

## A –Z OF BUILDING GLOSSARY EXPLAINED

**AGGREGATE:** Broken stone, gravel or sand often used with cement to form concrete. Aggregates may be coarse or fine and often used in the construction of “soakaways”.

**AIRBRICK:** A perforated brick built into a wall for the purpose of providing air for ventilation purposes. Used for instance, to ventilate the underside of a wooden floor or roof space.

**ARCHITRAVE:** A moulding around a doorway or window opening. It usually covers the joints between the frame and the wall finish, thus hiding any shrinkage gaps which may occur.

**ASBESTOS:** Material used in the past for insulation. Can sometimes be a health hazard and specialist advice should be sought if asbestos (especially blue asbestos) is found.

**ASPHALT:** Black, tar-like substance, designed to be impervious to moisture. Used on flat roofs, floors and sometimes “tanking” on walls below ground.

**BARGE BOARD:** See “Verge Board”

**BALANCED FLUE:** Common metal device, normally serving gas appliances. It allows air to be drawn to the appliance whilst also allowing fumes to escape.

**BALUSTER:** A post or vertical pillar supporting a hand rail or parapet rail.

**BALUSTRADE:** A collective name for a row of balusters or other infilling below a hand rail on a stair or parapet.

**BEETLE INFESTATION:** (Wood boring insects eg: woodworm). Larvae of various species of beetle can tunnel into timber causing damage. Specialist treatment normally required. Can also affect furniture.

**BENCHING:** Shaped concrete slope beside drainage channel within an inspection chamber. Also known as “haunching”.

**BITUMEN:** Black, sticky substance, similar to asphalt. Used in sealants, mineral felts and damp-proof courses.

**BOND:** The regular arrangements of bricks or stones in a wall so that the units may be joined together. The principal types of “bond” used in domestic construction being English, Flemish, Header, Stretcher, Diagonal or Garden wall bond.

**BREEZE BLOCK:** Originally made from clinker cinders or (“Breeze”) the term now commonly but incorrectly used to refer to various types of concrete and cement building blocks.

**BRESSUMMER:** Supporting beam across opening, normally timber.

**CARBONATION:** A natural process affecting the outer layer of concrete. Metal reinforcement within that layer is liable to early corrosion, consequent fracturing of the concrete in some cases.

**CASEMENT WINDOW:** A window composed of hinged, pivoted or fixed sashes.

**CAVITY WALL:** Traditional modern method of building external walls of houses comprising two leaves of brickwork or block work usually separated by a gap (“cavity”) of about 50mm (2 inches). New build now 75mm or even 100mm.

**CAVITY WALL INSULATION:** Filling of wall cavities by one of various forms of insulation material: - (Beads) Polystyrene Beads pumped into the cavities will easily fall out if the wall is broken. (Foam) Urea formaldehyde foam, mixed on site, and then pumped into the cavity where it sets. Can lead to problems of dampness and make replacement of wall ties more difficult. (Fibreglass) Inert mineral fibre pumped into the cavity.

**CAVITY WALL-TIE:** A twisted piece of metal or similar material bedded into the inner and outer leaves of cavity walls intended to strengthen the wall. Failure by corrosion can result in the wall becoming unstable, specialist replacement ties are then required which are stainless steel.

**CESSPOOL:** A simple method of drain comprising a holding tank which needs frequent emptying. Not to be confused with septic tank.

**CHIPBOARD:** Often referred to as “particle board”. Chips of wood compressed and glued into sheet form. Cheap method of decking to flat roofs, floors and (with formica or melamine surface) furniture, especially kitchen units.

**CLEANING EYE:** Sometimes known as an “access eye or rodding eye”. An opening in a drain or ventilation pipe, covered by a plate, the removal of which allows the drain to be rodded to clear blockages. Also on waste pipes from sinks, wash hand basins, showers or baths.

**COB:** Walling of damp earth sometimes mixed cement, rammed without reinforcement into a formwork. This cheap method of walling has in the past been practiced mainly in East Anglia and the West of England.

