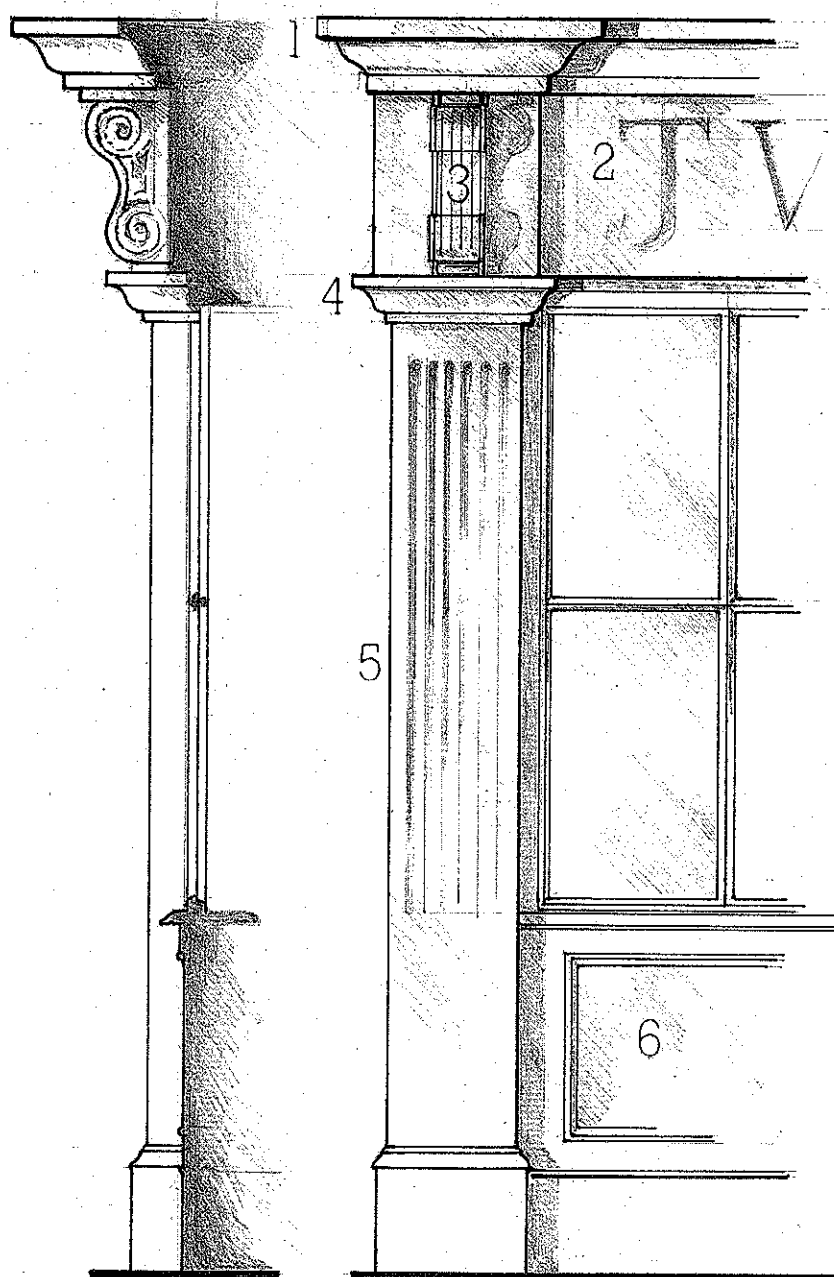


SHOPFRONTS & *ADVERTISEMENTS.*

- 1 cornice
- 2 fascia
- 3 console
- 4 capital
- 5 pilaster
- 6 stallriser



October 1985

City & District of St Albans.

A GUIDE TO SHOPFRONT AND ADVERTISEMENT DESIGN FOR
ST ALBANS CITY AND DISTRICT

CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. SHOPFRONTS IN CONSERVATION AREAS AND FOR LISTED BUILDINGS	1
3. HISTORIC SHOPFRONTS	2
1. Retention and Repair	
2. Replacement	
3. Removal	
4. DETAILED DESIGN OF SHOPFRONTS	4
1. Introduction	
2. Fascia	
3. Cornice	
4. Pilasters	
5. Stallriser	
6. Fenestration and Doors	
7. Materials	
8. Colour	
9. Shop Awnings, Canopies and Shutters	
10. Contemporary Designs	
11. Access for Disabled People	
5. ADVERTISEMENTS	10
1. Quantity	
2. Siting	
3. Fascias	
4. Projecting Signs	
5. Painted Wall Signs	
6. Window Signs	
7. Lettering	
a) Size	
b) Style	
c) Spacing	
d) Materials	
e) Illumination	
8. Legislation	
6. CHECK LIST	15
7. REFERENCES	17

APPENDIX

1. The Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1984.	18
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SHOPFRONT AND ADVERTISEMENT DESIGN

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This booklet on shopfront and advertisement design is intended to provide guidance throughout the District, but will concentrate on the special need for careful design within Conservation Areas and for Listed Buildings.
- 1.2 The guide provides applicants with pointers to the approach the District Council will adopt when considering and deciding planning applications for shop fronts and advertisements, and aims to assist the designer in contributing to the appearance of his building and the character of the area.
- 1.3 Within Conservation Areas and particularly when dealing with Listed Buildings, specialist design advice should be sought.
- 1.4 Consultations are also advised with the Planning Officers prior to the submission of an application in order to minimise delays in the consideration of applications.

