FREE PRINTABLE · BOOK SECTION 1.2 · Q2

Viewing Day Kit

Viewings: seeing past the staging. From *Buying & Renovating an Old House: The Honest Guide* by Rory J Dench. What to bring, the walk-round checklist and questions for the seller, with tick boxes.

Checked October 2026

Address: _____ Date and weather: _____

Tick each item as you check it. Anything you can't tick, circle it and write a note: those are your questions for the seller, the agent and your surveyor.

Plan the second viewing

- ☐ **Go in daylight,** and if you can, **in or just after heavy rain.** Gutters, downpipes and damp patches tell the truth on a wet day.
- ☐ **Take someone** who isn't in love with the house.
- ☐ **Bring a kit:** a torch (even in daylight), binoculars for the roof and chimneys, a marble for sloping floors, your phone for photos and a compass app, the Home Report or listing and a notebook or printed checklist.
- ☐ **Allow time.** An hour is reasonable for a second viewing of an old house. If the agent is rushing you, ask to come back.
- ☐ **Ask permission** before opening cupboards, lifting rugs or going into the loft.

The viewing day walk-round

Outside: stand back first. Look at the whole house from across the street, then from each side.

- ☐ Roof line straight, not dipping. Slates or tiles missing, slipped or hanging on metal strips.
- ☐ Chimneys upright, pots secure, flashings (the metal strips where the stack meets the roof) intact.
- ☐ In Scotland, skews (the stone copings up the gables) sound and not loose.
- ☐ Gutters: plants growing, sagging, overflow stains below.
- ☐ Downpipes: cracked, loose or ending on the ground or paving instead of into a drain.
- ☐ Ground, paths or paving against the walls: are they higher than the inside floor?
- ☐ Air vents in the walls clear, not buried by soil or paving.
- ☐ Pointing: soft and sandy (usually lime), or hard and grey (usually cement)?
- ☐ Render or harling: cracked, bulging or sounding hollow when tapped gently.
- ☐ Cracks: note the width, shape and where they are. Photograph each one with a coin for scale.
- ☐ Window sills and frames: soft, rotten or painted over.
- ☐ Look at next door's roof, chimneys and gutters too, especially if you share walls or a roof.

Inside: use your nose too.

- ☐ Musty smell, especially under the stairs, in cupboards on outside walls and in any cellar.
- ☐ Stains or tide marks low on walls; patches near windows, chimney breasts and ceilings.

- ☐ Black mould in corners and behind furniture (usually condensation; see 2.1).
- ☐ Floors: bouncy, soft or sloping. Roll the marble; listen for bounce rather than creak.
- ☐ Doors and windows: sticking, out of square or painted shut.
- ☐ The fuse board: modern with circuit breakers, or old with fuse wire? Any recent electrical certificate on it?
- ☐ The boiler: age, service sticker, carbon monoxide alarm nearby.
- ☐ The stopcock (often under the kitchen sink): a dull grey soft pipe may be lead (see 2.5).
- ☐ In Scotland, interlinked smoke and heat alarms and a carbon monoxide alarm where there's a boiler, fire or stove (see 2.5).

The loft, if you're allowed and it's safe to go up: look for daylight, water stains, fresh insect dust, insulation blocking the eaves and spray foam on the underside of the roof, which can affect your mortgage. Section 2.3 has the full loft checklist.

For a flat or tenement: look at the common stair, the close door, the roof from across the street, the back court and the rainwater pipes at the back. The condition of the shared parts is your problem too (see 1.7 and 3.7).

Stone houses: a closer look

- ☐ Sandstone peeling in layers, like pages of a book (delamination): needs a stonemason's view (2.2).
- ☐ Hard grey cement pointing with the stone or brick around it crumbling, flaking or hollowing or the joints standing proud of the stone (2.2).
- ☐ Stonework that is patchy, pale, pitted or rounded at the edges, with an unusually "new" look: possibly aggressive cleaning in the past (2.2).
- ☐ Flashings replaced with cement fillets or tape (2.3).
- ☐ Internal (valley or parapet) gutters behind a wall that you can't see from the ground: ask when they were last inspected and cleared (2.3).
- ☐ A damp patch inside: look outside at the same spot (gutter, downpipe, sill, pointing) (2.1).
- ☐ Timber: fresh, clean-edged holes with little piles of fine powder below them; cotton-wool-like white growth, grey strands or rust-orange dust. Point them out to your surveyor (2.4).

What you might see

What you see or hear	Light	What it usually means
Uneven floors, doors slightly out of square, hairline cracks in old plaster	**GREEN**	Normal settlement in an old house (see 2.2 and 2.4).
Original sash windows that rattle or stick	**GREEN**	Usually repairable (see 2.4).
Fresh paint or plaster in just one patch, low on a wall or on a ceiling	**AMBER**	May be covering a damp stain or a leak. Ask what it was.
Hard grey cement pointing on soft stone, or a painted or cement-rendered stone wall	**AMBER**	May be trapping moisture (see 2.2). Look inside for damp at the same spot.
Dehumidifiers running, windows wide open on a cold day or a strong smell of air freshener	**AMBER**	Can be a sign of damp or condensation the seller is managing. Ask.
Gutters with plants growing in them, green stains down the walls	**AMBER**	Blocked or failing rainwater goods. Usually a straightforward fix, but look inside below them (see 2.3).

What you see or hear	Light	What it usually means
A musty, mushroomy smell, especially under the stairs or near a floor	**RED**	Possible rot. Point it out to your surveyor and ask for a specialist to look (see 2.4).
Stepped or diagonal cracks you can fit a coin into, a bulging wall, a dipping roof line	**RED**	Possible structural movement. Get an engineer's opinion before you offer (see 2.2).
Very old wiring: round-pin sockets, fabric-covered cables, an old fuse box with fuse wire	**RED**	A rewire is likely (see 2.5).
"You can't go in the loft," or "the cellar's locked," with no good reason	**AMBER**	Ask again, or ask your surveyor to insist. What you can't see is what you'll pay for.

Questions for the seller or agent

- ☐ How long have you lived here? Why are you selling?
- ☐ Has there ever been damp, a leak or flooding? What was done?
- ☐ What work has been done, when and by whom? Is there paperwork, and are any guarantees (for example for damp-proofing or timber treatment) transferable?
- ☐ When were the roof, boiler and wiring last checked?
- ☐ Is it on mains water and drainage? If not, see the questions in 2.5.
- ☐ Have there been any alterations: removed walls, extensions, loft conversions, new windows? Did any need consent? Were a building warrant (Scotland) or Building Regulations approval (England and Wales) obtained and signed off?
- ☐ For a flat: is there a factor or managing agent? Is there a maintenance fund? Are any common repairs planned or agreed?
- ☐ Any disputes with neighbours over walls, drains, boundaries or access?
- ☐ Have there been any insurance claims, especially for subsidence, storm or flood?

Write down the answers, with the date and who gave them and pass them to your solicitor and surveyor.

Notes (date, who said what)

To ask my surveyor or a specialist to look at

Please read: this site is general guidance. It isn't a survey, a diagnosis, financial advice or legal advice, and it can't tell you whether a particular house is right for you. Always get independent professional advice about a specific house before you commit to buying it or to any work. Position as understood in September 2026. Current links and updates: buyinganoldhouse.co.uk/q2.

Interest disclosure: Natural Stone Craft, the publisher, provides heritage stone restoration services, including stone cleaning; this book recommends no firms, and its advice on stone repair and cleaning is the same whether or not you ever use us.

From the book *Buying & Renovating an Old House* by Rory J Dench. Get the book: buyinganoldhouse.co.uk/#book