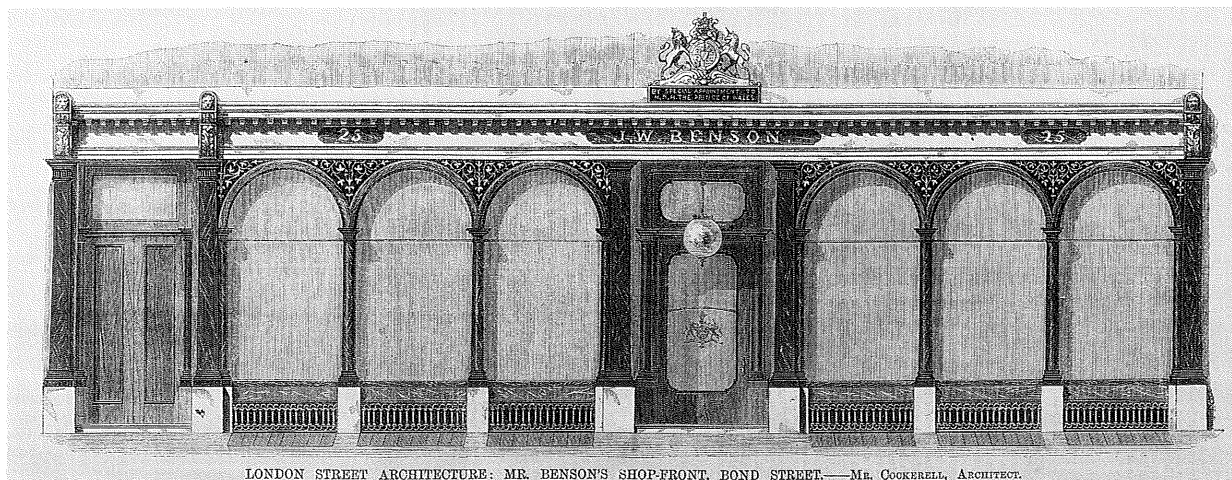


*A shop front of the late 1920s*

*Old Bond Street, London (1866).  
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LONDON STREET ARCHITECTURE: MR. BENSON'S SHOP-FRONT, BOND STREET.—MR. COCKERELL, ARCHITECT.

## INTRODUCTION

Many historic buildings have been spoilt by the insertion of inappropriate modern shop fronts, or by the crude repair of their original fronts. If shop premises are listed the replacement or alteration of the shop front will require listed building consent, and, in considering an application, planning authorities will seek to apply the Government's conservation guidelines (DoE Circular 8/87, Appendix IV). These stress that repair is preferable to replacement, and that new shop fronts should be designed in sympathy with the rest of the elevation.

Also, the replacement of a shop front in a Conservation Area will require planning permission from the local planning authority, who will need to pay special regard to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the scene.

This advice sheet discusses the problems which are most often encountered in the design and restoration of shop fronts in historic buildings. The drawings show examples of typical shop fronts. They are included for indicative purposes only and should not be slavishly copied. **Almost every shop front project will require individual treatment, with reference where necessary to other authentic local historical models.**

Listed Building  
Guidance Leaflet

Shop  
Fronts



## HISTORY

*56 Artillery Lane, Spitalfields, London (1756-7)*

The typical shop front, as developed in the eighteenth century, combined classical precedents of proportion and detail with pre-existing traditions of shop use. The front was divided by pilasters or columns, supporting a full entablature. It could be designed in various ways, to incorporate either a central or side entrance plus sometimes a separate entrance to the floors above. Whatever the arrangement, the shop window invariably had as its base a stall board supported by a stall riser, reminders of the days when goods were sold across an unglazed opening. The frieze above the window was enlarged to provide a flat fascia, which concealed the wooden bressummer carrying the rest of the facade. Above the frieze ran a crowning cornice, sometimes with blocking, which helped em-

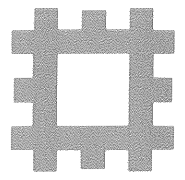
phasise the distinction between the retail floor and the domestic upper floors.

Broadly speaking this arrangement remained in use until the twentieth century, but with gradual modification over the years. Shop fronts can often be given an approximate date by examination of the mouldings, the materials used, and the size of the glazing divisions. Restoration projects should respect the many variations in the way these features were handled at different times.