2.0 Shopfronts in Conservation Areas and for Listed Buildings.

- 2.1 Conservation Areas are defined as areas or groups of buildings of special architectural or historical interest the character of which it is desirable to preserve and enhance.

Listed Buildings are buildings of special architectural or historic interest, included on a statutory list compiled by the Department of the Environment. These buildings are afforded special protection and may not be demolished, altered or extended without first acquiring Listed Building Consent from the local authority.

- 2.2 Often the commercial centre of an historic town or village contains or is contained within a Conservation Area, with a number of Listed Buildings, as is the case with St Albans and Harpenden, Sandridge, Redbourn and Wheathampstead. This can give rise to a conflict of interests between the desire by shopkeepers to be commercially conspicuous, and the need for preservation or enhancement of the character of the area.
- 2.3 To successfully design new shopfronts and advertisements, particularly within a Conservation Area, it is necessary to firstly consider the existing building at street level and above, and the street scene as a whole in terms of building proportions, construction, character and style. Secondly it is vitally important to choose carefully the scale, materials, colours and design details of the shopfront and the advertising to respect these factors, rather than to detract from them.

- 2.4 Most of our shopping streets are still dominated by older buildings which share a fairly common character placing great emphasis on vertical proportions. Plot widths were mainly traditionally narrow and window and door openings necessarily restricted in width. Storey height is usually expressed by use of plinths, string courses, friezes and differing height windows, and fascias and cornices are often richly detailed and modelled. These elements must be taken into account.
- 2.5 The shopfront should always be considered as an intrinsic part of the overall appearance of the building, and should appear to be naturally related to the upper floors. In particular it is essential that a shopfront does not detract from the character of a listed building.
- 2.6 It should be possible to combine a concern with the character of the building and street scene with the commercial desire to attract the public and advertise services and goods which are available. Unrestrained rivalry for custom will in most cases be counter-productive by increasing visual clutter and confusion.
- 2.7 In order for a shopfront and its advertising to respect the character of a Listed Building or the character of a Conservation Area it will probably be necessary for multiple traders to modify their corporate identity to some extent.

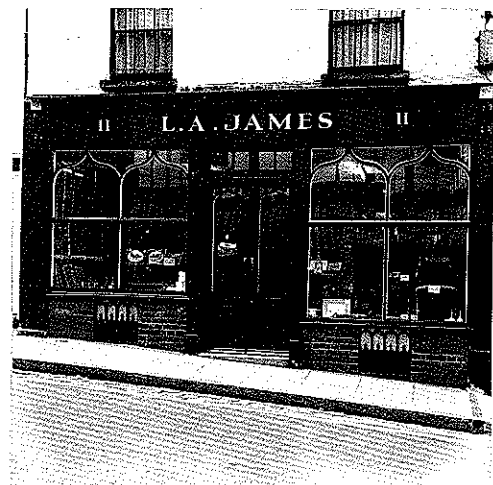
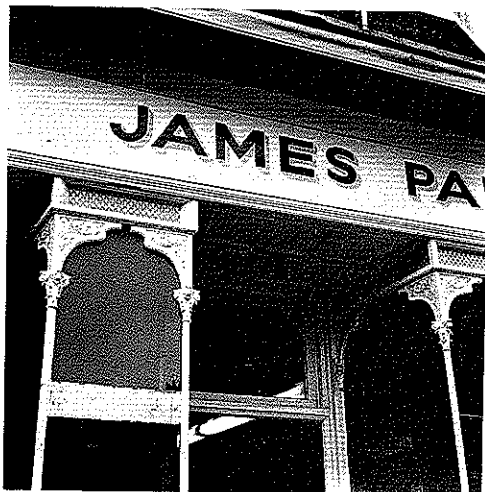
3.0 Historic Shopfronts

Shopfronts for historic buildings need to be very carefully designed in order to complement the character of the building.

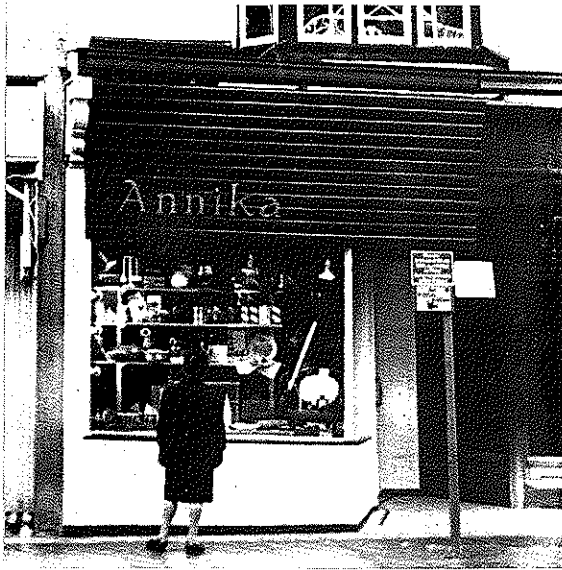
3.1 Retention and repair

Much of the detailed modelling and decoration of older shopfronts in Conservation Areas is particularly valuable in the street scene. In view of the rarity of early 18th and 19th Century shopfronts, their removal for the sake of modernity must be avoided, in favour of repair and maintenance. In some cases missing parts of old shopfronts can probably be reinstated but care must be taken that the detailing is correctly done.

