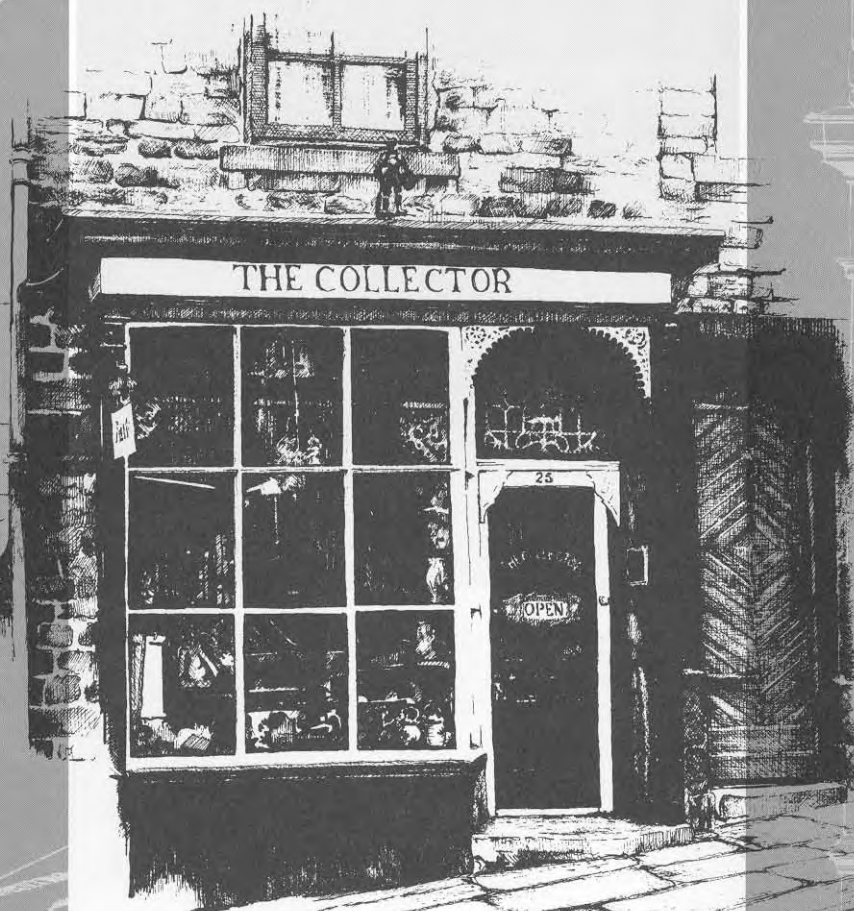


Shopfronts

DESIGN GUIDELINES IN COUNTY DURHAM



ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this leaflet is to promote and encourage good shopfront and advertisement design throughout County Durham, with the aim of improving the general standard of shopfront design.

The guidelines listed in this booklet provide the general approach that should be adopted when considering alterations to existing shopfronts and new shopfronts and advertisements. The aim is to assist the designer in contributing to the appearance of the building and character of the area.

These guidelines should not however be seen as hard and fast rules. Inventiveness is still necessary to achieve good design.



A traditional shopfront showing a simple yet attractive window pattern.

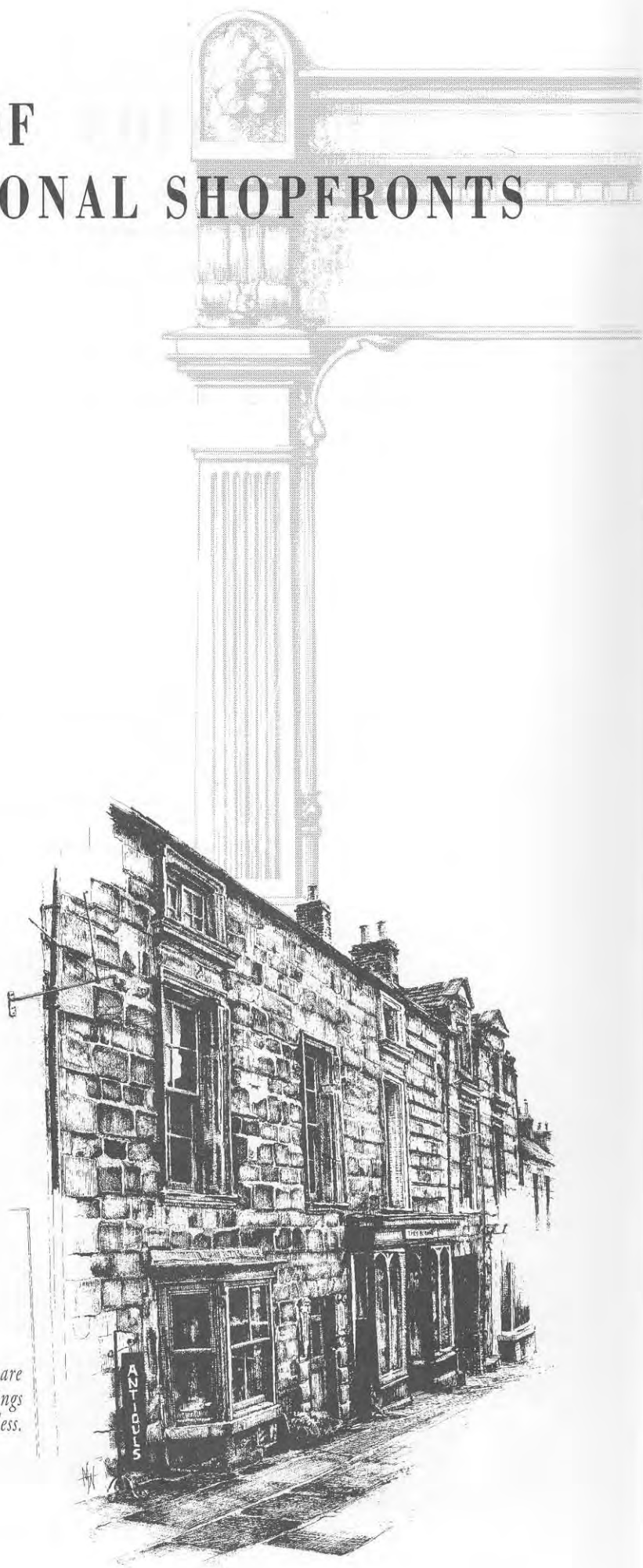
THE HISTORY OF TRADITIONAL SHOPFRONTS

Many historic streets have been associated with the buying and selling of goods and services for centuries. However, the idea of the shopping street as it is known today is a relatively recent development, which began to emerge in the late seventeenth century. Until then goods were sold from properties which would not have had a recognisable shopfront. Many of these properties were subsequently adapted to include a shopfront.

From the eighteenth century onwards, high street buildings were often designed with the shopfront as an integral part of the building and shopfront design was generally based on classical orders, eg doric or corinthian etc, with great importance placed on balancing proportion and harmony in the design.

Shopfronts throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century tended to have a fairly uniform appearance because plot widths were traditionally narrow and window and door openings necessarily restricted in width.

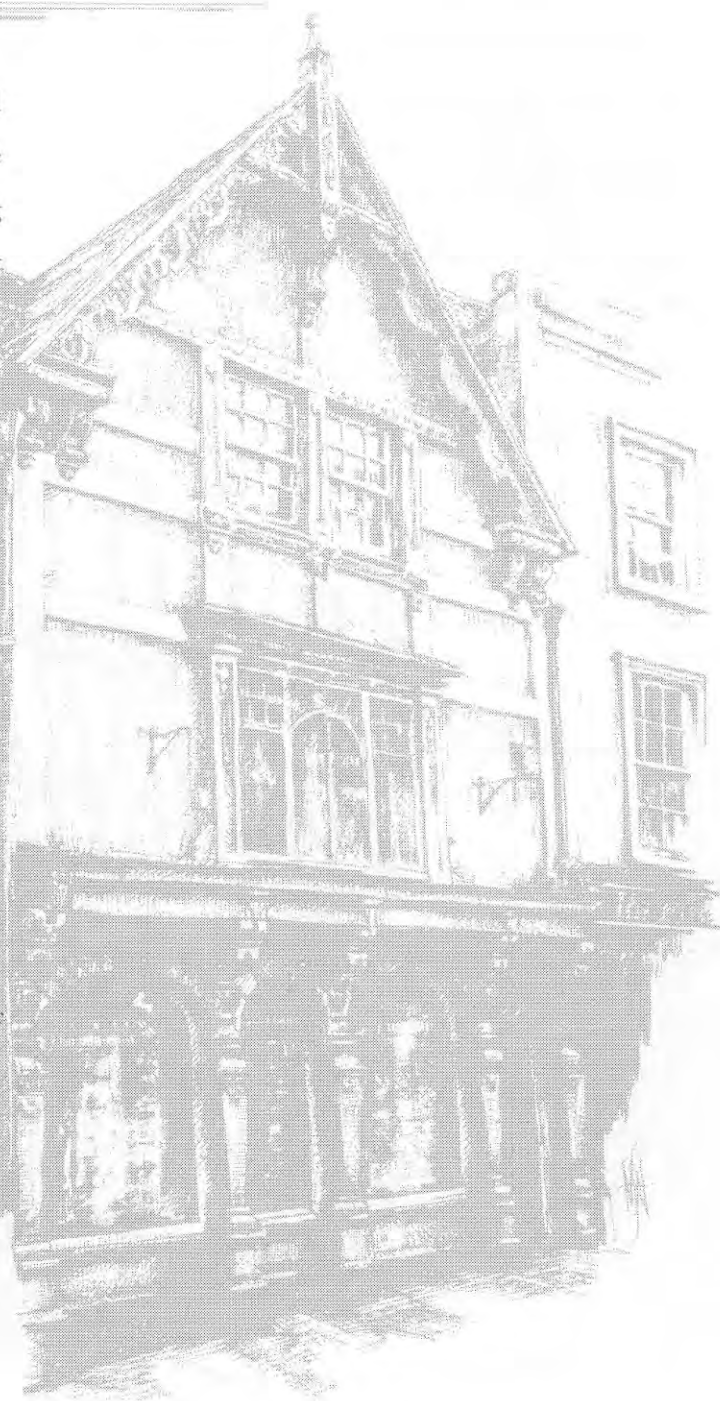
Many late nineteenth century shopfronts are insertions into older buildings but can be of historic interest nevertheless.



Great emphasis was also placed on vertical proportions, with storey height expressed by the use of plinths, string courses, friezes and differing height windows, while fascias were supported by vertical pillars employed in the post and beam method of support.

The best of the remaining old shopfronts show these principles in action. They also show a wealth of imaginative detail applied to all parts of the shopfront. Fascias and cornices in particular were often richly decorated and modelled.

