

MAINTAINING VALUE

MODULE 2

Individual Owners' Approaches to the Maintenance of their Listed Buildings

Final Report Submitted to Maintain our Heritage

by The University of the West of England, Bristol

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Table of contents

Executive Summary.....	3
1 Background to the research.....	5
1.1 Introduction.....	5
1.2 Previous research.....	5
1.3 Research aims.....	5
2 Methodology	6
2.1 Focus group.....	6
2.2 Questionnaire.....	6
2.3 Telephone interviews.....	6
3 Findings.....	7
3.1 Awareness of legal responsibilities	7
3.2 Attitudes towards maintenance.....	7
3.3 Maintenance practice.....	10
3.4 Attitudes to an independent maintenance inspection service.....	16
4 Conclusions.....	18
References	21
Appendices	22
Appendix 1: Questionnaire to listed building owners	23
Appendix 2: Questionnaire results	33
Appendix 3: Occupational and settlement classifications used to analyse questionnaire data	46
Appendix 4: Breakdown of interviews by settlement and building type	49
Appendix 5: Schedule for semi-structured interviews with listed building owners	50

List of Figures

Figure 3.1: Reasons why individual listed building owners maintain their building	8
Figure 3.2: Reasons why individual listed building owners do not use architects, building surveyors or builders as sources of maintenance advice	12
Figure 3.3: Frequency of external painting and decorating	13
Figure 3.4: Frequency of gutter clearances	14

List of Tables

Table 3.1: Percentage of owners who said that they would be very likely to consult professionals and friends or family members for advice on the maintenance of their listed building	11
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Executive summary

Aims

Domestic buildings represent 37.9 per cent of listed building entries (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2002). Individual owners, therefore, comprise a significant proportion of those caring for listed buildings. The aim of this module was to develop an understanding of individual owners' attitudes to the maintenance of their listed buildings and their approaches to this. It contributes to two of the key objectives of the *Maintaining Value* research programme: to examine the way in which individuals and organisations currently approach the maintenance of the listed buildings in their care; to investigate the potential for systematic maintenance management to create opportunities for the construction industry to develop new products and services.

Methods

A multiple method approach was adopted. An initial focus group of owners in the Bristol/Bath area was used to identify some of the key issues for individual owners in relation to maintenance. The results of this informed a postal questionnaire which was sent to over 1000 owners across the UK. Key issues to emerge from the questionnaires were explored in more depth through semi-structured telephone interviews which were conducted with 20 of the 270 owners who returned questionnaires. Interviewees were selected from Bristol/Bath and north east England (in order to reinforce ongoing research on the provision of commercial maintenance services), Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The sample was also chosen to reflect a range of settlement and building types.

Key findings

The majority of owners prioritised work on their building from a functional rather than from a cultural perspective. Moreover, the majority do not translate a sense of obligation to protect the historic nature, listing status, nor indeed the 'functional or financial asset' into undertaking maintenance in the sense of taking preventative action. Whether or not preventative maintenance is undertaken is influenced by whatever factors would influence their approach to maintenance on any house, rather than by its listed status.

The interviews reinforced a sense that owners associated cultural value with aesthetics rather than historic significance. They believe that character can be maintained by being reproduced by (extensive) repairs or replacement. Where they are concerned about a need to prevent fabric loss this is driven mainly by functional and cost considerations.

The majority of interviewees saw maintenance and repair as interchangeable concepts and, whilst the majority of survey respondents said that they tried to anticipate the maintenance needs of their building, the interviews suggested that in reality this was more of a vague good intent. Moreover, it applied mainly to anticipating when something will need repair or replacement, rather than maintaining it in order to delay failure and the need for repair.

The majority of interviewees did not put aside funds for future maintenance.

Although the majority of survey respondents said that some kind of regular inspection of their building was carried out, the interviews suggested that this was rather informal in nature and was often carried out either by the interviewees themselves, or a family member or friend. Again, the decision to carry out inspections, or not, seemed to be independent of the building's listed status.

Advice available to owners about both legal obligations and maintenance and repair was perceived to be poor. Builders are the group from whom advice was most likely to be sought (and who would be used for inspections). Advice on maintenance work was not highly valued or sought after, mainly because such work is regarded as consisting of simple and obvious jobs, which do not usually require independent advice or particular expertise.

The large majority of respondents carried out maintenance activities such as external painting, minor joinery repairs and minor roof covering repairs. A lesser, but still significant, majority had undertaken gutter clearance. The interviews suggested that the decision as to whether or not the owners did this maintenance themselves, or employed somebody to do it, was not related to listing status. This was again something that the owners would either do, or not do, whatever the status of the house/building. This would generally depend on inclination, ability and skills (but not 'heritage' skills).

The majority of owners do not think it necessary to employ an 'historic buildings specialist' as a builder. This was partly due to the nature of the work (reinforcing the sense that general maintenance and repair work is seen as straightforward and not requiring specialist skills or knowledge), and partly due to the sense that it is more important to have a builder who is known to be trustworthy.

A significant majority of the interviewees had not tried to find a specialist builder. Of those that had, a significant majority had found the process difficult. A significant number had also thought that the prices quoted by specialists were too high. Many of those who had not contacted specialists gave as a reason for not using them an assumption, or indeed knowledge, of the high cost of work by specialists. Other reasons included that they were not available in the area, or that, even if available, the specialist was uninterested in small jobs and/or too busy to undertake the work.