Original features are often concealed behind recent additions, and they can often be simply revealed and redecorated to great effect.

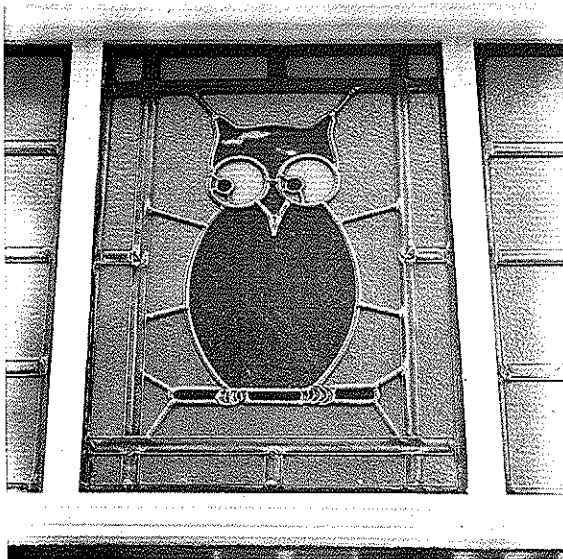


Modelling and decoration on traditional shopfronts

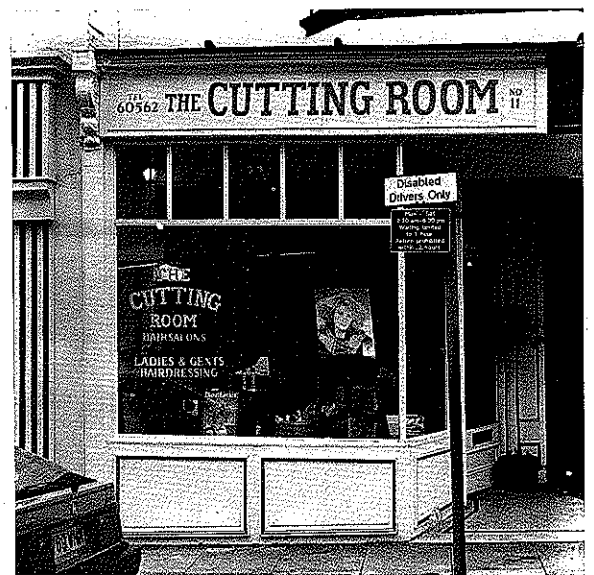


◀ Shop in Market Place in 1973. The huge fascia, attached in the late 1960's was completely out of scale with the shop, the building and the adjoining fascia.

In 1984 after the unsightly fascia was removed



◀ Fanlight detail revealed



3.2 Replacement

Where an existing traditional shopfront is irreparable or where an existing modern shopfront detracts from the character of an historic building, a replacement 'period' shopfront, which is historically correct for the elevation and to a high standard of design and craftsmanship will be favourably received.

3.3 Removal

It may be appropriate to return to the original elevational treatment of a building and dispense with a standard "shopfront". For example domestic windows could be re-inserted into an 18th Century building, or glazing could be inserted directly between the studs of a timber framed building. This will be a feasible approach where a window display is not of paramount importance to the retailer. With this approach the siting of advertisements needs to be modest and thoughtful. Applied letters, window signs and projecting signs will be more appropriate than fascias.

4.0 Detailed Design of shopfronts

4.1 Introduction

As shopfronts are available for close scrutiny, design and detailing are extremely important. Whilst this section concentrates on the traditional elements of shopfronts, which will be applicable to many situations, it should not be assumed that as long as a design incorporates traditional elements, it will automatically be in sympathy with its setting. The composition of the elements and their treatment (scale, materials, colours and modelling etc) are vital to the success of a design.

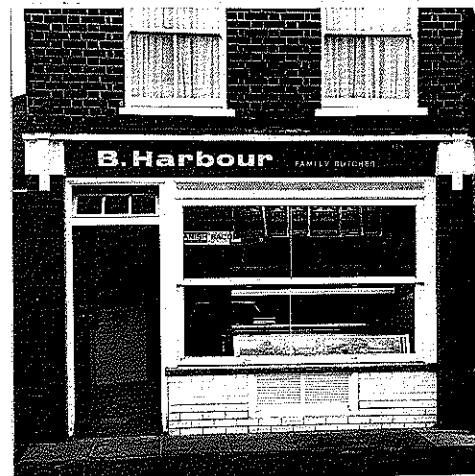
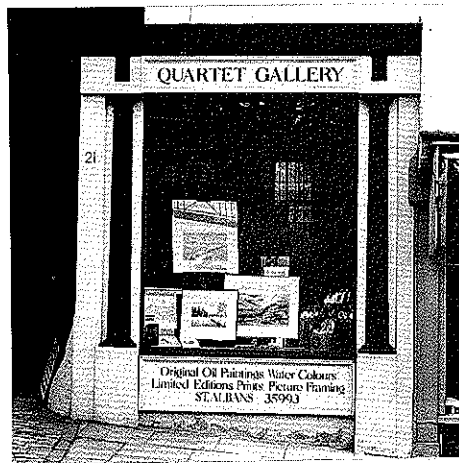
4.2 Fascia

Nineteenth century timber fascias assumed the proportion and place of the frieze and cornice in the classic entablature. This provided a harmony and relationship with the rest of the frontage.

