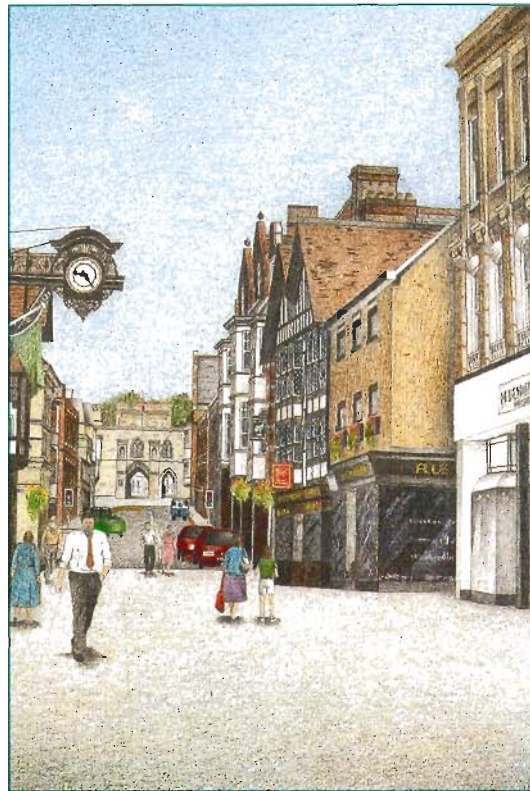


# SHOPFRONTS ADVERTISEMENTS in HISTORIC TOWNS



Published by The English Historic Towns Forum

# FOREWORD

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**T**his booklet has been produced at a time of growing concern over the quality of the town centre environment. At a time of increasing competition from highly accessible out-of-town shopping centres, it is becoming more and more important that the traditional town centre should be attractive and project an image of quality. As town centres contain a greater variety of speciality shops as well as a good deal of architectural and historic interest, they have potentially more to offer than out of town centres. An emphasis on good quality design, including the design of shopfronts and advertisements, will encourage investment and spending and will bring rewards which will ultimately benefit all of the traders in the centre.

**T**his booklet sets out the principles of good shopfront design. It recognises and accepts that companies have invested a great deal to promote their own corporate images. But also asks retailers to recognise that historic towns are investing a great deal on their own historic buildings and on the quality of their environment.

**T**his document is intended to act as a forum for discussion and co-operation between local authorities and retailers, with the ultimate aim of improving the environmental quality of traditional shopping centres.

**By Martin Bacon, Chairman of The English Historic Towns Forum.**

# INTRODUCTION

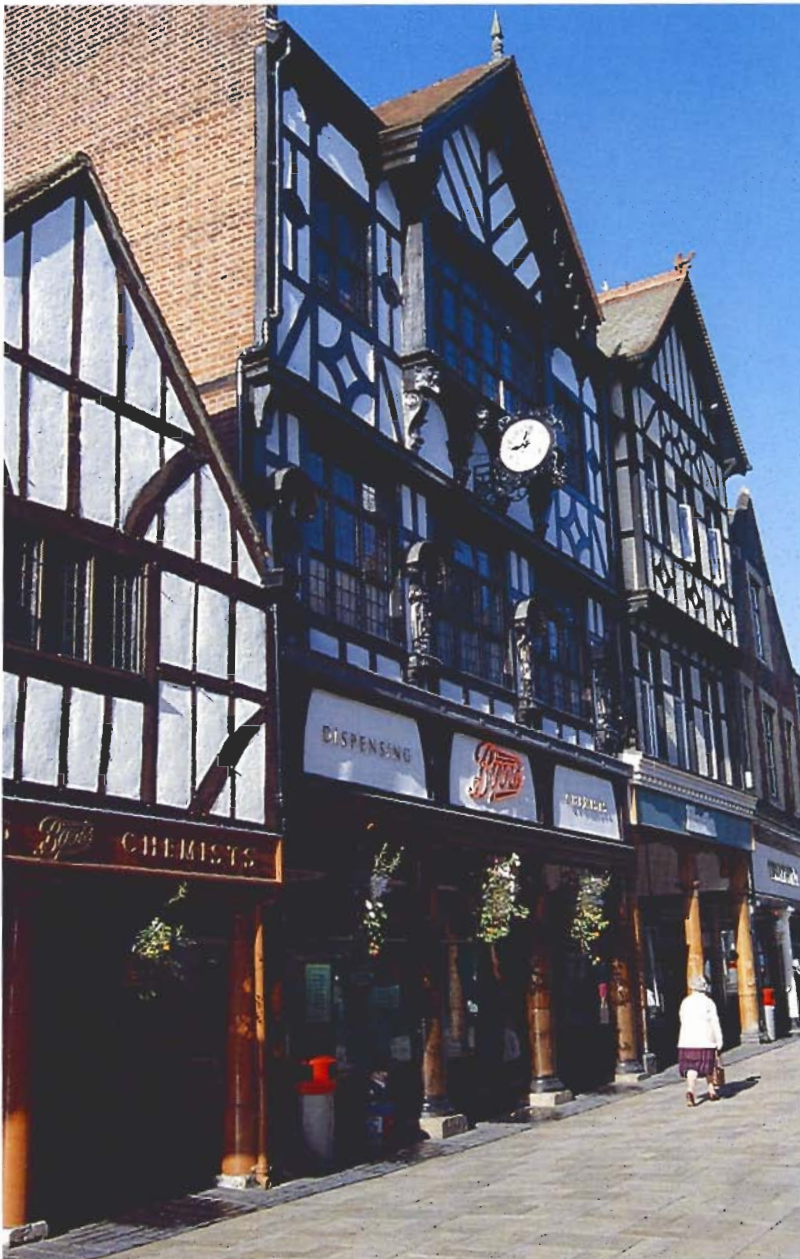
The centre of every historic town has its own unique character. Interesting buildings, local styles and materials and the pattern of streets and spaces all contribute to the special qualities of each place.

