membrane to the walls of the cellar, preventing water from entering the room itself, drains it effectively away, allowing the building to continue to breathe, and is completely reversible.

Solid floors
The insertion of a solid floor into an historic building, such as concrete screed floor, will exacerbate any damp problems within the building, preventing water moisture in the air from rising through the floor, and evaporating out of the walls, forcing more water into the walls than they can cope with at any one point. Any such floor should be removed, and replaced with a traditionally constructed floor, allowing the building to act and work as it was designed to.

Further Information
Further information and advice on damp and historic buildings, as well as other conservation practices and principles can be found at various web-sites, including:

- www.buildingconservation.com
- www.handr.co.uk
- www.ridoutassociates.co.uk
- www.ukdamp.co.uk
- www.newton-membranes.co.uk
- www.protectahome.co.uk

English Heritage publish specialist technical advisory leaflets which are available free from www.helm.org.uk

The Society for Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) have information on traditional construction methods, and hold training days and courses for their members, detail of which can be found at www.spab.org.uk

It is important to note that when working with Listed Buildings, special consent (Listed Building Consent) may be required for some works. It is advisable to check with the Council’s Conservation Officer prior to starting any such works. If plaster is to be removed, or a new floor inserted, then it is also likely that Building Regulations approval will be required. If consent is necessary, full details of damp protection and/or damp proofing may be required as a condition of any consent, together with appropriate surveys and detailed reasoning for the use of such products.

For further information and advice on the historic environment you can contact us in the following ways:

Writing:
Wyre Forest District Council
Economic Prosperity and Place Directorate
Wyre Forest House
Finepoint Way
Kidderminster DY11 7WF

Email:
conservation@wyreforestdc.gov.uk

Telephone:
01562 732536

This document can be made available in other languages (including British Sign Language) and alternative formats (large print, audio tape, computer disc and braille) on request from Wyre Forest District Council by telephoning 01562 732928 or by e-mailing worcestershirehub@wyreforestdc.gov.uk
What is rising damp?

Rising damp is the result of ground water being sucked up through the walls of the building, through a process called capillary action. Whilst small amounts of moisture within walls of historic buildings would usually not be a major issue, as the building should be able to cope with this through “breathing”, when this results in large large amounts of water, this can be detrimental to the the building, and its occupants, as this can result in damage to the fabric of the building. However, damp problems in historic buildings are often misdiagnosed as being rising damp, and owners are often sold useless and expensive treatments which are not needed, through a lack of understanding of the issues of damp. Please read our other leaflets on damp, which will help to understand damp in historic buildings.

Does my building suffer from rising damp?

Many buildings do have rising damp to some extent, but with historic buildings, this is generally not an issue, as the materials, such as lime, allow this additional water moisture to evaporate out of the building. However, when non-traditional materials, such as cement render, are used, then this will prevent evaporation taking place, and will compound the problem of damp.

With historic buildings, much rising damp is not due to an increase in the water table, or natural causes, but more likely due to excess water lying in the ground, caused by cracked pipes, or defective ground or surface drainage.

How can I address this?

As can be seen, rising damp is only one potential cause of damp at the base of walls, and is very rarely the primary source of excess water, if it is present. To address any damp problems, an accurate and correct diagnosis of the problem and its causes needs to be undertaken – it is strongly recommended that this is undertaken by an independent damp expert (one who is not interested in automatically selling a damp proof product without understanding the real causes of the problem).

Much of the time, good management of the building and its surroundings, will either remove the damp problem completely, or address it to such a point that the building can cope with the water moisture.

Regular inspections of pipes, drainage, cellarage will all help in understanding what the cause of any damp is, and should give some clear indication of what work needs to be undertaken to address this. If drainage or raised surface levels are identified as problematic, then the use of additional measures such as French drains, correctly constructed, or ventilated and drained “dry areas” will help with the removal of water moisture away from a building, and control the sources of damp.

Does my building need a damp proof course, injection or membrane inserted?

It is unlikely that your historic building will require a damp proof course, membrane of injection. Furthermore, it is also probable that, as these will have to be inserted after the building has been constructed, that they will not work to their expected control, as it cannot be guaranteed that they will permeate through the entire wall. Any such insertion will also prevent water moisture from within the building evaporating as it should, and thus will be likely to compound the issue of damp within the building and its fabric.

It is strongly advised that prior to undertaking any such work, that an independent expert be consulted to assess whether this is an appropriate measure to take. Whilst this may appear to be an additional expense, it is likely that this will save money in the short, medium and long term, in undertaking appropriate and correct remedial work, rather than spending up to several thousands of pounds on remedial work which will have little or no benefit to the building.

Ventilation

As with condensation, proper levels of ventilation are essential to ensure that excessive water moisture within the air is removed efficiently. This may range from removing cement-based renders through to inserting additional ventilation/air bricks into the walls to enable the building to breathe effectively.

If cellars are the dominant area of excessive damp in the property, then this can easily be addressed through sympathetic methods. Tanking is not recommended, as whilst this will prevent water moisture from entering the room, it retains the water in the walls, where is cannot escape, thereby creating severe damage in the long term. The most sympathetic and appropriate method of addressing damp in cellars is the use of a generic cavity drain membrane system. This attaches a waterproof