

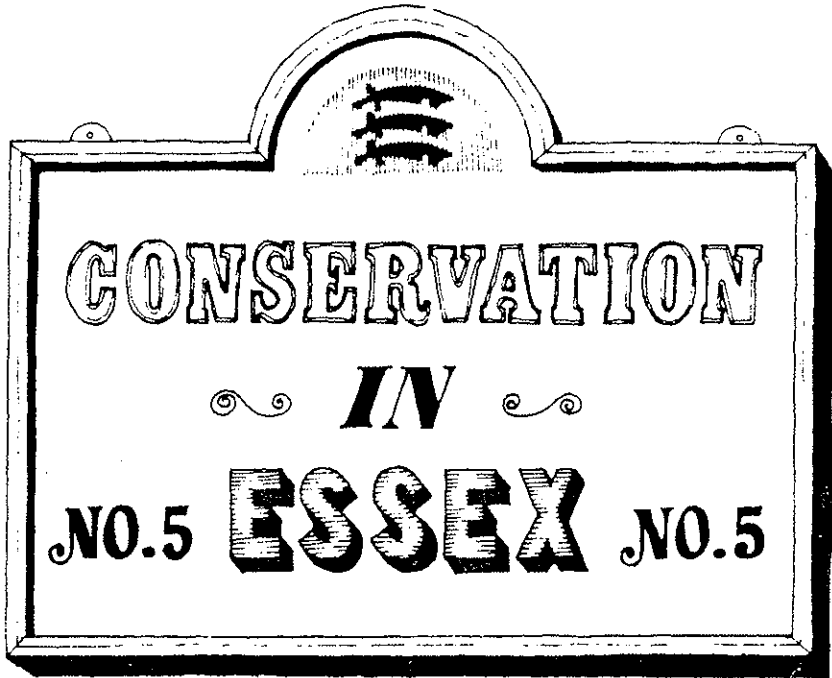


CONSERVATION
IN
NO.5 ESSEX NO.5

SHOPFRONTS



ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL



Price £1-50



1. Halstead

INTRODUCTION

The majority of Conservation Areas in Essex have at least one shop, and many include sizeable shopping areas. The detailed design of shopfronts, whether for new or existing buildings, is consequently a factor influencing the overall character of those areas. The twin objectives of conservation are to protect and enhance the existing environment, and shopfronts must be considered in this light. Obviously good historic shopfronts are deserving of protection and enhancement by means of sympathetic colouring and proper maintenance. New shopfronts should be regarded as an opportunity to enhance the street scene by providing something that respects the traditional concepts, forms a logical part of the overall elevation and emphasises the uniqueness of a particular village or town.

Too many old shopping streets resemble that part of Halstead illustrated in (1) where the shopfronts have obliterated the ground floor of the buildings, made a nonsense of upper floor fenestration patterns and divided the elevation of the historic building into two horizontal slices. Where opportunities occur, it should be the long-term aim to achieve replacement shopfronts which re-emphasise the individual components of the frontage by being less obtrusive and better related to the overall proportions of the building. The intention of this booklet is to suggest how these aims can be achieved by placing the problems within the relevant historical context. It should be emphasised that the suggestions included in this document are primarily aimed at improving shopfronts in Conservation Areas or in historic buildings, as other commercial areas are usually capable of assimilating a greater variety of designs.

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HISTORY

The early history of the shop is a somewhat under-researched subject, and one worthy of further study. There is little doubt that the first 'shops' in Britain were no more than stalls or booths set up in market places or at important fairs, and that manufacture took the form of cottage industry carried out in the traders' homes.*

Nevertheless, the word 'shop' appears frequently in medieval documents often as a tenanted element of an otherwise residential building complex. It appears that there were numerous examples of landowners erecting substantial town houses with a row of 'lock-up' shops on the ground floor. Sometimes the upper floors contained lodging rooms, presumably for bachelor apprentices or students, the entire tenanted block being a speculative venture. The 15th century Trinity Guildhall (later the Grammar School) at Felsted had four lock-up shops on the ground floor, perhaps to provide the Guild with extra income.

Fortunately, East Anglia still has a number of later medieval buildings which incorporate shops, although time and alterations have damaged and obscured their fabric. The illustration (2) shows examples from Saffron Walden, Writtle, Coggeshall, Felsted and Lavenham hypothetically reconstructed and arranged to form imaginary medieval streets. It seems likely that such buildings were used both for manufacture and retailing; their varied plan forms indicate complexity of use.

Examination of these medieval survivors reveals a 'shopfront' of two or more unglazed openings with carved, four-centred arched heads and rebates for some form of internal shutter. Evidence suggests the possibility of a low shelf pegged to the exterior of the structure, just below cill level. There seems to have been another form of 'shopfront' composed of a wider opening without arched spandrel panels and with a complicated system of sliding shutters. These late 14/15th century examples all show shopfronts that are an integral part of the structure of the building; the mullions, cills, arched heads and bracing being physically and visually perfectly fused into the overall appearance of the building (3). The richness and sophistication of the decorative detail distinguish these handsome timber-framed buildings as an important product of the perpendicular style.

Essex lacks surviving examples from the late 16th century, but contemporary survey drawings provide some useful information. A schematic drawing of Cheapside, London (4) shows rows of identical gable-fronted buildings with shops beneath. The unglazed shopfront (5) was still an integral part of the structural frame and the cill becomes a fully developed 'counter' or stall-board. It would seem that 'retail' had by then become the dominant function. Surprisingly, a shop in Chipping Ongar, dated 1642 on the window head, is structurally similar to the 'perpendicular' examples already cited.

The late 17th century example (6) had a timber-framed shopfront, paralleling the example of 1585 but surmounted by three storeys of masonry building. The large ground floor pilasters are reminiscent of inadequate Victorian attempts to integrate the shopfronts into the overall elevation. The curious small fanlight of lattice glazing was to be a popular feature with shopfront makers for over a century and can be found in many sophisticated 18th century examples.

The first glazed shopfronts are likely to have been of small, squarish panes, as in (7). Here the shopfront has been inserted under the jettied first floor of a medieval building, with part of the window as an openable casement. Topographical drawings suggest that paned windows of this kind were the rule through the first half of the eighteenth century, but with a gradual increase in complexity and sophistication.

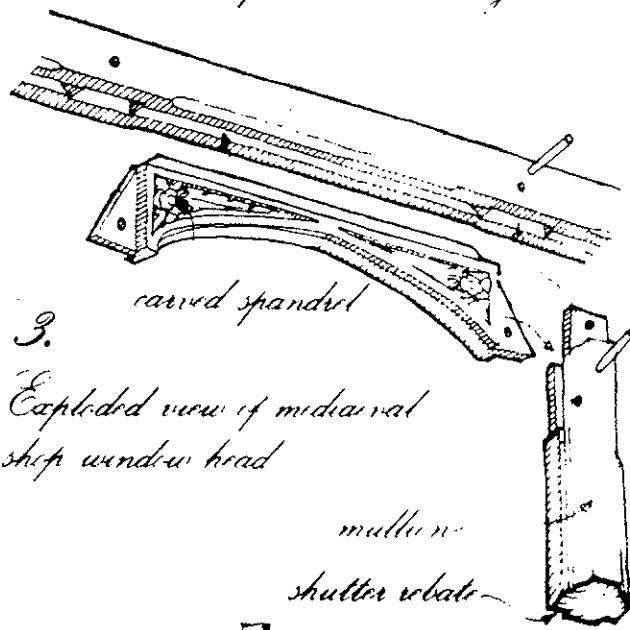
Whilst the English shopfront was evolving as a timber structure, Renaissance architects in Italy were seeking inspiration from the remains of Roman antiquity. Numerous large homes and palaces were erected with rows of 'shop' openings in the ground floor and low mezzanine floors above (8). This classical concept, with the shop as a logical part of the overall elevation, became the normal shopfront type in southern Europe and remains as such to the present day.

