

Closing and opening an existing fireplace sponsored by:



C-Caps (UK) Ltd
Chimney Caps for Disused Flues

■ Closing:

A fireplace, which is not used anymore, can be successfully closed to allow more wall space...

The insertion of an air-brick is required in the closing of the fireplace to allow air to circulate between the room and the top of the chimney, via the flue and fireplace. This will stop moisture collecting in the soot and smoke deposits within them and forming damp areas.

It is also advisable to cap the chimney with a ventilated cowl, which will allow air in and out, but not water. We are working with www.chimneycap.co.uk who produce just such a vent. The advantage of C-cap is that it will not leak, and it can be fitted in seconds. Your chimney is protected from the elements and from nesting birds...Chimney Caps ventilated cowls will not leak and blend in with the pots to maintain the traditional appearance of the stack.

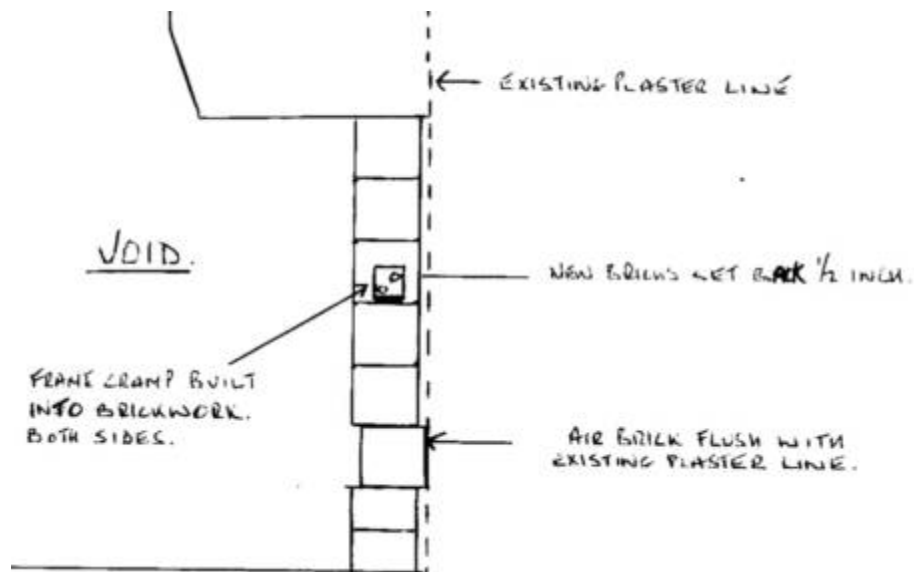


First measure the opening in square metres and multiply by 60. This will tell you how many bricks you will need. (An average fireplace will measure approx 400mm x 550mm or 0.4m x 0.55m.... Equalling 0.22 sq. m. x 60 = 13 bricks) you will need one 9 inch x 3 inch air- brick. Common bricks can be used for building, as they are the cheapest.

Sand and cement is obviously needed and this should be mixed at 4 sand to 1 cement for building the brickwork...The same mortar can be used for the render to cover the bricks with later, but you will have to wet it down a little to apply it.

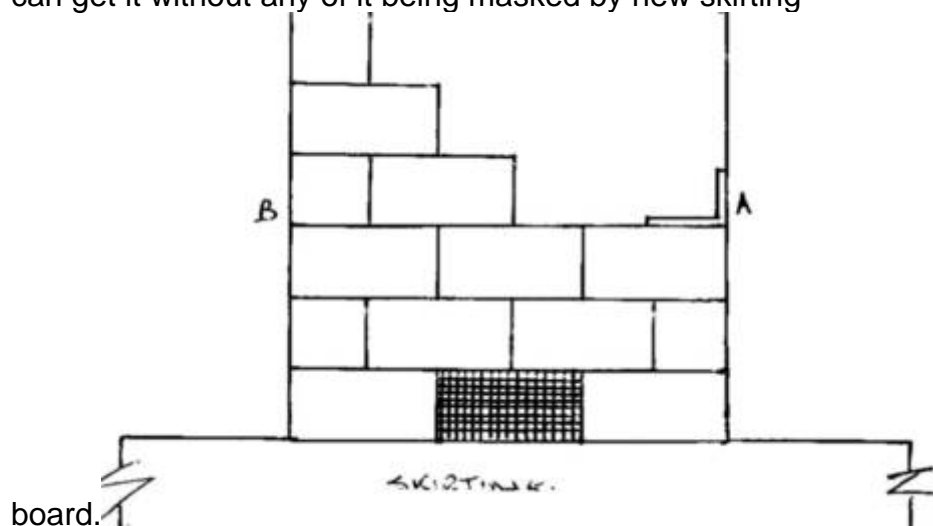
For an average fireplace you will also need 2 "frame cramps" which are normally fixed to a door or window frame and built into the brickwork joints.

These 2 however, will be plugged and screwed to the inside of the fireplace and be built into brickwork you are building. (See diagram)



The brickwork can now be built into the opening; it should be set back half an inch from the existing face of the plasterwork surrounding the fireplace. The air-brick however should be built out a little so that its face is flush with the existing plaster. You can check this by placing a spirit level across the opening. It should touch both sides of the fireplace, and the air-brick.

