GLOSSARY - A guide to the more commonly used words

Abutment	An intersection or junction, for example between a roof surface and a wall rising above it.
Aggregate	Pebbles, shingle, gravel etc used in the manufacture of concrete, and in the construction of soakaways.
Air brick	Perforated brick used for ventilation, especially to floor voids (beneath timber floors) and roof spaces.
Apron	An edge detail to a roof forming a watertight abutment with the fascia below.
Architrave	Joinery moulding around window or doorway.
Arris Rail	A triangular rail fixed to the fence with an arris (sharp edge) uppermost holding the boards together.
Asbestos	Fibrous mineral used in the past for insulation. Can be a health hazard. Specialist advice should be sought if asbestos, especially blue asbestos, is found.
Asbestos Cement	Cement with 10-15% asbestos as reinforcement. Fragile, will not bear heavy weights. Hazardous fibres may be released if cut or drilled.
Asphalt	Black, tar-like substance, strongly adhesive and impervious to moisture. Used on flat roofs and floors.
Balanced flue	Common metal device normally serving gas appliances which allows air to be drawn to the appliance whilst also allowing fumes to escape.
Barge Board	A sloping board along a gable, covering the ends of roof timbers for protection from rain.
Beetle infestation	(Wood boring insects: woodworm). Larvae of various species of beetle which tunnel into timber causing damage. Specialist treatment normally required. Can also affect furniture.
Benching	Smoothly contoured concrete slope beside drainage channel within an inspection chamber. Also known as Haunching.
Bitumen	Black, sticky substance, related to asphalt. Used in sealants, mineral felts and damp-proof courses.
Breeze block	Originally made from cinders ("breeze") the term now commonly used to refer to various types of concrete and cement building blocks.
Bressummer	A long heavy beam (usually timber) carrying a considerable load of brickwork or masonry over a large opening.
Carbonation	A natural process affecting the outer layer of concrete. Metal reinforcement within that layer is liable to early corrosion, with consequent fracturing of the concrete.
Cavity wall	Standard modern method of building external walls of houses comprising two leaves of bricks or blockwork separated by a gap ("cavity") of about 50mm (2 inches).
Cavity wall Insulation	Filling of cavities by one of various forms of insulation material: **Beads** – Polystyrene beads pumped into the cavities. Will easily fall out of the wall is broken open for any reason. **Foam** – Urea formaldehyde form, mixed on site, and pumped into the cavities where it sets. Can lead to problems of dampness and make replacement of wall ties more difficult. **Rockwool** – Inert mineral fibre pumped into the cavity.
Cavity wall tie	Metal device bedded into the inner and outer leaves of cavity walls to strengthen the wall. Failure by corrosion can result in the wall becoming unstable. Specialist replacement ties are then required.
Cesspool	A simple method of drain comprising a holding tank which needs frequent emptying. Not to be confused with Septic Tank.
Chipboard	Also 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.
Cistern	A storage vessel (cold water tank) usually serving a WC facility.
Collar	A connecting ring around a vertical pipe to ensure a watertight joint or timber tie between rafters to add strength to the roof frame.
Combination Boiler	Modern form of gas boiler hich activates on demand. With this form of boiler there is no need for water storage tanks, hot water cylinders etc.
Conduit	A metal or plastic tube fitted to a wall, ceiling or other part of building and used as an encasement to cables.
Coping	A brick, stone or concrete projection for weathering the top of a wall.
Corbel	Projection of stone, brick, timber or metal jutting out from a wall to support a weight.
Cornice	Ornamental moulded projection around the top of a building or around the wall of a room just below the ceiling.
Coving	Curbed junction between wall and ceiling or (rarely) between ceiling and floor.
Cowl	A metal cover fixed on a chimney to improve the draught.
Dado rail	A rail above wainscoting at waist height around a room.
Damp-proof Course	Or dpc. A horizontal layer of impervious material laid in wall to exclude water, usually at 15cm course above ground level, as well as above the junctions of parapet walls with a roof, and above door or window openings. Vertical damp courses (tanking) or asphaltic material are also provided to keep basements dry.
Deleterious	Materials considered to be injurious to health or mind.