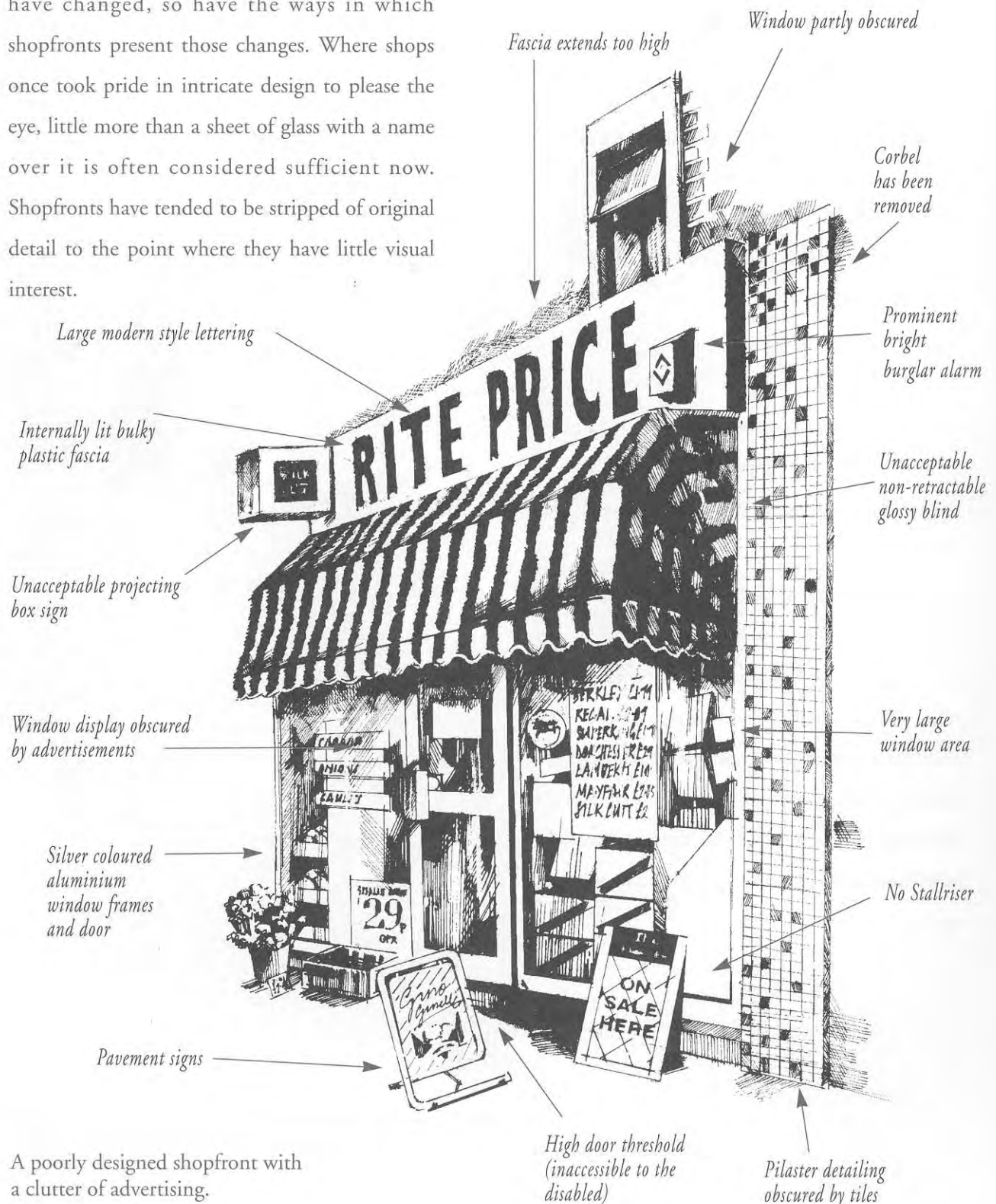
A reaction to this elaboration took place in the 1920's and 1930's. The inter-war design tended to avoid embellishment but nevertheless managed to create pattern and interest. The shopfronts were constructed of mahogany, chrome, bronze or marble and formed part of the design of an entire facade. Very few examples survive completely intact of this once popular style.



Elaborate inserted nineteenth century shopfront showing principles of verticality and visible support of upper floors.

MODERN SHOPFRONTS AND THE DECLINE OF

Shopfront design has changed dramatically over the last thirty years or so. As retailing methods have changed, so have the ways in which shopfronts present those changes. Where shops once took pride in intricate design to please the eye, little more than a sheet of glass with a name over it is often considered sufficient now. Shopfronts have tended to be stripped of original detail to the point where they have little visual interest.



SHOPFRONT DESIGN

Changing methods of displaying and selling goods and the availability of new materials such as sheet plastics, laminates, aluminium and plate glass coupled with the decline in carpentry have contributed to the changes in style and design.

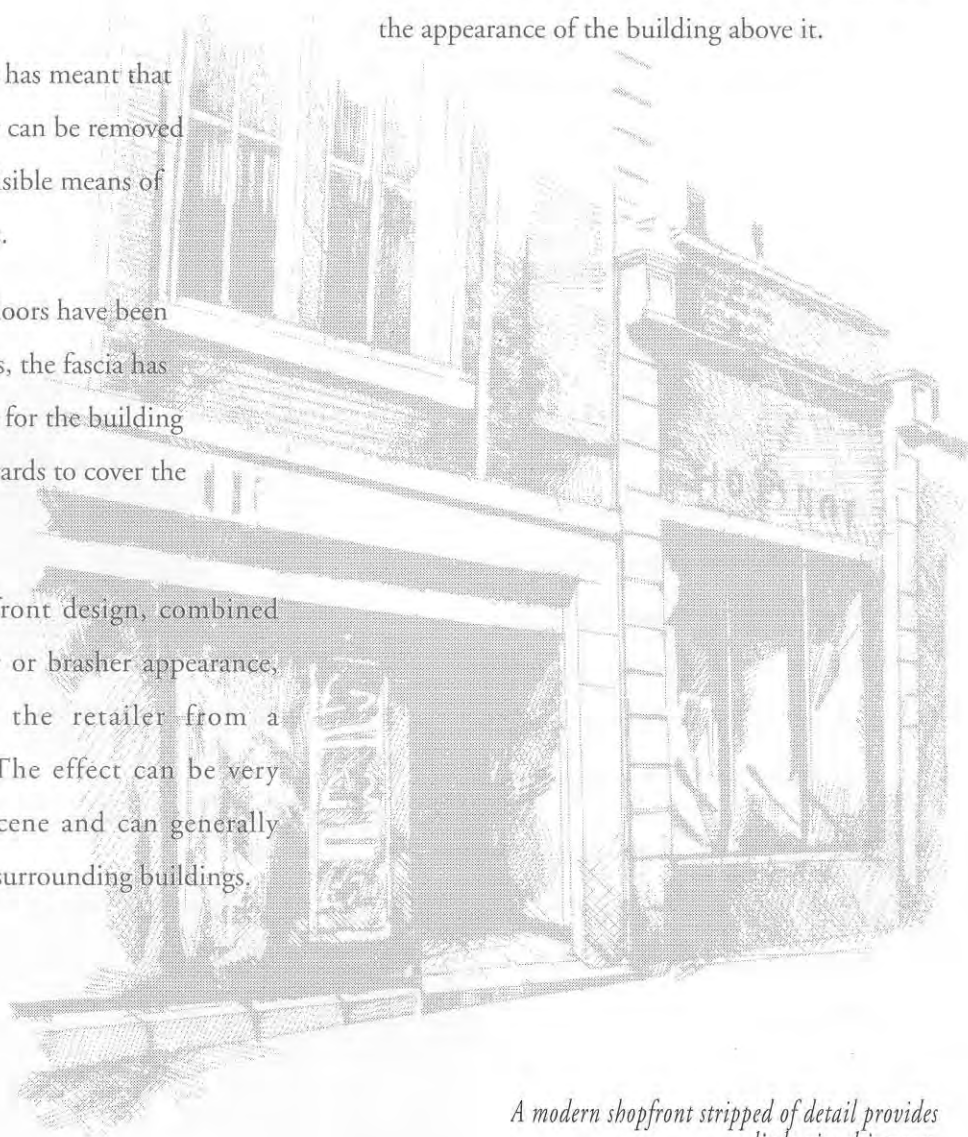
Basic rules of scale and proportion are often ignored in using new construction methods.

For example:

- ◆ The use of steel girders has meant that the whole ground floor can be removed and set back without visible means of support to upper floors.
- ◆ When higher ground floors have been fitted with false ceilings, the fascia has often become too deep for the building when extended downwards to cover the space between.

Such alterations to shopfront design, combined with a sometimes brighter or brasher appearance, may be demanded by the retailer from a commercial viewpoint. The effect can be very disruptive in the street scene and can generally relate badly to the existing surrounding buildings.

The general decline in the standard of shopfront design has also resulted from changing lifestyles and business practices. Living over the shop has largely disappeared with the decline in the family business and with it separate entrance doors at street level. At street level, businesses expanding into the shop next door have been united under a common fascia without regard to its effect on the appearance of the building above it.



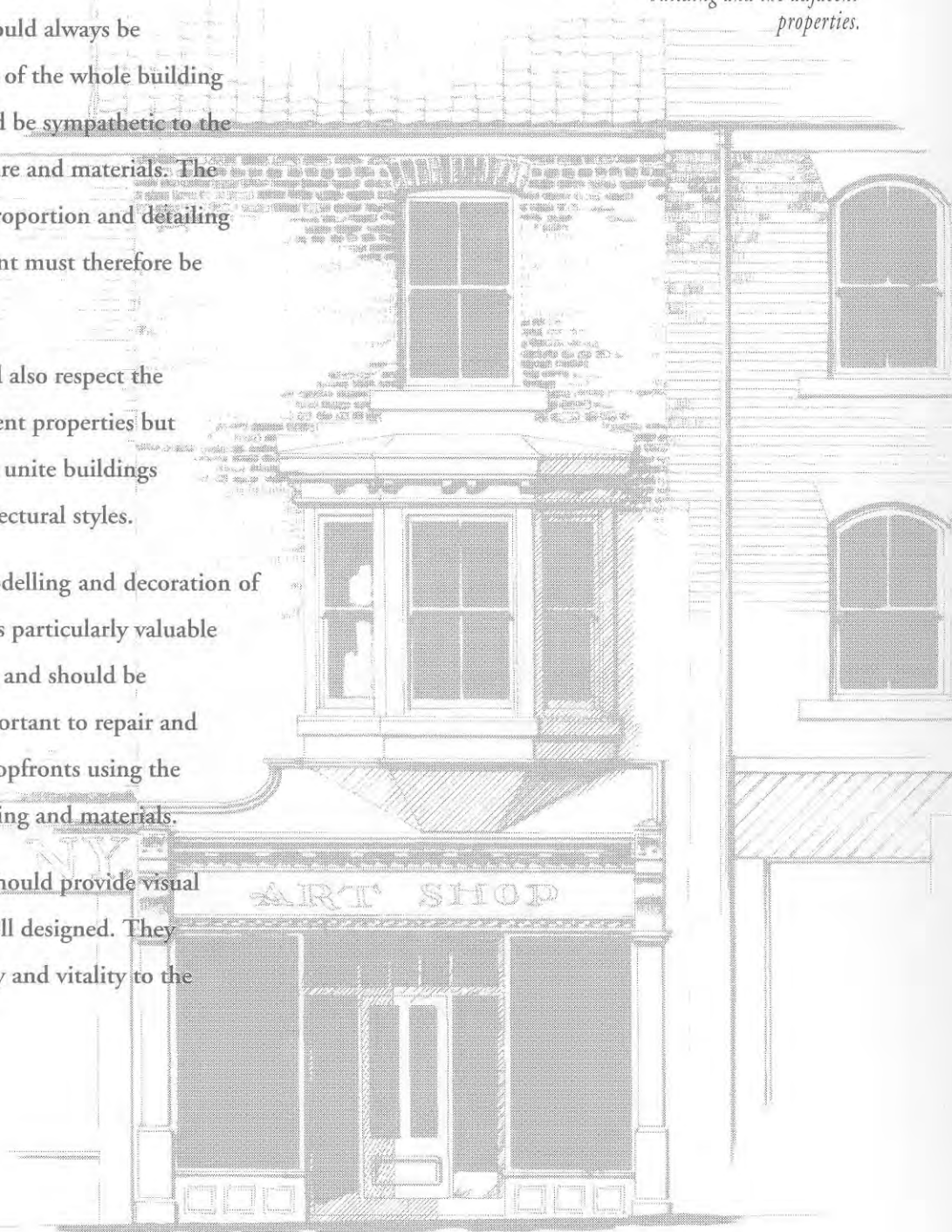
A modern shopfront stripped of detail provides little visual interest.

