SPECIFIC DEFECTS REPORT

Relating to Dampness and Structural Alterations
At a Residential Property in West Sussex

FOR

Mr H

Marketing by:

www.1stAssociated.co.uk

0800 298 5424

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION AND INSTRUCTION

We have been instructed by Mr H to prepare a report on his property in West Sussex.

We have carried out a visual inspection of the property.

It was a typical Autumnal day with the weather ranging from approximately ten degrees to approximately fifteen degrees at the time of the inspection.

We are Independent Chartered Building Surveyors. We are registered with the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and are members of the Independent Surveyors Association,

The work has been carried out as per our standard Terms and Conditions of Contract which have been emailed to you as part of the confirmation of our instructions. If you would like further clarification please do not hesitate to contact us.

SYNOPSIS

Following a Home Buyers Report commissioned by Mr H we have been made aware of two issues that were identified:

1. The dampness to the rear of the property
2. The structural alteration to the central wall.

We have been asked to comment further on these.

CONSTRUCTION SUMMARY

External

Chimneys:	Brick chimney
Main Roof:	Pitched roof with concrete tiles
Gutters and Downpipes/ Soil and Vent Pipe:	Mixture of Cast Iron and Plastic
Walls:	Victorian stretcher bond brickwork (assumed)
External Joinery:	Mixture of timber with double glazed window and typically fully double glazed
Foundations:	Not inspected (assumed a stepped brick foundation)

Internal

Ceilings:		Lath and plaster and plasterboard (assumed)
Walls		Mixture of solid and studwork (assumed)
Floors:	Ground Floor:	Suspended timber floor to the front and a solid concrete floor (assumed) to kitchen and bathroom
	First Floor:	Not inspected

The boiler is wall mounted within the kitchen/bathroom.

We have used the term 'assumed' as we have not opened up the structure.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive summaries are always "dangerous" as they try and encapsulate relatively complex problems in a few precise and succinct words. Having said that here is our executive summary and recommendations:

Problem

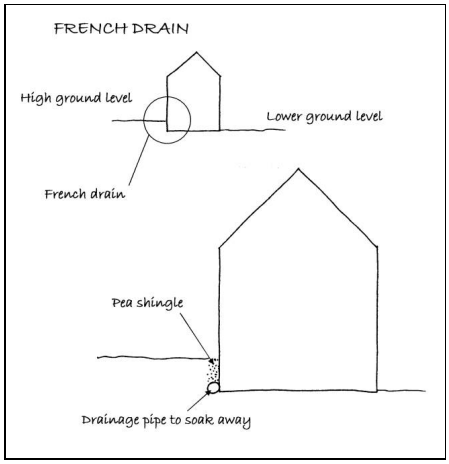
1. The Homebuyers Report identified dampness but has not given specific cause or a remedy.

2. The Homebuyers Report has identified structural concerns but not given a specific comment or remedy.

Dampness

1. We believe the problem to relate to a combination of issues primarily the ground level being too high but also the fact that to the rear of the property the water also appears to run towards the building and also it seems to be shaded from the sunlight.

   ACTION REQUIRED: We would recommend that the ground levels to both the front and rear of the property are lowered and a proper French gulley added. Please see the adjoining sketch and please note our article in the Appendices about French ponds which you should avoid!



   ANTICIPATED COST: £2,000 - £3,000; you do need to obtain your own quotations.

2. **Dampness may have affected the suspended timber floor**

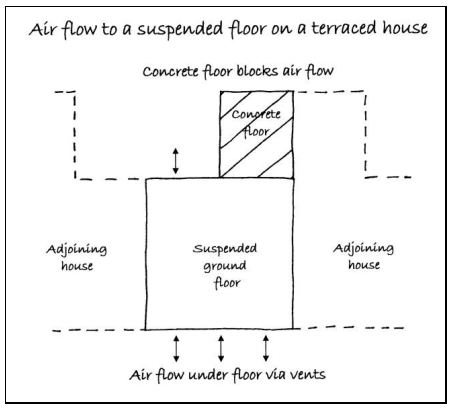
As you can see in the adjoining photos there is moss to the brick paves and also to the brick wall which indicates the area has been damp for a long time. It may have affected the suspended timber floor to the property. The suspended timber floor is to the front of the property and there is a concrete floor to the rear of the property.

