# SITE CLASSIFICATION REPORT SUMMARY

**BLOCK:** 1  
**SECTION:** 58  
**SUBURB:** Moncrieff  
**JOB No:** 77119.13  
**DATE:** August 2015  
**CLIENT:** Black Mountain Construction Assurance Pty Ltd

## CLASSIFICATION PROCEDURES:

### EXISTING SUBSURFACE CONDITIONS:

**Test Pit 64:** Located on the boundary of Blocks 1 & 23 Section 58. Sandy silt topsoil filling to 0.2 m overlying well compacted, moist to dry clayey silty sand, clayey gravel and cobbly controlled filling to the limit of investigation depth of 1.7 m.

**Test Pit 65:** Located on the boundary of Blocks 22 & 23 Section 58. Sandy silt topsoil filling to 0.1 m, well compacted, moist to dry clayey silty sand, clayey gravel and cobbly controlled filling to 1.2 m then very stiff, moist to dry clayey silt to 1.5 m overlying high strength, moderately weathered siltstone bedrock to the refusal depth of 1.6 m.

## BULK EARTHWORKS:

Filling within the block placed under Level 1 control as defined in AS 3798 – 2007 (Ref 1).

## SITE CLASSIFICATION:

Class M* (moderately reactive/filled block) based on limited subsurface information and determined in general accordance with the requirements of AS2870-2011 (Ref 2). The classification must be reassessed should the soil profile change either by adding fill or removing soil from the block and/or if the presence of service trenches or retaining walls are within the zone of influence of the block. Reference should be made to the comments provided below.

## FOOTING SYSTEMS:

Reference must be made to AS2870-2011 (Ref 2) which indicates footing systems that are appropriate for each site classification. All footings must found within a uniform bearing stratum of suitable strength/material, below the zone of influence of any service trenches, backfill zones, retaining walls or underground structures. Masonry walls should be articulated in accordance with current best practice. Footing systems must be confirmed by a structural engineer taking into consideration any onsite or offsite constraints.

## MAINTENANCE GUIDELINES:

CSIRO Sheet BTF 18 ‘Foundation Maintenance & Footing Performance’ (attached). Refer to comments about gardens, landscaping and trees on the performance of foundation soils.

## COMMENTS/LIMITATIONS:

Development specific geotechnical investigations must be undertaken.

Additional topsoils / filling may have been spread subsequent to the investigation.

Site preparation prior to the construction should include removal of all vegetation, topsoil and any uncontrolled filling.

All new filling must be placed under controlled conditions (AS 3798-2007).

Some variability in subsurface conditions must be anticipated.

Moisture condition of site soils and/or the presence of groundwater may vary considerably from time of investigation compared to at the time of construction.

Depending on the depth of site cut and trenches, rock excavation may be required.

It is recommended that footing excavations be inspected by a geotechnical engineer.

This report must be read in conjunction with the attached notes “About this Inspection Report”.

## REFERENCES:

Introduction
These notes are provided to amplify DP’s inspection report in regard to the limitations of carrying out inspection work. Not all notes are necessarily relevant to this report.

Standards
This inspection report has been prepared by qualified personnel to current engineering standards of interpretation and analysis.

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Reports
This inspection report may include advice or opinion that is based on engineering and/or geological interpretation, information provided by the client or the client’s agent, and information gained from:

• an investigation report for the project (if available to DP);
• inspection of the work, exposed ground conditions, excavation spoil and performance of excavating equipment while DP was on site;
• investigation and testing that was carried out during the site inspection;
• anecdotal information provided by authoritative site personnel; and
• DP’s experience and knowledge of local geology.

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• unexpected variations in subsurface conditions that are not evident from the inspection; and
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Foundation Maintenance and Footing Performance: A Homeowner’s Guide

Buildings can and often do move. This movement can be up, down, lateral or rotational. The fundamental cause of movement in buildings can usually be related to one or more problems in the foundation soil. It is important for the homeowner to identify the soil type in order to ascertain the measures that should be put in place in order to ensure that problems in the foundation soil can be prevented, thus protecting against building movement.

This Building Technology File is designed to identify causes of soil-related building movement, and to suggest methods of prevention of resultant cracking in buildings.

**Soil Types**

The types of soils usually present under the topsoil in land zoned for residential buildings can be split into two approximate groups – granular and clay. Quite often, foundation soil is a mixture of both types. The general problems associated with soils having granular content are usually caused by erosion. Clay soils are subject to saturation and swell/shrink problems.

Classifications for a given area can generally be obtained by application to the local authority, but these are sometimes unreliable and if there is doubt, a geotechnical report should be commissioned. As most buildings suffering movement problems are founded on clay soils, there is an emphasis on classification of soils according to the amount of swell and shrinkage they experience with variations of water content. The table below is Table 2.1 from AS 2870, the Residential Slab and Footing Code.

**Causes of Movement**

Settlement due to construction
There are two types of settlement that occur as a result of construction:
- **Immediate settlement** occurs when a building is first placed on its foundation soil, as a result of compaction of the soil under the weight of the structure. The cohesive quality of clay soil mitigates against this, but granular (particularly sandy) soil is susceptible.
- **Consolidation settlement** is a feature of clay soil and may take place because of the expulsion of moisture from the soil or because of the soil’s lack of resistance to local compressive or shear stresses. This will usually take place during the first few months after construction, but has been known to take many years in exceptional cases.

These problems are the province of the builder and should be taken into consideration as part of the preparation of the site for construction. Building Technology File 19 (BTF 19) deals with these problems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Foundation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Most sand and rock sites with little or no ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Slightly reactive clay sites with only slight ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Moderately reactive clay or silt sites, which can experience moderate ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Highly reactive clay sites, which can experience high ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Extremely reactive sites, which can experience extreme ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A to P</td>
<td>Filled sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Sites which include soft soils, such as soft clay or silt or loose sands; landslip; mine subsidence; collapsing soils; soils subject to erosion; reactive sites subject to abnormal moisture conditions or sites which cannot be classified otherwise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Erosion**

All soils are prone to erosion, but sandy soil is particularly susceptible to being washed away. Even clay with a sand component of say 10% or more can suffer from erosion.

**Saturation**

This is particularly a problem in clay soils. Saturation creates a bog-like suspension of the soil that causes it to lose virtually all of its bearing capacity. To a lesser degree, sand is affected by saturation because saturated sand may undergo a reduction in volume – particularly imported sand fill for bedding and blinding layers. However, this usually occurs as immediate settlement and should normally be the province of the builder.

**Seasonal swelling and shrinkage of soil**

All clays react to the presence of water by slowly absorbing it, making the soil increase in volume (see table below). The degree of increase varies considerably between different clays, as does the degree of decrease during the subsequent drying out caused by fair weather periods. Because of the low absorption and expulsion rate, this phenomenon will not usually be noticeable unless there are prolonged rainy or dry periods, usually of weeks or months, depending on the land and soil characteristics.

The swelling of soil creates an upward force on the footings of the building, and shrinkage creates subsidence that takes away the support needed by the footing to retain equilibrium.

**Shear failure**

This phenomenon occurs when the foundation soil does not have sufficient strength to support the weight of the footing. There are two major post-construction causes:
- **Significant load increase.**
- **Reduction of lateral support of the soil under the footing due to erosion or excavation.**
- In clay soil, shear failure can be caused by saturation of the soil adjacent to or under the footing.
Tree root growth
Trees and shrubs that are allowed to grow in the vicinity of footings can cause foundation soil movement in two ways:

- Roots that grow under footings may increase in cross-sectional size, exerting upward pressure on footings.
- Roots in the vicinity of footings will absorb much of the moisture in the foundation soil, causing shrinkage or subsidence.

Unevenness of Movement

The types of ground movement described above usually occur unevenly throughout the building's foundation soil. Settlement due to construction tends to be uneven because of:

- Differing compaction of foundation soil prior to construction.
- Differing moisture content of foundation soil prior to construction.

Movement due to non-construction causes is usually more uneven still. Erosion can undermine a footing that traverses the flow or can erode soil adjacent to a footing that runs in the same direction as the flow.

Saturation of clay foundation soil may occur where subfloor walls create a dam that makes water pond. It can also occur wherever there is a source of water near footings in clay soil. This leads to a severe reduction in the strength of the soil which may create local shear failure.

Seasonal swelling and shrinkage of clay soil affects the perimeter of the building first, then gradually spreads to the interior. The swelling process will usually begin at the uphill extreme of the building, or on the weather side where the land is flat. Swelling gradually reaches the interior soil as absorption continues. Shrinkage usually begins where the sun's heat is greatest.

Effects of Uneven Soil Movement on Structures

Erosion and saturation
Erosion removes the support from under footings, tending to cause subsidence of the part of the structure under which it occurs. Brickwork walls will resist the stress created by this removal of support by bridging the gap or cantilevering until the bricks or the mortar bedding fail. Older masonry has little resistance. Evidence of failure varies according to circumstances and symptoms may include:

- Step cracking in the mortar beds in the body of the wall or above/below openings such as doors or windows.
- Vertical cracking in the bricks (usually but not necessarily in line with the vertical beds or perrangs).

Isolated piers affected by erosion or saturation of foundations will eventually lose contact with the bearers they support and may tilt or fall over. The floors that have lost this support will become bouncy, sometimes rattling ornaments etc.

Seasonal swelling/shrinkage in clay
Swelling foundation soil due to rainy periods first lifts the most exposed extremities of the footing system, then the remainder of the perimeter footings while gradually permeating inside the building footprint to lift internal footings. This swelling first tends to create a dish effect, because the external footings are pushed higher than the internal ones.

The first noticeable symptom may be that the floor appears slightly dishy. This is often accompanied by some doors binding on the floor or the door head, together with some cracking of cornice mures. In buildings with timber flooring supported by bearers and joists, the floor can be bouncy. Externally there may be visible dishing of the hip or ridge lines.

As the moisture absorption process completes its journey to the innermost areas of the building, the internal footings will rise. If the spread of moisture is roughly even, it may be that the symptoms will temporarily disappear, but it is more likely that swelling will be uneven, creating a difference rather than a disappearance in symptoms. In buildings with timber flooring supported by bearers and joists, the isolated piers will rise more easily than the strip footings or piers under walls, creating noticeable doming of flooring.

Trees can cause shrinkage and damage

As the weather pattern changes and the soil begins to dry out, the external footings will be first affected, beginning with the locations where the sun's effect is strongest. This has the effect of lowering the external footings. The doming is accentuated and cracking reduces or disappears where it occurred because of dishing, but other cracks open up. The roof lines may become convex.

Doming and dishing are also affected by weather in other ways. In areas where warm, wet summers and cooler dry winters prevail, water migration tends to be toward the interior and doming will be accentuated, whereas where summers are dry and winters are cold and wet, migration tends to be toward the exterior and the underlying propensity is toward dishing.

Movement caused by tree roots

In general, growing roots will exert an upward pressure on footings, whereas soil subject to drying before tree or shrub roots will tend to remove support from under footings by inducing shrinkage.

Complications caused by the structure itself

Most forces that the soil causes to be exerted on structures are vertical – i.e. either up or down. However, because these forces are seldom spread evenly around the footings, and because the building resists uneven movement because of its rigidity, forces are exerted from one part of the building to another. The net result of all these forces is usually rotational. This resultant force often complicates the diagnosis because the visible symptoms do not simply reflect the original cause. A common symptom is binding of doors on the vertical member of the frame.

Effects on full masonry structures

Brickwork will resist cracking where it can. It will attempt to span areas that lose support because of subsided foundations or raised points. It is therefore usual to see cracking at weak points, such as openings for windows or doors.

In the event of construction settlement, cracking will usually remain unchanged after the process of settlement has ceased.

With local shear or erosion, cracking will usually continue to develop until the original cause has been remedied, or until the subsidence has completely neutralised the affected portion of footing and the structure has stabilised on other footings that remain effective.

In the case of swell/shrink effects, the brickwork will in some cases return to its original position after completion of a cycle, however it is more likely that the rotational effect will not be exactly reversed, and it is also usual that brickwork will settle into its new position and will resist the forces trying to return it to its original position. This means that in a case where swelling takes place after construction and cracking occurs, the cracking is likely to at least partly remain after the shrink segment of the cycle is complete. Thus, each time the cycle is repeated, the likelihood is that the cracking will become wider until the sections of brickwork become virtually independent.

With repeated cycles, once the cracking is established, if there is no other complication, it is normal for the incidence of cracking to stabilise, as the building has the articulation it needs to cope with the problem. This is by no means always the case, however, and monitoring of cracks in walls and floors should always be treated seriously.

Upheaval caused by growth of tree roots under footings is not a simple vertical shear stress. There is a tendency for the root to also exert lateral forces that attempt to separate sections of brickwork after initial cracking has occurred.
The normal structural arrangement is that the inner leaf of brickwork in the external walls and at least some of the internal walls [depending on the roof type] comprise the load-bearing structure on which any upper floors, ceilings and the roof are supported. In these cases, it is internally visible cracking that should be the main focus of attention, however there are a few examples of dwellings whose external leaf of masonry plays some supporting role, so this should be checked if there is any doubt. In any case, externally visible cracking is important as a guide to stresses on the structure generally, and it should also be remembered that the external walls must be capable of supporting themselves.

Effects on framed structures
Timber or steel framed buildings are less likely to exhibit cracking due to swell/shrink than masonry buildings because of their flexibility. Also, the doming/arching effects tend to be lower because of the lighter weight of walls. The main risks to framed buildings are encountered because of the isolated pier footings used under walls. Where erosion or saturation cause a footing to fall away, this can double the span which a wall must bridge. This additional stress can create cracking in wall linings, particularly where there is a weak point in the structure caused by a door or window opening. It is, however, unlikely that framed structures will be so stressed as to suffer serious damage without first exhibiting some or all of the above symptoms for a considerable period. The same warning period should apply in the case of upheaval. It should be noted, however, that where framed buildings are supported by strip footings there is only one leaf of brickwork and therefore the externally visible walls are the supporting structure for the building. In this case, the subfloor masonry walls can be expected to behave as full brickwork walls.

Effects on brick veneer structures
Because the load-bearing structure of a brick veneer building is the frame that makes up the interior leaf of the external walls plus perhaps the internal walls, depending on the type of roof, the building can be expected to behave as a framed structure, except that the external masonry will behave in a similar way to the external leaf of a full masonry structure.

Water Service and Drainage
Where a water service pipe, a sewer or stormwater drainage pipe is in the vicinity of a building, a water leak can cause erosion, swelling or saturation of susceptible soil. Even a minuscule leak can be enough to saturate a clay foundation. A leaking tap near a building can have the same effect. In addition, trenches containing pipes can become watercourses even though backfilled, particularly where broken rubble is used as fill. Water that runs along these trenches can be responsible for serious erosion, interstrata seepage into subfloor areas and saturation.

Pipe leakage and trench water flows also encourage tree and shrub roots to the source of water, complicating and exacerbating the problem. Poor roof plumbing can result in large volumes of rainwater being concentrated in a small area of soil:

- Incorrect falls in roof guttering may result in overflows, as may gutters blocked with leaves etc.
- Corroded guttering or downpipes can spill water to ground.
- Downpipes not positively connected to a proper stormwater collection system will direct a concentration of water to soil that is directly adjacent to footing, causing localised problems such as erosion, saturation and migration of water under the building.

### Seriousness of Cracking

In general, most cracking found in masonry walls is a cosmetic nuisance only and can be kept in repair or even ignored. The table below is a reproduction of Table C1 of AS 2870.

AS 2870 also publishes figures relating to cracking in concrete floors, however because wall cracking will usually reach the critical point significantly earlier than cracking in slabs, this table is not reproduced here.

### Prevention/Cure

**Plumbing**
Where building movement is caused by water service, roof plumbing, sewer or stormwater failure, the remedy is to repair the problem. It is prudent, however, to consider also rerouting pipes away from the building where possible, and relocating taps to positions where any leakage will not direct water to the building vicinity. Even where gully traps are present, there is sometimes sufficient spill to create erosion or saturation, particularly in modern installations using smaller diameter PVC fixtures. Indeed, some gully traps are not situated directly under the taps that are installed to charge them, with the result that water from the tap may enter the backfilled trench that houses the sewer piping. If the trench has been poorly backfilled, the water will either pond or flow along the bottom of the trench. As these trenches usually run alongside the footings and can be at a similar depth, it is not hard to see how any water that is thus directed into a trench can easily affect the foundation's ability to support footings or even gain entry to the subfloor area.

**Ground drainage**
In all soils there is the capacity for water to travel on the surface and below. Surface water flows can be established by inspection during and after heavy or prolonged rain. If necessary, a grated drain system connected to the stormwater collection system is usually an easy solution. It is, however, sometimes necessary when attempting to prevent water migration that testing be carried out to establish watertable height and subsoil water flows. This subject is referred to in BTF 19 and may properly be regarded as an area for an expert consultant.

**Protection of the building perimeter**
It is essential to remember that the soil that affects footings extends well beyond the actual building line. Watering of garden plants, shrubs and trees causes some of the most serious water problems. For this reason, particularly where problems exist or are likely to occur, it is recommended that an apron of paving be installed around as much of the building perimeter as necessary. This paving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASSIFICATION OF DAMAGE WITH REFERENCE TO WALLS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description of typical damage and required repair</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hairline cracks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine cracks which do not need repair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cracks noticeable but easily filled. Doors and windows stick slightly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cracks can be repaired and possibly a small amount of wall will need to be replaced. Doors and windows stick. Service pipes can fracture. Weather tightness often impaired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensive repair work involving breaking-out and replacing sections of walls, especially over doors and windows. Window and door frames distorted. Walls lean or bulge noticeably, some loss of bearing in beams. Service pipes disrupted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Water that is transmitted into masonry, metal or timber building elements causes damage and/or decay to those elements.
• High subfloor humidity and moisture content create an ideal environment for various pests, including termites and spiders.
• Where high moisture levels are transmitted to the flooring and walls, an increase in the dust mite count can ensue within the living areas. Dust mites, as well as dampness in general, can be a health hazard to inhabitants, particularly those who are abnormally susceptible to respiratory ailments.

The garden
The ideal vegetation layout is to have lawn or plants that require only light watering immediately adjacent to the drainage or paving edge, then more demanding plants, shrubs and trees spread out in that order.

Overwatering due to misuse of automatic watering systems is a common cause of saturation and water migration under footings. If it is necessary to use these systems, it is important to remove garden beds to a completely safe distance from buildings.

Existing trees
Where a tree is causing a problem of soil drying or there is the existence or threat of upheaval of footings, if the offending roots are subsidiary and their removal will not significantly damage the tree, they should be severed and a concrete or metal barrier placed vertically in the soil to prevent future root growth in the direction of the building. If it is not possible to remove the relevant roots without damage to the tree, an application to remove the tree should be made to the local authority. A prudent plan is to transplant likely offenders before they become a problem.

Information on trees, plants and shrubs
State departments overseeing agriculture can give information regarding root patterns, volume of water needed and safe distance from buildings of most species. Botanic gardens are also sources of information. For information on plant roots and drains, see Building Technology File 17.

Excavation
Excavation around footings must be properly engineered. Soil supporting footings can only be safely excavated at an angle that allows the soil under the footing to remain stable. This angle is called the angle of repose (or friction) and varies significantly between soil types and conditions. Removal of soil within the angle of repose will cause subsidence.

Remediation
Where erosion has occurred that has washed away soil adjacent to footings, soil of the same classification should be introduced and compacted to the same density. Where footings have been undermined, augmentation or other specialist work may be required. Remediation of footings and foundations is generally the realm of a specialist consultant.

Where isolated footings rise and fall because of swell/shrink effect, the homeowner may be tempted to alleviate floor bounce by filling the gap that has appeared between the bearer and the pier with blocking. The danger here is that when the next swell segment of the cycle occurs, the extra blocking will push the floor up into an accentuated dome and may also cause local shear failure in the soil. If it is necessary to use blocking, it should be by a pair of fine wedges and monitoring should be carried out fortightly.

This BTF was prepared by John Lewer FAIB, MIAMA, Partner, Construction Diagnosis.

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(Disclaimer: The information in this and other issues in the series is derived from various sources and was believed to be correct when published. The information is advisory. It is provided in good faith and is not claimed to be an exhaustive treatment of the relevant subject. Further professional advice needs to be obtained before taking any action based on the information provided.)

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JOB No: 77119.13     DATE: March 2015
CLIENT: Black Mountain Construction Assurance Pty Ltd

CLASSIFICATION PROCEDURES:

EXISTING SUBSURFACE CONDITIONS:

Test Pit 69: Located on the boundary of Blocks 14 & 15 Section 58. Sandy silt topsoil filling to 0.2 m, well compacted, moist to dry clayey silty gravel and cobbly controlled filling to 0.7 m then very stiff, moist to dry gravelly silt to 0.9 m overlying high strength, moderately to slightly weathered siltstone bedrock to the refusal depth of 1.0 m.

Test Pit 70: Located on the boundary of Blocks 12 & 13 Section 58. Sandy silt topsoil filling to 0.2 m, well compacted, moist to dry clayey silty gravel and cobbly controlled filling to 0.7 m then very stiff, moist to dry gravelly cobbly silt to 0.9 m overlying high strength, moderately to slightly weathered siltstone bedrock to the refusal depth of 1.0 m.

BULK EARTHWORKS:

Filling was placed over the northern half of the block under Level 1 control as defined in AS 3798 – 2007 (Ref 1).

SITE CLASSIFICATION: Class S* (slightly reactive/filled) based on limited subsurface information and determined in general accordance with the requirements of AS2870-2011 (Ref 2). If the building pad is founded entirely on weathered rock, a Class A classification may be appropriate. Therefore the classification must be reassessed should the soil profile change either by adding fill or removing soil from the block and/or if the presence of service trenches or retaining walls are within the zone of influence of the block. Reference should be made to the comments provided below.

FOOTING SYSTEMS: Reference must be made to AS2870-2011 (Ref 2) which indicates footing systems that are appropriate for each site classification. All footings must found within a uniform bearing stratum of suitable strength/material, below the zone of influence of any service trenches, backfill zones, retaining walls or underground structures. Masonry walls should be articulated in accordance with current best practice. Footing systems must be confirmed by a structural engineer taking into consideration any onsite or offsite constraints.

MAINTENANCE GUIDELINES: CSIRO Sheet BTF 18 'Foundation Maintenance & Footing Performance' (attached). Refer to comments about gardens, landscaping and trees on the performance of foundation soils.

COMMENTS/ LIMITATIONS:

Development specific geotechnical investigations must be undertaken.

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Site preparation prior to the construction should include removal of all vegetation, topsoil and any uncontrolled filling.

All new filling must be placed under controlled conditions (AS 3798-2007).

Some variability in subsurface conditions must be anticipated.

Moisture condition of site soils and/or the presence of groundwater may vary considerably from time of investigation compared to at the time of construction.

Hard rock excavation must be anticipated.

It is recommended that footing excavations be inspected by a geotechnical engineer.

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REFERENCES:


2. AS 2870-2011 'Residential Slabs and Footings,' Standards Association of Australia.
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These problems are the province of the builder and should be taken into consideration as part of the preparation of the site for construction. Building Technology File 19 (BTF 19) deals with these problems.

**Erosion**

All soils are prone to erosion, but sandy soil is particularly susceptible to being washed away. Even clay with a sand component of say 10% or more can suffer from erosion.

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This is particularly a problem in clay soils. Saturation creates a bog-like suspension of the soil that causes it to lose virtually all of its bearing capacity. To a lesser degree, sand is affected by saturation because saturated sand may undergo a reduction in volume – particularly imported sand fill for bedding and blinding layers. However, this usually occurs as immediate settlement and should normally be the province of the builder.

**Seasonal swelling and shrinkage of soil**

All clays react to the presence of water by slowly absorbing it, making the soil increase in volume (see table below). The degree of increase varies considerably between different clays, as does the degree of decrease during the subsequent drying out caused by fair weather periods. Because of the low absorption and expulsion rate, this phenomenon will not usually be noticeable unless there are prolonged rainy or dry periods, usually of weeks or months, depending on the land and soil characteristics.

The swelling of soil creates an upward force on the footings of the building, and shrinkage creates subsidence that takes away the support needed by the footing to retain equilibrium.

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This phenomenon occurs when the foundation soil does not have sufficient strength to support the weight of the footing. There are two major post-construction causes:

- Significant load increase.
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In clay soil, shear failure can be caused by saturation of the soil adjacent to or under the footing.

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Trees and shrubs that are allowed to grow in the vicinity of footings can cause foundation soil movement in two ways:

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The types of ground movement described above usually occur unevenly throughout the building's foundation soil. Settlement due to construction tends to be uneven because of:

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Effects of Uneven Soil Movement on Structures

Erosion and saturation
Erosion removes the support from under footings, tending to create subsidence of the part of the structure under which it occurs. Brickwork walls will resist the stress created by this removal of support by bridging the gap or cantilevering until the bricks or the mortar bedding fail. Older masonry has little resistance. Evidence of failure varies according to circumstances and symptoms may include:

- Step cracking in the mortar beds in the body of the wall or above/below openings such as doors or windows.
- Vertical cracking in the bricks (usually but not necessarily in line with the vertical beds or piers).

Isolated piers affected by erosion or saturation of foundations will eventually lose contact with the bearers they support and may tilt or fall over. The floors that have lost this support will become bouncy, sometimes rattling ornaments etc.

Seasonal swelling/shrinkage in clay
Swelling foundation soil due to rainy periods first lifts the most exposed extremities of the footing system, then the remainder of the perimeter footings while gradually permeating inside the building footprint to lift internal footings. This swelling first tends to create a dish effect, because the external footings are pushed higher than the internal ones.

The first noticeable symptom may be that the floor appears slightly dished. This is often accompanied by some doors binding on the floor or the door head, together with some cracking of cornice mitres. In buildings with timber flooring supported by bearers and joists, the floor can be bouncy. Externally there may be visible dishing of the hip or ridge lines.

As the moisture absorption process completes its journey to the innermost areas of the building, the internal footings will rise. If the spread of moisture is roughly even, it may be that the symptoms will temporarily disappear, but it is more likely that swelling will be uneven, creating a difference rather than a disappearance in symptoms. In buildings with timber flooring supported by bearers and joists, the isolated piers will rise more easily than the strip footings or piers under walls, creating noticeable doming of flooring.

Trees can cause shrinkage and damage
As the weather pattern changes and the soil begins to dry out, the external footings will be first affected, beginning with the locations where the sun's effect is strongest. This has the effect of lowering the external footings. The doming is accentuated and cracking reduces or disappears where it occurred because of dishing, but other cracks open up. The roof lines may become convex.

Domino and dishing are also affected by weather in other ways. In areas where warm, wet summers and cooler dry winters prevail, water migration tends to be toward the interior and doming will be accentuated, whereas where summers are dry and winters are cold and wet, migration tends to be toward the exterior and the underlying propensity is toward dishing.

Movement caused by tree roots
In general, growing roots will exert an upward pressure on footings, whereas soil subject to drying because of tree or shrub roots will tend to remove support from under footings by inducing shrinkage.

Complications caused by the structure itself
Most forces that the soil causes to be exerted on structures are vertical – i.e. either up or down. However, because these forces are seldom spread evenly around the footings, and because the building resists uneven movement because of its rigidity, forces are exerted from one part of the building to another. The net result of all these forces is usually rotational. This resultant force often complicates the diagnosis because the visible symptoms do not simply reflect the original cause. A common symptom is binding of doors on the vertical member of the frame.

Effects on full masonry structures
Brickwork will resist cracking where it can. It will attempt to span areas that lose support because of subsided foundations or raised points. It is therefore usual to see cracking at weak points, such as openings for windows or doors.

In the event of construction settlement, cracking will usually remain unchanged after the process of settlement has ceased.

With local shear or erosion, cracking will usually continue to develop until the original cause has been remedied, or until the subsidence has completely neutralised the affected portion of footing and the structure has stabilised on other footings that remain effective.