THE PRINCIPLES OF SHOPFRONT DESIGN

To design successful new shopfronts it is necessary to take into consideration the four principles that are listed below:

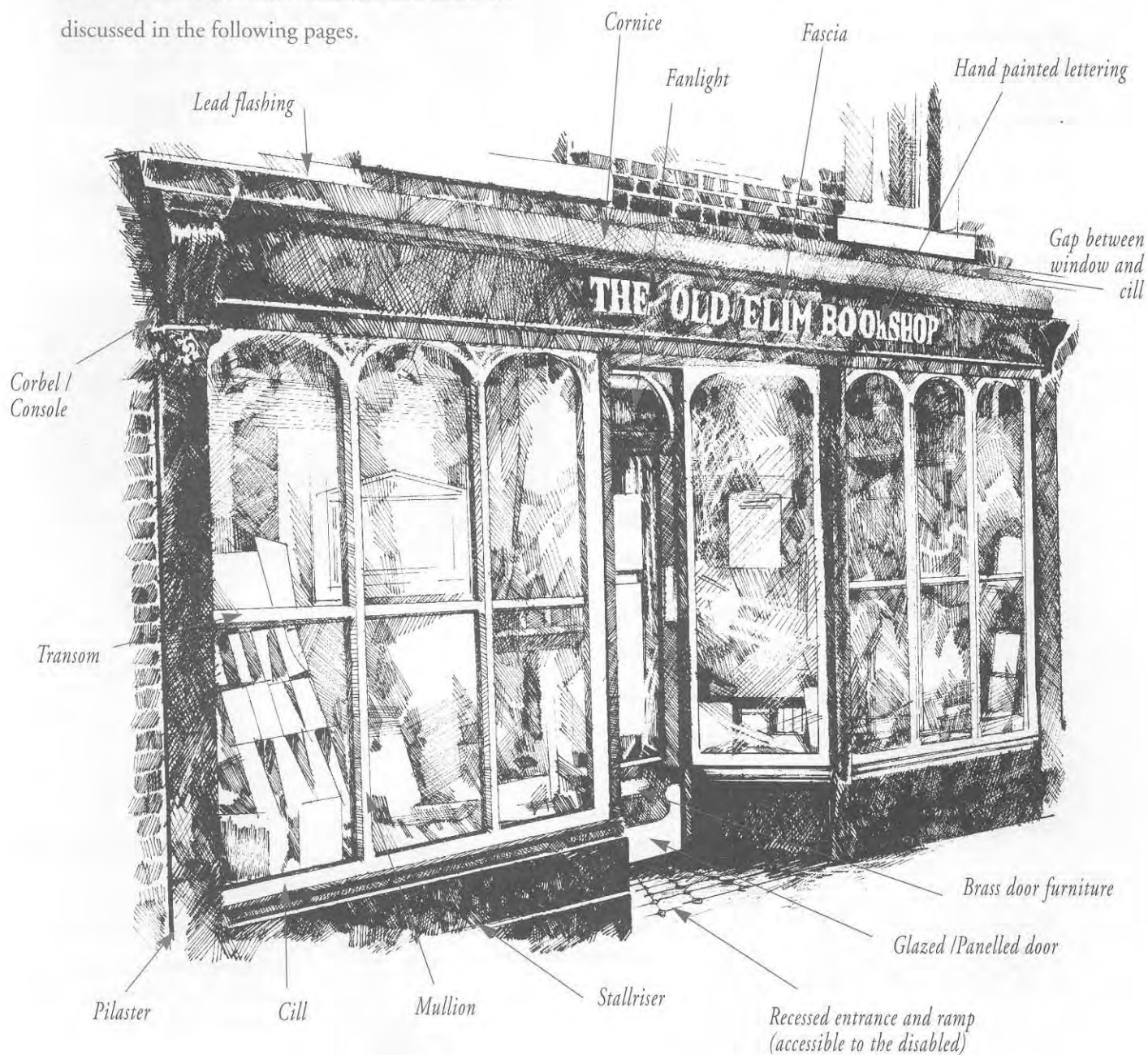
A new shopfront that respects the character and scale of the existing building and the adjacent properties.

- ◆ The shopfront should always be considered as part of the whole building design, and should be sympathetic to the existing architecture and materials. The character, scale, proportion and detailing above the shopfront must therefore be respected.
- ◆ Shopfronts should also respect the character of adjacent properties but should not aim to unite buildings of different architectural styles.
- ◆ The detailing, modelling and decoration of older shopfronts is particularly valuable in the street scene and should be retained. It is important to repair and maintain these shopfronts using the appropriate detailing and materials.
- ◆ New shopfronts should provide visual interest and be well designed. They should add quality and vitality to the street scene.



THE DETAILS OF GOOD SHOPFRONT DESIGN

Various elements can be used to enclose the shop window and entrance rather like a picture frame which sets off a painting. These include the pilaster, fascia, cornice and stallriser. Each has its own visual and practical function and these are discussed in the following pages.



Details of a well designed shopfront.

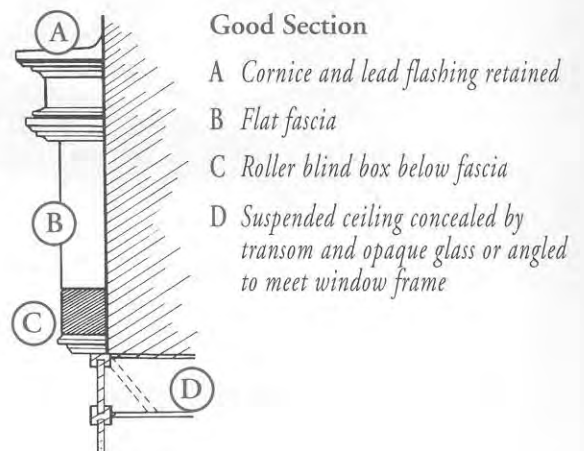
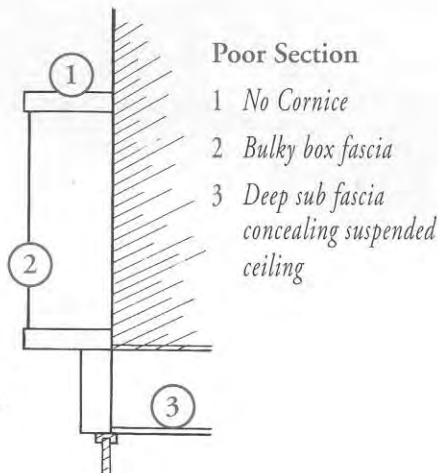
Fascia

Most shopfronts incorporate a fascia to display the name and/or type of shop. The scale and design of the fascia should be appropriate to the character, height and period of the building and in proportion with the design of the shopfront. Most traditional fascias do not exceed 15 inches (380mm) in depth. Excessively deep fascias should be avoided.

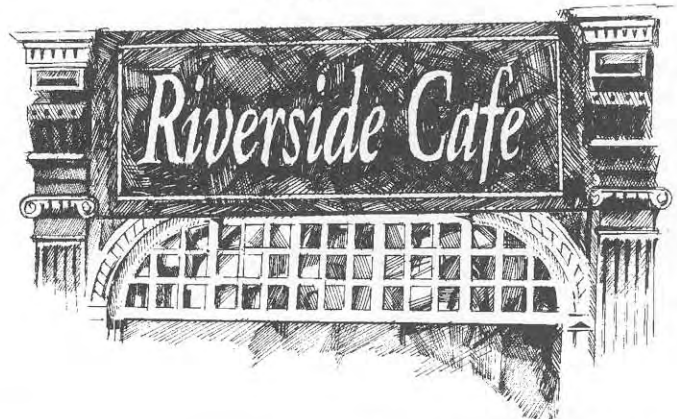
The fascia should usually be kept well below the first floor window cills leaving a suitable margin. The bottom of the fascia should not extend down too far in proportion to the rest of the shopfront, nor cover up architectural detail. Applied fasciaboards should not hide original details.

Where excessively deep fascias have been introduced in the past, their overall height should be reduced to expose, where practical, the wall surface below. Where a false ceiling is being inserted within the shop, it will not be appropriate merely to increase the fascia depth in conjunction with it. This should be treated as a separate element below the fascia.

Good and poor fascia sections.

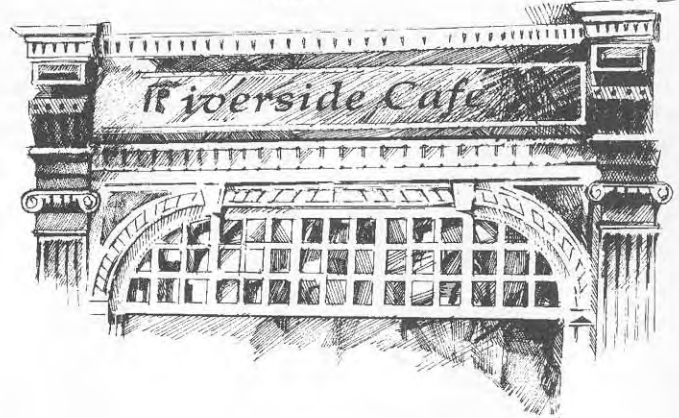


Before



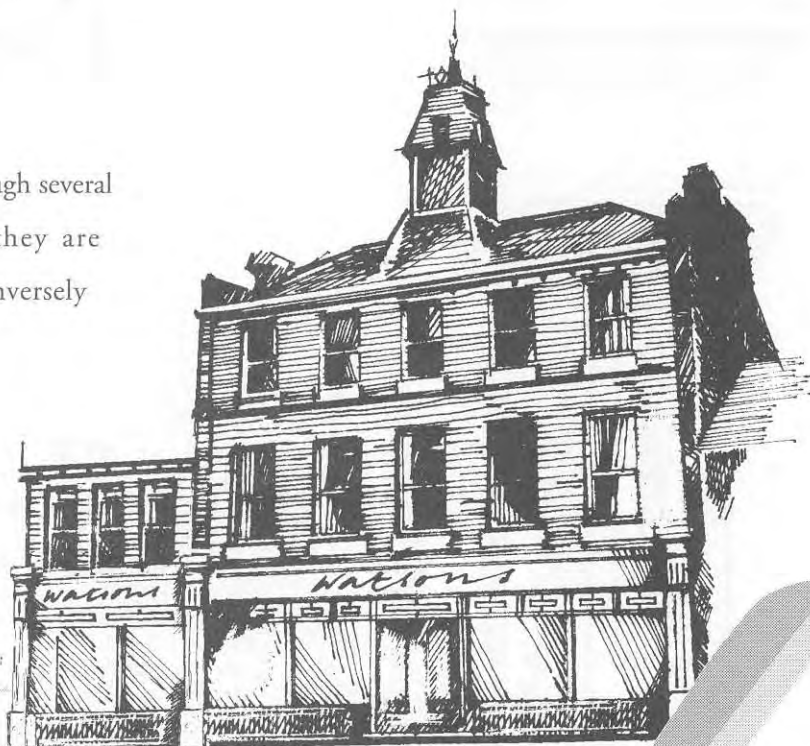
Later fascia obscures original detail.