Moss to the wall and brick paves indicates this area is damp and doesn't get much sun on it

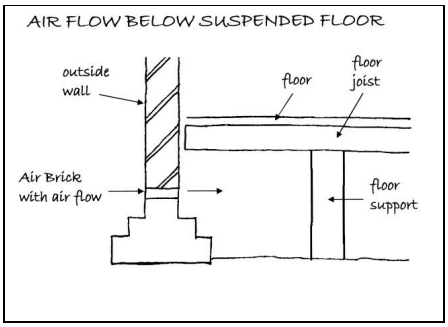
Cutting back of the brick where it is adjacent to the main property indicates that water may flow through this area

3. **Suspended timber ground floor**

The suspended timber floor requires airflow underneath it, you only have a few airbricks to the front and one airbrick to the rear as far as we can see. This means that the concrete is affectively acting like blotting paper for any dampness in the structure (please see the first sketch).



ACTION REQUIRED: We would recommend that you add additional air ventilation or even running vents internally where the timber floor meets the concrete floor.



Additionally we would recommend that you open up the floor to check its condition.

ANTICIPATED COST: £250 - £1,000 possibly more depending upon the amount of work required when opening up the floor; quotations required. Also it may be worth adding a running gulley internally as well as the airbricks.

Air vent under front door

4. **Single brick extension**

The bathroom extension has been built in a single brick wall so it was probably the old coal shed or similar storage area. We would expect dampness to occur in this type of construction. It would not meet current Building Regulation requirements for this type of building.

Single brick walls in bathroom

ACTION REQUIRED: The best way to keep this dry-ish (note we haven't said dry) is to have the French gulley to the side of it.

ANTICIPATED COST: Please see previous comments.

Single brick walls to bathroom

5. **General Comment**

You should obtain at least three like for like quotations from suitably qualified skilled tradespeople with regard to this work.

Structural Alterations

6. Structural Alterations Internally – central wall ground floor

Where a structural alteration has been carried out not to Building Regulations it would be more normal to have a pier both sides of any removed wall to give support to the lintel and the floor and structure above.

There is no pier in this instance therefore we feel it is unlikely that Building Regulation approval would have been obtained.

Missing pier where wall taken down

7. Shared Dividing Wall/Party Wall

In addition as you are obtaining support from the central shared wall, known as a party wall, there should also have been a Party Wall Agreement. As the interior of the property is relatively newly painted and possibly a skimcoat of plaster there are no identifying stress cracks around the lintel area where the point load would be occurring if it was defective.

ACTION REQUIRED: The only way we can mathematically establish if the lintel is acceptable is to have it opened up and the structure examined and calculations carried out to be submitted to Building Control to obtain retrospective advice. However we would comment that the structural alteration has clearly stood the test of time without any major bending or stress marks in the wall although do see our previous comments about it looking relatively newly painted and plastered.

ANTICIPATED COST: We are more than happy to return and comment further if you arrange for this or equally you could negotiate a discount purchase price, we would expect a worst case scenario to be in the region of £5,000 - £10,000, best case scenario to be in the region of a few hundred pounds which would be the cost of opening up the structure and obtaining calculations to establish it's condition and making good – this is not to obtain retrospective Building Control permission as this can sometimes be very difficult. We recommend opening up and calculations to be carried out. We would expect a reduction in the purchase price of between £5,000 - £10,000 to deal with this problem and the inconvenience associated with it and in the future there may be a reduction in the price when you come to sell the property. Quotations required.

Time Line – A brief history of the structure

We have not had the benefit of talking to the owners or the occupiers and therefore haven't been able to produce a Time Line other than:

DATE	DESCRIPTION
1880 - 1900	Year built
Date unknown	Various alterations over the years including double glazed windows, re-roofing, work to front and rear gardens

INSPECTION

Our inspection has been specifically related to the dampness and structural alterations issues detailed below:

Visual Inspection

Our inspection has taken the format of a visual inspection:

1. External of the property of the
   i. Front
   ii. Rear
   iii. Sides - we can't view the sides as it is a terraced property

   We have had the benefit of an x 16 x16 zoom lens on a digital camera

2. Internal of the property

   We have viewed:

   Ground Floor

   i. Through lounge
   ii. Hallway
   iii. Rear Kitchen (with walk through access to the bathroom)
   iv. Bathroom (rear ground floor)

3. Surrounding areas

   i. Front area
   ii. Rear area

4. We have not had the benefit of talking to the neighbours as they weren't in when we carried out the survey.

5. We have utilised an electronic conductivity meter (known commonly as damp meters). We have used a Gann Meter.

References

1stAssociated.co.uk – see articles on condensation, damp and French drains.