A majority of respondents expressed either a high or a medium level of interest in an independent inspection service, similar to Monumentenwacht. Of those who expressed a high or medium interest, however, a majority were either not prepared to pay anything or would only be willing to pay unrealistically low amounts. The discussion with the interviewees on the sum that they would be prepared to pay for a Monumentenwacht type service shed some light on the relatively low figure that many of the respondents to the questionnaire seemed to be prepared to pay. The sense from the interviewees was that the amount that people were prepared to pay was associated not with the value of the service in terms of its effect (protecting the asset as cultural heritage or as a house) but rather with the notion that:

- such a service would not be carried out by people with high level professional skills - one interviewee for example related it to Rentokill insurance;
- such a service needs to prove itself and that they would have to have experience of the service before they could put a value on it;
- the provision of such an advisory service should be available free, or at least subsidised. As one put it 'as the State's part of the bargain where listing imposes duties and costs';
- the advice was available from builders already;
- maintenance (but not necessarily repair) was common sense and/or they felt they knew what they were doing and that advice was not necessary.

1. Background to the research

1.1 Introduction

There are no exact figures for the proportion of listed buildings that are owned by private individuals. Figures from the State of the Historic Environment Report (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2002) for listed buildings by type, suggest that individual owners represent a significant proportion of those caring for listed buildings¹. Understanding this group's attitudes towards, and their behaviour in regard to maintenance is, therefore, vital to bringing about a step change in the way that the nation's heritage is maintained, and, as part of this, to inform the development of the commercial maintenance sector.

1.2 Previous research

Evidence about individual owners' maintenance practice is even more limited than that which exists about the maintenance behaviour of organisations. A report by Wedgwood Markham Associates Ltd (1994) appears to be the only piece of research to even touch upon this issue. The report looks at what aspects of repair and maintenance owners expected to carry out over the next three years and their planned expenditure for this. Unfortunately, the research often makes no distinction between 'improvements' 'repairs' and 'maintenance' and, therefore, gives little insight into preventative maintenance behaviour.

The literature gives more insight into the attitudes and maintenance behaviour of individual owners in general. A report by Leather *et al.* (1998) examines how owners identify the need to repair, maintain and improve their properties and at how owners organise and pay for building work and the associated problems. The report concludes that the forward planning of maintenance and repair is almost non-existent. Many owners were aware of condition problems, and relied overwhelmingly on informal diagnoses rather than on building professionals. Owners were more likely to contact contractors rather than consultants to diagnose problems. One of the main conclusions highlighted by the report is that owners neglect basic repair problems.

A more recent survey carried out by Mori (2003) on behalf of SPAB supports Leather *et al.*'s findings. It suggests that one-third of all property owners have carried out no building maintenance or repairs in the past five years. Lack of confidence rather than difficulty in finding skilled tradesmen was more of a constraint on undertaking maintenance although there were variations by region, gender and social class. The Welsh were most likely and Londoners least likely to undertake basic maintenance, whilst lack of confidence was a far greater constraint on women undertaking maintenance work themselves. Skills shortages appear to be greatest in London and the South East.

1.3 Research Aims

The literature reviewed suggests that in general individual owners tend to neglect basic preventative maintenance. An understanding of individual listed building owners' relationship to maintenance is lacking in three respects, however. First, there is very little insight into this specific group's attitudes towards the maintenance of their listed building. Do they, for example, feel a responsibility to act as a custodian of the nation's heritage and if so, does this change their attitudes and approach to maintenance? Is their ownership of a listed building perceived to present any extra burden or problem when it comes to maintenance. As prevailing heritage policy suggests there is a need for a fundamental shift towards a more positive and proactive stance towards maintenance, current baseline attitudes must first be

¹ Domestic buildings represent 37.9 per cent of listed building entries (DCMS, 2002).

understood if we are to pinpoint what kind of shift is required and begin to identify how this may be realised.

Second, there is a lack of information about the extent and nature of preventative maintenance work undertaken by listed building owners and of the factors, which support or constrain this.

Third, in relation to the commercial maintenance market, there is a need to understand listed building owners' experience of contracting and consultancy maintenance services and to begin to gauge the demand for a new type of systematic maintenance service. The aim of this module is to begin to fill the gaps in understanding of these three key areas. It contributes to two of the key aims of the *Maintaining Value* research programme: to examine the way in which individuals and organisations currently approach the maintenance of the listed buildings in their care; to investigate the potential for systematic maintenance management to create opportunities for the construction industry to develop new products and services.

2. Methodology

A multiple method approach was adopted.

2.1 Focus group

A focus group of owners in the Bristol/Bath area was used to elicit some of the key maintenance issues for individual owners.

2.2 Questionnaire

The data from the focus group informed a questionnaire (see example in Appendix 1) sent to 1000 listed building owners. In the absence of a comprehensive national database of listed building owners, questionnaires were sent out to a sample taken from the database owned by the Listed Building Owners' Club (LBOC). Although the membership of the LBOC necessarily contains people who are interested in heritage, the LBOC database is taken from local authorities' lists of owners, not just LPOC members, so it should reflect the profile of listed building owners.

The sample was chosen to reflect the national proportion of listed building grades and the geographical distribution of listed buildings. In addition an attempt was made to reflect different settlement types as this was thought likely to be one of the key factors determining the provision of commercial maintenance services. An additional 66 questionnaires were sent to owners whose names had been supplied by local conservation officers. Two hundred and seventy questionnaires were returned. The profile of owners who returned the questionnaire is in Appendix 2.

2.3 Telephone interviews

Key issues to emerge from the survey were explored in more depth through telephone interviews with 20 of the respondents. The original intention was to select interviewees from the the three geographical regions chosen for ongoing research on the provision of commercial maintenance services, namely, Bristol/Bath, London and Northumbria. This proved difficult primarily because of the lack of respondents from the London area. It was decided therefore to pick respondents from two of the areas (Bristol/ Bath and its environs and north east England) plus Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. We interviewed 12 people from England, 3 from Wales, 3 from Scotland and 2 from Northern Ireland. Within these geographical regions we attempted to get a spread related to settlement and building type. A breakdown of interviews by settlement and building type is shown in Appendix 4.