After



Original fascia exposed.

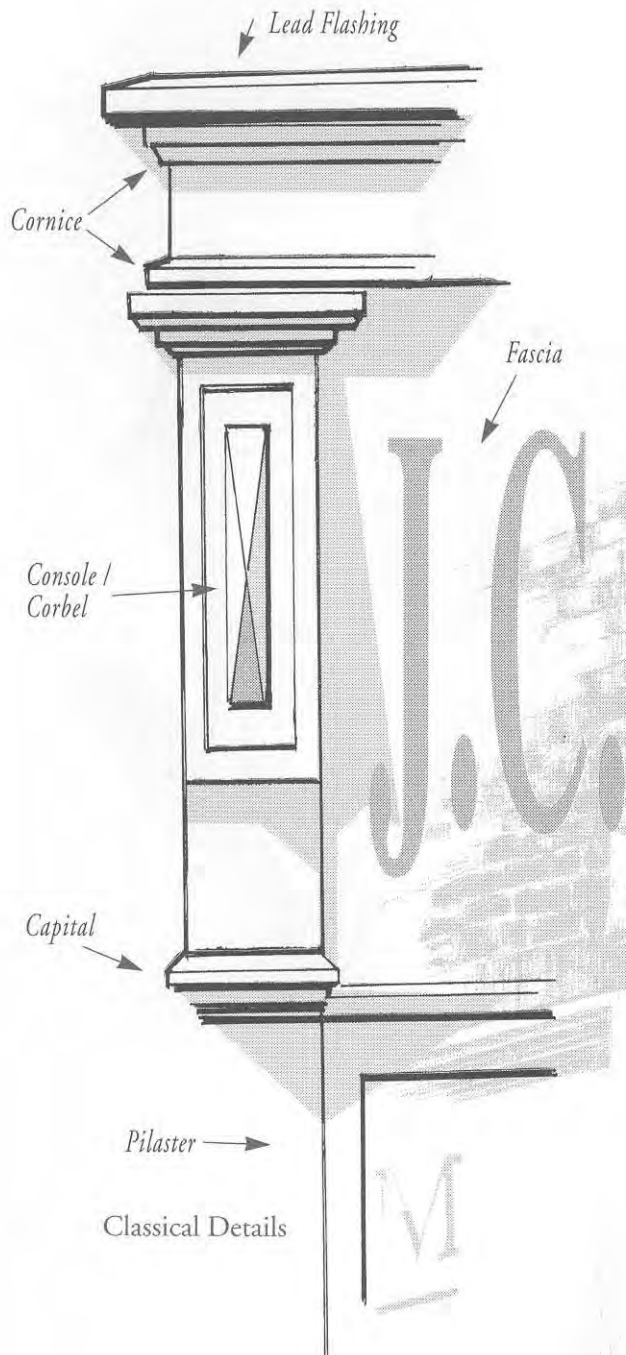
A common fascia should not run through several distinct elevations, even where they are occupied by the same business. Conversely where two users occupy the ground floor of a single building the shopfronts and fascias should be broadly co-ordinated.



Architectural elements of building carried down to shopfront.



Shopfront and fascia extended over two buildings - ignores division of units into plot sizes.



Classical Details

Console/Corbels

In Victorian shopfronts the capital at the head of the pilaster was often elaborated to form a console bracket extending outside the fascia to support a distinctive cornice. The bracket was often uniform in width on the front, the sides curved in the form of an upright 'S' with the bottom curve smaller than the upper curve.

Cornice

The cornice provides a necessary and attractive break between the shopfront and the building facade, and by throwing water clear of the shopfront can prevent decay. To omit the cornice leaves the shopfront incomplete and can result in a very mean and uninteresting appearance.

Original cornices and friezes should be retained or revealed or restored. A structural or applied cornice projection is required as part of nearly every shopfront design.

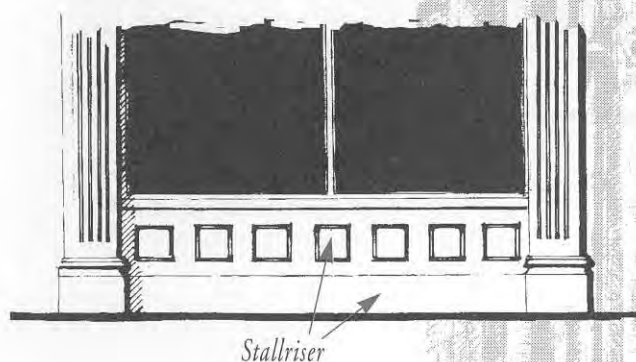
Elaborate console brackets and cornice details.



Pilasters

The pilasters are the shallow piers or columns which project slightly from the wall to each side of a shopfront. The pilasters provide visual and physical support to the fascia with which they form a type of picture frame containing the shopfront. Traditional pilasters usually have a wider base on a plinth at the bottom and a decorative capital to the top.

A traditional panelled stallriser, constructed of timber and hand painted.



Classical details

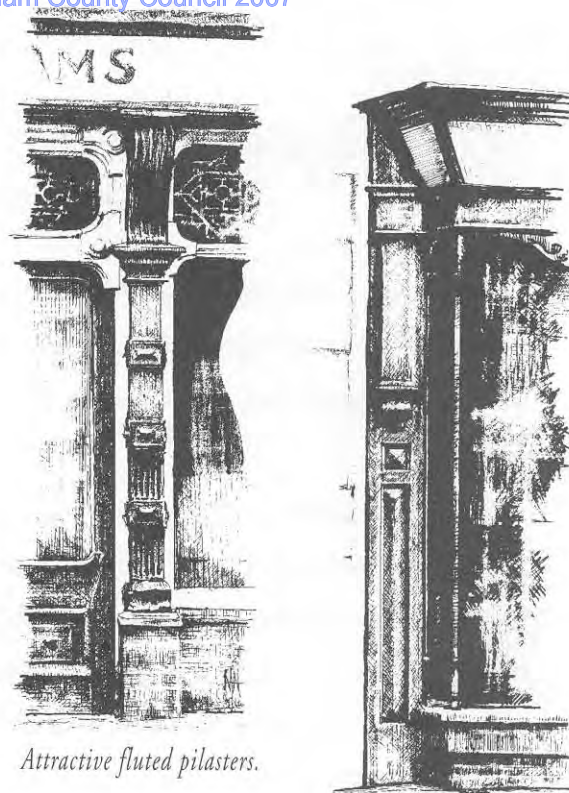
Mullion

Pilaster

Plinth / base

Cill

Stallriser



Attractive fluted pilasters.

Stallrisers

The stallriser is a vital component of the traditional shopfront. It gives protection to the base of the shop window from splash or damage and provides the building with a visual anchor to the ground. They are traditionally constructed of stone (generally ashlar or polished), render or panelled timber, although brick is sometimes found. Victorian shopfronts, most notably butchers and public houses, also used decorative tiles. These should be retained even where the shop name is changed.

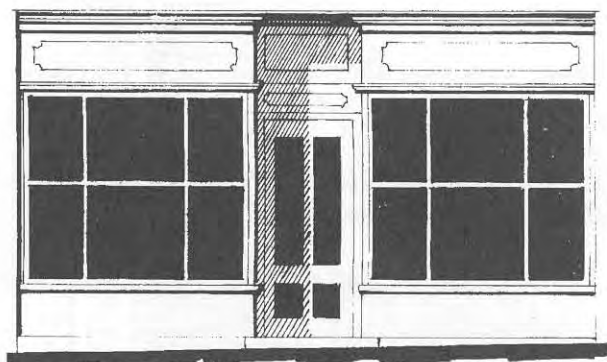
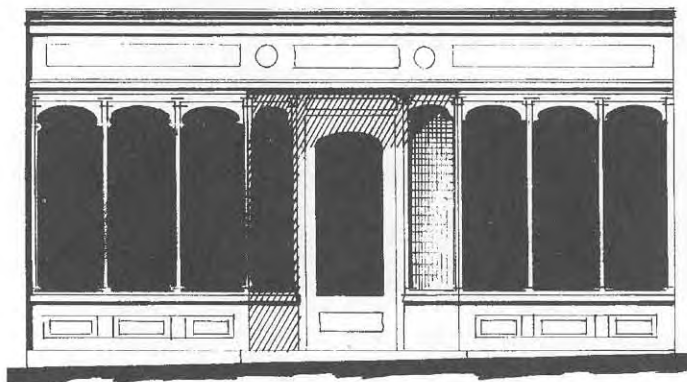
Mosaics and laminates are usually not appropriate materials for stallrisers of traditional buildings or in historic areas.

It is often possible to unify the facade of the building by using the facing material of the upper floors for the stallriser, eg. painted smooth render or stone.

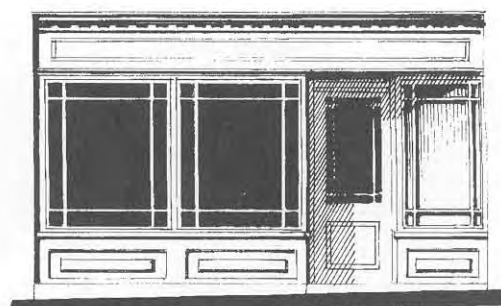
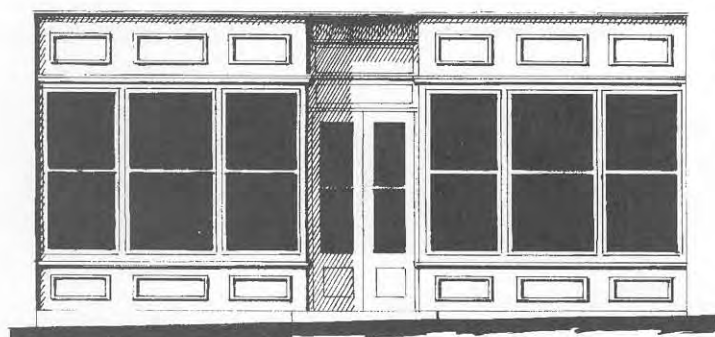
Windows

One of the most important visual elements of the shopfront is the large window area for the display of goods and the attraction of customers.

Very large undivided areas of glass should be avoided and windows ideally should be framed and subdivided vertically. Plate glass may provide a horizontal emphasis to the building at ground floor level resulting in conflict with the vertical character of upper floors. The main upright posts (mullions) which subdivide the glass can often be supplemented by horizontal members (transoms) or other slim glazing bars. Windows should normally be set in the same plane as the front of the building. Recesses should generally be limited to the shop entrance which should usually be centrally positioned.