**COLLAR BEAM:** A horizontal tie beam of a roof, which is joined to opposing rafters at a level above that of the wall plates.

**COLLAR:** Horizontal timber member designed to restrain opposing roof slopes. Absence, removal or weakening can lead to roof spread.

**COMBINATION BOILER:** Modern form of gas boiler which activates on demand usually within a pressurised system. With this form of boiler there is no need for water storage tanks, hot water cylinders etc.

**COPING/COPING STONE:** Usually stone or concrete, laid on top of a wall as a decorative finish and designed to stop rainwater soaking into the wall.

**CORBEL:** Projection of stone, brick, timber or metal jutting out from a wall to support a weight above it.

**CORNICE:** A large moulding at the junction between an inside wall and a ceiling. Can also include a moulding at the top of an outside wall designed to project and throw raindrops clear of the wall.

**COVING:** Curved junction between wall and ceiling.

**DADO RAIL:** A wooden moulding fixed to the wall or capping panelling and forming the top most part of a dado. Originally designed to avoid damage to the wall where people or furniture brushed against it.

**DAMP-PROOF COURSE:** Layer of impervious material (mineral felt, slate on some older properties, pvc etc) incorporated into a wall and designed to prevent dampness rising up the wall or lateral dampness around windows, doors etc. Various proprietary methods are available for damp-proofing existing walls including “electro-osmosis” and chemical injection.

**DEATHWATCH BEETLE:** (*Xestobium Rufovillosum*). Extremely serious insect pest which attacks structural timbers. Usually affects old hardwoods with fungal decay already present.

**DOUBLE GLAZING:** A method of thermal insulation usually either: Sealed Unit: Two panes of glass fixed and hermetically sealed together; Or secondary: In effect a second “window” positioned inside the original window.

**DOUBLE HUNG SASH WINDOW:** A window in which the opening lights slide vertically within a cased frame, counter balanced weights supported on sash cords which pass over pulleys in the frame.

**DRY ROT:** (*Serpula Lacrymans*). A very serious form of fungus which attacks structural and joinery timbers, often with devastating results. Can flourish in moist, unventilated areas.

**EAVES:** The overhanging edge of a roof.

**EFFLORESCENCE:** Powdery white salts crystallised on the surface of a wall as a result of moisture evaporation.

**ENGINEERING BRICK:** Particularly strong and dense type of brick, often used as a damp proof course in older buildings or manhole construction and piers for steel beams.

**FIBREBOARD:** Cheap, lightweight board material of little strength, used in ceilings or as insulation to attics.

**FLASHING:** Building technique designed to prevent leakage at a roof joint. Normally metal (lead, zinc, copper) but can be cement, felt or proprietary material.

**FLAUNCHING:** A cement mortar weathering on the top of a chimney stack, surrounding the base of the chimney pots to throw off the rain and thus prevent it from saturating the stack.

**FLUE:** A smoke duct in a chimney, or a proprietary pipe serving a heat producing appliance such as a central heating boiler.

**FLUE LINING:** Metal (usually stainless steel) tube within a flue – essential for high output gas appliances such as boilers. May also be manufactured from clay and built into the flue. Other proprietary flue liners are also available.

**FOUNDATIONS:** Normally concrete, laid underground as a structural base to a wall; in older buildings these may be brick or stone.

**FROG:** An indentation, usually V shaped in the bedding face of a brick to reduce its weight. “Frog down” or “Frog up” is the generally accepted way of describing how the brick is laid.

**GABLE:** Upper section of a wall, usually triangular in shape, at either end of a ridged roof or above a bay window.

**GROUND HEAVE:** Swelling of clay sub-soil due to the presence of moisture: can cause an upward movement of foundations in extreme cases.

**GULLEY:** An opening into which rain and water are collected before entering the drain.

**GUTTER:** A channel along the eaves of the roof or the edge of a path for removal of rainwater.

**HARDCORE:** Broken bricks or stone which, consolidated, are used as foundations in extreme cases and used for soakaways.