Shopfronts and advertisements also play an important part

because they are at the human, pedestrian scale and are nearly always designed to attract attention. They have a vital role in contributing to the character of historic town centres. It follows that shopfronts and advertisements which are unsympathetically designed will have the opposite effect.

The booklet recognises retailers' needs, and acknowledges that many retailers wish to trade on the basis of house colours and a house style. This must be reconciled with the need to enhance the unique quality of each shopping centre. The Forum believes that given co-operation and flexibility, and an emphasis on quality and traditional detailing, a corporate image can be adapted to fit into an historic environment without compromising the principles of good shopfront and advertisement design.

Indeed, careful attention to detailed design will give the shop a unique quality which will help to promote its image.



WINCHESTER

Historic town centre



PRESTON

New shopfront respects the character of the building

The promotion of good shopfront design is therefore essential if the character of historic shopping areas is to be conserved and enhanced. The English Historic Towns Forum, through this publication, aims to establish a basis for the

HEREFORD

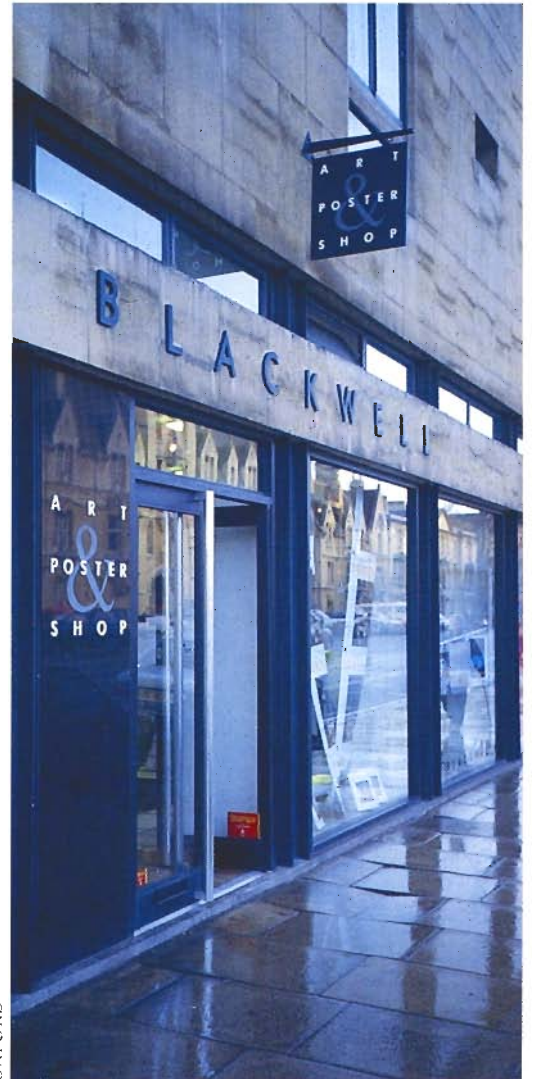


*These shopfronts disregard the proportions of the building*

promotion of good shopfront and advertisement design in historic town centres. It is hoped that local authorities will use the document and the principles set out in it to produce their own design guides. This will help both local authorities and retailers as it will make the ground rules for the design

of shopfronts and advertisements more explicit. It will help to save time and avoid misunderstanding.

It is intended that this publication will in time be used by all local authorities with traditional shopping streets, and by developers, retailers and shopfitters alike.