Shopfronts with well proportioned fenestrations sub-divided by mullions and transoms or slim glazing bars.



Windows should be framed and subdivided vertically.



Recessed doorway which is centrally located - plan form.

Window Display

The shopfront provides the framework for displaying goods. The method of display is crucial not only for attracting the customer but also creating a lively street atmosphere. Shop windows should not be obscured by a proliferation of advertisements, stickers or coloured film.

Some enterprises such as building societies, banks and bookmakers do not normally display goods and an imaginative approach to window display will help to avoid the deadening effect such units can have on the shopping street.

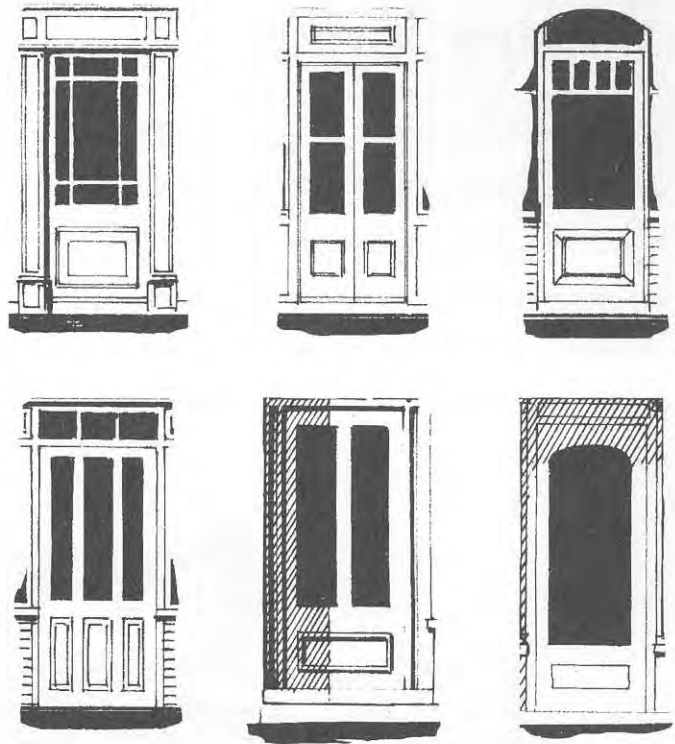


This shopfront provides the framework for an attractive window display.

Doors

The entrance gives an important first impression of the shop itself. A recessed doorway has the effect of inviting shoppers in, it also gives relief in the frontage and helps to break down the scale of the shopfront.

Existing original doors or traditional panelled doors should be retained, while the design of new shop doors must reflect the design of the shopfront and windows. The door should generally have a 'kick plate' or bottom panel of a height to match the stallriser. The door and window frame should usually be constructed of the same material and painted the same colour.



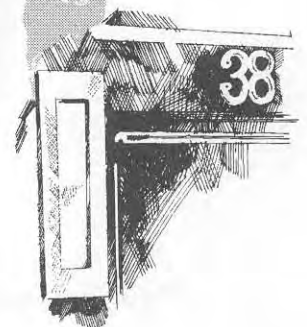
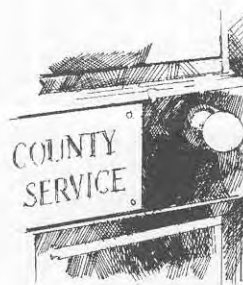
Traditional door styles.

Fanlights

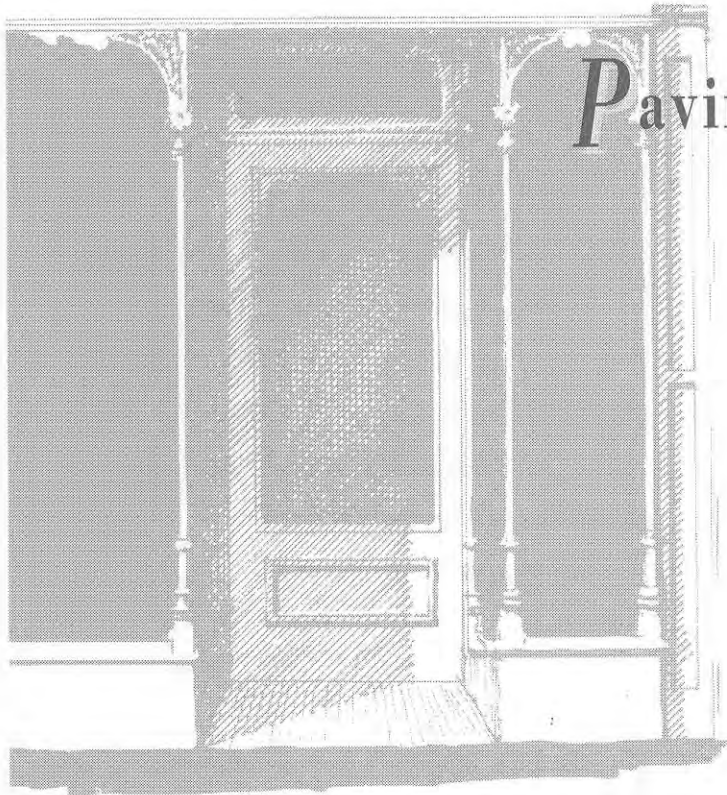
A fanlight is a window over a door which can resemble an open fan in design. The fanlight should be correct in style for the date and character of the shopfront and door.

Metalwork

Existing traditional metal fittings, such as letter boxes, door plates, handles, boot scrapers, etc. should be retained, and new door furniture should be chosen to match the style of the shopfront.



Modern aluminium door furniture is generally not appropriate for timber doors or traditional shopfronts and brass furniture of the style shown is preferred.



Recessed shop entrance.

Paving and access for the disabled

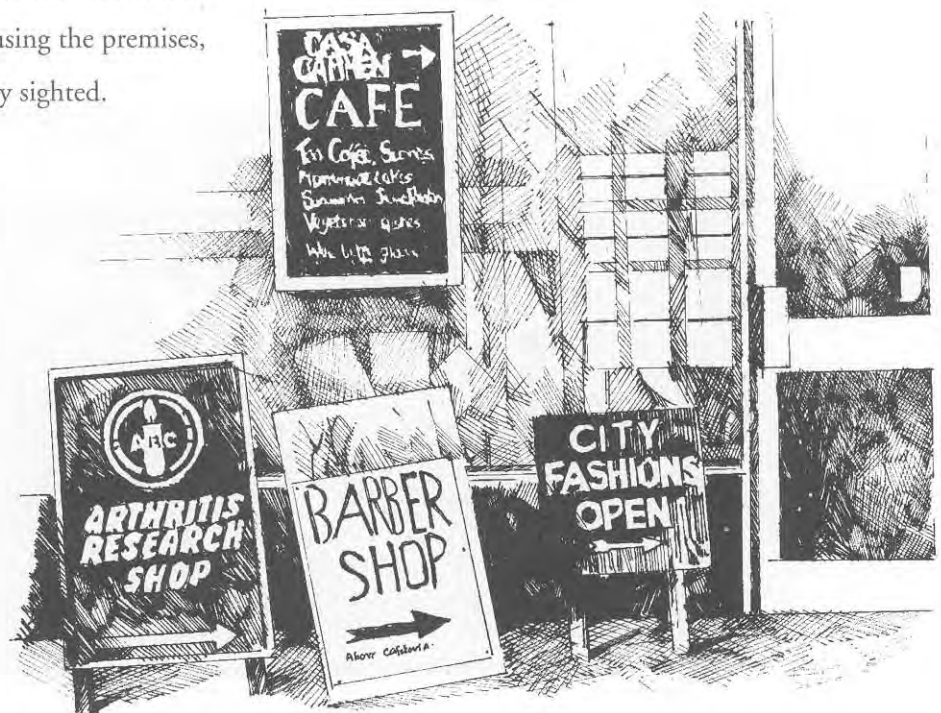
If the shop door is recessed it is important to make sure the paved area in front is carefully designed. As well as taking into account the colour and materials which blend in with the shopfront, it is necessary to consider access for the disabled.

Disabled access is desirable and can usually be achieved without detriment to the design of the shopfront. As a general principle, steps should be avoided and the entrance ramp to the shop should be surfaced in a non-slip material. Dimensions must comply with the Disabled Persons Act 1991 and the British Standards Institution Code of Practice for Access to Buildings for the Disabled.

Forecourts

The display of goods, or signs on forecourts gives the street a cluttered appearance and also causes problems to disabled people using the premises, especially the blind or partially sighted.

The use of forecourts for advertisement signs or display should be discouraged.



Clutter caused by forecourt display.

Materials

Much of the character of a historic area is derived from the mellowed appearance of traditional materials such as stone, brick, tile, slate and timber and this must be respected in the design of shopfronts. Materials should be chosen to conform with the historic character of the area, and with the building above or, where suitable, to each side.

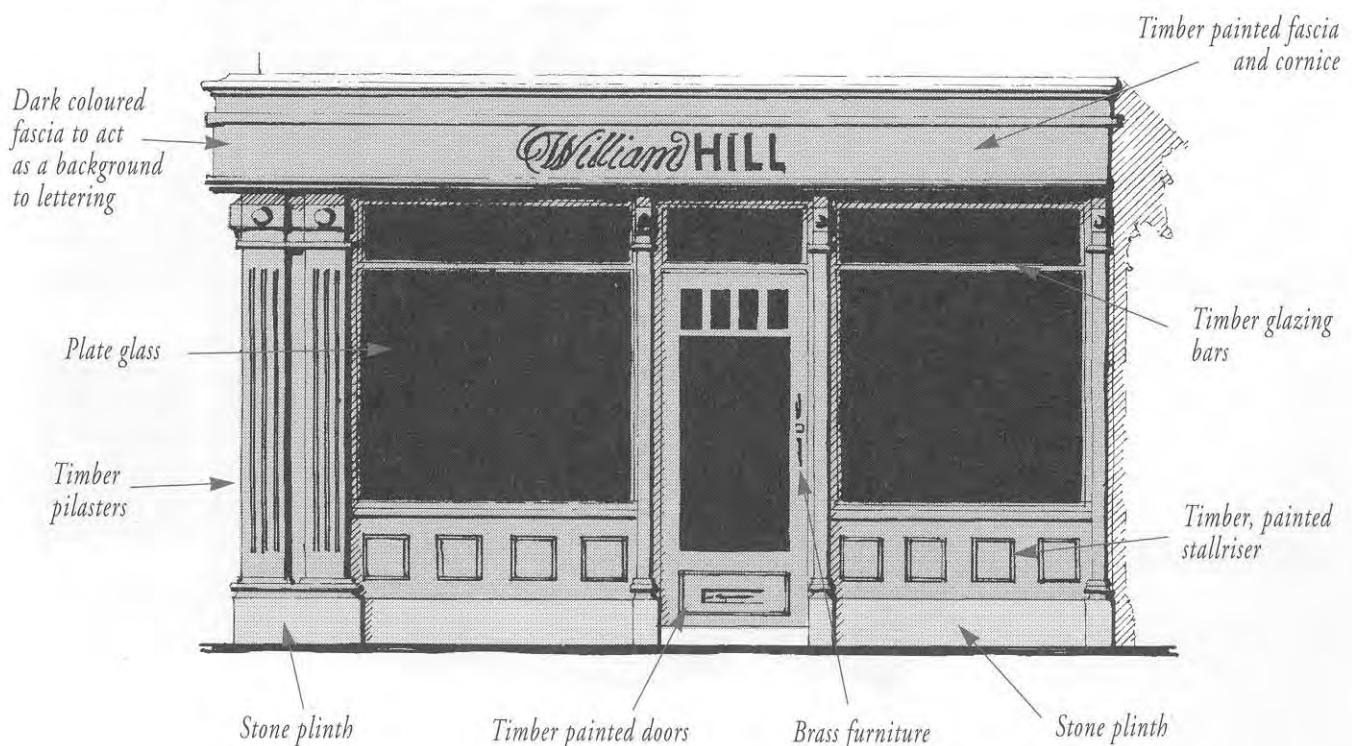
The range of materials in use in historic areas should not be indiscriminately increased. Modern materials such as plastics, aluminium and stainless steel, and anodised or plastic-coated metals are generally unsympathetic when viewed in combination with natural materials and should be avoided where possible, or used only with discretion.