SURVEY FINDINGS

1. From our visual external inspection we noted:

   i. High ground levels to the front and rear with a slope towards the rear of the property.

High ground level to rear

   ii. High ground levels have also exposed the airbricks to act as gutters.

Airbrick acting as gutter

   iii. There is a damp proof course visible to the front of the property.

Damp proof course to front of property too low due to high ground level

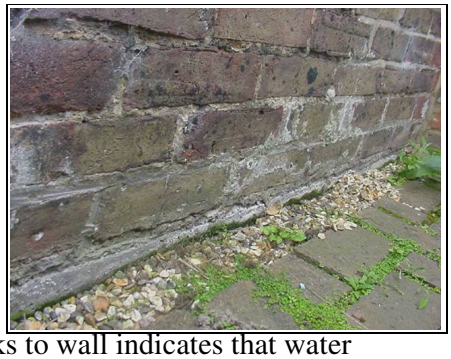
Close up of damp proof course

   iv. There is no damp proof course visible to the rear. It is a reasonable assumption that it also has a damp proof course.

v. Part of the rear of the property is built in a single brick predominantly to the bathroom area.

vi. We noted to the rear single storey bathroom part of the structure that there was a mixture of plastic gutters and cast iron downpipes which do tend to leak.

Mixture of plastic and cast iron gutters and downpipes



Marks to wall indicates that water runs down the side of the wall

Moss and grass between the brick paves indicates that water sits in this area possibly from adjacent overflowing drains

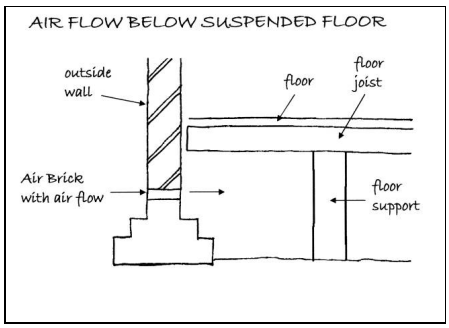
vii. There is also an unsecured plastic downpipe and hopperhead to the side of the property relating to the kitchen.

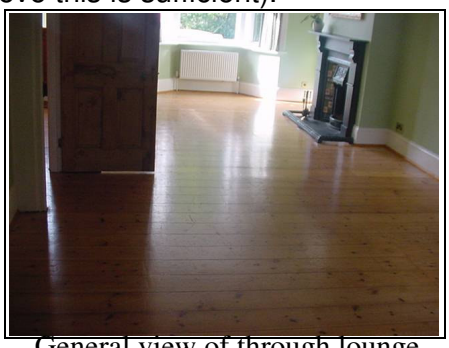
2. From our visual internal inspection we noted

i. Signs of deterioration of plaster were noted in the kitchen and to the dividing wall within the kitchen.

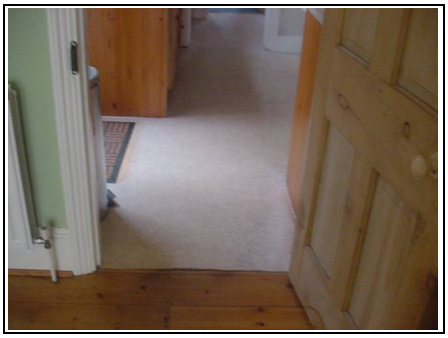
ii. On the removed internal wall we noted there was no pier to the left hand party wall, (all directions given as you face the property) therefore it is unlikely that this will have building regulations approval. We would advise that it also needs party wall approval as you are taking support from a dividing wall also known as a party wall which falls under the Party Wall Act 1996.

iii. It was noted there was a suspended timber floor with joists running front to back in the through lounge area with a solid concrete floor in the kitchen and bathroom area therefore there is no through flow of air underneath the property (one airbrick was noted but we don't believe this is sufficient).