The fascia must never be out of scale with the building as a whole as an overdeep fascia will break this proportion and appear to crush the facade beneath.

Fascias which fill in the whole space between the shop window and first floor windows usually appear too big for the building and detract from the balance between the amount of wall and windows space. Every opportunity should be taken to reduce the depth of overdeep fascias.

Fascias should preferably never 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 relate. This does not necessarily mean a loss of identity for either shop.



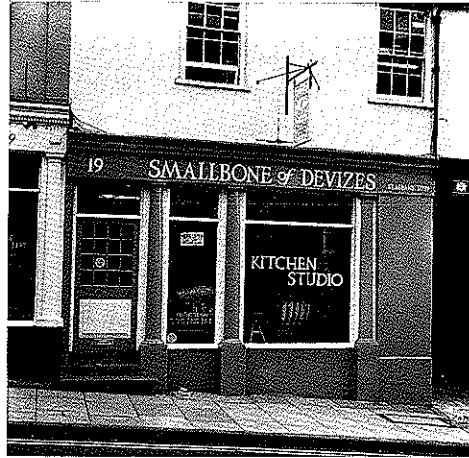
Well-balanced shopfronts with modest yet effective fascias

4.3 Cornice

The classic entablature was crowned by a cornice providing a valuable and attractive break between the shopfront and the building facade above. To omit the cornice leaves the shopfront incomplete and it tails off into the building facade proper in an unsatisfactory way. A lack of such modelling of the planes of a shopfront can result in a very dull or uninteresting appearance.

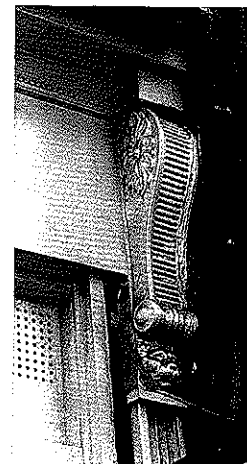
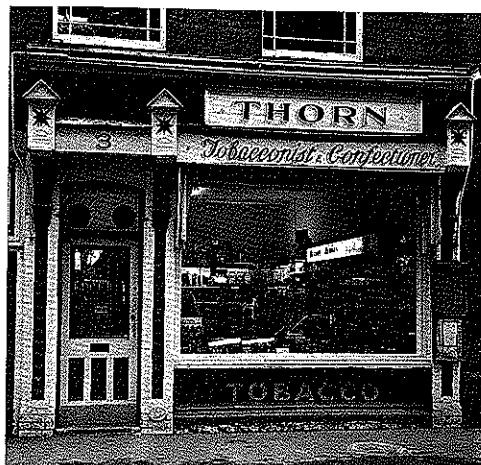
4.4 Pilasters

The pilasters are the shallow piers or columns which project slightly from the wall to each side of a shopfront, and where the facade is long may also occur at intervals along it. The pilasters provide visual and physical support to the fascia and together they form a type of picture frame containing the shopfront. They usually have a wider base on a plinth at the bottom and a decorated capital to the top.



Pilasters along the length of a shopfront

In Victorian shopfronts the capital at the head of the pilasters was often elaborated to form a "console bracket" extending outside the fascia to support a distinctive cornice.



Elaborate console brackets to contain the fascia

4.5 Stallriser

Together with the pilasters, the stallriser is important in providing visual support for the upper part of the building. Most traditional shops had stallrisers, usually of stone, brick or render and sometimes of wooden panelling on a rendered or stone plinth. Some Victorian shopfronts used decorative tiles (most notably butchers and public houses). Mosaics, laminates and marble are rarely appropriate materials for stallrisers on traditional buildings.

It will often be possible to unify the facade of the building by using the facing material of the upper floor for the stallriser eg. painted smooth render or brick.

Where a stallriser has been removed for a plate glass window to pavement level, reinsertion should often be considered at the earliest opportunity.

4.6 Fenestration and Doors

One of the most important visual elements of the shopfront is the large window area for the display of goods and attraction of customers. As such it presents difficult design problems.

It is necessary to consider whether the style, size and shape of the shop window openings will clash with the style, scale and shape of those on the upper floor. Very often the area of glass will need to be subdivided by upright posts (mullions) or horizontal beams (transoms), or slim glazing bars.

On a practical note, butt jointing in glass may become loose, chipped and dangerous. This can almost always be avoided or suitably covered with framing. This will rarely conflict with design and will often improve it by breaking up large areas of window glass.

The style, scale and shape of door openings needs similar careful consideration.

Shopfront with well-proportioned fenestration sub-divided by mullions and transoms, and with a substantial brick stallriser



4.7 Materials

Much of the character of a Conservation Area is derived from the mellowed appearance of traditional materials such as brick, stone, 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.