3. Findings

3.1 Awareness of legal responsibilities

The responsibilities of individual owners are set out in *The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990*. This requires owners of listed buildings to seek permission (Listed Building Consent) for changes which ‘would affect its character as a building of special architectural or historic interest’ (c.7, Chapter II, paragraph 7). There is no specific duty of care or requirement to maintain a listed building imposed by this Act (but there are a series of provisions within the Act for local authorities to react to situations where listed buildings are not being properly maintained). *Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas (PPG15)*, whilst emphasising the importance of maintenance, reinforces this position:

There is no specific duty on owners to keep their buildings in a good state of repair (though it will normally be in their interests to do so), but local authorities have powers to take action where a historic building has deteriorated to the extent that its preservation may be at risk. (section 7.4)

Thirty seven per cent of owners indicated that they were very aware of their legal responsibilities as a listed building owner, whilst 54 per cent indicated that they were quite aware.

The overall profile of respondents to the questionnaire in terms of their level of educational attainment and occupation was higher than the UK average. It is possible, therefore, that the level of awareness is higher among the sample than one might expect of the UK overall.

3.2 Attitudes towards maintenance

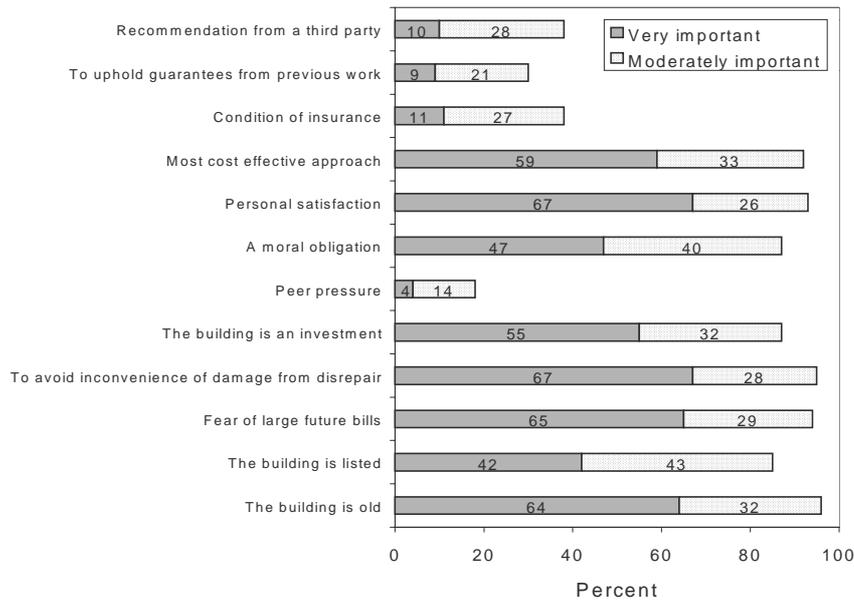
3.2.1 Reasons for maintaining buildings

The survey data suggests that the fact that the building was the owners home and that it was historic were more important reasons for maintaining it than its listed status. Eighty two per cent of respondents to the questionnaire said that the fact that the building was their home was a very important factor in the standards of maintenance that they decided to adopt. Forty five per cent said that the building’s historic nature was a very important factor in this respect, whilst only 35 per cent said that the building’s listed status was a very important factor. Fourteen per cent of respondents said that the listed status of the building was not important in determining the standards of maintenance adopted.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether ‘purely financial reasons’, ‘mainly to avoid inconvenience and discomfort of damage from disrepair’, ‘just in the interests of preventing unnecessary loss or damage to the historic fabric’ or some combination of the above reasons best described their reasons for anticipating the maintenance needs of their building. Forty four per cent of respondents indicated that a variety of combinations of the above reasons motivated them to anticipate the maintenance needs of their building. Where respondents identified a single reason for anticipating maintenance needs, 16 per cent said that it was to avoid inconvenience and discomfort. Five per cent said they anticipated maintenance needs in the interests of preventing unnecessary loss or damage to the historic fabric of their building. Purely financial reasons were the motivation for anticipating maintenance needs in only three per cent of cases.

The results of a separate question asking respondents to evaluate a list of factors motivating maintenance are shown in Figure 3.1

Figure 3.1: Reasons why individual listed building owners maintain their building



The respondents were also given the opportunity to suggest other important reasons why they maintain their building. Sixteen per cent replied to this and the most common reason given was that it was their home.

Although a large percentage indicated that the driver for maintenance decisions was a combination of ‘purely financial reasons’, ‘mainly to avoid inconvenience and discomfort of damage from disrepair’, ‘just in the interests of preventing unnecessary loss or damage to the historic fabric’, the high importance given to factors such as “Personal satisfaction” and “To avoid inconvenience of damage from disrepair” reinforces the sense that they make decisions about maintenance based on the fact that they live (or in a very small number of cases work) in the building.

The response that purely financial reasons was not a significant primary motive was perhaps contradicted by the ‘very important’ scores for ‘Fear of large future bills’ and ‘the building is an investment’. The belief that maintenance is the most cost effective approach would also seem to reinforce the sense that financial reasons are a primary driver for decisions. The finding that more importance was placed on the fact that the building is historic as a factor in maintaining it than was placed on the fact that it is listed was supported by a number of ad hoc comments from respondents and also from the interviews. There was a sense that it was the emotional ties to the house that were important drivers and that decisions were based on the feeling of a ‘moral’ duty rather than statutory requirements. It might be suggested that for some of the respondents the historic nature of the building reinforced a notion of ‘home’

The interviews reinforced the sense that the most important factor for the majority in making maintenance decisions was the fact that the building was their home. As one remarked ‘my decisions are born out of the needs of it being a house.’ The fact that the house was also an asset that needed to be protected came across more strongly in the interviews than it did in the questionnaires. That they are living in a cultural artefact was clearly, for the majority of interviewees, a secondary factor when it comes to their approach to maintaining and repairing their building. That is not to say that they are unaware of (or do not take seriously) their statutory duty and, clearly for some their moral obligation. What it does seem to mean however is that generally they think about, and prioritise, work from a functional perspective

rather than a cultural perspective –even though they know that listing will affect the manner of the repair, materials used etc.