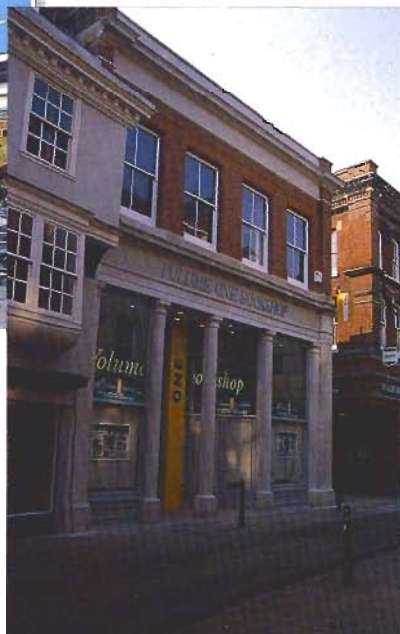
OXFORD

*Well designed shopfront in a modern building*

CANTERBURY



*Above: poor shopfronts can erode the character of historic areas*

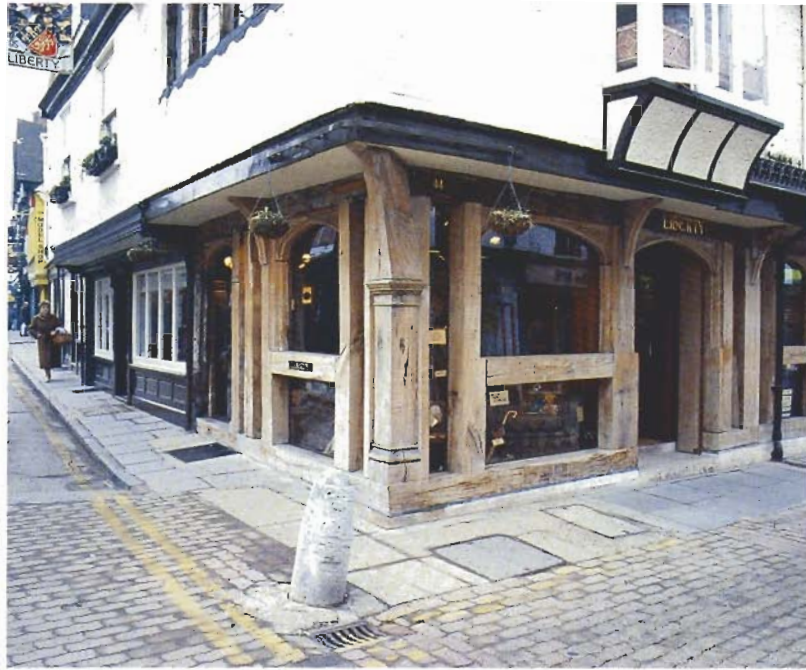


*Right: the same building improved by new shopfront*

# PRINCIPLES OF GOOD SHOPFRONT & ADVERTISEMENT DESIGN

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 that began to emerge in the late seventeenth century. Until then, goods were sold from properties which would not have had a recognisable shopfront. So, today, there might be medieval or even later buildings in our high streets that were never originally intended to have a shopfront, but have been successfully adapted for this purpose. From the eighteenth century onwards, high street buildings were often designed with the shopfront as an integral part of the building, and shopfront design has generally been based on the classical orders (albeit sometimes extremely loosely). Such rules of balance, proportion and harmony still apply today.

Many shopping streets, particularly those in historic towns, have evolved over hundreds of years and have experienced continual change. Old views of historic streets show the diversity and exuberance of traditional shopfront design. However it is important to observe certain basic



Scholarly interpretation of a medieval shopfront

principles if the character and appearance of such historic shopping streets are to be retained along with their vitality.

## RETENTION OF EXISTING SHOPFRONTS

Where the existing shopfront contributes to the character of the building or area, it should normally be kept rather than replaced. Often the cheapest solution is to retain and refurbish what is there already.

Very few early shopfronts survive and, where they do, special

care is needed to ensure that they are preserved and restored in a sensitive manner with careful attention to detail.

Sometimes, original features such as pilasters or fascias survive hidden under later work and can be revealed, greatly enhancing the appearance of the shopfront. Similarly, high quality terrazzo or mosaic ingos should be retained.

Some of the more recent shopfronts can also be of interest. Interwar designs incorporating Art Nouveau, Art Deco or Jazz detailing are often of high quality, constructed from

materials such as mahogany, bronze, chrome and marble, and may form part of the design of an entire facade.

Often, the shopfront is not contemporary with the building. However it should be remembered that successive additions can add to the character of a building; they show how the building has evolved over time. It would normally be quite wrong to remove, for example, a good Victorian shopfront from a Georgian building on the grounds of historical accuracy.

## THE REPLACEMENT OF SHOPFRONTS

In certain cases the existing shopfront might not be capable of retention. In others, it might be positively desirable to encourage the replacement of the existing shopfront.



Carefully detailed early 19th century replica shopfront

BATH

Many modern shopfronts do not incorporate the traditional features of shopfront design. Shopfronts which have large plate glass windows, excessively deep fascias, crude joinery or unsuitable materials such as unpainted tropical hardwood or aluminium will normally detract from the character of the building and the area, and their replacement with a more appropriate design should be considered. However, good quality modern designs do exist and should be valued, especially when they occur on modern buildings.

Where the existing shopfront is to be replaced, the question arises as to how the replacement should be designed. Should it be a traditional style or should it be a modern design?

Although there are no hard and fast rules, an important principle is that the shopfront should not be designed in isolation but should be considered as part of the architectural composition of the building. The design should therefore respect the period and style of the building in which it is fitted.

If a shopfront is to be fitted in a traditional style, then it must be historically accurate and appropriate to the building and to the locality. Old records, local libraries, photo-libraries and, in certain cases, pattern books of old shopfronts can assist in establishing appropriate precedents.

The Planning Department of your Local Authority will be pleased to assist in establishing a suitable design.

The main point to remember in considering the design of a new shopfront is that the shopfront is part of a building and the building is part of the street.



Some buildings must do without a shopfront

## THE STREET

The design of the shopfront should take into account the rhythm and characteristics of the street. Are the building plots wide or narrow? How strong are the horizontal and vertical elements? Most traditional shopping streets contain a great deal of variety. Sameness of design is therefore generally

not appropriate in streets which have a variety of different building styles, although an exception might be made where there are a number of shops within a terrace building which has been designed as a single composition.