Painted timber is the most prevalent shopfront material of historic streets and should form the basis of most designs. Varnished natural or stained hardwood and softwood is usually inappropriate, being alien to the painted timber features in common use, particularly on the upper floors of buildings. The exception being the use of oiled or stained oak in a timber framed building.

The range of materials in use in a Conservation Area 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.

Materials such as rustic stonework, ceramic products and exotic materials like marble are inappropriate and too pretentious in most Conservation Area street scenes.

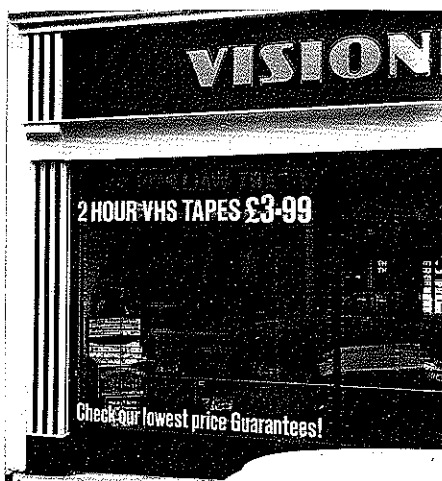
In particularly sensitive areas consideration should be given to the use of suitable second-hand materials and architectural features, both for new buildings and alterations.

It should be borne in mind that within limited funds it is better to rely on a modest scheme that is well done and fits in with its setting, than to prepare a dramatic shopfront with cheaper and cruder materials which does not bear scrutiny.

4.8 Colour

Colour schemes should harmonise with the remainder of the building and the street scene and strident or harsh colours or garish colour combinations should be avoided.

Colour can however be used to advantage to emphasise important elements of the design, and to highlight or reinforce the structural logic of the design. It can also be used to pick out details eg. gilding of mouldings, capitals and fluting. An inventive colour scheme may be all that is needed to give the facelift which is required for an old existing shopfront rather than going to the expense of a replacement. In many cases features of the whole building rather than just the shopfront may be used to advantage. A well maintained historic building can be the retailer's best asset and advertisement in the street scene.



Colour used to pick out important detailing is a very effective advertisement of the premises

4.9 Shop Awnings, Canopies and Shutters

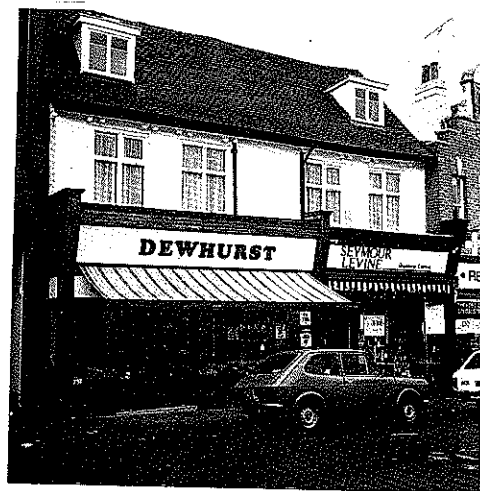
The traditional shop blind in this country is the straight awning type, mounted on a roller, which sometimes has separate side panels. Seen on shops selling perishables it was pulled out on sunny days. When not in use it was virtually invisible, concealed in a blind box designed carefully as part of the cornice or fascia forming part of the classical entablature of the shopfront.

Recently the continental dutch canopy has increased in number. This is curved on section and sometimes also on plan and appears like a pram hood. It cannot be concealed in a blind box and is usually attached to the face of the building or fascia, against which it usually folds back. When folded, the fabric bunches up untidily often obscuring part if not all of the fascia. However, these blinds are rarely folded back (some are permanently fixed down) often obscuring the traditional details of the fascia and upper parts of the shopfront and totally dominating the building.

Many canopies are made from shiny plastic which is out of character with the traditional materials of Conservation Areas.

For these reasons continental canopies are considered inappropriate for use on traditional buildings and shopfronts and their use should be discouraged. On statutorily listed buildings where dutch canopies are historically inaccurate for the building they should be avoided altogether.

The straight type of blind may be appropriate for a listed building but there are occasions when a blind box or blind, however designed, is inappropriate eg. where it will obscure important features of the fascia, or visually unbalance a group or pair of buildings or matching shopfronts, or obscure important views in Conservation Areas or of other Listed Buildings.



Traditional straight awnings. On the left set within a traditional blind box. On the right, a blind box is attached to the lower part of the fascia.

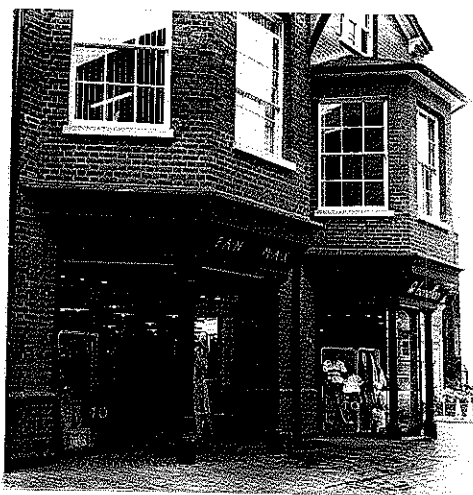
Care should be taken when choosing security shutters or grilles, so that they do not detract from the shopfront, the building and the street scene. Shutters which require a permanent bulky housing attached to the fascia, or high on the shopfront are generally unsightly, and where possible the need for 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 usually unacceptable. Removable open-mesh grilles are preferable, particularly on listed buildings and in Conservation Areas.

