



Understanding Chimneys, Damp & Internal Moisture

Helpful guidance for homeowners:

Chimneys are often associated with leaks, but in reality, **not all damp around a chimney is caused by the roof or external masonry**. This guide is intended to help homeowners understand how chimney-related damp can occur internally, why it can be mistaken for an external leak, and how it should be correctly investigated.

Why Chimney Damp Can Be Misleading

Internal damp marks around chimney breasts or adjacent walls are commonly assumed to be caused by rain entering from outside. While this *can* sometimes be the case, there are many **internal and environmental factors** that can produce the same symptoms — even when the roof, flashings, and chimney works are in objectively sound condition.

Because damp symptoms often look similar regardless of cause, correct diagnosis is essential.

Common Internal Causes of Chimney Damp

1. Condensation

Warm, moisture-laden air inside the property can condense on:

- Cold chimney masonry
- Redundant chimney flues
- External walls around the chimney breast

This is particularly common:

- In winter
- In unused or blocked chimneys
- Where ventilation is limited
- In well-sealed modern homes

Condensation is **not caused by roofing defects**.

2. Hygroscopic Salts

Historic chimney use (coal, wood, gas fires) leaves salts within the masonry. These salts:

- Attract moisture from the air
- Cause damp staining even in dry weather
- Can reappear years after a chimney is no longer in use

This is known as **hygroscopic moisture** and is an internal material issue, not a roof leak.

3. Residual or Transferred Moisture

Chimney masonry can absorb moisture during prolonged wet periods. Once wet, moisture may:

- Migrate internally
- Appear at ceiling or wall junctions
- Continue to show after rainfall has stopped

This is part of the **natural behavior of traditional masonry**, not necessarily a failure of repairs.

4. Ventilation & Airflow Issues

Unused or capped flues without ventilation can trap moisture internally. This can lead to:

- Persistent damp smells
- Surface staining
- Condensation build-up within the chimney structure

What Roofing & Chimney Repairs Do

Roofing and chimney works such as:

- Lead flashings
- Re-pointing
- Chimney head or flaunching repairs
- Chimney rebuilds or partial rebuilds

are designed to **address visible defects and external failure points**.

When inspections confirm these elements are **sound and intact**, they are performing as intended.

However, these works **cannot control internal humidity, condensation, salts, or the natural moisture behaviour of masonry**.

Why Damp Can Appear Years After Works

It is not unusual for homeowners to notice damp:

- Several years after roofing works
- During unusually wet or cold periods
- Following changes to heating, ventilation, or occupancy

If our inspection confirms that the roof and chimney works remain in good condition, then the cause is **unlikely to be external**.

Effect of Prolonged Damp on Internal Plaster

Where damp has been present for a prolonged period, the internal plaster itself can become perished, salt-contaminated, or weakened. Traditional plaster and modern gypsum plaster are both susceptible to damage when repeatedly exposed to moisture. Over time, this can cause the plaster to lose its integrity and ability to dry properly.

Even once the original source of moisture has been addressed or eliminated, damaged plaster can continue to show staining or damp patches. This does not necessarily indicate ongoing water ingress, but rather moisture being retained within the plaster or salts continuing to attract moisture from the air. In such cases, the affected plaster may need to be removed and replaced using appropriate materials to fully resolve the issue and prevent the reappearance of damp marks.

Common Misconception

“If the leak is fixed, the damp should disappear immediately.”

In reality, when damp has been present for some time, the surrounding materials — particularly plaster and masonry — can become saturated or salt-contaminated. Even after the original cause has been resolved, these materials may continue to show damp staining until they have fully dried or been replaced. This does not indicate a new or ongoing leak, but rather the after-effects of prolonged moisture within the structure.

Guarantees & Responsibility

Our guarantee covers:

- Workmanship
- Materials supplied and installed by us
- Defects directly related to the agreed scope of works

Our guarantee does not extend to:

- Internal condensation
- Hygroscopic salts
- Moisture transfer within masonry
- Ventilation-related issues
- Environmental or weather-related damp
- Misdiagnosis where damp is later found to be non-external

Where our works are objectively sound, internal damp is considered **outside the scope of roofing responsibility**.

What We Recommend

If internal damp persists and our works are confirmed to be in good condition, the correct next step is to consult a **qualified damp or condensation specialist**. They can:

- Measure moisture accurately
- Assess ventilation and airflow
- Identify salt contamination
- Recommend appropriate internal solutions

This ensures the **right problem is treated**, avoiding unnecessary or ineffective external works.

Our Ongoing Support

We always aim to act reasonably and professionally. We are happy to:

- Inspect our works
- Explain findings clearly
- Offer guidance where appropriate
- Remain available if further roofing advice is needed

Once internal factors are ruled out or addressed, we will always be here to help if any genuine external issues arise.

In Summary

Not all chimney damp is caused by the roof or external masonry.
Correct diagnosis protects both the property and the homeowner.