In the case of swell/shrink effects, the brickwork will in some cases return to its original position after completion of a cycle, however it is more likely that the rotational effect will not be exactly reversed, and it is also usual that brickwork will settle in its new position and will resist the forces trying to return it to its original position. This means that in a case where swelling takes place after construction and cracking occurs, the cracking is likely to at least partly remain after the shrink segment of the cycle is complete. Thus, each time the cycle is repeated, the likelihood is that the cracking will become wider until the sections of brickwork become virtually independent.

With repeated cycles, once the cracking is established, if there is no other complication, it is normal for the incidence of cracking to stabilise, as the building has the articulation it needs to cope with the problem. This is by no means always the case, however, and monitoring of cracks in walls and floors should always be treated seriously.

Uphover caused by growth of tree roots under footings is not a simple vertical shear stress. There is a tendency for the root to also exert lateral forces that attempt to separate sections of brickwork after initial cracking has occurred.
The normal structural arrangement is that the inner leaf of brickwork in the external walls and at least some of the internal walls (depending on the roof type) comprise the load-bearing structure on which any upper floors, ceilings and the roof are supported. In these cases, it is internally visible cracking that should be the main focus of attention, however there are a few examples of dwellings whose external leaf of masonry plays some supporting role, so this should be checked if there is any doubt. In any case, externally visible cracking is important as a guide to stresses on the structure generally, and it should also be remembered that the external walls must be capable of supporting themselves.

**Effects on framed structures**
Timber or steel framed buildings are less likely to exhibit cracking due to swell/shrink than masonry buildings because of their flexibility. Also, the doming/sinking effects tend to be lower because of the lighter weight of walls. The main risks to framed buildings are encountered because of the isolated pier footings used under walls. Where erosion or saturation causes a footing to fall away, this can double the span which a wall must bridge. This additional stress can create cracking in wall linings, particularly where there is a weak point in the structure caused by a door or window opening. It is, however, unlikely that framed structures will be so stressed as to suffer serious damage without first experiencing some or all of the above symptoms for a considerable period. The same warning period should apply in the case of upheaval. It should be noted, however, that where framed buildings are supported by strip footings there is only one leaf of brickwork and therefore the externally visible walls are the supporting structure for the building. In this case, the subfloor masonry walls can be expected to behave as full brickwork walls.

**Effects on brick veneer structures**
Because the load-bearing structure of a brick veneer building is the frame that makes up the interior leaf of the external walls plus perhaps the internal walls, depending on the type of roof, the building can be expected to behave as a framed structure, except that the external masonry will behave in a similar way to the external leaf of a full masonry structure.

**Water Service and Drainage**
Where a water service pipe, a sewer or stormwater drainage pipe is in the vicinity of a building, a water leak can cause erosion, swelling or saturation of susceptible soil. Even a minuscule leak can be enough to saturate a clay foundation. A leaking tap near a building can have the same effect. In addition, trenches containing pipes can become watercourses even though backfilled, particularly where broken rubble is used as fill. Water that runs along these trenches can be responsible for serious erosion, interstrata seepage into subfloor areas and saturation.

Pipe leakage and trench water flows also encourage tree and shrub roots to the source of water, complicating and exacerbating the problem.
Poor roof plumbing can result in large volumes of rainwater being concentrated in a small area of soil:
- Incorrect falls in roof guttering may result in overflows, as may gutters blocked with leaves etc.
- Corroded guttering or downpipes can spill water to the ground.
- Downpipes not positively connected to a proper stormwater collection system will direct a concentration of water to soil that is directly adjacent to footings, causing targeted problems such as erosion, saturation and migration of water under the building.

**Seriousness of Cracking**
In general, most cracking found in masonry walls is a cosmetic nuisance only and can be kept in repair or even ignored. The table below is a reproduction of Table C1 of AS 2870.

AS 2870 also publishes figures relating to cracking in concrete floors, however because wall cracking will usually reach the critical point significantly earlier than cracking in slabs, this table is not reproduced here.

**Prevention/Cure**

**Plumbing**
Where building movement is caused by water service, roof plumbing, sewer or stormwater failure, the remedy is to repair the problem. It is prudent, however, to consider also rerouting pipes away from the building where possible, and relocating taps to positions where any leakage will not direct water to the building vicinity. Even where gully traps are present, there is sometimes sufficient spill to create erosion or saturation, particularly in modern installations using smaller diameter PVC fixtures. Indeed, some gully traps are not situated directly under the taps that are installed to charge them, with the result that water from the tap may enter the backfilled trench that houses the sewer piping. If the trench has been poorly backfilled, the water will either pond or flow along the bottom of the trench. As these trenches usually run alongside the footings and can be at a similar depth, it is not hard to see how any water that is thus directed into a trench can easily affect the foundation's ability to support footings or even gain entry to the subfloor area.

**Ground drainage**
In all soils there is the capacity for water to travel on the surface and below it. Surface water flows can be established by inspection during and after heavy or prolonged rain. If necessary, a graded drain system connected to the stormwater collection system is usually an easy solution.

It is, however, sometimes necessary when attempting to prevent water migration that testing be carried out to establish watertable height and subsoil water flows. This subject is referred to in BIF 19 and may properly be regarded as an area for an expert consultant.

**Protection of the building perimeter**
It is essential to remember that the soil that affects footings extends well beyond the actual building line. Watering of garden plants, shrubs and trees causes some of the most serious water problems.
For this reason, particularly where problems exist or are likely to occur, it is recommended that an apron of paving be installed around as much of the building perimeter as necessary. This paving

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cracks noticeable but easily filled. Doors and windows stick slightly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cracks can be repaired and possibly a small amount of wall will need to be replaced. Doors and windows stick. Service pipes can fracture. Weathertightness often impaired</td>
</tr>
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<td>Extensive repair work involving breaking-out and replacing sections of walls, especially over doors and windows. Window and door frames distort. Walls lean or bulge noticeably, some loss of bearing in beams. Service pipes disrupted</td>
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Gardens for a reactive site

- Water that is transmitted into masonry, metal or timber building elements causes damage and/or decay to those elements.
- High subfloor humidity and moisture content create an ideal environment for various pests, including termites and spiders.
- Where high moisture levels are transmitted to the flooring and walls, an increase in the dust mite count can ensue within the living areas. Dust mites, as well as dampness in general, can be a health hazard to inhabitants, particularly those who are abnormally susceptible to respiratory ailments.

The garden

The ideal vegetation layout is to have lawn or plants that require only light watering immediately adjacent to the drainage or paving edge, then more demanding plants, shrubs and trees spread out in that order.

Overwatering due to misuse of automatic watering systems is a common cause of saturation and water migration under footings. If it is necessary to use these systems, it is important to remove garden beds to a completely safe distance from buildings.

Existing trees

Where a tree is causing a problem of soil drying or there is the existence or threat of upheaval of footings, if the offending roots are subsidiary and their removal will not significantly damage the tree, they should be severed and a concrete or metal barrier placed vertically in the soil to prevent future root growth in the direction of the building. If it is not possible to remove the relevant roots without damage to the tree, an application to remove the tree should be made to the local authority. A prudent plan is to transplant likely offenders before they become a problem.

Information on trees, plants and shrubs

State departments overseeing agriculture can give information regarding root patterns, volume of water needed and safe distance from buildings of most species. Botanic gardens are also sources of information. For information on plant roots and drains, see Building Technology File 17.

Excavation

Excavation around footings must be properly engineered. Soil supporting footings can only be safely excavated at an angle that allows the soil under the footing to remain stable. This angle is called the angle of repose (or friction) and varies significantly between soil types and conditions. Removal of soil within the angle of repose will cause subsidence.

Remediation

Where erosion has occurred that has washed away soil adjacent to footings, soil of the same classification should be introduced and compacted to the same density. Where footings have been undermined, augmentation or other specialist work may be required. Remediation of footings and foundations is generally the realm of a specialist consultant.

Where isolated footings rise and fall because of swell/shrink effect, the homeowner may be tempted to alleviate floor bounce by filling the gap that has appeared between the bearer and the pier with blocking. The danger here is that when the next swell segment of the cycle occurs, the extra blocking will push the floor up into an accentuated dome and may also cause local shear failure in the soil. If it is necessary to use blocking, it should be by a pair of fine wedges and monitoring should be carried out fortightly.

This BTF was prepared by John Lewer FAIB, MIAMA, Partner, Construction Diagnosis.

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The information in this and other issues in the series was derived from various sources and was believed to be correct when published. The information is advisory. It is provided in good faith and not claimed to be an exhaustive treatment of the relevant subject. Further professional advice needs to be obtained before taking any action based on the information provided.

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SITE CLASSIFICATION REPORT SUMMARY

BLOCK: 14  SECTION: 58  SUBURB: Moncrieff East
JOB No: 77119.13  DATE: March 2015
CLIENT: Black Mountain Construction Assurance Pty Ltd

CLASSIFICATION PROCEDURES:

EXISTING SUBSURFACE CONDITIONS:

Test Pit 69: Located on the boundary of Blocks 14 & 15 Section 58. Sandy silt topsoil filling to 0.2 m, well compacted, moist to dry clayey silty gravel and cobbly controlled filling to 0.7 m then very stiff, moist to dry gravelly silt to 0.9 m overlying high strength, moderately to slightly weathered siltstone bedrock to the refusal depth of 1.0 m.

Test Pit 70: Located on the boundary of Blocks 12 & 13 Section 58. Sandy silt topsoil filling to 0.2 m, well compacted, moist to dry clayey silty gravel and cobbly controlled filling to 0.7 m then very stiff, moist to dry gravelly cobbly silt to 0.9 m overlying high strength, moderately to slightly weathered siltstone bedrock to the refusal depth of 1.0 m.

BULK EARTHWORKS:
Filling was placed over the northern half of the block under Level 1 control as defined in AS 3798 – 2007 (Ref 1).

SITE CLASSIFICATION: Class S* (slightly reactive/filled) based on limited subsurface information and determined in general accordance with the requirements of AS2870-2011 (Ref 2). If the building pad is founded entirely on weathered rock, a Class A classification may be appropriate. Therefore the classification must be reassessed should the soil profile change either by adding fill or removing soil from the block and/or if the presence of service trenches or retaining walls are within the zone of influence of the block. Reference should be made to the comments provided below.

FOOTING SYSTEMS: Reference must be made to AS2870-2011 (Ref 2) which indicates footing systems that are appropriate for each site classification. All footings must found within a uniform bearing stratum of suitable strength/material, below the zone of influence of any service trenches, backfill zones, retaining walls or underground structures. Masonry walls should be articulated in accordance with current best practice. Footing systems must be confirmed by a structural engineer taking into consideration any onsite or offsite constraints.

MAINTENANCE GUIDELINES: CSIRO Sheet BTF 18 ‘Foundation Maintenance & Footing Performance’ (attached). Refer to comments about gardens, landscaping and trees on the performance of foundation soils.

COMMENTS/LIMITATIONS:

Development specific geotechnical investigations must be undertaken.

Additional topsoils / filling may have been spread subsequent to the investigation.

Site preparation prior to the construction should include removal of all vegetation, topsoil and any uncontrolled filling.

All new filling must be placed under controlled conditions (AS 3798-2007).

Some variability in subsurface conditions must be anticipated.

Moisture condition of site soils and/or the presence of groundwater may vary considerably from time of investigation compared to at the time of construction.

Hard rock excavation must be anticipated.

It is recommended that footing excavations be inspected by a geotechnical engineer.

This report must be read in conjunction with the attached notes “About this Inspection Report”.

REFERENCES:


Douglas Partners
Geotechnics | Environment | Groundwater
About this Inspection Report

Introduction
These notes are provided to amplify DP's inspection report in regard to the limitations of carrying out inspection work. Not all notes are necessarily relevant to this report.

Standards
This inspection report has been prepared by qualified personnel to current engineering standards of interpretation and analysis.

Copyright and Limits of Use
This inspection report is the property of DP and is provided for the exclusive use of the client for the specific project and purpose as described in the report. It should not be used by a third party for any purpose other than to confirm that the construction works addressed in the report have been inspected as described. Use of the inspection report is limited in accordance with the Conditions of Engagement for the commission.

DP does not undertake to guarantee the works of the contractors or relieve them of their responsibility to produce a completed product conforming to the design.

Reports
This inspection report may include advice or opinion that is based on engineering and/or geological interpretation, information provided by the client or the client’s agent, and information gained from:

- an investigation report for the project (if available to DP);
- inspection of the work, exposed ground conditions, excavation spoil and performance of excavating equipment while DP was on site;
- investigation and testing that was carried out during the site inspection;
- anecdotal information provided by authoritative site personnel; and
- DP’s experience and knowledge of local geology.

Such information may be limited by the frequency of any inspection or testing that was able to be practically carried out, including possible site or cost constraints imposed by the client/contractor(s). For these reasons, the reliability of this inspection report is limited by the scope of information on which it relies.

Every care is taken with the inspection report as it relates to interpretation of subsurface conditions and any recommendations or suggestions for construction or design. However, DP cannot anticipate or assume responsibility for:

- unexpected variations in subsurface conditions that are not evident from the inspection; and
- the actions of contractors responding to commercial pressures.

Should these issues occur, then additional advice should be sought from DP and, if required, amendments made.

This inspection report must be read in conjunction with any attached information. This inspection report should be kept in its entirety without separation of individual pages or sections. DP cannot be held responsible for interpretations or conclusions from review by others of this inspection report or test data, which are not otherwise supported by an expressed statement, interpretation, outcome or conclusion stated in this inspection report.
Foundation Maintenance and Footing Performance: A Homeowner’s Guide

Buildings can and often do move. This movement can be up, down, lateral or rotational. The fundamental cause of movement in buildings can usually be related to one or more problems in the foundation soil. It is important for the homeowner to identify the soil type in order to ascertain the measures that should be put in place in order to ensure that problems in the foundation soil can be prevented, thus protecting against building movement.

This Building Technology File is designed to identify causes of soil-related building movement, and to suggest methods of prevention of resultant cracking in buildings.

**Soil Types**

The types of soils usually present under the topsoil in land zoned for residential buildings can be split into two approximate groups – granular and clay. Quite often, foundation soil is a mixture of both types. The general problems associated with soils having granular content are usually caused by erosion. Clay soils are subject to saturation and swell/shrink problems.

Classifications for a given area can generally be obtained by application to the local authority, but these are sometimes unreliable and if there is doubt, a geotechnical report should be commissioned. As most buildings suffering movement problems are founded on clay soils, there is an emphasis on classification of soils according to the amount of swell and shrinkage they experience with variations of water content. The table below is Table 2.1 from AS 2870, the Residential Slab and Footing Code.

**Causes of Movement**

Settlement due to construction

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The first noticeable symptom may be that the floor appears slightly dished. This is often accompanied by some doors binding on the floor or the door head, together with some cracking of concrete mutes. In buildings with timber flooring supported by bearers and joists, the floor can be bouncy. Externally there may be visible dishing of the hip or ridge lines.

As the moisture absorption process completes its journey to the innermost areas of the building, the internal footings will rise. If the spread of moisture is roughly even, it may be that the symptoms will temporarily disappear, but it is more likely that swelling will be uneven, creating a difference rather than a disappearance in symptoms. In buildings with timber flooring supported by bearers and joists, the isolated piers will rise more easily than the strip footings or piers under walls, creating noticeable doming of flooring.

As the weather pattern changes and the soil begins to dry out, the external footings will be first affected, beginning with the locations where the sun's effect is strongest. This has the effect of lowering the external footings. The doming is accentuated and cracking reduces or disappears where it occurred because of dishing, but other cracks open up. The roof lines may become convex.

Doming and dishing are also affected by weather in other ways. In areas where warm, wet summers and cooler dry winters prevail, water migration tends to be toward the interior and doming will be accentuated, whereas where summers are dry and winters are cold and wet, migration tends to be toward the exterior and the underlying propensity is toward dishing.

Movement caused by tree roots

In general, growing roots will exert an upward pressure on footings, whereas soil subject to drying because of tree or shrub roots will tend to remove support from under footings by inducing shrinkage.

Complications caused by the structure itself

Most forces that the soil causes to be exerted on structures are vertical – i.e. either up or down. However, because these forces are seldom spread evenly around the footings, and because the building resists uneven movement because of its rigidity, forces are exerted from one part of the building to another. The net result of all these forces is usually rotational. This resultant force often complicates the diagnosis because the visible symptoms do not simply reflect the original cause. A common symptom is binding of doors on the vertical member of the frame.

Effects on full masonry structures

Brickwork will resist cracking where it can. It will attempt to span areas that lose support because of subsided foundations or raised points. It is therefore usual to see cracking at weak points, such as openings for windows or doors.

In the event of construction settlement, cracking will usually remain unchanged after the process of settlement has ceased.

With local shear or erosion, cracking will usually continue to develop until the original cause has been remedied, or until the subsidence has completely neutralised the affected portion of footing and the structure has stabilised on other footings that remain effective.

In the case of swell/shrink effects, the brickwork will in some cases return to its original position after completion of a cycle, however it is more likely that the rotational effect will not be exactly reversed, and it is also usual that brickwork will settle in its new position and will resist the forces trying to return it to its original position. This means that in a case where swelling takes place after construction and cracking occurs, the cracking is likely to at least partly remain after the shrink segment of the cycle is complete. Thus, each time the cycle is repeated, the likelihood is that the cracking will become wider until the sections of brickwork become virtually independent.

With repeated cycles, once the cracking is established, if there is no other complication, it is normal for the incidence of cracking to stabilise, as the building has the articulation it needs to cope with the problem. This is by no means always the case, however, and monitoring of cracks in walls and floors should always be treated seriously.

Upholstery caused by growth of tree roots under footings is not a simple vertical shear stress. There is a tendency for the root to also exert lateral forces that attempt to separate sections of brickwork after initial cracking has occurred.
The normal structural arrangement is that the inner leaf of brickwork in the external walls and at least some of the internal walls (depending on the roof type) comprise the load-bearing structure on which any upper floors, ceilings and the roof are supported. In these cases, it is internally visible cracking that should be the main focus of attention, however there are a few examples of dwellings whose external leaf of masonry plays some supporting role, so this should be checked if there is any doubt. In any case, externally visible cracking is important as a guide to stress on the structure generally, and it should also be remembered that the external walls must be capable of supporting themselves.

**Effects on framed structures**

Timber or steel framed buildings are less likely to exhibit cracking due to swell/shrink than masonry buildings because of their flexibility. Also, the domino/dishing effects tend to be lower because of the lighter weight of walls. The main risks to framed buildings are encountered because of the isolated pier footings used under walls. Where erosion or saturation cause a footing to fall away, this can double the span which a wall must bridge. This additional stress can create cracking in wall linings, particularly where there is a weak point in the structure caused by a door or window opening. It is, however, unlikely that framed structures will be so stressed as to suffer serious damage without first exhibiting some or all of the above symptoms for a considerable period. The same warning period should apply in the case of upheaval. It should be noted, however, that where framed buildings are supported by strip footings there is only one leaf of brickwork and therefore the externally visible walls are the supporting structure for the building. In this case, the subfloor masonry walls can be expected to behave as full brickwork walls.

**Effects on brick veneer structures**

Because the load-bearing structure of a brick veneer building is the frame that makes up the interior leaf of the external walls plus perhaps the internal walls, depending on the type of roof, the building can be expected to behave as a framed structure, except that the external masonry will behave in a similar way to the external leaf of a full masonry structure.

**Water Service and Drainage**

Where a water service pipe, a sewer or stormwater drainage pipe is in the vicinity of a building, a water leak can cause erosion, swelling or saturation of susceptible soil. Even a miniscule leak can be enough to saturate a clay foundation. A leaking tap near a building can have the same effect. In addition, trenches containing pipes can become watercourses even though backfilled, particularly where broken rubble is used as fill. Water that runs along these trenches can be responsible for serious erosion, interstrata seepage into subfloor areas and saturation.

Pipe leakage and trench water flows also encourage tree and shrub roots to the source of water, complicating and exacerbating the problem.

Poor roof plumbing can result in large volumes of rainwater being concentrated in a small area of soil:

- Incorrect falls in roof guttering may result in overflows, as may gutters blocked with leaves etc.
- Corroded guttering or downpipes can spill water to ground.
- Downpipes not positively connected to a proper stormwater collection system will direct a concentration of water to soil that is directly adjacent to footings, causing damage problems such as erosion, saturation and migration of water under the building.

**Seriousness of Cracking**

In general, most cracking found in masonry walls is a cosmetic nuisance only and can be kept in repair or even ignored. The table below is a reproduction of Table C1 of AS 2870.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of typical damage and required repair</th>
<th>Approximate crack width limit (see Note 3)</th>
<th>Damage category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hairline cracks</td>
<td>&lt;0.1 mm</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine cracks which do not need repair</td>
<td>&lt;1 mm</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cracks noticeable but easily filled. Doors and windows stick slightly</td>
<td>&lt;5 mm</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cracks can be repaired and possibly a small amount of wall will need to be replaced. Doors and windows stick. Service pipes can fracture. Weather tightness often impaired</td>
<td>5–15 mm (or a number of cracks 3 mm or more in one group)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensive repair work involving breaking-out and replacing sections of walls, especially over doors and windows. Window and door frames distort. Walls lean or bulge noticeably, some loss of bearing in beams. Service pipes disrupted</td>
<td>15–25 mm but also depend on number of cracks</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AS 2870 also publishes figures relating to cracking in concrete floors, however because wall cracking will usually reach the critical point significantly earlier than cracking in slabs, this table is not reproduced here.

**Prevention/Cure**

**Plumbing**

Where building movement is caused by water service, roof plumbing, sewer or stormwater failure, the remedy is to repair the problem. It is prudent, however, to consider also rerouting pipes away from the building where possible, and relocating taps to positions where any leakage will not direct water to the building vicinity. Even where gully traps are present, there is sometimes sufficient spill to create erosion or saturation, particularly in modern installations using smaller diameter PVC fixtures. Indeed, some gully traps are not situated directly under the taps that are installed to charge them, with the result that water from the tap may enter the backfilled trench that houses the sewer piping. If the trench has been poorly backfilled, the water will either pond or flow along the bottom of the trench. As these trenches usually run alongside the footings and can be at a similar depth, it is not hard to see how any water that is thus directed into a trench can easily affect the foundation’s ability to support footings or even gain entry to the subfloor area.

**Ground drainage**

In all soils there is the capacity for water to travel on the surface and below it. Surface water flows can be established by inspection during and after heavy or prolonged rain. If necessary, a graded drain system connected to the stormwater collection system is usually an easy solution.

It is, however, sometimes necessary when attempting to prevent water migration that testing be carried out to establish watertable height and subsoil water flows. This subject is referred to in BITF 19 and may properly be regarded as an area for an expert consultant.

**Protection of the building perimeter**

It is essential to remember that the soil that affects footings extends well beyond the actual building line. Watering of garden plants, shrubs and trees causes some of the most serious water problems. For this reason, particularly where problems exist or are likely to occur, it is recommended that an apron of paving be installed around as much of the building perimeter as necessary. This paving
should extend outwards a minimum of 900 mm (more in highly reactive soil) and should have a minimum fall away from the building of 1:60. The finished paving should be no less than 100 mm below brick vent bases.

It is prudent to relocate drainage pipes away from this paving, if possible, to avoid complications from future leakage. If this is not practical, earthenware pipes should be replaced by PVC and backfilling should be of the same soil type as the surrounding soil and compacted to the same density.

Except in areas where freezing of water is an issue, it is wise to remove taps in the building area and relocate them well away from the building – preferably not uphill from it (see BTF 19).

It may be desirable to install a grated drain at the outside edge of the paving on the uphill side of the building. If subsoil drainage is needed this can be installed under the surface drain.

Condensation
In buildings with a subfloor void such as where bearers and joists support flooring, insufficient ventilation creates ideal conditions for condensation, particularly where there is little clearance between the floor and the ground. Condensation adds to the moisture already present in the subfloor and significantly slows the process of drying out. Installation of an adequate subfloor ventilation system, either natural or mechanical, is desirable.

Warning: Although this Building Technology File deals with cracking in buildings, it should be said that subfloor moisture can result in the development of other problems, notably:

- Water that is transmitted into masonry, metal or timber building elements causes damage and/or decay to those elements.
- High subfloor humidity and moisture content create an ideal environment for various pests, including termites and spiders.
- Where high moisture levels are transmitted to the flooring and walls, an increase in the dust mite count can ensue within the living areas. Dust mites, as well as dampness in general, can be a health hazard to inhabitants, particularly those who are abnormally susceptible to respiratory ailments.

The garden
The ideal vegetation layout is to have lawn or plants that require only light watering immediately adjacent to the drainage or paving edge, then more demanding plants, shrubs and trees spread out in that order.

Overwatering due to misuse of automatic watering systems is a common cause of saturation and water migration under footings. If it is necessary to use these systems, it is important to remove garden beds to a completely safe distance from buildings.

Existing trees
Where a tree is causing a problem of soil drying or there is the existence of threat of upheaval of footings, if the offending roots are subsidiary and their removal will not significantly damage the tree, they should be severed and a concrete or metal barrier placed vertically in the soil to prevent future root growth in the direction of the building. If it is not possible to remove the relevant roots without damage to the tree, an application to remove the tree should be made to the local authority. A prudent plan is to transplant likely offenders before they become a problem.

Information on trees, plants and shrubs
State departments overseeing agriculture can give information regarding root patterns, volume of water needed and safe distance from buildings of most species. Botanic gardens are also sources of information. For information on plant roots and drains, see Building Technology File 17.

Excavation
Excavation around footings must be properly engineered. Soil supporting footings can only be safely excavated at an angle that allows the soil under the footing to remain stable. This angle is called the angle of repose (or friction) and varies significantly between soil types and conditions. Removal of soil within the angle of repose will cause subsidence.

Remediation

Where erosion has occurred that has washed away soil adjacent to footings, soil of the same classification should be introduced and compacted to the same density. Where footings have been undermined, augmentation or other specialist work may be required. Remediation of footings and foundations is generally the realm of a specialist consultant.

Where isolated footings rise and fall because of swell/shrink effect, the homeowner may be tempted to alleviate floor bounce by filling the gap that has appeared between the bearer and the pier with blocking. The danger here is that when the next swell segment of the cycle occurs, the extra blocking will push the floor up into an accentuated dome and may also cause local shear failure in the soil. If it is necessary to use blocking, it should be by a pair of fine wedges and monitoring should be carried out fortuitously.

This BTF was prepared by John Lewer FIAI, MIAMA, Partner, Construction Diagnosis.
# SITE CLASSIFICATION REPORT SUMMARY

**BLOCK:** 15  
**SECTION:** 58  
**SUBURB:** Moncrieff East  
**JOB No:** 77119.13  
**DATE:** March 2015  
**CLIENT:** Black Mountain Construction Assurance Pty Ltd

## CLASSIFICATION PROCEDURES:

### EXISTING SUBSURFACE CONDITIONS:

**Test Pit 68:** Located on the boundary of Blocks 15 & 16 Section 58. Sandy silt topsoil filling to 0.2 m overlying high strength, moderately to slightly weathered siltstone bedrock to the refusal depth of 0.4 m.

**Test Pit 69:** Located on the boundary of Blocks 14 & 15 Section 58. Sandy silt topsoil filling to 0.2 m, well compacted, moist to dry clayey silty gravel and cobbly controlled filling to 0.7 m then very stiff, moist to dry gravelly silt to 0.9 m overlying high strength, moderately to slightly weathered siltstone bedrock to the refusal depth of 1.0 m.

## BULK EARTHWORKS:

Filling was placed over the northern half of the block under Level 1 control as defined in AS 3798 – 2007 (Ref 1).

## SITE CLASSIFICATION:

Class S* (slightly reactive/filled) based on limited subsurface information and determined in general accordance with the requirements of AS2870-2011 (Ref 2). If the building pad is founded entirely on weathered rock, a Class A classification may be appropriate. Therefore the classification must be reassessed should the soil profile change either by adding fill or removing soil from the block and/or if the presence of service trenches or retaining walls are within the zone of influence of the block. Reference should be made to the comments provided below.