4.10 Contemporary Designs

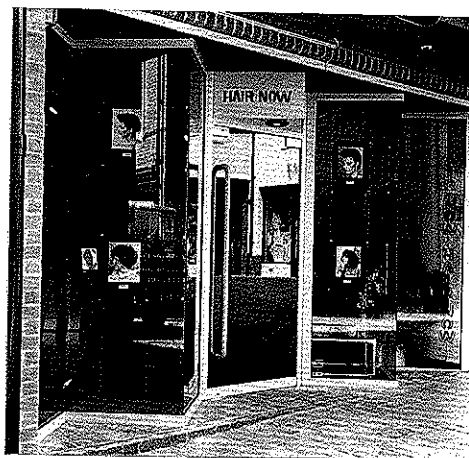
The emphasis so far has been on traditional elements of design. However, in the same way that a shopfront incorporating traditional elements may not necessarily be sympathetic to its surroundings, modern designs need not be unsympathetic.

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 impeccably 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 stability of the building.



This shopfront illustrates a "frameless solution" set behind traditional pilasters which give visual support for the upper part of the building

Modern shopfront using yellow synthapulvin coated aluminium framing, set within a strong structural opening



4.11 Access for Disabled People

All new buildings that are to be used by the public are required, where reasonable and practicable, to be accessible to disabled people. These requirements are set out in The Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act and should be borne in mind when designing a new shopfront.

5.0 Advertisements

5.1 Quantity

Whilst commercial premises wish to inform the public of their name and the goods and services which are available, there is also a desire to attract attention.

However, an excessive amount of advertising material merely creates a cluttered and unsightly appearance and is counterproductive. Posters, window stickers and free standing forecourt advertisements are commonly used and can give a very untidy appearance to premises if they are used excessively. In particular, unnecessary duplication of the message should be avoided: the simpler the message the greater is its impact.

5.2 Siting

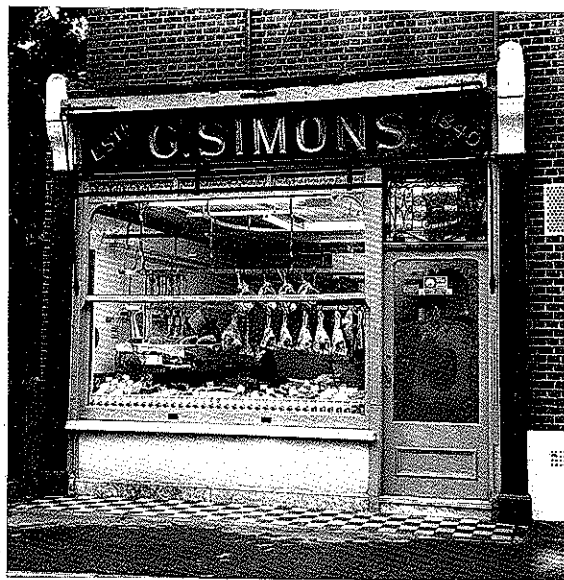
The most usual siting for information is the traditional shop fascia, but fascias and indeed other advertisements should never obscure the important architectural features of a building, or the modelling of the shopfront (see also 4.2). In some cases it may be necessary to avoid a fascia and to apply lettering directly to the wall or to the inside of the display window, or perhaps convey the message using a hanging sign (see also 5.4 and 5.6).

Advertisements above ground floor level often detract from the balance of wall and window space and should usually be avoided. Where upper floors have separate business uses their lettering ought to be in black or gold and applied directly to the window panes.



A traditional Victorian shopfront with glass fascia and gold lettering

Lettering applied directly to the brickwork



5.3 Fascias

The fascia is the usual place for displaying advertising material, particularly the name and profession of the person carrying on the business at the premises.

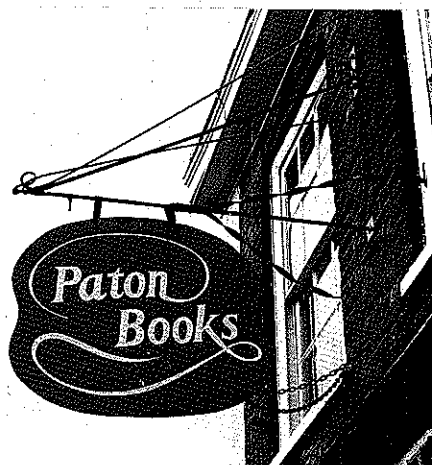
As fascias form such an important element in the design of shopfronts they are discussed fully in 4.2 above.

As set out in 5.7.(a) below, the size of lettering should relate to the area of the fascia, and the type of material should complement those of the existing building and shopfront.