Deleterious Materials	Materials commonly considered include high alumina cement, woodwool slabs in permanent formwork, calcium chloride admixtures for use in concrete or mortar, asbestos or asbestos based products, urea formaldehyde foam. Formaldehyde when used as an adhesive in boards and many composite panels used mainly commercially due to poor fire performance and bonding methods, vermiculite, silicate tiles or bricks, lead or materials containing lead where they may be ingested, inhaled or absorbed, mineral wool where small particles less than 3 microns in diameter and a length of 22 microns can be released, polyurethane foam and any other material or combination of materials which does not comply with the relevant British Standard or Code of Practice. The above however is not an exhaustive list.
Dry rot	Timber decay due to dampness (the fungus usually responsible being merulius lacrymans), but not such intense dampness as that which causes wet rot. Dry rot has a noticeable smell, spreads rapidly even through brickwork, and is difficult to eradicate from the house without burning all decaying timber, disinfecting the remainder and removing the infection from the brickwork by heating it with a blow lamp or disinfecting it thoroughly.
Efflorescence	Powdery white salts left on a wall surface as it dries out after initial construction.
Engineering brick	Particularly strong and dense type of brick, sometimes used as a damp-proof course.
Fascia board	A wide board set vertically on edge, fixed to the rafter ends or wall plate or wall. It carries the gutter round the eaves, or, the wide board above a shop front.
Fenestration	The architectural arrangement of the windows and other openings in the walls of a building, mainly in the facade.
Fibreboard	Cheap, lightweight board material of little strength, used in ceilings or as insulation to attics.
Fillet	A waterproofing which replaces flashings at abutments or under verges, and may consist of a triangular mortar strip (cement fillet), or an asphalt seal.
Fissures	Small splits usually found in asphalt.
Flashing	A strip of impervious material, usually flexible material (lead commonly used), which excludes water from the junction between a roof covering and another surface (usually vertical). Flashings, at their upper end, are usually wedged tightly into mortar joints, which have been raked out to receive them.
Flaunching	A cement mortar fillet round the top of a chimney stack to throw off the rain, surrounding the chimney pot.
Flue	A passage for smoke in a chimney. For an open fire it is finished with flue lining.
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.
Foundations	Normally concrete, laid underground as a structural base to a wall. In older buildings may be brick or stone.
Frog	A depression imprinted in the upper surface of a brick, to save clay, reduce weight and increase the strength of the wall. Bricks should always be laid frog uppermost.
Gable	The triangular part of the end wall of a building with a sloping roof between the barge boards or rafters. A gable may be of any material - weatherboards, brick, stone, hung tiles, etc.
Gravel board	A horizontal board fixed to the underside of fence to prevent the vertical boards from reaching the ground.
Ground heave	Swelling of clay sub-soil due to absorption of moisture. Can cause an upward movement in foundations.
Gully	An open drain linking into the main system.
Hearth	Part of a fireplace set within the floor to avoid fires occurring from the use of the fireplace.
Herringbone	A form of stiffening floor joists at their midspan by fixing a light strut from the bottom of one to the top of the adjoining joist.
Hip	The outstanding edge formed by the meeting of two roof surfaces (but not the top edge).
Hipping	Dishing/distortion of the roof usually at the party wall.
Hip iron	A metal bar fixed to the hip rafter. It projects and is seen at the foot of the hip. Its function is to hold the lowest hip tile in place.
Hip tile	Clay or concrete tiles which cover those roofing tiles which meet at a hip.
Hygroscopic Salts	The salts in plaster brought to the surface by the action of water within the wall.
Inspection Chamber	Commonly called "manhole". 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.
Interceptor trap	A water-sealed trap within the inspection chamber nearest the main sewer, generally used to disconnect the two drain runs and air.
Interstitial	In between two surfaces.
Intumescent	The quality of a product which allows the main product to be fire resistant i.e. paint/strip.
Jamb	Side part of a doorway or window.
Jointing	The mortar between the brickwork to join them together.
Joist	Horizontal structural timber used in flat roof, ceiling and floor construction. Occasionally also metal.

Laminating The flaking of tiles where the product of building materials and slate, splits into different layers due to the passing of time and weathering.

Lath Thin strip of wood used in the fixing of roof tiles or slates, or as a backing to plaster.

Lichen A flowerless plant which grows and forms a crust on stonework, tree-trunks etc usually found on roof surfaces.

Lintel A small beam over a door or window head, usually carrying wall load alone.

London bar Strip of metal that is formed to run over a door lock, being secured to the door frame making it substantially harder for forced entry to occur.

Mortar Mixture of sand, cement, lime and water, used to join stones or bricks.

Mullion Vertical bar dividing individual lights in a window.

Newel post Top or bottom post of stair rail.

Oversite Rough concrete below timber ground floors. The level of the oversite should be above external ground level.

Oversite-concrete A layer of about 15cm (6in) of concrete to seal the earth under the ground of a house.

Parapet wall A low wall guarding the edge of a roof, bridge, balcony etc; that part of a house wall which passes above the roof.

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 widespread use for ceilings and walls.

Plinth An external layer of cement thickening the base of a column, wall or pedestal.

Pointing The surface mortar between the brickwork which is not necessarily of the same consistency, i.e. sand/cement, to that of the jointing, and acts generally as an additional weathering protection.

Portico Series of columns attached to a building serving as a porch.