*Remains of Roman shops of masonry construction survive at Pompeii and Ostia, with grooves for sliding shutters. Shops were a common feature of Roman towns, where they fronted the street as part of the complex layout of the typical Roman town house.

History 1400-1700



Medieval ships in East Anglia 2.



3.

Exploded view of medieval ship window head

carved spandrel

mullion

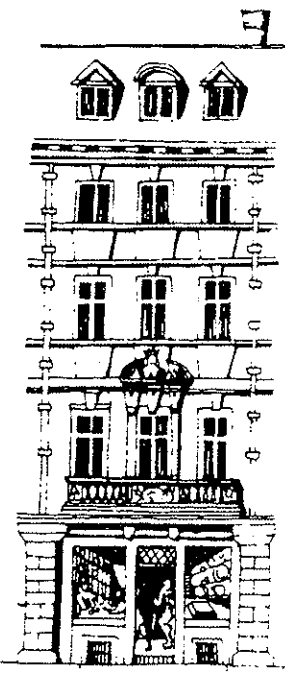
shutter rebate



4. Cheapside 1585



5. Branchley Kent



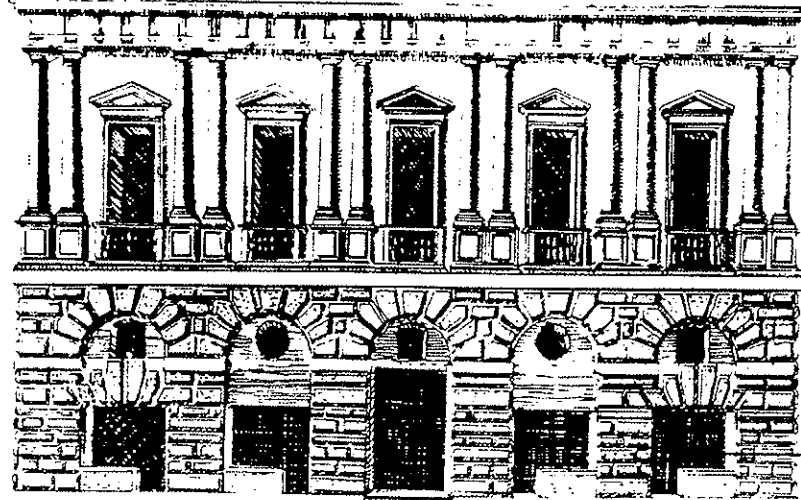
Late 17th century Shop, London

7.

Small paneled window under medieval jetty

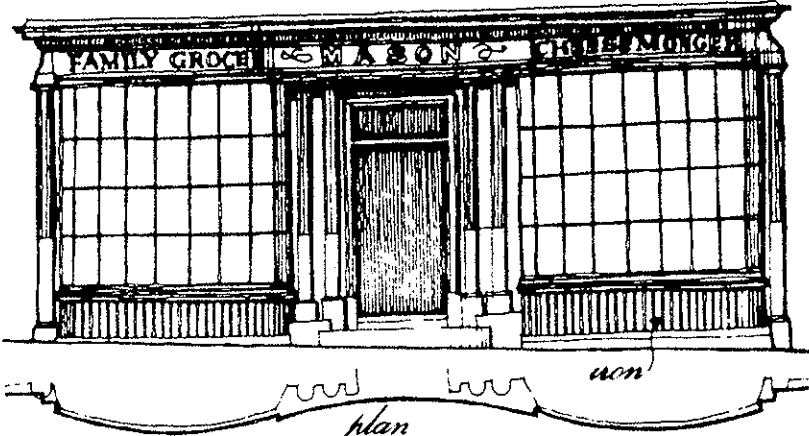
8.