5.4 Projecting Signs

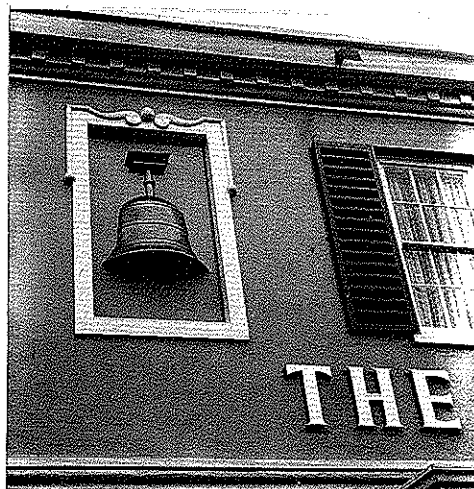
Unfortunately the design of projecting signs has become very standardised. They are usually formed of a bulky steel box casing containing acrylic panels, with internal illumination. They are often in bright eye-catching colours with a limited range of lettering. They have largely replaced more traditional symbolic projecting signs of a wide variety which added interest to their surroundings rather than detracting from them.

Small and neat traditional-style hanging signs will be encouraged in place of these bulky projecting signs. These should generally be constructed of materials which complement the existing building and shopfront, and could be of wrought iron, stove-enamelled metal sheets or painted timber. It may however be possible to use new materials in an equally interesting and acceptable manner.



*Small neat
metal hanging
sign*

Symbolic wall sign



Painted wooden board signs



5.5 Painted Wall Signs

These signs either comprise timber boards or signs painted directly onto the walls (often prominent flank walls) of commercial buildings. This is a traditional form of advertising popular with the Victorians. Only certain locations may be suitable for such signs eg. these are often suited to public houses. They should be regularly maintained, and removed when redundant, and should not be too many in number, otherwise their value is lost.

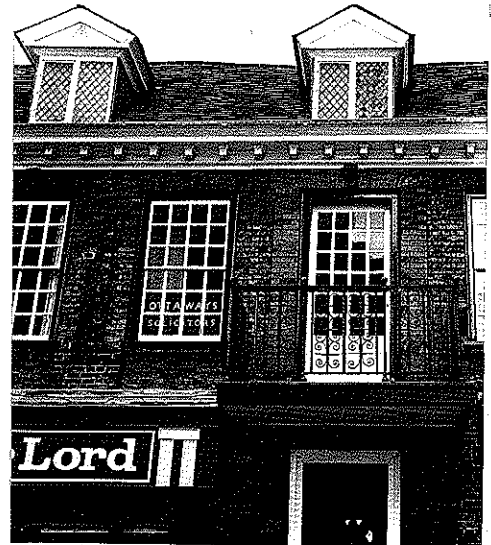
5.6 Window Signs

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 it does not involve physical alterations to the front of the building and can therefore be valuable for historic buildings where the attachment of a fascia and projecting signs could detract from the special architectural and historic character of the building.

Window signs are also valuable where upper floors are occupied by a separate business. Traditional gold-leaf lettering edged in black, or black or white lettering is usually acceptable, where it does not adversely affect the appearance of a building providing that care is taken over the positioning, style and size of letters.

*Gold lettering to
first floor window* ➤

*Painted sign on ground
floor shopfront window*



5.7 Lettering

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

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

*Lettering well-related
to the fascia depth*

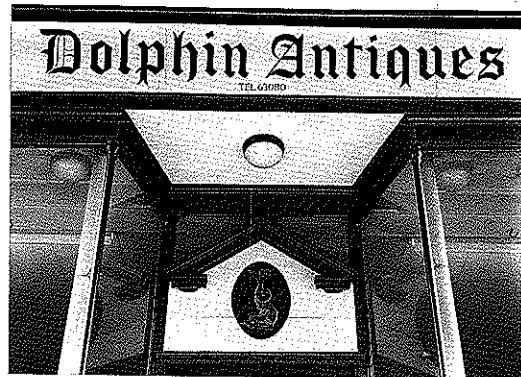


(b)

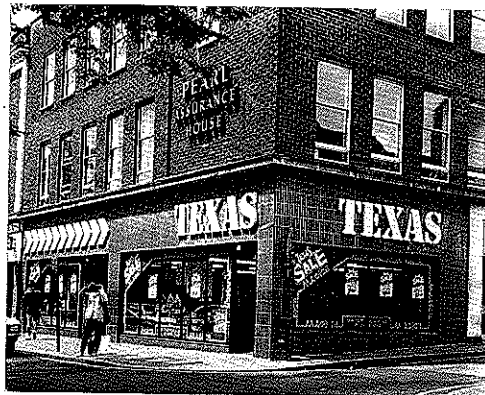
Style

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. Multiple traders will be expected to modify the size and style of their standard "corporate" lettering where it would conflict with the character of the building or area.

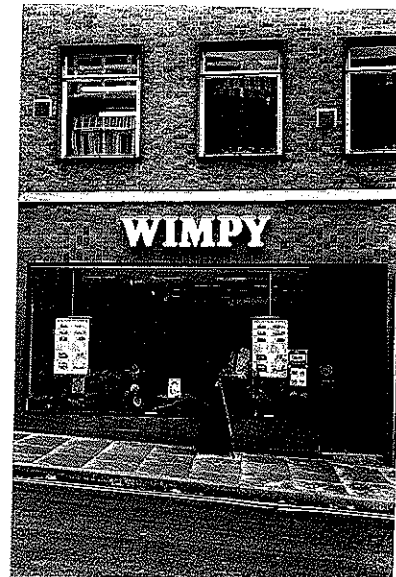
Some styles of lettering which depart too radically from familiar forms can be difficult to read, and are therefore best avoided.