3.2.2 Distinction between maintenance and repair

There was, from the interviewees, a clear sense that the majority do not translate a sense of obligation to protect the historic nature, listing status, nor indeed the ‘functional or financial asset’ into undertaking maintenance – at least in the sense of taking preventative action to prevent loss of historic fabric. The common reference point for the interviewees in discussing maintenance in fact related mainly to repairing or replacing things appropriately – and appropriate is usually seen as being driven by appearance (this is probably reinforced by their perception of their statutory obligations). That is, there was a real sense from the interviews that historic character is invested in appearance (and can therefore be reproduced).

Any sense of a need to prevent fabric loss is driven by functional and cost considerations. Buying into a ‘stitch in time’ philosophy, (which most did even if they did not act on it), is an approach that the individual would take or not irrespective of whether the building was listed. It is also clear that, for most of the interviewees, the timing of the stitch relates to when failure has taken place, that is, for the majority of the interviewees the prompt to action is an early state of disrepair (or later depending on money).

The interviewees all said that they think about the possible consequences of not carrying out maintenance but it became clear in discussion that only a minority think seriously about the consequences of not carrying out maintenance. They are aware in a general sense but in reality their focus is on the need to carry out repairs, before further deterioration, which may result in failure, occurs. It is the functional loss /future costs that drives action. Two typical responses were, ‘ I would always do work for functional reasons’ or ‘you repair it when it fails.

This sense was reinforced by the fact that in an opening question most of the interviewees did not distinguish between repair and maintenance and when asked what kinds of activities might the term maintenance cover most gave examples of repairs or replacement. A few gave examples of processes which would be categorised as alterations.

The interviewee who seemed most keenly aware of the sense that maintenance might prevent or slow down the loss of historic fabric, and that this was an important issue, said that financial and organisational reasons meant he would always batch jobs. He commented that he did this despite the fact that he knew that this would often mean loss of fabric because action might be taken too early or too late. The majority of interviewees appeared to do things to protect functionality even if a ‘heritage loss’ resulted, that is, they do not prioritise from a conservation perspective. It can be suggested that this is not just to do with pragmatism but also related to the sense that they see heritage mainly in terms of appearance – and therefore things can be replaced because they can be reproduced.

3.2.3 Anticipation of maintenance need

Ninety one per cent of respondents to the questionnaire said that they tried to anticipate the maintenance need of their building. The interviews tended to suggest that for the majority this is only a vague intent and that it applies mainly to anticipating when something will need repair or replacement rather than maintaining it in order to delay failure and the need for repair.

Sixty seven per cent of the respondents to the questionnaire said that they make financial provision for their anticipated maintenance work. The follow up interviews did not reflect this or rather they suggested that this was less focussed and less planned than might be deduced

from the questionnaires. The overwhelming majority of interviewees did not put aside funds for future maintenance and repair. Only two did so in a planned way (and both did so in relation to an ordered inspection), with one putting aside money for their three year planning period and the other setting up funds to deal with particular anticipated jobs. The ones that did not were split between those who have other financial priorities, either in the long or the short term, those who set aside sums for contingencies generally –some of which may or may not get spent on the house and those that do not think that way or ‘are not that organised’. It is worth noting that the conversation about financial provision reinforced the notion that it was repairs rather than preventative maintenance that was being focussed on.

3.3 Maintenance practice

3.3.1 Inspections

Forty six per cent of respondents said that an inspection of the main external elements was carried out on their building every year. Where respondents identified another time period, 21 per cent said that the frequency of inspection was 2-5 years. Eight per cent said that they never carried out an inspection of the main external elements of their listed building.

Of the owners who said that inspections were undertaken, 63 per cent of these said that they were undertaken by the owner themselves, a friend or a family member. In 23 per cent of these cases the individual concerned was a builder, a surveyor or an architect. Thirty per cent of owners employed a builder to undertake such inspections, 11 per cent a surveyor and nine per cent an architect.

There was a smaller incidence of inspections being carried out by the interview group. Only five of the interviewees carried out what might be thought of as coherent regular inspections. Of these five, one carried out a very systematic element by element inspection once a year, and produced a 3 year plan and a 3 year budget. Two of the interviewees looked at major elements: one twice a year the other once a year. Two had the roofs checked once a year but they did not have other elements inspected. The others either did nothing, or inspected only in reaction to adverse weather conditions, or they inspected parts of the building because there had been a history of particular problems such as dampness and rot (one of the roof inspections fell into this category). Some ‘kept an eye on’ or perhaps more accurately worried about a particular element that was vulnerable and was seen as having ‘heritage value’. A number suggested that whilst they did not carry out a systematic inspection they knew the building and its potential problems well enough to spot defects.

It can be suggested that in respect of inspections whether people either carry them out or not is irrespective of whether the building is listed. They are again making decisions based on the fact that the building is their home – and they are or are not the type of people that inspect and plan their maintenance irrespective of whether they own a listed building. There were two exceptions to this amongst the interviewees: one who developed a particular interest in historic building and the issues surrounding them after moving into her property. She commented, ‘I am aware of the building and its historic context ... and driven by constant vigilance’. The other lived in a house that was on the ‘at risk’ register and this seemed to inform his sense that inspections were valuable.

3.3.2 Seeking advice

The questionnaires suggested that the most important source of guidance on maintenance matters was the Local Authority (56 per cent). Magazines (42 per cent) were ranked as the next most frequently sought source. National and local conservation bodies were the least frequently sought sources (34 per cent).

The questionnaire asked the respondents to specify the national or local conservation body. Thirty four per cent did so. Of these many confused matters by mentioning the local authority which was covered by another tick box: and this shows that local authorities are seen as a conservation body.