House of Raphael c. 1512



shop

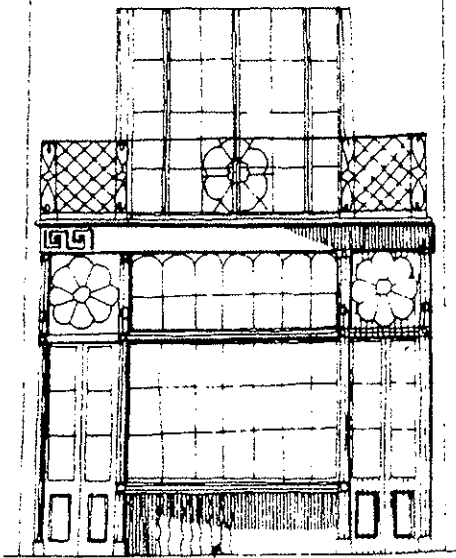
1700-1830



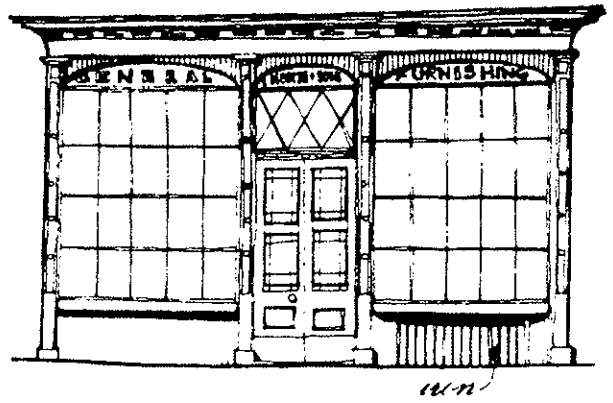
9. Late 18th century *plan* Dorking



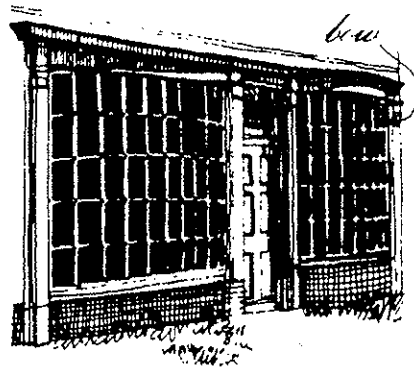
10. Bow window Bath



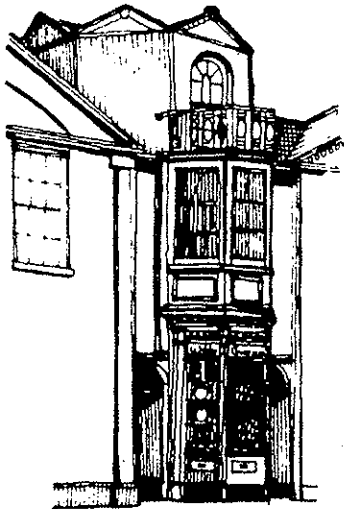
11. *plan* See John Scane 1797



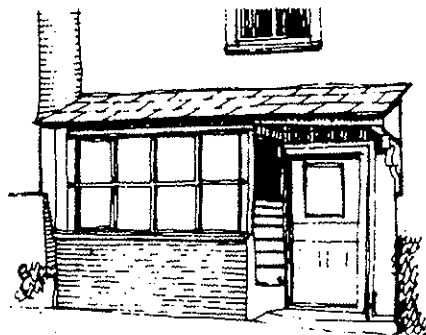
12. Slight bow Hereford



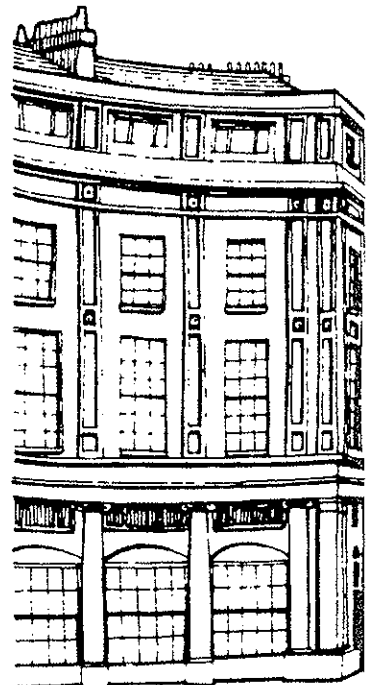
13. Village shop Suffolk



14. Bay shopfront Diss



15. Early 19th century village shop

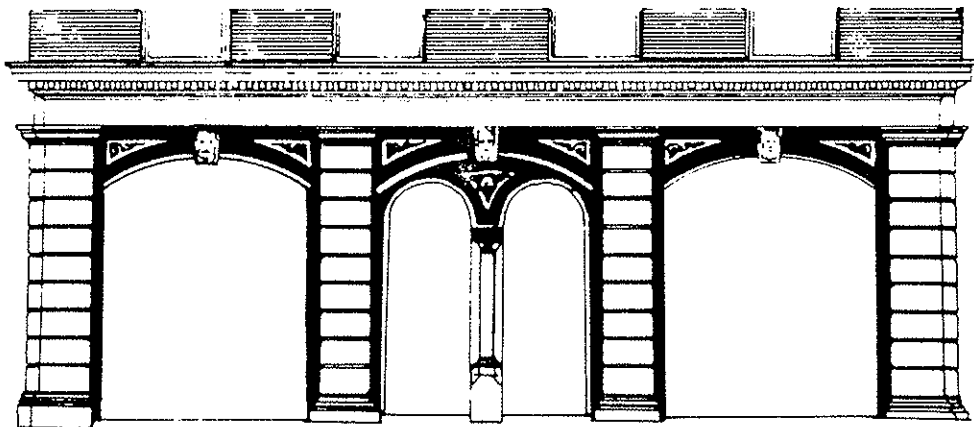


16. Integrated shops

A common variation incorporated the shop opening (glazed from c.1700 onwards) and the mezzanine window within a single arch, forming an entirely arcaded ground floor (16). Through the influence of Palladio this motif enjoyed some popularity in 18th century England, as in the shopfronts of Pulteney Bridge, Bath by Robert Adam. Buildings of the classical/baroque revival of the late 19th century also borrowed this idea as a means of satisfactorily incorporating the shopfront in a dignified manner. Despite this introduction of a 'correct' classical model, the majority of the late 18th century shopfronts belong to the timber tradition. Many shopfronts were obviously incorporated in existing buildings or as part of newly completed speculative terraces, thus necessitating a solution independent of the facade above. Despite this inherent difficulty, late 18th century shopfronts are invariably satisfactory in relation to the overall appearance of the building.

To achieve this result the designers used a number of recurring devices. The shopfront was treated as an example of fine quality joinery, attached to the facade like a free-standing bookcase. Most shopfronts projected in the form of bow, or series of bows, with a rich overall texture of finely detailed components. The small panes of glass, set in curves to reflect the light, tended to disguise rather than reveal the considerable width of the shop opening itself (9-14). The way in which the classical design elements such as pilasters and entablatures are attenuated and re-interpreted is reminiscent of the 'timber perpendicular' of the medieval examples. In examples with a 'gothick' flavour, the similarity is even more apparent. For humble village shops, the rectangular-paned, small bay window with lean-to pentice roof was prevalent and many examples fortunately remain (15).

Nineteenth century shopfronts survive in considerable numbers and sometimes form the greater part of shopping frontages in small market towns. Their design tends to follow one of the two basic types outlined above; infilling of a masonry arcade or colonnade, or timber structures applied to the face of the building. As the century wore on, glass became cheaper and available in larger panes, whilst increasing advantage was taken of new materials such as cast iron and ceramics for cladding. Many examples are extremely decorative although much of the ornamentation is debased and unassimilated into the overall scheme.



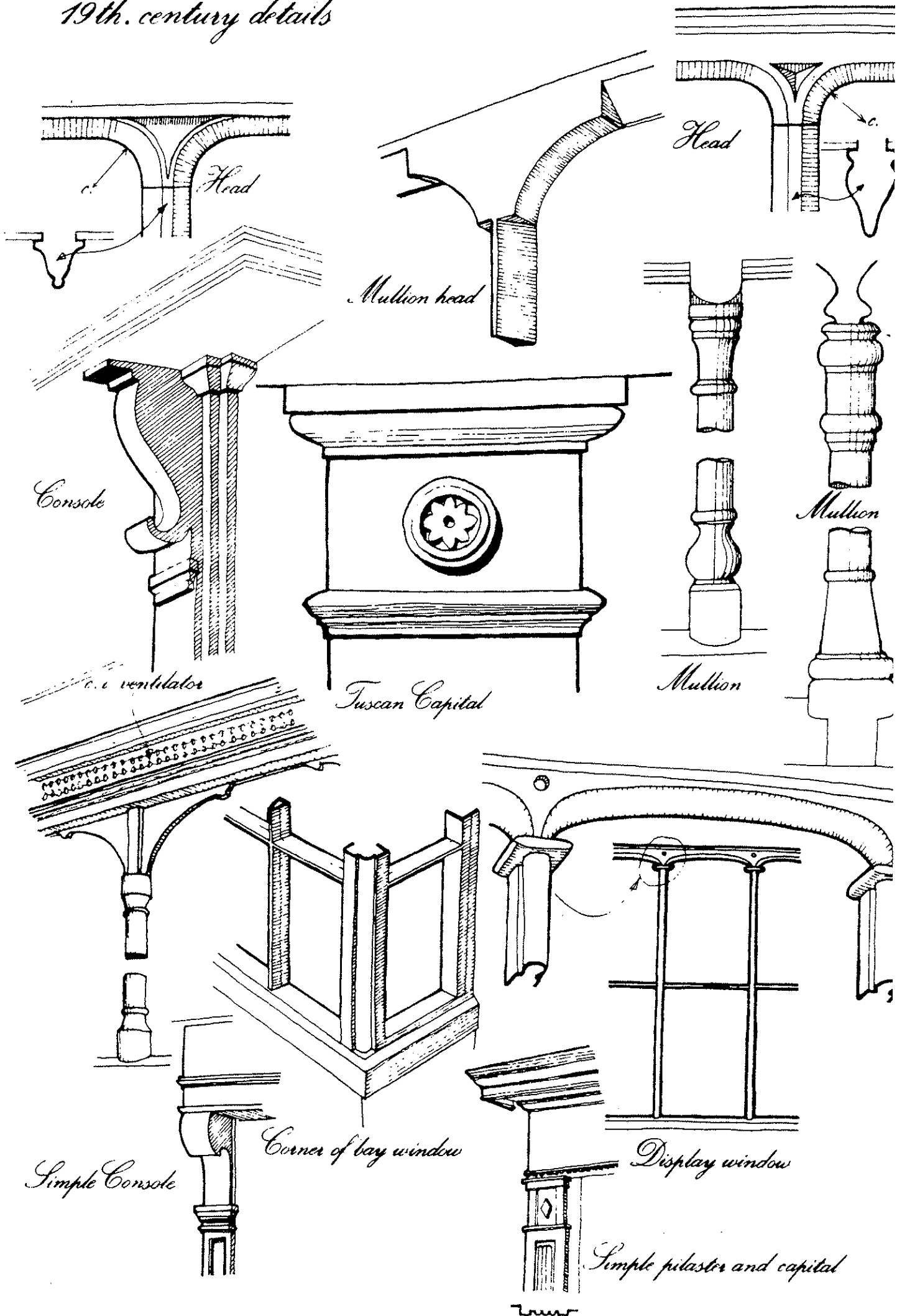
17.
Inventive 19th century shopfront in Chelmsford, with portrait head keystones.