## FOOTING SYSTEMS:

Reference must be made to AS2870-2011 (Ref 2) which indicates footing systems that are appropriate for each site classification. All footings must found within a uniform bearing stratum of suitable strength/material, below the zone of influence of any service trenches, backfill zones, retaining walls or underground structures. Masonry walls should be articulated in accordance with current best practice. Footing systems must be confirmed by a structural engineer taking into consideration any onsite or offsite constraints.

## MAINTENANCE GUIDELINES:

CSIRO Sheet BTF 18 ‘Foundation Maintenance & Footing Performance’ (attached). Refer to comments about gardens, landscaping and trees on the performance of foundation soils.

## COMMENTS/ LIMITATIONS:

Development specific geotechnical investigations must be undertaken.

Additional topsoils / filling may have been spread subsequent to the investigation.

Site preparation prior to the construction should include removal of all vegetation, topsoil and any uncontrolled filling.

All new filling must be placed under controlled conditions (AS 3798-2007).

Some variability in subsurface conditions must be anticipated.

Moisture condition of site soils and/or the presence of groundwater may vary considerably from time of investigation compared to at the time of construction.

Hard rock excavation must be anticipated.

It is recommended that footing excavations be inspected by a geotechnical engineer.

This report must be read in conjunction with the attached notes “About this Inspection Report”.

## REFERENCES:

About this Inspection Report

Introduction
These notes are provided to amplify DP’s inspection report in regard to the limitations of carrying out inspection work. Not all notes are necessarily relevant to this report.

Standards
This inspection report has been prepared by qualified personnel to current engineering standards of interpretation and analysis.

Copyright and Limits of Use
This inspection report is the property of DP and is provided for the exclusive use of the client for the specific project and purpose as described in the report. It should not be used by a third party for any purpose other than to confirm that the construction works addressed in the report have been inspected as described. Use of the inspection report is limited in accordance with the Conditions of Engagement for the commission.

DP does not undertake to guarantee the works of the contractors or relieve them of their responsibility to produce a completed product conforming to the design.

Reports
This inspection report may include advice or opinion that is based on engineering and/or geological interpretation, information provided by the client or the client’s agent, and information gained from:

- an investigation report for the project (if available to DP);
- inspection of the work, exposed ground conditions, excavation spoil and performance of excavating equipment while DP was on site;
- investigation and testing that was carried out during the site inspection;
- anecdotal information provided by authoritative site personnel; and
- DP’s experience and knowledge of local geology.

Such information may be limited by the frequency of any inspection or testing that was able to be practically carried out, including possible site or cost constraints imposed by the client/contractor(s). For these reasons, the reliability of this inspection report is limited by the scope of information on which it relies.

Every care is taken with the inspection report as it relates to interpretation of subsurface conditions and any recommendations or suggestions for construction or design. However, DP cannot anticipate or assume responsibility for:

- unexpected variations in subsurface conditions that are not evident from the inspection; and
- the actions of contractors responding to commercial pressures.

Should these issues occur, then additional advice should be sought from DP and, if required, amendments made.

This inspection report must be read in conjunction with any attached information. This inspection report should be kept in its entirety without separation of individual pages or sections. DP cannot be held responsible for interpretations or conclusions from review by others of this inspection report or test data, which are not otherwise supported by an expressed statement, interpretation, outcome or conclusion stated in this inspection report.
Foundation Maintenance
and Footing Performance:
A Homeowner’s Guide

Buildings can and often do move. This movement can be up, down, lateral or rotational. The fundamental cause of movement in buildings can usually be related to one or more problems in the foundation soil. It is important for the homeowner to identify the soil type in order to ascertain the measures that should be put in place in order to ensure that problems in the foundation soil can be prevented, thus protecting against building movement.

This Building Technology File is designed to identify causes of soil-related building movement, and to suggest methods of prevention of resultant cracking in buildings.

Soil Types

The types of soils usually present under the topsoil in land zoned for residential buildings can be split into two approximate groups – granular and clay. Quite often, foundation soil is a mixture of both types. The general problems associated with soils having granular content are usually caused by erosion. Clay soils are subject to saturation and swell/shrink problems.

Classifications for a given area can generally be obtained by application to the local authority, but these are sometimes unreliable and if there is doubt, a geotechnical report should be commissioned.

As most buildings suffering movement problems are founded on clay soils, there is an emphasis on classification of soils according to the amount of swell and shrinkage they experience with variations of water content. The table below is Table 2.1 from AS 2870, the Residential Slab and Footing Code.

Causes of Movement

Settlement due to construction

There are two types of settlement that occur as a result of construction:

- Immediate settlement occurs when a building is first placed on its foundation soil, as a result of compaction of the soil under the weight of the structure. The cohesive quality of clay soil mitigates against this, but granular (particularly sandy) soil is susceptible.
- Consolidation settlement is a feature of clay soil and may take place because of the expulsion of moisture from the soil or because of the soil’s lack of resistance to local compressive or shear stresses. This will usually take place during the first few months after construction, but has been known to take many years in exceptional cases.

These problems are the province of the builder and should be taken into consideration as part of the preparation of the site for construction. Building Technology File 19 (BT19) deals with these problems.

Erosion

All soils are prone to erosion, but sandy soil is particularly susceptible to being washed away. Even clay with a sand component of say 10% or more can suffer from erosion.

Saturation

This is particularly a problem in clay soils. Saturation creates a bog-like suspension of the soil that causes it to lose virtually all of its bearing capacity. To a lesser degree, sand is affected by saturation because saturated sand may undergo a reduction in volume – particularly imported sand fill for bedding and blinding layers. However, this usually occurs as immediate settlement and should normally be the province of the builder.

Seasonal swelling and shrinkage of soil

All clays react to the presence of water by slowly absorbing it, making the soil increase in volume (see table below). The degree of increase varies considerably between different clays, as does the degree of decrease during the subsequent drying out caused by fair-weather periods. Because of the low absorption and expulsion rate, this phenomenon will not usually be noticeable unless there are prolonged rainy or dry periods, usually of weeks or months, depending on the land and soil characteristics.

The swelling of soil creates an upward force on the footings of the building, and shrinkage creates subsidence that takes away the support needed by the footing to retain equilibrium.

Shear failure

This phenomenon occurs when the foundation soil does not have sufficient strength to support the weight of the footing. There are two major post-construction causes:

- Significant load increase.
- Reduction of lateral support of the soil under the footing due to erosion or excavation.
- In clay soil, shear failure can be caused by saturation of the soil adjacent to or under the footing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Most sand and rock sites with little or no ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Slightly reactive clay sites with only slight ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Moderately reactive clay or silt sites, which can experience moderate ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Highly reactive clay sites, which can experience high ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Extremely reactive sites, which can experience extreme ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A to P</td>
<td>Filled sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Sites which include soft soils, such as soft clay or silt or loose sands; landslip; mine subsidence; collapsing soils; soils subject to erosion; reactive sites subject to abnormal moisture conditions or sites which cannot be classified otherwise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

 GENERAL DEFINITIONS OF SITE CLASSES |
Tree root growth

Trees and shrubs that are allowed to grow in the vicinity of footings can cause foundation soil movement in two ways:

- Roots that grow under footings may increase in cross-sectional size, exerting upward pressure on footings.
- Roots in the vicinity of footings will absorb much of the moisture in the foundation soil, causing shrinkage or subsidence.

Unevenness of Movement

The types of ground movement described above usually occur unevenly throughout the building's foundation soil. Settlement due to construction tends to be uneven because of:

- Differing compaction of foundation soil prior to construction.
- Differing moisture content of foundation soil prior to construction.

Movement due to non-construction causes is usually more uneven still. Erosion can undermine a footing that traverses the flow or can erode soil adjacent to a footing that runs in the same direction as the flow.

Saturation of clay foundation soil may occur where subfloor walls create a dam that makes water pond. It can also occur wherever there is a source of water near footings in clay soil. This leads to a severe reduction in the strength of the soil which may create local shear failure.

Seasonal swelling and shrinkage of clay soil affects the perimeter of the building first, then gradually spreads to the interior. The swelling process will usually begin at the uphill extreme of the building, or on the weather side where the land is flat. Swelling gradually reaches the interior soil as absorption continues. Shrinkage usually begins where the sun's heat is greatest.

Effects of Uneven Soil Movement on Structures

Erosion and saturation

Erosion removes the support from under footings, tending to create subsidence of the part of the structure under which it occurs. Brickwork walls will resist the stress created by this removal of support by bridging the gap or cantilevering until the bricks or the mortar bedding fail. Older masonry has little resistance. Evidence of failure varies according to circumstances and symptoms may include:

- Step cracking in the mortar beds in the body of the wall or above/below openings such as doors or windows.
- Vertical cracking in the bricks (usually but not necessarily in line with the vertical beds or piers).

Isolated piers affected by erosion or saturation of foundations will eventually lose contact with the bearers they support and may tilt or fall over. The floors that have lost this support will become bouncy, sometimes rattling ornamentation.

Seasonal swelling/shrinkage in clay

Swelling foundation soil due to rainy periods first lifts the most exposed extremities of the footing system, then the remainder of the perimeter footings while gradually permeating inside the building footprint to lift internal footings. This swelling first tends to create a dish effect, because the external footings are pushed higher than the internal ones.

The first noticeable symptom may be that the floor appears slightly dishy. This is often accompanied by some doors binding on the floor or the door head, together with some cracking of cornice mitres. In buildings with timber flooring supported by bearers and joists, the floor can be bouncy. Externally there may be visible dishing of the hip or ridge lines.

As the moisture absorption process completes its journey to the innermost areas of the building, the internal footings will rise. If the spread of moisture is roughly even, it may be that the symptoms will temporarily disappear, but it is more likely that swelling will be uneven, creating a difference rather than a disappearance in symptoms. In buildings with timber flooring supported by bearers and joists, the isolated piers will rise more easily than the strip footings or piers under walls, creating noticeable doming of flooring.

Trees can cause shrinkage and damage

As the weather pattern changes and the soil begins to dry out, the external footings will be first affected, beginning with the locations where the sun's effect is strongest. This has the effect of lowering the external footings. The doming is accentuated and cracking reduces or disappears where it occurred because of drying, but other cracks open up. The roof lines may become convex.

Drying and dishing are also affected by weather in other ways. In areas where warm, wet summers and cooler dry winters prevail, water migration tends to be toward the interior and doming will be accentuated, whereas where summers are dry and winters are cold and wet, migration tends to be toward the exterior and the underlying propensity is toward dishing.

Movement caused by tree roots

In general, growing roots will exert an upward pressure on footings, whereas soil subject to drying because of tree or shrub roots will tend to remove support from under footings by inducing shrinkage.

Complications caused by the structure itself

Most forces that the soil causes to be exerted on structures are vertical - i.e., either up or down. However, because these forces are seldom spread evenly around the footings, and because the building resists uneven movement because of its rigidity, forces are exerted from one part of the building to another. The net result of all these forces is usually rotational. This resultant force often complicates the diagnosis because the visible symptoms do not simply reflect the original cause. A common symptom is binding of doors on the vertical member of the frame.

Effects on full masonry structures

Brickwork will resist cracking where it can. It will attempt to span areas that lose support because of subsided foundations or raised points. It is therefore usual to see cracking at weak points, such as openings for windows or doors.

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**Water Service and Drainage**

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In general, most cracking found in masonry walls is a cosmetic nuisance only and can be kept in repair or even ignored. The table below is a reproduction of Table C1 of AS 2870.

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**Prevention/Cure**

**Plumbing**

Where building movement is caused by water service, roof plumbing, sewer or stormwater failure, the remedy is to repair the problem. It is prudent, however, to consider also rerouting pipes away from the building where possible, and relocating taps to positions where any leakage will not direct water to the building vicinity. Even where gully traps are present, where there is sometimes sufficient spill to create erosion or saturation, particularly in modern installations using smaller diameter PVC fixtures. Indeed, some gully traps are not situated directly under the taps that are installed to charge them, with the result that water from the tap may enter the backfilled trench that houses the sewer piping. If the trench has been poorly backfilled, the water will either pond or flow along the bottom of the trench. As these trenches usually run alongside the footings and can be at a similar depth, it is not hard to see how any water that is thus directed into a trench can easily affect the foundation’s ability to support footings or even gain entry to the subfloor area.

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In all soils there is the capacity for water to travel on the surface and below it. Surface water flows can be established by inspection during and after heavy or prolonged rain. If necessary, a grated drain system connected to the stormwater collection system is usually an easy solution.

It is, however, sometimes necessary when attempting to prevent water migration that testing be carried out to establish watertable height and subsoil water flows. This subject is referred to in BTF 19 and may properly be regarded as an area for an expert consultant.

**Protection of the building perimeter**

It is essential to remember that the soil that affects footings extends well beyond the actual building line. Watering of garden plants, shrubs and trees causes some of the most serious water problems. For this reason, particularly where problems exist or are likely to occur, it is recommended that an apron of paving be installed around as much of the building perimeter as necessary. This paving

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should extend outwards a minimum of 900 mm (more in highly reactive soil) and should have a minimum fall away from the building of 1:60. The finished paving should be no less than 100 mm below brick base.

It is prudent to relocate drainage pipes away from this paving, if possible, to avoid complications from future leakage. If this is not practical, earthware pipes should be replaced by PVC and backfilling should be of the same soil type as the surrounding soil and compacted to the same density.

Except in areas where freezing of water is an issue, it is wise to remove taps in the building area and relocate them well away from the building – preferably not uphill from it (see BTF 19).

It may be desirable to install a grated drain at the outside edge of the paving on the uphill side of the building. If subsoil drainage is needed this can be installed under the surface drain.

Condensation

In buildings with a subfloor void such as where bearers and joists support flooring, insufficient ventilation creates ideal conditions for condensation, particularly where there is little clearance between the floor and the ground. Condensation adds to the moisture already present in the subfloor and significantly slows the process of drying out. Installation of an adequate subfloor ventilation system, either natural or mechanical, is desirable.

Warning: Although this Building Technology File deals with cracking in buildings, it should be said that subfloor moisture can result in the development of other problems, notably:

• Water that is transmitted into masonry, metal or timber building elements causes damage and/or decay to those elements.
• High subfloor humidity and moisture content create an ideal environment for various pests, including termites and spiders.
• Where high moisture levels are transmitted to the flooring and walls, an increase in the dust mite count can ensue within the living areas. Dust mites, as well as dampness in general, can be a health hazard to inhabitants, particularly those who are abnormally susceptible to respiratory ailments.

The garden

The ideal vegetation layout is to have lawn or plants that require only light watering immediately adjacent to the drainage or paving edge, then more demanding plants, shrubs and trees spread out in that order.

Overwatering due to misuse of automatic watering systems is a common cause of saturation and water migration under footings. If it is necessary to use these systems, it is important to remove garden beds to a completely safe distance from buildings.

Existing trees

Where a tree is causing a problem of soil drying or there is the existence or threat of upheaval of footings, if the offending roots are subsidiary and their removal will not significantly damage the tree, they should be severed and a concrete or metal barrier placed vertically in the soil to prevent future root growth in the direction of the building. If it is not possible to remove the relevant roots without damage to the tree, an application to remove the tree should be made to the local authority. A prudent plan is to transplant likely offenders before they become a problem.

Information on trees, plants and shrubs

State departments overseeing agriculture can give information regarding root patterns, volume of water needed and safe distance from buildings of most species. Botanic gardens are also sources of information. For information on plant roots and drains, see Building Technology File 17.

Excavation

Excavation around footings must be properly engineered. Soil supporting footings can only be safely excavated at an angle that allows the soil under the footing to remain stable. This angle is called the angle of repose (or friction) and varies significantly between soil types and conditions. Removal of soil within the angle of repose will cause subsidence.

Remediation

Where erosion has occurred that has washed away soil adjacent to footings, soil of the same classification should be introduced and compacted to the same density. Where footings have been undermined, augmentation or other specialist work may be required. Remediation of footings and foundations is generally the realm of a specialist consultant.

Where isolated footings rise and fail because of swell/shrink effect, the homeowner may be tempted to alleviate floor bounce by filling the gap that has appeared between the bearer and the pier with blocking. The danger here is that when the next swell segment of the cycle occurs, the extra blocking will push the floor up into an accentuated dome and may also cause local shear failure in the soil. If it is necessary to use blocking, it should be by a pair of fine wedges and monitoring should be carried out forthwith.

This BTF was prepared by John Lewer FAIB, MIAMA, Partner, Construction Diagnosis.
SITE CLASSIFICATION REPORT SUMMARY

BLOCK: 16  SECTION: 58  SUBURB: Moncrieff

JOB No: 77119.13  DATE: August 2015

CLIENT: Black Mountain Construction Assurance Pty Ltd

CLASSIFICATION PROCEDURES:

EXISTING SUBSURFACE CONDITIONS:

Test Pit 67: Located on the boundary of Blocks 17 & 18 Section 58. Sandy silt topsoil filling to 0.1 m, well compacted, moist to dry clayey silty sand, clayey gravel and cobble controlled filling to 1.1 m then stiff, moist to dry silt to 1.2 m overlying high strength, moderately to slightly weathered siltstone bedrock to the refusal depth of 1.3 m.

Test Pit 68: Located on the boundary of Blocks 15 & 16 Section 58. Sandy silt topsoil filling to 0.2 m overlying high strength, moderately to slightly weathered siltstone bedrock to the refusal depth of 0.4 m.

BULK EARTHWORKS:

Filling within the block placed under Level 1 control as defined in AS 3798 – 2007 (Ref 1).

SITE CLASSIFICATION: Class M* (moderately reactive/filled block) based on the worst case soil profile and on limited subsurface information and determined in general accordance with the requirements of AS2870-2011 (Ref 2). It must be noted that part of the block would be equivalent to Class S conditions therefore the classification must be reassessed should the soil profile change either by adding fill or removing soil from the block and/or if the presence of service trenches or retaining walls are within the zone of influence of the block. Reference should be made to the comments provided below.

FOOTING SYSTEMS:

Reference must be made to AS2870-2011 (Ref 2) which indicates footing systems that are appropriate for each site classification. All footings must found within a uniform bearing stratum of suitable strength/material, below the zone of influence of any service trenches, backfill zones, retaining walls or underground structures. Masonry walls should be articulated in accordance with current best practice. Footing systems must be confirmed by a structural engineer taking into consideration any onsite or offsite constraints.

MAINTENANCE GUIDELINES: CSIRO Sheet BTF 18 'Foundation Maintenance & Footing Performance' (attached). Refer to comments about gardens, landscaping and trees on the performance of foundation soils.

COMMENTS/ LIMITATIONS:

Development specific geotechnical investigations must be undertaken.

Additional topsoils / filling may have been spread subsequent to the investigation.

Site preparation prior to the construction should include removal of all vegetation, topsoil and any uncontrolled filling.

All new filling must be placed under controlled conditions (AS 3798-2007).

Some variability in subsurface conditions must be anticipated.

Moisture condition of site soils and/or the presence of groundwater may vary considerably from time of investigation compared to at the time of construction.

Hard rock excavation must be anticipated over parts of the block.

It is recommended that footing excavations be inspected by a geotechnical engineer.

This report must be read in conjunction with the attached notes “About this Inspection Report”.

REFERENCES:


Douglas Partners
Geotechnics / Environment / Groundwater
Introduction
These notes are provided to amplify DP’s inspection report in regard to the limitations of carrying out inspection work. Not all notes are necessarily relevant to this report.

Standards
This inspection report has been prepared by qualified personnel to current engineering standards of interpretation and analysis.

Copyright and Limits of Use
This inspection report is the property of DP and is provided for the exclusive use of the client for the specific project and purpose as described in the report. It should not be used by a third party for any purpose other than to confirm that the construction works addressed in the report have been inspected as described. Use of the inspection report is limited in accordance with the Conditions of Engagement for the commission.

DP does not undertake to guarantee the works of the contractors or relieve them of their responsibility to produce a completed product conforming to the design.

Reports
This inspection report may include advice or opinion that is based on engineering and/or geological interpretation, information provided by the client or the client’s agent, and information gained from:

- an investigation report for the project (if available to DP);
- inspection of the work, exposed ground conditions, excavation spoil and performance of excavating equipment while DP was on site;
- investigation and testing that was carried out during the site inspection;
- anecdotal information provided by authoritative site personnel; and
- DP’s experience and knowledge of local geology.

Such information may be limited by the frequency of any inspection or testing that was able to be practically carried out, including possible site or cost constraints imposed by the client/contractor(s). For these reasons, the reliability of this inspection report is limited by the scope of information on which it relies.

Every care is taken with the inspection report as it relates to interpretation of subsurface conditions and any recommendations or suggestions for construction or design. However, DP cannot anticipate or assume responsibility for:

- unexpected variations in subsurface conditions that are not evident from the inspection; and
- the actions of contractors responding to commercial pressures.

Should these issues occur, then additional advice should be sought from DP and, if required, amendments made.

This inspection report must be read in conjunction with any attached information. This inspection report should be kept in its entirety without separation of individual pages or sections. DP cannot be held responsible for interpretations or conclusions from review by others of this inspection report or test data, which are not otherwise supported by an expressed statement, interpretation, outcome or conclusion stated in this inspection report.
Foundation Maintenance and Footing Performance: A Homeowner’s Guide

Buildings can and often do move. This movement can be up, down, lateral or rotational. The fundamental cause of movement in buildings can usually be related to one or more problems in the foundation soil. It is important for the homeowner to identify the soil type in order to ascertain the measures that should be put in place in order to ensure that problems in the foundation soil can be prevented, thus protecting against building movement.

This Building Technology File is designed to identify causes of soil-related building movement, and to suggest methods of prevention of resultant cracking in buildings.

Soil Types

The types of soils usually present under the topsoil in land zoned for residential buildings can be split into two approximate groups – granular and clay. Quite often, foundation soil is a mixture of both types. The general problems associated with soils having granular content are usually caused by erosion. Clay soils are subject to saturation and swell/shrink problems.

Classifications for a given area can generally be obtained by application to the local authority, but these are sometimes unreliable and if there is doubt, a geotechnical report should be commissioned. As most buildings suffering movement problems are founded on clay soils, there is an emphasis on classification of soils according to the amount of swell and shrinkage they experience with variations of water content. The table below is Table 2.1 from AS 2870, the Residential Slab and Footing Code.

Causes of Movement

Settlement due to construction

There are two types of settlement that occur as a result of construction:

- Immediate settlement occurs when a building is first placed on its foundation soil, as a result of compaction of the soil under the weight of the structure. The cohesive quality of clay soil mitigates against this, but granular (particularly sandy) soil is susceptible.

- Consolidation settlement is a feature of clay soil and may take place because of the expulsion of moisture from the soil or because of the soil’s lack of resistance to local compressive or shear stresses. This will usually take place during the first few months after construction, but has been known to take many years in exceptional cases.

These problems are the province of the builder and should be taken into consideration as part of the preparation of the site for construction. Building Technology File 19 (BTF 19) deals with these problems.

Erosion

All soils are prone to erosion, but sandy soil is particularly susceptible to being washed away. Even clay with a sand component of say 10% or more can suffer from erosion.

Saturation

This is particularly a problem in clay soils. Saturation creates a bog-like suspension of the soil that causes it to lose virtually all of its bearing capacity. To a lesser degree, sand is affected by saturation because saturated sand may undergo a reduction in volume – particularly imported sand fill for bedding and blinding layers. However, this usually occurs as immediate settlement and should normally be the province of the builder.

Seasonal swelling and shrinkage of soil

All clays react to the presence of water by slowly absorbing it, making the soil increase in volume (see table below). The degree of increase varies considerably between different clays, as does the degree of decrease during the subsequent drying out caused by fair weather periods. Because of the low absorption and expulsion rate, this phenomenon will not usually be noticeable unless there are prolonged rainy or dry periods, usually of weeks or months, depending on the land and soil characteristics.

The swelling of soil creates an upward force on the footings of the building, and shrinkage creates subsidence that takes away the support needed by the footing to retain equilibrium.

Shear failure

This phenomenon occurs when the foundation soil does not have sufficient strength to support the weight of the footing. There are two major post-construction causes:

- Significant load increase.
- Reduction of lateral support of the soil under the footing due to erosion or excavation.
- In clay soil, shear failure can be caused by saturation of the soil adjacent to or under the footing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Foundation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Most sand and rock sites with little or no ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Slightly reactive clay sites with only slight ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Moderately reactive clay or silt sites, which can experience moderate ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Filled sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
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</table>
Tree root growth
Trees and shrubs that are allowed to grow in the vicinity of footings can cause foundation soil movement in two ways:

- Roots that grow under footings may increase in cross-sectional size, exerting upward pressure on footings.
- Roots in the vicinity of footings will absorb much of the moisture in the foundation soil, causing shrinkage or subsidence.

Unevenness of Movement

The types of ground movement described above usually occur unevenly throughout the building's foundation soil. Settlement due to construction tends to be uneven because of:

- Differing compaction of foundation soil prior to construction.
- Differing moisture content of foundation soil prior to construction.

Movement due to non-construction causes is usually more uneven still. Erosion can undermine a footing that traverses the flow or can cause soil adjacent to a footing that runs in the same direction as the flow.

Saturation of clay foundation soil may occur where subfloor walls create a dam that makes water pond. It can also occur wherever there is a source of water near footings in clay soil. This leads to a severe reduction in the strength of the soil which may create local shear failure.

Seasonal swelling and shrinkage of clay soil affects the perimeter of the building first, then gradually spreads to the interior. The swelling process will usually begin at the uphilled extreme of the building, or on the weather side where the land is flat. Swelling gradually reaches the interior soil as absorption continues. Shrinkage usually begins where the sun's heat is greatest.

Effects of Uneven Soil Movement on Structures

Erosion and saturation
Erosion removes the support from under footings, tending to create subsidence of the part of the structure under which it occurs. Brickwork walls will resist the stress created by this removal of support by bridging the gap or cantilevering until the bricks or the mortar bedding fail. Older masonry has little resistance. Evidence of failure varies according to circumstances and symptoms may include:

- Step cracking in the mortar beds in the body of the wall or above/below openings such as doors or windows.
- Vertical cracking in the bricks (usually but not necessarily in line with the vertical beds or perpendiculars).

Isolated piers affected by erosion or saturation of foundations will eventually lose contact with the bearings they support and may tilt or fall over. The floors that have lost this support will become bouncy, sometimes rattling ornaments etc.

Seasonal swelling/shrinkage in clay
Swelling foundation soil due to rainy periods first lifts the most exposed extremities of the footing system, then the remainder of the perimeter footings while gradually permeating inside the building footprint to lift internal footings. This swelling first tends to create a dish effect, because the external footings are pushed higher than the internal ones.

The first noticeable symptom may be that the floor appears slightly dished. This is often accompanied by some doors binding on the floor or the door head, together with some cracking of cornice natures. In buildings with timber flooring supported by bearers and joists, the floor can be bouncy. Externally there may be visible dishing of the hip or ridge lines.

As the moisture absorption process completes its journey to the innermost areas of the building, the internal footings will rise. If the spread of moisture is roughly even, it may be that the symptoms will temporarily disappear, but it is more likely that swelling will be uneven, creating a difference rather than a disappearance in symptoms. In buildings with timber flooring supported by bearers and joists, the isolated piers will rise more easily than the strip footings or piers under walls, creating noticeable doming of flooring.

Trees can cause shrinkage and damage

As the weather pattern changes and the soil begins to dry out, the external footings will be first affected, beginning with the locations where the sun's effect is strongest. This has the effect of lowering the external footings. The doming is accentuated and cracking reduces or disappears where it occurred because of dishing, but other cracks open up. The roof lines may become convex.

Doming and dishing are also affected by weather in other ways. In areas where warm, wet summers and cooler dry winters prevail, water migration tends to be toward the interior and doming will be accentuated, whereas where summers are dry and winters are cold and wet, migration tends to be toward the exterior and the underlying propensity is toward dishing.

Movement caused by tree roots
In general, growing roots will exert an upward pressure on footings, whereas soil subject to drying because of tree or shrub roots will tend to remove support from under footings by inducing shrinkage.

