

QUINQUENNIAL INSPECTIONS

Information Paper 3

Damp In Church/Chapel Buildings

Water is the enemy of building fabric and the most probable cause of rapid deterioration in the condition of a building. There are many causes of damp and early detection of damp in building elements and materials gives an opportunity to make a timely diagnosis of the cause and arrange remedy. This should lead to a suitable, comparatively low-cost remedy in contrast to more expensive repairs that might be required if damp goes undetected.

Typical sources of damp are:

- 1) Roof defects, eg missing slates/tiles, loose ridge tiles, defective roof valleys and flashings.
- 2) Cracked surfaces and loose edgings to flat roofs.
- 3) Chimneystack defects, eg loose bricks, defective pointing and cappings, loose flashings.
- 4) Faulty gutters and downpipes, blocked valley gutters, damaged and inadequate below ground drainage.
- 5) Frost damaged masonry, and receded mortar joints which have become very porous.
- 6) Raised exterior ground levels causing damp to the base of walls and allowing water into floor voids.
- 7) Abutting structures without a damp proof membrane.
- 8) Blocked air vents and inadequate ventilation in timber suspended floors.
- 9) Plumbing failures, especially in concealed pipework behind walls or buried in floors.
- 10) Inappropriate use of modern materials for repairs of traditional buildings, for example cement-based mortars for repointing solid masonry walls.
- 11) Condensation related damp, eg unventilated roof voids and suspended floors, standing water in cellars.

Where a building has been subject to flooding or damp ingress, care should be taken in selecting the most appropriate method of drying. Excessive use of de-humidifiers can dry a building too quickly and break the natural flow rate of evaporating water causing moisture to be trapped within building materials. Natural drying through good ventilation is usually favoured.

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Repairs

External masonry repairs and repointing, and internal re-plastering following water ingress or damage, especially in older heritage buildings with solid masonry walls, should only be carried out by contractors with suitable knowledge and experience of appropriate materials and techniques.

Property Stewards may benefit from building a good working relationship with reliable building contractors with the relevant skills so that they are available when needed thus avoiding using unknown or low skilled contractors in an emergency. It may be advantageous to share details of approved contractors within Circuits and groups of Churches to avoid engaging the services of poorly-skilled tradespeople. There is a shortage of good-quality tradespeople, and it pays to have good working relationships with contractors.

In order to ensure that contractors carry out appropriate repairs it is advisable to engage a suitably qualified Surveyor or Architect to prepare a detailed specification for use by your building contractor. The added cost of the specification may save much greater subsequent expenses which can result from unsuitable repairs or over engineered/excessive solutions.

About Stephen Barlow

Stephen is a practicing chartered surveyor and RICS registered valuer with 35 years experience who set up his own practice in 2002. Stephen specialises in surveying churches, particularly providing Quinquennial condition reports which are required every five years as part of planned preventative maintenance programmes. Stephen's clients include numerous Methodist Church circuits and the East Midlands United Reformed Church. Stephen also advises local authorities and private clients with regard to building defects pathology.

If you wish to discuss any services offered please contact Stephen for informal advice. He is happy to provide examples of Quinquennial reports to prospective new church clients.

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