

Glossary of architectural terms

Before starting your baseline survey, if you are not already familiar with the words used to describe architectural features you might find a glossary useful. There is a short glossary below, alternatively, you might like to visit the Looking at Buildings website (www.lookingatbuildings.org.uk). This is an educational resource created by the Pevsner Architectural Guides. It contains a wealth of information to help you understand historic buildings, styles of architecture and methods of construction.

Abutment	This word can be used in two senses. It is the point at which a roof meets a wallhead and also a massive structure supporting the ends of a bridge.
Ashlar	Masonry that has been shaped into regular squared blocks and given a smooth face. It is laid in level courses and tends to have very fine mortar joints.
Bargeboard	Bargeboards are fixed to the gable ends of roofs to conceal and protect the ends of the roof timbers or thatch. They often project over the wall face and are frequently decorative.
Buttress	A masonry support that gives additional strength to a wall and resists outwards thrust.
Came	A strip of lead with an H-shaped profile used to join pieces of glass together in a leaded window.
Cill (or sill)	The horizontal bottom member of a window or screen.
Clerestory	The section of the main wall below the eaves and above the top of the aisle roof which is pierced with windows giving light into the interior.
Conservation	Action necessary to preserve anything of acknowledged value.
Coping	A protective covering of brick or stone on the top of a wall. The coping will usually project to help throw rainwater away from the wall.
Corbel	A block of masonry that projects from the wall and carries the end of a roof truss or beam. Corbels are often carved with grotesque human or animal figures.
Cornice	A continuous horizontal feature running around the top of a wall or the top of a room.
Crypt	An underground chamber or vault often used for burials.
Curtilage	It is difficult to define curtilage exactly but it is generally taken to be a piece of ground ancillary to a building and necessary to the function and/or enjoyment of that building. The important factors are the physical relationship between the ground and the building; past and present ownership; and the past and present use.
Eaves	The underside of a sloping roof where it overhangs the wall below.
Efflorescence	A white powdery deposit found on the surface of stone, brick or plaster. It occurs when excessive moisture causes the soluble salts present in the masonry to dissolve. They are then drawn towards the internal surface of the wall, as this is usually warmer than the external surface. Once they reach the face of the wall the water evaporates and the salts re-crystallise on the surface. Efflorescence is unsightly but relatively harmless and can be brushed off when dry, although it is usually a sign that there may be too much moisture in the fabric.
Encaustic tiles	Earthenware tiles fired with a pattern and glaze
Fabric	The materials from which a building is constructed.
Faculty	A faculty is a licence authorising an agreed package of work granted by an ecclesiastical body.
Fascia	A strip of timber boarding fixed to the ends of the rafters or fitted below a wall head on a building with a flat or low-pitched roof. It is sometimes decorative but often supports the gutter fixings.
Ferramenta	The metal framework of internal saddle-bars and external stanchions used to support the glazing in large windows. Ferramenta were originally made from wrought iron but are now more likely to be manufactured from mild steel or sometimes stainless steel.

Fillet	A fillet is a thin flat band, running between mouldings, the purpose of which is to separate and define them. It is also a wedge shaped strip of mortar used to protect a junction such as that between a roof and a wall from the weather.
Flashing	A protective strip of lead, copper or zinc covering a joint that is exposed to the weather. Where a horizontal surface meets a vertical surface, flashings are often in two parts – an upstand or soaker, which turns up the vertical surface and a cover (counter) flashing, which turns down over it. Soakers are small individual flashings laid with each course of slate or tile.
Gargoyle	A projecting water spout, usually grotesquely carved in the form of an animal or human figure.
Hood moulding	A projecting stone moulding over an arch, door or window, which is designed to throw rainwater clear of the building. (Also known as label mould)
Ironmongery	A general name for door and window fittings including hinges, locks and catches, handles and knobs.
Jamb	Blocks of masonry forming the side of a door or window.
Lancet	Slender single-light, pointed-arched window.
Lime	Traditional binder used to form a mortar. Lime mortars are usually off white in colour, although they can be tinted with brick or stone dust. Old lime mortar is usually crumbles in the hand in contrast to cement based mortars that are greyer in colour and hard or brittle. Quicklime (calcium oxide) is made by heating limestone (calcium carbonate). When water is added to quicklime (slaking) heat is given off. The slaked lime is mixed with sharp sand to produce a mortar or can be applied to a wall surface as a render or plaster. There are a number of different grades of lime and mortars and renders have to be accurately specified, mixed and applied in the right conditions.
Limewash	A coating or paint finish for masonry or render made from slaked lime mixed with water.
Maintenance	The process of slowing down the rate of decay by keeping the fabric of a building in good condition.
Mullion	A vertical timber or stone bar dividing a window into 'lights'.
Parapet	A low wall built around a roof to prevent people falling over the edge.
Pier	A solid vertical mass of masonry supporting a vertical load.
Pinnacle	A tall pointed decorative feature, usually at a corner of a building or above the top of a buttress.
Plinth	A projecting platform supporting a building or providing the base for a column or sculpture.
Putty	Glazier's putty is a mixture of whiting (crushed chalk) and linseed oil and is used to fix glass panes into a window frame. Lime putty is the product of slaking quicklime with water.
Quoin	A large, usually dressed stone used to form the corner of a building.
Rafter	The sloping beam in a timber roof structure that connects the ridge beam to the wall plate. A roof may have principal rafters and/or common rafters. A purlin is a horizontal timber member that transfers the load from the common rafters to the principal rafter.
Render	A covering to the outside walls for protection from the weather.
Roughcast	A form of external rendering mixed with a coarse aggregate such as gravel.
Repair	Work that is carried out to put right defects, significant decay or damage.
Soffit	The flat ceiling under a lintel, gallery, beam, stair or overhanging roof etc.
String Course	A horizontal course or moulding projecting from the surface of an exterior wall. Usually at the junction between floors or towards the top of the wall.
Tracery	Slender moulded stone bars which intersect to form patterns at the head of a window. Tracery is usually a feature of the Gothic style of architecture.
Transom	In any large window with mullions, the transom is a horizontal bar of wood or stone running across the whole window. It will usually have a similar profile to the mullions.
Vestment	Any of the various garments worn ceremonially by members of the clergy and church choirs.
Wallhead	The top of a masonry wall sometimes visible from the roof space.
Wall plate	Horizontal timber member placed on top of the wall to support the load imposed upon it by the roof structure.