part D - Toxic substances

Part E - Sound proofing

Part F - Ventilation

Part G - Hygiene

Part H – Drainage and waste disposal

Part J – Heating appliances

Part K – Stairs, ramps and guards

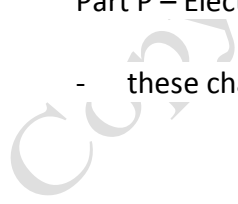
Part L – Conservation of fuel and power

Part M – Access to and use of buildings

Part N – Glazing materials and protection

Part P – Electric safety

- these change from time to time.



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LIMITATIONS

Our limitations are as the agreed Terms and Conditions of Engagement.

CONDITIONS OF ENGAGEMENT

The report has been prepared in accordance with our Conditions of Engagement and should be regarded as a comment on the overall condition of the property and the quality of its structure and not as an inventory of every single defect. It relates to those parts of the property that were reasonably and safely accessible at the time of the inspection, but you should be aware that defects can subsequently develop particularly if you do not follow the recommendations.

ENGLISH LAW

We would remind you that this report should not be published or reproduced in any way without the surveyor's expressed permission and is governed by English Law and any dispute arising there from shall be adjudicated upon only by the English Courts.

SOLE USE

This report is for the sole use of the named Client and is confidential to the Client and his professional advisors. Any other persons rely on the Report at their own risk.

ONLY HUMAN!

Although we are pointing out the obvious, our Surveyors obviously can't see through walls, floors, heavy furniture, fixed kitchen units etc. they have therefore made their best assumptions in these areas.

As this is a one off inspection, we cannot guarantee that there are no other defects than those mentioned in the report and also that defects can subsequently develop.

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WEATHER

It was overcast at the time of the inspection. The weather did not hamper the survey.

Our weather seems to be moving towards the extremities from relatively mid range. A few interesting facts in Britain over the years have been:

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| 2000 | Wettest year on record at the time |
| 2003 | Driest year on record at the time |
| 2004 | Wettest August on record at the time |
| 2004 | Boscastle was the worst flash flood on record at the time |
| 2005 | Third driest year on record at the time |
| 2006 | Warmest year recorded on record at the time |
| July 2006 | Hottest July on record at the time |
| 2006 | Hottest autumn on record at the time |
| 2007 | Warmest spring on record at the time |
| 2007 | Wettest June on record at the time |
| April '06-April '07 | Hottest 12 months on record at the time |
| 2008 | |
| 2009 | Third wettest August since 1956 |
| 2010 | Heaviest snowfall in March since 1991 |
| | Britain faces one of the coldest winters for 100 years |

References BBC News www.bbc.co.uk

This may have adverse effects on lots of buildings in years to come.

NOT LOCAL

It should be noted that we are not local surveyors to this area and are carrying out the work without the benefits of local knowledge on such things as soil conditions, aeroplane flight paths, and common defects in materials used in the area etc.

OCCUPIED PROPERTY

The property was occupied at the time of our survey, which meant that there were various difficulties when carrying out the survey such as stored items within cupboards, the loft space and obviously day-to-day household goods throughout the property. We have, however, done our best to work around these.

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INSPECTION LIMITED

Unfortunately in this instance our inspection has been very limited as we haven't carried out any tests on the services and we haven't opened up the floors and we had a limited head and shoulders only inspection of the roof space due to the mass of insulation. We have not opened up the structure or tested the services.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Our computer system sends two copies of our Terms and Conditions to the email address given to us when booking the survey; one has the terms attached and the other has links to the Terms and Conditions on our website (for a limited time). If you have not received these please phone your contact immediately.

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