

# Shopfronts & Signs

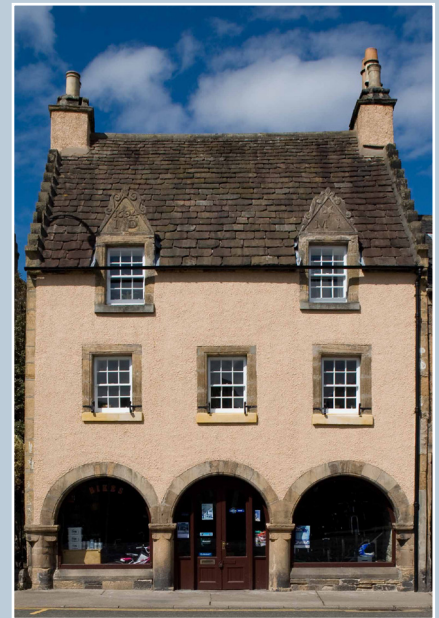


# Key Issues

- 1. Historic shopfronts contribute to the architectural quality of a building and to the character of a place. Listed building consent is required for any works affecting the character of a listed building.**
- 2. The interest of a historic shopfront can be derived from its architectural quality, fixtures and features and its historical and cultural associations. Regional variations and functional shop types are often identifiable in their form and details.**
- 3. Alterations to historic shopfronts to accommodate commercial needs such as security and signage or associated with a change of use can affect a building's visual amenity and character.**
- 4. Where historic shopfronts have been altered unsympathetically it may be possible to restore elements of the original or historic design on the basis of sound evidence.**
- 5. Planning authorities give advice on the requirement for listed building consent, advertisement consent and other permissions.**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This is one of a series of guidance notes on managing change in the historic environment for use by planning authorities and other interested parties. The series explains how to apply the policies contained in the *Scottish Historic Environment Policy* (2009) ([SHEP](#), PDF 312K) and *The Scottish Planning Policy* (2010) ([SPP](#), PDF 299K).
- 1.2 This note sets out the principles that apply to altering historic shopfronts and signs. It should inform planning policies and the determination of applications relating to the historic environment, and replaces the equivalent guidance in *The Memorandum of Guidance on Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas* (1998).
- 1.3 Monuments scheduled under the Ancient Monuments & Archaeological Areas Act 1979 require scheduled monument consent for any works. Where a structure is both scheduled and listed, the scheduling controls have precedence. Separate advice is available from Historic Scotland's website: [Scheduled Monuments: Guidance for Owners, Occupiers & Land Managers](#) (PDF 718K).



*Braco's Banking House (1694), High Street, Elgin. In the late 17th century a number of Scottish burghs adopted a continental model of arcades at the ground floor to house shops.*

## 2. WHY ARE SHOPFRONTS IMPORTANT?

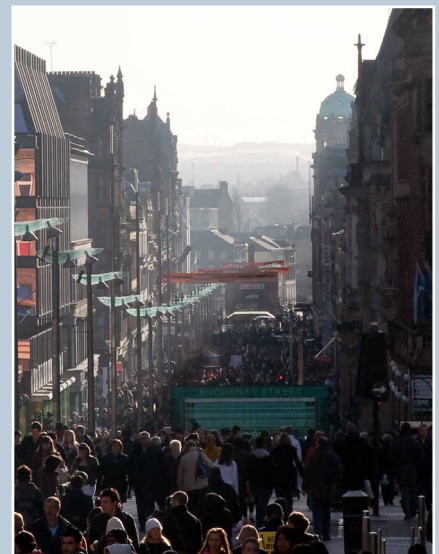
- 2.1 Historic shopfronts are important for the contribution they make to the character of a place and through their historical and cultural associations. Where a shopfront is part of the original design of a building it will contribute to the building's architectural significance.
- 2.2 Further guidance is given in Historic Scotland's publication *Historic Retail Buildings: a Short Guide for Shop Owners* (2009).

## 3. IDENTIFYING THE INTEREST IN A HISTORIC SHOP

- 3.1 Shops have evolved from medieval luckenbooths in the main street to more formal street frontages that display goods through increasing amounts of glass. Small panes gave way to plate glass from the 1840s, and curved glass came later. Regional variations and functional shop types are identifiable in their form and details.