Surviving examples such as the magnificent front at 56, Artillery Lane Spitalfields (1756-7) show that in the mid-eighteenth century the glazing divisions were small and the stall riser quite high. The wide glazing bars projected only slightly in front of the glass. Comparison with another well-

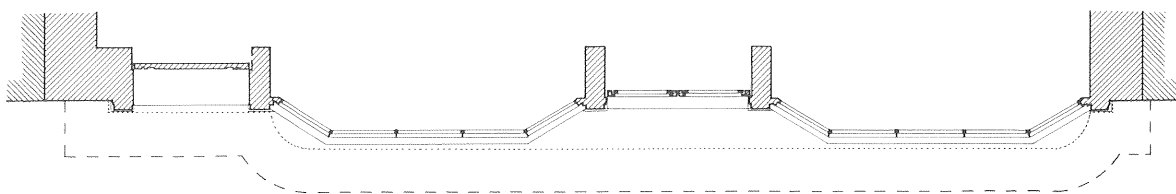
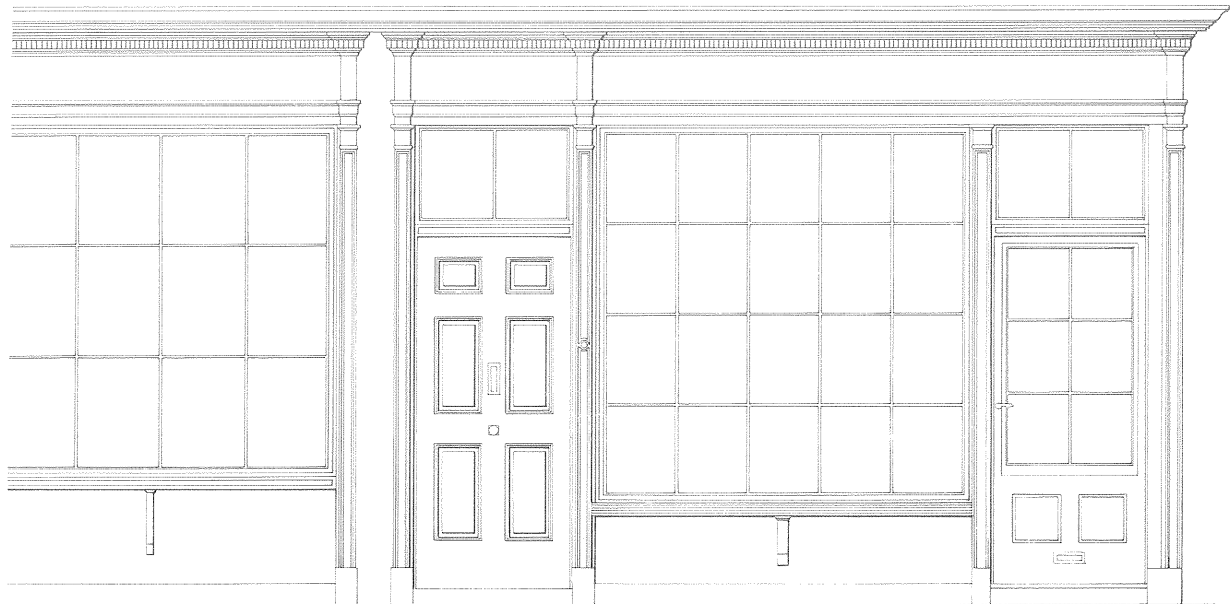
preserved shop front of almost forty years later, at 88, Dean Street, Soho, shows how each component had been refined; fewer glazing divisions, thinner glazing bars, and a lower stall riser, the whole composition framed by delicate pilaster strips.

The tendency towards larger paned windows, already manifest at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was encouraged by the removal of the excise duty on glass in 1845. Thereafter panes of 7-8ft  $\times$  3-4ft (c2.3m  $\times$  1.1m) were often used, supported by glazing bars of cast iron, cast brass or wood encased in sheet brass. Enlarged openings produced the solecism of huge upper storeys being apparently carried on a chasm of glass. One solution to this problem, as at 25, Old Bond Street (1866), was to mount the glass behind an arcaded front.