## THE BUILDING

The design of the shopfront should take into account the age and architectural design of the building and should treat the building as a whole. The shopfront should not attempt to divorce the ground floor from the rest of the building or over-emphasize the fascia.



HEREFORD, before



HEREFORD

HEREFORD, after



*New shopfront restores the architectural relationship between ground and upper floor*

*New shopfront respects the proportion of the building*

*The retailer must adapt to suit the property*



## ADVERTISEMENTS

Advertisements can make a significant contribution to the character of conservation areas, but poorly designed incongruous signs can detract from the character.

Original fascias should always be retained as they form part of the design of the shopfront. Sometimes, the original fascia may be concealed by a more modern fascia and where an existing traditional shopfront is to be retained, it may often be rewarding to remove the more modern work and reveal the original fascia beneath.

Fascia advertisements and projecting and hanging signs should always be designed to compliment the design of the building and the shopfront. Too many advertisements will detract from the building



*A flexible approach to corporate image*

and they will be less effective in attracting attention.

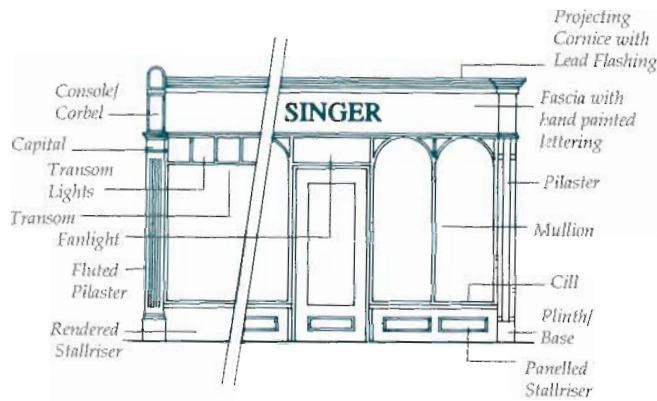
The details of good shopfront and advertisement design are dealt with in the following sections.



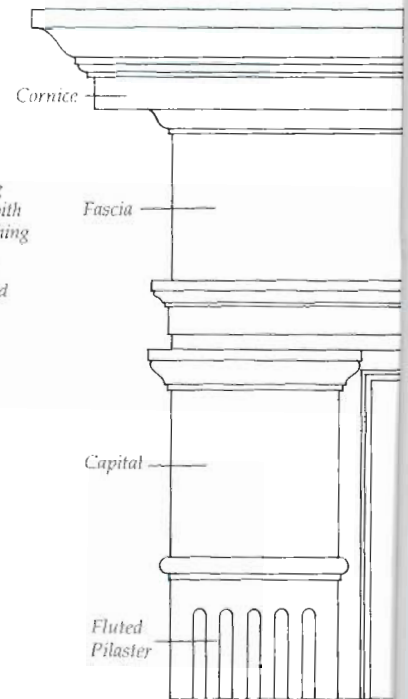
# THE DETAILS OF GOOD SHOPFRONT DESIGN

The main purpose of the shopfront is to display goods for sale. It also has an important role in projecting the image of the shop. It follows that a shopfront that is tawdry in construction and materials or discordant in its colour scheme will not project a good image or enhance the display of the items for sale. The same is true of the whole of the shopping street.

Eighteenth and nineteenth century shopfront design was based on a set of principles which was noticeably successful in achieving a satisfactory relationship between the shopfront and the building as a whole. These principles still hold good. Various elements can be used to enclose the shop window and entrance rather in the manner of a picture frame which sets off a painting. These include the pilasters, fascia, cornice and stall riser. Each has its own visual and practical function. The pilasters identify the vertical division between the shopfronts; the fascia



Shopfront terms



Classical details

provides the space for advertising; the cornice gives a strong line at the top of the shopfront and protection from the weather; the stallriser gives protection at ground level and provides a solid base; and all of these elements form a frame which suggests, visually, a method of support for the building facade above.

These principles are still valid for new shopfronts, but all too often they are misunderstood. The accurate detailing of the traditional shopfront is just like a reproduction of a piece of antique furniture: if the details are incorrect the result is unconvincing and often ugly. However, it is

Below & right: the individual solution is encouraged



COVENT GARDEN



CHELTENHAM

the creative interpretation of a tradition which has always led to a lively townscape in historic towns, and the Forum wishes to encourage the individual solution.

## FASCIAS AND FASCIA DESIGNS

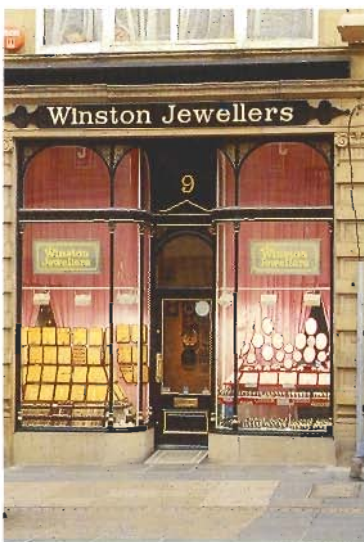
**M**ost shopfronts have a fascia. Fascia design should be appropriate to the character and period of the building, in particular, the shopfront. As a rule, Georgian and early Victorian designs positioned the upright fascia on top of the pilasters with either plain or decorated ends, whereas later styles were usually contained within console boxes and were often canted forwards.