**HAUNCHING:** See “benching”. Also term used to describe the support to a drain underground.

**HIP:** The external junction between two intersecting roof slopes.

**HIP TILE:** A saddle shaped or angular tile fitting over the intersection of those roofing tiles which meet at a hip.

**IN SITU:** “In position” – applied to work done in the position where it is finally required, eg: concrete may be precast in sections which are later taken into position where they are required or it may be cast “in situ”.

**INSPECTION CHAMBER:** Commonly called the “man hole”: access point to a drain comprising a chamber (of brick, concrete or plastic) with the drainage channel at its base and a removable cover at ground level.

**JAMB:** Vertical side face of a doorway or window. Joist a timber or steel beam directly supporting a floor and sometimes alternatively or additionally supporting a ceiling. Steel beams are usually referred to as RSJ’s (rolled steel joists), U beams or universal columns.

**KEY:** The roughness of a surface which provides a bond for any application of paint, plaster, rendering, tiles etc or spaces between laths or wire meshes which provide a grip for plaster.

**LANDSLIP:** Downhill movements of unstable earth, clay, rock etc often following prolonged heavy rain or coastal erosion, but sometimes due to sub-soil having poor cohesion.

**LATH:** Thin strip of wood used in the fixing of roof tiles or slates, or as backing to plaster.

**LINTEL:** A horizontal beam over a door or window opening usually carrying the load of the wall above. Often lintels can be partially or completely hidden from view.

**LONGHORN:** Beetle (Hylotrupe Bajulas). A Serious insect pest mainly confined to the extreme South-East of England, which can totally destroy the structural strength of wood.

**LPG:** Liquid Petroleum Gas or Propane. Available to serve gas appliances in areas without mains gas. Requires a storage tank.

**MORTAR:** Mixture of sand, cement, water and sometimes lime used to join stones or bricks.

**MULLION:** Vertical bar dividing individual lights in a window.

**NEWEL:** Stout post supporting a staircase handrail at the top and bottom. Also, the central pillar of a winding spiral staircase.

**OVERSITE:** Rough concrete below timber ground floors Parapet low wall along the edge of a roof, balcony etc.

**PARAPET GUTTER:** A timber gutter of rectangular cross-sections usually provided with flexible metal or other impervious lining. Used behind a parapet or sometimes at a valley.

**PIER:** A vertical column of brickwork or other material. Used to strengthen the wall or to support a weight.

**PLASTERBOARD:** Stiff “sandwich” of plaster between coarse paper. Now in wide spread use for ceilings and walls.

**POINTING:** Outer edge of mortar joint between bricks, stones etc.

**POWDER POST:** Beetle (Bostrychide or Iyctidae family of beetles). A relatively uncommon pest which can, if untreated, cause widespread damage to structural timbers.

**PURLIN:** Horizontal beam in a roof upon which rafters rest.

**QUOIN:** the external angle of a building; or specifically, bricks or stone blocks forming that angle.

**RAFTER:** A sloping roof beam, usually timber, forming the carcass of a roof.

**RANDOM RUBBLE:** Basically early method of stone wall construction with no attempt at bonding or coursing.

**RENDERING:** Vertical covering of a wall either plaster (internally) or cement (externally), sometimes with pebbledash, stucco or Tyrolean textured finish.

**REVEALS:** The side faces of a window or a door opening.

**RIDGE:** The highest part or apex of a roof, usually horizontal.

**RIDGE TILE:** A specially shaped tile for covering and making weather right the ridge of a roof. These tiles may have a rounded or angular cross-section.

**RISER:** The vertical part of a step or stair.

**RISING DAMP:** Moisture soaking up a wall from below ground, by capillary action which can cause rot in timbers, plaster decay, decoration failure etc.

**ROOF SPREAD:** Outward bowing of a wall caused by the thrust of a badly restrained roof framework (see “collar”).

**RSJ:** Frequently used abbreviation for a rolled steel joist.

**SCREED:** Final smooth finish of a solid floor; usually cement concrete or asphalt.

**SEPTIC TANK:** Drain installation whereby sewage decomposes through the action of bacteria, which can be slowed down or stopped altogether by the use of chemicals such as bleach, biological washing powders etc.