Complications caused by the structure itself
Most forces that the soil causes to be exerted on structures are vertical - i.e. either up or down. However, because these forces are seldom spread evenly around the footings, and because the building resists uneven movement because of its rigidity, forces are exerted from one part of the building to another. The net result of all these forces is usually rotational. This resultant force often complicates the diagnosis because the visible symptoms do not simply reflect the original cause. A common symptom is binding of doors on the vertical member of the frame.

Effects on full masonry structures
Brickwork will resist cracking where it can. It will attempt to span areas that lose support because of subsided foundations or raised points. It is therefore usual to see cracking at weak points, such as openings for windows or doors.

In the event of construction settlement, cracking will usually remain unchanged after the process of settlement has ceased.

With local shear or erosion, cracking will usually continue to develop until the original cause has been remedied, or until the subsidence has completely neutralised the affected portion of footing and the structure has stabilised on other footings that remain effective.

In the case of swell/shrink effects, the brickwork will in some cases return to its original position after completion of a cycle, however it is more likely that the rotational effect will not be exactly reversed, and it is also usual that brickwork will settle in its new position and will resist the forces trying to return it to its original position. This means that in a case where swelling takes place after construction and cracking occurs, the cracking is likely to at least partly remain after the shrink segment of the cycle is complete. Thus, each time the cycle is repeated, the likelihood is that the cracking will become wider until the sections of brickwork become virtually independent.

With repeated cycles, once the cracking is established, if there is no other complication, it is normal for the incidence of cracking to stabilise, as the building has the articulation it needs to cope with the problem. This is by no means always the case, however, and monitoring of cracks in walls and floors should always be treated seriously.

Uphelav caused by growth of tree roots under footings is not a simple vertical shear stress. There is a tendency for the root to also exert lateral forces that attempt to separate sections of brickwork after initial cracking has occurred.
The normal structural arrangement is that the inner leaf of brickwork in the external walls and at least some of the internal walls (depending on the roof type) comprise the load-bearing structure on which any upper floors, ceilings and the roof are supported. In these cases, it is internally visible cracking that should be the main focus of attention, however there are a few examples of dwellings whose external leaf of masonry plays some supporting role, so this should be checked if there is any doubt. In any case, externally visible cracking is important as a guide to stresses on the structure generally, and it should also be remembered that the external walls must be capable of supporting themselves.

### Effects on Framed Structures
Timber or steel framed buildings are less likely to exhibit cracking due to swelling/shrinking than masonry buildings because of their flexibility. Also, the doming/dishing effects tend to be lower because of the lighter weight of walls. The main risks to framed buildings are encountered because of the isolated pier footings used under walls. Where erosion or saturation cause a footing to fall away, this can double the span which a wall must bridge. This additional stress can create cracking in wall linings, particularly where there is a weak point in the structure caused by a door or window opening. It is, however, unlikely that framed structures will be so stressed as to suffer serious damage without first exhibiting some or all of the above symptoms for a considerable period. The same warning period should apply in the case of upheaval. It should be noted, however, that where framed buildings are supported by strip footings there is only one leaf of brickwork and therefore the externally visible walls are the supporting structure for the building. In this case, the subfloor masonry walls can be expected to behave as full brickwork walls.

### Effects on Brick Veneer Structures
Because the load-bearing structure of a brick veneer building is the frame that makes up the interior leaf of the external walls plus perhaps the internal walls, depending on the type of roof, the building can be expected to behave as a framed structure, except that the external masonry will behave in a similar way to the external leaf of a full masonry structure.

### Water Service and Drainage
Where a water service pipe, a sewer or stormwater drainage pipe is in the vicinity of a building, a water leak can cause erosion, swelling or saturation of susceptible soil. Even a minuscule leak can be enough to saturate a clay foundation. A leaking tap near a building can have the same effect. In addition, trenches containing pipes can become watercourses even though backfilled, particularly where broken rubble is used as fill. Water that runs along these trenches can be responsible for serious erosion, interstrata seepage into subfloor areas and saturation.

Pipe leakage and trench water flows also encourage tree and shrub roots to the source of water, complicating and exacerbating the problem.

Poor roof plumbing can result in large volumes of rainwater being concentrated in a small area of soil: - Incorrect falls in roof guttering may result in overflows, as may gutters blocked with leaves etc.

- Corroded guttering or downpipes can spill water to ground.
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Where building movement is caused by water service, roof plumbing, sewer or stormwater failure, the remedy is to repair the problem. It is prudent, however, to consider also rerouting pipes away from the building where possible, and relocating taps to positions where any leakage will not direct water to the building vicinity. Even where gully traps are present, there is sometimes sufficient spill to create erosion or saturation, particularly in modern installations using smaller diameter PVC fixtures. Indeed, some gully traps are not situated directly under the taps that are installed to charge them, with the result that water from the tap may enter the backfilled trench that houses the sewer piping. If the trench has been poorly backfilled, the water will either pond or flow along the bottom of the trench. As these trenches usually run alongside the footings and can be at a similar depth, it is not hard to see how any water that is thus directed into a trench can easily affect the foundation's ability to support footings or even gain entry to the subfloor area.

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It is, however, sometimes necessary when attempting to prevent water migration that testing be carried out to establish watertestable height and subsol water flows. This subject is referred to in BTIF 19 and may properly be regarded as an area for an expert consultant.

### Protection of the Building Perimeter
It is essential to remember that the soil that affects footings extends well beyond the actual building line. Watering of garden plants, shrubs and trees causes some of the most serious water problems.

For this reason, particularly where problems exist or are likely to occur, it is recommended that an apron of paving be installed around as much of the building perimeter as necessary. This paving

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The ideal vegetation layout is to have lawn or plants that require only light watering immediately adjacent to the drainage or paving edge, then more demanding plants, shrubs and trees spread out in that order.

Overwatering due to misuse of automatic watering systems is a common cause of saturation and water migration under footings. If it is necessary to use these systems, it is important to remove garden beds to a completely safe distance from buildings.

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Where a tree is causing a problem of soil drying or there is the existence or threat of upheaval of footings, if the offending roots are subsidiary and their removal will not significantly damage the tree, they should be severed and a concrete or metal barrier placed vertically in the soil to prevent future root growth in the direction of the building. If it is not possible to remove the relevant roots without damage to the tree, an application to remove the tree should be made to the local authority. A prudent plan is to transplant likely offenders before they become a problem.

Information on trees, plants and shrubs
State departments overseeing agriculture can give information regarding root patterns, volume of water needed and safe distance from buildings of most species. Botanic gardens are also sources of information. For information on plant roots and drains, see Building Technology File 17.

Excavation
Excavation around footings must be properly engineered. Soil supporting footings can only be safely excavated at an angle that allows the soil under the footing to remain stable. This angle is called the angle of repose (or friction) and varies significantly between soil types and conditions. Removal of soil within the angle of repose will cause subsidence.

Remediation
Where erosion has occurred that has washed away soil adjacent to footings, soil of the same classification should be introduced and compacted to the same density. Where footings have been undermined, augmentation or other specialist work may be required. Remediation of footings and foundations is generally the realm of a specialist consultant.

Where isolated footings rise and fall because of swell/shrink effect, the homeowner may be tempted to alleviate floor bounce by filling the gap that has appeared between the bearer and the pier with blocking. The danger here is that when the next swell segment of the cycle occurs, the extra blocking will push the floor up into an accentuated dome and may also cause local shear failure in the soil. If it is necessary to use blocking, it should be by a pair of fine wedges and monitoring should be carried out fortightly.

This BTF was prepared by John Lewer FAIB, MIAMA, Partner, Construction Diagnosis.
SITE CLASSIFICATION REPORT SUMMARY

BLOCK: 17  SECTION: 58  SUBURB: Moncrieff
JOB No: 77119.13  DATE: August 2015
CLIENT: Black Mountain Construction Assurance Pty Ltd

CLASSIFICATION PROCEDURES:

EXISTING SUBSURFACE CONDITIONS:
Test Pit 67: Located on the boundary of Blocks 17 & 18 Section 58. Sandy silt topsoil filling to 0.1 m, well compacted, moist to dry clayey silty sand, clayey gravel and cobbly controlled filling to 1.1 m then stiff, moist to dry silt to 1.2 m overlying high strength, moderately to slightly weathered siltstone bedrock to the refusal depth of 1.3 m.

Test Pit 68: Located on the boundary of Blocks 15 & 16 Section 58. Sandy silt topsoil filling to 0.2 m overlying high strength, moderately to slightly weathered siltstone bedrock to the refusal depth of 0.4 m.

BULK EARTHWORKS:
Filling within the block placed under Level 1 control as defined in AS 3798 – 2007 (Ref 1).

SITE CLASSIFICATION: Class M* (moderately reactive/filled block) based on limited subsurface information and determined in general accordance with the requirements of AS2870-2011 (Ref 2). The classification must be reassessed should the soil profile change either by adding fill or removing soil from the block and/or if the presence of service trenches or retaining walls are within the zone of influence of the block. Reference should be made to the comments provided below.

FOOTING SYSTEMS: Reference must be made to AS2870-2011 (Ref 2) which indicates footing systems that are appropriate for each site classification. All footings must found within a uniform bearing stratum of suitable strength/material, below the zone of influence of any service trenches, backfill zones, retaining walls or underground structures. Masonry walls should be articulated in accordance with current best practice. Footing systems must be confirmed by a structural engineer taking into consideration any onsite or offsite constraints.

MAINTENANCE GUIDELINES: CSIRO Sheet BTF 18 ‘Foundation Maintenance & Footing Performance’ (attached). Refer to comments about gardens, landscaping and trees on the performance of foundation soils.

COMMENTS/LIMITATIONS:
Development specific geotechnical investigations must be undertaken.
Additional topsoils / filling may have been spread subsequent to the investigation.
Site preparation prior to the construction should include removal of all vegetation, topsoil and any uncontrolled filling.
All new filling must be placed under controlled conditions (AS 3798-2007).
Some variability in subsurface conditions must be anticipated.
Moisture condition of site soils and/or the presence of groundwater may vary considerably from time of investigation compared to at the time of construction.
Hard rock excavation must be anticipated at the southern part of the block.
It is recommended that footing excavations be inspected by a geotechnical engineer.
This report must be read in conjunction with the attached notes "About this Inspection Report".

REFERENCES:
2. AS 2870-2011 'Residential Slabs and Footings,' Standards Association of Australia.
Introduction
These notes are provided to amplify DP’s inspection report in regard to the limitations of carrying out inspection work. Not all notes are necessarily relevant to this report.

Standards
This inspection report has been prepared by qualified personnel to current engineering standards of interpretation and analysis.

Copyright and Limits of Use
This inspection report is the property of DP and is provided for the exclusive use of the client for the specific project and purpose as described in the report. It should not be used by a third party for any purpose other than to confirm that the construction works addressed in the report have been inspected as described. Use of the inspection report is limited in accordance with the Conditions of Engagement for the commission.

DP does not undertake to guarantee the works of the contractors or relieve them of their responsibility to produce a completed product conforming to the design.

Reports
This inspection report may include advice or opinion that is based on engineering and/or geological interpretation, information provided by the client or the client’s agent, and information gained from:

- an investigation report for the project (if available to DP);
- inspection of the work, exposed ground conditions, excavation spoil and performance of excavating equipment while DP was on site;
- investigation and testing that was carried out during the site inspection;
- anecdotal information provided by authoritative site personnel; and
- DP’s experience and knowledge of local geology.

Such information may be limited by the frequency of any inspection or testing that was able to be practically carried out, including possible site or cost constraints imposed by the client/contractor(s). For these reasons, the reliability of this inspection report is limited by the scope of information on which it relies.

Every care is taken with the inspection report as it relates to interpretation of subsurface conditions and any recommendations or suggestions for construction or design. However, DP cannot anticipate or assume responsibility for:

- unexpected variations in subsurface conditions that are not evident from the inspection; and
- the actions of contractors responding to commercial pressures.

Should these issues occur, then additional advice should be sought from DP and, if required, amendments made.

This inspection report must be read in conjunction with any attached information. This inspection report should be kept in its entirety without separation of individual pages or sections. DP cannot be held responsible for interpretations or conclusions from review by others of this inspection report or test data, which are not otherwise supported by an expressed statement, interpretation, outcome or conclusion stated in this inspection report.
Foundation Maintenance and Footing Performance: A Homeowner’s Guide

Buildings can and often do move. This movement can be up, down, lateral or rotational. The fundamental cause of movement in buildings can usually be related to one or more problems in the foundation soil. It is important for the homeowner to identify the soil type in order to ascertain the measures that should be put in place in order to ensure that problems in the foundation soil can be prevented, thus protecting against building movement.

This Building Technology File is designed to identify causes of soil-related building movement, and to suggest methods of prevention of resultant cracking in buildings.

Soil Types

The types of soils usually present under the topsoil in land zoned for residential buildings can be split into two approximate groups — granular and clay. Quite often, foundation soil is a mixture of both types. The general problems associated with soils having granular content are usually caused by erosion. Clay soils are subject to saturation and swell/shrink problems.

Classifications for a given area can generally be obtained by application to the local authority, but these are sometimes unreliable and if there is doubt, a geotechnical report should be commissioned.

As most buildings suffering movement problems are founded on clay soils, there is an emphasis on classification of soils according to the amount of swell and shrinkage they experience with variations of water content. The table below is Table 2.1 from AS 2870, the Residential Slab and Footing Code.

Causes of Movement

Settlement due to construction

There are two types of settlement that occur as a result of construction:

- Immediate settlement occurs when a building is first placed on its foundation soil, as a result of compaction of the soil under the weight of the structure. The cohesive quality of clay soil mitigates against this, but granular (particularly sandy) soil is susceptible.
- Consolidation settlement is a feature of clay soil and may take place because of the expulsion of moisture from the soil or because of the soil’s lack of resistance to local compressive or shear stresses. This will usually take place during the first few months after construction, but has been known to take many years in exceptional cases.

These problems are the province of the builder and should be taken into consideration as part of the preparation of the site for construction. Building Technology File 19 (BTTF 19) deals with these problems.

Erosion

All soils are prone to erosion, but sandy soil is particularly susceptible to being washed away. Even clay with a sand component of say 10% or more can suffer from erosion.

Saturation

This is particularly a problem in clay soils. Saturation creates a bog-like suspension of the soil that causes it to lose virtually all of its bearing capacity. To a lesser degree, sand is affected by saturation because saturated sand may undergo a reduction in volume — particularly imported sand fill for bedding and blinding layers. However, this usually occurs as immediate settlement and should normally be the province of the builder.

Seasonal swelling and shrinkage of soil

All clays react to the presence of water by slowly absorbing it, making the soil increase in volume (see table below). The degree of increase varies considerably between different clays, as does the degree of decrease during the subsequent drying out caused by fair weather periods. Because of the low absorption and expulsion rate, this phenomenon will not usually be noticeable unless there are prolonged rainy or dry periods, usually of weeks or months, depending on the land and soil characteristics.

The swelling of soil creates an upward force on the footings of the building, and shrinkage creates subsidence that takes away the support needed by the footing to retain equilibrium.

Shear failure

This phenomenon occurs when the foundation soil does not have sufficient strength to support the weight of the footing. There are two major post-construction causes:

- Significant load increase.
- Reduction of lateral support of the soil under the footing due to erosion or excavation.
- In clay soil, shear failure can be caused by saturation of the soil adjacent to or under the footing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Foundation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Most sand and rock sites with little or no ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Slightly reactive clay sites with only slight ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Moderately reactive clay or silt sites, which can experience moderate ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Highly reactive clay sites, which can experience high ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Extremely reactive sites, which can experience extreme ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A to P</td>
<td>Filled sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Sites which include soft soils, such as soft clay or silt or loose sands; landslip; mine subsidence; collapsing soils; soils subject to erosion; reactive sites subject to abnormal moisture conditions or sites which cannot be classified otherwise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tree root growth
Trees and shrubs that are allowed to grow in the vicinity of footings can cause foundation soil movement in two ways:

- Roots that grow under footings may increase in cross-sectional size, exerting upward pressure on footings.
- Roots in the vicinity of footings will absorb much of the moisture in the foundation soil, causing shrinkage or subsidence.

Unevenness of Movement
The types of ground movement described above usually occur unevenly throughout the building's foundation soil. Settlement due to construction tends to be uneven because of:

- Differing compaction of foundation soil prior to construction.
- Differing moisture content of foundation soil prior to construction.

Movement due to non-construction causes is usually more uneven still. Erosion can undermine a footing that traverses the flow or can erode away part of the soil adjacent to a footing that runs in the same direction as the flow.

Saturation of clay foundation soil may occur where subfloor walls create a dam that makes water pond. It can also occur wherever there is a source of water near footings in clay soil. This leads to a severe reduction in the strength of the soil which may create local shear failure.

Seasonal swelling and shrinkage of clay soil affects the perimeter of the building first, then gradually spreads to the interior. The swelling process will usually begin at the uphill extreme of the building, or on the weather side where the land is flat. Swelling gradually reaches the interior soil as absorption continues. Shrinkage usually begins where the sun's heat is greatest.

Effects of Uneven Soil Movement on Structures

Erosion and saturation
Erosion removes the support from under footings, tending to create subsidence of the part of the structure under which it occurs. Brickwork walls will resist the stress created by this removal of support by bridging the gap or cantilevering until the bricks or the mortar bedding fail. Older masonry has little resistance. Evidence of failure varies according to circumstances and symptoms may include:

- Step cracking in the mortar beds in the body of the wall or above/below openings such as doors or windows.
- Vertical cracking in the bricks (usually but not necessarily in line with the vertical beds or perpents).

Isolated piers affected by erosion or saturation of foundations will eventually lose contact with the bearers they support and may tilt or fall over. The floors that have lost this support will become bouncy, sometimes rattling ornaments etc.

Seasonal swelling/shrinkage in clay
Swelling foundation soil due to rainy periods first lifts the most exposed extremities of the footing system, then the remainder of the perimeter footings while gradually permeating inside the building footprint to lift internal footings. This swelling first tends to create a dish effect, because the external footings are pushed higher than the internal ones.

The first noticeable symptom may be that the floor appears slightly dish. This is often accompanied by some doors binding on the floor or the door head, together with some cracking of cornice mitres. In buildings with timber flooring supported by bearers and joists, the floor can be bouncy. Externally there may be visible dishing of the hip or ridge lines.

As the moisture absorption process completes its journey to the innermost areas of the building, the internal footings will rise. If the spread of moisture is roughly even, it may be that the symptoms will temporarily disappear, but it is more likely that swelling will be uneven, creating a difference rather than a disappearance in symptoms. In buildings with timber flooring supported by bearers and joists, the isolated piers will rise more easily than the strip footings or piers under walls, creating noticeable doming of flooring.

As the weather pattern changes and the soil begins to dry out, the external footings will be first affected, beginning with the locations where the sun's effect is strongest. This has the effect of lowering the external footings. The doming is accentuated and cracking reduces or disappears where it occurred because of dishing, but other cracks open up. The roof lines may become convex.

Domino and dishing are also affected by weather in other ways. In areas where warm, wet summers and cooler dry winters prevail, water migration tends to be toward the interior and doming will be accentuated, whereas where summers are dry and winters are cold and wet, migration tends to be toward the exterior and the underlying propensity is toward dishing.

Movement caused by tree roots
In general, growing roots will exert an upward pressure on footings, whereas soil subject to drying because of tree or shrub roots will tend to remove support from under footings by inducing shrinkage.

Complications caused by the structure itself
Most forces that the soil causes to be exerted on structures are vertical – i.e., either up or down. However, because these forces are seldom spread evenly around the footings, and because the building resists uneven movement because of its rigidity, forces are exerted from one part of the building to another. The net result of all these forces is usually rotational. This resultant force often complicates the diagnosis because the visible symptoms do not simply reflect the original cause. A common symptom is binding of doors on the vertical member of the frame.

Effects on full masonry structures
Brickwork will resist cracking where it can. It will attempt to span areas that lose support because of subsided foundations or raised points. It is therefore usual to see cracking at weak points, such as openings for windows or doors. In the event of construction settlement, cracking will usually remain unchanged after the process of settlement has ceased.

With local shear or erosion, cracking will usually continue to develop until the original cause has been remedied, or until the subsidence has completely neutralised the affected portion of footing and the structure has stabilised on other footings that remain effective.

In the case of swell/shrink effects, the brickwork will in some cases return to its original position after completion of a cycle, however it is more likely that the rotational effect will not be exactly reversed, and it is also usual that brickwork will settle in its new position and will resist the forces trying to return it to its original position. This means that in a case when swelling takes place after construction and cracking occurs, the cracking is likely to at least partly remain after the shrink segment of the cycle is complete. Thus, each time the cycle is repeated, the likelihood is that the cracking will become wider until the sections of brickwork become virtually independent.

With repeated cycles, once the cracking is established, if there is no other complication, it is normal for the incidence of cracking to stabilise, as the building has the articulation it needs to cope with the problem. This is by no means always the case, however, and monitoring of cracks in walls and floors should always be treated seriously.

Uphulse caused by growth of tree roots under footings is not a simple vertical shear stress. There is a tendency for the root to also exert lateral forces that attempt to separate sections of brickwork after initial cracking has occurred.
The normal structural arrangement is that the inner leaf of brickwork in the external walls and at least some of the internal walls (depending on the roof type) comprise the load-bearing structure on which any upper floors, ceilings and the roof are supported. In these cases, it is internally visible cracking that should be the main focus of attention, however there are a few examples of dwellings whose external leaf of masonry plays some supporting role, so this should be checked if there is any doubt. In any case, externally visible cracking is important as a guide to stresses on the structure generally, and it should also be remembered that the external walls must be capable of supporting themselves.

Effects on framed structures
Timber or steel framed buildings are less likely to exhibit cracking due to swell/shrink than masonry buildings because of their flexibility. Also, the doming/dishing effects tend to be lower because of the lighter weight of walls. The main risks to framed buildings are encountered because of the isolated pier footings used under walls. Where erosion or saturation cause a footing to fall away, this can double the span which a wall must bridge. This additional stress can create cracking in wall linings, particularly where there is a weak point in the structure caused by a door or window opening. It is, however, unlikely that framed structures will be so stressed as to suffer serious damage without first exhibiting some or all of the above symptoms for a considerable period. The same warning period should apply in the case of upheaval. It should be noted, however, that where framed buildings are supported by strip footings there is only one leaf of brickwork and therefore the externally visible walls are the supporting structure for the building. In this case, the subfloor masonry walls can be expected to behave as full brickwork walls.

Effects on brick veneer structures
Because the load-bearing structure of a brick veneer building is the frame that makes up the interior leaf of the external walls plus perhaps the internal walls, depending on the type of roof, the building can be expected to behave as a framed structure, except that the external masonry will behave in a similar way to the external leaf of a full masonry structure.

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**Water Service and Drainage**

Where a water service pipe, a sewer or stormwater drainage pipe is in the vicinity of a building, a water leak can cause erosion, swelling or saturation of susceptible soil. Even a miniscule leak can be enough to saturate a clay foundation. A leaking tap near a building can have the same effect. In addition, trenches containing pipes can become watercourses even though backfilled, particularly where broken rubble is used as fill. Water that runs along these trenches can be responsible for serious erosion, interstrata seepage into subfloor areas and saturation.

Pipe leakage and trench water flows also encourage tree and shrub roots to the source of water, complicating and exacerbating the problem.

Poor roof plumbing can result in large volumes of rainfall being concentrated in a small area of soil:

- Incorrect falls in roof guttering may result in overflows, as may gutters blocked with leaves etc.

- Corroded guttering or downpipes can spill water to ground.
- Downpipes not positively connected to a proper stormwater collection system will direct a concentration of water to soil that is directly adjacent to footing. This can be a cause of problems such as erosion, saturation and migration of water under the building.

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**Seriousness of Cracking**

In general, most cracking found in masonry walls is a cosmetic nuisance only and can be kept in repair or even ignored. The table below is a reproduction of Table C1 of AS 2870. AS 2870 also publishes figures relating to cracking in concrete floors, however because wall cracking will usually reach the critical point significantly earlier than cracking in slabs, this table is not reproduced here.

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**Prevention/Cure**

**Plumbing**
Where building movement is caused by water service, roof plumbing, sewer or stormwater failure, the remedy is to repair the problem. It is prudent, however, to consider also rerouting pipes away from the building where possible, and relocating taps to positions where any leakage will not direct water to the building vicinity. Even where gully traps are present, there is sometimes sufficient spill to create erosion or saturation, particularly in modern installations using smaller diameter PVC fixtures. Indeed, some gully traps are not situated directly under the taps that are installed to charge them, with the result that water from the tap may enter the backfilled trench that houses the sewer piping. If the trench has been properly backfilled, the water will either pond or flow along the bottom of the trench. As these trenches usually run alongside the footings and can be at a similar depth, it is not hard to see how any water that is thus directed into a trench can easily affect the foundation’s ability to support footings or even gain entry to the subfloor area.

**Ground drainage**
In all soils there is the capacity for water to travel on the surface and below it. Surface water flows can be established by inspection during and after heavy or prolonged rain. If necessary, a grated drain system connected to the stormwater collection system is usually an easy solution.

It is, however, sometimes necessary when attempting to prevent water migration that testing be carried out to establish watertable height and subsoil water flows. This subject is referred to in BTIF 19 and may properly be regarded as an area for an expert consultant.

**Protection of the building perimeter**
It is essential to remember that the soil that affects footings extends well beyond the actual building line. Watering of garden plants, shrubs and trees causes some of the most serious water problems. For this reason, particularly where problems exist or are likely to occur, it is recommended that an apron of paving be installed around as much of the building perimeter as necessary. This paving

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of typical damage and required repair</th>
<th>Approximate crack width limit (see Note 3)</th>
<th>Damage category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hairline cracks</td>
<td>&lt;0.1 mm</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine cracks which do not need repair</td>
<td>&lt;1 mm</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cracks noticeable but easily filled. Doors and windows stick slightly</td>
<td>&lt;5 mm</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cracks can be repaired and possibly a small amount of wall will need to be replaced. Doors and windows stick. Service pipes can fracture. Weather tightness often impaired</td>
<td>5–15 mm (or a number of cracks 3 mm or more in one group)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensive repair work involving breaking-out and replacing sections of walls, especially over doors and windows. Window and door frames distort. Walls lean or bulge noticeably, some loss of bearing in beams. Service pipes disrupted</td>
<td>15–25 mm but also depend on number of cracks</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
should extend outwards a minimum of 900 mm (more in highly reactive soil) and should have a minimum fall away from the building of 1:60. The finished paving should be no less than 100 mm below brick base.

It is prudent to relocate drainage pipes away from this paving, if possible, to avoid complications from future leakage. If this is not practical, earthenware pipes should be replaced by PVC and backfilling should be of the same soil type as the surrounding soil and compacted to the same density.

Except in areas where freezing of water is an issue, it is wise to remove taps in the building area and relocate them well away from the building – preferably not uphill from it (see BTF 19).

It may be desirable to install a grated drain at the outside edge of the paving on the uphill side of the building. If subsoil drainage is needed this can be installed under the surface drain.

Condensation

In buildings with a subfloor void such as where bearers and joists support flooring, insufficient ventilation creates ideal conditions for condensation, particularly where there is little clearance between the floor and the ground. Condensation adds to the moisture already present in the subfloor and significantly slows the process of drying out. Installation of an adequate subfloor ventilation system, either natural or mechanical, is desirable.

Warning: Although this Building Technology File deals with cracking in buildings, it should be said that subfloor moisture can result in the development of other problems, notably:

- Water that is transmitted into masonry, metal or timber building elements causes damage and/or decay to those elements.

- High subfloor humidity and moisture content create an ideal environment for various pests, including termites and spiders.

- Where high moisture levels are transmitted to the flooring and walls, an increase in the dust mite count can ensue within the living areas. Dust mites, as well as dampness in general, can be a health hazard to inhabitants, particularly those who are abnormally susceptible to respiratory ailments.

The garden

The ideal vegetation layout is to have lawn or plants that require only light watering immediately adjacent to the drainage or paving edge, then more demanding plants, shrubs and trees spread out in that order.