English  
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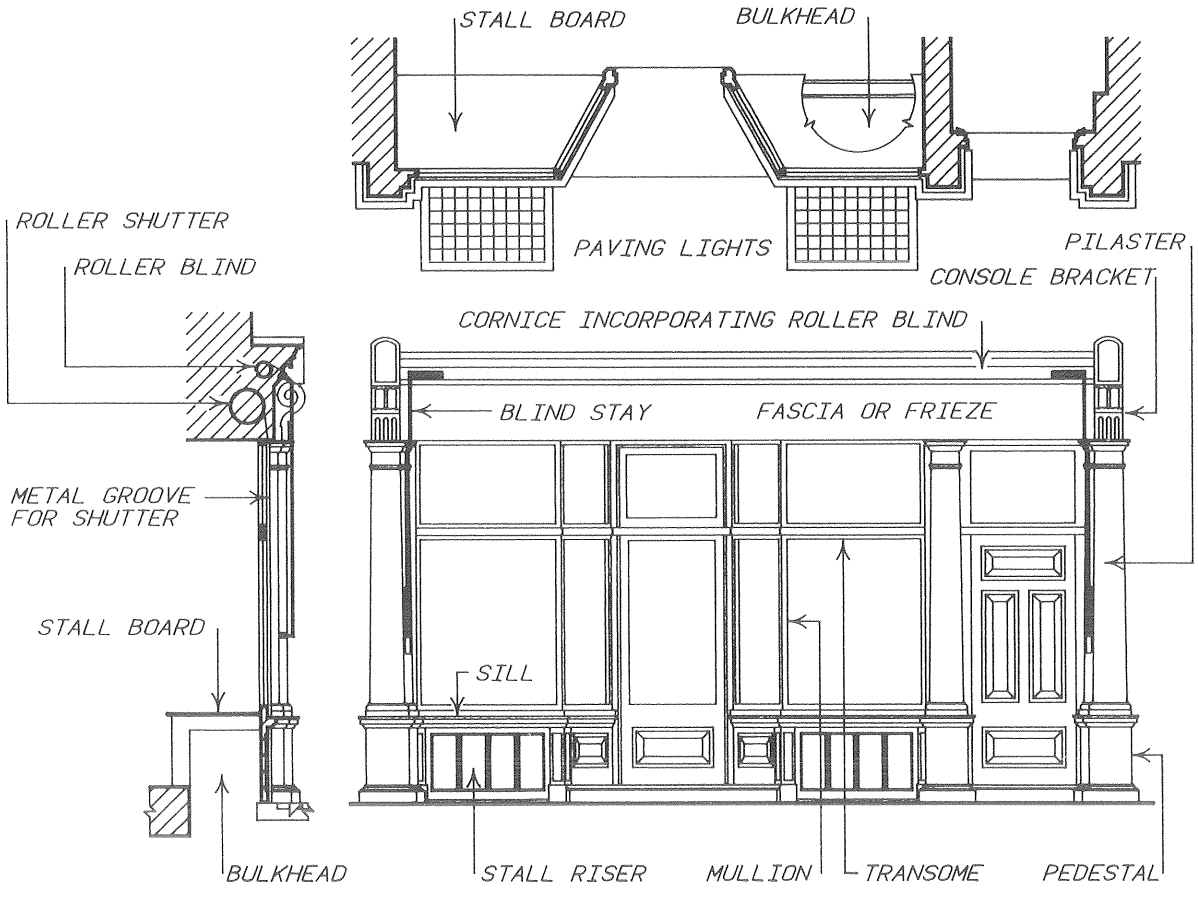
*A late eighteenth-century shop  
front*



*A shop front of the late eighteenth century. The shop door appears to be a  
later nineteenth-century insertion. Dean Street, London*

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Shop  
Fronts



The principal elements of a shop front. This drawing is based on an early twentieth-century design



An example of a new shop front sympathetically designed in keeping with the date and scale of the original building

Parallel with these changes in glazing went the introduction of stylistic variations – Greek, Gothic, Tudor, and even the Alhambric style – though usually these were used within the conventional frame. At the end of the nineteenth century improved methods of artificial lighting made the shop window as a source of natural light less important, thus permitting the use of deeply recessed fronts and lobby entrances.

The architectural conflicts of the early twentieth century affected shop front design as much as other spheres, producing conscientious revivals of classically based models as well as clean, geometric designs devoid of any historical antecedents. This advice sheet does not cover such examples though some, such as Simpson's at 203, Piccadilly in London, are listed. Their restoration calls for the same kind of care as those of earlier periods.