General view of through lounge with joists running front to back

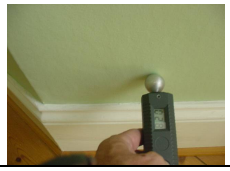
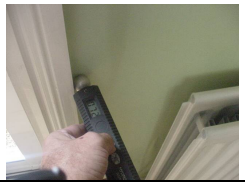
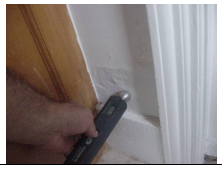


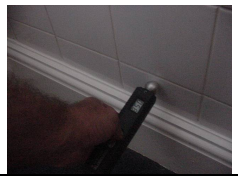
Timber suspended floor construction meets concrete in kitchen

Concrete between timber floor and the kitchen floor

Note: we have not moved furniture or fixtures and fittings.
Note: the full areas inspected are identified within the inspection part of the report.

3. Electronic Conductivity Meter Readings (Gann Damp Meter) was used, the readings are as follows:

Room (directions given as you face property)	**Readings Obtained**	**Typical Readings**
Typical solid wall reading		40 - 60
Through Lounge Front Bay window area	40-50	
Through lounge rear – left hand side: Skirting height: 1m: 2m approx:	 56 55 49	
Through lounge rear wall – right hand side: Skirting height: 1m: 2m approx:	 98 38 55	
Through Lounge Front bay	28 	
Through lounge Rear door - against door jam	72 	
Through lounge Rear door – away from door jam, indicating there may be conductive material around the frame	26 	
Kitchen and Bathroom Internal wall	69 	

Kitchen Concrete floor	71 	
Bathroom	58 	

4. We would comment that we feel there is a conductor within the wall, possibly a foil backed plaster as higher readings were obtained nearer to the door. Equally this could be due to the lack of a vertical damp proof course which we could see no sign of externally.
5. Note the bathroom construction and possibly part of the kitchen were single brick.

Other

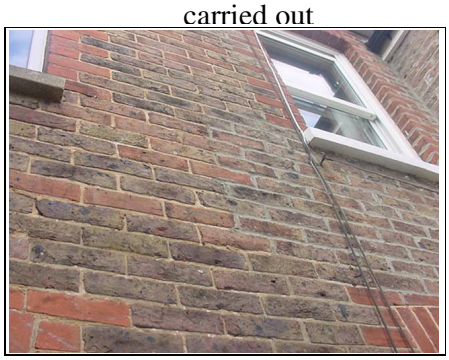
We would draw to your attention:

Walls

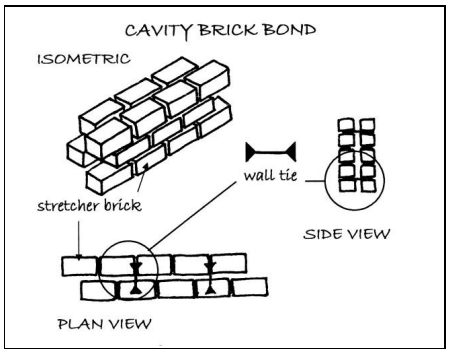
1. A circular cement plug to the rear cavity wall indicating insulation may have been added or a check for wall tie problems or somebody filling up a hole where bees or wasps have got in. We would recommend your legal advisor needs to specifically ask if cavity wall insulation has been added or wall tie replacement. This can affect our comments within this report.

Drill hole that has been resealed with a modern cement mortar indicating some work has been carried out

Old stretcher bond brickwork indicating cavity wall

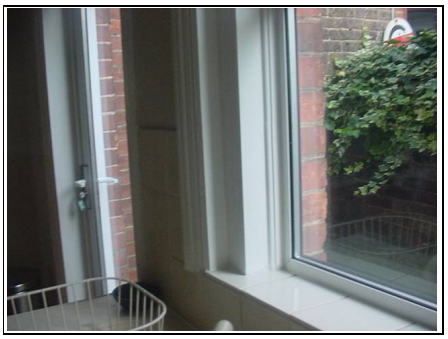


Shows that there has been repointing to the brickwork to the right hand side of the photo in a slightly greyer darker modern cement mortar



2. Windows

To the front bay window the timber surround with the double glazing within it rot was found.