Overwatering due to misuse of automatic watering systems is a common cause of saturation and water migration under footings. If it is necessary to use these systems, it is important to remove garden beds to a completely safe distance from buildings.

Existing trees

Where a tree is causing a problem of soil drying or there is the existence or threat of upheaval of footings, if the offending roots are subsidiary and their removal will not significantly damage the tree, they should be severed and a concrete or metal barrier placed vertically in the soil to prevent future root growth in the direction of the building. If it is not possible to remove the relevant roots without damage to the tree, an application to remove the tree should be made to the local authority. A prudent plan is to transplant likely offenders before they become a problem.

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Remediation of footings and foundations is generally the realm of a specialist consultant.

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This BTF was prepared by John Lewer FAIB, MIAMA, Partner, Construction Diagnosis.
SITE CLASSIFICATION REPORT SUMMARY

BLOCK: 18  SECTION: 58  SUBURB: Moncrieff
JOB No: 77119.13  DATE: August 2015
CLIENT: Black Mountain Construction Assurance Pty Ltd

CLASSIFICATION PROCEDURES:

EXISTING SUBSURFACE CONDITIONS:

Test Pit 66: Located on the boundary of Blocks 19 & 20 Section 58. Sandy silt topsoil filling to 0.1 m, well compacted, moist to dry clayey silty sand, clayey gravel and cobbly controlled filling to 1.2 m then stiff, moist to dry silt to 1.4 m overlying hard, moist to dry gravelly silt to the limit of investigation depth of 1.8 m.

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BULK EARTHWORKS:

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FOOTING SYSTEMS:

Reference must be made to AS2870-2011 (Ref 2) which indicates footing systems that are appropriate for each site classification. All footings must found within a uniform bearing stratum of suitable strength/material, below the zone of influence of any service trenches, backfill zones, retaining walls or underground structures. Masonry walls should be articulated in accordance with current best practice. Footing systems must be confirmed by a structural engineer taking into consideration any onsite or offsite constraints.

MAINTENANCE GUIDELINES:

CSIRO Sheet BTF 18 ‘Foundation Maintenance & Footing Performance’ (attached). Refer to comments about gardens, landscaping and trees on the performance of foundation soils.

COMMENTS/LIMITATIONS:

Development specific geotechnical investigations must be undertaken.

Additional topsoils / filling may have been spread subsequent to the investigation.

Site preparation prior to the construction should include removal of all vegetation, topsoil and any uncontrolled filling.

All new filling must be placed under controlled conditions (AS 3798-2007).

Some variability in subsurface conditions must be anticipated.

Moisture condition of site soils and/or the presence of groundwater may vary considerably from time of investigation compared to at the time of construction.

Depending on the depth of site cut and trenches, rock excavation may be required.

It is recommended that footing excavations be inspected by a geotechnical engineer.

This report must be read in conjunction with the attached notes “About this Inspection Report”.

REFERENCES:


About this Inspection Report

Introduction
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DP does not undertake to guarantee the works of the contractors or relieve them of their responsibility to produce a completed product conforming to the design.

Reports
This inspection report may include advice or opinion that is based on engineering and/or geological interpretation, information provided by the client or the client’s agent, and information gained from:

- an investigation report for the project (if available to DP);
- inspection of the work, exposed ground conditions, excavation spoil and performance of excavating equipment while DP was on site;
- investigation and testing that was carried out during the site inspection;
- anecdotal information provided by authoritative site personnel; and
- DP’s experience and knowledge of local geology.

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Foundation Maintenance and Footing Performance:
A Homeowner’s Guide

Buildings can and often do move. This movement can be up, down, lateral or rotational. The fundamental cause of movement in buildings can usually be related to one or more problems in the foundation soil. It is important for the homeowner to identify the soil type in order to ascertain the measures that should be put in place in order to ensure that problems in the foundation soil can be prevented, thus protecting against building movement.

This Building Technology File is designed to identify causes of soil-related building movement, and to suggest methods of prevention of resultant cracking in buildings.

### Soil Types

The types of soils usually present under the topsoil in land zoned for residential buildings can be split into two approximate groups -- granular and clay. Quite often, foundation soil is a mixture of both types. The general problems associated with soils having granular content are usually caused by erosion. Clay soils are subject to saturation and swell/shrink problems.

Classifications for a given area can generally be obtained by application to the local authority, but these are sometimes unreliable and if there is doubt, a geotechnical report should be commissioned.

As most buildings suffering movement problems are founded on clay soils, there is an emphasis on classification of soils according to the amount of swell and shrinkage they experience with variations of water content. The table below is Table 2.1 from AS 2870, the Residential Slab and Footing Code.

### Causes of Movement

**Settlement due to construction**

There are two types of settlement that occur as a result of construction:

- **Immediate settlement** occurs when a building is first placed on its foundation soil, as a result of compaction of the soil under the weight of the structure. The cohesive quality of clay soil mitigates against this, but granular (particularly sandy) soil is susceptible.
- **Consolidation settlement** is a feature of clay soil and may take place because of the expulsion of moisture from the soil or because of the soil’s lack of resistance to local compressive or shear stresses. This will usually take place during the first few months after construction, but has been known to take many years in exceptional cases.

These problems are the province of the builder and should be taken into consideration as part of the preparation of the site for construction. Building Technology File 19 (BTF 19) deals with these problems.

**Erosion**

All soils are prone to erosion, but sandy soil is particularly susceptible to being washed away. Even clay with a sand component of say 10% or more can suffer from erosion.

**Saturation**

This is particularly a problem in clay soils. Saturation creates a bog-like suspension of the soil that causes it to lose virtually all of its bearing capacity. To a lesser degree, sand is affected by saturation because saturated sand may undergo a reduction in volume – particularly imported sand fill for bedding and blinding layers. However, this usually occurs as immediate settlement and should normally be the province of the builder.

**Seasonal swelling and shrinkage of soil**

All clays react to the presence of water by slowly absorbing it, making the soil increase in volume (see table below). The degree of increase varies considerably between different clays, as does the degree of decrease during the subsequent drying out caused by fair weather periods. Because of the low absorption and expulsion rate, this phenomenon will not usually be noticeable unless there are prolonged rainy or dry periods, usually of weeks or months, depending on the land and soil characteristics.

The swelling of soil creates an upward force on the footings of the building, and shrinkage creates subsidence that takes away the support needed by the footing to retain equilibrium.

**Shear failure**

This phenomenon occurs when the foundation soil does not have sufficient strength to support the weight of the footing. There are two major post-construction causes:

- **Significant load increase.**
- **Reduction of lateral support of the soil under the footing due to erosion or excavation.**
- **In clay soil, shear failure can be caused by saturation of the soil adjacent to or under the footing.**

### General Definitions of Site Classes

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Foundation Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Most sand and rock sites with little or no ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Slightly reactive clay sites with only slight ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Moderately reactive clay or silt sites, which can experience moderate ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Highly reactive clay sites, which can experience high ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Extremely reactive sites, which can experience extreme ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A to P</td>
<td>Filled sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Sites which include soft soils, such as soft clay or silt or loose sands; landslip; mine subsidence; collapsing soils; soils subject to erosion; reactive sites subject to abnormal moisture conditions or sites which cannot be classified otherwise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tree root growth
Trees and shrubs that are allowed to grow in the vicinity of footings can cause foundation soil movement in two ways:

- Roots that grow under footings may increase in cross-sectional size, exerting upward pressure on footings.
- Roots in the vicinity of footings will absorb much of the moisture in the foundation soil, causing shrinkage or subsidence.

Unevenness of Movement
The types of ground movement described above usually occur unevenly throughout the building's foundation soil. Settlement due to construction tends to be uneven because of:

- Differing compaction of foundation soil prior to construction.
- Differing moisture content of foundation soil prior to construction.

Movement due to non-construction causes is usually more uneven still. Erosion can undermine a footing that traverses the flow or can erode soil adjacent to a footing that runs in the same direction as the flow.

Saturation of clay foundation soil may occur where subfloor walls create a dam that makes water pond. It can also occur wherever there is a source of water near footings in clay soil. This leads to a severe reduction in the strength of the soil which may create local shear failure.

Seasonal swelling and shrinkage of clay soil affects the perimeter of the building first, then gradually spreads to the interior. The swelling process will usually begin at the uphill extreme of the building, or on the weather side where the land is flat. Swelling gradually reaches the interior soil as absorption continues. Shrinkage usually begins where the sun's heat is greatest.

Effects of Uneven Soil Movement on Structures
Erosion and saturation
Erosion removes the support from under footings, tending to create subsidence of the part of the structure under which it occurs. Brickwork walls will resist the stress caused by this removal of support by bridging the gap or cantilevering until the bricks or the mortar bedding fail. Older masonry has little resistance. Evidence of failure varies according to circumstances and symptoms may include:

- Step cracking in the mortar beds in the body of the wall or above/below openings such as doors or windows.
- Vertical cracking in the bricks (usually but not necessarily in line with the vertical beds or piers).

Isolated piers affected by erosion or saturation of foundations will eventually lose contact with the bearers they support and may tilt or fall over. The floors that have lost this support will become bouncy, sometimes rattling ornaments etc.

Seasonal swelling/shrinkage in clay
Swelling foundation soil due to rainy periods first lifts the most exposed extremities of the footing system, then the remainder of the perimeter footings while gradually permeating inside the building footprint to lift internal footings. This swelling first tends to create a dish effect, because the external footings are pushed higher than the internal ones.

The first noticeable symptom may be that the floor appears slightly dished. This is often accompanied by some doors binding on the floor or the door head, together with some cracking of concrete finishes. In buildings with timber flooring supported by bearers and joists, the floor can be bouncy. Externally there may be visible dishing of the hip or ridge lines.

As the moisture absorption process completes its journey to the innermost areas of the building, the internal footings will rise. If the spread of moisture is roughly even, it may be that the symptoms will temporarily disappear, but it is more likely that swelling will be uneven, creating a difference rather than a disappearance in symptoms. In buildings with timber flooring supported by bearers and joists, the isolated piers will rise more easily than the strip footings or piers under walls, creating noticeable doming of flooring.

Trees can cause shrinkage and damage
As the weather pattern changes and the soil begins to dry out, the external footings will be first affected, beginning with the locations where the sun's effect is strongest. This has the effect of lowering the external footings. The doming is accentuated and cracking reduces or disappears where it occurred because of dishing, but other cracks open up. The roof lines may become convex.

Domino and dishing are also affected by weather in other ways. In areas where warm, wet summers and cooler dry winters prevail, water migration tends to be toward the interior and doming will be accentuated, whereas where summers are dry and winters are cold and wet, migration tends to be toward the exterior and the underlying propensity is toward dishing.

Movement caused by tree roots
In general, growing roots will exert an upward pressure on footings, whereas soil subject to drying because of tree or shrub roots will tend to remove support from under footings by inducing shrinkage.

Complications caused by the structure itself
Most forces that the soil causes to be exerted on structures are vertical - i.e. either up or down. However, because these forces are seldom spread evenly around the footings, and because the building resists uneven movement because of its rigidity, forces are exerted from one part of the building to another. The net result of all these forces is usually rotational. This resultant force often complicates the diagnosis because the visible symptoms do not simply reflect the original cause. A common symptom is binding of doors on the vertical member of the frame.

Effects on full masonry structures
Brickwork will resist cracking where it can. It will attempt to span areas that lose support because of subsided foundations or raised points. It is therefore usual to see cracking at weak points, such as openings for windows or doors.

In the event of construction settlement, cracking will usually remain unchanged after the process of settlement has ceased.

With local shear or erosion, cracking will usually continue to develop until the original cause has been remedied, or until the subsidence has completely neutralised the affected portion of footing and the structure has stabilised on other footings that remain effective.

In the case of swell/shrink effects, the brickwork will in some cases return to its original position after completion of a cycle, however it is more likely that the rotational effect will not be exactly reversed, and it is also usual that brickwork will settle in its new position and will resist the forces trying to return it to its original position. This means that in a case where swelling takes place after construction and cracking occurs, the cracking is likely to at least partly remain after the shrink segment of the cycle is complete. Thus, each time the cycle is repeated, the likelihood is that the cracking will become wider until the sections of brickwork become virtually independent.

With repeated cycles, once the cracking is established, if there is no other complication, it is normal for the incidence of cracking to stabilise, as the building has the articulation it needs to cope with the problem. This is by no means always the case, however, and monitoring of cracks in walls and floors should always be treated seriously.

Uphewal caused by growth of tree roots under footings is not a simple vertical shear stress. There is a tendency for the root to also exert lateral forces that attempt to separate sections of brickwork after initial cracking has occurred.
The normal structural arrangement is that the inner leaf of brickwork in the external walls and at least some of the internal walls (depending on the roof type) comprise the load-bearing structure on which any upper floors, ceilings and the roof are supported. In these cases, it is internally visible cracking that should be the main focus of attention, however there are a few examples of dwellings whose external leaf of masonry plays some supporting role, so this should be checked if there is any doubt. In any case, externally visible cracking is important as a guide to stresses on the structure generally, and it should also be remembered that the external walls must be capable of supporting themselves.

Effects on framed structures
Timber or steel framed buildings are less likely to exhibit cracking due to swell/shrink than masonry buildings because of their flexibility. Also, the doming/dishling effects tend to be lower because of the lighter weight of walls. The main risks to framed buildings are encountered because of the isolated pier footings used under walls. Where erosion or saturation cause a footing to fail away, this can double the span which a wall must bear. This additional stress can create cracking in wall linings, particularly where there is a weak point in the structure caused by a door or window opening. It is, however, unlikely that framed structures will be so stressed as to suffer serious damage without first exhibiting some or all of the above symptoms for a considerable period. The same warning period should apply in the case of upheaval. It should be noted, however, that where framed buildings are supported by strip footings there is only one leaf of brickwork and therefore the externally visible walls are the supporting structure for the building. In this case, the subfloor masonry walls can be expected to behave as full brickwork walls.

Effects on brick veneer structures
Because the load-bearing structure of a brick veneer building is the frame that makes up the interior leaf of the external walls plus perhaps the internal walls, depending on the type of roof, the building can be expected to behave as a framed structure, except that the external masonry will behave in a similar way to the external leaf of a full masonry structure.

Water Service and Drainage
Where a water service pipe, a sewer or stormwater drainage pipe is in the vicinity of a building, a water leak can cause erosion, swelling or saturation of susceptible soil. Even a minuscule leak can be enough to saturate a clay foundation. A leaking tap near a building can have the same effect. In addition, trenches containing pipes can become watercourses even though backfilled, particularly where broken rubble is used as fill. Water that runs along these trenches can be responsible for serious erosion, interstrata seepage into subfloor areas and saturation.

Pipe leakage and trench water flows also encourage tree and shrub roots to the source of water, complicating and exacerbating the problem.
Poor roof plumbing can result in large volumes of rainwater being concentrated in a small area of soil:

- Incorrect falls in roof guttering may result in overflows, as may gutters blocked with leaves etc.
- Corroded guttering or downpipes can spill water to ground.
- Downpipes not positively connected to a proper stormwater collection system will direct a concentration of water to soil that is directly adjacent to footings causing target problems such as erosion, saturation and migration of water under the building.

### Seriousness of Cracking

In general, most cracking found in masonry walls is a cosmetic nuisance only and can be kept in repair or even ignored. The table below is a reproduction of Table C1 of AS 2870. AS 2870 also publishes figures relating to cracking in concrete floors, however because wall cracking will usually reach the critical point significantly earlier than cracking in slabs, this table is not reproduced here.

### Prevention/Cure

**Plumbing**
Where building movement is caused by water service, roof plumbing, sewer or stormwater failure, the remedy is to repair the problem. It is prudent, however, to consider also rerouting pipes away from the building where possible, and relocating taps to positions where any leakage will not direct water to the building vicinity. Even where gully traps are present, there is sometimes sufficient spill to create erosion or saturation, particularly in modern installations using smaller diameter PVC fixtures. Indeed, some gully traps are not situated directly under the taps that are installed to charge them, with the result that water from the tap may enter the backfilled trench that houses the sewer piping. If the trench has been poorly backfilled, the water will either pond or flow along the bottom of the trench. As these trenches usually run alongside the footings and can be at a similar depth, it is not hard to see how any water that is thus directed into a trench can easily affect the foundation's ability to support footings or even gain entry to the subfloor area.

**Ground drainage**
In all soils there is the capacity for water to travel on the surface and below it. Surface water flows can be established by inspection during and after heavy or prolonged rain. If necessary, a grated drain system connected to the stormwater collection system is usually an easy solution. It is, however, sometimes necessary when attempting to prevent water migration that testing be carried out to establish watertable height and subsoil water flows. This subject is referred to in BTIF 19 and may properly be regarded as an area for an expert consultant.

**Protection of the building perimeter**
It is essential to remember that the soil that affects footings extends well beyond the actual building line. Watering of garden plants, shrubs and trees causes some of the most serious water problems. For this reason, particularly where problems exist or are likely to occur, it is recommended that an apron of paving be installed around as much of the building perimeter as necessary. This paving

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### CLASSIFICATION OF DAMAGE WITH REFERENCE TO WALLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of typical damage and required repair</th>
<th>Approximate crack width limit (see Note 3)</th>
<th>Damage category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hairline cracks</td>
<td>&lt;0.1 mm</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pine cracks which do not need repair</td>
<td>&lt;1 mm</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cracks noticeable but easily filled. Doors and windows stick slightly</td>
<td>&lt;5 mm</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cracks can be repaired and possibly a small amount of wall will need to be replaced. Doors and windows stick. Service pipes may fracture. Weather tightness often impaired</td>
<td>5–15 mm (or a number of cracks 3 mm or more in one group)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensive repair work involving breaking-out and replacing sections of walls, especially over doors and windows. Window and door frames distort. Walls lean or bulge noticeably, some loss of bearing in beams. Service pipes disrupted</td>
<td>15–25 mm but also depend on number of cracks</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gardens for a reactive site

- Water that is transmitted into masonry, metal or timber building elements causes damage and/or decay to those elements.
- High subfloor humidity and moisture content create an ideal environment for various pests, including termites and spiders.
- Where high moisture levels are transmitted to the flooring and walls, an increase in the dust mite count can ensue within the living areas. Dust mites, as well as dampness in general, can be a health hazard to inhabitants, particularly those who are abnormally susceptible to respiratory ailments.

The garden

The ideal vegetation layout is to have lawn or plants that require only light watering immediately adjacent to the drainage or paving edge, then more demanding plants, shrubs and trees spread out in that order.

Overwatering due to misuse of automatic watering systems is a common cause of saturation and water migration under footings. If it is necessary to use these systems, it is important to remove garden beds to a completely safe distance from buildings.

Existing trees

Where a tree is causing a problem of soil drying or there is the existence or threat of upheaval of footings, if the offending roots are subsidiary and their removal will not significantly damage the tree, they should be severed and a concrete or metal barrier placed vertically in the soil to prevent future root growth in the direction of the building. If it is not possible to remove the relevant roots without damage to the tree, an application to remove the tree should be made to the local authority. A prudent plan is to transplant likely offenders before they become a problem.

Information on trees, plants and shrubs

State departments overseeing agriculture can give information regarding root patterns, volume of water needed and safe distance from buildings of most species. Botanic gardens are also sources of information. For information on plant roots and drains, see Building Technology File 17.

Excavation

Excavation around footings must be properly engineered. Soil supporting footings can only be safely excavated at an angle that allows the soil under the footing to remain stable. This angle is called the angle of repose (or friction) and varies significantly between soil types and conditions. Removal of soil within the angle of repose will cause subsidence.

Remediation

Where erosion has occurred that has washed away soil adjacent to footings, soil of the same classification should be introduced and compacted to the same density. Where footings have been undermined, augmentation or other specialist work may be required. Remediation of footings and foundations is generally the realm of a specialist consultant.

Where isolated footings rise and fall because of swell/shrink effect, the homeowner may be tempted to alleviate floor bounce by filling the gap that has appeared between the bearer and the pier with blocking. The danger here is that when the next swell segment of the cycle occurs, the extra blocking will push the floor up into an accentuated dome and may also cause local shear failure in the soil. If it is necessary to use blocking, it should be by a pair of fine wedges and monitoring should be carried out fortuitously.

This BTF was prepared by John Lewer FAIB, MIAMA, Partner, Construction Diagnosis.

The information in this and other issues in the series was derived from various sources and was believed to be correct when published. The information is advisory. It is provided in good faith and not claimed to be an exhaustive treatment of the relevant subject.

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**SITE CLASSIFICATION REPORT SUMMARY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BLOCK:</th>
<th>19</th>
<th>SECTION:</th>
<th>58</th>
<th>SUBURB:</th>
<th>Moncrieff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JOB No:</td>
<td>77119.13</td>
<td>DATE:</td>
<td>August 2015</td>
<td>CLIENT:</td>
<td>Black Mountain Construction Assurance Pty Ltd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### CLASSIFICATION PROCEDURES:

### EXISTING SUBSURFACE CONDITIONS:

**Test Pit 66:** Located on the boundary of Blocks 19 & 20 Section 58. Sandy silt topsoil filling to 0.1 m, well compacted, moist to dry clayey silty sand, clayey gravel and cobbly controlled filling to 1.2 m then stiff, moist to dry silt to 1.4 m overlying hard, moist to dry gravelly silt to the limit of investigation depth of 1.8 m.

**Test Pit 67:** Located on the boundary of Blocks 17 & 18 Section 58. Sandy silt topsoil filling to 0.1 m, well compacted, moist to dry clayey silty sand, clayey gravel and cobbly controlled filling to 1.1 m then stiff, moist to dry silt to 1.2 m overlying high strength, moderately to slightly weathered siltstone bedrock to the refusal depth of 1.3 m.

### BULK EARTHWORKS:

Filling within the block placed under Level 1 control as defined in AS 3798 – 2007 (Ref 1).

### SITE CLASSIFICATION:

Class M* (moderately reactive/filled block) based on limited subsurface information and determined in general accordance with the requirements of AS2870-2011 (Ref 2). The classification must be reassessed should the soil profile change either by adding fill or removing soil from the block and/or if the presence of service trenches or retaining walls are within the zone of influence of the block. Reference should be made to the comments provided below.

### FOOTING SYSTEMS:

Reference must be made to AS2870-2011 (Ref 2) which indicates footing systems that are appropriate for each site classification. All footings must found within a uniform bearing stratum of suitable strength/material, below the zone of influence of any service trenches, backfill zones, retaining walls or underground structures. Masonry walls should be articulated in accordance with current best practice. Footing systems must be confirmed by a structural engineer taking into consideration any onsite or offsite constraints.

### MAINTENANCE GUIDELINES:

CSIRO Sheet BTF 18 ‘Foundation Maintenance & Footing Performance’ (attached). Refer to comments about gardens, landscaping and trees on the performance of foundation soils.

### COMMENTS/LIMITATIONS:

- Development specific geotechnical investigations must be undertaken.
- Additional topsoils/filling may have been spread subsequent to the investigation.
- Site preparation prior to the construction should include removal of all vegetation, topsoil and any uncontrolled filling.
- All new filling must be placed under controlled conditions (AS 3798-2007).
- Some variability in subsurface conditions must be anticipated.
- Moisture condition of site soils and/or the presence of groundwater may vary considerably from time of investigation compared to at the time of construction.
- Depending on the depth of site cut and trenches, rock excavation may be required.
- It is recommended that footing excavations be inspected by a geotechnical engineer.
- This report must be read in conjunction with the attached notes “About this Inspection Report”.

### REFERENCES:

2. AS 2870-2011 'Residential Slabs and Footings,' Standards Association of Australia.

[Signature]

Douglas Partners
**Geotechnics | Environment | Groundwater**
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</tr>
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<td>E</td>
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Tree root growth
Trees and shrubs that are allowed to grow in the vicinity of footings can cause foundation soil movement in two ways:

- Roots that grow under footings may increase in cross-sectional size, exerting upward pressure on footings.
- Roots in the vicinity of footings will absorb much of the moisture in the foundation soil, causing shrinkage or subsidence.

Unevenness of Movement
The types of ground movement described above usually occur unevenly throughout the building's foundation soil. Settlement due to construction tends to be uneven because of:

- Differing compaction of foundation soil prior to construction.
- Differing moisture content of foundation soil prior to construction.

Movement due to non-construction causes is usually more uneven still. Erosion can undermine a footing that traverses the flow or can cause soil adjacent to a footing that runs in the same direction as the flow.

Seasonal swelling and shrinkage of clay soil affects the perimeter of the building first, then gradually spreads to the interior. The swelling process will usually begin at the uphill extreme of the building, or on the weather side where the land is flat. Swelling gradually reaches the interior soil as absorption continues. Shrinkage usually begins where the sun's heat is greatest.

Effects of Uneven Soil Movement on Structures
Erosion and saturation
Erosion removes the support from under footings, tending to create subsidence of the part of the structure under which it occurs. Brickwork walls will resist the stress caused by this removal of support by bridging the gap or cantilevering until the bricks or the mortar bedding fail. Older masonry has little resistance. Evidence of failure varies according to circumstances and symptoms may include:

- Step cracking in the mortar beds in the body of the wall or above/below openings such as doors or windows.
- Vertical cracking in the bricks (usually but not necessarily in line with the vertical beds or perpends).

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Swelling foundation soil due to rainy periods first lifts the most exposed extremities of the footing system, then the remainder of the perimeter footings while gradually permeating inside the building footprint to lift internal footings. This swelling first tends to create a dish effect, because the external footings are pushed higher than the internal ones.

The first noticeable symptom may be that the floor appears slightly dished. This is often accompanied by some doors binding on the floor or the door head, together with some cracking of cornice nitches. In buildings with timber flooring supported by bearers and joists, the floor can be bouncy. Externally there may be visible dishing of the hip or ridge lines.

As the moisture absorption process completes its journey to the innermost areas of the building, the internal footings will rise. If the spread of moisture is roughly even, it may be that the symptoms will temporarily disappear, but it is more likely that swelling will be uneven, creating a difference rather than a disappearance in symptoms. In buildings with timber flooring supported by bearers and joints, the isolated piers will rise more easily than the strip footings or piers under walls, creating noticeable doming of flooring.

As the weather pattern changes and the soil begins to dry out, the external footings will be first affected, beginning with the locations where the sun's effect is strongest. This has the effect of lowering the external footings. The doming is accentuated and cracking reduces or disappears where it occurred because of dishing, but other cracks open up. The roof lines may become convex.

Doming and dishing are also affected by weather in other ways. In areas where warm, wet summers and cooler dry winters prevail, water migration tends to be toward the interior and doming will be accentuated, whereas where summers are dry and winters are cold and wet, migration tends to be toward the exterior and the underlying propensity is toward dishing.

Movement caused by tree roots
In general, growing roots will exert an upward pressure on footings, whereas soil subject to drying because of tree or shrub roots will tend to remove support from under footings by inducing shrinkage.

Complications caused by the structure itself
Most forces that the soil causes to be exerted on structures are vertical – i.e. either up or down. However, because these forces are seldom spread evenly around the footings, and because the building resists uneven movement because of its rigidity, forces are exerted from one part of the building to another. The net result of all these forces is usually rotational. This resultant force often complicates the diagnosis because the visible symptoms do not simply reflect the original cause. A common symptom is binding of doors on the vertical member of the frame.

Effects on full masonry structures
Brickwork will resist cracking where it can. It will attempt to span areas that lose support because of subsided foundations or raised points. It is therefore usual to see cracking at weak points, such as openings for windows or doors. In the event of construction settlement, cracking will usually remain unchanged after the process of settlement has ceased.

With local shear or erosion, cracking will usually continue to develop until the original cause has been remedied, or until the subsidence has completely neutralised the affected portion of footing and the structure has stabilised on other footings that remain effective.

In the case of swell/shrink effects, the brickwork will in some cases return to its original position after completion of a cycle, however it is more likely that the rotational effect will not be exactly reversed, and it is also usual that brickwork will settle in its new position and will resist the forces trying to return it to its original position. This means that in a case where swelling takes place after construction and cracking occurs, the cracking is likely to at least partly remain after the shrink segment of the cycle is complete. Thus, each time the cycle is repeated, the likelihood is that the cracking will become wider until the sections of brickwork become virtually independent.

