



**Historic Building
Advisory Service**

350mm Insulation
ideally at 18°C

PO Box 2140
Tisbury, Salisbury
Wiltshire, SP2 2DW
Telephone: 01747 870772
www.historicbuildingss.co.uk

Ref: 24903/RJH

22 December, 2024

Mrs N Barker,
Rest Harrow,
Primrose Lane,
Woodfalls,
Salisbury,
Wiltshire,
SP5 2NA.

Dear Mrs Barker,

Historic Building Damp Appraisal – Rose Cottage, High Street, Berwick St James, Wiltshire

Following our recent visit to look at the property you own and where there are problems with damp at Rose Cottage, High Street, Berwick St James, Salisbury, Wiltshire, we give our opinion on the condition of the building as we saw it during our recent visit to site. An electronic copy of this letter has also been sent to you by e-mail.

We visited the property on 29 November, 2024, when the weather was dry.

This is an unlisted cottage of two storeys that sits on the east side of the High Street, where it has an east – west axis, so that it sits with the west gable against the edge of the road and area of garden on both the north and south side of the building. The cottage contains. It contains four bedrooms and a bathroom on the first floor and kitchen, dining room, living room on the ground floor.

From the appearance of the original fabric, where this can be seen on the west gable as well as part of the back wall, this possibly dates to the early to mid 17th C where the walls are of banded knapped flint and Chilmark or similar stone, with part of the back wall also including banded rock chalk with the stone. The original part of the building seems to have been raised in the 18th C as suggested by the brickwork used on the front to lift the eaves level by approximately 1.0 m. In the latter part of the 20th C the cottage was extended on the east end with the additional of two storey block, so that the roof, covered with clay plain tiles, which runs continuously from end to end.

The west wall has been re-pointed, apparently within the last 10 years or so, using a very hard mortar which, although this is claimed to be a lime mortar, it appears to be more the density of cement type material. It has been applied to the stone and flint work and it can be seen where it's the use is allowing erosion of the softer stones is continuing. That could suggest that the ability of this wall to lose moisture vapour from the core is limited, not being able to 'breathe', and so it will be cooler and more prone to internal condensation occurrence.

The historic west end of the south side of the house, possibly at the time when the two storey extension was added, has had the whole of this façade rendered with a hard cement type material that extends right down to ground level. This has subsequently been coated with a modern plastic or polymer type paint, so creating a largely vapour impermeable coating applied to the wall. That will prevent it from losing moisture from inside the house to the outside, as can be expected for

traditionally built cottages, and that can then built-up in the fabric and be perceived as penetrating damp.

There are hard pavings along the base of the historic part of the south wall that will encourage moisture to rise up the fabric, as it will not be able to dry properly. That is a particular problem as the wall coating runs down to this and water will be drawn up the joint between the external finish and the wall core by capillary action.

It is assumed that the extension at the east end was built in cavity construction where the problem of 'breathability' encountered with traditional solid walls is much less. In such a situation the use of hard renders and modern wall paints do not present such a problem of moisture entrapment in the fabric.

Internally damp is seen predominantly in the west end ground floor room, as well as the lobby to the base of the original stairs to the first floor, and to a lesser extent within the east ground floor room of the original part of the building. Little or no damp problems seem to be occurring in the modern ground floor part, except for where there is condensation due to a combination of inadequate heating and general lack of ventilation through this part.

The ground floor west room at the time of this visit was very warm and very humid. Damp was seen as disruption of the surface decorations on the south wall, as well as loss of adhesion to wallpaper and other decorations to the west wall. The problems reported to us was that this originally started at low level and had slowly risen up through the walls where it is now being experienced at ceiling level.

These problems are probably due to a cocktail of causes that are being encountered. We were shown construction drawings from when the extension was added and it would appear that the walls internal faces to this room were stripped of original plaster and then coated with a waterproofing material called Synthraprufe and then replastered with modern gypsum type plaster. Such work can cause problems to the walls at low level where the condensation becomes apparent due to there being a waterproof barrier to the inner face of the wall, where the fabric behind the can remain damp, and so condensation can occur on the surface internally. That then is perceived as rising or penetrating damp, but is probably not.

The walls generally on the west and south side are faced externally with materials which are largely vapour impermeable and so prevent moisture vapour from passing through the fabric from the inside to the exterior. That will result in much entrapment if moisture in the fabric which can result in severe moisture saturation of the walls, due to interstitial condensation, and is seen on the inner face as a form of surface dampness as the condensation cycle increases with greater signs of disruption of the decorations and the like.

There is general dampness seen to the base of the external walls in the stairs lobby area. This was of a similar nature to that seen in the west room, but this has also affected joinery items such as skirting boards.

There was no effective ventilation in this room with no windows being open and these did not appear to be fitted with either trickle vents or draught latches. The latter may be able to be retrospectively installed to air provision to this space. Advice may need to be given to the occupant on the need to maintain even heating through the property, as well as ensure that an adequate level of ventilation both to the outside air and within rooms is achieved.