Timber was the dominant shopfront material in previous centuries. As well as being the most

versatile of materials, it is durable and repainting can freshen up or change the appearance of a shopfront at a minimum cost. Painted timber is generally preferable to stained hardwood. The use of non sustainable tropical hardwoods is environmentally questionable and such materials are often alien to the street scene.

Colour

Colour schemes should harmonise with the remainder of the building and the street scene. Colour can be used to emphasise important elements of the structure and design and at the same time pick out detail. Garish colour combinations should be avoided.

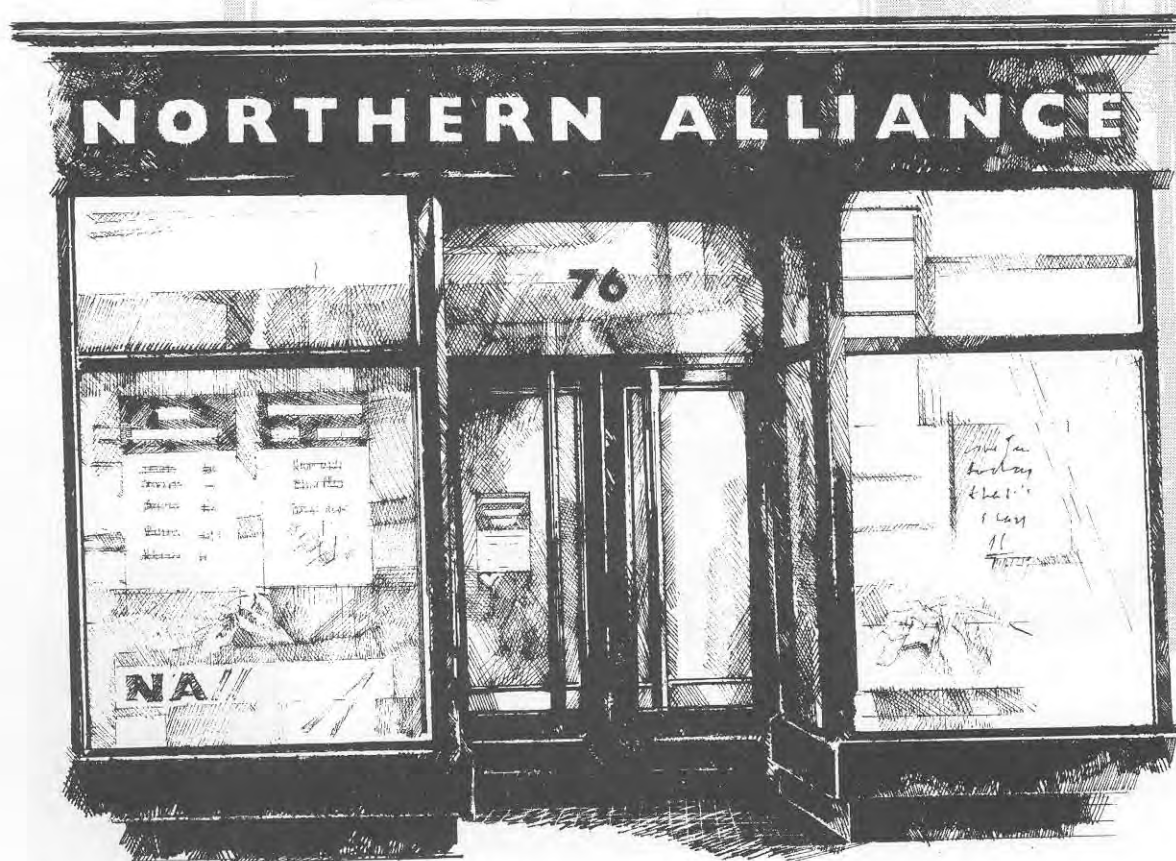


CONTEMPORARY DESIGNS

The emphasis so far has been on traditional elements of design. However, in the same way that a shopfront incorporating traditional elements may not necessarily be sympathetic to its surroundings, modern designs need not be unsympathetic.

Contemporary designs and the use of some modern materials of a high standard will be encouraged where appropriate and will usually be most appropriate in contemporary buildings.

However the use of a contemporary approach can sometimes relate well to an historic building, eg. glazed windows and door openings can be used which are well designed, and related in scale, proportion and detailing to the elevation as a whole, with no frames being visible. Care must be taken so that such solutions do not undermine the visual unity of the building and damage the appearance.



A simple modern shopfront using traditional scale and proportion and high quality materials in a modern form.

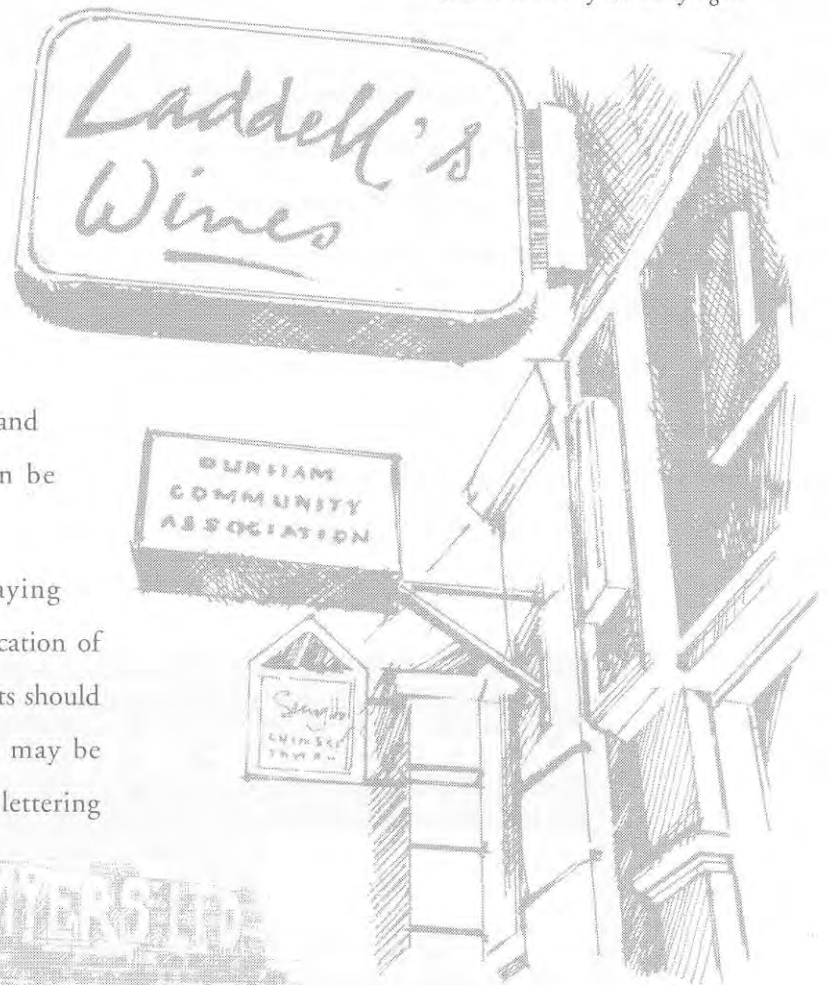
ADVERTISEMENTS

Whilst commercial premises need to provide the public with the name and goods and services that are available, there is also a desire to attract attention.

Often the simpler the message the greater the impact. An excessive amount of advertising material creates a cluttered and unsightly appearance, which can often be counter productive.

The fascia is the prime place for displaying advertising material and unnecessary duplication of the message in other forms of advertisements should be avoided if possible. In some cases it may be necessary to avoid a fascia, and to apply lettering directly to the wall or to the inside of a display window or perhaps convey the message using a hanging sign.

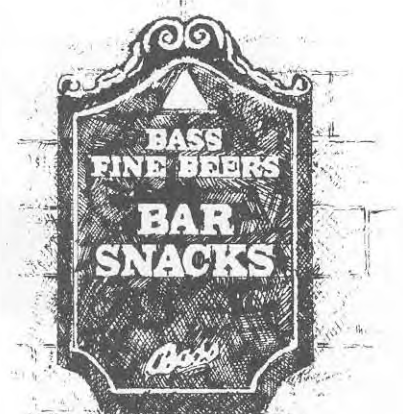
Clutter caused by too many signs.



Lettering applied directly onto the wall

Painted wall signs

This traditional form of advertising was popular with the Victorians. The signs either comprised of timber boards or signs painted directly onto the walls and were often sited on prominent walls of public houses and commercial buildings. Their use should be limited, otherwise their value is lost.



A painted timber board wall sign.

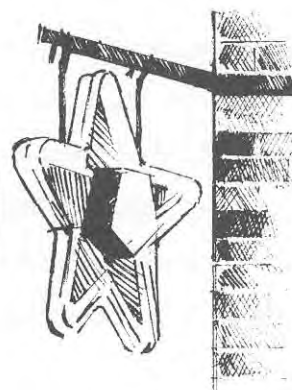
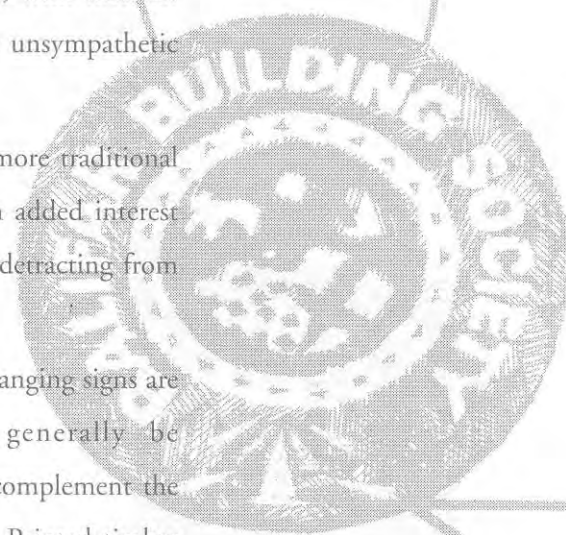
Projecting signs

The design of the modern projecting sign has become sadly nondescript. Projecting box signs which are often formed of a bulky metal box casing containing plastic panels, with internal illumination, are often in bright unsympathetic colours.

