Slipped slates, flashings and chimneys

Rory J Dench
UK-wide pointers: England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland

Much of the damage to old houses starts at the top, and water often soaks timbers for a while before it shows.

What you might see

- A few slipped, cracked or missing slates.
- A slope with many slipped slates, or slates hanging by small metal strips (tingles).
- Lifted or missing lead flashing where the roof meets a chimney or wall.
- A chimney stack that leans, with open joints, cracked pots or a missing mortar cap.
- A damp patch on a chimney breast inside.
- Daylight in the loft, or wet or stained timbers.

Likely causes

- Old nails rusting through (sometimes called nail sickness).
- Weather and age on flashings, joints and the mortar cap on the stack.
- A disused flue sealed at the top and bottom, so air can't move and moisture can't escape.
- Blocked internal (valley or parapet) gutters you can't see from the ground.

What you can safely check yourself

- Use binoculars from the ground, ideally in or just after rain, and look at each slope, each chimney, and where each downpipe ends.
- In the loft, with a torch, look for daylight, water staining, fresh insect holes or dust, and whether insulation blocks the eaves.
- Stay off the roof. Slates and old timbers can break underfoot. Look from the ground, from the loft, or through binoculars. Avoid pressure-washing slates, which can damage them.

When to call a professional

- Call a roofer for slipped or missing slates and failed flashings, ideally before water gets into the timbers.
- Call a structural engineer for a badly sagging roof, a leaning stack that looks unstable, or spread wall heads.
- A chimney sweep who is a member of a recognised trade association can sweep, inspect and smoke-test a flue before you use a fire or stove. A working carbon monoxide alarm in any room with a fire, stove or boiler is sensible, and is a legal requirement in some situations (for example in Scotland, and for landlords and new installations elsewhere). Check the rule for your nation.

What to ask them

- Can the sound slates be kept and reused?
- Is this a patch repair or does the slope need stripping and relaying?
- What will you use to fix the flashing, and can you show me photos before and after?
- Is the roof covering a like-for-like replacement, and does the structure need checking?

Who to look for

- Roofer experienced in natural slate or the local traditional covering. In Scotland, ask about Scottish slate and sarking boards.
- Chimney sweep from a recognised trade association.
- A structural engineer on the Conservation Accreditation Register for Engineers (CARE), run by the Institution of Civil Engineers and the Institution of Structural Engineers.
- For a shared roof (a flat, tenement or shared building), speak first to your neighbours or co-owners, and to your managing agent, freeholder or landlord if you have one (in Scotland, your factor).

Worth knowing. Leave work on roofs and chimneys to trades with the right equipment. A change of roof material, or new chimney or flue work, can need consent or approval. Ask your council before you book.

WHERE THE RULES DIFFER BY NATION	
England	For listed building consent, apply to your local planning authority. Historic England is the national body. For building regulations, apply to your council's building control or to a Registered Building Control Approver (a private firm on the Building Safety Regulator's register). **For this job.** Slates and tiles are often fixed to battens rather than sarking boards, though practice varies. *Official pages: historicengland.org.uk and gov.uk/building-regulations-approval*
Wales	For listed building consent, apply to your local planning authority. Cadw is the Welsh Government's historic environment service. For building regulations, apply to your council's building control or to a Registered Building Control Approver on the Wales register. **For this job.** Slates and tiles are often fixed to battens rather than sarking boards, though practice varies. *Official pages: cadw.gov.wales and gov.wales/find-building-control-body*
Scotland	For listed building consent, your council's planning department is the main contact. Historic Environment Scotland is the national body. A building warrant is the permission needed for much building work. It comes from your council's building standards team (the "verifier"). Scotland has no private approvers. **For this job.** Slates are usually fixed to sarking boards. Changing roofs or other structural parts can need a building warrant. Ask your council's building standards department. *Official pages: historicenvironment.scot and mygov.scot/building-warrant*
Northern Ireland	For listed building consent, apply to your district council, which asks the Department for Communities' Historic Environment Division (HED) for advice. For building regulations, apply to your district council's building control. **For this job.** One district council's published list includes installing a flue or heating appliance among work needing approval or a notice. Ask your district council. *Official pages: communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/listed-buildings and nidirect.gov.uk/articles/how-apply-building-regulations-approval*
If the house is listed or in a conservation area, ask the council before changing the roof covering or the chimney. Ask your council's building control (building standards in Scotland) whether chimney, flue or roof work needs approval. Grants for repairs may exist for some buildings. Check the official page for your nation before you plan on one. Consent decisions are for your council, not this card.	

From *Buying & Renovating an Old House: The Honest Guide* by Rory J Dench. Paperback: https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B0HMNSXH1W · Companion page: buyinganoldhouse.co.uk/roofs

General information for homes in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, with fuller pointers for England, Wales and Scotland. It is not legal, surveying, engineering or financial advice, and it is not a survey, a damp or timber diagnosis, or a check that anything in your home is safe. It does not promise any result, such as that a repair will work or that a consent will be granted. Rules, consents and registers differ between the nations and change over time. Check with your council or the official body named, and take independent professional advice about your own property before you commit to work or spend money. This does not affect your legal rights as a consumer.

Last checked: 16 Oct 2026.