Bath Shopfronts

Guidelines for Design and Conservation

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1993
The Town Hall at Bath
(Aquatint by Thomas Malton,
1779) showing shops in the
High Street
These guidelines are the second of the three interdependent Elements of the Shopfront Policy.
Principles, Guidelines and Survey.

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Introduction

Due to its extraordinary history Bath has inherited an unusually large number of fine Georgian and Victorian shopfronts. These have survived largely due to the slow later growth of the city. Taken as a whole they constitute an ideal resource for the study of traditional shopfronts.

These guidelines set out an analysis of these shopfronts in overall and detailed design terms. This is followed by specific and general guidelines for the design of new shopfronts and the conservation of traditional shopfronts in the city.

The Shopfront Principles were originated by Graham Finch DipArch, RIBA, who also researched and wrote the Shopfront Guidelines and Record, acting as a consultant to Bath City Council.
Bath Shopfronts: Style

The shopfronts of the city are of many styles. For the purposes of these guidelines, and at the risk of over-simplification, these have been defined below. They have also been grouped into three categories according to their basic nature and inspiration. There are unavoidably overlaps in both style and category.

1-00 SHOPFRONT PERIODS AND STYLES

CLASSICAL

Mid Georgian (Palladian) 1750 – 1775
Late Georgian (Neo-Classical) 1775 – 1800
Regency and William IV (Greek Revival) 1800 – 1837
Victorian/Edwardian/early George V Classical 1837 – 1914
20th Century Revival : Neo-Georgian 1918 – 1955
20th Century Revival : New Classical 1975 –

VICTORIAN/EDWARDIAN

Early Victorian 1837 – 1870
Late Victorian 1870 – 1901
Edwardian and early George V 1901 – 1914

MODERN MOVEMENT

Early 20th Century Modern 1918 – 1939
Late 20th Century Modern 1945 –

1.2 The Shopfront Tradition

The tradition of shopfront design is not static, but evolutionary, often developing by reviving earlier styles and adapting them to suit current needs.

1.5 Present Day Revivals

The New Classical and New Victorian/Edwardian Revivals constitute a response to the special context of the City. They can be manifested either by the accurate use of traditional forms or by their progressive development.

The New Classical Revival, though in its early stages, is already established in this country, and is clearly very suitable for use in Bath. The New Victorian/Edwardian Revival is as yet only in its preliminary stage.

It is usually preferable for new classical work to be complete in its original condition, but is often valid both historically and practically to incorporate later changes such as the provision of either mullions or plate glass in lieu of small panes, as generally occurred during the Victorian period.
View looking down Broad Street from the Lansdown Road/George Street junction circa 1836

14 Abbey Church Yard
[page 11, left]

4 North Parade Passage
[page 11, right]

Definitions

Throughout this document the term *Traditional* refers to shopfronts of either classical or Victorian/Edwardian/Early George V date or style, (referred to also as Victorian/Edwardian). The term *Non-Traditional* refers to those designed in the styles of the Modern Movement. *Early* refers to original shopfronts of pre-plate glass type (before about 1845).
Bath Shopfronts: Examples

CLASSICAL

2.1 MID GEORGIAN [PALLADIAN]

The following examples of shopfronts in the city have been selected for their quality and interest and also to illustrate the work of successive periods and styles from about 1750 to the present day.

1 Terrace Walk circa 1740-50 A full scale architectural (Ionic) front in stonework, now painted. Originally a coffee house, with the entrance probably at the side in North Parade Passage.

2, 5, 11 and 12 Queen Street circa 1760 A group of four shops consisting of eight flat-fronted, splayed-ended bay windows with separate doorways. They have no fascias and presumably originally had hanging signs.

4 North Parade Passage pre 1766 (Sally Lunn’s) Early bow-fronted shopfront with integral doorway and geometrical wooden fanlight. No fascia. Door replaced.

It is hoped that by visiting and examining them, particularly in detail, applicants will see their proposals as part of an evolving tradition and not in isolation.

2.2 LATE GEORGIAN [NEO-CLASSICAL]

5 Church Street post 1766 Bow-fronted shopfront with integral doorway and geometrical wooden fanlight. Fascia. Glazing bars replaced. Compromised by modern external security grilles.

9 and 16 Argyle Street circa 1793 Two similar deep bow-fronted shopfronts with central entrances. Spectacular lead-faced fanlights over windows and doorways. Glazing bars to No. 16 removed.