Purlin A horizontal beam in a roof, at right angles to the principal rafters or trusses, and carried on them.

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.

Rendering Vertical covering of a wall either plaster (internally) or cement (externally), sometimes with pebble dash, stucco or Tyrolean textured finish.

Reveals The side faces of a window or door opening.

Ridge tiles The tiles which cover the apex of the roof, between two angled roof surfaces, and are quite often the same tiles used as those for the hip.

Riser The upright face of a step.

Rising damp Moisture soaking up a wall from below ground, by capillary action causing rot in timbers, plaster decay, decoration failure etc.

Roof spread Outward bowing of a wall caused by the thrust of a badly restrained roof carcass (see Collar).

R S J Rolled-steel joist. A steel beam directly supporting a floor/load.

Salt staining The powdery white salts left on the wall surface, generally caused by the high level of water within the bricks forcing the salt to the surface.

Screed Final, smooth finish of a solid floor. Usually cement, concrete or asphalt.

Septic tank Tank Drain installation whereby sewage decomposes through bacteriological action, which can be slowed down or stopped altogether by the use of chemicals such as bleach, biological washing powders etc.

Settlement General disturbance in a structure showing as distortion in walls etc, possibly a result of major structural failure. Sometimes of little current significance, commonly occurring immediately after construction.

Sleeper Wall A half brick wall built of stretchers (ideally) with gaps between holding up the floor at ground level.

Soakaway Arrangement for disposal of rainwater, utilising graded aggregate laid below ground naturally draining into the soil.

Soaker A small piece of flexible metal cut to shape to interlock with slates or tiles. It makes a water-tight joint at a hip or valley or at an abutment between a roof and a wall.

Soffit The under-surface, most generally referred to as the under-surface of the eaves of the roof at upper level, but could also be the under-surface of a cornice, stair, beam, arch or other building constituents. It is therefore any under-surface except a ceiling.

Soffit board A horizontal board nailed to the underside of rafters, forming the soffit under an overhanging eave.

Spalling The flaking away of the external surface of the brick, stone or cement work, generally caused by frost damage when the constituent is constantly damp.

Spandrel Space above and to the sides of an arch. Also the space below a staircase.

Sprocket rafter An angled piece of timber reducing the pitch of the roof at eaves level.

String A sloping board at each end of the treads housed or cut to carry the treads and risers of a stair.

Strut Timber used to support the roof frame angled down from the purlin usually over a load bearing area.

Stucco Smooth plaster finish for outside walls.

Stud partition Lightweight, sometimes non-loadbearing wall construction comprising a framework of timber faced with plaster, plasterboard or other finish.

Subsidence Ground movement, generally downward, possibly a result of mining activities or clay shrinkage.

Sub-soil	Soil lying immediately below the top soil, upon which foundations usually bear.
Sulphate attack	Chemical reaction, activated by water, between tricalcium aluminate and soluble sulphates. Can cause deterioration in brick walls and concrete floors.
Tanking	A waterproof skin (commonly asphalt, concrete or other impervious material) laid beneath a basement floor and up the basement walls.
Tie bar	Heavy metal bar passing through a wall, or walls, to brace a structure from structural instability.
Transom	Horizontal bar of wood or stone across a window or top of door.
Tread	The level part of a step.
Trussed rafters	Method of roof construction utilising prefabricated triangular framework of timbers. Now widely used in domestic construction.
Undercloak	A course of slates or plain tiles at eaves or verges placed under the surface tiles.
Underpinning	Method of strengthening weak foundations whereby a new, stronger foundation is placed beneath the original.
Upstand	That part of a felt or flexible-metal flashing, or roof covering which turns up beside a wall.
Valley	The intersection between two sloping surfaces of a roof, towards which water flows, the opposite of a hip. The valley can be continuous with the slopes, made of the same material, and therefore being no need for any sharp angles or valley gutter.
Valley gutter	A gutter lined with flexible metal in a valley, usually between two roof slopes, for example, a secret gutter or a box gutter. It may also be of concrete, precast or cast in place.
Ventilation	Necessary in all buildings to disperse moisture resulting from bathing, cooking, breathing etc, and to assist in prevention of condensation.
Verge	The edge of a sloping roof which overhangs a gable, sometimes including the bricks which cope the gable wall.
Verge board	Timber, sometimes decorative, placed at the verge of a roof. Also known as barge board.
Wainscotting	Panelling over the lower half of the walls of a room above the skirting.
Wall plate	Timber placed at the eaves of a roof, to take the weight of the roof timbers.
Weephole	A small hole in a wood cill which allows water to escape outwards.
Wet rot	Decay of timber due to damp conditions. Not to be confused with the more serious Dry Rot. (Coniophora Puteana).
Woodworm	A wood boring larva or furniture beetle.