

# Why External Inspections Matter — The Most Overlooked Part of Damp Diagnosis

Most homeowners discover damp inside their homes and naturally assume the problem originates indoors. However, the reality is quite different — the vast majority of damp issues begin outside the property, not within it. Understanding where moisture truly comes from is the first step towards an accurate diagnosis and effective, lasting solution.



# The Problem with Indoor-Only Surveys

## What Most Surveys Miss


Many damp surveys focus exclusively on internal symptoms — damp meters, salt analysis, and visual staining. Whilst these provide useful data, they only tell half the story. Without examining the exterior, surveyors often misdiagnose the root cause, leading to incorrect treatments that fail to resolve the underlying issue.

BS 5250, the British Standard for moisture control, explicitly requires assessment of external moisture sources before any diagnosis is made. This isn't optional guidance — it's fundamental to accurate surveying.

## The Cost to Homeowners

When external causes go unidentified, homeowners frequently spend substantial sums on internal damp-proofing treatments, chemical injections, or replastering works. These interventions may temporarily mask symptoms, but the moisture continues to enter from outside.

The result? Damp returns within months or years, requiring additional expenditure and causing ongoing frustration, property damage, and potential health concerns.

 **Understanding the external causes prevents unnecessary costs and repeat problems.** A proper external inspection identifies the true moisture source, saving you money and ensuring the right solution first time.

# Raised Ground Levels, Decking, Patios & Driveways



## Raised Ground & Soil Beds

Soil, gravel, or flower beds built up against walls often sit above the damp proof course (DPC), which is designed to prevent moisture rising. When ground levels exceed the DPC, water bypasses this protection entirely, saturating the wall base and causing internal damp at low levels.



## Decking & Patios

Timber decking and paving installed too high bridge the DPC in the same way as raised soil. Additionally, these surfaces trap moisture underneath, preventing walls from drying naturally. The combination creates persistently damp conditions that often mimic rising damp symptoms.



## Sloping Driveways

Driveways that slope towards the property direct rainwater and surface run-off straight into the wall base. Over time, this constant moisture load saturates brickwork and overwhelms the DPC, leading to penetrating damp internally.



## Hard Surface Pooling

Materials like asphalt, concrete, and block paving shed water sideways rather than absorbing it. Without proper falls and drainage, water pools at wall bases, creating localised saturation. This is particularly problematic during heavy rainfall.

**BS 6576 Principle:** Rising damp cannot be definitively diagnosed until ground levels and external moisture loads adjacent to walls have been properly assessed and ruled out as contributing factors.

# Vegetation, Roots, Ivy & Blocked Air Bricks



Plants and vegetation growing against walls create multiple moisture-related problems that surveyors must identify during external inspections. Whilst greenery enhances aesthetics, it significantly impacts building performance and moisture management.

## Moisture Trapping


Ivy, shrubs, and climbing plants trap moisture against wall surfaces, preventing natural drying. Leaves and stems hold rainwater against brickwork for extended periods, saturating mortar joints and allowing water ingress. This trapped moisture creates ideal conditions for penetrating damp and can hide existing defects like cracked render or failed pointing.

## Root Damage

Plant roots actively seek moisture and nutrients within mortar joints. As roots grow, they open up joints and create pathways for water to travel deep into wall structures. These openings also allow moisture to track horizontally and vertically within the wall, causing damp to appear in unexpected locations internally.

## Blocked Ventilation

Air bricks provide crucial sub-floor ventilation, allowing moisture to escape from beneath suspended floors. When vegetation, soil, or debris blocks these vents, moisture accumulates under floors, leading to timber decay, musty odours, and cold, damp ground floors. Many homeowners unknowingly bury air bricks when landscaping.

 **BS 5250 Principle:** Vegetation increases moisture loading on building fabric and reduces drying potential by restricting airflow and trapping moisture against surfaces.

# Gutters, Downpipes, Render & Building Junctions

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## Defective Rainwater Goods

Blocked, leaking, or damaged gutters and downpipes are amongst the most common external causes of damp. When gutters overflow or downpipes split, large volumes of water discharge directly onto wall surfaces. This repeated saturation overwhelms brickwork, causing penetrating damp that appears internally as staining, peeling paint, or plaster damage. Behind downpipes, hidden saturation often goes unnoticed until significant damage occurs.

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## Render Defects & Failed Pointing

Cracked render, blown render, and eroded mortar pointing create direct pathways for water ingress. Hairline cracks may seem minor, but they allow water to penetrate behind render, where it becomes trapped and causes extensive hidden damage. Failed pointing between bricks permits rainwater to track through walls, particularly during wind-driven rain. These defects are easily visible externally but impossible to detect from inside.

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## Window & Door Junction Failures

The junctions between window frames, door frames, and surrounding masonry are critical waterproofing details. Missing or deteriorated sealant, poorly fitted frames, and inadequate weatherproofing allow water to track between the frame and wall. This moisture travels internally, causing damp patches around openings, rotting timber frames, and damage to internal finishes. Many cases diagnosed as condensation are actually junction failures.

**These are the faults most internal-only surveys miss — yet they cause the majority of internal damp problems.** External inspection identifies these defects immediately, allowing targeted, cost-effective repairs rather than unnecessary internal treatments.