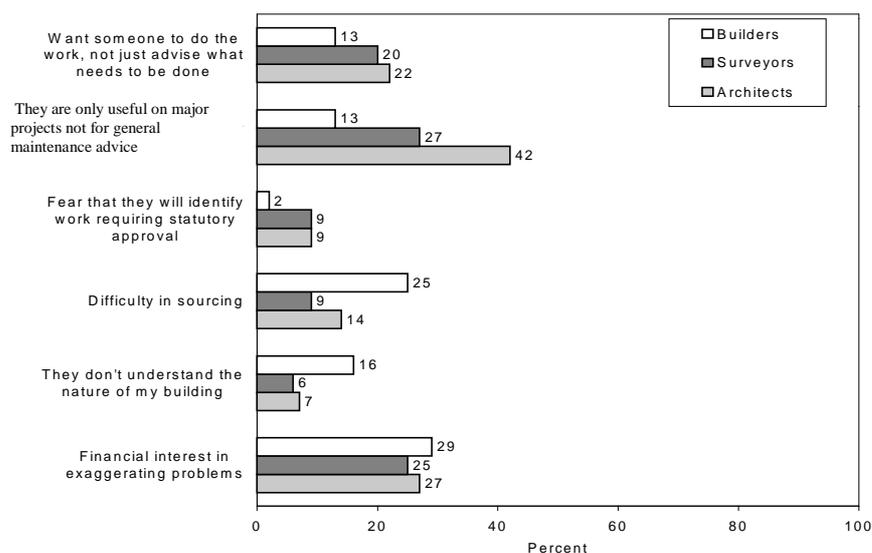
During the interviews virtually everyone (without prompting) said that they felt that advice to owners in terms of both clarity about legal obligations and how and where to seek advice on maintenance and repair was very poor. Those who did not fall into this category were usually people with some inside knowledge but even they said that but for that they would have been floundering. One respondent, an architect, commented that ‘most people wouldn’t know where to start’. The general perception from the interviews was that English Heritage generally seemed remote or it was assumed advice on maintenance and repair was not the sort of thing they did, although some interviewees had had very positive experience with particular regions. With Historic Scotland generally the sense amongst the Scottish interviewees was that they were seen as approachable and provided a good level of technical advice (although this appeared to relate to repairs rather than maintenance). Very few of the interviewees had heard of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) and only one referred to them as being a good source of advice. Those in Scotland tended to see them as a particularly English institution. Some of the interviewees said that other listed building owners were an important source of information.

The questionnaires asked whether owners how likely they would be to consult professionals and friends/family members for advice about their listed buildings. The results suggest that individual owners are most likely to consult builders and conservation officers for advice (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Percentage of owners who said that they would be very likely to consult professionals and friends or family members for advice on the maintenance of their listed building

Architect	Building Surveyor	Conservation Officer	Friend/Family Member	Builder
22%	25%	44%	23%	54%

In regards to why they do not use architects, building surveyors or builders, there appears to be a general distrust of these professions and a concern that they have a financial interest in finding and exaggerating problems. This concern is equally spread over all three professions. A breakdown of the results regarding this issue is shown in Figure 3.2

Figure 3.2: Reasons why individual listed building owners do not use architects, building surveyors or builders as sources of maintenance advice

The interviews reinforced the sense that builders are the main source of advice for individuals. The idea that professionals, such as architects or surveyors, might be a source of independent advice, and that this might be valuable, was only held by a minority. Of the majority, some agreed that they might be useful but said that the extra costs of employing a consultant did not justify using them. Others pointed out that consultants would be equally prone to giving advice which served them financially. One interviewee who saw the value of independent advice would not necessarily go to a consultant, they would be equally likely to go to a builder.

There was little sense from the interviewees that they felt that consultants would have a greater expertise in repairs and maintenance than builders (just the opposite in fact). Two interviewees did suggest that consultants would be valuable in looking to the future, in contrast to a builder who, as one said, 'would look just at what was in front of them'. Where architects were consulted it tended to be because they were known to the interviewee and /or had been engaged by them for work other than repairs (extensions etc). Generally surveyors did not seem to be thought of as possible sources of advice.

There was no real sense of the availability of advice from consultants being an issue for the majority of interviewees. This was mainly because most people would not think of using them. For many this was because they saw, certainly maintenance, but also repairs, as routine jobs that 'are obvious' and did not require 'independent advice' or particular expertise. Maintenance issues could often be decided on by the owner who would then instruct the builder. As one interviewee commented, 'I cant see the value, what would they do?'

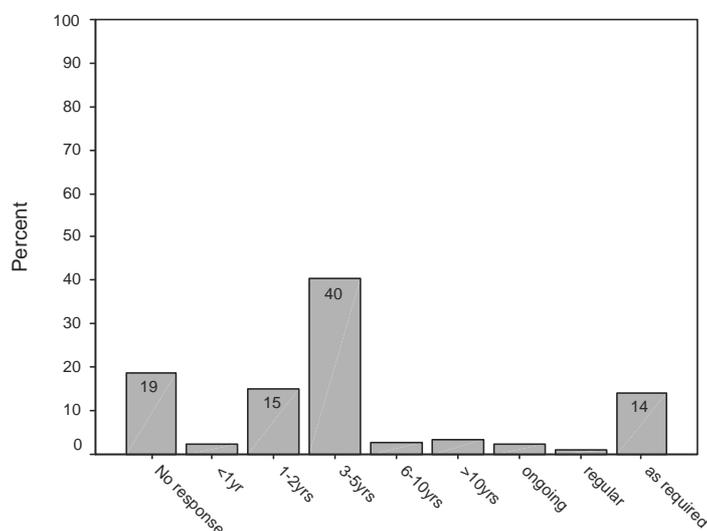
Likewise inspections (from which advice would flow) were seen as something that a builder would be perfectly competent to do – indeed perhaps the obvious person. Only two interviewees suggested that an independent consultant was necessary for inspections. One of these was the owner of a commercial building and suggested that an architect was the most appropriate person (he was himself an architect) because they could also give design advice. The other said she valued independent advice from consultants particularly as there was a lack of sympathy and understanding for historic structures in Northern Ireland. The respondent referred to this as the 'bungalow mentality'.