6 and 7 Bath Street Designed integrally with the buildings of the street (Thomas Baldwin, 1791). Elegant console brackets, astragal and hollow glazing bars. Wooden fanlights. Panels added over lower panes at an early date. The shopfronts on the other side of the street are modern replacements, unfortunately without doorways, and spoilt by not stepping down with the fall of the street.
2.5 Regency and William IV [Greek Revival]

7 and 8 Old Bond Street circa 1800 Two magnificent double bow-fronted shopfronts with serpentine entablatures. Originally part of a group of eight similar shopfronts. (The east side of the street then extended further northwards – see Street Panoramas of 1840). Typical Regency reeded pilasters with lion’s heads. Glazing bars to No. 7 removed. A drawing, circa 1919, shows lead-faced fanlights to both doorways of No. 8.


7 Northumberland Place circa 1820 The best preserved of what was once a group of four matching small-scale shopfronts, perfect in scale for this narrow street. Reeded pilasters with lions’ heads. Tapered glazing bars, every second vertical bar removed. No. 5 has an original lead-faced fanlight.

4 Cleveland Terrace Designed as part of the overall composition of the approach to Cleveland Bridge [Henry Goodridge, circa 1832]. A complete flat-fronted, quadrant-ended bay-window shopfront, with window transom to receive tops of shutters and decorative divisions to upper lights. Double doors with shutter recesses. Some early glass.

14 Abbey Churchyard circa 1830 Exceptional large-scale shopfront with double flat-fronted quadrant-ended bays with continuous fanlight over. Reeded brass-faced sill and wrought iron undercliff railings. Elegant ornament to soffit in compo. Well-restored, including replacement of glazing bars.

8 Argyle Street circa 1828 Perfect example of Greek Revival (Ionic) shopfront. Large panes set in tapering glazing bars, some of which have been replaced (the thicker ones). Inner shop, door in hardwood with fine glazing bars. The interior retains many early fittings including some of their contents.

16 Margaret’s Buildings circa 1830 Neat, rectangular projecting shopfront with central doorway. Lions’ heads to pilasters. Glazing bars replaced except for those at the back of the left hand return.
Classical

16 Margaret's Buildings [left]
9 Argyle Street [right]

111/116 Walcot Street [left]
22a Wood Street [right]

Bath Street detail [left]
Old Bond Street [right]
Classical

1 Terrace Walk [left]
14 Westgate Street [right]

7 Northumberland Place [left]
14 Old Bond Street [right]

11 Queen Street, [left]
4 Cleveland Terrace [right]
Classical

5 Argyle Street

9b Margaret's Buildings  
[below, left]

2 Wood Street [right]
Victorian/Edwardian

3 Milsom Street [left]
2 North Parade Passage [right]

32 Milsom Street [left]
1-8 Milsom Street [right]

12 New Bond Street
2-4 VICTORIAN/EDWARDIAN/EARLY GEORGE V CLASSICAL

1 - 6 Wood Street 1871 A formal composition of six shopfronts modulated by Corinthian columns. Cast iron undereave railings.

17/18 Millsom Street 1911 Dignified six-bay Corinthian front. Originally with doorways in the narrower bays at each end.

2-5 TWENTIETH-CENTURY CLASSICAL REVIVAL: NEO-GEORGIAN

18/19 Old Bond Street 1932 Confident and refined design for the Bath Gas Company. Lantern supported by wrought iron brackets over doorway. The original drawings show double doors instead of the present single door.

5 Edgar Buildings, George Street 1933 A sturdy architectural front in the Tuscan order. Ornamental metalwork at the head of the window and doorway removed.

14 Old Bond Street 1935 Large double bow-front in mahogany. Originally had matching columns capped by urns on each side of the doorway. The columns were removed in 1960 when the single door was changed to two separate doors, but the urns have been re-used.

2-6 TWENTIETH-CENTURY CLASSICAL REVIVAL: NEW CLASSICAL

2 and 5 Upper Borough Walls Two similar shopfronts of Victorian form with Greek Revival detail and plateglass windows.

16/17 Old Bond Street 1982 Two projecting bays consisting of Tuscan columns supporting heavy pediments. Plateglass windows. Originally had gilt boot hanging sign.