Box signs have largely replaced more traditional symbolic projecting signs, which added interest to the surroundings rather than detracting from them.

Small and neat traditional style hanging signs are encouraged. They should generally be constructed of materials which complement the existing building and shopfront. Painted timber and metal signs of a high design quality are often considered acceptable.

The signs should be fixed by a metal bracket, in a position that does not obscure or damage architectural features or cause obstruction or danger to passers-by or traffic.



Examples of appropriate hanging signs, fixed by metal brackets.



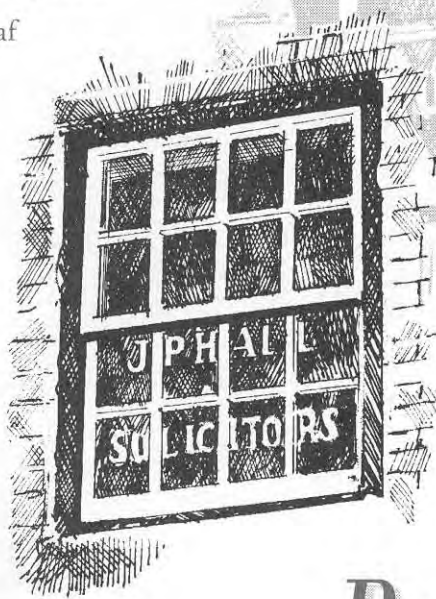
Inappropriate bulky, internally illuminated box sign.



Window signs

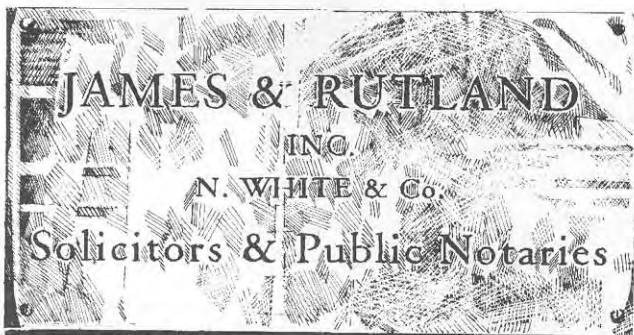
Lettering and decorative signs can be painted onto the inside of window glass to great effect, and can be very attractive. A particular advantage is that physical alterations to the front of the building are not involved.

Window signs are also valuable where upper floors are occupied by a separate business. Traditional gold leaf lettering edged in black or white lettering is usually acceptable provided that attention is paid to positioning and size of the letters.



An example of a window sign painted on the glass, which can be either white lettering or gold leaf lettering edged in black.

Business name plates



A business name plate.

Where there are office or business premises above street level, or in cases where a shopfront type display is not possible, the usual means of advertising is to have a name plate next to the street entrance.

Business name plates should not be illuminated. No more than one should be displayed for each person, partnership or company.

Lettering

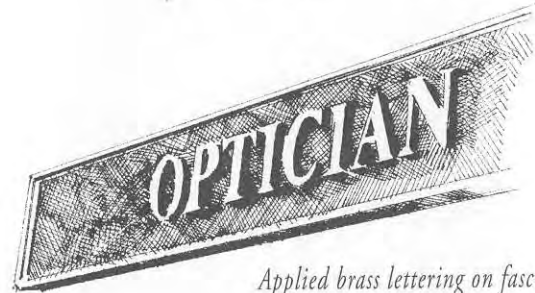
Lettering should be part of the architectural detail of a building and should also respect the character of the street as a whole.

Hand painted letters by a competent sign writer are likely to be acceptable. Applied individually, fixed lettering (eg brass or other metal) may be particularly appropriate for pubs and hotels. It is however important that care should be taken over the size and style of the lettering.

(a) **SIZE** - 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



Hand painted lettering on fascia.



Applied brass lettering on fascia.



Enamel lettering and fascia.



Oversize lettering for the size of the fascia.

with all the other elements making up the street scene. The most usual fault is in selecting letters which are too large and dominate the fascia and the shopfront.

(b) **STYLE** - The style of lettering can help to convey the image of the shop. However, it is important that it does not conflict with the other elements of the building.

House styles of national firms are a special case. In most Conservation Areas it is to be expected that modifications of these would be sought. It is realised that recognition is important but the connection can be made without contravening good shopfront design.

Some styles of lettering which depart too radically from familiar forms can be difficult to read, and therefore best avoided.



A sympathetic adaptation of a house style in a Conservation Area.

Illumination

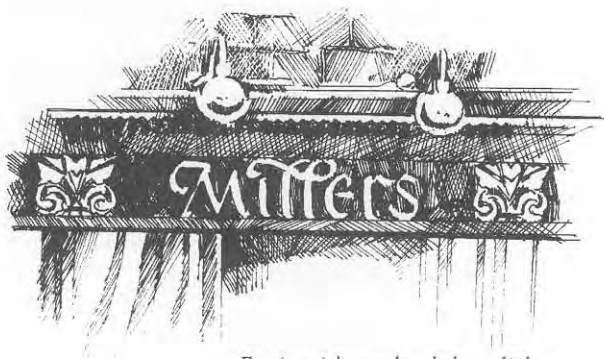
Shopfronts do not need special illumination if the level of street lighting from shop window illumination is adequate.

Box fascias internally illuminated are best avoided. Plastic and aluminium box fascias almost invariably project forward of the main face of the building, in a bulky and unsightly manner.

It is preferable that individual internally illuminated or halo illuminated letters are not used in historic areas or on listed buildings. A more even and pleasant effect may be created by external illumination by spotlights and house lights, but great care is needed to avoid lighting units which appear unsightly in the daylight or interfere with traffic at night. Light fittings should ideally be concealed, especially when fluorescent tubes are used.



Hanging sign with neat spotlights.



Fascia with two hooded spotlights.



Halo illuminated letters.



Hanging sign with a full length strip light concealed by a compact hood.



Internally illuminated fascias.

ACCESSORIES

Blinds

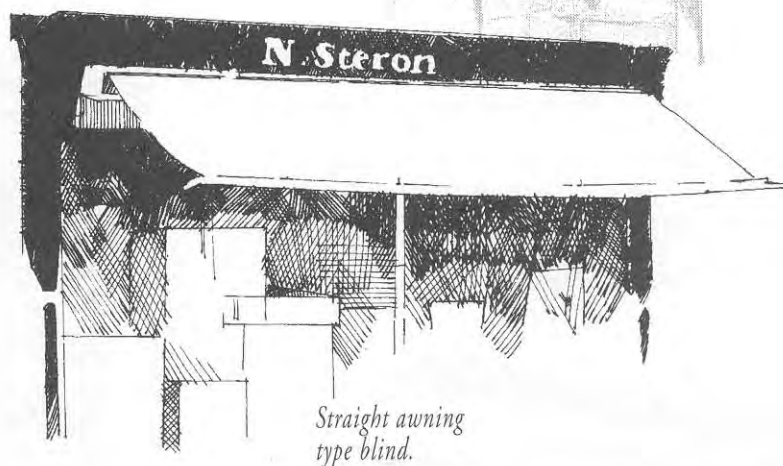
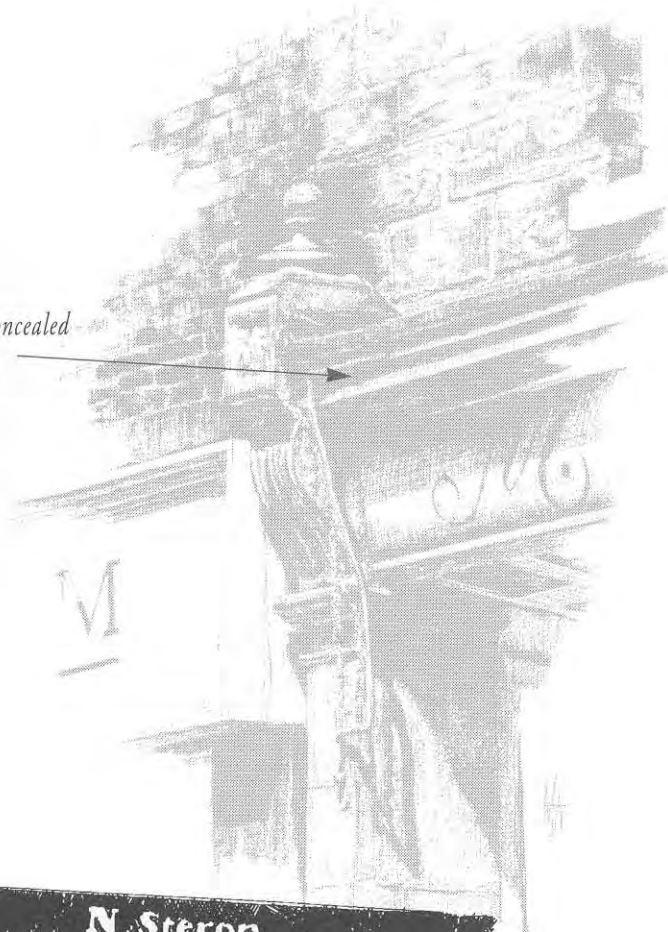
Goods may need to be protected from damage by sunlight and where films attached to the glass or internal retractable blinds are not practical, blinds or canopies may be required. Normally, however, there is little need for them on north facing elevations or in narrow streets.

The traditional shop blind is the straight awning type, mounted on a roller supported by brackets. When not in use it was virtually invisible, concealed in a blind box designed carefully as part of the cornice or fascia. These traditional items should be repaired and retained even where the blind is not useful to the current occupier.

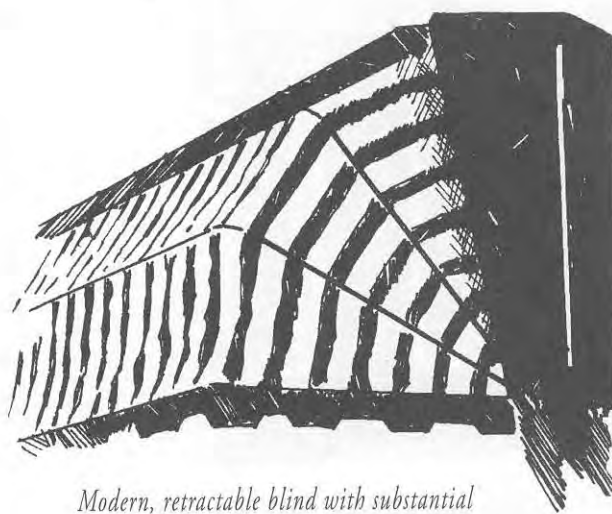
Replacement of such blinds with modern ones raises problems:

Fully retractable blinds with modern mechanisms and material still require substantial box housing. Often made of aluminium including a fascia bar, they may be difficult to integrate with traditional shopfronts.

Invisible concealed blind box



Straight awning type blind.