The interviews tended to qualify the questionnaire finding that conservation officers were a significant source of advice. Whilst a number of interviewees had established good relationships with their local authority and would readily seek advice, the large majority of interviewees would not. A number of the latter group referred to local authorities being aggressive and unhelpful and some referred to a local authority tendency to concentrate on penalties whilst providing little in the way of support and advice. Where conservation officers were asked for advice this tended to be in relation to clarification of the statutory requirements, that is, it was about what the owners could or could not do. Two interviewees specifically asked for advice in order, as one put it, 'just to keep them on side'. The most common reasons for not seeking advice from conservation officers or the local authority were that they 'lacked expertise' and that they were 'just not interested'. Several of the interviewees had clearly never considered that the local authority might be a potentially valuable source of advice and support and were surprised by the thought whilst others were clear that it was not the local authority role. The idea that 'the City is there to police consent' typified the attitude of this group of interviewees. It was also clear, however, that the majority would, where possible, avoid getting involved with 'them'.

3.3.3 Maintenance activities

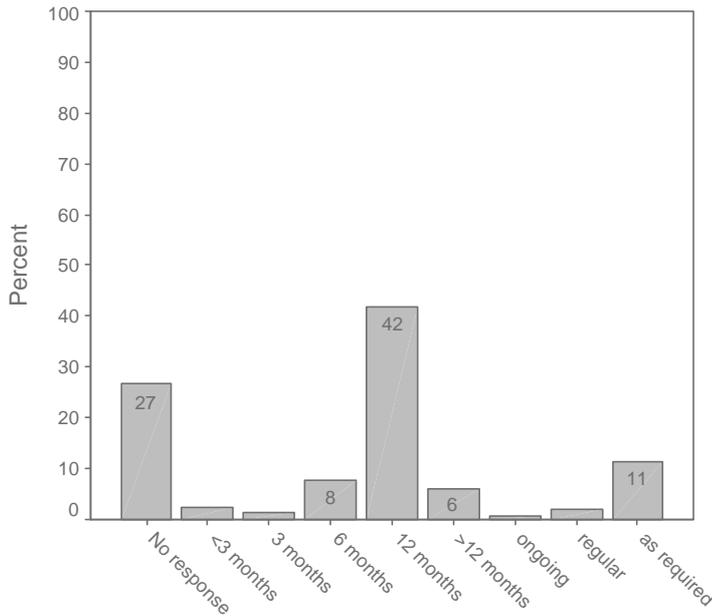
Ninety two per cent of all respondents had carried out maintenance activities related to external painting, minor repairs to external joinery and minor roof covering repairs. Eighty seven per cent had undertaken gutter clearances and seventy nine per cent minor roof structure repairs. More than half of the respondents painted and decorated the exterior at least every five years (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3: Frequency of external painting and decoration



Forty two per cent of respondents cleared gutters on an annual basis whilst eight per cent carried out this maintenance task every six months (Figure 3.4). Nearly one third of respondents did not clear gutters at all.

Figure 3.4: Frequency of gutter clearances



Just over one half of the respondents made minor repairs to windows and doors, roof coverings and to the roof structure on an ‘as required’ basis

Thirty per cent of respondents carried out external painting and decorating themselves. Sixty per cent employ someone to do this type of work, whilst in 11 per cent of cases this work was shared between the owner and ‘someone else’. Similarly, minor repairs to external joinery are carried out more often by someone else (51 per cent) than by the owners themselves (41 per cent) whilst in eight per cent of cases the work was shared.

Not surprisingly minor repairs to both roof coverings and structure were principally carried out by ‘someone else’ (80 per cent of cases), whilst five per cent of owners carried out this type of work themselves. Five per cent shared this work with ‘someone else’.

In 55 per cent of cases, gutter clearance was carried out by the owners themselves.

Respondents to the questionnaire were given the opportunity to add to the list of maintenance activities that they carried out. Few did so but the most frequent addition was pointing.

3.3.4 Factors influencing maintenance practice

Lack of skills was mentioned by 60 per cent of the respondents as the most significant constraint on their carrying out maintenance by themselves. Lack of time and the requirement for specialist equipment was reported by 48 per cent of respondents, ranked as the second most significant factor. Lack of knowledge, reported by 44 per cent of respondents was nearly as significant a constraint.

Thirty six per cent of respondents indicated that requirements for specialist materials was a constraint on maintenance being carried out by themselves, whilst problems with access was reported by 27 per cent of owners. Difficulties with access were either related to the building itself making it dangerous and/or requiring specialist equipment, or to age/ill health/fear of heights.

The interviews support a suggestion that the constraints preventing people undertaking maintenance work themselves are not related to the fact that the building is listed. They would either do or not do the same things whatever the status of the house/building and this would generally depend on inclination and skills (but not heritage skills) as well as issues of access. Cost was less significant as a constraint for respondents, (18 per cent).

3.3.5 Sourcing builders

A recommendation from someone known to and trusted by the respondent was the most common means (74 per cent) by which they selected a builder to work on their listed building. Having used a company previously (64 per cent) and having seen their work elsewhere (53 per cent) were also commonly used criteria. These reasons were reinforced by the interviews. Only a small percentage (13 per cent) of the respondents reported that provision of the most competitive quote and (13 per cent) the recommendation from a conservation society best described their reasons for selecting a building contractor.

Fifty nine per cent of respondents had not tried to use a builder who specialised in historic building maintenance. The overwhelming reason for this was that the work did not require a specialist. This was partly due to the nature of the work and partly due to the sense that it is more important to have a builder who can be shown to be trustworthy – this included being experienced in working on older buildings. This attitude was demonstrated through comments such as:

Local good craftsmen are familiar with materials and procedures in the locality and are much more likely to do a better job than a “specialist historic builder” from outside the area.