24 Westgate Street 1987 A light-hearted Regency style flat-fronted shopfront with plate-glass caps to the pilasters. Designed as if the glazing bars had been removed and replaced by mullions and plate glass.

24 Westgate Street 1987 Flat-fronted greengrocer's shopfront designed in Greek Revival style following that of the surviving pilaster to No. 9. Once part of a matching group of three shopfronts of 1837 (see Street Panoramas). The windows are now designed to a different arrangement and as if the earlier glazing bars had been replaced with arched plate-glass windows of circa 1850.

9b Margaret's Buildings 1989 A Regency style rectangular-bayed shopfront designed as if its glazing bars had been taken out and replaced with plate glass. Gilt flowers in compo to tops of reeded pilasters. 19th century decorative grille under eave.
VICTORIAN/EDWARDIAN

2.7 EARLY VICTORIAN

8 Abbey Churchyard circa 1830-40 Large-scale flat-fronted shopfront standing in front of earlier arched openings. Designed for large square panes of either cylinder or plate glass. Glazing to fanlight recently painted over.

14 Green Street circa 1850-60 Narrow-arcaded shopfront (mullions originally full height). Exquisite double floral consoles of free-flowing form. Three-dimensional wooden fascia lettering.

19 Green Street circa 1850-60 Originally arcaded. Double console brackets presumably by the same carver who made the consoles at No. 14. Turned pendant drops to cornice.

LATE VICTORIAN

10 Abbey Churchyard 1879 Characteristically confident shopfront of this date. Elaborate console brackets. Quadrant corners to top of full-sheet plate glass window.

11-13 Milsom Street 1879 Jolly's centrepiece. The most extravagant shopfront in Bath, richly carved and wrought in stone, granite, bronze and mahogany.

12 George Street circa 1884 Tall full-sheet plate glass front in stone surround. Cast iron colonettes and cresting above cornice.

7 & 8 Milsom Street Built for R King and Son, drapers. The cornice is supported on exquisite palm leaf corbels. The lobby was originally much narrower and the windows extended up to the line of arched decoration on the fascia (photograph of 1909).
Victorian/Edwardian

11 Green Street

HARRIS & SON

14

11 George Street

PESTLE & MORTAR
CHEMISTS est. 1823
2.9 EDWARDIAN AND EARLY GEORGE V

5 Milson Street 1911 Curved glass to windows either side of a deep tapered lobby with mosaic floor. Very large console brackets to each end of fascia with delicately carved ornament. Art Nouveau door handle.

32 Milson Street 1902 Elegant light-weight shopfront in hardwood (now painted). Curved glass. Tapered lobby with mirrored soffit. Narrow entrance door with brass and ebony pull handle.

12 New Bond Street 1906 Built as a jeweller’s shop. Curved glass windows. Two entrance lobbies with mosaic floors. Cut glass fanlights.

11 George Street 1909 An exceptional shopfront. Curved front with curvilinear glazing bars to top part of windows and fanlight, glazed in bevelled glass. Mirror glass in panels to soffit. Magnificent door continuing the curvilinear theme.

2.10 TWENTIETH-CENTURY REVIVAL: NEW VICTORIAN/EDWARDIAN

2 North Parade Passage 1987 Modest and very suitable flat-fronted shopfront of early Victorian/Classical pattern.

14 St James Parade 1988 Modest shopfront with elliptical arcing of a type common in Bath in the 1850s. Spoilt by strong blue paintwork.
Modern Movement

11 Kingsmead Square

11 Upper Borough Walls
MODERN MOVEMENT

2.11 EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY MODERN

19 New Bond Street 1922 Elegant shopfront in black and white marble, with recessed lobby and curved glass windows. Bronze framing to windows, now painted.

14 Cheap Street 1927 Continuous wide stone surround with stepped top of Art Deco flavour. Bronze framing. Black and gold marble stall riser. Large scale three-dimensional lettering (not original).

12 Northgate Street 1928 Continuous wide stone surround with finely carved acanthus leaf enrichment to architrave. Granite base. Bronze framing and fascia lettering.

