

Maintenance routines

By George Butlin

Regular and appropriate maintenance – particularly to the exterior – is vital in preserving the qualities that give houses of this age their special character. This is a suggested routine which should ensure the fabric of the building is kept in good repair.

Annually

Drainage gullies and hoppers should be cleared. Failure to do this is the single biggest cause of deterioration in buildings all over the world. In Bedford Park, where gardens and streets are so well endowed with trees, this should really be done twice a year, in autumn and spring. Clear drain grilles in hard surfaced areas.

Gutters – which can sag and lose stop ends – should be cleared, along with down pipes, which can become blocked or detached from hoppers. Also inspect valley gutters where roof slopes meet, and keep clear of leaves.

Roofs should be inspected (if necessary, with the aid of binoculars). Check the brick joints at the corners of chimney stacks, which may have opened, cement fillets at roof abutments, which may have cracked, lead flashings, which can become dislodged, and brick copings to ornamental gables where the pointing is particularly vulnerable. Check flat roof areas.

Roof tiles which have slipped or cracked should be replaced with exactly matching tiles. It is advisable to keep a small quantity of spares for repairs when needed.

Ground floor air bricks should be kept clear of leaves and debris. Ensure that soil is kept well below damp proof courses.

Windows should be checked at the junction of window sash boxes and cills, which are particularly vulnerable to decay. Ensure that when making any repair new timber is well prepared against decay and carefully pieced in.

Glass in stained glass door panels and windows should be safeguarded. There are numerous specialists who can replace broken glass and brittle lead in small areas.

Three to four year intervals

Redecorate to a regular schedule using a good quality external paint system, with top quality flexible filler material as needed.

Palisade fences and balustrades normally benefit from redecoration at intervals not exceeding three years. The spindles can be pointed with flexible sealant at the junction with cills and rails, which will greatly increase their life and reduce the risk of decay at these vulnerable points.

For other external joinery four years should be considered the maximum interval between redecoration.

In all of the above, refer to the relevant technical note for more detailed guidance on materials and workmanship.