Lettering which conveys the image of the shop



Modifications to "corporate" lettering



(c)

Spacing

Individual letters should be neither too widely spaced, nor cramped together. Compact styles of lettering often look best on a short fascia, whilst extended letters can achieve a balanced appearance on longer fascias.

(d)

Materials

In general, materials for lettering and signs should follow the guidelines on shopfront materials generally (see 4.7). Traditionally shopfronts had hand painted timber fascias which harmonised with the traditional construction and materials of the buildings. More recently, new materials have become available, particularly acrylic/perspex sheeting, plate glass and aluminium. Whilst these are often suitable for new developments where the main building may be constructed of aluminium, concrete and glass, they are usually inappropriate for older shop fronts. Hand-painted softwood signs are therefore generally preferable and will be encouraged, although free-standing cast metal, enamelled, or cut-out wooden letters applied to a fascia or directly to the building may be an acceptable alternative.

(e)

Illumination

The illumination of advertisements is a sensitive problem in a Conservation Area. Whilst appropriate use of lighting may contribute to the interest and attractiveness of some signs and shopfronts, excessive illumination is unnecessary and can detract from the building and its locality.

In some cases, individual internally illuminated or halo-illuminated letters may be acceptable on non-listed buildings. However, plastic and aluminium box fascias will not normally be allowed. They almost invariably project forward of the main face of the building and appear bulky and unsightly.

External illumination by spotlights or troughlights creates a much more even and pleasant effect, but great care is needed to avoid lighting units which appear unsightly in the daylight.

Neon lighting may be acceptable in certain situations but should be sensibly located and of the right scale to avoid it becoming over dominant.



*Symbolic hanging sign with
neat spotlights*

5.8 Legislation

The Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1984 set out the legislation regarding the display of advertisements. Appendix 1 gives some guidance regarding these Regulations.

6.0 Checklist

Below is a useful checklist covering the key points which you should consider when you are proposing to alter a shopfront.

6.1 The Building

Is the building in a Conservation Area?

Is it a statutorily Listed Building? (If so it will need special attention to existing features, materials and design)

Is it an important local building of some architectural or historic importance?

Is it part of a larger group of buildings?

Is it really part of a larger building?

6.2 The existing Shopfront

Is the shopfront contemporary with the building?

Has it got any special historic features?

Is it well-related by construction or detail with the building of which it is part?

Does the shopfront have valuable features in common with other shops in the group?

Is it one of those rare shopfronts which perfectly complements the building of which it is a part?

If so do you really need to change it or would renovation, repainting and new lettering suffice?

Are there existing features which could be improved?

If it needs to be changed have you considered the following?

6.3 The Proposed Shopfront

Is the new design compatible with the building of which it is part?

Is it desirable to copy features and materials of nearby buildings, shopfronts or signs?

Are the chosen materials in keeping

- a) with the design
- b) with the building above, and
- c) with the location?

Are the proposed advertisements in keeping with the design of the shopfront, the building and the location?

Does the amount and scale of advertising detract from the appearance of the building or street scene?

Is the fascia overlarge - could it effectively be reduced in depth or width?

Are the signs too large for the fascia?

Is the location one in which internally illuminated signs will detract from the appearance of the area and/or the building?

If so and if illumination is required is it possible to externally illuminate the required lettering instead?

Have you considered access for the disabled?

7.0 References

If you are frequently involved in the design and building of shopfronts you may find the following references useful.

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APPENDIX I

The Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1984

Definitions

An advertisement is defined as "any word, letter, model, sign, placard, board, notice, device or representation, whether illuminated or not, in the nature of and employed wholly or partly for the purposes of advertisement, announcement or direction, (excluding any such thing employed wholly as a memorial or as a railway signal), and (without prejudice to the foregoing provision) includes any hoarding or similar structure or any balloon used or adapted for use for the display of advertisements".

An illuminated advertisement is "an advertisement which is designed or adapted to be illuminated by artificial lighting, directly or by reflection, and which is so illuminated for the purposes of advertisement, announcement or direction".

Control of Advertisements

No advertisement may be displayed without consent which may be given by either:

"express consent" - ie permission granted by the planning authority, or

"deemed consent" - ie permission granted automatically by the advertisement regulations.

It is an offence to display an advertisement without consent. Such an offence could result in prosecution.

Deemed Consent The advertisement regulations (Regulation 14) set out in detail the seven specific classes of advertisement that have automatic consent. This is subject to the powers of the local authority to request their removal if this is considered necessary to remedy a substantial injury to the amenity of the locality or for public safety (Regulation 16).

Express Consent In determining an application for express consent to display an advertisement, the planning authority is statutorily obliged to take account of amenity and public safety.

The Regulations are available from Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Any queries regarding these regulations can be directed to the planning authority.