2.12 LATE TWENTIETH-CENTURY MODERN


45 Milsom Street 1980 Sophisticated modern design exploiting the qualities of metal and glass.

20 Green Street 1987 Confident and well-detailed modern shopfront with mid-Victorian flavour.

15 Kingsmead Square 1985 A clear and architectural interpretation of a traditional form. Good colour (Burgundy) and well-formed modern lettering in gold leaf.
Classical Architecture

A study of classical architecture, in particular that of the late 18th and early 19th century in Bath, is an essential preparation for designing classical work in the City. Classical architecture is a precious inheritance from classical antiquity. The design of classical shopfronts is an integral part of this tradition. Its basic characteristics are harmony, proportion, symmetry, unity, and a balance of form, line and decoration.

3.1 CLASSICAL ARCHITECTURE IN GENERAL

Classical architecture is based on the Five Orders of Architecture: Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian and Composite. An order consists of a column, crowned by a capital and supporting a group of horizontal elements, cornice, frieze and architrave, collectively known as the entablature. Each of the orders is different in design, proportion, detail and ornament.

The Greek and Roman versions are of different character. The proportions of an order are based on the diameter of the column at the base. This is multiplied to produce the height of the column and the proportions of the building as a whole. It is divided and sub-divided to establish the relationships of the elements of the order down to the smallest detail.

The Five Orders from

Tuscan Order
Doric Order
Ionic Order
Roman Order and Corinthian Order

The Orders of the Ancients.
3-2 Architectural Classicism

The term architectural classicism is used throughout to describe the full and correct use of the orders of architecture as distinct from the simpler and more common form astylar classicism generally used in shopfront design.

3-3 Astylar [or Simplified] Classicism

In the design of shopfronts, the orders in their full expression were only used where formality was required. More usually a simplified or attenuated version was used. It is referred to here as astylar (or simplified) classicism. The classical system of proportion is still inherent in the design, as it is in all design of the Georgian or Regency periods, but commonly in practice proportion was judged by eye on the principle that if it looked right, it was right.

Example of Architectural Classicism: 8 Argyle Street (page 10) and of Astylar Classicism: 5 Church Street (page 9).
Classical Shopfronts

A study of original classical shopfronts generally, and in Bath specifically, particularly their elements and details, is an essential preparation for the design of new classical shopfronts in the city.

4.1 Introduction

The shopfronts of the later Georgian and Regency periods were designed within the tradition of classical architecture, using its developing styles, usually in astylar form.

These were, in succession:
- Palladian (inspired by the work and writings of the Italian Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio), Neo-Classical (inspired principally by a direct study of ancient Roman architecture), and Greek Revival, (inspired by the architecture of ancient Greece). Occasionally shopfronts were designed with gothic (pointed-arched) windows and detail, or even in more exotic styles such as Chinese or Egyptian.

The design of shopfronts also followed its own line of development in response to particular practical and aesthetic needs.

4.2 Characteristics of Classical Shopfronts

a) Classical principles of composition, proportion, detail and decoration applied throughout.
b) Shop windows of simple geometric form (flat-fronted splayed-ended, bow-fronted, flat-fronted quadrant-ended or the more universal flat or rectangular-projecting front).
c) Glazing in crown glass, initially in small panes, but increasing in size throughout the period. Larger sheets of glass produced by the improved cylinder method were introduced from the late 1820s onwards.
d) Provision of lifting external shutters to windows and shop-doors, with a shutter slot under the architrave, and a shutter recess in the shop-door.
e) Roller blinds not included as an integral part of the design.
f) Construction of the shopfront in wood (painted, grained or marbled).

4.3 The Typical Classical Shopfront Format

The typical classical shopfront format consists of a framework of vertical elements, columns or pilasters, supporting a horizontal element the entablature, with the enclosed area occupied by the window(s) and door(s). In order to maintain the geometry of this framework, the elements defining its vertical co-ordinates should align in both dimensions. Specifically the face of a column or pilaster should normally align with the fascia above, on face and return. Where there are no columns or pilasters, the door or window frames act as equivalents, but are of necessity slightly set back from the entablature in order to allow for the shutter slot.
4-4 SCHEDULE OF ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS OF CLASSICAL SHOPFRONTS

The following schedule lists and describes the most common elements of a classical shopfront, whether of architectural or astylar type. The examples given represent only a few of the many variations to be found, but include those most characteristic of Bath shopfronts. All elements vary in scale according to the scale of the shopfront as a whole. They are listed generally from the cornice downwards.