Designers seemed to have lost sight of any need to consider the shopfront as an integral part of the building and the results were often extremely damaging. Large areas of glass undermined the visual stability of the building and dominant name fascias introduced powerful horizontals at variance with the proportions of the building.

Generally, Victorian shopfront in the same plane as the building frontage or are hollowed out with cavernous recesses, both tendencies denying the apparent stability of the structure. However, the 18th century tradition of good craftsmanship lingered on and the decorative treatment of components is often worthy of study.

The illustrations of 19th century details show the kind of simplified classical or eclectic details that are still worthy of close study today.

19th. century details



Console

Mullion head

Head

Mullion

Mullion

Tuscan Capital

ventilator

Simple Console

Corner of bay window

Display window

Simple pilaster and capital

The 20th century has seen the design faults of the previous hundred years continued and further exaggerated, with the addition of numerous new and unsympathetic materials such as mosaics, plastics and exotic metals. The introduction of standard 'corporate identity' designs has further undermined the individuality of shopping streets, whilst crude 'neo-georgian' essays in hardwood and fibre glass have devalued the old traditions.

RETENTION OF HISTORIC SHOPFRONTS

In view of the relative rarity of early shopfronts, all examples of pre-1800 date should be highly valued and retained. Even where shops are to be converted to dwellings or other uses, good examples ought still to be kept and if necessary privacy achieved with curtaining or ingenious forms of obscured glazing. Many 19th century shopfronts are equally worthy of retention and should be carefully repaired and maintained. Older shopfronts may form part of the elevations of Listed Buildings and are consequently subject to the Listed Building Consent procedures. (Owners should contact the District Council Planning Department or Essex County Council Planning Department, Environmental Services Branch, for advice on this matter).

To remove a reasonably attractive Victorian shopfront only to replace it with a poor, utilitarian modern design is a pointless and wasteful operation. Owners often do not realise that an inventive colour scheme on an old shopfront can provide the new 'image' which they seek.

Old butchers' shopfronts are particularly interesting: their projecting canopies, shutters, grilles, meat rails and sash windows represent a response to special needs and are reminiscent of earlier shop front forms.

Grants

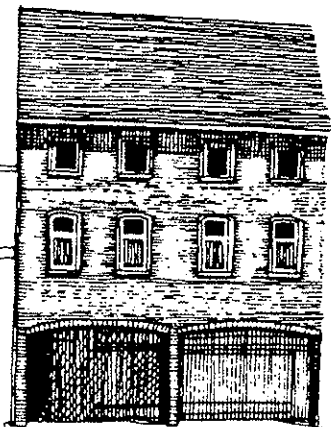
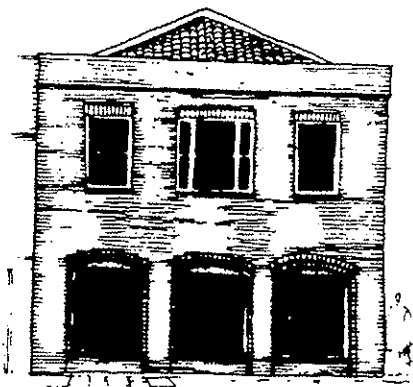
Old shopfronts forming part of Listed Buildings or buildings included in a 'Town Scheme' area, may be eligible for grant aid for repair works. Owners should contact their District Council Planning Department or the County Planning Department, Environmental Services Branch, for information.

THE DESIGN OF NEW SHOPFRONTS

The shopfront has, as its basic elements, an entrance door, a sign indicating the name of the proprietor and trade and a large glazed opening for the display of goods and for attracting business.

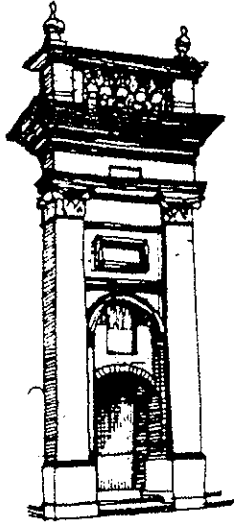
The glazed opening is the primary visual element of this combination and presents the most difficult design problems.

Voids in the fabric of buildings normally fall into one of two categories:- the trabeated opening (post and beam) or the arcuated (arched). The two drawings (18 and 19) of Spanish vernacular arcades illustrate these two structural concepts in their simplest form. The trabeated type is that found in buildings with a structural frame. The arcuated form belongs most naturally to load-bearing masonry structures. The use of arcuated openings in framed buildings or trabeated openings in heavy masonry structures can produce uncomfortable visual ambiguity.



20a.

Modern examples of ill-proportioned, arcuated shopfronts with unresolved relationships between the ground and upper floors.



20b.

*An ingenious 18th century elevation,
disguising a squat arcade.*

(Bernardo Vittone)

The Shopfront as Part of an Elevation

The shopfront should be considered as an intrinsic part of the overall appearance of a building. It should appear to be perfectly related to the upper floors in structural concept, proportion, scale and vertical alignment. All the elements of the elevation should be fused together to express an effect of logical visual inevitability.

In order to consider fully the implications of this statement, it is convenient to examine the problems presented by the design of a complete new commercial elevation in an historic street. The first task is to identify all the design constraints in the composition of the elevation. This can be used to assist in the design of the shopfront and its incorporation in the existing street elevation. For the purpose of this exercise all the examples shown are for two storey buildings with ground floor shops and an upper floor of offices or flats. The two-storey elevation is more difficult to compose than that for a three or four storey building because the proportioning difficulties are more extreme.

Formal Solutions

In considering the overall appearance of an elevation suitable for a traditional location, thought must be given to its relationship with neighbouring existing buildings. The new elevation should be compatible with its context in materials, scale and visual intricacy in order to take its place within an harmonious street scene. It is suggested that the 'classical' method of composing formal architecture is not only well represented in our historic commercial areas but also is a vital part of our conscious and unconscious assessment of formal buildings. However far the detailed design of a particular building may depart from the classical design elements, its proportional relationship should still be subject to these criteria.

Illustrations (21-31) show a variety of ways of integrating shopfronts into the overall elevation of a building. Each type includes a diagram of the concept, a typical elevation, and a section showing the relationship of storey heights. In addition some examples are illustrated by an historic precedent.

Formal Trabeated Solution

In the first example (21) the shopfront is framed in a Doric colonnade with the entablature forming a natural fascia. The upper storey forms a classical 'attic' and each bay of this storey should be more or less square in proportion.

As the section drawing shows, this is an excellent way of relating a tall ground floor shop with the usual office/residential floor-to-ceiling height of the upper floor. The lower 'order' and the pilaster, together with the treatment of the upper floor, help to fuse together the overall facade and mitigate the scale discrepancy between the sizes of the voids in the two floors.

