

7. **Roof** - Discussing the principle types of materials involved including traditional and modern materials alike and identifying the main causes of physical deterioration and also those areas that might be potentially concealing a problem for various reasons. Looking at specialist modern materials and commenting upon their suitability for domestic usage.

# The Property Doctor

## How good is the roof over your head?

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...If there is one thing that everybody knows, it is that the roof is a very important aspect of any property. The essential of any roof finish is its ability to keep the property dry and protected from our aggressive Scottish climate including not only rain, but also wind and snow. Traditionally this has been achieved by constructing a fairly heavy roof structure comprising large timber sections that in turn support timber boards called sarking to which the roof slates are nailed.

When slates were first employed they were quarried in Scotland. Unfortunately, new Scottish slate has not been available for many years and as a result, much of the slate in use is second-hand. These materials require thorough checking, re-holing and re-dressing before being re-fixed. Quality of the finished product will suffer if this checking process is not good enough. The net result of poor quality control is a loosely fixed slate that will deteriorate more rapidly than the original roof. The suitability of an existing slate for re-use requires careful assessment.

The most important aspects of a slated roof are the combination of the roof's angle of inclination, the overlap and the degree of security achieved by the nail fixings. If any of these are not adequate the result is a leaking roof or danger from falling materials.

Many will have heard the term a 'nail sick' roof (nail head corrosion). However, it is just as likely that the slate head will soften or crumble. Incidentally, the timber sarking can also very occasionally, deteriorate to a point where it is unable to hold the slate nails.

Older slate roofs can leak in the event that a single slate fails. This may be because the slates have no under-slating membrane (bituminous felt layer). All modern roofs have this membrane applied beneath the finish.

Modern roofs are clad in a wide range of materials principally including slate, clay and concrete tiles. Other materials including: wooden shingles, metal cladding and in the case of flat roofs, bituminous based felts, high-tech membranes and single ply materials. The many pitched roofing materials available bring with them a problem of differing specification, detailing and standards of installation. Whereas a Slater historically learned his trade over the first few years of working, the Roofer of today needs to be constantly trained, as he comes across new materials. The importance of complying with specific manufacturer's recommendations is an essential part of British Standard requirements thus enabling the contractor to satisfy Building Control. All too often we see instances where these recommendations are not complied with. For instance, we often see adhesives used to secure tiled materials in a manner that was never intended. The result will ultimately be the premature failure of the roof coverings and unnecessary costs to the owner.

Most tile and slate materials available today are well manufactured. Nonetheless, these materials require careful and accurate application to ensure the roof covering performs throughout its designed life. In most cases tiled materials should last between 40 and 60 years. Some lightweight and cheap materials have been sold as 'slate' equivalents. Often these thinly manufactured or imported natural slate materials suffer deterioration due to our aggressive environment. Often foot traffic due to the requirement for regular maintenance can also cause further damage. It is important to consider carefully what you are getting for your money; cheap equivalents are sometimes just that.

As far as flat roof finishes are concerned, this is a subject in itself! In simple terms, some felt materials are only suited to nailing on a garden shed. However, on the other side of the coin, there are many high quality felts available today. For assuredness we would always recommend that you apply a brand name felt with a minimum 10 year guaranteed materials and workmanship backup. These systems are appropriate on any roof over accommodation other than a garage. If the garage is integral then we would similarly recommend the adoption of a guaranteed system. Guarantees upwards of 20 years are available. If your roof is completely flat then this is what you should be looking towards. The additional costs are completely justified. It is also important that the roofing contractor is approved by the felt manufacturer and trained in the application of the system proposed. Insurance backed guarantees are also a worthwhile consideration.

Modern single ply and other high-tech materials have their place, but accessibility and the potential of vandalism must be borne in mind as these surfaces are easily damaged. Again, guaranteed systems from brand names are recommended as the best means of obtaining protection against the cowboys. One important factor to bear in mind is the limited number of contractors able to apply and to subsequently repair or alter these roofs.

If you have any queries, or need to consult the Property Doctor please contact either Colin Bruce or Brian Shaw on 01383 824450 or by mobile (24 hours) on 07900 913975, Bruce Shaw Property Consultants Limited, 6 Forth Reach, Dalgety Bay, Fife KY11 9FF or visit us on-line at [www.bruce-shaw.co.uk](http://www.bruce-shaw.co.uk) (New web-site coming soon).