Typical window detail with traditional wider brickwork

Wet rot to timber frame to front bay window

SUMMARY UPON REFLECTION

The Summary Upon Reflection is a second summary so to speak, which is carried out when we are doing the second or third draft a few days after the initial survey when we have had time to reflect upon our thoughts on the property. We would add the following in this instance:

We would recommend a discount is obtained on the purchase price in the region of £5,000 - £10,000 for each of the two elements ie. a total of £10,000 - £20,000.

We would also comment following our discussions with yourself that we don't feel that mortgage broker recommended surveyors, as there is a vested interest in the mortgage being taken by yourselves, are not truly independent particularly if the surveying company is in addition "related" to the estate agent be it directly or indirectly owned or on a panel of surveyors that the estate agents regularly uses.

If you would like any further advice on any of the issues discussed or indeed any that have not been discussed! Please do not hesitate to contact us on 0800 298 5424.

APPENDIX 1

French Drain

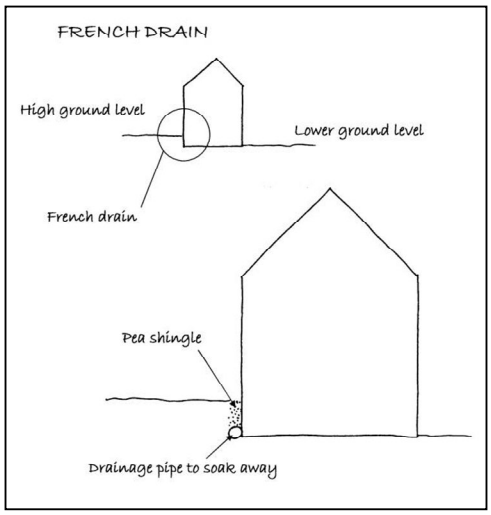
Using a French drain to resolve a dampness problem

We are finding where we are asked to look at damp walls and damp floors or damp problems in general that commonly it is because the external ground level is higher than the internal ground level, or airbricks have been blocked, or simply paving slabs, decking or briquettes have been used to form a patio area. This then discharges any rainwater against the building. Quite often the solution is to add a French drain.

Whilst French drains are quite simple and are basically nothing more than trenches filled with gravel, a although there is a bit more to them, as we will explain, they are almost a D.I.Y. job for most people and they are relatively easy to install and are low cost, However, you do need some care and attention, otherwise you can install what we have heard referred to, as the French pond.

What use is a French drain?

A French drain is a trench, the width of approximately six inches or 300 millimetres wide, or the width of your spade, and is approximately twice the depth, i.e. 12 inches or 300 millimetres. In most cases this will suffice, however, where there is a great deal of ground water you may wish to make the trench wider and deeper.



The French drain acts as an area where water soaks away quickly. We often recommend them close to building, but not next to the building, as this helps reduce the ground level and/or take any water that is directed at that area away. For example, where a patio has been put in place which aims any rainwater at part of the wall. As mentioned, whilst a French drain is a D.I.Y. job, it does need some understanding of how it works.

French drains must be on a slope

The piping that goes at the base of a French drain should be perforated or, as we did years ago for land drains, there should be gaps between each pipe. It should be set onto a bed of firm ground and the pipes should on a fall to the drain. Whilst you should be able to ensure there is enough fall by sight, we also like the idea of rolling a marble from one end to the other.

You will then need to put the pipes down, fill the trench with half an inch, to an inch, of good sized gravel. You can leave it at that, or in addition you can cover with stand and then turf over. This is how a basic French drain is carried out.

The French drain system that we would recommend

This would be as described, although we would add to the base an inch or two of gravel on to which the perforated drainage pipe will rest. It will then wrap around that drainage pipe filter fabric. This is to stop the holes in the perforated pipe from blocking up. By the way, the drainage pipe should be four to six inches/100 millimetres to 250 millimetres. We would then fill with gravel. In addition to this, we would add a silt trap and this is added in the run of the pipe and is very similar to a road gully (not that's of much use if you don't understand how a road gully works). The silt trap is a rectangular box with a pipe opening at each end. The drained water passes onto this and any particles sink to the bottom of the box and then the water travels on to the other side of the box, enabling you to feed into a drain.

These are usually made of glass reinforced polyester and have been available in this form since the mid-1980's. They are normally reinforced with a steel frame for additional strength and re-bedded in concrete.