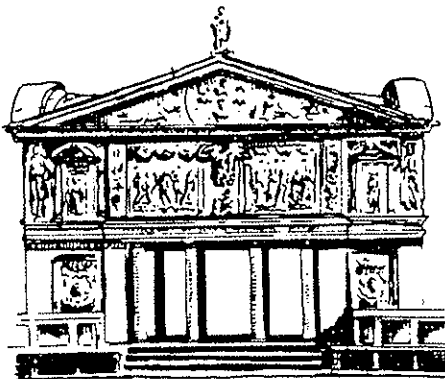
With both trabeated and arcuated types of formal solution, simple infill glazing is desirable to form a more or less invisible 'skin' between outside and inside.



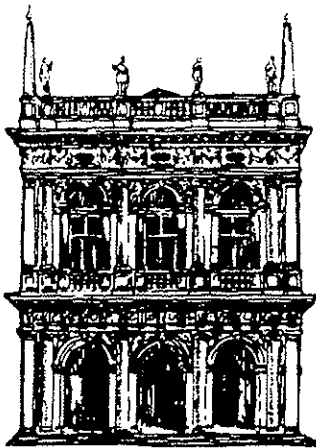
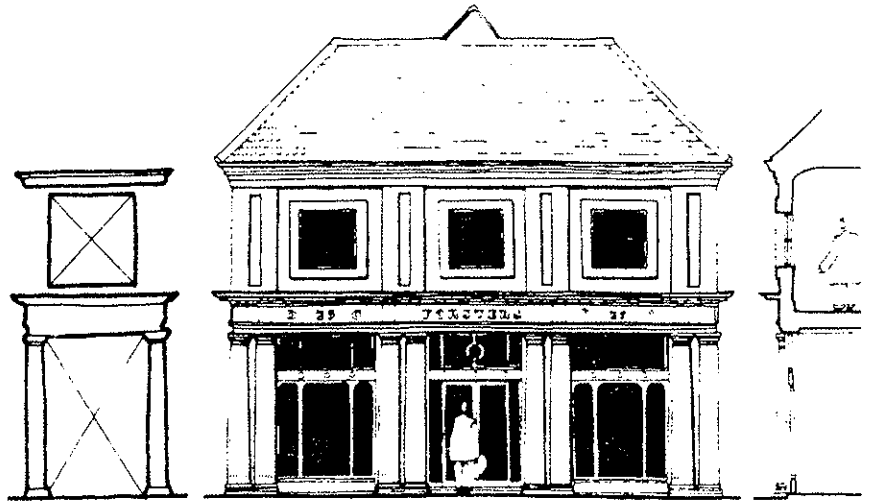
Trabeated 18.



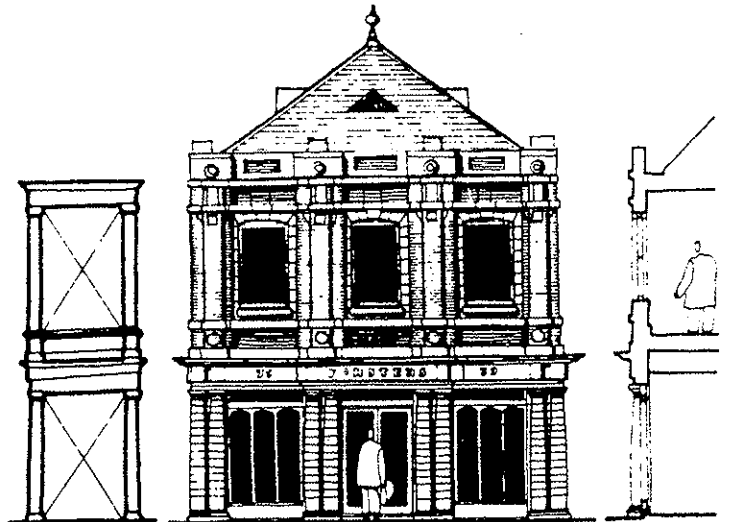
Arched 19.



21.



22.



The second example (22) shows a similar Doric colonnade at ground floor level with an upper floor proportioned to represent a second storey-height 'order' standing on pedestals. This upper 'order' has been simplified and adjusted to the limits of legibility. This solution provides a shop unit of relatively low floor-to-ceiling height with a generously proportioned office suite over.

Examples (21) and (22) represent two approaches adopted for the satisfactory proportioning of a formal two-storey building. Solutions involving a more nearly equal relationship between storey heights will inevitably be less satisfactory.

Formal Arcuated Solution

This solution (23) is parallel to that of (21), but with a glazed, arcuated base rather than a colonnade. The upper floor is again treated as an attic storey richly decorated to contrast with the simplicity of the ground floor. Variations on this theme can be produced, either with a storey-height order of columns and entablature imposed on the arcade, or with a giant order running through both storeys.

It will not normally be practical to use the arcuated type based upon (22), as either the arcade would be absurdly squat or the upper floor ridiculously tall. A compromise is possible, making use of an elliptical arched colonnade (24) to reduce the ground floor height, but this still provides a very tall upper floor. A three storey elevation lends itself well to this solution.

A simple brick elevation using segmental arches to suggest a colonnade and attic effect is illustrated in (25). The narrowness of the intermediate piers is suggestive of giant and secondary orders akin to Michelangelo's Capitoline Palaces, but with arches rather than lintels. Because of the lack of surface architectural detail, the disparate scale effect between storeys is apparent. In this example the problem is avoided by setting back the shopfront as a true arcade.

Solutions Based on the Traditional Timber Framed Shopfront

Example (26) illustrates a new building suggestive of a medieval timber framed structure. The shopfront is based on the 15th century types already described, the storey-height painted mullions appearing to be part of the primary structure. In this way the window area of the ground floor is visually part of the overall elevation as infill panels of glazing rather than plaster.

The theme is continued in (27) where a timber framed appearance is sought only for the upper floor. The ground floor expresses the characteristics of load bearing brickwork, with heavy piers and arches for narrower spans. Such a solution will be successful if the shop windows appear to be narrow enough to be spanned by a timber beam. The glazed area and stall riser should look like later light-weight infilling.

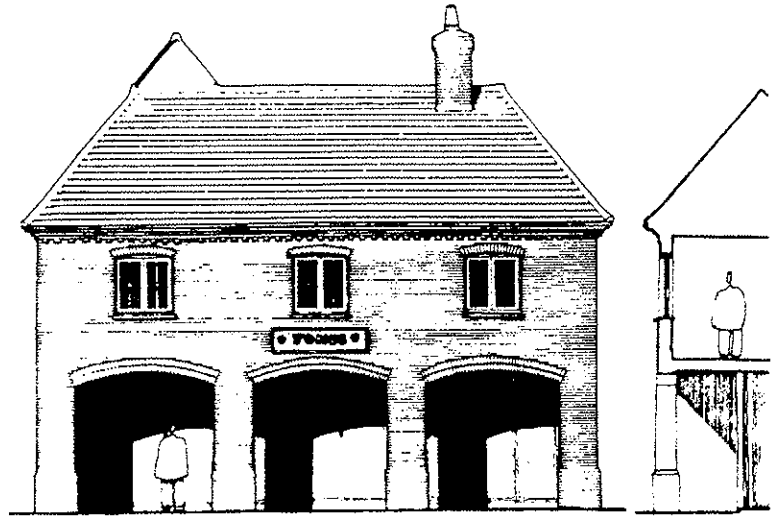
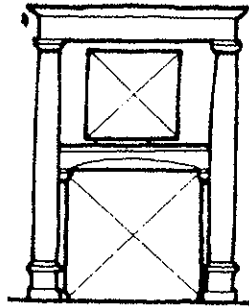
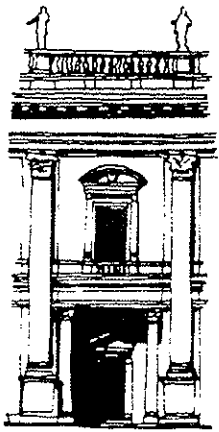
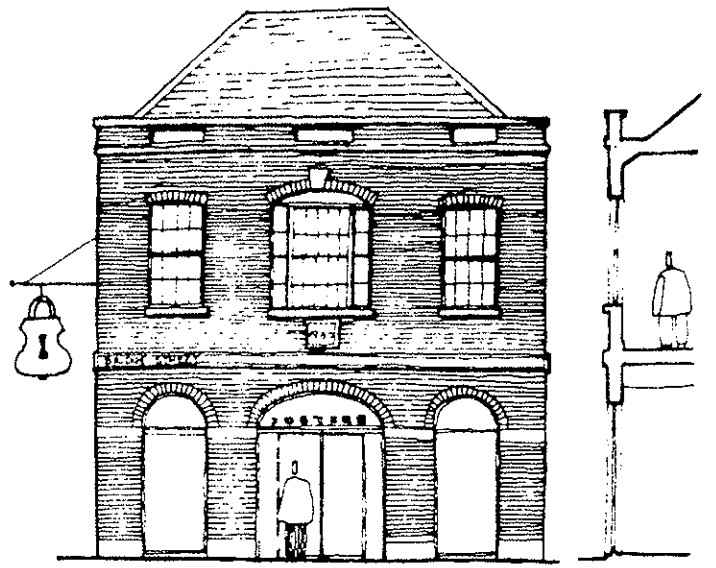
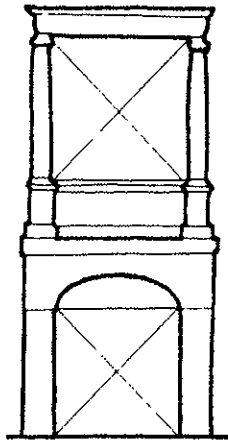
With the approach shown in (28) the shopfronts are treated as projecting showcases, like the popular tradition in the 18th and 19th centuries. By reason of the forward projection and the crucially important intricacy of the sub-division of the glazed area, the shopfront appears to be applied to the building rather than forming a hole in it.

The example (29) shows a small, flush shopfront treated as an elevational feature, like an overlarge Georgian doorcase. It is important that there is plain surface all around the window to isolate it in the wall area, and that the glass area is sub-divided into relatively small panes to stress the apparent continuity of the wall plane. An elaborately three dimensional treatment of the surround is also essential.

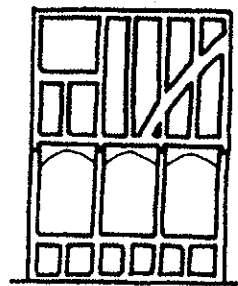
Projecting shopfronts, as (3), can be extremely successful when they appear to be separate structures placed against the face of the building, as a kind of street furniture. Again, they should be surrounded by areas of plain walling and intricately sub-divided with glazing bars.

The last example (31) is based on the 17th century open, unglazed shopfront and is ideal for retailers such as greengrocers and fruiterers where an open shopfront with shutters is desired. The posts should be very substantial and painted so as to provide a strong visual sense of support. It may be possible to achieve a glazed shopfront with this kind of appearance, making use of non-reflective glazing set back, or else in the 1950's style of parabolic glazing fixed to the back of the stall-board. Ordinary plate glass is visually inappropriate in this kind of design, as the size of the shop window openings will clash with the scale of those on the upper floor.

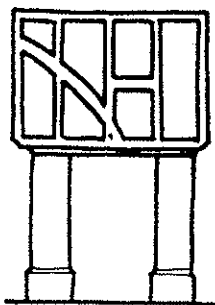
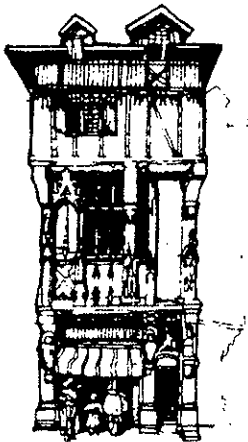
24.

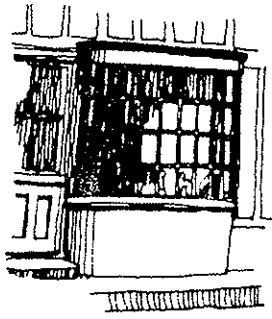


25.

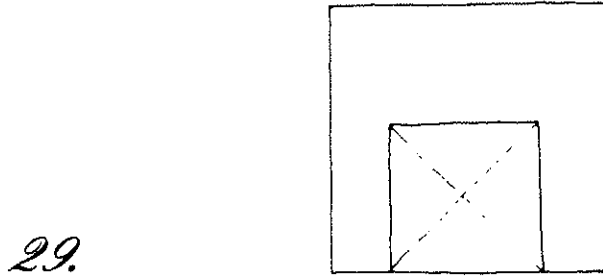
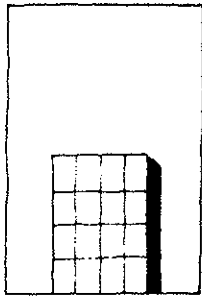


26.

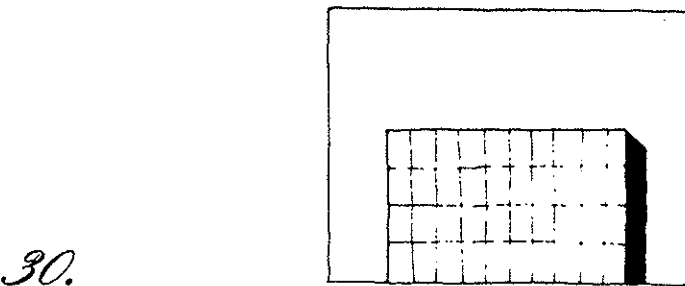
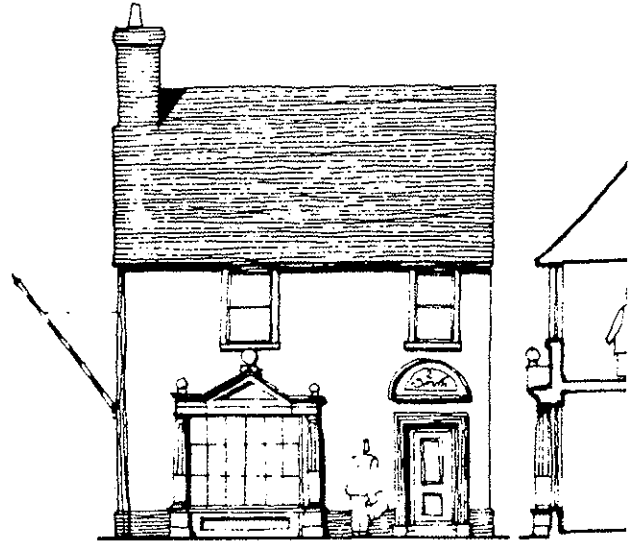




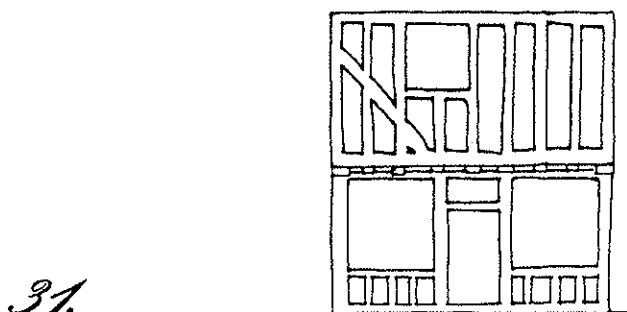
28.



