

## Homes with History

Many people love the romantic idea of owning a home with lots of history and period features but there is more to owning a piece of history than the fairy-tale; many old buildings cost more to upkeep and renovate than new properties. Plus they require research to keep them true to their original style.

Organisations such as The Georgian Group and The Victorian Society offer a range of very affordable publications which give information about the history, design, materials and construction of each element of the house. The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) runs training courses for builders specialising in conservation work. SPAB also provides a free technical advice line, a web site and an excellent range of publications on the care and repair of old buildings.

If you live in a listed building, or are thinking of buying one, you have more than just authentic design to consider. Listing is a process of identifying and protecting our heritage, and the Secretary of State has a statutory duty to maintain a list of all our buildings of special architectural or historic interest. The lists were started in 1953 and they are supervised by English Heritage, which can provide detailed information about the subject. There are Around 374,000 listed buildings In England, from grand monuments to famous homes and even old phone boxes! These lists are kept By local authorities. Listed buildings are divided into Grade I, Grade II\* and Grade II. Generally, buildings from pre 1700 to 1840 are likely to be listed. After that time, only the best examples will probably be listed. Post 1945 buildings are only listed if they are of outstanding quality or considered to be of architectural importance. A building has normally to be over 30 years old to be eligible for listing.

Owning a listed building means you will not be able to alter or extend it in any way that affects its character without consent and it's wise to check out even minor repairs. In fact, altering a listed building without consent is in fact a criminal offence! Hugh Petter, a director at ADAM Architecture, a company renowned for classical and traditional design, advises: "Informal discussion with the local planning office is always advisable at the early stage of any project. If unauthorised works are carried out on a listed building, the local planning authority can prosecute you and serve a listed building enforcement notice although you do have the right of appeal. There is no fee attached to a Listed Building Consent Application and they typically take eight to thirteen weeks to process. Listed Building Consent is separate from planning permission, so this may also need to be applied for.

Having alterations made to a period property, listed or not, can be a lengthy process, and it's worth employing a specialist builder to do the job. FMB member Phillip Hall, who runs Hall Construction in Oxfordshire, specialises in refurbishing period properties. He says: "The initial costs to renovate or extend a period property are often 30-50% higher than in contemporary buildings, due to the materials and skilled labour involved, and most new owners do not appreciate that." He recommends that anyone undertaking work should employ a specialist building team he says: "It's worth considering a warranty, such as the FMB's MasterBond, which is a safety net for any problems with the work. It can be a difficult area. Builders with key skills are usually booked well in advance."

Kathie Stevens and her husband, say that it is worth the wait. They employed Hall Construction to renovate their 17th century farmhouse in the Cotswolds. Kathie explains: "The ground floor was sagging, the staircase had to be rebuilt, the roof had to be reinsulated and some dormer windows needed replacing, all in keeping with the original designs. Then we discovered that the

basement probably dates back even further, to maybe even the thirteenth century.”

Using a builder with in-depth knowledge of historical architecture, she says, ensured that any potential problems were identified quickly and the work undertaken efficiently, using both high standards and care. So if you are prepared for lengthy challenges, have the patience and the money to care for and maintain your listed property in line with the regulations, you’ll end up with not only an enviable, beautiful home, but a piece of history all of your own.

**Further Information:**

- Federation of Master Builders (FMB): 020 7242 7583 or [www.fmb.org.uk](http://www.fmb.org.uk)
- SPAB: 020 7456 0916 or [www.spab.org.uk](http://www.spab.org.uk)
- Georgian Group: [www.georgiangroup.org.uk](http://www.georgiangroup.org.uk)
- Victorian Society: [www.victorian-society.org.uk](http://www.victorian-society.org.uk)
- English Heritage: 0870 333 1181 or [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)
- Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA): 020 7580 5533 or [www.architecture.com](http://www.architecture.com)
- Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland: 0131 229 7545 or [www.rias.org.uk/](http://www.rias.org.uk/)
- Historic Scotland: 0131 668 8600 or [www.historic-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk)