

A Stitch in time.....

Making sure that our homes and buildings are in good working order can seem like a real chore, and most of us consider that the bricks and mortar will survive without any checking or general regular maintenance. Many of us will regularly service and MOT our cars, mow the lawn, and repair fences when needed, but spend little time ensuring that our largest and most expensive asset is in good working order.



A small amount of time and a small amount of regular investment can limit the need for or extent of, major and often highly expensive repairs. It is also wise to understand the construction of the building, and to ensure that any repairs or alterations are undertaken using

the appropriate materials, to ensure that the building continues to work as it should. Too often, repairs are undertaken using different materials, resulting in different parts of the building working against each other, rather than in harmony, resulting in long-term damage, possibly with larger costs to put this right.



First Steps

The first step in good management and maintenance is to carry out regular inspections of the building. This can either be done yourself with a minimum of knowledge, or can often be commissioned. For example, churches and most public buildings

are inspected every five years, with faults and possible problems identified at this stage, with a time-scale for the repair or issue to be addressed, depending on the severity of the problem – this also allows time to cost the work, and to save some money to help pay for any work needed.

If you undertake the survey yourself, and you identify problems you may not understand, you may require the services of a suitably qualified professional - try to find one who has knowledge and understanding of historic buildings and their repair, and preferably one who has been recommended by some one you know. This means you can also check their work before employing them.



If you are buying on old house, money invested in a full building survey, rather than just the bank valuation report, can help identify potential issues you may have missed, and would not be picked up in the basic report.

Finding the Right Help

It can be a daunting task to find the right professional to help in this work. Any person you employ to undertake this work should be independent and objective, and not identifying works to be undertaken unnecessarily. Architects, surveyors and structural engineers are usually relatively easy to find, but they need to have experience in the type of building you live in (for example, if it is a timber-framed house, then the person should have experience of timber framed buildings and their repair). Always ask for references, and see if you can view other works they have undertaken, to ensure that you are happy with the quality of work.

Both the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), and the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) can provide a list of conservation-accredited professionals in your area. It may also be worth contacting the local Conservation Officer whether they can help you.

Various websites and organisations provide free advice through leaflets and articles, which can often be of great help – details of some can be found at the end of this leaflet.

Carrying out your own inspection

Any planned periodic inspection needs some thought, preparation and organisation. Firstly, it is always good to carry out an inspection during or straight after some heavy rain, this will help identify faults and defects in the roof and/or gutters/drainpipes.



It is best to prepare a file, with previous inspections, details of the building's physical history, plans of the building, and some sketch elevations. Using these, together with a torch, and a camera, start outside, examine the roof, and work downwards, looking for slipped slates and ridge tiles, warping or bowing in the roof, condition of windows,

pointing and brickwork, and gutters and drainpipes. Then move inside the building, starting in the attic, and go through the house room by room. Use a small knife to test woodwork – where it is soft, it may need either repairing or replacing. The leaflet "Maintenance Checklist" will take you through your building thoroughly, and help you make a list of things which need to be done, together with a time-scale for them.