29.



30.



31.



DISPLAY

The display of goods to attract custom seems to have been a fairly unimportant aspect of the medieval shop. With the exception of the retailers of perishable goods, it seems likely that most shopkeepers kept fairly small stocks of goods and produced to customer orders. Many of the 15th century shopfronts are very high above footpath level and would not have been practical either as counters or display windows. It seems likely that the 18th century glazed shop window provided the first opportunity for window dressing and, in the large towns, the pleasures of window shopping are first noted in this period.

As it is the intention of this booklet to encourage more appropriate shopfronts with, inevitably, small areas of glazing, the problems of display must be considered.

For some kinds of shop, the window area has become simply a means of lighting and viewing into the shop interior, with the unfortunate result that the extent of the internal floorspace is greatly emphasised. In recent years the use of windows for display seems to be on the decline. Even supermarket operators, renowned for obliterating their windows with disagreeable posters, are now building totally windowless stores. Such trends work in favour of reducing the dominance of glazing in new shopfronts, but it remains important to pay regard to those retailers (such as shoe shops and clothiers) who continue to require large window displays to attract custom.



32

Reconstruction of 15th century shops, Saffron Walden.

For such traders, the traditional English timber shopfront seems appropriate (26-30), the window designed as a showcase of limited depth with a glazed or shuttered back. This would provide space for a display of a typical selection of goods or for special items. The sub-division of a small-paned window with coincident shelving often used in the past for showing small objects, can provide a particularly pleasing effect.

For greengrocers and fishmongers the open unglazed shop is the traditional and most attractive form (4, 5, 31) whilst for the butcher the canopy and sash window should be the pattern.

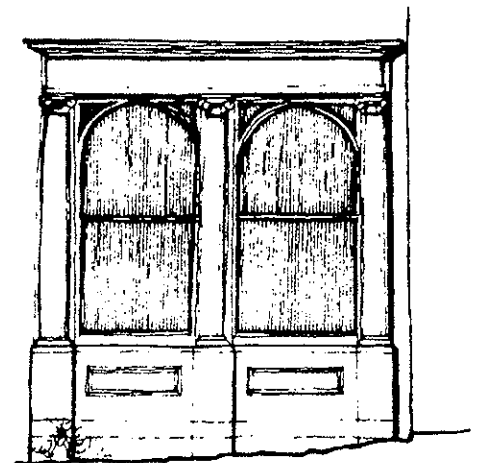
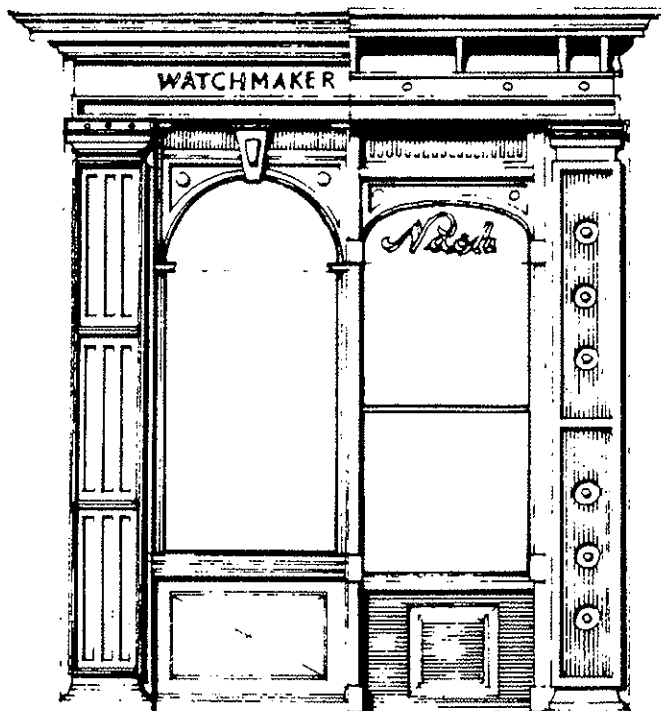
DETAILED DESIGN

Having considered the general principles of shopfront design it is essential to pay equal regard to visual detail if the end result is to be convincing. A shopfront has to bear very close inspection as a direct result of its function and any coarseness of design or execution is immediately apparent. Although present day shopfronts usually have a fairly short life, an air of permanence should nevertheless be the aim. A rapid sequence of alterations is often a manifestation of dissatisfaction with the crudities of usual 20th century solutions.

Whatever the character of the design it will only be a success if carried out with a high standard of craftsmanship and care. Today, when labour-intensive operations are expensive, this care is rarely exercised, resulting in shoddy and utilitarian effects. Sometimes the problem is side-stepped by utilising standard factory made components, but these inevitably require unsympathetic materials and present a mass-produced appearance. To some extent the problem can be minimised by skilful design, making use of easily available materials without costly fabrication, but arranged to make interesting architectural effects.

A new shopfront for an attractive historic building obviously requires an exceptional standard of craftsmanship in order to realise a design of quality and originality. Where this utilises classical or historic elements these should be as authentic as possible.

Where the building is entirely new or is somewhat less important, rather more freedom is usual and justifiable. It is suggested that drawing (33), showing alternative treatments for a two-light, flush display window, demonstrates a valid concept. Although the elements are loosely classical, the pilasters lack entasis and the composition is assembled of more or less standard joinery sections, fret-cut panels, and glued and screwed stick-on details. A rich colour scheme with the inserts and panels picked out with one or more contrasting colours would add to the effect by emphasising the complexity of the detail. This kind of solution is desirable for many Conservation Areas because it is a continuation of the British timber shopfront tradition. Like the 18th century examples, it offers a large measure of visual intricacy and an elaboration of linear components (always an important part of the English aesthetic), and forms a self-contained composition when attached to the face of the building. This type of design presents great opportunities for invention of less historically based detail, but this should always be arranged so as to provide an overall texture and to make an organised composition.



*Two light window Eggshell
34.*

*A two light shopfront with simplified
'classical' detail. 33.*

Even where the designer has the best of intentions, a lack of understanding as to the capabilities of the shop fitter and a failure to control the overall effect often spoils the result.

The best solutions rely on close collaboration between the architect and the fabricator – a partnership which could exploit the potential of shopfitting companies, who could extend their scope into the field of purpose-made shopfronts enriched with detail.

An additional detailed design problem which should not be overlooked is the provision of sun-blinds. If these are required they should be incorporated into the design of the shopfront, with the blind box itself as slim and unobtrusive as possible. 'Dutch blinds' should be avoided, as they require additional vertical housings and their sidings tend to interrupt the street view.

MATERIALS

Materials should be chosen to emphasise the historic character of the area and to reinforce the visual unity of the street scene. Painted timber is the prevalent shopfront material of virtually all historic streets and should generally form the basis of new designs. The use of varnished, natural or stained hardwoods and softwood is almost always inappropriate, being alien to the existing pattern and also to the painted timber features of the upper floors. The texture of materials is an important consideration which should strongly influence choice. The intention should be to achieve a gradual transition between the rough, natural textures of walling materials and the smooth, hard surface of window glass. Again, painted timber is the ideal intermediate texture to make this transition. Materials such as rustic stonework, ceramic products and exotic materials like marble should be avoided as being too pretentious for most Conservation Area street scenes.

Plastic sheets and anodised or plastic-coated metals should not be used, as these are generally unsympathetic when viewed in combination with natural textures. Many of these materials also have glossy surfaces, and their reflective qualities emphasise every imperfection in the fitting and jointing of the panels. Materials without texture also suffer from the disturbing phenomenon known as 'colour filming' where the colour of the material does not appear fixed to the surface but to float either in front or behind the real surface. With all painted timber features, particularly fascias, care should be taken to achieve good weathering properties and freedom from short-term distortion.