**M**ost traditional fascias do not exceed fifteen inches in depth. Excessively deep fascias should be avoided. The scale and design should be in proportion to the design of the shop front and the height of the building as a whole. The fascias should be kept well below the first floor window sills, leaving a suitable margin, and the bottom of the fascias should not extend down too far in proportion to the rest of the shopfront. Where excessively deep fascias have been introduced in the past, the overall height should be reduced to expose the wall surface above. The existence of a former unsuitable fascia should not be allowed to influence the design of the replacement. Where a false ceiling is being

HALIFAX, before



HALIFAX, after



*Deep fascia removed*

inserted within the shop it will not be appropriate to increase the fascia depth in conjunction with it. Other methods should be considered to hide a false ceiling such as setting back and forming a splayed bulkhead, or in the detailing of the transom.

**I**t is usual for the fascia above it, normally in the form of a moulded cornice, which is both decorative and functional, as it terminates the shopfront design and gives weather protection by throwing water clear of the shopfront and preventing rot. In appropriate circumstances,

traditional roller blinds can be incorporated within the cornice. The coping should be weathered with a properly detailed lead sheeting.

**H**and painted timber fascias are commonly associated with traditional shopfronts. Glass painted signs were a traditional feature of late 19th century shopfronts and may be considered as an alternative. Fascia lettering should convey the essential message of the retailer. The shop name alone will normally have most effect, and additional advertising is generally only confusing and serves to detract from the shopfront. If any further signage is needed, it can be painted on the glass but shop windows should never be blocked by advertising.

BATH



*Hand painted fascia, new shopfront*

**M**odern boxed fascias which project from the face of the building are clumsy and should be avoided. It is always necessary to integrate the design of the fascia with the shopfront so lettering is normally best either signwritten onto the fascia or, if carried out in a traditional manner, applied as individual letters. New fascias should not be added over the top of the



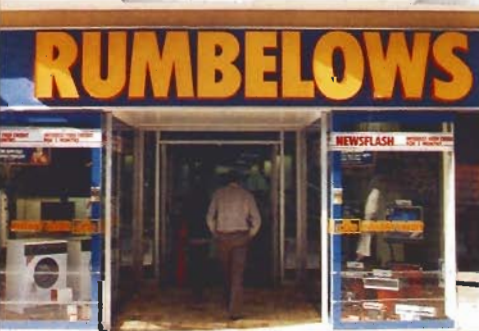
KENDAL

*Individual and attractive approach to fascia signing*

existing ones, and signwriting should always be applied directly to the fascia as applied boards looks clumsy.

## LETTERING

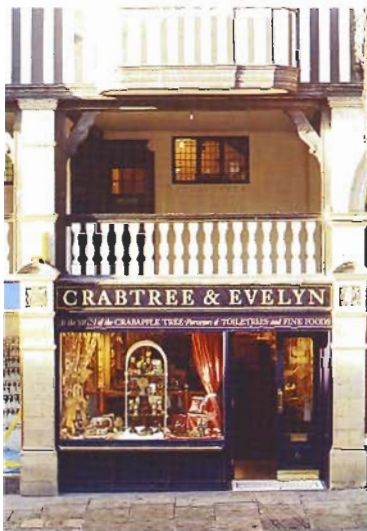
Lettering can evoke an image and provide great decorative interest. Considerable artistic effect can be provided if a competent signwriter is employed. The choice of lettering and illustration can reflect the use and character of the shop and should also take into account the character of the building. Colours are important: gilding or strong tones on a dark background reflect light, and are clearly visible at night. Rich effects can be achieved by shading and blocking of letters.



CANTERBURY

*Overlarge letters in garish colours*

Individual letters can be useful particularly where there is no fascia and the lettering is attached to the natural materials of the building. Simple solid shapes will normally be appropriate and the traditional gilded lettering with a half round section is particularly appropriate for pubs and hotels.



CHESTER

*Gilt lettering on glass*

## STALLRISERS

The stallriser is a vital element of the traditional shopfront. It gives protection to the shop window and provides the building with a visual anchor to the ground. Stallrisers will vary in height according to the style adopted. Stallrisers are often panelled in timber, but later patterns may take the form of a deep moulded skirting and could also be made from glazed tile or marble. Doors should be part glazed with a timber panel to reflect the height of the stallriser. In appropriate cases, recessing the door helps to give relief to the shopfront.

## MATERIALS

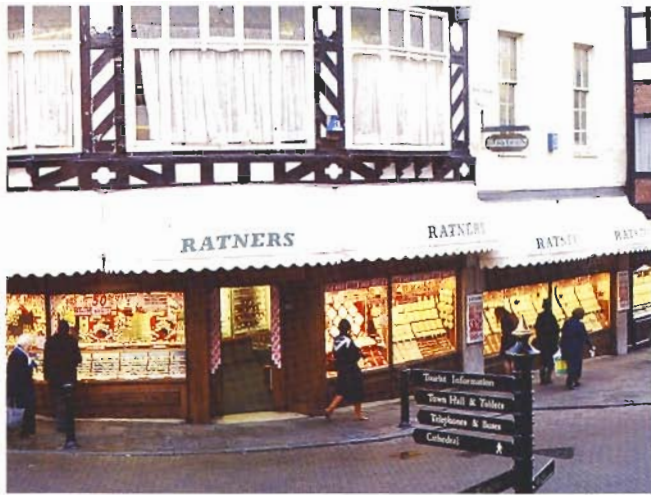
The materials with which old buildings are faced are mostly matt and non reflective. There is normally no place for glossy surfaces such as acrylic sheeting and perspex, aluminium or plastic shopfronts in historic areas.