*An example of traditional shop front shutters*



## SHOP SECURITY

Before the 1830s shop windows were closed at night with wooden shutters, held in slots within the stall board and the soffit of the fascia, and secured with iron bars. Such a system can still work perfectly well if shopkeepers are willing to take down and put up the shutters every day.

In the mid-nineteenth century wooden shutters were superseded by revolving iron shutters, housed in a box in the entablature and lowered in iron grooves. Many examples of this system still work well today.

It is important to consider shop security as early as possible when

designing a new shop front, so that whatever method is used can be incorporated as unobtrusively as possible. Glazing bars can be reinforced behind with T-section steel, and a brick or concrete wall can be built behind the stall riser if the shopkeeper fears that part of the front may be vulnerable.

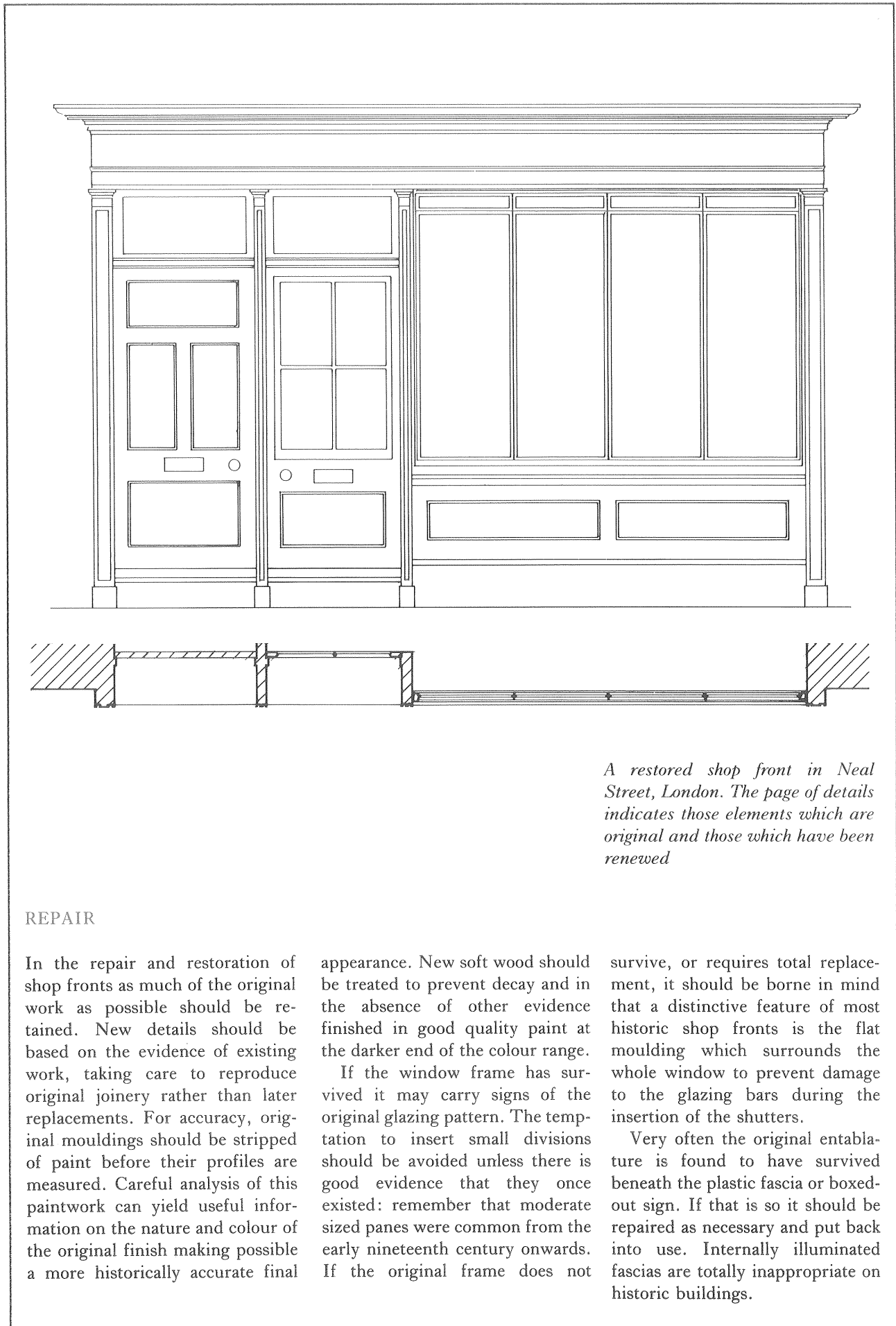
## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

In certain circumstances and providing that their design and location is carefully considered, hanging signs may enhance the street scene. They should preferably be painted, not too large, and fitted in a way that does not damage or obscure the shop front.