Although we have owned old buildings previously they have never been listed. This specialist knowledge or experience whilst desirable I suspect tends to increase the price, although I wouldn’t rule them out, it wouldn’t be the most important factor when selecting a builder.

My builder is prepared to do any work appropriately and will not overcharge me.

Experience rather than specialist. Specialist price unnecessary.

Use builders I know and trust with relevant skills and experience to the job required.

Some of the reasons the respondents gave for not trying to find a builder who specialised in historic building maintenance were based on the assumptions that the owners made about the extra cost associated with specialist builders as well as difficulty in finding them.

Fifty eight per cent of the respondents who had tried to find a specialist builder had found it either easy or very easy. Forty two per cent either found it difficult or impossible to find such specialists. The reasons that this group gave for the difficulty was:

- the specialists were either not interested in the job often because it was too small or they were too busy (referred to 26 times);

Good builders are busy! I sought recommendations from other conservation officers, but most people they speak of only work in their area and wont travel to Berwick- its too far from Newcastle and Edinburgh! Getting 3 quotes to apply for HERS grants is hard for applicants I deal with at work

- there were no appropriate specialists in the local area;

Its difficult to find any good builder let alone a specialist historic one
The respondents did not know where to start looking.

- the specialists were too costly;

Cost- any builder claiming to specialise in listed buildings come at a premium

Cost inflated for basic work

- they did not have the skills they advertised (referred to 4 times).

The majority of interviewees reinforced the impression that owners did not think it was necessary for builders to have specialist qualifications, nor to be affiliated with particular organisations. Some recognised this as an issue but said that it was more important that there was experience and sympathy/understanding. It was clear, however, that, for the majority, familiarity, competence and trustworthiness were the main criteria for selection.

A significant number were of the opinion that their buildings contained nothing that was specialised enough to justify a specialist. Four of the interviewees specifically said that they would be wary of using specialists because as one said 'heritage specialisms..... suggest a tag that attracts premiums that cannot necessarily be justified' and the other suggested that 'A heritage label is always expensive'. The third said that they would always seek out non specialists first because of the fear of the costs of specialists and the fourth thought it important to use specialists but would tend not to do so because of the (assumed) costs.

3.4 Attitudes to an independent maintenance inspection service

Almost one third of individual listed building owner respondents expressed a high level of interest in an independent inspection service, similar to Monumentenwacht. A further 41 per cent expressed a medium level of interest whilst 18 per cent said that their interest in such a service was low and nine per cent said that they were not sure.

Of those who expressed a high or medium interest in a Monumentenwacht-type service, 22 per cent said that they would not be willing to pay for such a service, whilst 37 per cent were only willing to pay unrealistically low amounts, that is one hundred pounds or less.

In response to a question asking respondents to identify from a list of potential incentives those that would encourage their use of a maintenance inspection service 85 per cent said that one or more of the following financial incentives would make them more likely to make use of the service:

- If the service was linked to reduced insurance premiums (87 per cent);
- If the service was linked to tax incentives (85 per cent);
- If the service was linked to a grant scheme (87 per cent).

By contrast, only 40 per cent of respondents indicated that they would be more likely to use the service if it were linked to a service that carried out that work.

A strong theme emerging from the interviews was that of the credibility of any proposed service. Generally there was strong agreement that such a service:

- needed to be supported /recommended by a recognisable/reputable organisation;
- should be seen to be independent and authoritative.

For the majority of interviewees 'independent' meant not associated with statutory control. For most people this meant the local authority, although some felt that English Heritage should not be involved. For the interviewees from Scotland there was a split between those who would not want Historic Scotland to be involved and those who thought they were appropriate.

The reason that the majority gave for saying that the service should be independent of the local authority was because of the local authorities' 'policing' role. The majority stressed that the service should give supportive advice and that it was extremely important that there was no sense that owners should be required to carry out any of the work identified in the survey. As one person said.

I would be nervous of getting advice from a source that might lead to a need for statutory approval for work.

The antipathy to potentially being made to carry out work identified in a survey was partly to do with costs, (albeit mainly the timing of costs,). For a significant number, however, there was a more general issue of not wanting to get involved any further with 'the bureaucracy'. For some this was expressed in a tangible sense of not wanting others deciding how they should look after their own property. Some feared that it might alter or distort their own intentions whilst for others it was clearly a point of principle:

I cant bear to be told what to do with my own house.

There were also indications of an ostrich mentality, that is of not wanting to use such a service for fear of finding out about work that needed doing but could not be afforded.

Many of the interviewees saw the value of a Monumentenwacht type service being in providing a one-off inspection only where general advice on preventative maintenance could be linked to maintenance and repair issues specific to the owner's house and its context. It could be suggested that such a service provided at the point of sale could also be linked to clear and supportive explanation of statutory obligations and information about where further advice and support could be obtained. Most others interviewees thought that the interval of inspection should be greater than one year. Many could not suggest what that different interval would be but of those that did every 2-3 years was the most common suggestion followed by a small number suggesting every 5 years.

For some of the interviewees it was important that those undertaking the inspection knew the locality and had a detailed understanding of the building type. In addition it was also suggested that a coordinated service (a one stop shop providing strategic advice, coordinating job packages, providing advice on grants and suitable contractors) would be valuable.

The discussion with the interviewees on the sum that they would be prepared to pay for a Monumentenwacht type service may shed some light on the relatively low figure that many of the respondents to the questionnaire seemed to be prepared to pay. The sense from the interviewees was that the amount that people were prepared to pay was associated not with the value of the service in terms of its effect (protecting the asset as cultural heritage or as a house) but rather with the notion that:

- such a service would not be carried out by people with high level professional skills - one interviewee for example related it to Rentokill insurance);

- such a service needs to prove itself and that they would have to have experience of the service before they could put a value on it;
- the provision of such an advisory service should be available free or at least subsidised. As one put it ‘as the State’s part of the bargain where listing imposes duties and costs’;
- the advice was available from builders already;
- maintenance (but not necessarily repair) was common sense and/or they felt they knew what they were doing and that advice was not necessary.