Timber was the standard shopfront material of previous centuries. It is the most versatile of materials; it can be worked into almost any profile, it is durable and repainting can freshen up or change the appearance of a shopfront at minimum cost. However, painted timber is generally preferable to stained hardwood. Occasionally the use of polished mahogany or oak can be appropriate, but non sustainable tropical hardwoods are strongly discouraged. Their use is not only environmentally questionable; such materials are also alien to the historic street.



WINCHESTER

*Timber is a versatile material for shopfronts*



CHESTER

Unsuitable blinds

## CANOPIES AND BLINDS

Blinds have a practical purpose - to protect goods from damage by sunlight. Normally there is no need for them on north facing elevations or in narrow streets. They should always be retractable so that the fascia is not permanently obscured, and they may be pulled down only when required.

Dutch blinds or balloon canopies are usually erected as a means of increasing advertising space. Their structure tends to obscure the fascia, and introduces a dominant shape which is out of character with the street. The use of plastics, wet-look or stretch fabrics for blinds is strongly discouraged.

As with all elements of the shopfront, thought must be given as to how best the blind box can be integrated within the overall design; incorporation within the fascia cornice was the traditional solution in most cases.

## SECURITY SHUTTERS

When installing a new shopfront, questions of security should always be taken into account. Solid security shutters have a most deadening effect on the



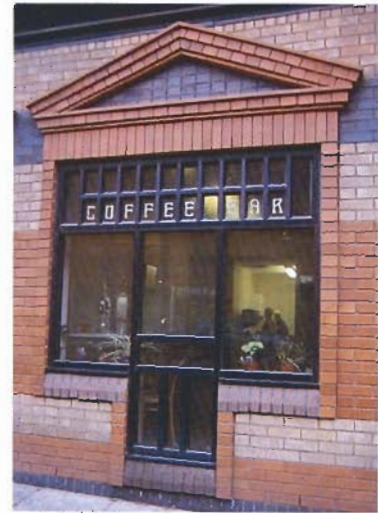
GLOUCESTER

Security shutters located behind the glazing

character of shopping streets. Where security is a problem there are more acceptable ways of safeguarding the contents of the shop by the use of laminated glass or internal lattice grills. Traditionally, solid removable shutters were used and in appropriate circumstances these could be considered. Small panelled windows are less of a temptation to willful damage than large sheets of plate glass.

## WINDOWS

Large undivided areas of glass should be



WIGAN

Shopfront with interesting glazing subdivision

avoided. The method of subdivision should suit the character of the shopfront and building, with smaller paned designs appropriate to an early Victorian building, but with larger plate glass areas more appropriate to late 19th century styles. Doors and recesses can be used to break up the window area. Should a cash dispenser be needed, it must be treated as an integral part of the window design. Generally it is best placed within a recessed doorway. Under no circumstances should it be used as a means of advertising.



COVENT GARDEN

Subdividing the glazed area provides for lively display

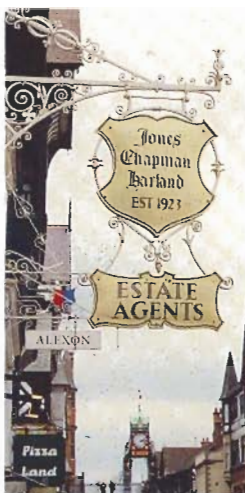
Hanging signs



WINCHESTER



WINCHESTER



CHESTER

## PROJECTING SIGNS

In historic areas, and on historic buildings, projecting signs may not always be suitable for the building or area. Where they can be erected, traditional hanging signs are the most appropriate and should take the form of a swinging sign hung from a wrought iron bracket. Where an original bracket of traditional style survives, this should be re-used. Hanging symbols denoting the trade carried on in the premises might be considered as an alternative to a hanging board.

Although signboards were traditionally in timber with a vertical emphasis, it is difficult to predetermine the size and design of hanging signs. A general principle is that they should be of a high design quality and relate to the size and scale of the building facade and not appear either over-intrusive or ridiculously small.

Projecting box signs and signs forming a projecting part of a fascia will not be appropriate in historic streets.

The design of the bracket should be carefully considered and simple brackets will be appropriate in most cases, although in certain circumstances more elaborate signs in wrought or cast iron can be appropriate. Signs and brackets should always follow the local traditions.

There should normally be not more than one hanging sign and this should be carefully positioned to take into account the architectural design of the building. The traditional position for signs in many places is level with the first floor windows but there will be regional variations and each building should be treated on its merits. However, in some cases the architectural design of the building or the character of the street will be of such importance and quality that any form of projecting sign may be unacceptable.

## ILLUMINATION

The lighting of historic centres requires a co-ordinated approach. The highlighting of buildings

and pedestrian spaces is the key to a lively and safe night-time environment. Shop signs do not need special illumination if the level of streetlighting and the light from shop windows is adequate for trade.