a Entablature The entablature consists of the cornice, fascia and architrave. It normally follows the plan form of the windows and doorways underneath, but may depart from this to a degree, as in the serpentine entablatures of 7 and 8 Old Bond Street. In a distinctive late 18th century form the entablature sets forward and back to define alternate convex and flat or concave projections (none existing in Bath except for the nominal projection of 7 Old Bond Street, No. 8 having been altered).

b Cornice The crowning member of the entablature. It throws off the rain and provides some protection from the sun. It forms a definite finish to the top of the shopfront, separating it visually from the upper part of the building, thus enabling the shopfront to be designed independently. 18th century cornices are usually of conventional architectural form, angled at 45°, or steeper. Regency cornices are typically much more horizontal in character. The resultant wide soffit is sometimes ornamented with one of a variety of a classical motifs (14 Abbey Churchyard).

c Fascia frieze The frieze is the middle member of the architectural entablature. It often includes additional architectural elements making it unsuitable for the addition of lettering. It was therefore simplified for shopfront use and became the fascia. Mid 18th century shopfronts of modest size usually do not have fascias as these were not required for lettering, the shop being identified by means of a hanging sign. (2, 3, 11 and 12 Queen Street).

d Architrave The lowest member of the entablature. Architecturally it gives the impression of load-bearing over the span between the columns. In shopfront design it is often reduced to nominal proportions, either set up from the lower edge of the entablature or placed there to give it definition. (7 and 8 Old Bond Street). In Greek Revival design it is sometimes omitted entirely (4 Cleveland Terrace).

e Capital The capital celebrates the transfer of load from the entablature to the column or pilaster and gives visual interest. The Tuscan and Doric capitals have a swelling cap the echinus, based on the form of a sea urchin. The Ionic is in the form of a double spiral volute. The Corinthian is made up of gracefully arranged foliage (acanthus leaves). The Composite is a combination of the Ionic and the Corinthian. In astylar design the capital is reduced to the minimum, typically consisting of a moulded cap and a plain necking above an astragal (fine half-round moulding.)
Classical Shopfronts

1 Edgar Buildings [left]

2 Upper Borough Walls [right]

3 Westgate Street [left]

18 / 19 Old Bond Street [right]

16 / 17 Old Bond Street
Classical Shopfronts

6 Old Bond Street: Sash screen behind the cornice (left)

7 Northumberland Place
Lion's head and shutter slot (right)

3 John Street: Shutter recess on door (left)

7 Northumberland Place
Detail of reeded sill and guard button (right)

The Corridor (below left)

32 Monmouth Street
Fixed door shutter (below right)
f  **Column**  The column is the archetypal classical element. It supports the entablature and defines the various compartments of the shopfront. Columns should be placed in a clear relationship with each other to demonstrate a sense of order. A typical shopfront columniation is the short, long, short rhythm of 8 Argyle Street. Columns can either be free-standing, three-quarter or semi-engaged, and may be plain or fluted.

g  **Pilaster**  A pilaster is a flattened version of a column, and is used extensively in shopfront design. It is used in a similar way to that of a column. Where columns and pilasters are used in the same sequence their capitals and other features should normally match. Late 18th century pilasters usually consist of a recessed panel between narrow mouldings. The panel is sometimes decorated with *compo* ornament (20 Walcot Buildings, London Road). Typically Regency pilasters are reeded. The reeds are either evenly spaced between square margins (7 Northumberland Place), or gathered together within a recessed panel (7 and 8 Old Bond Street). There are many variations of this theme, and more may be found by looking at domestic examples. Reeded pilasters are usually topped with a square block which is finished either with an inset turned roundel (patera) (5 Monmouth Street), or with a classical motif such as a lion's head (7 Northumberland Place), or a wreath (5 Walcot Buildings, London Road). Where pilasters frame a doorway the reeding may return across the doorhead (11 Queen Street).

A pilaster usually has a plinth block at its base. 18th century plinth blocks typically have moulded tops, but few survive (6, 7 Bath Street) due to their liability to rot, and have been replaced incorrectly. Regency plinth blocks are usually plain with minimal projection at the sides.

h  **Console**  Console brackets may be placed either under the architrave to give visual support and interest in lieu of a capital (9 and 6 Argyle Street), or under the cornice to form a definite end to the entablature.
Classical Shopfronts

11 Queen Street (left)
Detail of bay window

17 & 18 Milsom Street (right)
Corinthian Capital

11 & 12 Milsom Street 1845