COLOUR

The colouring of a shopfront should be determined by the need to harmonise with the rest of the building and street scene, and to emphasise the important design elements.

There are well-established procedures for the painting of classical designs, such as the gilding or picking out of mouldings, capitals and fluting. Care should be taken to emphasise the structural logic of such a design by using the same base colour for pilasters and entablature (fascia).

Where natural materials abound, earth colours are generally advisable and high intensity hues should be avoided, particularly on north facing or poorly illuminated frontages. It is useful to remember that 'cold' colours will normally give the effect of recession and 'warm' colours that of projection. Particularly where walling is dark in tone, the use of white paint for the framing is visually satisfying and provides a unifying link with painted upper-storey windows.

The shopfront should be painted to harmonise with the upper floors of the building and to reinforce the overall effect of unity throughout the facade. This, of course, can increase the 'impact' of the shop in the street scene.

ADVERTISEMENT MATERIAL

Information, whether in the form of lettering, signs or symbols must always be considered as an integral part of the total composition of a building. Therefore any application for a new shopfront should indicate details of such lettering and signs.

In selecting forms of advertising, the character of the area, the building and the particular business should all be taken into account. Certain letter styles are evocative of particular trades or are expressive of states of mind (solid and respectable, gay and frivolous, etc.), and this factor can be used to provide identity or to integrate the design with the overall character of the building.

Lettering and Symbols

In general serif letters are more appropriate than enlarged type-faces as they are more strongly defined, have better articulation and are more vigorous, thus more in sympathy with the architectural framework. Individual letters should neither be too widely spaced nor cramped together, as legibility will be impaired. Also, it should be borne in mind that letters become unreadable when they depart too radically from familiar forms.

Italic letters is generally unsympathetic to buildings, as the diagonal emphasis is destructive of repose and in conflict with the satisfactory resolution of the vertical and horizontal emphasis of the building.

Lettering and symbols should be regarded as minor points of emphasis on a building and should not conflict with the major focal points of a facade. They can provide a valuable element of visual intricacy and therefore gain a degree of compatibility with adjoining buildings. Free-standing cast metal or cut-out wooden letters can be useful in this respect because their depth can give them apparent visual weight, although this type of letter should be used with care, as in sharp perspective it can become difficult to read. Painted lettering with shading can also provide visual intricacy. It has a directness and a close relationship to the building without intruding upon the form, which makes it a vital part of the townscape vocabulary. Traditionally, many commercial premises had lettering painted directly upon the brick or render front. When this was carried out with wit and assurance it became a pleasing feature of the street scene.

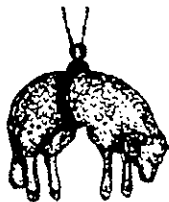
Individual letters must be well-proportioned and compatible in visual weight one with the other. The actual size of the lettering should be determined by the need to be reasonably legible to pedestrians, not unduly obtrusive in relation to the building facade, and integrated with all the other elements making up the street scene.

Materials for Lettering

In general, materials for lettering and signs should have regard to the factors set out in the section on shopfront materials. Hand-painted softwood signs are the most satisfactory form of fascia for a Conservation Area as they have both texture and a degree of individuality invaluable in establishing an identity.

Hanging Signs

There is a long tradition of hanging signs (24,29,30,35) dating back through guild-signs to Roman times. They are an apt way of conveying information to the pedestrian, particularly in an enclosed situation such as an arcade. Where a fascia is undesirable, a hanging sign might be a useful alternative.



35.

A hanging trade sign for a gentlemen's outfitters.

Other Advertisements

Advertising pure and simple, that is lettering and signs in excess of the name of the business and the service or goods supplied – must be carefully controlled where it affects historic buildings or Conservation Areas. In the majority of cases it should be discouraged, principally for the reasons set out at the beginning of this Section. Where it is incorporated, it must be designed with particular regard to the form and elevations of the building.

If window-area is not necessary for display of goods or lighting it is likely to be obscured with posters. Where display requirements are such that large windows are unnecessary, the opportunity should be taken to limit the glass area and adopt the 'showcase' approach mentioned earlier.

Advertisement hoardings, except those around construction sites, are unacceptable in Conservation Areas as they are totally alien to the architectural and street scene. Signs should be kept to the essential minimum and integrated with the buildings.

Public Houses are usually attractive buildings and their signing has traditionally been a local focus. There is an increasing tendency to replace craftsmanship and individual design with standardised and mass-produced products which, in their materials, colour and scale, totally disregard the architectural qualities of the building and the surrounding scene. Traditional signs should always be retained, whilst new ones should respect and follow the tradition of individually and local identity.

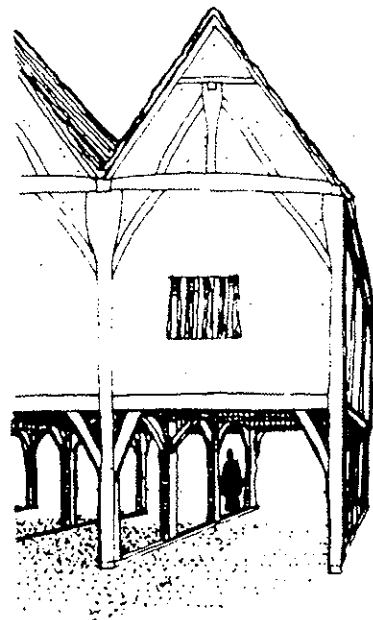
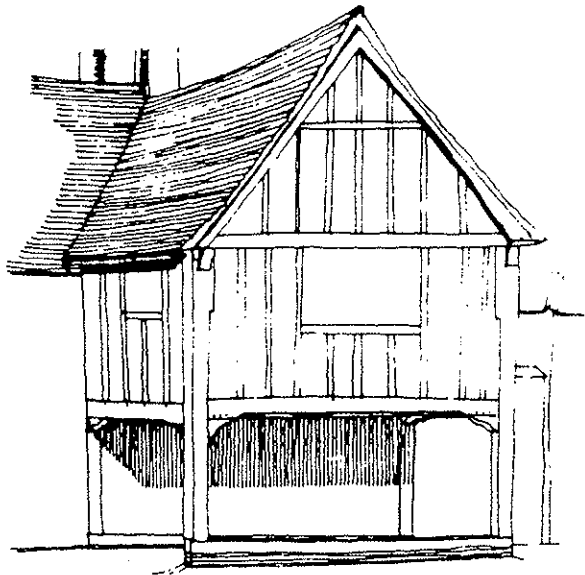
Sponsored and Corporate Signs

Sponsored and corporate signs tend to undermine the individual identity of a town and village as well as that of the premises themselves. Whilst it is conceded that there are reasons for brand identity it is important that these pressures should be tempered to ensure that such identification is made, but not overstated.

Lettering, Information and Advertisements

Whilst commercial premises need to inform the public of the goods and service which are available, there is also a commercial desire to attract attention. Unrestrained, such efforts result in self-defeating rivalry producing larger and more garish signs ending in confusion and visual chaos.

To combat this tendency a code of good manners based on high standards of design should be established to limit this aggressive and self-destructive competition. It should be rigorously applied in all Conservation Areas, and indeed in all but the most blatantly aggressive commercial areas.



36.

Medieval covered 'shops'

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D. F. STENNING, Dip. Arch. (Brighton)
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37.

Formal 19th century elevation, of some character, but with a slightly uneasy relationship between the heights of the ground and upper floors.