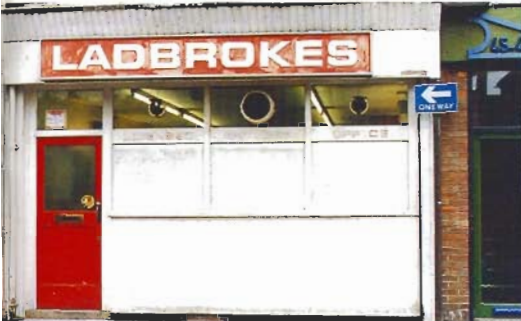
Illumination of signs can however sometimes contribute to the street scene where the illumination is treated as an integrated part of the overall design and not merely a means of drawing attention to an advertisement.

Where lighting is acceptable, the source of illumination should be discreetly hidden on suitable parts of the building. Internally illuminated box fascias, individually illuminated letters, halo-lit perspex letters, swan neck and projecting spotlights and fluorescent lighting on channels will normally be out of place in historic areas. It will not generally be appropriate to illuminate projecting signs unless they belong to a public house, restaurant or similar late-opening premises.

## WINDOW DISPLAY

The shopfront provides the framework for displaying goods. The method of display is crucial not only in attracting the customer, but also making for a lively street. Shop windows should not be obscured by a proliferation of stickers. A few carefully chosen and well arranged items will be more eye catching than a display window crammed with goods.

In the case of building societies, banks and other money shops, and those high street units which do not display goods (including bookmakers), an imaginative approach will help to avoid the deadening effect such units can have on the shopping street.



Betting shop presents a poor image

SALISBURY

## ACCESS FOR DISABLED

New shopfronts should accommodate the needs of disabled people. As a general principle, steps should be avoided and doors should be capable of being opened by people in wheelchairs. Handrails are helpful at changes in level, and frameless glass doors should not be used as they are dangerous for the young and partially sighted. On listed buildings and in very sensitive historic areas, the needs for disabled people should be taken into account as far as possible, commensurate with the need to preserve the character of the building or area.

## COLOUR SCHEMES

The sensitive use of colour offers much scope for improving the street scene; but there is no standard formula.

The imposition of corporate colour schemes regardless of the location may erode the character of the area, but minor variations from a retailer's corporate colour can help to project the uniqueness of the location.

Rich dark colours often look very good as they leave the window displays to provide the highlight.

of all replica shopfronts, it is vital that details are correctly reproduced. The application of "stick on" mouldings to flat plywood sheets, or distorted proportions will spoil the result.

Some planning authorities will provide detail sheets for traditional shopfront designs.

## MAINTENANCE

Regular maintenance is essential if shopfronts are to remain attractive. This is particularly important in the case of joinery work and metal surfaces.

Neglect will lead to decay and unnecessary expenditure on repairs or replacement.

Most shopping streets have empty shops. To avoid them detracting from the character of the street, owners should ensure that maintenance and repair be continued pending a change of tenant.

## RESTORING HISTORIC SHOPFRONTS

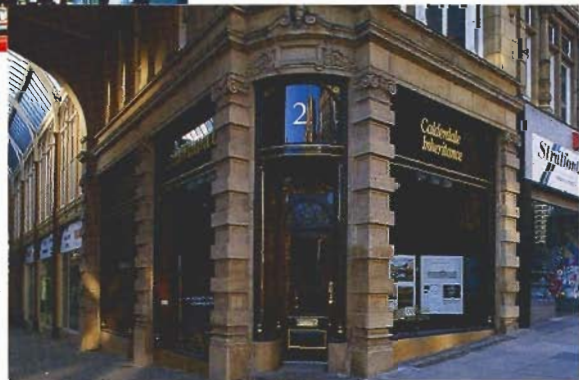
Where historic shopfronts have been mutilated, sufficient evidence may remain in the way of fragments on site, or documentary evidence in local libraries to permit an accurate reconstruction. In the case

HALIFAX, before



Original shopfront restored

HALIFAX, after



# IS PLANNING PERMISSION REQUIRED?

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.

Advertisement consent is required for the display of most signs, though there are exceptions. The Advertisement Regulations are complex, and advice should always be sought from the Local Planning Authority. In Conservation Areas all illuminated signs need consent.

## CONSERVATION AREA CONSENT

Demolition or partial demolition of any building in a Conservation Area needs Conservation Area Consent. This would include the removal of a shopfront or any features that give character to a building.

## LISTED BUILDING CONSENT

Any alteration affecting the

character of a Listed Building requires consent. This can include such details as re-painting a shopfront in a different colour, installing a security alarm or extractor fan, altering the shop interior, or installing shutters, blinds and advertisements.

## SPECIAL ADVERTISEMENT CONTROL

Some historic areas are designated Areas of Special Control for Advertisements. With these areas more stringent controls exist.