A shop may demonstrate a combination of aesthetic, associated and historical interest:

- 3.2 **Aesthetic interest:** in for example its architectural form. Most shops draw their details from the classical vocabulary



*Buchanan Street, Glasgow, one of Scotland's premier shopping streets. Initially a residential street of Glasgow's second 'New Town', it was developed with shops from the 1820s.*





A traditional mortar and pestle symbol outside the chemist in the High Street, Haddington, East Lothian.

Hanover Street, Edinburgh. These copper sculptures were designed to advertise a travel agency. That function has ceased but the artworks add value to the new shop and to the streetscene.



of architecture: pilasters, consoles and cornices framing the window.

- 3.3 **Associated interest:** a shopfront might be valued for its association with a significant designer, craftsman, patron or historic event. It might also be important as a source of memory or for what it means to a group of people or a place.
- 3.4 **Historical interest** derives from the potential of a historic shopfront to provide evidence about the past. For example the use of common symbols such as a pestle and mortar for Pharmacists.
- 3.5 **Associated features** such as signage, canopies, awnings, gates and other traditional security features can also contribute to the character of a historic shopfront.

#### 4. PRINCIPLES FOR REPAIR AND ALTERATION

- 4.1 In addition to the following, most Planning Authorities offer design guidance on new shopfronts as well as alterations to historic shopfronts.

##### General

- 4.2 High quality historic shopfronts should be retained. Good examples of Georgian, Victorian, Edwardian and inter-war shopfronts are now scarce. Some newer, well-designed shopfronts which relate to the architectural quality of a building are also significant. The commercial purpose of a shopfront is to attract customers. This can present challenges for the historic

character of a building or place. A balance needs to be achieved between accommodating commercial needs such as signage and security and maintaining the historic significance of the shopfront. Shopfronts which straddle two separate buildings should acknowledge the architectural and structural divisions above.

- 4.3 Where historic details such as pilasters, capitals, console brackets, entablatures or cast-iron columns are found, an earlier shopfront may be at least partly recoverable. Even if only the cornice survives, this should be retained as a valuable demarcation line between the shopfront and the facade above. Stallrisers similarly contribute to the balance of a shopfront by providing a solid base for the display window. Good examples, including those in stone, timber, tile, iron or toughened glass (such as 'Vitrolite'), should be kept.

### Signage and advertising

- 4.4 The thresholds and door reveals of some premises, particularly those of dairies, fishmongers and butchers, occasionally display decorative tiles of high quality. Trade emblems such as fishmongers' carved wooden fish were common until recently. These are now rare and should be retained.
- 4.5 Lettering on fascias, windows and doors which contribute to the significance of a historic shopfront should be retained. New lettering must be carefully designed to respect the character of a building and be located appropriately. Fixings that cut across architectural detail or that sit uneasily against the form of the entrance or the surrounding façade should be avoided. Traditional hand-painted sign-writing is encouraged. Often this will not require consent if the building fabric is otherwise retained.
- 4.6 If a fascia is excessively deep or encroaches upon the first floor, the opportunity should be taken to create a fascia of more appropriate depth and height.
- 4.7 The number, design, illumination and siting of projecting signs should be carefully considered.

### Blinds and canopies

- 4.8 Traditional sun blinds or awnings are often found where a display window contained perishable goods. A traditional blind is a length of woven canvas attached to a folding metal frame and a roller which fully retracts into a box. These can sometimes be refurbished.
- 4.9 The introduction of new blind boxes to a historic shopfront should not mask or cut across detailing which contributes to the significance of a building. Where an external blind cannot be neatly accommodated, internal filter blinds or clear screens may be fitted to cut the transmission of UV rays.



*One of the cast-iron shopfronts that came to light during recent refurbishment of Dundee's Improvement Act streets.*



*Gardner's Warehouse, Jamaica Street, Glasgow. Now in use as a bar, this pioneering iron-framed building was constructed as a retail warehouse in 1855-6 for A Gardner & Son, cabinet makers and upholsterers. The original lettering was kept at first floor, and new lettering in a similar style fitted to match the new name at the ground floor.*



*Replacement fabric attached to the traditional awning mechanisms at McEwens, St John Street, Perth.*





Cockburn Street, Edinburgh. Original later 19th-century timber panelled security shutters that slide down into slots beneath the windows during the day. © N Haynes.