With repeated cycles, once the cracking is established, if there is no other complication, it is normal for the incidence of cracking to stabilise, as the building has the articulation it needs to cope with the problem. This is by no means always the case, however, and monitoring of cracks in walls and floors should always be treated seriously.

Upheaval caused by growth of tree roots under footings is not a simple vertical shear stress. There is a tendency for the root to also exert lateral forces that attempt to separate sections of brickwork after initial cracking has occurred.
The normal structural arrangement is that the inner leaf of brickwork in the external walls and at least some of the internal walls (depending on the roof type) comprise the load-bearing structure on which any upper floors, ceilings and the roof are supported. In these cases, it is internally visible cracking that should be the main focus of attention, however there are a few examples of dwellings whose external leaf of masonry plays some supporting role, so this should be checked if there is any doubt. In any case, externally visible cracking is important as a guide to stresses on the structure generally, and it should also be remembered that the external walls must be capable of supporting themselves.

**Effects on framed structures**
Timber or steel framed buildings are less likely to exhibit cracking due to swell/shrink than masonry buildings because of their flexibility. Also, the doming/distinct effects tend to be lower because of the lighter weight of walls. The main risks to framed buildings are encountered because of the isolated pier footings used under walls. Where erosion or saturation cause a footing to fall away, this can double the span which a wall must bridge. This additional stress can create cracking in wall linings, particularly where there is a weak point in the structure caused by a door or window opening. It is, however, unlikely that framed structures will be so stressed as to suffer serious damage without first exhibiting some or all of the above symptoms for a considerable period. The same warning period should apply in the case of upheaval. It should be noted, however, that where framed buildings are supported by strip footings there is only one leaf of brickwork and therefore the externally visible walls are the supporting structure for the building. In this case, the subfloor masonry walls can be expected to behave as full brickwork walls.

**Effects on brick veneer structures**
Because the load-bearing structure of a brick veneer building is the frame that makes up the interior leaf of the external walls plus perhaps the internal walls, depending on the type of roof, the building can be expected to behave as a framed structure, except that the external masonry will behave in a similar way to the external leaf of a full masonry structure.

**Water Service and Drainage**
Where a water service pipe, a sewer or stormwater drainage pipe is in the vicinity of a building, a water leak can cause erosion, swelling or saturation of susceptible soil. Even a miniscule leak can be enough to saturate a clay foundation. A leaking tap near a building can have the same effect. In addition, trenches containing pipes can become watercourses even though backfilled, particularly where broken rubble is used as fill. Water that runs along these trenches can be responsible for serious erosion, interstrata seepage into subfloor areas and saturation.

Pipe leakage and trench water flows also encourage tree and shrub roots to the source of water, complicating and exacerbating the problem. Poor roof plumbing can result in large volumes of rainwater being concentrated in a small area of soil:

- Incorrect falls in roof guttering may result in overflows, as may gutters blocked with leaves etc.
- Corroded guttering or downpipes can spill water to ground.
- Downpipes not positively connected to a proper stormwater collection system will direct a concentration of water to soil that is directly adjacent to footings causing target problems such as erosion, saturation and migration of water under the building.

**Seriousness of Cracking**
In general, most cracking found in masonry walls is a cosmetic nuisance only and can be kept in repair or even ignored. The table below is a reproduction of Table C1 of AS 2870.

AS 2870 also publishes figures relating to cracking in concrete floors, however because wall cracking will usually reach the critical point significantly earlier than cracking in slabs, this table is not reproduced here.

**Prevention/Cure**

**Plumbing**
Where building movement is caused by water service, roof plumbing, sewer or stormwater failure, the remedy is to repair the problem. It is prudent, however, to consider also rerouting pipes away from the building where possible, and relocating taps to positions where any leakage will not direct water to the building vicinity. Even where gully traps are present, there is sometimes sufficient spill to create erosion or saturation, particularly in modern installations using smaller diameter PVC fixtures. Indeed, some gully traps are not situated directly under the taps that are installed to charge them, with the result that water from the tap may enter the backfilled trench that houses the sewer piping. If the trench has been properly backfilled, the water will either pond or flow along the bottom of the trench. As these trenches usually run alongside the footings and can be at a similar depth, it is not hard to see how any water that is thus directed into a trench can easily affect the foundation's ability to support footings or even gain entry to the subfloor area.

**Ground drainage**
In all soils there is the capacity for water to travel on the surface and below it. Surface water flows can be established by inspection during and after heavy or prolonged rain. If necessary, a grated drain system connected to the stormwater collection system is usually an easy solution.

It is, however, sometimes necessary when attempting to prevent water migration that testing be carried out to establish watertable height and subsoil water flows. This subject is referred to in BTIF 19 and may properly be regarded as an area for an expert consultant.

**Protection of the building perimeter**
It is essential to remember that the soil that affects footings extends well beyond the actual building line. Watering of garden plants, shrubs and trees causes some of the most serious water problems.

For this reason, particularly where problems exist or are likely to occur, it is recommended that an apron of paving be installed around as much of the building perimeter as necessary. This paving

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<th>Classification of damage with reference to walls</th>
<th>Approximate crack width limit (see Note 3)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hairline cracks</td>
<td>&lt;0.1 mm</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pine cracks which do not need repair</td>
<td>&lt;1 mm</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cracks noticeable but easily filled. Doors and windows stick slightly</td>
<td>&lt;5 mm</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cracks can be repaired and possibly a small amount of wall will need to be replaced. Doors and windows stick. Service pipes can fracture. Weathertightness often impaired</td>
<td>5–15 mm (or a number of cracks 3 mm or more in one group)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensive repair work involving breaking-out and replacing sections of walls, especially over doors and windows. Window and door frames distort. Walls lean or bulge noticeably, some loss of bearing in beams. Service pipes disrupted</td>
<td>15–25 mm but also depend on number of cracks</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
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should extend outwards a minimum of 900 mm (more in highly reactive soil) and should have a minimum fall away from the building of 1:60. The finished paving should be no less than 100 mm below brick vent bases.

It is prudent to relocate drainage pipes away from this paving, if possible, to avoid complications from future leakage. If this is not practical, earthenware pipes should be replaced by PVC and backfilling should be of the same soil type as the surrounding soil and compacted to the same density.

Except in areas where freezing of water is an issue, it is wise to remove taps in the building area and relocate them well away from the building – preferably not uphill from it (see BTF 19).

It may be desirable to install a grated drain at the outside edge of the paving on the uphill side of the building. If subsoil drainage is needed this can be installed under the surface drain.

Condensation

In buildings with a subfloor void such as where bearers and joints support flooring, insufficient ventilation creates ideal conditions for condensation, particularly where there is little clearance between the floor and the ground. Condensation adds to the moisture already present in the subfloor and significantly slows the process of drying out. Installation of an adequate subfloor ventilation system, either natural or mechanical, is desirable.

Warning: Although this Building Technology File deals with cracking in buildings, it should be said that subfloor moisture can result in the development of other problems, notably:

- Water that is transmitted into masonry, metal or timber building elements causes damage and/or decay to these elements.
- High subfloor humidity and moisture content create an ideal environment for various pests, including termites and spiders.
- Where high moisture levels are transmitted to the flooring and walls, an increase in the dust mite count can ensue within the living areas. Dust mites, as well as dampness in general, can be a health hazard to inhabitants, particularly those who are abnormally susceptible to respiratory ailments.

The garden

The ideal vegetation layout is to have lawn or plants that require only light watering immediately adjacent to the drainage or paving edge, then more demanding plants, shrubs and trees spread out in that order.

Overwatering due to misuse of automatic watering systems is a common cause of saturation and water migration under footings. If it is necessary to use these systems, it is important to remove garden beds to a completely safe distance from buildings.

Existing trees

Where a tree is causing a problem of soil drying or there is the existence of threat of upheaval of footings, if the offending roots are subsidiary and their removal will not significantly damage the tree, they should be severed and a concrete or metal barrier placed vertically in the soil to prevent future root growth in the direction of the building. If it is not possible to remove the relevant roots without damage to the tree, an application to remove the tree should be made to the local authority. A prudent plan is to transplant likely offenders before they become a problem.

Information on trees, plants and shrubs

State departments overseeing agriculture can give information regarding root patterns, volume of water needed and safe distance from buildings of most species. Botanic gardens are also sources of information. For information on plant roots and drains, see Building Technology File 17.

Excavation

Excavation around footings must be properly engineered. Soil supporting footings can only be safely excavated at an angle that allows the soil under the footing to remain stable. This angle is called the angle of repose (or friction) and varies significantly between soil types and conditions. Removal of soil within the angle of repose will cause subsidence.

Remediation

Where erosion has occurred that has washed away soil adjacent to footings, soil of the same classification should be introduced and compacted to the same density. Where footings have been undermined, augmentation or other specialist work may be required. Remediation of footings and foundations is generally the realm of a specialist consultant.

Where isolated footings rise and fall because of swell/shift effect, the homeowner may be tempted to alleviate floor bounce by filling the gap that has appeared between the bearer and the pier with blocking. The danger here is that when the next swell segment of the cycle occurs, the extra blocking will push the floor up into an accentuated dome and may also cause local shear failure in the soil. If it is necessary to use blocking, it should be by a pair of fine wedges and monitoring should be carried out fortightly.

This BTF was prepared by John Lever fAIB, MIAMA, Partner, Construction Diagnosis.
SITE CLASSIFICATION REPORT SUMMARY

BLOCK: 20  SECTION: 58  SUBURB: Moncrieff
JOB No: 77119.13  DATE: August 2015
CLIENT: Black Mountain Construction Assurance Pty Ltd

CLASSIFICATION PROCEDURES:

EXISTING SUBSURFACE CONDITIONS:

Test Pit 65: Located on the boundary of Blocks 22 & 23 Section 58. Sandy silt topsoil filling to 0.1 m, well compacted, moist to dry clayey silty sand, clayey gravel and cobbly controlled filling to 1.2 m then very stiff, moist to dry clayey silt to 1.5 m overlying high strength, moderately weathered siltstone bedrock to the refusal depth of 1.6 m.

Test Pit 66: Located on the boundary of Blocks 19 & 20 Section 58. Sandy silt topsoil filling to 0.1 m, well compacted, moist to dry clayey silty sand, clayey gravel and cobbly controlled filling to 1.2 m then stiff, moist to dry silt to 1.4 m overlying hard, moist to dry gravelly silt to the limit of investigation depth of 1.8 m.

BULK EARTHWORKS:

Filling within the block placed under Level 1 control as defined in AS 3798 – 2007 (Ref 1).

SITE CLASSIFICATION: Class M* (moderately reactive/filled block) based on limited subsurface information and determined in general accordance with the requirements of AS2870-2011 (Ref 2). The classification must be reassessed should the soil profile change either by adding fill or removing soil from the block and/or if the presence of service trenches or retaining walls are within the zone of influence of the block. Reference should be made to the comments provided below.

FOOTING SYSTEMS: Reference must be made to AS2870-2011 (Ref 2) which indicates footing systems that are appropriate for each site classification. All footings must found within a uniform bearing stratum of suitable strength/material, below the zone of influence of any service trenches, backfill zones, retaining walls or underground structures. Masonry walls should be articulated in accordance with current best practice. Footing systems must be confirmed by a structural engineer taking into consideration any onsite or offsite constraints.

MAINTENANCE GUIDELINES: CSIRO Sheet BTF 18 ‘Foundation Maintenance & Footing Performance’ (attached). Refer to comments about gardens, landscaping and trees on the performance of foundation soils.

COMMENTS/ LIMITATIONS:

Development specific geotechnical investigations must be undertaken.

Additional topsoils / filling may have been spread subsequent to the investigation.

Site preparation prior to the construction should include removal of all vegetation, topsoil and any uncontrolled filling.

All new filling must be placed under controlled conditions (AS 3798-2007).

Some variability in subsurface conditions must be anticipated.

Moisture condition of site soils and/or the presence of groundwater may vary considerably from time of investigation compared to at the time of construction.

Depending on the depth of site cut and trenches, rock excavation may be required.

It is recommended that footing excavations be inspected by a geotechnical engineer.

This report must be read in conjunction with the attached notes “About this Inspection Report”.

REFERENCES:


About this Inspection Report

Introduction
These notes are provided to amplify DP’s inspection report in regard to the limitations of carrying out inspection work. Not all notes are necessarily relevant to this report.

Standards
This inspection report has been prepared by qualified personnel to current engineering standards of interpretation and analysis.

Copyright and Limits of Use
This inspection report is the property of DP and is provided for the exclusive use of the client for the specific project and purpose as described in the report. It should not be used by a third party for any purpose other than to confirm that the construction works addressed in the report have been inspected as described. Use of the inspection report is limited in accordance with the Conditions of Engagement for the commission.

DP does not undertake to guarantee the works of the contractors or relieve them of their responsibility to produce a completed product conforming to the design.

Reports
This inspection report may include advice or opinion that is based on engineering and/or geological interpretation, information provided by the client or the client’s agent, and information gained from:

- an investigation report for the project (if available to DP);
- inspection of the work, exposed ground conditions, excavation spoil and performance of excavating equipment while DP was on site;
- investigation and testing that was carried out during the site inspection;
- anecdotal information provided by authoritative site personnel; and
- DP’s experience and knowledge of local geology.

Such information may be limited by the frequency of any inspection or testing that was able to be practically carried out, including possible site or cost constraints imposed by the client/contractor(s). For these reasons, the reliability of this inspection report is limited by the scope of information on which it relies.

Every care is taken with the inspection report as it relates to interpretation of subsurface conditions and any recommendations or suggestions for construction or design. However, DP cannot anticipate or assume responsibility for:

- unexpected variations in subsurface conditions that are not evident from the inspection; and
- the actions of contractors responding to commercial pressures.

Should these issues occur, then additional advice should be sought from DP and, if required, amendments made.

This inspection report must be read in conjunction with any attached information. This inspection report should be kept in its entirety without separation of individual pages or sections. DP cannot be held responsible for interpretations or conclusions from review by others of this inspection report or test data, which are not otherwise supported by an expressed statement, interpretation, outcome or conclusion stated in this inspection report.
Foundation Maintenance and Footing Performance: A Homeowner’s Guide

Buildings can and often do move. This movement can be up, down, lateral or rotational. The fundamental cause of movement in buildings can usually be related to one or more problems in the foundation soil. It is important for the homeowner to identify the soil type in order to ascertain the measures that should be put in place in order to ensure that problems in the foundation soil can be prevented, thus protecting against building movement.

This Building Technology File is designed to identify causes of soil-related building movement, and to suggest methods of prevention of resultant cracking in buildings.

Soil Types

The types of soils usually present under the topsoil in land zoned for residential buildings can be split into two approximate groups – granular and clay. Quite often, foundation soil is a mixture of both types. The general problems associated with soils having granular content are usually caused by erosion. Clay soils are subject to saturation and swell/shrink problems.

Classifications for a given area can generally be obtained by application to the local authority, but these are sometimes unreliable and if there is doubt, a geotechnical report should be commissioned. As most buildings suffering movement problems are founded on clay soils, there is an emphasis on classification of soils according to the amount of swell and shrinkage they experience with variations of water content. The table below is Table 2.1 from AS 2870, the Residential Slab and Footing Code.

Causes of Movement

Settlement due to construction

There are two types of settlement that occur as a result of construction:

- Immediate settlement occurs when a building is first placed on its foundation soil, as a result of compaction of the soil under the weight of the structure. The cohesive quality of clay soil mitigates against this, but granular (particularly sandy) soil is susceptible.
- Consolidation settlement is a feature of clay soil and may take place because of the expulsion of moisture from the soil or because of the soil’s lack of resistance to local compressive or shear stresses. This will usually take place during the first few months after construction, but has been known to take many years in exceptional cases.

These problems are the province of the builder and should be taken into consideration as part of the preparation of the site for construction. Building Technology File 19 (BT 19) deals with these problems.

Erosion

All soils are prone to erosion, but sandy soil is particularly susceptible to being washed away. Even clay with a sand component of say 10% or more can suffer from erosion.

Saturation

This is particularly a problem in clay soils. Saturation creates a bog-like suspension of the soil that causes it to lose virtually all of its bearing capacity. To a lesser degree, sand is affected by saturation because saturated sand may undergo a reduction in volume – particularly imported sand fill for bedding and blinding layers. However, this usually occurs as immediate settlement and should normally be the province of the builder.

Seasonal swelling and shrinkage of soil

All clays react to the presence of water by slowly absorbing it, making the soil increase in volume (see table below). The degree of increase varies considerably between different clays, as does the degree of decrease during the subsequent drying out caused by fair weather periods. Because of the low absorption and expulsion rate, this phenomenon will not usually be noticeable unless there are prolonged rainy or dry periods, usually of weeks or months, depending on the land and soil characteristics.

The swelling of soil creates an upward force on the footings of the building, and shrinkage creates subsidence that takes away the support needed by the footing to retain equilibrium.

Shear failure

This phenomenon occurs when the foundation soil does not have sufficient strength to support the weight of the footing. There are two major post-construction causes:

- Significant load increase.
- Reduction of lateral support of the soil under the footing due to erosion or excavation.

In clay soil, shear failure can be caused by saturation of the soil adjacent to or under the footing.

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Trees and shrubs that are allowed to grow in the vicinity of footings can cause foundation soil movement in two ways:

- Roots that grow under footings may increase in cross-sectional size, exerting upward pressure on footings.
- Roots in the vicinity of footings will absorb much of the moisture in the foundation soil, causing shrinkage or subsidence.

Unevenness of Movement

The types of ground movement described above usually occur unevenly throughout the building’s foundation soil. Settlement due to construction tends to be uneven because of:

- Differing compaction of foundation soil prior to construction.
- Differing moisture content of foundation soil prior to construction.

Movement due to non-construction causes is usually more uneven still. Erosion can undermine a footing that traverses the flow or can wash out soil adjacent to a footing that runs in the same direction as the flow.

Saturation of clay foundation soil may occur where subfloor walls create a dam that makes water pond. It can also occur wherever there is a source of water near footings in clay soil. This leads to a severe reduction in the strength of the soil which may create local shear failure.

Seasonal swelling and shrinkage of clay soil affects the perimeter of the building first, then gradually spreads to the interior. The swelling process will usually begin at the uphill extreme of the building, or on the weather side where the land is flat. Swelling gradually reaches the interior soil as absorption continues. Shrinkage usually begins when the sun’s heat is greatest.

Effects of Uneven Soil Movement on Structures

Erosion and saturation
Erosion removes the support from under footings, tending to create subsidence of the part of the structure under which it occurs. Brickwork walls will resist the stress created by this removal of support by bridging the gap or cantilevering until the bricks or the mortar bedding fail. Older masonry has little resistance. Evidence of failure varies according to circumstances and symptoms may include:

- Step cracking in the mortar beds in the body of the wall or above/below openings such as doors or windows.
- Vertical cracking in the bricks (usually but not necessarily in line with the vertical beds or piers).

Isolated piers affected by erosion or saturation of foundations will eventually lose contact with the bearers they support and may tilt or fall over. The floors that have lost this support will become bouncy, sometimes rattling ornaments etc.

Seasonal swelling/shrinkage in clay

Swelling foundation soil due to rainy periods first lifts the most exposed extremities of the footing system, then the remainder of the perimeter footings while gradually permeating inside the building footprint to lift internal footings. This swelling first tends to create a dish effect, because the external footings are pushed higher than the internal ones.

The first noticeable symptom may be that the floor appears slightly dished. This is often accompanied by some doors binding on the floor or the door head, together with some cracking of cornice mitres. In buildings with timber flooring supported by bearers and joists, the floor can be bouncy. Externally there may be visible dishing of the hip or ridge lines.

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As the weather pattern changes and the soil begins to dry out, the external footings will be first affected, beginning with the locations where the sun’s effect is strongest. This has the effect of lowering the external footings. The doming is accentuated and cracking reduces or disappears where it occurred because of dishing, but other cracks open up. The roof lines may become convex.

Denting and dishing are also affected by weather in other ways. In areas where warm, wet summers and cooler dry winters prevail, water migration tends to be toward the interior and doming will be accentuated, whereas where summers are dry and winters are cold and wet, migration tends to be toward the exterior and the underlying propensity is toward dishing.

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In general, growing roots will exert an upward pressure on footings, whereas soil subject to drying because of tree or shrub roots will tend to remove support from under footings by inducing shrinkage.

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Most forces that the soil causes to be exerted on structures are vertical—i.e. either up or down. However, because these forces are seldom spread evenly around the footings, and because the building resists uneven movement because of its rigidity, forces are exerted from one part of the building to another. The net result of all these forces is usually rotational. This resultant force often complicates the diagnosis because the visible symptoms do not simply reflect the original cause. A common symptom is binding of doors on the vertical member of the frame.

Effects on full masonry structures
Brickwork will resist cracking where it can. It will attempt to span areas that lose support because of subsided foundations or raised points. It is therefore usual to see cracking at weak points, such as openings for windows or doors.

In the event of construction settlement, cracking will usually remain unchanged after the process of settlement has ceased.

With local shear or erosion, cracking will usually continue to develop until the original cause has been remedied, or until the subsidence has completely neutralised the affected portion of footing and the structure has stabilised on other footings that remain effective.

In the case of swell/shrink effects, the brickwork will in some cases return to its original position after completion of a cycle, however it is more likely that the rotational effect will not be exactly reversed, and it is alsousual that brickwork will settle in its new position and will resist the forces trying to return it to its original position. This means that in a case where swelling takes place after construction and cracking occurs, the cracking is likely to at least partly remain after the shrink segment of the cycle is complete. Thus, each time the cycle is repeated, the likelihood is that the cracking will become wider until the sections of brickwork become virtually independent.

With repeated cycles, once the cracking is established, if there is no other complication, it is normal for the incidence of cracking to stabilise, as the building has the articulation it needs to cope with the problem. This is by no means always the case, however, and monitoring of cracks in walls and floors should always be treated seriously.

Uphesal caused by growth of tree roots under footings is not a simple vertical shear stress. There is a tendency for the root to also exert lateral forces that attempt to separate sections of brickwork after initial cracking has occurred.
The normal structural arrangement is that the inner leaf of brickwork in the external walls and at least some of the internal walls (depending on the roof type) comprise the load-bearing structure on which any upper floors, ceilings and the roof are supported. In these cases, it is internally visible cracking that should be the main focus of attention, however there are a few examples of dwellings whose external leaf of masonry plays some supporting role, so this should be checked if there is any doubt. In any case, externally visible cracking is important as a guide to stresses on the structure generally, and it should also be remembered that the external walls must be capable of supporting themselves.

Effects on framed structures
Timber or steel framed buildings are less likely to exhibit cracking due to swell/shrink than masonry buildings because of their flexibility. Also, the doming/reflecting effects tend to be lower because of the lighter weight of walls. The main risks to framed buildings are encountered because of the isolated pier footings used under walls. Where erosion or saturation cause a footing to fail away, this can double the span which a wall must bridge. This additional stress can create cracking in wall linings, particularly where there is a weak point in the structure caused by a door or window opening. It is, however, unlikely that framed structures will be so stressed as to suffer serious damage without first exhibiting some or all of the above symptoms for a considerable period. The same warning period should apply in the case of upheaval. It should be noted, however, that where framed buildings are supported by strip footings there is only one leaf of brickwork and therefore the externally visible walls are the supporting structure for the building. In this case, the subfloor masonry walls can be expected to behave as full brickwork walls.

Effects on brick veneer structures
Because the load-bearing structure of a brick veneer building is the frame that makes up the interior leaf of the external walls plus perhaps the internal walls, depending on the type of roof, the building can be expected to behave as a framed structure, except that the external masonry will behave in a similar way to the external leaf of a full masonry structure.

Water Service and Drainage
Where a water service pipe, a sewer or stormwater drainage pipe is in the vicinity of a building, a water leak can cause erosion, swelling or saturation of susceptible soil. Even a minuscule leak can be enough to saturate a clay foundation. A leaking tap near a building can have the same effect. In addition, trenches containing pipes can become watercourses even though backfilled, particularly where broken rubble is used as fill. Water that runs along these trenches can be responsible for serious erosion, interrata sewerage into subfloor areas and saturation.

Pipe leakage and trench water flows also encourage tree and shrub roots to the source of water, complicating and exacerbating the problem.

Protection of the building perimeter
It is essential to remember that the soil that affects footings extends well beyond the actual building line. Watering of garden plants, shrubs and trees causes some of the most serious water problems.

For this reason, particularly where problems exist or are likely to occur, it is recommended that an apron of paving be installed around as much of the building perimeter as necessary. This paving

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• Water that is transmitted into masonry, metal or timber building elements causes damage and/or decay to those elements.
• High subfloor humidity and moisture content create an ideal environment for various pests, including termites and spiders.
• Where high moisture levels are transmitted to the flooring and walls, an increase in the dust mite count can ensue within the living areas. Dust mites, as well as dampness in general, can be a health hazard to inhabitants, particularly those who are abnormally susceptible to respiratory ailments.

The garden

The ideal vegetation layout is to have lawn or plants that require only light watering immediately adjacent to the drainage or paving edge, then more demanding plants, shrubs and trees spread out in that order.

Overwatering due to misuse of automatic watering systems is a common cause of saturation and water migration under footings. If it is necessary to use these systems, it is important to remove garden beds to a completely safe distance from buildings.

Existing trees

Where a tree is causing a problem of soil drying or there is the existence or threat of upheaval of footings, if the offending roots are subsidiary and their removal will not significantly damage the tree, they should be severed and a concrete or metal barrier placed vertically in the soil to prevent future root growth in the direction of the building. If it is not possible to remove the relevant roots without damage to the tree, an application to remove the tree should be made to the local authority. A prudent plan is to transplant likely offenders before they become a problem.

Information on trees, plants and shrubs

State departments overseeing agriculture can give information regarding root patterns, volume of water needed and safe distance from buildings of most species. Botanic gardens are also sources of information. For information on plant roots and drains, see Building Technology File 17.

Excavation

Excavation around footings must be properly engineered. Soil supporting footings can only be safely excavated at an angle that allows the soil under the footing to remain stable. This angle is called the angle of repose (or friction) and varies significantly between soil types and conditions. Removal of soil within the angle of repose will cause subsidence.

Remediation

Where erosion has occurred that has washed away soil adjacent to footings, soil of the same classification should be introduced and compacted to the same density. Where footings have been undermined, augmentation or other specialist work may be required. Remediation of footings and foundations is generally the realm of a specialist consultant.

Where isolated footings rise and fall because of swell/shrink effect, the homeowner may be tempted to alleviate floor bounce by filling the gap that has appeared between the bearer and the pier with blocking. The danger here is that when the next swell segment of the cycle occurs, the extra blocking will push the floor up into an accentuated dome and may also cause local shear failure in the soil. If it is necessary to use blocking, it should be by a pair of fine wedges and monitoring should be carried out fortightly.

This BTF was prepared by John Lewer FAIB, MIAMA, Partner, Construction Diagnosis.

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The information in this and other issues in the series was derived from various sources and was believed to be correct when published.

The information is advisory. It is provided in good faith and not claimed to be an exhaustive treatment of the relevant subject.

Further professional advice needs to be obtained before taking any action based on the information provided.

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## SITE CLASSIFICATION REPORT SUMMARY

**BLOCK:** 21  
**SECTION:** 58  
**SUBURB:** Moncrieff  
**JOB No:** 77119.13  
**DATE:** August 2015  
**CLIENT:** Black Mountain Construction Assurance Pty Ltd

### CLASSIFICATION PROCEDURES:

#### EXISTING SUBSURFACE CONDITIONS:

**Test Pit 65:** Located on the boundary of Blocks 22 & 23 Section 58. Sandy silt topsoil filling to 0.1 m, well compacted, moist to dry clayey silty sand, clayey gravel and cobbly controlled filling to 1.2 m then very stiff, moist to dry clayey silt to 1.5 m overlying high strength, moderately weathered siltstone bedrock to the refusal depth of 1.6 m.

