FREE PRINTABLE · BOOK SECTION 2.1 · Q9

Damp diary

Damp. From *Buying & Renovating an Old House: The Honest Guide* by Rory J Dench. A dated diary for each damp patch, with what to watch for in the rain and how to tell the four causes apart.

Checked October 2026

How to use this diary

- **Give each damp patch a line every time you look at it:** the date, the room, which wall and what you see.
- **Look in heavy rain, with a torch,** at the gutters, downpipes and gullies. Look outside at the same spot as any damp patch inside.
- **Note the weather in the days before.** A patch high on a wall or around a window that's worse after heavy rain points to penetrating damp; mould in cold corners that's worse in winter points to condensation.
- **Note the heating and ventilation:** was the room heated, were windows opened after showers and cooking, was washing dried indoors, is furniture against a cold external wall?
- **Take photographs from the same spot, inside and out,** and write the photo reference here. Put the inside photo next to the outside one: often the cause is on the other side of the wall.
- **A cheap digital hygrometer** left in the bedroom for a week helps: if it sits high every morning, your "damp" may be your own breath.

A moisture-meter reading isn't a diagnosis. Take this diary to your surveyor: the useful question is "where is the water coming from, and why can't it dry out?"

Four causes to tell apart

Cause	Light	What you might see	What to check
Condensation	**GREEN**	Black mould in cold corners, behind wardrobes, around window reveals, worse in winter; water streaming down windows on cold mornings	Heat and ventilation, not a damp-proof course: steady background heat, extraction, windows opened after showers and cooking, furniture a hand's width off cold external walls. GREEN means "not a failure of the wall", not "ignore it".
Penetrating damp	**AMBER**	A damp patch high on a wall or around a window, worse after heavy rain; a damp chimney breast	Look outside at the same spot: the gutter, downpipe, sill, pointing, flashing or cement harling.
Ground moisture	**AMBER**	A tide mark and flaking plaster low on walls, up to around a metre; fluffy white salts	Ground, paving or a path built up against the wall; blocked gullies and leaking drains; cement render, gypsum plaster or plastic paint. Outside ground should sit well below the inside floor (ideally at least 150 mm) and slope away.
Leaks	**RED**	A wet patch on a ceiling, or staining below a bathroom	Pipes, radiators, a shower tray, a washing machine, a WC. A leak can look exactly like rising or penetrating damp: find it first.

Damp diary

Date	Room and wall	What you see (where, size, mould, salts, smell)	Weather in the days before	Heating and ventilation	Photo ref
Example	*Back bedroom, north wall, behind the wardrobe*	*Low tide mark, flaking paint, a smell*	*Cold and dry all week*	*Room shut up, unheated; washing drying on a rack*	*IMG_0412*

Damp diary (continued)

Date	Room and wall	What you see (where, size, mould, salts, smell)	Weather in the days before	Heating and ventilation	Photo ref

Notes for your surveyor

Who to call

- **An independent building surveyor** with experience of traditional buildings. In Scotland, look for RICS conservation accreditation or a surveyor who works regularly with pre-1919 houses. In England and Wales, a RICS Level 3 surveyor with conservation experience.
- **A roofer or plumber** first, if the source is plainly a gutter, slate or pipe.
- **Not** a company that offers a free damp survey and sells treatment, as your only opinion.

Free guidance: Historic Environment Scotland's INFORM and short guides on damp in traditional buildings; Historic England's and SPAB's advice on damp.

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/q9.

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