Care should be taken not to create a 'cluttered' aspect to the street scene in general. Internally illuminated box signs are not acceptable. It is preferable to use discreetly mounted spot lighting or concealed top light tubes. Usually a hanging sign needs local authority per-

mission and it is advisable to consult them at an early stage.

Where blinds are fitted they should be appropriate in appearance and material to the building. Fixed blinds and those made of plastic are not suitable additions to an historic shop front.



*A restored shop front in Neal Street, London. The page of details indicates those elements which are original and those which have been renewed*

## REPAIR

In the repair and restoration of shop fronts as much of the original work as possible should be retained. New details should be based on the evidence of existing work, taking care to reproduce original joinery rather than later replacements. For accuracy, original mouldings should be stripped of paint before their profiles are measured. Careful analysis of this paintwork can yield useful information on the nature and colour of the original finish making possible a more historically accurate final

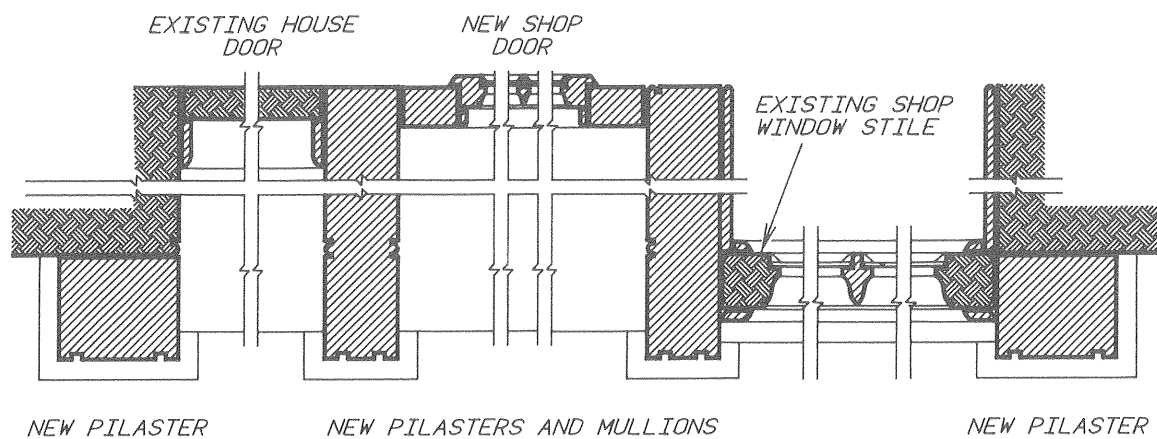
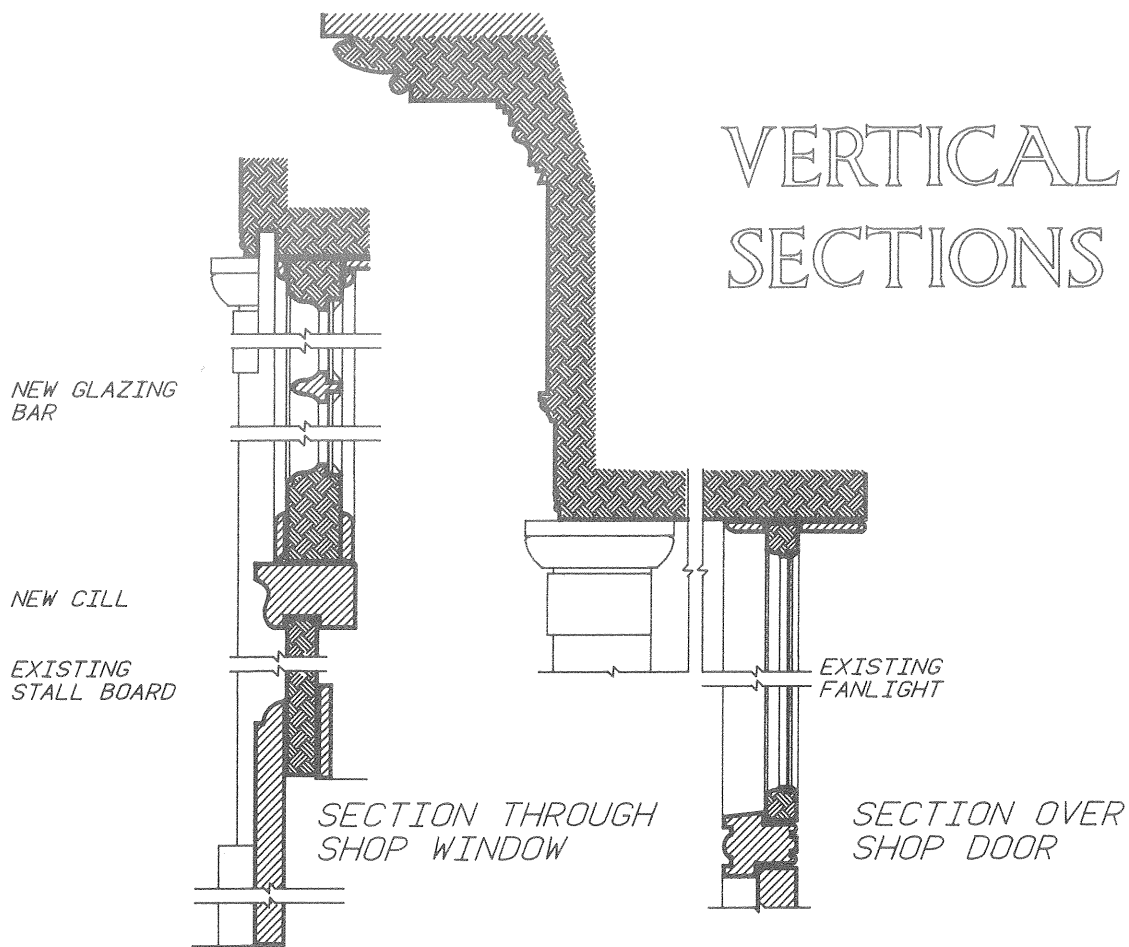
appearance. New soft wood should be treated to prevent decay and in the absence of other evidence finished in good quality paint at the darker end of the colour range.