**Test Pit 66:** Located on the boundary of Blocks 19 & 20 Section 58. Sandy silt topsoil filling to 0.1 m, well compacted, moist to dry clayey silty sand, clayey gravel and cobbly controlled filling to 1.2 m then stiff, moist to dry silt to 1.4 m overlying hard, moist to dry gravelly silt to the limit of investigation depth of 1.8 m.

### BULK EARTHWORKS:

Filling within the block placed under Level 1 control as defined in AS 3798 – 2007 (Ref 1).

### SITE CLASSIFICATION:

Class M* (moderately reactive/filled block) based on limited subsurface information and determined in general accordance with the requirements of AS2870-2011 (Ref 2). The classification must be reassessed should the soil profile change either by adding fill or removing soil from the block and/or if the presence of service trenches or retaining walls are within the zone of influence of the block. Reference should be made to the comments provided below.

### FOOTING SYSTEMS:

Reference must be made to AS2870-2011 (Ref 2) which indicates footing systems that are appropriate for each site classification. All footings must found within a uniform bearing stratum of suitable strength/material, below the zone of influence of any service trenches, backfill zones, retaining walls or underground structures. Masonry walls should be articulated in accordance with current best practice. Footing systems must be confirmed by a structural engineer taking into consideration any onsite or offsite constraints.

### MAINTENANCE GUIDELINES:

CSIRO Sheet BTF 18 ‘Foundation Maintenance & Footing Performance’ (attached). Refer to comments about gardens, landscaping and trees on the performance of foundation soils.

### COMMENTS/LIMITATIONS:

Development specific geotechnical investigations must be undertaken.  
Additional topsoils/filling may have been spread subsequent to the investigation.  
Site preparation prior to the construction should include removal of all vegetation, topsoil and any uncontrolled filling.  
All new filling must be placed under controlled conditions (AS 3798-2007).  
Some variability in subsurface conditions must be anticipated.  
Moisture condition of site soils and/or the presence of groundwater may vary considerably from time of investigation compared to at the time of construction.  
Depending on the depth of site cut and trenches, rock excavation may be required.  
It is recommended that footing excavations be inspected by a geotechnical engineer.

This report must be read in conjunction with the attached notes “About this Inspection Report”.

### REFERENCES:

About this Inspection Report

Introduction
These notes are provided to amplify DP’s inspection report in regard to the limitations of carrying out inspection work. Not all notes are necessarily relevant to this report.

Standards
This inspection report has been prepared by qualified personnel to current engineering standards of interpretation and analysis.

Copyright and Limits of Use
This inspection report is the property of DP and is provided for the exclusive use of the client for the specific project and purpose as described in the report. It should not be used by a third party for any purpose other than to confirm that the construction works addressed in the report have been inspected as described. Use of the inspection report is limited in accordance with the Conditions of Engagement for the commission.

DP does not undertake to guarantee the works of the contractors or relieve them of their responsibility to produce a completed product conforming to the design.

Reports
This inspection report may include advice or opinion that is based on engineering and/or geological interpretation, information provided by the client or the client’s agent, and information gained from:

- an investigation report for the project (if available to DP);
- inspection of the work, exposed ground conditions, excavation spoil and performance of excavating equipment while DP was on site;
- investigation and testing that was carried out during the site inspection;
- anecdotal information provided by authoritative site personnel; and
- DP’s experience and knowledge of local geology.

Such information may be limited by the frequency of any inspection or testing that was able to be practically carried out, including possible site or cost constraints imposed by the client/contractor(s). For these reasons, the reliability of this inspection report is limited by the scope of information on which it relies.

Every care is taken with the inspection report as it relates to interpretation of subsurface conditions and any recommendations or suggestions for construction or design. However, DP cannot anticipate or assume responsibility for:

- unexpected variations in subsurface conditions that are not evident from the inspection; and
- the actions of contractors responding to commercial pressures.

Should these issues occur, then additional advice should be sought from DP and, if required, amendments made.

This inspection report must be read in conjunction with any attached information. This inspection report should be kept in its entirety without separation of individual pages or sections. DP cannot be held responsible for interpretations or conclusions from review by others of this inspection report or test data, which are not otherwise supported by an expressed statement, interpretation, outcome or conclusion stated in this inspection report.
Foundation Maintenance and Footing Performance:
A Homeowner’s Guide

Buildings can and often do move. This movement can be up, down, lateral or rotational. The fundamental cause of movement in buildings can usually be related to one or more problems in the foundation soil. It is important for the homeowner to identify the soil type in order to ascertain the measures that should be put in place in order to ensure that problems in the foundation soil can be prevented, thus protecting against building movement.

This Building Technology File is designed to identify causes of soil-related building movement, and to suggest methods of prevention of resultant cracking in buildings.

- **Soil Types**
  The types of soils usually present under the topsoil in land zoned for residential buildings can be split into two approximate groups – granular and clay. Quite often, foundation soil is a mixture of both types. The general problems associated with soils having granular content are usually caused by erosion. Clay soils are subject to saturation and swell/shrink problems.

  Classifications for a given area can generally be obtained by application to the local authority; but these are sometimes unreliable and if there is doubt, a geotechnical report should be commissioned.

- **Causes of Movement**
  - **Settlement due to construction**
    - Immediate settlement occurs when a building is first placed on its foundation soil, as a result of compaction of the soil under the weight of the structure. The cohesive quality of clay soil mitigates against this, but granular (particularly sandy) soil is susceptible.
    - Consolidation settlement is a feature of clay soil and may take place because of the expulsion of moisture from the soil or because of the soil’s lack of resistance to local compressive or shear stresses. This will usually take place during the first few months after construction, but has been known to take many years in exceptional cases.

  These problems are the province of the builder and should be taken into consideration as part of the preparation of the site for construction. Building Technology File 19 (BT 19) deals with these problems.

- **Erosion**
  All soils are prone to erosion, but sandy soil is particularly susceptible to being washed away. Even clay with a sand component of say 10% or more can suffer from erosion.

- **Saturation**
  This is particularly a problem in clay soils. Saturation creates a bog-like suspension of the soil that causes it to lose virtually all of its bearing capacity. To a lesser degree, sand is affected by saturation because saturated sand may undergo a reduction in volume – particularly imported sand fill for bedding and blinding layers. However, this usually occurs as immediate settlement and should normally be the province of the builder.

- **Seasonal swelling and shrinkage of soil**
  All clays react to the presence of water by slowly absorbing it, making the soil increase in volume (see table below). The degree of increase varies considerably between different clays, as does the degree of decrease during the subsequent drying out caused by fair weather periods. Because of the low absorption and expulsion rate, this phenomenon will not usually be noticeable unless there are prolonged rainy or dry periods, usually of weeks or months, depending on the land and soil characteristics.

  The swelling of soil creates an upward force on the footings of the building, and shrinkage creates subsidence that takes away the support needed by the footing to retain equilibrium.

- **Shear failure**
  This phenomenon occurs when the foundation soil does not have sufficient strength to support the weight of the footing. There are two major post-construction causes:
  - Significant load increase.
  - Reduction of lateral support of the soil under the footing due to erosion or excavation.

  In clay soil, shear failure can be caused by saturation of the soil adjacent to or under the footing.

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**GENERAL DEFINITIONS OF SITE CLASSES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Foundation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Most sand and rock sites with little or no ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Slightly reactive clay sites with only slight ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Highly reactive clay sites, which can experience high ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>A to P</td>
<td>Filled sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Sites which include soft soils, such as soft clay or silt or loose sands; landslip; mine subsidence; collapsing soils; soils subject to erosion; reactive sites subject to abnormal moisture conditions or sites which cannot be classified otherwise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tree root growth

Trees and shrubs that are allowed to grow in the vicinity of footings can cause foundation soil movement in two ways:

- Roots that grow under footings may increase in cross-sectional size, exerting upward pressure on footings.
- Roots in the vicinity of footings will absorb much of the moisture in the foundation soil, causing shrinkage or subsidence.

Unevenness of Movement

The types of ground movement described above usually occur unevenly throughout the building's foundation soil. Settlement due to construction tends to be uneven because of:

- Differing compaction of foundation soil prior to construction.
- Differing moisture content of foundation soil prior to construction.

Movement due to non-construction causes is usually more uneven still. Erosion can undermine a footing that traverses the flow or can create a sink adjacent to a footing that runs in the same direction as the flow.

Saturation of clay foundation soil may occur where subfloor walls create a dam that makes water pond. It can also occur wherever there is a source of water near footings in clay soil. This leads to a severe reduction in the strength of the soil which may create local shear failure.

Seasonal swelling and shrinkage of clay soil affects the perimeter of the building first, then gradually spreads to the interior. The swelling process will usually begin at the uphill extreme of the building, or on the weather side where the land is flat. Swelling gradually reaches the interior soil as absorption continues. Shrinkage usually begins where the sun's heat is greatest.

Effects of Uneven Soil Movement on Structures

Erosion and saturation

Erosion removes the support from under footings, tending to create subsidence of the part of the structure under which it occurs. Brickwork walls will resist the stress created by this removal of support by bridging the gap or cantilevering until the bricks or the mortar bedding fail. Older masonry has little resistance. Evidence of failure varies according to circumstances and symptoms may include:

- Step cracking in the mortar bed in the body of the wall or above/below openings such as doors or windows.
- Vertical cracking in the bricks (usually but not necessarily in line with the vertical beds or piers).

Isolated piers affected by erosion or saturation of foundations will eventually lose contact with the bearers they support and may tilt or fall over. The floors that have lost this support will become bouncy, sometimes rattling ornaments etc.

Seasonal swelling/shrinkage in clay

Swelling foundation soil due to rainy periods first lifts the most exposed extremities of the footing system, then the remainder of the perimeter footings while gradually permeating inside the building footprint to lift internal footings. This swelling first tends to create a dish effect, because the external footings are pushed higher than the internal ones.

The first noticeable symptom may be that the floor appears slightly dished. This is often accompanied by some doors binding on the floor or the door head, together with some cracking of cornice mitres. In buildings with timber flooring supported by bearers and joists, the floor can be bouncy. Externally there may be visible dishing of the hip or ridge lines.

As the moisture absorption process completes its journey to the innermost area of the building, the internal footings will rise. If the spread of moisture is roughly even, it may be that the symptoms will temporarily disappear, but it is more likely that swelling will be uneven, creating a difference rather than a disappearance in symptoms. In buildings with timber flooring supported by bearers and joists, the isolated pier will rise more easily than the strip footings or piers under walls, creating noticeable doming of flooring.

Trees can cause shrinkage and damage

As the weather pattern changes and the soil begins to dry out, the external footings will be first affected, beginning with the locations where the sun's effect is strongest. This has the effect of lowering the external footings. The doming is accentuated and cracking reduces or disappears where it occurred because of dishing, but other cracks open up. The roof lines may become convex.

Doming and dishing are also affected by weather in other ways. In areas where warm, wet summers and cooler dry winters prevail, water migration tends to be toward the interior and doming will be accentuated, whereas where summers are dry and winters are cold and wet, migration tends to be toward the exterior and the underlying propensity is toward dishing.

Movement caused by tree roots

In general, growing roots will exert an upward pressure on footings, whereas soil subject to drying because of tree or shrub roots will tend to remove support from under footings by inducing shrinkage.

Complications caused by the structure itself

Most forces that the soil causes to be exerted on structures are vertical – i.e. either up or down. However, because these forces are seldom spread evenly around the footings, and because the building resists uneven movement because of its rigidity, forces are exerted from one part of the building to another. The net result of all these forces is usually rotational. This resultant force often complicates the diagnosis because the visible symptoms do not simply reflect the original cause. A common symptom is binding of doors on the vertical member of the frame.

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Brickwork will resist cracking where it can. It will attempt to span areas that lose support because of subsided foundations or raised points. It is therefore usual to see cracking at weak points, such as openings for windows or doors.

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The normal structural arrangement is that the inner leaf of brickwork in the external walls and at least some of the internal walls [depending on the roof type] comprise the load-bearing structure on which any upper floors, ceilings and the roof are supported. In these cases, it is internally visible cracking that should be the main focus of attention, however there are a few examples of dwellings whose external leaf of masonry plays some supporting role, so this should be checked if there is any doubt. In any case, externally visible cracking is important as a guide to stresses on the structure generally, and it should also be remembered that the external walls must be capable of supporting themselves.

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Water Service and Drainage
Where a water service pipe, a sewer or stormwater drainage pipe is in the vicinity of a building, a water leak can cause erosion, swelling or saturation of susceptible soil. Even a minuscule leak can be enough to saturate a clay foundation. A leaking tap near a building can have the same effect. In addition, trenches containing pipes can become watercourses even though backfilled, particularly where broken rubble is used as fill. Water that runs along these trenches can be responsible for serious erosion, interstrata seepage into subfloor areas and saturation.

Pipe leakage and trench water flows also encourage tree and shrub roots to the source of water, complicating and exacerbating the problem. Poor roof plumbing can result in large volumes of rainwater being concentrated in a small area of soil:

- Incorrect falls in roof guttering may result in overflows, as may gutters blocked with leaves etc.
- Corroded guttering or downpipes can spill water to ground.
- Downpipes not positively connected to a proper stormwater collection system will direct a concentration of water to soil that is directly adjacent to footing, causing serious problems such as erosion, saturation and migration of water under the building.

### Seriousness of Cracking

In general, most cracking found in masonry walls is a cosmetic nuisance only and can be kept in repair or even ignored. The table below is a reproduction of Table C1 of AS 2870.

AS 2870 also publishes figures relating to cracking in concrete floors, however because wall cracking will usually reach the critical point significantly earlier than cracking in slabs, this table is not reproduced here.

### Prevention/Cure

**Plumbing**

Where building movement is caused by water service, roof plumbing, sewer or stormwater failure, the remedy is to repair the problem. It is prudent, however, to consider also rerouting pipes away from the building where possible, and relocating taps to positions where any leakage will not direct water to the building vicinity. Even where gully traps are present, there is sometimes sufficient spill to create erosion or saturation, particularly in modern installations using smaller diameter PVC fixtures. Indeed, some gully traps are not situated directly under the taps that are installed to charge them, with the result that water from the tap may enter the backfilled trench that houses the sewer piping. If the trench has been poorly backfilled, the water will either pond or flow along the bottom of the trench. As these trenches usually run alongside the footings and can be at a similar depth, it is not hard to see how any water that is thus directed into a trench can easily affect the foundation's ability to support footings or even gain entry to the subfloor area.

**Ground drainage**

In all soils there is the capacity for water to travel on the surface and below it. Surface water flows can be established by inspection during and after heavy or prolonged rain. If necessary, a graded drain system connected to the stormwater collection system is usually an easy solution.

It is, however, sometimes necessary when attempting to prevent water migration that testing be carried out to establish watertable height and subsoil water flows. This subject is referred to in BTF 19 and may properly be regarded as an area for an expert consultant.

**Protection of the building perimeter**

It is essential to remember that the soil that affects footings extends well beyond the actual building line. Watering of garden plants, shrubs and trees causes some of the most serious water problems. For this reason, particularly where problems exist or are likely to occur, it is recommended that an apron of paving be installed around as much of the building perimeter as necessary. This paving

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**CLASSIFICATION OF DAMAGE WITH REFERENCE TO WALLS**

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<td>Extensive repair work involving breaking-out and replacing sections of walls, especially over doors and windows. Window and door frames distort. Walls lean or bulge noticeably, some loss of bearing in beams. Service pipes disrupted</td>
<td>15–25 mm but also depend on number of cracks</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Water that is transmitted into masonry, metal or timber building elements causes damage and/or decay to those elements.
• High subfloor humidity and moisture content create an ideal environment for various pests, including termites and spiders.
• Where high moisture levels are transmitted to the flooring and walls, an increase in the dust mite count can ensue within the living areas. Dust mites, as well as dampness in general, can be a health hazard to inhabitants, particularly those who are abnormally susceptible to respiratory ailments.

The garden
The ideal vegetation layout is to have lawn or plants that require only light watering immediately adjacent to the drainage or paving edge, then more demanding plants, shrubs and trees spread out in that order.

Overwatering due to misuse of automatic watering systems is a common cause of saturation and water migration under footings. If it is necessary to use these systems, it is important to remove garden beds to a completely safe distance from buildings.

Existing trees
Where a tree is causing a problem of soil drying or there is the existence or threat of upheaval of footings, if the offending roots are subsidiary and their removal will not significantly damage the tree, they should be severed and a concrete or metal barrier placed vertically in the soil to prevent future root growth in the direction of the building. If it is not possible to remove the relevant roots without damage to the tree, an application to remove the tree should be made to the local authority. A prudent plan is to transplant likely offenders before they become a problem.

Information on trees, plants and shrubs
State departments overseeing agriculture can give information regarding root patterns, volume of water needed and safe distance from buildings of most species. Botanic gardens are also sources of information. For information on plant roots and drains, see Building Technology File 17.

Excavation
Excavation around footings must be properly engineered. Soil supporting footings can only be safely excavated at an angle that allows the soil under the footing to remain stable. This angle is called the angle of repose (or friction) and varies significantly between soil types and conditions. Removal of soil within the angle of repose will cause subsidence.

Remediation
Where erosion has occurred that has washed away soil adjacent to footings, soil of the same classification should be introduced and compacted to the same density. Where footings have been undermined, augmentation or other specialist work may be required. Remediation of footings and foundations is generally the realm of a specialist consultant.
Where isolated footings rise and fall because of swell/shrink effect, the homeowner may be tempted to alleviate floor bounce by filling the gap that has appeared between the bearer and the pier with blocking. The danger here is that when the next swell segment of the cycle occurs, the extra blocking will push the floor up into an accentuated dome and may also cause local shear failure in the soil. If it is necessary to use blocking, it should be by a pair of fine wedges and monitoring should be carried out fortightly.

This BTIF was prepared by John Lewer FAIB, MIAMA, Partner, Constuction Diagnosis.
SITE CLASSIFICATION REPORT SUMMARY

BLOCK: 22  
SECTION: 58  
SUBURB: Moncrieff

JOB No: 77119.13  
DATE: August 2015

CLIENT: Black Mountain Construction Assurance Pty Ltd

CLASSIFICATION PROCEDURES:

EXISTING SUBSURFACE CONDITIONS:

Test Pit 64: Located on the boundary of Blocks 1 & 23 Section 58. Sandy silt topsoil filling to 0.2 m overlying well compacted, moist to dry clayey silty sand, clayey gravel and cobbly controlled filling to the limit of investigation depth of 1.7 m.

Test Pit 65: Located on the boundary of Blocks 22 & 23 Section 58. Sandy silt topsoil filling to 0.1 m, well compacted, moist to dry clayey silty sand, clayey gravel and cobbly controlled filling to 1.2 m then very stiff, moist to dry clayey silt to 1.5 m overlying high strength, moderately weathered siltstone bedrock to the refusal depth of 1.6 m.

BULK EARTHWORKS:

Filling was placed over the northern half of the block under Level 1 control as defined in AS 3798 – 2007 (Ref 1).

SITE CLASSIFICATION: Class M* (moderately reactive/filled block) based on limited subsurface information and determined in general accordance with the requirements of AS2870-2011 (Ref 2). The classification must be reassessed should the soil profile change either by adding fill or removing soil from the block and/or if the presence of service trenches or retaining walls are within the zone of influence of the block. Reference should be made to the comments provided below.

FOOTING SYSTEMS:

Reference must be made to AS2870-2011 (Ref 2) which indicates footing systems that are appropriate for each site classification. All footings must found within a uniform bearing stratum of suitable strength/material, below the zone of influence of any service trenches, backfill zones, retaining walls or underground structures. Masonry walls should be articulated in accordance with current best practice. Footing systems must be confirmed by a structural engineer taking into consideration any onsite or offsite constraints.

MAINTENANCE GUIDELINES:

CSIRO Sheet BTF 18 ‘Foundation Maintenance & Footing Performance’ (attached). Refer to comments about gardens, landscaping and trees on the performance of foundation soils.

COMMENTS/LIMITATIONS:

Development specific geotechnical investigations must be undertaken.

Additional topsoils / filling may have been spread subsequent to the investigation.

Site preparation prior to the construction should include removal of all vegetation, topsoil and any uncontrolled filling.

All new filling must be placed under controlled conditions (AS 3798-2007).

Some variability in subsurface conditions must be anticipated.

Moisture condition of site soils and/or the presence of groundwater may vary considerably from time of investigation compared to at the time of construction.

Rock excavation may be required over parts of the block.

It is recommended that footing excavations be inspected by a geotechnical engineer.

This report must be read in conjunction with the attached notes "About this Inspection Report".

REFERENCES:

Introduction
These notes are provided to amplify DP’s inspection report in regard to the limitations of carrying out inspection work. Not all notes are necessarily relevant to this report.

Standards
This inspection report has been prepared by qualified personnel to current engineering standards of interpretation and analysis.

Copyright and Limits of Use
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DP does not undertake to guarantee the works of the contractors or relieve them of their responsibility to produce a completed product conforming to the design.

Reports
This inspection report may include advice or opinion that is based on engineering and/or geological interpretation, information provided by the client or the client’s agent, and information gained from:

- an investigation report for the project (if available to DP);
- inspection of the work, exposed ground conditions, excavation spoil and performance of excavating equipment while DP was on site;
- investigation and testing that was carried out during the site inspection;
- anecdotal information provided by authoritative site personnel; and
- DP’s experience and knowledge of local geology.

Such information may be limited by the frequency of any inspection or testing that was able to be practically carried out, including possible site or cost constraints imposed by the client/contractor(s). For these reasons, the reliability of this inspection report is limited by the scope of information on which it relies.

Every care is taken with the inspection report as it relates to interpretation of subsurface conditions and any recommendations or suggestions for construction or design. However, DP cannot anticipate or assume responsibility for:

- unexpected variations in subsurface conditions that are not evident from the inspection; and
- the actions of contractors responding to commercial pressures.

Should these issues occur, then additional advice should be sought from DP and, if required, amendments made.

This inspection report must be read in conjunction with any attached information. This inspection report should be kept in its entirety without separation of individual pages or sections. DP cannot be held responsible for interpretations or conclusions from review by others of this inspection report or test data, which are not otherwise supported by an expressed statement, interpretation, outcome or conclusion stated in this inspection report.
Foundation Maintenance and Footing Performance: A Homeowner’s Guide

Buildings can and often do move. This movement can be up, down, lateral or rotational. The fundamental cause of movement in buildings can usually be related to one or more problems in the foundation soil. It is important for the homeowner to identify the soil type in order to ascertain the measures that should be put in place in order to ensure that problems in the foundation soil can be prevented, thus protecting against building movement.

This Building Technology File is designed to identify causes of soil-related building movement, and to suggest methods of prevention of resultant cracking in buildings.

**Soil Types**

The types of soils usually present under the topsoil in land zoned for residential buildings can be split into two approximate groups – granular and clay. Quite often, foundation soil is a mixture of both types. The general problems associated with soils having granular content are usually caused by erosion. Clay soils are subject to saturation and swell/shrink problems.

Classifications for a given area can generally be obtained by application to the local authority, but these are sometimes unreliable and if there is doubt, a geotechnical report should be commissioned. As most buildings suffering movement problems are founded on clay soils, there is an emphasis on classification of soils according to the amount of swell and shrinkage they experience with variations of water content. The table below is Table 2.1 from AS 2870, the Residential Slab and Footing Code.

**Causes of Movement**

Settlement due to construction

There are two types of settlement that occur as a result of construction:

- **Immediate settlement** occurs when a building is first placed on its foundation soil, as a result of compaction of the soil under the weight of the structure. The cohesive quality of clay soil mitigates against this, but granular (particularly sandy) soil is susceptible.

- **Consolidation settlement** is a feature of clay soil and may take place because of the expulsion of moisture from the soil or because of the soil’s lack of resistance to local compressive or shear stresses. This will usually take place during the first few months after construction, but has been known to take many years in exceptional cases.

These problems are the province of the builder and should be taken into consideration as part of the preparation of the site for construction. Building Technology File 19 (BTF 19) deals with these problems.

### Erosion

All soils are prone to erosion, but sandy soil is particularly susceptible to being washed away. Even clay with a sand component of say 10% or more can suffer from erosion.

### Saturation

This is particularly a problem in clay soils. Saturation creates a bog-like suspension of the soil that causes it to lose virtually all of its bearing capacity. To a lesser degree, sand is affected by saturation because saturated sand may undergo a reduction in volume – particularly imported sand fill for bedding and blinding layers. However, this usually occurs as immediate settlement and should normally be the province of the builder.

### Seasonal swelling and shrinkage of soil

All clays react to the presence of water by slowly absorbing it, making the soil increase in volume (see table below). The degree of increase varies considerably between different clays, as does the degree of decrease during the subsequent drying out caused by fair weather periods. Because of the low absorption and expulsion rate, this phenomenon will not usually be noticeable unless there are prolonged rainy or dry periods, usually of weeks or months, depending on the land and soil characteristics.

The swelling of soil creates an upward force on the footings of the building, and shrinkage creates subsidence that takes away the support needed by the footing to retain equilibrium.

### Shear failure

This phenomenon occurs when the foundation soil does not have sufficient strength to support the weight of the footing. There are two major post-construction causes:

- Significant load increase.
- Reduction of lateral support of the soil under the footing due to erosion or excavation.

In clay soil, shear failure can be caused by saturation of the soil adjacent to or under the footing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Foundation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Most sand and rock sites with little or no ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Slightly reactive clay sites with only slight ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Moderately reactive clay or silt sites, which can experience moderate ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Highly reactive clay sites, which can experience high ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Extremely reactive sites, which can experience extreme ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A to P</td>
<td>Filled sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Sites which include soft soils, such as soft clay or silt or loose sands; landslip; mine subsidence; collapsing soils; soils subject to erosion; reactive sites subject to abnormal moisture conditions or sites which cannot be classified otherwise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tree root growth
Trees and shrubs that are allowed to grow in the vicinity of footings can cause foundation soil movement in two ways:

- Roots that grow under footings may increase in cross-sectional size, exerting upward pressure on footings.
- Roots in the vicinity of footings will absorb much of the moisture in the foundation soil, causing shrinkage or subsidence.

**Unevenness of Movement**

The types of ground movement described above usually occur unevenly throughout the building's foundation soil. Settlement due to construction tends to be uneven because of:

- Differing compaction of foundation soil prior to construction.
- Differing moisture content of foundation soil prior to construction.

Movement due to non-construction causes is usually more uneven still. Erosion can undermine a footing that traverses the flow or can loosen soil adjacent to a footing that runs in the same direction as the flow.

Saturation of clay foundation soil may occur where subfloor walls create a dam that makes water pond. It can also occur wherever there is a source of water near footings in clay soil. This leads to a severe reduction in the strength of the soil which may cause local shear failure.

Seasonal swelling and shrinkage of clay soil affects the perimeter of the building first, then gradually spreads to the interior. The swelling process will usually begin at the uphill extreme of the building, or on the weather side where the land is flat. Swelling gradually reaches the interior soil as absorption continues. Shrinkage usually begins where the sun's heat is greatest.

**Effects of Uneven Soil Movement on Structures**

Erosion and saturation
Erosion removes the support from under footings, tending to create subsidence of the part of the structure under which it occurs. Brickwork walls will resist the stress caused by this removal of support by bridging the gap or cantilevering until the bricks or the mortar bedding fail. Older masonry has little resistance. Evidence of failure varies according to circumstances and symptoms may include:

- Step cracking in the mortar beds in the body of the wall or above/below openings such as doors or windows.
- Vertical cracking in the bricks (usually but not necessarily in line with the vertical beds or piers).

Isolated piers affected by erosion or saturation of foundations will eventually lose contact with the bearers they support and may tilt or fall over. The floors that have lost this support will become bouncy, sometimes rattling ornaments etc.

Seasonal swelling/shrinkage in clay
Swelling foundation soil due to rainy periods first lifts the most exposed extremities of the footing system, then the remainder of the perimeter footings while gradually permeating inside the building footprint to lift internal footings. This swelling first tends to create a dish effect, because the external footings are pushed higher than the internal ones.