4. Conclusions

It is clear that the primary factor influencing the way that individuals conceive of and carry out maintenance is the fact that the building is their home. Whilst this may seem an obvious point, it is an important one because, although they were keenly aware of a sense of statutory and more importantly perhaps a moral duty to protect that part of the cultural heritage that they owned, generally they think about, and prioritise, work from a functional perspective rather than a cultural perspective.

There was however, from the interviewees, a clear sense that the majority do not translate a sense of obligation to protect the historic nature, listing status, nor indeed the ‘functional or financial asset’ into undertaking maintenance – at least in the sense of taking preventative action. The majority of interviewees saw ‘maintenance’ and ‘repair’ as interchangeable concepts. There was a clear sense from the interviews that whether or not the majority undertake preventative maintenance is not generally influenced by listing status, rather it is influenced by whatever would influence their approach to maintenance on any house. This does not mean that they do not think that the historic nature is unimportant but that they think that that character can be maintained by being reproduced by (extensive) repairs or replacement. Any sense of a need to prevent fabric loss is driven by functional and cost considerations.

A large number of respondents to the questionnaire indicated that they tried to anticipate the maintenance need of their building. The interviews tended to suggest, however, that for the majority this was more of a vague intent and that it applies mainly to anticipating when something will need repair or replacement rather than maintaining it in order to delay failure and the need for repair. In a similar vein, whilst the majority of the respondents to the questionnaire said that they make financial provision for their anticipated maintenance work, the interviews suggested that this was less focussed and less planned than might be deduced from the questionnaires. The overwhelming majority of interviewees did not put aside funds for future maintenance and repair.

A significant number of respondents said that an inspection of the main external elements was carried out on a regular basis. The majority of these were undertaken by themselves or a family member/friend. The interviews suggest that such inspections may be less systematic and comprehensive than might be deduced from the questionnaires. It can be suggested that in respect of inspections people again either carry them out or not irrespective of whether the building is listed. They are again making decisions based on the fact that the building is their home. Whilst some may carry out inspections because of a particular, usually serious, problem that has had to be dealt with in the past, generally people either are or are not the type that inspect and plan their maintenance irrespective of whether they own a listed building.

During the interviews virtually everyone (without prompting) said that they felt that advice to owners in terms of both clarity about legal obligations and how and where to seek advice on maintenance and repair was very poor. Builders are the group from whom advice was most likely to be sought (and who would be used for inspections). Advice on repair and maintenance was not highly valued or sought after because, certainly maintenance, but also much repair work, is regarded as consisting of simple and 'obvious' jobs that do not usually require 'independent advice' or particular expertise.

The large majority of respondents carried out maintenance activities such as external painting, minor joinery repairs and minor roof covering repairs and a lesser but still significant majority had undertaken gutter clearance. The interviews suggested that the decision as to whether or not the owners did this maintenance themselves or employed somebody to do it was not related to listing status. This was again something that the owners would either do or not do whatever the status of the house/building. This would generally depend on inclination and skills (but not heritage skills). This reinforces what does (or rather does not) inform and drive attitudes and may be a factor in how a Monumentenwacht service is perceived and valued.

The majority of owners do not think it necessary to employ an 'historic buildings specialist' as a builder. This was partly due to the nature of the work (reinforcing the sense that general maintenance and repair work is seen as straightforward and not requiring specialist skills or knowledge) and partly due to the sense that it is more important to have a builder who is known to be trustworthy.

A significant majority had not tried to find a specialist builder but of those who had a significant minority found this process difficult. The reasons for the difficulty included the fact that specialists were too costly. This cost factor was also assumed to be the case by many who had not tried to find them. Other reasons included that they were not available in the area, or that even if available the specialist was uninterested in small jobs and/or too busy to undertake them.

A majority of respondents expressed either a high or a medium level of interest in an independent inspection service, similar to Monumentenwacht. Of those who expressed a high or medium interest however a majority would either not be prepared to pay anything or would only be willing to pay unrealistically low amounts.. The discussion with the interviewees on the sum that they would be prepared to pay for a Monumentenwacht type service may shed some light on the relatively low figure that many of the respondents to the questionnaire seemed to be prepared to pay. It certainly reinforced some of the attitudes referred to above.

Although there is clearly a problem with generalising from the number of interviews that were carried out there is value perhaps in acknowledging what seemed to be some explicit and implicit themes emerging from them. The majority of interviewees seemed to have little awareness of those 'philosophical' principles of conservation which emphasise both preventative maintenance and minimum intervention-and therefore the importance of retaining authentic fabric. This is probably reinforced by (or is a reinforcer of) a sense that value is mainly represented in 'appearance', a situation which in turn can suggest that the reproduction of parts of the building does not produce any loss in cultural value. In such a scenario it is perhaps not surprising that individual owners do not fully appreciate the importance of maintenance in the protection of built cultural heritage.

It could further be surmised that the situation is also reinforced by a number of other factors.

For example, the builders used by most of the interviewees were not 'specialists' in historic buildings and, whilst they may well be skilful, and 'sympathetic' in dealing with older buildings they may well not aware of conservation ideas and concerns. Even where specialist

contractors are used there is at least anecdotal evidence that, in some instances, craftsmen may be unsympathetic to concepts such as minimum intervention and honest repairs. This may be particularly so where such ideas may seem to work against their craft training and perhaps their instinct to practice their craft skills through “reproducing the past”. Moreover, although the emphasis in conservation areas is on character and appearance there are suggestions that concerns over appearance tend to dominate and this may have a reinforcing effect for individual owners even if they do not themselves live in a conservation area.