



Building Terms Explained

As builders will sometimes use unfamiliar technical words or terms, we have put together this list to help you understand:

Architrave: A timber moulding used to hide the gap between the wall finish and the door/ window frame

Asphalt: A bitumen based product often used for waterproofing flat roofs, cellars or other areas subject to damp conditions

Balanced Flue: Equipment that allows gas heating appliances to draw fresh air from outside the property whilst also allowing burnt gases to escape, in effect replacing the chimney

Ball Cock: A valve used in toilet cisterns and water tanks to control the flow of water

Baluster: One of a set of posts supporting a stair handrail (also known as a spindle)

Bargeboard: A gable roof trim, made from timber, plastic or metal, which follows the pitch of the roof. Traditionally decorative and acts as a protector to the roof timbers

Batten: A section of timber often used for fixing roof tiles and slates or other building materials

Beading: Usually timber or plastic bead used to hide a gap. For example, laminate floors laid after the skirting is in place will have a bead fixed to the skirting

Bleeding: Process of removing trapped air from central heating systems

Blown: A term used to describe a bonding failure. For example, when a layer of plaster or cement rendering has come away from a wall possibly due to age or poor application

Building Control: Local Authority controlled process to maintain building standards

Casing: The timber lining of a door or window opening

Cavity Wall: Usually an exterior wall made up of two single walls, separated by an air space

Cornice: Continuous horizontal moulding between the walls and ceiling of a room

Coving: A prefabricated moulding used to make a cornice

Damp-Proof Course (DPC): A layer of material that prevents moisture rising from the ground into the walls of a building

Damp-Proof Membrane: A layer of material that prevents moisture rising through a concrete floor

Drip Groove: A groove in the underside of a windowsill to prevent rainwater running back to the wall

Eaves: The lower edges of a roof that project beyond the walls. It is made up of the soffit and fascia

Efflorescence: A white powdery deposit caused by soluble salts. Often found on new bricks or plaster

Fascia: Horizontal strip of wood or PVC that covers the end of the rafters and to which the external guttering is fixed

Flashband: Temporary self-adhesive strip giving an instant waterproof seal

Flashing: A weatherproof junction (often made of lead) between a roof and a wall or chimney

Flaunching: A mortared slope at the top of the chimneystack used to secure the chimney pot and channel rainwater from the structure

Fuse Board: Where the main electrical service cable connects to the house circuitry via the consumer unit, controlling the electricity supply to the property

Gable: This is usually the triangular area of wall between the roof pitch, the “Gable End” extends to the ground level

Galvanised: Metal sheeting, covered with a protective coating of zinc

Grout: Material used to fill gaps between tiles

Gutter and Guttering: A gently sloping channel used to remove rainwater

Hardcore: Broken bricks or stones used to form a sub base below paving, foundations etc

Hip Tiles: Tiles used where two angled roofs meet

Insulation: Materials used to reduce the transmission of heat or sound or a nonconductive material surrounding electrical wires

Jamb: The vertical part of a doorframe or window frame

Joist: A horizontal wooden or metal beam, used to support a structure such as a floor, ceiling or wall

Lath & Plaster: Traditional method of finishing timber frames, walls or ceilings. Narrow strips of wood nailed to the stud or joists to provide a supporting framework to accept a plaster finish

Lintel: A horizontal beam used to support the wall over a door or window opening

Mastic: A non-setting compound used to seal joints usually around windows or door frames

Mono-Pitch Roof: A roof that slopes in one direction only

Mortar: A bonding mix of sand and cement

Newel: The post at top or bottom of a flight of stairs, which supports the handrail

Overflow Pipe: A pipe that channels flowing water away from the building, in the event of a valve failure

Partition Wall: A separating wall between rooms, not usually load bearing

Party Wall: The wall between two houses, over which each of the adjoining owners has equal rights in law

Pelmet: A board fixed over a window to conceal a curtain rail or blind fastenings

Planning Permission: A statutory process to be followed seeking approval from the local authority before most (but not all) building work can commence

Plinth: The recessed base of a cupboard to provide foot space – Also called Kick boards

Pointing: The mortar joint between bricks

Primer: Paint applied to a bare surface of wood, metal or new plaster

Radiator Valve: A valve located where the pipework connects to the radiator and used to control the flow of water in the system and in some cases also controls temperature (thermostatic valve)

Rafters: A series of sloped beams that extend from the roof ridge down to the eaves, designed to support the roof deck and its associated loads

Rendering: Weatherproof finish to external walls usually made of sand and cement or sand and lime in older properties

Ridge Tile: A roof tile that is bedded in mortar (some modern systems are clipped in place) at the roof apex

Sarking: Roofing felt or timber boarding laid under the slates or tiles of a pitched roof

Screed: A layer of cement and sand mortar laid on solid floors. It provides a smooth surface ready for the final floor finish

Silicone Sealant: A flexible material used to seal joints usually in wet areas such as baths or sinks. Sets to a rubber like constancy

Soffit: Boarding under the gutter area

Spindle: One of a set of posts supporting a stair handrail (also known as a baluster)

Tanking: A waterproofing system, used to keep cellars or basements dry

Valley: The area where the two pitches of a roof meet, traditionally finished in lead or valley tiles. Modern properties often use GRP (Glass Reinforced Plastic) or other materials

Verge: The edge of a pitched roof at the gable