

## Shopfront design sheets 1 - 6

### **2. Elements of a traditional shopfront, historical shopfront design and the shopfront window**

Informal Guidance to Support SPG3 and SPG4



## Design sheet 2: Elements of a traditional shopfront, historical shopfront design and the shopfront window

New shopfronts in historic buildings should incorporate elements of a traditional shopfront as these relate to the building which they share.

Most traditional shopfronts are composed of two parts: The shop surround and the shopscreen. The success of a shop design depends on the careful proportioning of the principal elements of both parts, i.e. the pilaster, fascia and cornice of the shop surround, and the stall riser, windows and door that make up the screen.

### Historic Shopfront Design

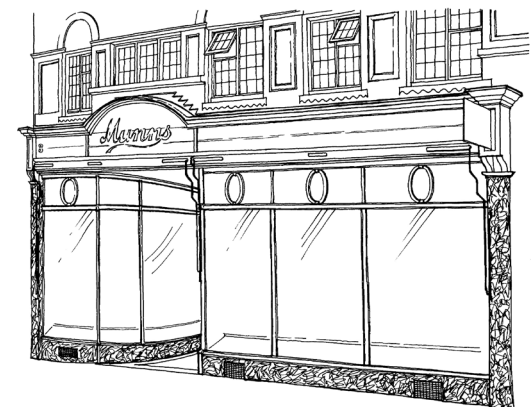
Prior to the industrial revolution retail trade took place in the market. The earliest shops were generally simply variations of the market stall. It was not until the end of the 17th century that the shop window was introduced. The shop as we know it today emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century facilitated by the greater availability of glass.

The design of shopfronts has always been influenced by fashion and the prevailing architectural style of the time. From the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century shopfronts evolved through styles broadly categorised as Georgian (1780-1840), Victorian (1830-1900) and Edwardian (1900-1920). Despite changing details, the same basic principles of design and proportion were always applied.

- A notable increase in the height, width and depth of the shopfront;
- Unbroken window panes from sill to fascia, often only vertically divided by mullions;
- A shop surround consisting of pilasters that terminate in elaborately carved console brackets;
- Deeply recessed doorways with the threshold in mosaic;



Prime examples of traditional shopfronts (public house and retail) in Gravesend town centre



- Use of a greater variety of materials, such as tiles or marble, particularly for the stallriser and shop surround.

## The Shopfront Window

The glazed part of the shopfront, the display window, needs to be in proportion with the rest of the elevation and in character with the street. Large stretches of plate glass tend to be unsuitable in historic areas as it has a disruptive and dominating effect. Windows should be divided vertically to make them taller than their width reflecting the vertical emphasis of the building above. This can be achieved by the introduction of mullions, or by placing the door centrally.

Where a business occupies more than one premises, the display windows should not expand over more than one building as this disrupts the rhythm of original property divisions in the street scene.

## Transom Lights

On taller shopfronts, the inclusion of a horizontal glazing bar (transom) may be appropriate. The space behind transom lights can be used as the location for roller grille boxes where these cannot be incorporated in the design otherwise (see Supplementary Planning Guidance 4 -[Security measures for shopfronts and commercial premises](#) and Design sheet 6 Security).

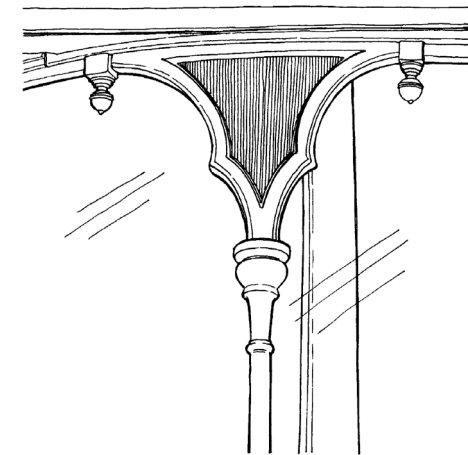
## Mullions

Mullions can be used to break up large areas of glass to give the shopfront visually a vertical emphasis. They can be reinforced and adapted to hold plate, toughened and laminated glass. Subdividing the window by mullions also limits the amount of glazing to be replaced in case of breakage.

Mullions should be positioned in a way that reflects the rhythm of openings and structural masonry of the buildings above. Traditionally, mullions were not rectangular in section, but moulded. Where a traditional shopfront design is proposed tapered, lambs-tongue or rounded sections are preferred as these give a more slender appearance and subtle shadow lines.



The use of transom lights on taller shopfronts may be appropriate



Mullions break up large areas of glass and give the shopfront a vertical emphasis