It is also reported by the tenant that during recent heavy rains water was pouring down from the roof over this face of the south wall externally. When this was examined externally it can be suggested that the guttering is under sized for the amount of roof it drains, is blocked and in need of thorough cleaning so it operates correctly. This would also seem to be generally defective as there are dips in the run due to a lack of support over the sitting room area, which allows it to overflow at a low point.

Therefore, as well as the walls are not able to 'breathe' and lose moisture from the inside to the outside air, that damp is being exacerbated by lack of ventilation internally and the walls are being cooled further by water washing down them due to a lack of maintenance to the gutters externally. This later problem will also introduce additional water into the fabric through micro cracking in the paint coating, but from which it will be very difficult for it to be lost through normal evaporation.

Remedial works should start with improving the ventilation potential to this room such as, fitting a catch to the windows that will allow them to be secured in a slightly open manner so as to allow air movement. That should enable a change of air within the room, but still maintain security. Another way to do this is to introduce a grille in the base of the former fireplace opening in the base of the west wall so it can act as a passive ventilation stack.

An important element of work is to overhaul the guttering to ensure that this is all working properly by carrying water away and not allowing it to overflow and run down the face of the walls. An action that should be considered to be undertaken at that time is to introduce a French drain to the base of the walls externally. To do that the concrete pavings should be cut back at least 250 mm (10") on the face of the wall and the drain taken down to about ideally 150 mm below the internal floor level providing this does not destabilise the structure. It will all help to remove moisture and cold soil from that position.

A longer term consideration should be to have the west gable repointed in a permeable and purely lime mortar to the stonework, which will also even up the somewhat untidy appearance of the present application. More importantly we would suggest the removal of the hard cement render from the south wall face of the original part of the cottage and repoint the underlying fabric with a vapour permeable lime mortar.

If the latter option is not considered at this stage, then a lesser method would be to remove the render along the base of the wall for approximately 1.0 m high to create a drying zone. To do this is quite simple with cut horizontal cut through the bottom of the coating so the lower render can be stripped off and then the exposed wall face repointed in lime mortar. This will help dry the base of the wall, remove some of the moisture from the fabric and reduce the risk of capillary rising damp.

Internally, where there are signs of wet related decay to the skirting boards in the stairs lobby and the adjacent rooms, these should be taken off to at least 1.0 m past the last sign of decayed timber. They can then be replaced with new treated and matching profile timbers and then decorated to blend back in to place. Treatment of the fabric behind timber should be undertaken using material such as a boron salt to reduce the risk of this fungal decay spreading.

On the first floor there are some signs of problems with moisture, particularly in bedroom 1, affecting the south wall and to some extent the west wall on the junction. Most of this is possibly due to the lack of ventilation internally and also the overflowing guttering externally. The cleaning work should be undertaken as a first action and then monitored for longer term action that may be required, such as the greater removal of the render and repointing of the external gable.

In the other bedrooms there was damp seen at high level adjacent to the ceiling junctions. This is possibly related to overflowing guttering that is affecting the top parts of the walls externally, as the roof coverings on this section appeared to be in fair condition.

As we discussed, following the interior viewing of the property, there is a need for some pruning back of the trees and shrubs around the house and the beech hedge along the south boundary so as to improve air flow around the property. This will help with the drying out of the building as it presently seems to be a stagnant air pocket.

On the south side the hedge should be topped to a maximum of about 2.0 m to improve sunlight drying of the fabric as well as air circulation, but at the same time will still maintain privacy on that side. Then around the east end of the house there is much overgrowth from willow and holly which

should be carefully pruned back so as not to disrupt the roof coverings and also to allow improved air flow, but should not need the removal of these completely. On the northeast side there is a problem with a large hazel bush growing up against the cottage and with the holly tree on the north side and these should all be cut back.

There is a shed against the north side of the building, just inside the roadside boundary wall, that has a bituminous felt roof that from its general appearance probably has a life of about 5 years before it will need replacing. Removal of this structure would help with air flow around the building if that could be achieved.

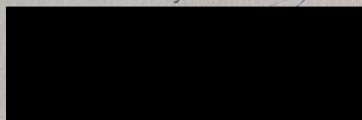
It should be noted that items such as removal of the shed and trees may need planning approval as this is within a designated conservation area, as will changes to the exterior of the property, such as the removal of render or repointing.

As with many old cottages such as this, there is seldom a single reason or cause for damp in the property as you are encountering here. Therefore, because of this cocktail it will probably be necessary to go through a process of elimination with various suggested work items to see which is the most cost effective. In doing that care should be taken to use appropriate materials and methods so as not to introduce other problems of possible damp entrapment within the building.

As our work is now completed to an appropriate stage, we take this opportunity to submit our fee invoice for your attention and settlement.

The Historic Building Advisory Service can provide a wide range of professional services to help you get the most from your property. These include assisting with ordering necessary repairs, designs for extensions and new buildings, obtaining planning and building regulation approvals, getting the best prices for the work and supervision of the work. If we can be of further assistance with this or further projects or ideas, we would be very pleased to discuss them with you.

Yours sincerely



R J Hill MRICS, MCIFA

