



Welcome to **August's** email bulletin. This month our topic is **old doors**. You can also view an illustrated version of this bulletin [online](#). If you have a subject that you would like us to cover in a future bulletin let us know by emailing the team at info@spabfim.org.uk.

Things to think about...

There is no need to assume that an old or damaged door will automatically need to be replaced. Most historic doors can be adequately repaired at far less cost and may outlive newer examples, as the quality of historic timber can sometimes be better than the materials now available. However, the bottom section of the door and its sill are certainly more exposed to weather than many other elements of joinery so they will deteriorate over time, even when made of hardwood. Cracks or open joints may therefore need to be filled to prevent water getting in. If water is able to penetrate these areas, it can do serious damage, so it is important to check any timberwork carefully in order to spot potential problems at an early stage. A skilled carpenter or joiner will be able to cut out small areas of decay and repair them with a new piece of timber. The distortion of timbers is rarely a problem and is usually attributable to the natural movement that occurred while the timber was drying out.

It should also be possible to open and close a door easily, without using any force. Worn or badly fitted hinges can damage both the door and the frame, whilst open joints can allow the frame of a door to sag, making opening and closing difficult. Check to see whether the door has warped or deformed due to joint failure. Problems like these can be put right by an experienced joiner. The principle to adopt in all joinery repairs is to retain as much of the original as possible and to replace only what is necessary, using matching timber.

Finishes: Traditionally, external oak doors were left untreated though there is some evidence that they may once have been limewashed. Though some people now favour regular treatment with linseed oil or tung oil this is not usually necessary. Left to its own devices oak will weather to an attractive silvery grey colour and will withstand the elements quite adequately. On the other hand, softwoods, such as pine and fir, which were commonly used from the Georgian period onwards, are generally less durable and need to be painted to protect them from decay.

Ironmongery: This is a general name for door and window fittings including hinges, locks and catches, handles and knobs. Such items are often highly decorative and are therefore hugely important to the character of old doors. For this reason, they should be repaired and retained if possible. A skilled blacksmith or locksmith may be able to help.

Things to do...

- Check all doors, sills and frames for signs of timber decay or damage. Repairs should be carried out by a skilled carpenter or joiner and advice sought from your professional advisor if necessary.
- If areas of softwood have previously been painted, make sure that the integrity of the surface is maintained. This will probably mean repainting external timberwork every few years though evidence suggests that lead paints and linseed oil paints will last longer than modern alternatives.
- Lubricate door ironmongery and check the security of any locks.

Further information

- SPAB Technical Q&A Number 5 - [Old Doors](#)
- [Early and Vernacular Door Fittings](#) by Linda Hall (Building Conservation Directory)
- [Conservation, Care and Maintenance of Keys and Locks](#) - Churchcare

Need more help?

If you have any questions about maintenance or repair issues contact our [Technical Helpline](#) for advice and guidance. This service is normally available on **Fridays** between **9.30am and 3.30pm** on **0207 456 0916**. Alternatively you can email your questions to advice@spabfim.org.uk. Copies of the SPAB's range of Technical Pamphlets and Information Sheets are available to purchase from our [online bookshop](#).

Sara Crofts Faith in Maintenance Project Director

Stave off decay by daily care ~ William Morris 1877

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