## SEEK ADVICE

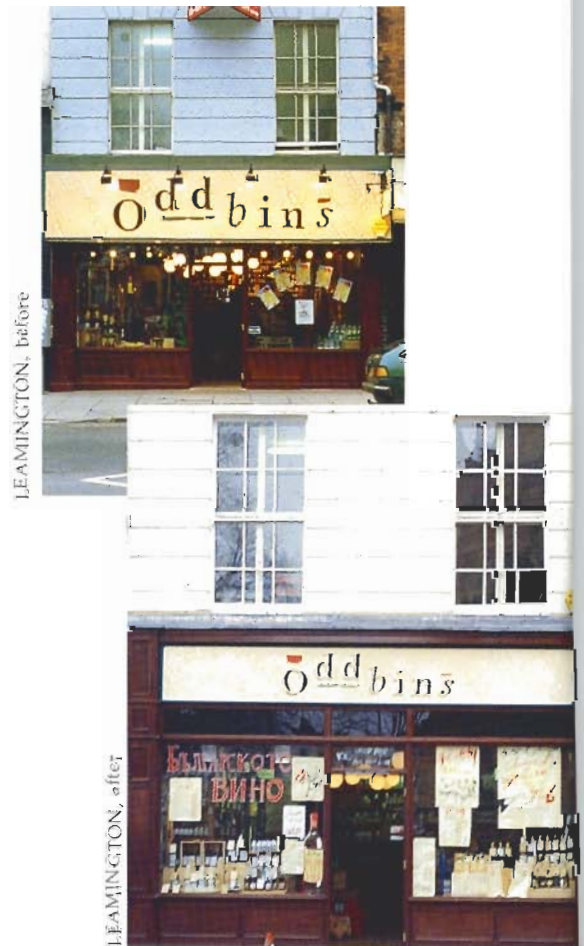
In all cases it is worth seeking preliminary advice from the Local Planning Office.

Many Planning Authorities produce Design Guides for shopfronts and will be pleased to discuss design matters with applicants and their agents at an early stage.

There may also be policies on shopfronts included in Local Plans. Such plans are statutory documents and it will be wise to ensure that the policies are not being disregarded.

Works carried out without consent

may result in enforcement action. This will cause unnecessary disruption and can lead to considerable expense. A survey of recent appeal decisions on shopfront design suggests that Local Authority efforts to conserve the character of historic areas will be supported by the Department of the Environment. Unauthorised works to a listed building or the display of an advertisement without express consent can also result in prosecution.



Shopfront proportions restored following successful enforcement action

# CONCLUSION

The standard of design excellence required in historic towns requires skill and sensitivity. It is therefore advisable to employ an architect or designer with a real understanding of the building and the surrounding area.

Many of the best new shopfronts have evolved through fruitful negotiation with the planning office, and applications will always be determined more speedily if potential problems are resolved at the outset.

Just as this booklet recommends that local authorities produce their own design guides for shopfronts and advertisements to make their requirements clear, it also recommends that retail groups should consider producing a statement on their own corporate policy on shopfronts and set out the senior contact points in their organisations.

It's always worthwhile to see good design rewarded and a positive way of promoting good design is for Civic Societies, Chambers of Trade and Local Authorities to introduce design awards for shopfronts.



WINCHESTER

*Historic street scene reflected in attractive shopfront*



The following local authorities, retailers, organizations and individuals are thanked for supplying information.

Bath City Council  
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Chichester District Council  
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Cotswold District Council  
Derby City Council  
Durham City Council  
Eden District Council  
Ellesmere Port & Neston Borough Council  
Exeter City Council  
Hereford City Council  
High Peak Borough Council  
Hove Borough Council  
Lancaster City Council  
Lichfield City Council  
Lincoln City Council  
Macclesfield Borough Council  
Norwich City Council  
Oswestry Borough Council  
Oxford City Council  
Preston Borough Council  
Rossendale Borough Council  
St Albans City & District Council  
Salisbury District Council  
Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council  
South Lakeland District Council  
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council  
Warwick District Council  
West Lancashire District Council  
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Windsor & Maidenhead Borough Council  
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# THE ENGLISH HISTORIC TOWNS FORUM

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**OBJECTIVE:** The English Historic Towns Forum was created in order to promote and reconcile prosperity and conservation in historic towns.

**BACKGROUND:** The Forum was founded in 1987 at a conference in Bath when representatives from twenty English historic towns and cities discussed matters of common interest.

The forum sets out to-

- establish and encourage contact between local authorities having responsibility for the management of important historic towns and cities
- organise seminars, workshops and conferences to discuss issues of common concern.
- encourage a corporate, inter-disciplinary approach to the management of historic towns
- compile and circulate information describing the approach of different authorities to critical management issues for historic towns
- express a collective view on proposals which are likely to affect the interests of historic towns

Membership of the Forum currently stands at 45 full members with an increasing number of affiliated members. For membership details please contact:-

The Huntingdon Centre, The Vineyards,  
The Paragon, Bath, BA1 5NA.

# LAND SECURITIES PLC

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**L**and Securities has a long association with the historic towns of England and in the case of the developments currently being undertaken in Canterbury, we have ensured that they are in keeping with the surrounding architectural environment through close liaison with the City Council, Conservation Groups and the Archaeological Trust.

**S**hopfronts are an integral part of the historic landscape but all too often in the absence of specific guidelines, an inappropriate style of shopfitting can adversely affect the street scene.

**W**ith this in mind, we are pleased to sponsor EHTF's initiative in producing and publishing this guide in the belief that it will help foster increased awareness and a sense of responsibility for our heritage leading to high standards of shopfront design.

**Peter Hunt, Chairman, Land Securities PLC**