4.10 Modern fixed canopy blinds are not a traditional feature of the street scene. They will rarely be appropriate on listed buildings and upon unlisted buildings within conservation areas. Even where there may be practical reasons for a canopy, fixings that cut across architectural detail or that sit uneasily against the form of the entrance or the surrounding facade should be avoided.

### Security

4.11 Externally mounted modern roller shutters can be difficult to accommodate on a historic shopfront. Alternatives can include removable external grilles, toughened glass or security film. There are also measures that can be taken internally to improve the security of a shopfront. These can include internal grilles and shutters. Planning authorities often offer planning guidance on appropriate shop front security measures.

### Other items

4.12 Other items which attach to, pass through or project forward of the facade, such as cash dispensing machines (ATMs), can affect the character of a building. New openings for these should avoid cutting through architectural features or disturbing symmetry. Lights and cabling should be located so as to minimise physical damage to the fabric.

### Restoration

4.13 It is often possible to restore shopfronts on the basis of sound research and physical evidence. Where an existing shopfront is unsympathetic and there is reliable evidence of what was there before, it may be appropriate to re-create the earlier frontage. However, where the existing shopfront is of interest, even if not original, it should be retained.

### Changes of use

4.14 Where a shopfront was part of the original design of a historic building it may contribute to its architectural quality. If conversion to another use such as residential is deemed acceptable, the work should fully respect the existing shopfront. The use of frosted glass and set-back mezzanine floors can help to overcome privacy issues where there are large areas of glazing.



These modern removable external grilles by an artistic blacksmith were put into shops in place of less attractive fixed mesh as part of the Bo'ness Townscape Heritage Initiative.

## 5. CONSENTS

5.1 Listed building consent is required for any work to a listed shopfront that affects its character. The local authority determines the need for consent.

5.2 Where listed building consent is required, an application is made to the local authority. This should include accurate scale drawings showing both the existing situation and proposed works in context. It is normally helpful to provide detailed

technical information and photographs.

- 5.3 Many changes to shops require planning permission and advertisement consent may be required for any changes to signage. Other regulations such as the Food Hygiene Act, building standards and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 also have implications and advice should be sought prior to undertaking any works.
- 5.4 Further guidance on access issues is given in Historic Scotland's *Managing Change in the Historic Environment: Accessibility* guidance note.



*A shopfront restored through the Arbroath Townscape Heritage Initiative.*

## Other selected Historic Scotland publications and links

*Historic Retail Buildings: a Short Guide for Shop Owners* (2009)

*Inform Guide: Ceramic Tiled Flooring* (2007)

*Inform Guide: Graffiti and its Safe Removal* (2005)

*Inform Guide: Fire Safety* (2005)

For the full range of Inform Guides, Practitioner Guides, Technical Advice Notes and Research Reports please see the [Publications](#) section of the Historic Scotland website.

## Other selected publications and links

[Conserving Scotland's Retail Buildings Seminar](#) (September 2008) (transcripts of talks given at this seminar).

## FURTHER INFORMATION AND ADVICE

Details of all individual scheduled monuments, listed buildings, designated gardens and designed landscapes, and designated wrecks can be obtained from Historic Scotland (see contact details below) or at: [www.pastmap.org.uk](http://www.pastmap.org.uk). Details of listed buildings can also be obtained from the relevant local authority for the area.

Advice on the requirement for listed building consent, conservation area consent, building warrants, and other permissions/consents should be sought from local authorities.

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### Cover images

*Art Nouveau glass in a shopfront of circa 1900, Main Street, Callander, Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park.*

*Tiled entrance to a former Buttercup Dairy shop (circa 1910), Warrender Park Road, City of Edinburgh. The tiles were designed by J. Duncan Ltd of Glasgow after a painting by Tom Curr. © N Haynes.*

*Interior of a late 19th-century chemist shop.*