The air-brick should be in the middle of the new brickwork and as low as you can get it without any of it being masked by new skirting



A & B represent the positions of the frame cramps.

When the brickwork is built, “rake” out the joints by about 10mm. This will give a good key for the render you will apply when the brickwork is firm enough to withstand the pressure of applying it.

To render, spread the sand and cement as evenly as you can over the brickwork; preferably using a plasterers trowel, but it is possible to use the back of the trowel you used to lay the bricks with. When you think you have enough on, use the spirit level, laid across the opening as before, and “dragged” upward. This will pull off all render that is “proud” of the existing plasterwork. You may have to apply a bit more to any depressions, but by repeating the process you will finish with a rendered section, which is flush with the existing plaster. The air-brick of course will already be at this level.

You must now use a wooden or plastic “float” to rub over this surface. Do not do this immediately after you have finished the render. Allow the render to dry out for a while. This is ready to “rub in” when you can move the float on the surface of the render without the render moving, but all pin-holes fill up with the deposits of render left on the trowel. Rub in a circular motion, with steady, not firm, pressure and you will be left with a nice flat surface, which should be 2 or 3mm below the level of the existing plaster.

This new surface must now be “scratched”. Use a nail and put light scratches all over it. This is to give a good key for the final coat of plaster called “skim”.

When you are buying skim, most merchants will know what you mean, but its real name is multi purpose top coat plaster. This must be mixed to a very creamy consistency (runny custard) and applied using a plasterer’s trowel.

When you have covered the area, leave for a minute or two and trowel up again. Repeat this 2 or 3 times (more if necessary) and the trowel marks will disappear, as the plaster gets harder. Timing is the essence of this type of plastering and you will not have time to go shopping when this stuff is on the wall.

Your surface is now complete and you can fix the skirting boards in place.

Finally you will need a grill to cover the air-brick. These can be found at Builders merchants and diy stores. They are either plastic or brass effect and can be screwed or glued in place.

Don't forget you now need to cap the top of the pot or flue. See www.chimneycap.co.uk

■ OPENING A FIREPLACE.

In most situations the above operations will be done in reverse. It is unlikely that any structural alteration will have been done to your fireplace when it was bricked up, but you must still proceed with caution. **Do not attempt to make the opening any larger than it was originally. Fire openings are quite an exact science. Altering their shape and size will affect the efficiency of the fire and possibly lead to a “blowback” of smoke etc.**

Determine the centre of the section to be removed and make a hole at floor level, this hole can then be widened and raised until you meet the sides and top of the original opening. Clean off any jagged bits of brick and plaster etc and remove all debris from inside the opening. You should be able to reach up at least an arms length without obstruction. Do not attempt to look up until you have done this arm test.

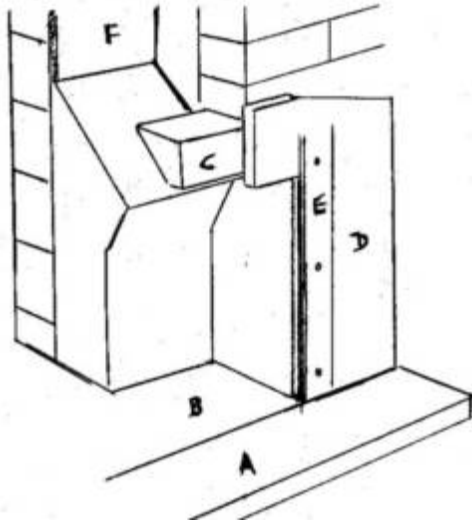
It is at this stage you will need to check the builders have not capped off the chimney. Call in a Corgi registered plumber to test the flue. Please do not assume that because it looks clear it is suitable for a fire that has any kind of exhaust fumes. At worst, your flue may have to be lined.

You can now make good any areas of brickwork and plaster that have been damaged. This should be done using lime mortar, which is less susceptible to cracking in the heat. The mix for this will be 4 parts soft sand, 2 parts lime and 1 part cement. All of the materials mentioned in these help sheets are available from builders merchants.

The area you are making good needs to be free from soot and any flaking material.

Corners can be reinstated by tacking a piece of timber to the face of the existing wall and rendering up to it. The timber can be removed the following day leaving a straight edge. If top coat plaster (skim) is required to the surface, some scratch marks should be placed in the render to give a key, i.e. allow a stronger bond between the two surfaces. (see closing a fireplace).

- A. Hearth formed as you wish, generally stone slabs, quarry tiles or bricks.
- B. Concrete base.
- C. Throat lintel, this will be an integral part of the existing fireplace.
- D. Plaster/render (containing lime)
- E. Timber tacked on to form straight edge to D & C if necessary
- F. Flue. Must be checked by corgi-registered fitter.



If a hearth is required this can be formed in front of the opening either by paving slabs, or a bed of sharp sand and cement with quarry tiles laid over. The bed for the slabs or quarry tiles should be 4 parts sharp sand and 1 part cement. The gap between the back edge of your new hearth and the back of the fireplace opening can be filled with either concrete or the same mix of sharp sand and cement. **Please check for any cowl or cap that is on top of your existing chimney. If it is, it must now be removed**