Book reviews

Watts Pocket Handbook

Summary

Title: Watts Pocket Handbook

Authors: Watts and Partners

Publisher: RICS Books,
London, UK

Publication Date: April 2006

ISBN: 1842192493

Details: Paperback, 296 pages
(180 × 100 × 16mm)

List price: £20

Best price: £16.99 at
www.constructionbooksdirect.com

Value for money: Good

Audience: Practitioner

Jurisdiction: Mostly relates to England and Wales but some references to Scottish practices

This is a pocket-sized book that has been revised annually since 1983 and claims to be an essential guide to property and professionals. Purchase also gives access to the monthly promotional and technical bulletins published by Watts and Partners, the authors of this book. The latest bulletin, as an example, touched on a number of items that included Part L Compliance and advance warnings of planning changes proposed by the former ODPM.

The book is arranged in nine sections, namely, property acquisition (dealing with surveys and due diligence), development and procurement (dealing with construction contracts and the surveyor's role in management and supervision), legislation (building and construction regulations and legislation and a section on dilapidations), design (architectural and design criteria, building services design, site analysis and flooding), materials and defects (materials and building defects, testing methods, cladding and its failure), conservation, maintenance management, cost management and technical resources (listing very basic conversion formulae and some websites).

The content varies from lists to very informative text on elements of surveying work. The section of Acts of Parliament and Legislation is a list of some of the legislation, but there is no guidance as to what each contains (short of the Act's title) or why their content is of interest to the surveyor. In a similar vein, the lists of recent court decisions (for example, page 108) do not indicate why these case reports could assist

surveyors in their work. (One page 91 there are bullet points but these are too short to assist without reading the report.)

As an example of the informative text, there is a 44-page section on material and defects, one of the largest sections in the book and a valuable element in its own right. It starts with a summary of the materials that are damaging to health and those that damage buildings, and then goes into more detail on the problems and legislation affecting asbestos (although that section does not pick up the 2005 changes in designation for some asbestos containing materials), high alumina cement and chlorides. There is a section that schedules common defects in commercial and residential properties and then problem areas in 1960s and 1970s buildings. While there is a useful piece on Japanese knotweed there is no illustration and, as it is a criminal offence to cause its growth, this would have been useful.

This is an uneven book that varies between providing too brief a summary and very informative and full text. This is a common problem with pocket books, but here the reader is left wondering if Watts and Partners receive additional information to support the gaps in the text. For all its limitations the benefits that this book provides make it good value for money and it is a recommended addition to a practitioner's library.

Malcolm Hollis
Managing Editor