If the window frame has survived it may carry signs of the original glazing pattern. The temptation to insert small divisions should be avoided unless there is good evidence that they once existed: remember that moderate sized panes were common from the early nineteenth century onwards. If the original frame does not



survive, or requires total replacement, it should be borne in mind that a distinctive feature of most historic shop fronts is the flat moulding which surrounds the whole window to prevent damage to the glazing bars during the insertion of the shutters.

Very often the original entablature is found to have survived beneath the plastic fascia or boxed-out sign. If that is so it should be repaired as necessary and put back into use. Internally illuminated fascias are totally inappropriate on historic buildings.

# VERTICAL SECTIONS



# HORIZONTAL SECTION

-  EXISTING ORIGINAL ELEMENTS
-  NEW ELEMENTS

Listed Building  
Guidance Leaflet

Shop  
Fronts

## NEW SHOP FRONTS

The design of a new shop front on historical principles should normally obey certain simple ground rules. As with repairs, the starting-point should be the detailed examination of the whole building facade, plus a study of the building's context in the street. If one or more premises are to be united to form a single shop care should be taken to maintain the individuality of each shop front within the row.

Many shop fronts are of a different date to the structure above, and in some cases it may be appropriate to reproduce that sense of historical adaptation rather than to design a front of exactly the same period as the building. Obviously, however, a front should never appear to be of an earlier date than the rest of the fabric.

Within its own terms a new shop front should be historically and architecturally credible. The correct materials should be used – wood, plus occasionally brass or cast iron; glazing bars should be correctly shaped, bearing in mind that in shop fronts the mouldings always appear on the exterior; and the proportions of the front as a whole should be harmonious. In particular, it is important that the fascia should not be too deep. The use of 'bottle-glass' should be avoided.

Architectural patterns books of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and evidence of surviving examples, reveal the large number of types that were produced, even within quite short periods. So although it is important to follow the basic principles, there is immense scope for variations.



*An example of a sympathetically designed twentieth-century shop front which replaced unsuitable plate glass windows*

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