The first noticeable symptom may be that the floor appears slightly dishy. This is often accompanied by some doors binding on the floor or the door head, together with some cracking of cornice mitres. In buildings with timber flooring supported by bearers and joists, the floor can be bouncy. Externally there may be visible dishing of the hip or ridge lines.

As the moisture absorption process completes its journey to the innermost areas of the building, the internal footings will rise. If the spread of moisture is roughly even, it may be that the symptoms will temporarily disappear, but it is more likely that swelling will be uneven, creating a difference rather than a disappearance in symptoms. In buildings with timber flooring supported by bearers and joists, the isolated piers will rise more easily than the strip footings or piers under walls, creating noticeable doming of flooring.

As the weather pattern changes and the soil begins to dry out, the external footings will be first affected, beginning with the locations where the sun's effect is strongest. This has the effect of lowering the external footings. The doming is accentuated and cracking reduces or disappears where it occurred because of dishing, but other cracks open up. The roof lines may become convex.

Doming and dishing are also affected by weather in other ways. In areas where warm, wet summers and cooler dry winters prevail, water migration tends to be toward the interior and doming will be accentuated, whereas where summers are dry and winters are cold and wet, migration tends to be toward the exterior and the underlying frost heave is toward dishing.

**Movement caused by tree roots**

In general, growing roots will exert an upward pressure on footings, whereas soil subject to drying because of tree or shrub roots will tend to remove support from under footings by inducing shrinkage.

**Complications caused by the structure itself**
Most forces that the soil causes to be exerted on structures are vertical – i.e., either up or down. However, because these forces are seldom spread evenly around the footings, and because the building resists uneven movement because of its rigidity, forces are exerted from one part of the building to another. The net result of all these forces is usually rotational. This resultant force often complicates the diagnosis because the visible symptoms do not simply reflect the original cause. A common symptom is binding of doors on the vertical member of the frame.

**Effects on full masonry structures**
Brickwork will resist cracking where it can. It will attempt to span areas that lose support because of subsided foundations or raised points. It is therefore usual to see cracking at weak points, such as openings for windows or doors.

In the event of construction settlement, cracking will usually remain unchanged after the process of settlement has ceased.

With local shear or erosion, cracking will usually continue to develop until the original cause has been remedied, or until the subsidence has completely neutralised the affected portion of footing and the structure has stabilised on other footings that remain effective.

In the case of swell/shrink effects, the brickwork will in some cases return to its original position after completion of a cycle, however it is more likely that the rotational effect will not be exactly reversed, and it is also usual that brickwork will settle in its new position and will resist the forces trying to return it to its original position. This means that in a case where swelling takes place after construction and cracking occurs, the cracking is likely to at least partly remain after the shrink segment of the cycle is complete. Thus, each time the cycle is repeated, the likelihood is that the cracking will become wider until the sections of brickwork become virtually independent.

With repeated cycles, once the cracking is established, if there is no other complication, it is normal for the incidence of cracking to stabilise, as the building has the articulation it needs to cope with the problem. This is by no means always the case, however, and monitoring of cracks in walls and floors should always be treated seriously.

Upheaval caused by growth of tree roots under footings is not a simple vertical shear stress. There is a tendency for the root to also exert lateral forces that attempt to separate sections of brickwork after initial cracking has occurred.
The normal structural arrangement is that the inner leaf of brickwork in the external walls and at least some of the internal walls (depending on the roof type) comprise the load-bearing structure on which any upper floors, ceilings and the roof are supported. In these cases, it is internally visible cracking that should be the main focus of attention, however there are a few examples of dwellings whose external leaf of masonry plays some supporting role, so this should be checked if there is any doubt. In any case, externally visible cracking is important as a guide to stresses on the structure generally, and it should also be remembered that the external walls must be capable of supporting themselves.

**Effects on framed structures**

Timber or steel framed buildings are less likely to exhibit cracking due to swell/shrink than masonry buildings because of their flexibility. Also, the doming/dishing effects tend to be lower because of the lighter weight of walls. The main risks to framed buildings are encountered because of the isolated pier footings used under walls. Where erosion or saturation cause a footing to fail away, this can double the span which a wall must bridge. This additional stress can create cracking in wall linings, particularly where there is a weak point in the structure caused by a door or window opening. It is, however, unlikely that framed structures will be so stressed as to suffer serious damage without first exhibiting some or all of the above symptoms for a considerable period. The same warning period should apply in the case of upheaval. It should be noted, however, that where framed buildings are supported by strip footings there is only one leaf of brickwork and therefore the externally visible walls are the supporting structure for the building. In this case, the subfloor masonry walls can be expected to behave as full brickwork walls.

**Effects on brick veneer structures**

Because the load-bearing structure of a brick veneer building is the frame that makes up the interior leaf of the external walls plus perhaps the internal walls, depending on the type of roof, the building can be expected to behave as a framed structure, except that the external masonry will behave in a similar way to the external leaf of a full masonry structure.

**Water Service and Drainage**

Where a water service pipe, a sewer or stormwater drainage pipe is in the vicinity of a building, a water leak can cause erosion, swelling or saturation of susceptible soil. Even a minuscule leak can be enough to saturate a clay foundation. A leaking tap near a building can have the same effect. In addition, trenches containing pipes can become watercourses even though backfilled, particularly where broken rubble is used as fill. Water that runs along these trenches can be responsible for serious erosion, interstrata seepage into subfloor areas and saturation.

Pipe leakage and trench water flows also encourage tree and shrub roots to the source of water, complicating and exacerbating the problem.

Poor roof plumbing can result in large volumes of rainwater being concentrated in a small area of soil:

- Incorrect falls in roof guttering may result in overflows, as may gutters blocked with leaves etc.
- Corroded guttering or downpipes can spill water to ground.
- Downpipes not positively connected to a proper stormwater collection system will direct a concentration of water to soil that is directly adjacent to footings, creating target problems such as erosion, saturation and migration of water under the building.

### Seriousness of Cracking

In general, most cracking found in masonry walls is a cosmetic nuisance only and can be kept in repair or even ignored. The table below is a reproduction of Table C1 of AS 2870. AS 2870 also publishes figures relating to cracking in concrete floors, however because wall cracking will usually reach the critical point significantly earlier than cracking in slabs, this table is not reproduced here.

### Prevention/Cure

**Plumbing**

Where building movement is caused by water service, roof plumbing, sewer or stormwater failure, the remedy is to repair the problem. It is prudent, however, to consider also rerouting pipes away from the building where possible, and relocating taps to positions where any leakage will not direct water to the building vicinity. Even where gully traps are present, there is sometimes sufficient spill to create erosion or saturation, particularly in modern installations using smaller diameter PVC fixtures. Indeed, some gully traps are not situated directly under the taps that are installed to charge them, with the result that water from the tap may enter the backfilled trench that houses the sewer piping. If the trench has been poorly backfilled, the water will either pond or flow along the bottom of the trench. As these trenches usually run alongside the footings and can be at a similar depth, it is not hard to see how any water that is thus directed into a trench can easily affect the foundation's ability to support footings or even gain entry to the subfloor area.

**Ground drainage**

In all soils there is the capacity for water to travel on the surface and below it. Surface water flows can be established by inspection during and after heavy or prolonged rain. If necessary, a graded drain system connected to the stormwater collection system is usually an easy solution.

It is, however, sometimes necessary when attempting to prevent water migration that testing be carried out to establish watertable height and subsoil water flows. This subject is referred to in BTIF 19 and may properly be regarded as an area for an expert consultant.

**Protection of the building perimeter**

It is essential to remember that the soil that affects footings extends well beyond the actual building line. Watering of garden plants, shrubs and trees causes some of the most serious water problems.

For this reason, particularly where problems exist or are likely to occur, it is recommended that an apron of paving be installed around as much of the building perimeter as necessary. This paving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASSIFICATION OF DAMAGE WITH REFERENCE TO WALLS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description of typical damage and required repair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hairline cracks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pine cracks which do not need repair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cracks noticeable but easily filled. Doors and windows stick slightly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cracks can be repaired and possibly a small amount of wall will need to be replaced. Doors and windows stick. Service pipes can fracture. Weather tightness often impaired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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This BTF was prepared by John Lever FTAIB, MiAMA, Partner, Construction Diagnosis.
SITE CLASSIFICATION REPORT SUMMARY

BLOCK: 23  SECTION: 58  SUBURB: Moncrieff
JOB No: 77119.13  DATE: August 2015
CLIENT: Black Mountain Construction Assurance Pty Ltd

CLASSIFICATION PROCEDURES:

EXISTING SUBSURFACE CONDITIONS:

Test Pit 64: Located on the boundary of Blocks 1 & 23 Section 58. Sandy silt topsoil filling to 0.2 m overlying well compacted, moist to dry clayey silty sand, clayey gravel and cobbly controlled filling to the limit of investigation depth of 1.7 m.

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BULK EARTHWORKS:

Filling within the block placed under Level 1 control as defined in AS 3798 – 2007 (Ref 1).

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COMMENTS/ LIMITATIONS:

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Site preparation prior to the construction should include removal of all vegetation, topsoil and any uncontrolled filling.

All new filling must be placed under controlled conditions (AS 3798-2007).

Some variability in subsurface conditions must be anticipated.

Moisture condition of site soils and/or the presence of groundwater may vary considerably from time of investigation compared to at the time of construction.

Depending on the depth of site cut and trenches, rock excavation may be required.

It is recommended that footing excavations be inspected by a geotechnical engineer.

This report must be read in conjunction with the attached notes "About this Inspection Report".

REFERENCES:

2. AS 2870-2011 'Residential Slabs and Footings,' Standards Association of Australia.
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Such information may be limited by the frequency of any inspection or testing that was able to be practically carried out, including possible site or cost constraints imposed by the client/contractor(s). For these reasons, the reliability of this inspection report is limited by the scope of information on which it relies.

Every care is taken with the inspection report as it relates to interpretation of subsurface conditions and any recommendations or suggestions for construction or design. However, DP cannot anticipate or assume responsibility for:

- unexpected variations in subsurface conditions that are not evident from the inspection; and
- the actions of contractors responding to commercial pressures.

Should these issues occur, then additional advice should be sought from DP and, if required, amendments made.

This inspection report must be read in conjunction with any attached information. This inspection report should be kept in its entirety without separation of individual pages or sections. DP cannot be held responsible for interpretations or conclusions from review by others of this inspection report or test data, which are not otherwise supported by an expressed statement, interpretation, outcome or conclusion stated in this inspection report.
Foundation Maintenance and Footing Performance: A Homeowner’s Guide

Buildings can and often do move. This movement can be up, down, lateral or rotational. The fundamental cause of movement in buildings can usually be related to one or more problems in the foundation soil. It is important for the homeowner to identify the soil type in order to ascertain the measures that should be put in place in order to ensure that problems in the foundation soil can be prevented, thus protecting against building movement.

This Building Technology File is designed to identify causes of soil-related building movement, and to suggest methods of prevention of resultant cracking in buildings.

Soil Types

The types of soils usually present under the topsoil in land zoned for residential buildings can be split into two approximate groups – granular and clay. Quite often, foundation soil is a mixture of both types. The general problems associated with soils having granular content are usually caused by erosion. Clay soils are subject to saturation and swell/shrink problems.

Classifications for a given area can generally be obtained by application to the local authority, but these are sometimes unreliable and if there is doubt, a geotechnical report should be commissioned. As most buildings suffering movement problems are founded on clay soils, there is an emphasis on classification of soils according to the amount of swell and shrinkage they experience with variations of water content. The table below is Table 2.1 from AS 2870, the Residential Slab and Footing Code.

Causes of Movement

Settlement due to construction

There are two types of settlement that occur as a result of construction:

- Immediate settlement occurs when a building is first placed on its foundation soil, as a result of compaction of the soil under the weight of the structure. The cohesive quality of clay soil mitigates against this, but granular (particularly sandy) soil is susceptible.
- Consolidation settlement is a feature of clay soil and may take place because of the expulsion of moisture from the soil or because of the soil’s lack of resistance to local compressive or shear stresses. This will usually take place during the first few months after construction, but has been known to take many years in exceptional cases.

These problems are the province of the builder and should be taken into consideration as part of the preparation of the site for construction. Building Technology File 19 (BTF 19) deals with these problems.

Erosion

All soils are prone to erosion, but sandy soil is particularly susceptible to being washed away. Even clay with a sand component of say 10% or more can suffer from erosion.

Saturation

This is particularly a problem in clay soils. Saturation creates a bog-like suspension of the soil that causes it to lose virtually all of its bearing capacity. To a lesser degree, sand is affected by saturation because saturated sand may undergo a reduction in volume – particularly imported sand fill for bedding and blinding layers. However, this usually occurs as immediate settlement and should normally be the province of the builder.

Seasonal swelling and shrinkage of soil

All clays react to the presence of water by slowly absorbing it, making the soil increase in volume (see table below). The degree of increase varies considerably between different clays, as does the degree of decrease during the subsequent drying out caused by fair weather periods. Because of the low absorption and expulsion rate, this phenomenon will not usually be noticeable unless there are prolonged rainy or dry periods, usually of weeks or months, depending on the land and soil characteristics.

The swelling of soil creates an upward force on the footings of the building, and shrinkage creates subsidence that takes away the support needed by the footing to retain equilibrium.

Shear failure

This phenomenon occurs when the foundation soil does not have sufficient strength to support the weight of the footing. There are two major post-construction causes:

- Significant load increase.
- Reduction of lateral support of the soil under the footing due to erosion or excavation.
- In clay soil, shear failure can be caused by saturation of the soil adjacent to or under the footing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Foundation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Most sand and rock sites with little or no ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Slightly reactive clay sites with only slight ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Moderately reactive clay or silt sites, which can experience moderate ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Highly reactive clay sites, which can experience high ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Extremely reactive sites, which can experience extreme ground movement from moisture changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A to P</td>
<td>Filled sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Sites which include soft soils, such as soft clay or silt or loose sands; landslip; mine subsidence; collapsing soils; soils subject to erosion; reactive sites subject to abnormal moisture conditions or sites which cannot be classified otherwise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tree root growth
Trees and shrubs that are allowed to grow in the vicinity of footings can cause foundation soil movement in two ways:

- Roots that grow under footings may increase in cross-sectional size, exerting upward pressure on footings. 
- Roots in the vicinity of footings will absorb much of the moisture in the foundation soil, causing shrinkage or subsidence.

Unevenness of Movement
The types of ground movement described above usually occur unevenly throughout the building's foundation soil. Settlement due to construction tends to be uneven because of:

- Differing compaction of foundation soil prior to construction. 
- Differing moisture content of foundation soil prior to construction.

Movement due to non-construction causes is usually more uneven still. Erosion can undermine a footing that traverses the flow or can erode soil adjacent to a footing that runs in the same direction as the flow.

Saturation of clay foundation soil may occur where subfloor walls create a drain that makes water pond. It can also occur wherever there is a source of water near footings in clay soil. This leads to a severe reduction in the strength of the soil which may create local shear failure.

Seasonal swelling and shrinkage of clay soil affects the perimeter of the building first, then gradually spreads to the interior. The swelling process will usually begin at the uphill extreme of the building, or on the weather side where the land is flat. Swelling gradually reaches the interior soil as absorption continues. Shrinkage usually begins where the sun's heat is greatest.

Effects of Uneven Soil Movement on Structures
Erosion and saturation
Erosion removes the support from under footings, tending to create subsidence of the part of the structure under which it occurs. Brickwork walls will resist the stress created by this removal of support by bridging the gap or cantilevering until the bricks or the mortar bonding failure. Older masonry has little resistance. Evidence of failure varies according to circumstances and symptoms may include:

- Step cracking in the mortar beds in the body of the wall or above/below openings such as doors or windows. 
- Vertical cracking in the bricks (usually but not necessarily in line with the vertical beds or piers).

Isolated piers affected by erosion or saturation of foundations will eventually lose contact with the bearers they support and may tilt or fall over. The floors that have lost this support will become bouncy, sometimes rattling ornaments etc.

Seasonal swelling/shrinkage in clay
Swelling foundation soil due to rainy periods first lifts the most exposed extremities of the footing system, then the remainder of the perimeter footings while gradually permeating inside the building footprint to lift internal footings. This swelling first tends to create a dish effect, because the external footings are pushed higher than the internal ones.

The first noticeable symptom may be that the floor appears slightly dished. This is often accompanied by some doors binding on the floor or the door head, together with some cracking of concrete nibs. In buildings with timber flooring supported by bearers and joists, the floor can be bouncy. Externally there may be visible dishing of the hip or ridge lines.

As the moisture absorption process completes its journey to the innermost areas of the building, the internal footings will rise. If the spread of moisture is roughly even, it may be that the symptoms will temporarily disappear, but it is more likely that swelling will be uneven, creating a difference rather than a disappearance in symptoms. In buildings with timber flooring supported by bearers and joists, the isolated piers will rise more easily than the strip footings or piers under walls, creating noticeable doming of flooring.

Trees can cause shrinkage and damage
![Trees causing damage](image)

As the weather pattern changes and the soil begins to dry out, the external footings will be first affected, beginning with the locations where the sun's effect is strongest. This has the effect of lowering the external footings. The doming is accentuated and cracking reduces or disappears where it occurred because of dishing, but other cracks open up. The roof lines may become convex.

Daming and dishing are also affected by weather in other ways. In areas where warm, wet summers and cooler dry winters prevail, water migration tends to be toward the interior and doming will be accentuated, whereas where summers are dry and winters are cold and wet, migration tends to be toward the exterior and the underlying propensity is toward dishing.

Movement caused by tree roots
In general, growing roots will exert an upward pressure on footings, whereas soil subject to drying because of tree or shrub roots will tend to remove support from under footings by inducing shrinkage.

Complications caused by the structure itself
Most forces that the soil causes to be exerted on structures are vertical - i.e. either up or down. However, because these forces are seldom spread evenly around the footings, and because the building resists uneven movement because of its rigidity, forces are exerted from one part of the building to another. The net result of all these forces is usually rotational. This resultant force often complicates the diagnosis because the visible symptoms do not simply reflect the original cause. A common symptom is binding of doors on the vertical member of the frame.

Effects on full masonry structures
Brickwork will resist cracking where it can. It will attempt to span areas that lose support because of subsided foundations or raised points. It is therefore usual to see cracking at weak points, such as openings for windows or doors.

In the event of construction settlement, cracking will usually remain unchanged after the process of settlement has ceased.

With local shear or erosion, cracking will usually continue to develop until the original cause has been remedied, or until the subsidence has completely neutralised the affected portion of footing and the structure has stabilised on other footings that remain effective.

In the case of swell/shrink effects, the brickwork will in some cases return to its original position after completion of a cycle, however it is more likely that the rotational effect will not be exactly reversed, and it is also usual that brickwork will settle in its new position and will resist the forces trying to return it to its original position. This means that in a case where swelling takes place after construction and cracking occurs, the cracking is likely to at least partly remain after the shrink segment of the cycle is complete. Thus, each time the cycle is repeated, the likelihood is that the cracking will become wider until the sections of brickwork become virtually independent.

With repeated cycles, once the cracking is established, if there is no other complication, it is normal for the incidence of cracking to stabilise, as the building has the articulation it needs to cope with the problem. This is by no means always the case, however, and monitoring of cracks in walls and floors should always be treated seriously.

Upholstery caused by growth of tree roots under footings is not a simple vertical shear stress. There is a tendency for the root to also exert lateral forces that attempt to separate sections of brickwork after initial cracking has occurred.
The normal structural arrangement is that the inner leaf of brickwork in the external walls and at least some of the internal walls (depending on the roof type) comprise the load-bearing structure on which any upper floors, ceilings and the roof are supported. In these cases, it is internally visible cracking that should be the main focus of attention, however there are a few examples of dwellings whose external leaf of masonry plays some supporting role, so this should be checked if there is any doubt. In any case, externally visible cracking is important as a guide to stresses on the structure generally, and it should also be remembered that the external walls must be capable of supporting themselves.

Effects on framed structures
Timber or steel framed buildings are less likely to exhibit cracking due to swell/shrink than masonry buildings because of their flexibility. Also, the damping/discharging effects tend to be lower because of the lighter weight of walls. The main risks to framed buildings are encountered because of the isolated pier footings used under walls. Where erosion or saturation cause a footing to fall away, this can double the span which a wall must bridge. This additional stress can create cracking in wall linings, particularly where there is a weak point in the structure caused by a door or window opening. It is, however, unlikely that framed structures will be so stressed as to suffer serious damage without first exhibiting some or all of the above symptoms for a considerable period. The same warning period should apply in the case of upheaval. It should be noted, however, that where framed buildings are supported by strip footings there is only one leaf of brickwork and therefore the externally visible walls are the supporting structure for the building. In this case, the subfloor masonry walls can be expected to behave as full brickwork walls.

Effects on brick veneer structures
Because the load-bearing structure of a brick veneer building is the frame that makes up the interior leaf of the external walls plus perhaps the internal walls, depending on the type of roof, the building can be expected to behave as a framed structure, except that the external masonry will behave in a similar way to the external leaf of a full masonry structure.

Water Service and Drainage
Where a water service pipe, a sewer or stormwater drainage pipe is in the vicinity of a building, a water leak can cause erosion, swelling or saturation of susceptible soil. Even a minuscule leak can be enough to saturate a clay foundation. A leaking tap near a building can have the same effect. In addition, trenches containing pipes can become watercourses even though backfilled, particularly where broken rubble is used as fill. Water that runs along these trenches can be responsible for serious erosion, interstrata seepage into subfloor areas and saturation. Pipe leakage and trench water flows also encourage tree and shrub roots to the source of water, complicating and exacerbating the problem. Poor roof plumbing can result in large volumes of rainwater being concentrated in a small area of soil:

- Incorrect falls in roof guttering may result in overflows, as may gutters blocked with leaves etc.
- Corroded guttering or downpipes can spill water to ground.
- Downpipes not positively connected to a proper stormwater collection system will direct a concentration of water to soil that is directly adjacent to footsteps causing target problems such as erosion, saturation and migration of water under the building.

### Seriousness of Cracking
In general, most cracking found in masonry walls is a cosmetic nuisance only and can be kept in repair or even ignored. The table below is a reproduction of Table C1 of AS 2870.

| AS 2870 also publishes figures relating to cracking in concrete floors, however because wall cracking will usually reach the critical point significantly earlier than cracking in slabs, this table is not reproduced here.

### Prevention/Cure
Plumbing
Where building movement is caused by water service, roof plumbing, sewer or stormwater failure, the remedy is to repair the problem. It is prudent, however, to consider also rerouting pipes away from the building where possible, and relocating taps to positions where any leakage will not direct water to the building vicinity. Even where gully traps are present, there is sometimes sufficient spill to create erosion or saturation, particularly in modern installations using smaller diameter PVC fixtures. Indeed, some gully traps are not situated directly under the taps that are installed to charge them, with the result that water from the tap may enter the backfilled trench that houses the sewer piping. If the trench has been poorly backfilled, the water will either pond or flow along the bottom of the trench. As these trenches usually run alongside the footings and can be at a similar depth, it is not hard to see how any water that is thus directed into a trench can easily affect the foundation's ability to support footings or even gain entry to the subfloor area.

Ground drainage
In all soils there is the capacity for water to travel on the surface and below it. Surface water flows can be established by inspection during and after heavy or prolonged rain. If necessary, a grated drain system connected to the stormwater collection system is usually an easy solution.

It is, however, sometimes necessary when attempting to prevent water migration that testing be carried out to establish watertable height and subsoil water flows. This subject is referred to in BTR 19 and may properly be regarded as an area for an expert consultant.

Protection of the building perimeter
It is essential to remember that the soil that affects footings extends well beyond the actual building line. Watering of garden plants, shrubs and trees causes some of the most serious water problems. For this reason, particularly where problems exist or are likely to occur, it is recommended that an apron of paving be installed around as much of the building perimeter as necessary. This paving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASSIFICATION OF DAMAGE WITH REFERENCE TO WALLS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description of typical damage and required repair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hairline cracks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine cracks which do not need repair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cracks noticeable but easily filled. Doors and windows stick slightly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cracks can be repaired and possibly a small amount of wall will need to be replaced. Doors and windows stick. Service pipes can fracture. Weather tightness often impaired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensive repair work involving breaking-out and replacing sections of walls, especially over doors and windows. Window and door frames distort. Walls lean or bulge noticeably, some loss of bearing in beams. Service pipes disrupted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
should extend outwards a minimum of 900 mm (more in highly reactive soil) and should have a minimum fall away from the building of 1:60. The finished paving should be no less than 100 mm below brick vent bases.

It is prudent to relocate drainage pipes away from this paving, if possible, to avoid complications from future leakage. If this is not practical, earthenware pipes should be replaced by PVC and backfilling should be of the same soil type as the surrounding soil and compacted to the same density.

Except in areas where freezing of water is an issue, it is wise to remove taps in the building area and relocate them well away from the building – preferably not uphill from it (see BT 19).

It may be desirable to install a grated drain at the outside edge of the paving on the uphill side of the building. If subsoil drainage is needed this can be installed under the surface drain.

Condensation
In buildings with a subfloor void such as where bearers and joists support flooring, insufficient ventilation creates ideal conditions for condensation, particularly where there is little clearance between the floor and the ground. Condensation adds to the moisture already present in the subfloor and significantly slows the process of drying out. Installation of an adequate subfloor ventilation system, either natural or mechanical, is desirable.

Warning: Although this Building Technology File deals with cracking in buildings, it should be said that subfloor moisture can result in the development of other problems, notably:

- Water that is transmitted into masonry, metal or timber building elements causes damage and/or decay to those elements.
- High subfloor humidity and moisture content create an ideal environment for various pests, including termites and spiders.
- Where high moisture levels are transmitted to the flooring and walls, an increase in the dust mite count can ensue within the living areas. Dust mites, as well as dampness in general, can be a health hazard to inhabitants, particularly those who are abnormally susceptible to respiratory ailments.

The garden
The ideal vegetation layout is to have lawn or plants that require only light watering immediately adjacent to the drainage or paving edge, then more demanding plants, shrubs and trees spread out in that order.

Overwatering due to misuse of automatic watering systems is a common cause of saturation and water migration under footings. If it is necessary to use these systems, it is important to remove garden beds to a completely safe distance from buildings.

Existing trees
Where a tree is causing a problem of soil drying or there is the existence or threat of upheaval of footings, if the offending roots are subsidiary and their removal will not significantly damage the tree, they should be severed and a concrete or metal barrier placed vertically in the soil to prevent future root growth in the direction of the building. If it is not possible to remove the relevant roots without damage to the tree, an application to remove the tree should be made to the local authority. A prudent plan is to transplant likely offenders before they become a problem.

Information on trees, plants and shrubs
State departments overseeing agriculture can give information regarding root patterns, volume of water needed and safe distance from buildings of most species. Botanic gardens are also sources of information. For information on plant roots and drains, see Building Technology File 17.

Excavation
Excavation around footings must be properly engineered. Soil supporting footings can only be safely excavated at an angle that allows the soil under the footing to remain stable. This angle is called the angle of repose (or friction) and varies significantly between soil types and conditions. Removal of soil within the angle of repose will cause subsidence.

Remediation
Where erosion has occurred that has washed away soil adjacent to footings, soil of the same classification should be introduced and compacted to the same density. Where footings have been undermined, augmentation or other specialist work may be required. Remediation of footings and foundations is generally the realm of a specialist consultant.

Where isolated footings rise and fall because of swell/shrink effect, the homeowner may be tempted to alleviate floor bounce by filling the gap that has appeared between the bearer and the pier with blocking. The danger here is that when the next swell segment of the cycle occurs, the extra blocking will push the floor up into an accentuated dome and may also cause local shear failure in the soil. If it is necessary to use blocking, it should be by a pair of fine wedges and monitoring should be carried out fortightly.

This BT was prepared by John Lewer FTAIB, MIAMA, Partner, Construction Diagnosis.