**SETTLEMENT:** All properties settle to some extent, and this can show as cracking and or distortion in walls. Very often minor settlement is not of great significance to the building as a whole.

**SEWER:** A large, underground pipe or drain used for conveying water and sewage. The local authority is usually responsible for the sewers, which collect the effluent from various drains, the drains being responsibility of the land owners.

**SHAKES:** Naturally occurring timber cracks in timber; in building timbers, shakes appear quite dramatically, but strength is not always impaired.

**SHINGLES:** Small rectangular slabs of wood used on roofs instead of tiles, slates etc.

**SOAKAWAY:** A pit, filled with broken stones etc below ground to take drainage from rainwater pipes or land drains and allow it to disperse.

**SOAKER:** Piece of flexible metal fitted to interlock with slates or tiles and make water tight joint between a wall and a roof or at a hip or valley. Stepped flashings are used over the soakers at a joint against the wall.

**SOFFIT:** The underside of an arch, beam, staircase, eaves or other feature of a building.

**SOIL PIPE/ SOIL STACK:** A vertical pipe conveys sewage to the drains. It's upper end is usually vented above the eaves.

**SOLID FUEL:** Heating fuel, normally wood coal or one of a variety of proprietary fuels.

**SPANDREL:** Space above and to the sides of an arch; also the space below the staircase.

**STOPCOCK:** A valve on a gas or water supply pipe which is used to cut off the supply.

**STUD PARTITION:** Lightweight, non-load bearing wall construction comprising a framework of timber faced with plasterboard and plaster or other finish.

**SUBSIDENCE:** Ground movement, generally downward, possibly a result of mining activities or failure of the sub soil.

**SUB SOIL:** Soil lying immediately below the top soil.

**SULPHATE ATTACK:** Chemical reaction, activated by water, between tricalcium aliminate and soluble sulphates which can cause deterioration in brick walls and concrete floors.

**TIE BAR:** Metal bar passing through a wall, or walls in an attempt to brace a structure suffering from structural instability.

**TORCHING:** Mortar applied on the underside of roof tiles or slates to help prevent moisture penetration. Not necessary when roof is under drawn with felt.

**TRANSOM:** Horizontal bar of wood or stone across a window or top of door.

**TREAD:** The horizontal part of a step or stair.

**TRUSSED RAFTERS:** Method of roof construction, utilising prefabricated triangular framework of timbers. Now widely used in domestic construction.

**UNDERPINNING:** Method of strengthening weak foundations, whereby a new, stronger foundation is placed beneath the original.

**VALLEY GUTTER:** Horizontal or sloping gutter, usually lead or tile lined, at the internal intersection between roof slopes.

**VENTILATION:** Necessary in all buildings to disperse moisture resulting from bathing, cooking, breathing etc, and assist in prevention of condensation. Floors: necessary to avoid rot, especially dry rot; achieved by air bricks near to the ground level. Roofs: necessary to disperse condensation within roof spaces; achieved either by airbricks in gables or vents at the eaves.

**VERGE:** The edge of the roof, especially over a gable or around a dormer window or skylight.

**VERGE BOARD:** Timber, sometimes decorative, placed at the verge of a roof; also known as "barge board".

**WALL PLATE:** Timber placed at the eaves of a roof, designed to take the weight of the roof timbers and coverings.

**WALL TIE:** See "cavity wall tie".

**WASTE PIPE:** A pipe from a wash hand basin, sink or bath to carry away the waste water into the drains.

**WEATHERING BOARDING:** Horizontal overlapping boards nailed on the outside of a building to provide the finished wall surface.

**WET ROT:** (*Coniophora Puteana*). Decay of timber due to damp conditions. Not to be confused with the more serious "Dry Rot".

**WOOD WORM:** Colloquial term for beetle infestation: usually intended to mean Common Furniture Beetle (*Anobium Punctatum*): by far the most frequently encountered insect attack in structural and joinery timbers.