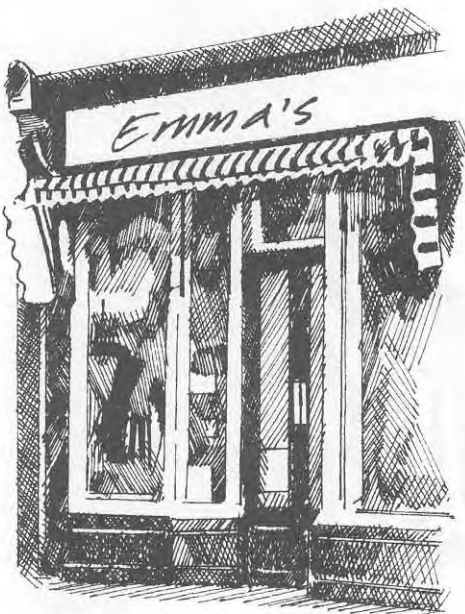
Modern, retractable blind with substantial box housing.

Blinds continued

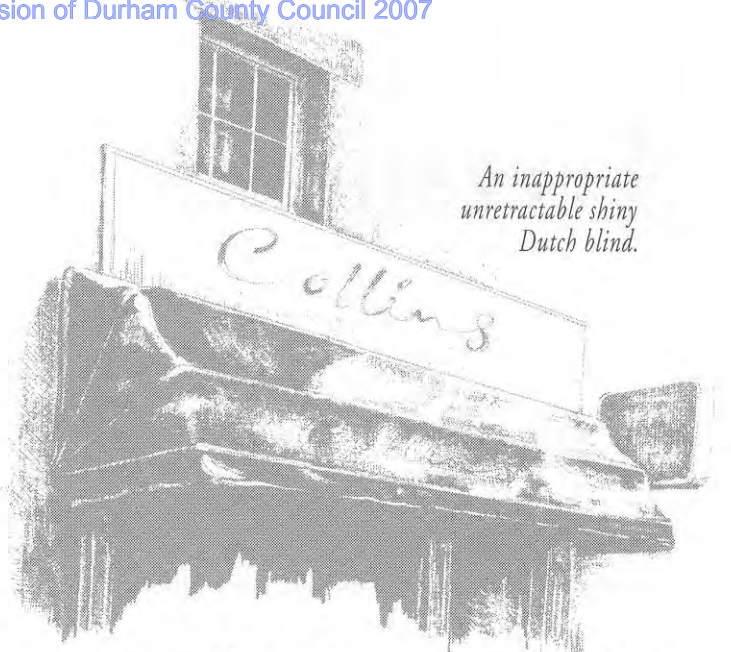
Semi-retractable or unretractable designs such as the Dutch canopy which is curved in section and appears like a pram hood, cannot be concealed successfully in a blind box. When folded, the fabric bunches up untidily, often obscuring part if not all of the fascia. However these blinds are rarely folded back and some are permanently fixed down, often obscuring traditional details and totally dominating the building.

New blinds in historic areas should therefore be fully retractable, so that they may be pulled down only when required and so that the fascia is not permanently obscured. They should be accompanied by carefully designed modifications to the shopfront to incorporate the housing.

The fixing of blinds above or across architectural details should be avoided.

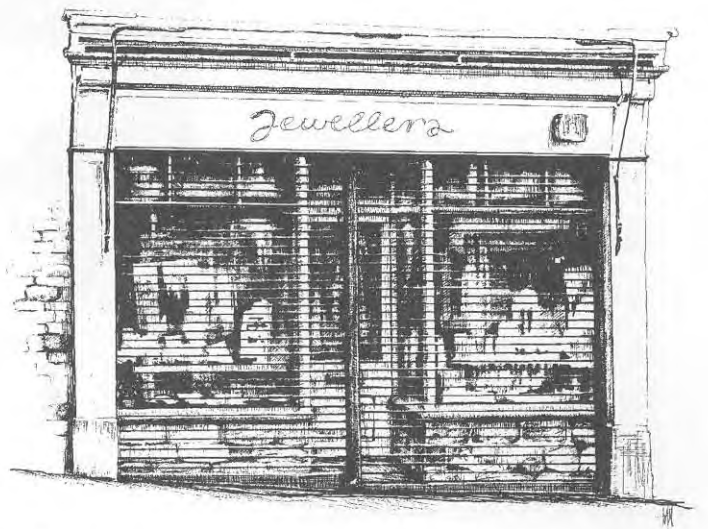


A semi retractable canopy which cannot be concealed successfully in the blind box.



An inappropriate unretractable shiny Dutch blind.

Many new blinds and canopies are made of shiny plastics which are out of character with traditional buildings and materials in Conservation Areas. New external blinds should be of traditional canvas retractable, flat or fan type.



External shutter and alarm box.

Alarms

These are usually best mounted on the fascia. Generally a visible but unobtrusive place can be found near to it where architectural detail is not obscured. In some cases the colour may have to be painted out to blend with the background. An alarm need not be painted in a bright unrelated colour.

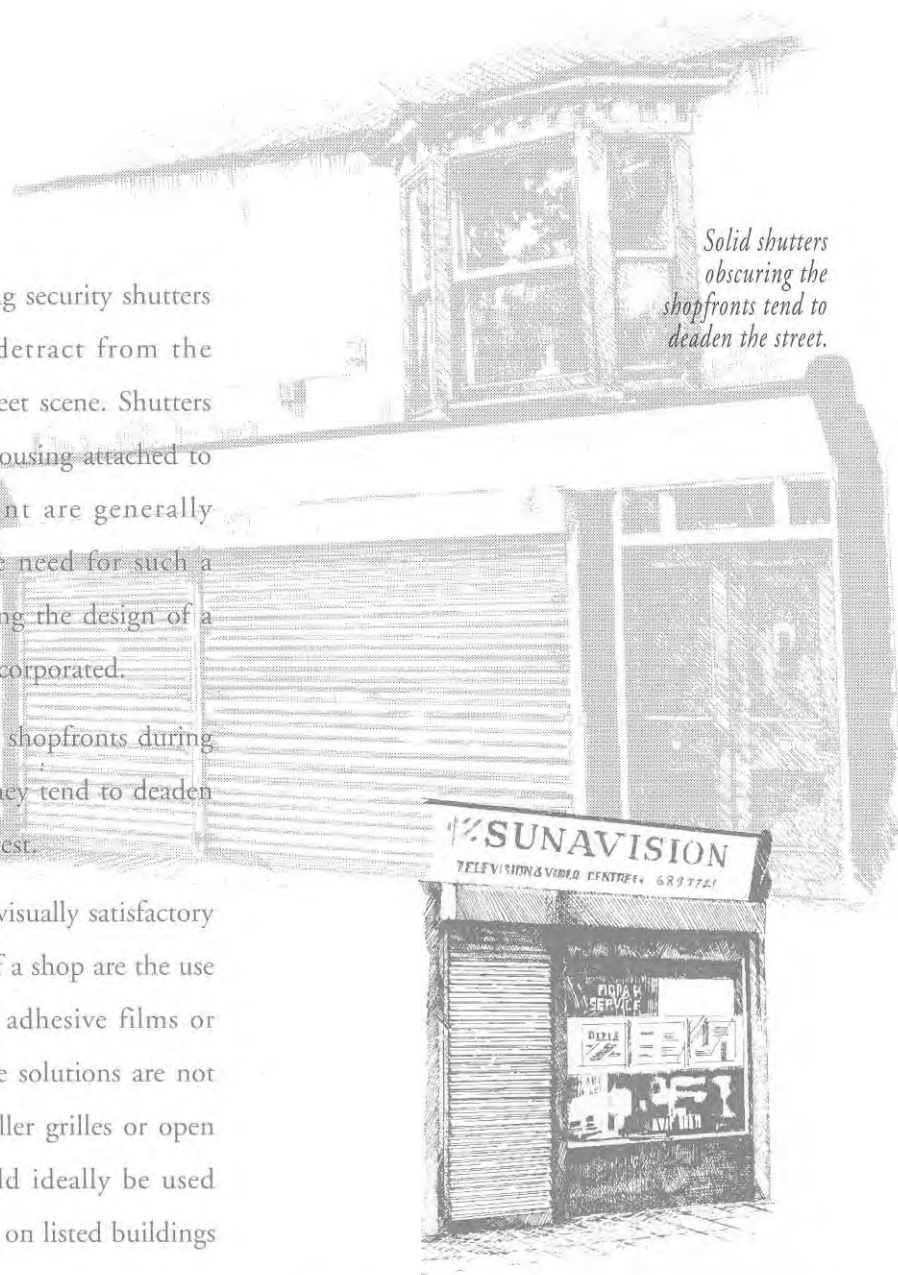
Shutters

Care should be taken when choosing security shutters or grilles, so that they do not detract from the shopfront, the building and the street scene. Shutters which require a permanent bulky housing attached to the fascia, high on the shopfront are generally unsightly, and where possible the need for such a housing should be considered during the design of a shopfront, so that it can be neatly incorporated.

Solid shutters which totally obscure shopfronts during closing hours are not desirable as they tend to deaden the street, cutting out light and interest.

Where security is a problem, more visually satisfactory ways of safeguarding the contents of a shop are the use of toughened glass, shatter-proof adhesive films or internal open lattice grilles. If these solutions are not practical, external black painted roller grilles or open mesh demountable shutters should ideally be used instead of solid shutters particularly on listed buildings or in Conservation Areas.

Internal open lattice window shutter and demountable door shutter.

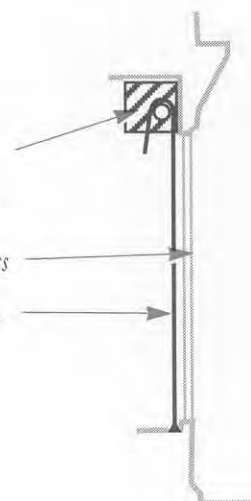


The substantial box housing for solid shutters is particularly unattractive and difficult to integrate within the shopfront.


Security grille
box hidden
behind fascia

Strengthen glass

Internal grille



PLANNING AND OTHER PERMISSIONS



Alterations to shopfronts will normally require consent under the Planning Acts or Advertisement Regulations (or both). Planning permission is needed for any material change in the external appearance of a shop. This could include altering the glazing, changing facing materials, installing blinds or shutters or enlarging the size of a fascia.

Advertising, including the content of fascia boards and the display of most signs may require Advertisement Consent. The Advertisement Regulations are complex, and advice should always be sought from the relevant Local Planning Authority before any works are undertaken. In addition, in cases of design and conservation of shopfronts, it may be worthwhile in the early stages seeking advice from the Local Planning Authority's Officers, as they will be responsible for determining the applications, before any works are undertaken. Assistance and advice is also obtainable from Durham County Council.

Works carried out without consent may result in enforcement action. This will cause unnecessary disruption and can lead to considerable expense. The local authority has powers to remove unauthorised development and signs and may also declare an Area of Special Control if further detailed control is felt to be required.

For further information or for assistance contact:

The District Planning Officer for the area concerned or

Director of Environment,
Durham County Council,
County Hall,
Durham DH1 5UQ.

Telephone (091) 383 4104

Useful References

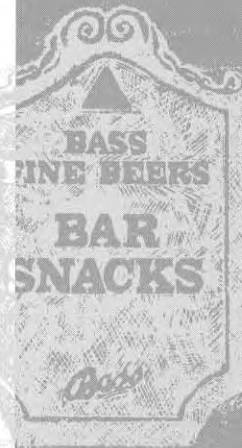
"So you want to alter your shop?"

The Royal Town Planning Institute.

October 1987.

The Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1989 and 1990.
HMSO.

Outdoor Advertisements and Signs.
HMSO 1989.



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