The French pond!

French drains will, over time, clog up, which is why we recommend using a filter fabric. However, even with this they will eventually clog up. Unfortunately, there is no dino-rod equivalent, as it is normally fine sand, organic matter or clay that has clogged up the French drain. So, it is a case of digging it up and cleaning the pipework (or it may be quicker to just replace it), adding a filter fabric and re-filling the gravel.

LIMITATIONS

Specific Defects Report

1. Conditions of Engagement

Please note: references to the masculine include, where appropriate, the feminine.

Subject to express agreement to the contrary (which in this particular case has been none) and any agreed amendments/additions (of which in this particular case there have been none), the terms on which the Surveyor will undertake the Specific Defects Report are set out below.

Based upon a visual inspection as defined below the Surveyor will advise the Client by means of a written report as to his opinion of the visible condition and state of repair of the specific problem or problems only. In this instance ground floor dampness and alterations to the ground floor.

2. The Inspection

a) Accessibility and Voids

The Surveyor will base this report on a visual inspection and accordingly its scope is limited. It does not include an inspection of those areas, which are covered, unexposed or inaccessible. Our visual inspection will relate to the specific defects shown to us only.

b) Floors

We have not opened up the floor structure but would recommend that the floor structure is opened up. We have only carried out a visual inspection and any conclusions will be based upon our best assumptions. We can open up the floor if so required at an extra fee.

c) Roofs

The Surveyor will not inspect the roofs in this instance.

d) Boundaries, Grounds and Outbuildings

The inspection will not include boundaries, grounds and outbuildings unless specifically stated (none stated).

e) Services

No services inspected.

f) Areas not inspected

The Surveyor will have only inspected those areas identified within the report. His report will be based upon possible or probable defects based upon what he has seen together with his knowledge of that type of structure. If you feel that any further areas need inspection then please advise us immediately.

g) Specific Defects Report

As this is a report upon a Specific Defect we do not offer any comment or guidance upon reactive maintenance and/or planned or routine maintenance items.

h) Whilst we have used reasonable skill and care in preparing this report, it should be appreciated that the Chartered Surveyors cannot offer any guarantee that the property will be free from future defects or that existing defects will not suffer from further deterioration;

3. Deleterious and Hazardous materials

a) Unless otherwise expressly stated in the Report, the Surveyor will assume that no deleterious or hazardous materials or techniques have been used in the construction of the property. However the Surveyor will advise in the report if in his view there is a likelihood that high alumina cement (HAC) concrete has been used in the construction and that in such cases specific enquiries should be made or tests carried out by a specialist.

4. Contamination

The Surveyor will not comment upon the existence of contamination as this can only be established by appropriate specialists. Where, from his local knowledge or the inspection he considers that contamination might be a problem he should advise as to the importance of obtaining a report from an appropriate specialist.

5. Consents, Approvals and Searches

a) The Surveyor will assume that the property is not subject to any unusual or especially onerous restrictions or covenants which apply to the structure or affect the reasonable enjoyment of the property.

b) The Surveyor will assume that all bye-laws, Building Regulations and other consents required have been obtained. In the case of new buildings and alterations and extensions, which require statutory consents or approval the Surveyor will not verify whether, such consents have been obtained. Any enquiries should be made by the Client or his legal advisers.

Drawings and specifications will not be inspected by the Surveyor. It is the Clients responsibility to forward any drawings and specifications that he has or knows the whereabouts of to us to include information in our report. If these are not forthcoming we will make our best assumptions based upon the information available.

c) The Surveyor will assume that the property is unaffected by any matters which would be revealed by a Local Search and replies to the usual enquiries or by a Statutory Notice and that neither the property nor its condition its use or intended use is or will be unlawful.

6. Fees and Expenses

The Client will pay the Surveyor the agreed fee for the Report and any expressly agreed disbursements in addition.

7. Restrictions on Disclosures

a) This report is for the sole use of the Client in connection with the property and is limited to the current brief. No responsibility is accepted by the Chartered Surveyors if used outside these terms.

b) Should any disputes arise they will be dealt with and settled under English law;

c) This report does not fall under the Third Parties Rights Act.

8. Safe Working Practices

The Surveyor will follow the guidance given in Surveying Safely issued by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS).