Shopfronts

OF COUNTY CORK

A DESIGN GUIDE FOR THE HISTORIC SETTING

Shopfronts of County Cork
A Design Guide for the Historic Setting

by John Hegarty

This guide book aims to identify the significance of the historic shopfronts
of County Cork and the benefit of establishing the distinctive character
of historic examples to the wider community and economic interests.
Recommendations are made for repair and reinstatement of
shopfronts in the historic setting.

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council

Cork
County Council
Comhairle Contae Chorcaí

Shopfronts

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Shopfront A:
Small window panes, shutters held in with steel bar. Very slender pilasters and delicate lintel and architrave (sign). Ovolo cornice (Doric order). Late 18th to early 19th century.

Shopfront B:
Robust detail generally. Solid pilasters (columns), ogee cornice, large glass panes and robust mullions. Mid to late 19th century

Shopfront C:
Slender columns, larger panes than Shopfront A. Simple cornice, architrave and frieze/lintel (sign). Early 19th century.

Shopfront D:
Large area of glazing, fine detail, detailed fanlight above door (as per furniture). Early 19th century.

Shopfront E:
Robust detail. Mid to late 19th century.

FIGURE 1
Shopfronts on Market Street, Bandon. c.1900
Image from the Lawrence Collection.

Foreword

A MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR OF THE COUNTY OF CORK AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF CORK COUNTY COUNCIL.

The shopfronts of County Cork are unique representations of the skills of past generations. They form a special part of the distinctive character of our county. Studying the history of our shopfronts can help us to maintain and reinforce the unique qualities that they give to our towns and villages.

Here the Heritage Unit presents a historical background to shopfronts with drawings and images, helping to explain this specific part of our built environment. We hope that through this book they may establish a greater understanding and appreciation of shopfronts in the county. We hope the history and illustrations presented here will form a valuable resource for shopfront owners and designers, and for historical research. We commend all those involved in producing this detailed publication.

Cllr. Declan Hurley,
Mayor of the
County of Cork

Tim Lucey,
Chief Executive,
Cork County Council .

Contents

"The benefits of investing in heritage for livability, job creation, and local economic development have been increasingly studied and debated over the last few decades…"

A conserved historic core can differentiate that place from competing locations—branding it nationally and internationally, thus helping to attract investment and talented people.

"Heritage anchors people to their roots, builds self-esteem and restores dignity."

- from 'Economics of Uniqueness: Investing in Historic City Cores and Cultural Heritage Assets for Sustainable Development' (The World Bank)

Introduction

Ireland & the New Architecture

Irish architecture was revolutionised to a modern simple aesthetic in the 18th century. Clean lines were combined with Classical proportion and detail. The change was far reaching. Irish towns and cities began to represent a built form of the philosophy of the new Age of Enlightenment that was sweeping across Europe. This was the 'Irish Age of Reason' in architecture and formed the greatest part of the distinctive built heritage of our country. It was a period of growth and optimism, brought about by peace and trade. In the period between 1750 and 1840, the population more than doubled from three million to eight million people. Serious problems in Ireland which led to famine, population decline and a lack of industrialisation in many parts meant that the architecture of the period was greatly preserved until late in the 20th century.

In the growth period, economy of thought and ingenious consideration of design produced great beauty effortlessly. The examination of any one element of this architecture clearly demonstrates the Spartan simplicity and practicality of the age.

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FIGURE 2
A student on a ladder measuring the Corinthian order of the Temple of Jupiter Stator, Rome. Image courtesy of Sir John Soane's Museum, London.

FIGURE 3
A green harp flag, used to represent Ireland at various times during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.

The Distinctive Identity of Irish Architecture

In Irish towns and villages the form of buildings was plain but for the necessary expression of doorways or shop fronts. There were practical rules for the construction of buildings where windows were vertical and glass panes were as large as could be manufactured at the time. Doorways and shopfronts were of highly detailed joinery. Shopfronts became the visual expression of commerce in every town and village.

Craftsmen began to automatically create the complex joinery required for shopfronts, referring to pattern books created by the architects of the day. Nothing was wasted. Timber was scarce and often imported and thus nothing was oversized.

The Emergence of the Shopfront in History

In Ireland as in European settlements in general, any buildings of a more public function had a significantly different expression in terms of scale or material character to the general rows of houses. The first manifestation of this separate expression was in the temple or church and then, here in our towns, in the market house whose expression is always of a significantly different form and scale. In the market house we see commerce beginning to reveal itself in architectural expression. As commerce moved to individual producers and merchants the shopfront became the next expression of design separation. In the beginning the shopfront would stand alone in its expression within streets of rows of houses. Over time however many shopfronts were introduced to the more successful towns and villages and each one sat beside the next, competing for attention. Many houses developed more and more complex and light shopfronts until the ground floors of the most successful towns each contained shopfronts, one after the other and all designed to attract for the sale and display of ever more sophisticated goods.

> *"Any of the cornices in this book may be used to the shop fronts. Divide the height here figured into as many parts as figured in the cornice you make use of and dispose them to the moulding in height and projection as figured."*

(A note from a drawing in the pattern book,'The Practical House Carpenter' (1792) by William Pain).

FIGURE 4
A mid to late eighteenth century shopfront in Kinsale with shell spandrel motif to the windows.
Image from the Lawrence Collection.

FIGURE 5
A late eighteenth century dresser with pilasters and similar spandrel motif.
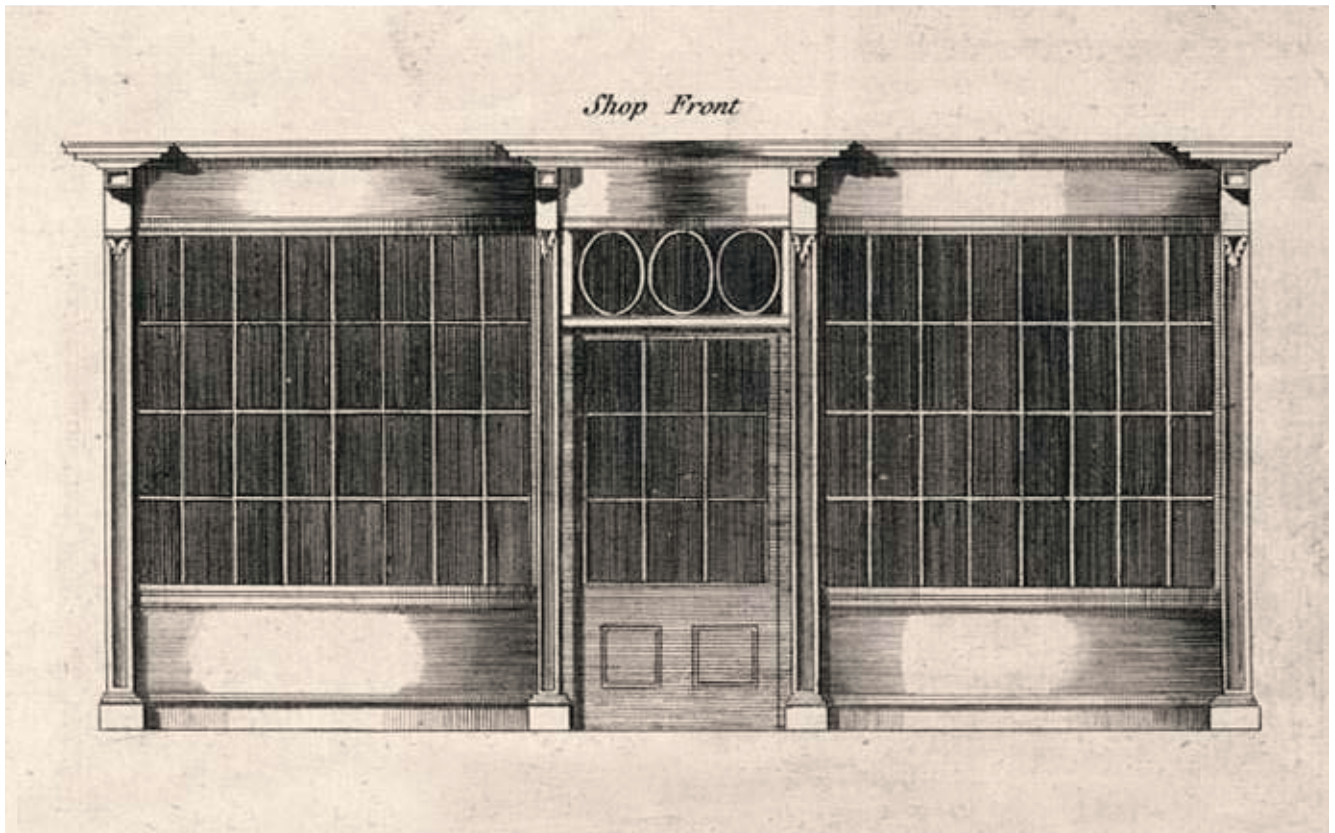Image courtesy of Claudia Kinmonth.

FIGURE 6
Shopfront design from pattern book, The Practical House Carpenter - William Pain (1792). Deilcate pilasters, narrow frieze or lintel (signage), very small glass panes with delicate curved facade.

FIGURE 7
A scene from an Irish household, c.1828, displaying many items of household joinery and furniture.
John G. Mulvany

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The Architectural Expression of Shopfronts

In the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries people travelled to the birthplace of Classicism in Greek and Italian states to examine Classical detail and proportion. Classical language was then reinterpreted for use in the new expression of Irish architecture. Classicism based on symmetry and specific detail became the architectural language of a modern, progressive Ireland. The country took this design ethic on board with great enthusiasm in the latter 18th century as greater peace reigned.

The examination of any one element of architecture of the time clearly demonstrates the practicality of the age and the scholarly interpretation of Classical detail. As there is little comparatively built in the late Victorian Age, the 18th and early 19th century, Classical simplicity in Ireland forms the distinctive character of the country that we know and love and are known for throughout the world.

The architecture of this period is concerned with proportion, simple forms and minimal fine detailing. Economy of construction and of design are a way of thinking for the time. No other country embraced this new age of simplicity in architecture as Ireland did. The design and tradition of the shopfronts of County Cork represent a microcosm of this golden age in architecture in their pared simplicity and intricate, reference to Classical detail and proportion.

Pattern Books, Joinery & the Spread of Classicism

In 18th century Ireland, pattern books for joiners were used as reference to accurate Classical detail and as explanation on how to interpret Classical detail for local design application. Pattern books were particularly created for and referenced by joinery shops and displayed different solutions for shopfront design. In Ireland, extensive building at this time meant that tens of thousands of shopfronts were constructed in the period from 1700 to 1840 under a system that developed refinement and deep consideration of Classical detail. Joinery techniques became highly sophisticated. Apprenticeship of architects and joiners was central to the refinement of these ideas. The professions maintained their own standards and techniques.

Regional Distinctiveness in Cork Shopfronts

In the shopfronts of County Cork, the elements of column, lintel and cornice are all variations on the form of the most accurate interpretation of the Classical orders. The complex joinery that is a shopfront was conceived and constructed in as fine and considerate a manner as any great piece of 18th or 19th century Irish furniture and contained refined devices to fulfil a complex and evolved design relating to the display and sale of goods. No other country embraced this Classical modernism as holistically as Ireland did and no other county did so as enthusiastically as County Cork.

FIGURE 8
A shopfront in Fermoy (photograph c. 1990) based on a Classical temple of the Ionic order. The windows, cornice, signage and door have been altered over time, but the ionic columns and overall form of the original shopfront remain.

FIGURE 9
A shopfront in Mitchelstown.

FIGURE 10
A shopfront in Bandon.
Image from the Lawrence Collection.

In County Cork, the character and design of shopfronts varies from town to town. This creates a rich diversity of language and a distinctive identity to each place. Variations occurred as different areas were more or less prosperous than others. Regional joinery shops produced localised designs from pattern books, but adapted them to meet the specific social and cultural needs of their area. Sometimes they promoted their own philosophy and skill in craftsmanship and design, which was enough to create a distinctive local aesthetic.

Kildorrery in North Cork has elaborate shopfronts with console brackets that rise through the cornice, which may reflect the design devices of a local joinery shop. Castletownroche has slender shopfronts with dentils to the cornices from an early tradition partly based on scarcity of timber. Mallow, Charleville and Doneraile had plain, elegant, boxy shopfronts that protrude into the street. Youghal & Cobh had many ornate shopfronts with highly decorative console brackets reflecting the availability of better resources in the prosperity of the late 19th century.

As one moves further into West Cork, detail to shopfronts becomes a little more robust than the coastal examples found in Kinsale, for example, but they are still accurately based on the Classical temple.

FIGURE 11
A streetscape in Bandon, Co. Cork, c.1900.
Image from the Lawrence Collection.

Shopfront Timeline
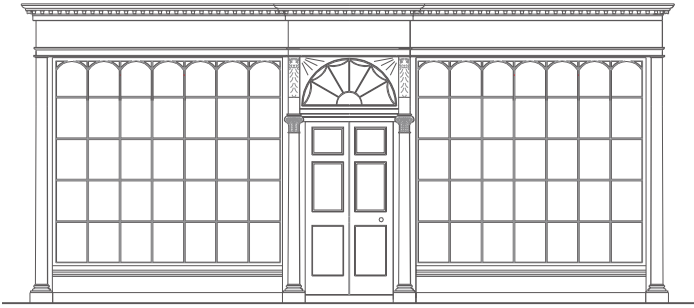
A
Oliver Plunkett Street, Cork
Early to mid 18th century

B
Oliver Plunkett Street, Bandon
Early to mid 18th century

LEARY   CUMMINS.

E
South Main Street, Bandon
Late 18th century

H
Main Street, Innishannon
Early 19th century

17

I
North Main Street, Youghal
Mid 19th century

Irish population 3 million

1769 - Cork Committee of Merchants founded

1782 - Free trade granted between Ireland and England, followed by economic boom

1798 - Rebellion

Irish population 5 million

1801 - Act of Union

1803 - Robert Emmet Rebellion

Shipbuilding, brewing, distilling, tanning and the butter trade flourish in Cork harbour during this time.

A   B   C   D   E   F   G

1750   1800
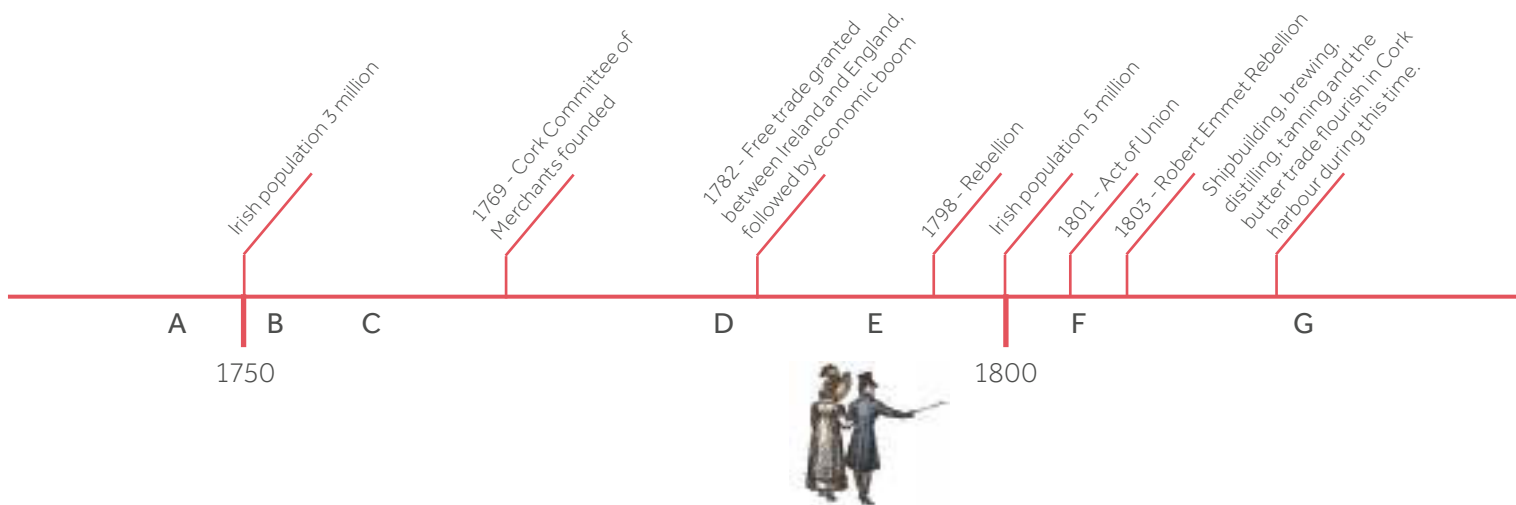
C
Main Street, Castletownroche
Mid 18th century

D
King Street, Mitchelstown
Late 18th century
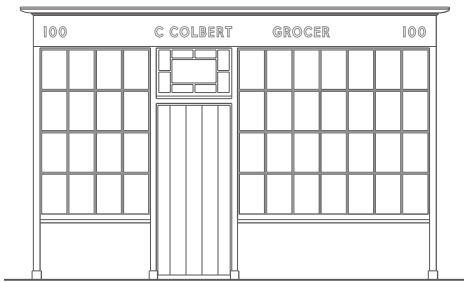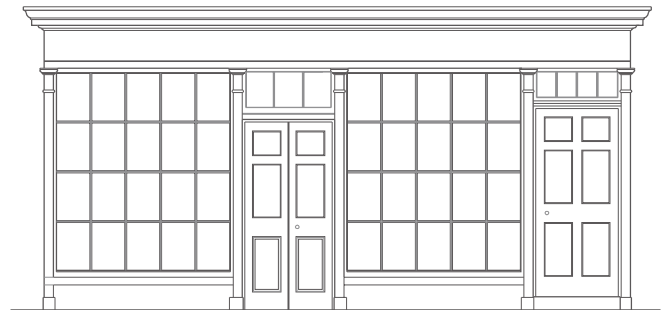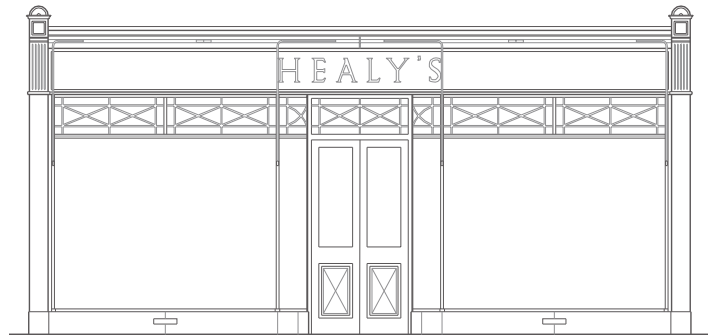

100   C COLBERT   GROCER   100

F
North Main Street, Youghal
Late 18th century

G
Main Street, Mallow
Early 19th century

ROPE & SAILMAKER   MILLER   SHIP BREAD STORE
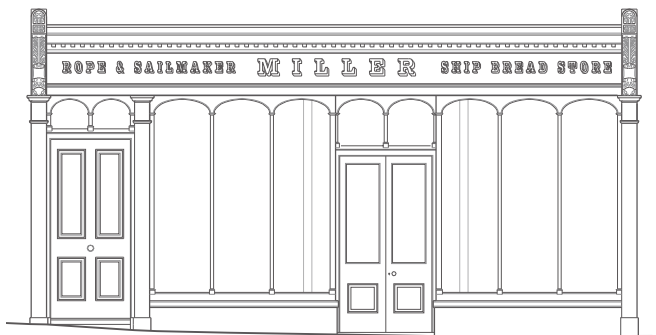
J
Harbour Hill, Cobh
Late 19th century

HEALY'S

K
Percival Street, Kanturk
Early 20th century

1829 - Catholic Emancipation

Irish population 8 million

1845-1849 - The Great Famine

1849 - Arrival of Railway
Dublin-Cork main line and Cork
& Bandon Railway opened

1852 - National Exhibition
held in Cork

Irish population 7 million

1880 - Cork Butter Market is
the largest in the world

1883 - Cork Industrial
Exhibition

Irish population 4.5 million

1902-1903 - Cork
International Exhibition

H   I   J   K

1850   1900

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Shopfront Elements & Architecture

plain lettering without serifs

architrave

fanlight

pilaster or engaged column

recessed panel

flush panel

stone plinth or base

cornice

frieze or fascia

capital

glazing bar
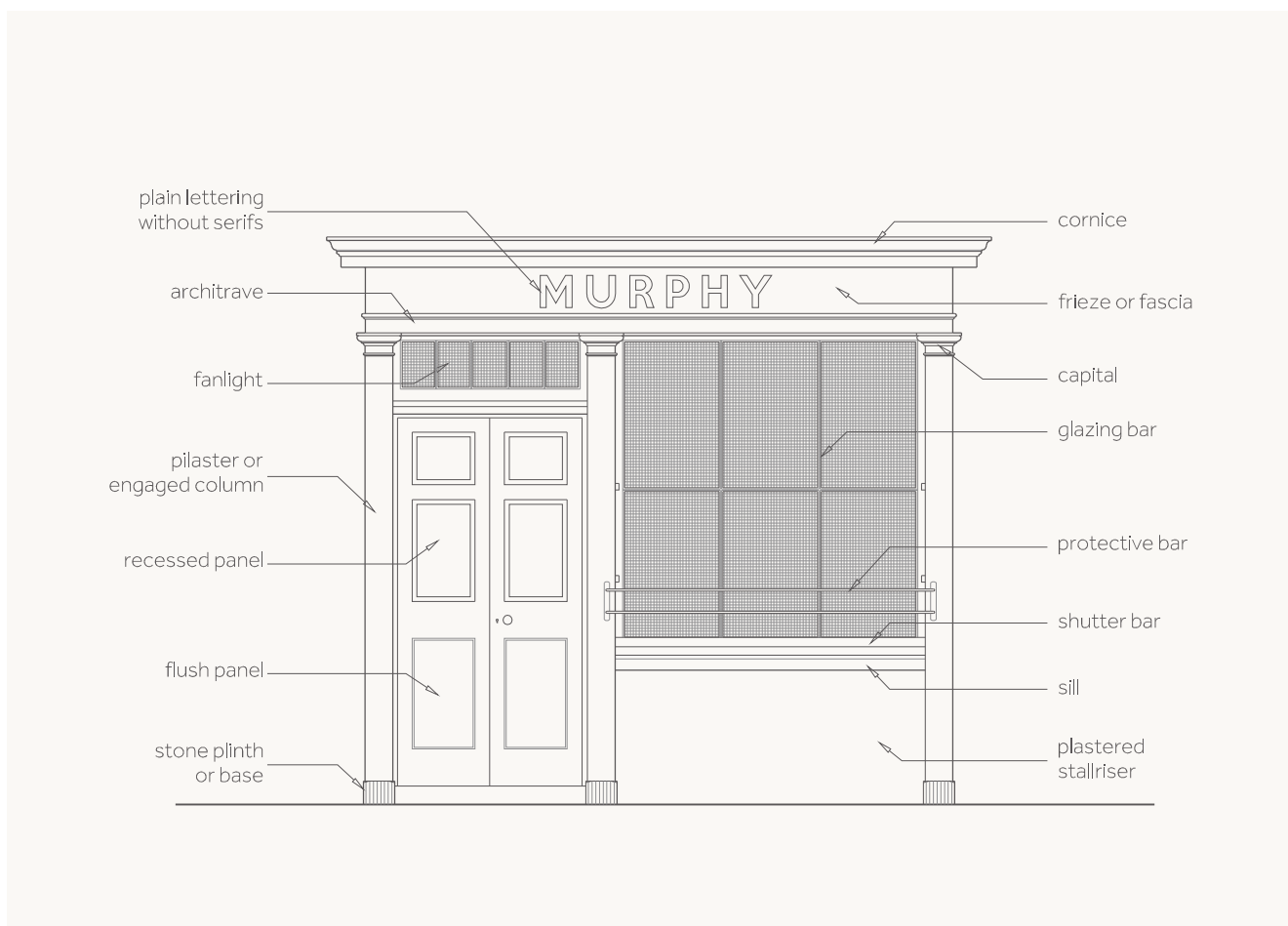
protective bar

shutter bar

sill

plastered stallriser

MURPHY

A typical early to mid 19th century shopfront based on an original from Innishannon, Co. Cork.

Three simple, Doric style pilasters with a Classical lintel (signage) and with cornice above to add a weather-protecting overhang. The doors are narrow to save space and a pair allows larger objects in and out. The lower panels are deliberately flush, making them stronger and sturdier. Glazing is large to the display window but small above the door where expense was spared. Signage is located on the Classical lintel or frieze (fascia) which is presented as resting on the three pilasters in the manner of a simple Classical temple. The Classical detail matched that found in the Classical interiors of the time. The shopfront was an expression of the function to display goods and attract custom. Detail came from pattern books and was strictly reproduced based on antique Roman and Greek buildings.

lettering with serifs & shadows

awning box

cornice

console bracket or scroll

architrave

frieze or fascia

fanlight

mullion

pilaster with recessed panel

glazing bar

glazed panel

protective bar

sill

stone plinth or base

stallriser with plaster panel

14 BRODERICK 14

A typical late 19th century shopfront based on an original from Cobh, Co. Cork.

The strict Classical rules for detail and proportion were relaxed in the 19th Century to accommodate a more relaxed style. Carved console brackets were introduced above pilasters either side of the signage. Recessed panels were introduced to pilasters. Panels were introduced to stallrisers. In many places in the County, glazing mullions were stylised and arched timber framing was created above glazing panels. Awnings within a box were accommodated above signage and between console brackets. Generally, the period represented an increase in detail and a reduction in strict adherence to Classicism reflecting architectural trends of the time.

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The Setting of a Shopfront

Streets & Public Space

The streets of any city, town or village are formed by the buildings that line them and overlook them. This is a hard and fast rule for successful space. Buildings are the enclosing walls of our streets and we perceive the street as the space between building facades. This is clearly demonstrated in the Lawrence Collection photographs of the 19th century. In general the rules of successful town or village design have changed little since those invented by the ancient Greek and Roman civilisations and were well appreciated by those building in County Cork in the 18th and 19th century.

In Ireland, the main facades of the buildings face onto streets and public space. Doors, windows, and shopfronts face the public space and allow for entrance to the streets and overlooking of the public space by the building occupants. This overlooking means that the streets are relatively safe when the buildings are occupied.

Setting

The setting of a shopfront includes all the surrounding area of the building and landscaping contained within a view of the shopfront. A limited material palette and minimalistic detailing determines the general quality of the setting of the Irish shopfront. Natural materials of stone and flag define the paved landscape. A limited palette of materials, simple signage and an uncluttered facade is part of an Irish town or village character.

Recommendations

There are some few material and detail changes that have greatly affected the character and authenticity of the setting of towns and villages throughout Ireland. The timber roof overhang was introduced to Ireland in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1980s a version of the overhang was introduced in PVC plastic and it has been added to the edges of historic roofs throughout the country since. Looking at the Lawrence Collection images or even photographs up to the 1980s, we see the minimal character of towns and villages retained with no boxed overhangs visible at roof and eaves level.

Elements that generally cause visual disturbance and alteration to the specific and distinctive character of our historic places are: manufactured timber or pvc doors, extruded downpipes and gutters, manufactured timber or pvc windows and modern or manufactured materials used for paving in historic settings. Manufactured slates and stone cladding may also greatly alter the material quality and detail of a setting. In general, historic building techniques, detailing and materials sit better in the historic environment.

FIGURE 14
Flag street paving with white imestone kerb, local to County Cork.

FIGURE 15
Stone paving re-laid in original pattern.

FIGURE 16
A typical shopfront on the ground floor of a house in an Irish town; a traditional eaves detail showing the simple, plain arrangement of slate, gutter and wall; and a timber doorcase typical of many streetscapes in County Cork.
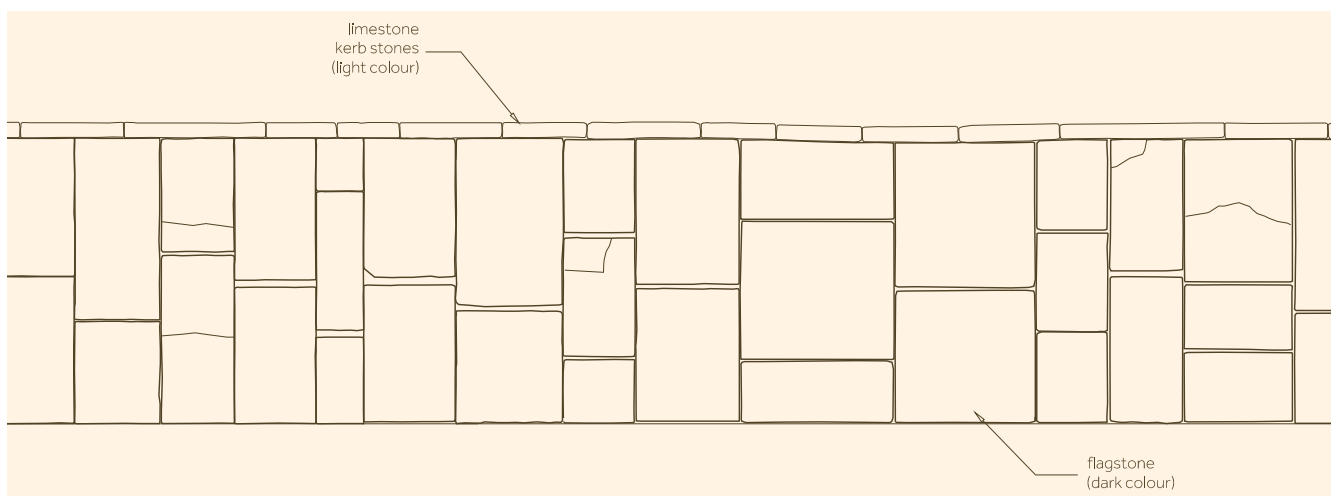

limestone
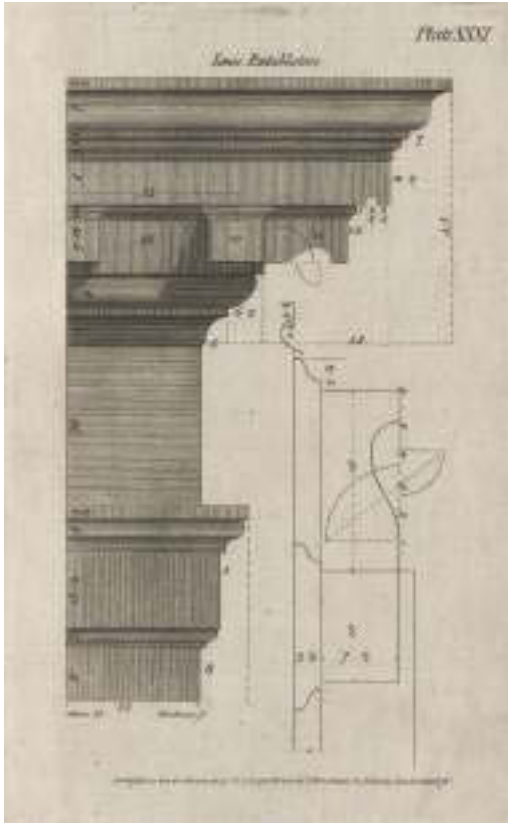kerb stones
(light colour)

flagstone
(dark colour)

FIGURE 17
A historic flagstone footpath.

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Materials

In the late 18th century Irish city or town, buildings were of simple form and practical in every manner. In construction the best of all available technology was used to create practical but well proportioned and detailed buildings. If resources existed, fine embellishment was reserved for deliberate and functional locations like doorways and shopfronts. Every element contained a high level of practicality and economy almost unseen today.

Joinery

Irish timber joinery evolved over time into a high art, culminating in the late 18th and early 19th century. Hundreds of years of knowledge, relating to design and craftsmanship were honed into a highly sophisticated craft. A good joiner understood optimum sizes for joinery panels, mullions and frames, joints and expansion. Nothing was wasted or oversized. The performance of different timbers were understood and applied to appropriate use. Elements were designed in Classical forms for strength and for the grading of light and sharpness of form. Not all right-angled joints were fully mitred, especially in delicate timber elements. Beading, grooves and frames all had deliberate application. Classical forms were well understood and were applied from study and experience. The best craftsmen developed this language further with each generation.

Cast Iron

Late 19th century shopfronts were characterised by corbelled or scrolled console brackets, framing the signage from either end above the pilasters and a large window display. The creation of the large window was facilitated by the availability of cast iron columns for structural purposes. Together with new glass technology, cast iron columns revolutionised the size of openings that could be created in shopfronts. Decorative detail was also sometimes applied to shopfronts in cast iron.

FIGURE 19
A late 19th century, highly decorative, raised console bracket and cornice on a shopfront in Kildorrery, Co. Cork.

FIGURE 18
A pattern book design detailing the entablature in the Ionic order from 'The Builder's Golden Rule' (1782) by William Pain.

Plastered & Tiled Shopfronts

In the late 19th century fired and glazed clay tiles became popular for shopfronts, in particular in larger towns and cities. Glazed ceramic tiles were formed into complete pilasters and often reflected a more mannerist, even gothic or vernacular tradition. Some of the designs referenced an earlier style from the late 17th Century and others had medieval, Romanesque and even Art Nouveau references loosely based on the Arts and Crafts movement of the late 19th century.

In the same period and into the 20th century, moulded plaster shopfronts were made using techniques created for cornices, architraves and pediments on facades and around windows of 19th century buildings. These shopfronts were hardwearing and those that were made have lasted well. The technique limited the use of fine detail and sat directly on the wall surface so was limited in its expression.

Modern Materials

Traditionally, shopfronts were made of painted timber, an ideal material for replicating intricate Classical detailing. If properly primed and painted, timber can be extremely durable. Other materials, such as bronze, cast iron, marble and stone have also been used in shopfront construction, particularly in the 20th century.

There are a number of modern sheet materials whose smooth, shiny and flat surface can make them sit uneasily on historic buildings. Highly-polished stone, stainless steel, aluminium, plastic, acrylic, mirrored panels, and poor-quality flat-faced timber panels are unlikely to find approval on Protected Structures or buildings within an Architectural Conservation Area.

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FIGURE20
A plastered shopfront and signage, with cast iron column behind to allow for a continuous, larger pane of glass.

Glazing

History of Glass Production

The process of creating discs of glass existed since Roman times but was perfected in the 17th century. It was originally known as Normandy glass but became known as 'Crown Glass' following a crown stamp that was applied for identification. The best glass was cut from the large flat areas of the disc produced. The glass may be identified as it has a curvature visible on inspection as well as imperfect bubbles within.

In the mid 19th century, a new process was developed in France which allowed long cylinders to be created. The glass was still imperfect in that it was textured and with bubbles but did not show curved lines. The glass allowed for a fashion of glazed shopfronts with a quarter cylinder pane often at the entrance, which lightened the appearance of the shopfront and increased display area.

In 1916 a process of drawing and hanging a flat sheet of glass was developed in France and concurrently in the US. Cast plate glass also developed from the 18th century which involved an imperfect sheet of glass that was flattened on sand, then ground and polished into a perfect form. This was a costly process and mainly used in cabinets and later in early cars but not windows generally. Modern float glass took over the market from the 1950s onwards.

Windows

The earliest shopfronts had small panes of glass set up in a grid. They were orientated vertically to reflect the human form and the vertical shape of standard window openings.

As larger panes of glass became more widely available, newer shopfronts were built with larger panes of glass, however older shopfronts were very often upgraded by the owners to larger pane sizes. Sometimes, console brackets or new doors were added to existing shopfronts but the basic pilaster, signage and cornice would typically remain. Historic shopfronts often contain a progression of additions to earlier designs. Larger glazing panes were often the first and sometimes the only addition.

Recommendations

Generally shopfront windows should be divided with mullions. It is not intended to obscure goods, but only to give proportion to existing surrounds. Clear film may give a laminate surface to existing glazing if required for safety. This may be important if historic glass is to be retained.

FIGUR 21
A late 18th century projecting shopfront with small glazing panes and very slim pilasters.
Image from the Lawrence Collection.

FIGURE 22
An early to mid 19th century shopfront with large glazing panes and wider pilasters of delicate detail.
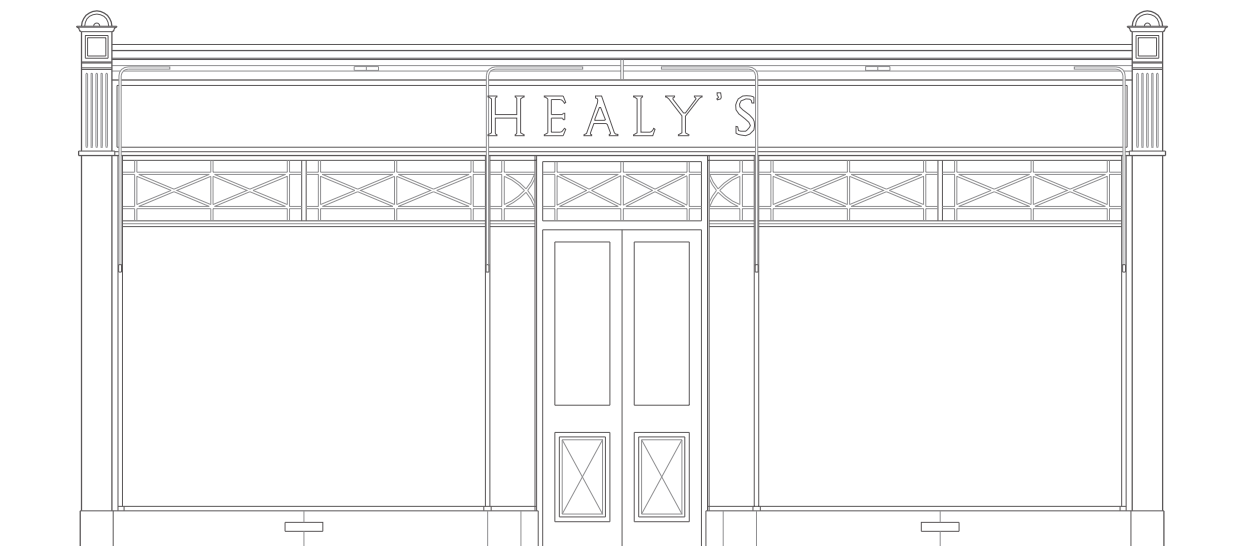
FIGURE 23
Vertical glazing to a mid 19th century shopfront with curved top and very slender mullions. Horizontal glazing bars may have been removed and cill lowered in late 19th century.
Image courtesy of Trevor Finnegan.

FIGURE 24
OLIVER PLUNKETT STREET, CORK (historic reconstruction)
Very finely detailed 18th century shopfront. Fine Classical detail from a pattern book and symmetry define this early shopfront. Very fine composite columns and console brackets below the lintel (signage) express the importance of the entrance door. The glazing is of small panes, as larger panes could not be economically produced at the time.

FIGURE 25
PERCIVAL STREET, KANTURK (historic reconstruction)
An early 20th century shopfront from Kanturk references an early Georgian style in the console brackets. An awning is fully integrated and glazing is large to the display and continues in a curve into the entrance doors as was now possible technologically. The lightness and modernity is integrated to the Classicism with smaller window panes and intricate metalwork above the large display. The design includes raised panels to the door and an early concrete stallriser.

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FIGURE 26
Closed shutters on a nineteenth century
shopfront in Youghal, Co. Cork, c.1890.
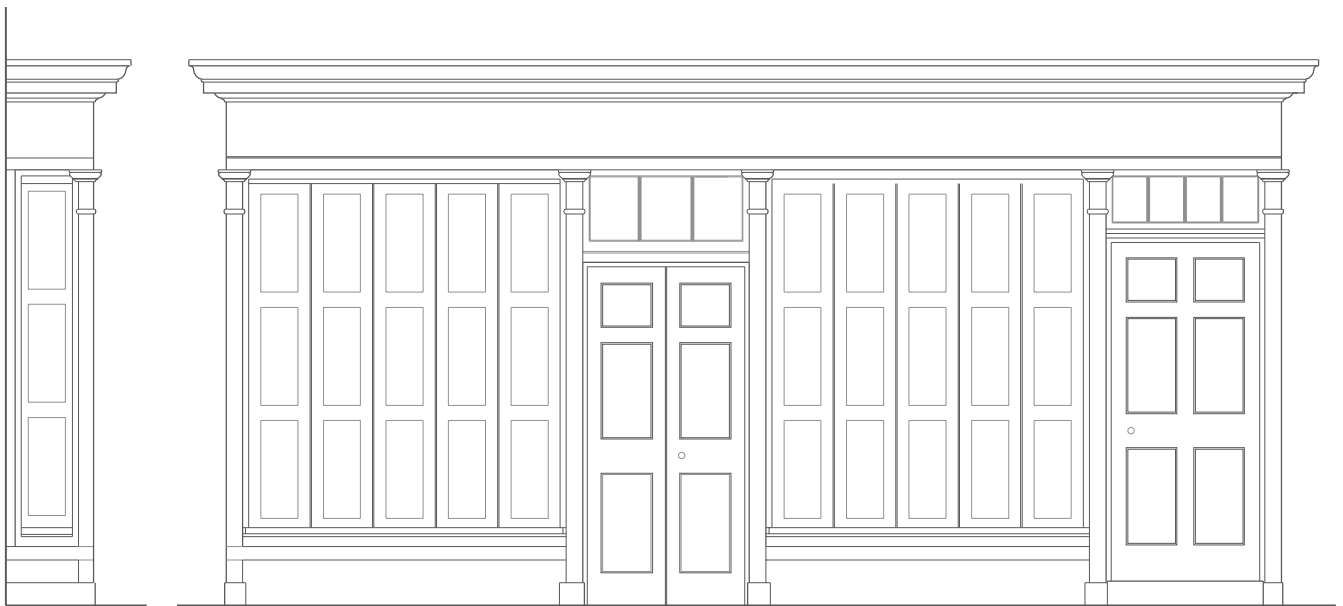Image from the Lawrence Collection.

FIGURE 27
'Maureen's Bar', an early nineteenth century
shopfront in Buttevant, displaying traditional colour and
lettering.

FIGURE 28
Green was a popular colour for shopfront joinery as it
was economic to make, fashionable and sympathetic to
a rural environment.

Shutters

In the late 18th century and 19th century timber shutters predominated in use on shopfronts as a means of protection when shops were closed. They were made in separate vertical-panelled timber frames. Each panel was slotted together one by one in front of windows and held in place by steel bars and clips. This meant that the display of goods was limited to working hours. As time progressed into the late 19th century they became less often used as greater peace and policing prevailed. This coincided with the ever greater openness of shopfronts facilitated also by glass technology and the introduction of cast iron columns as support.

Recommendations

External security roller shutters hung from a box housed over the signage of any shop front detracts considerably from the character of that shopfront. Security shutters if necessary can be placed inside display windows and can be open grille. Where a shop retains its own removable metal grill or timber-panelled shutters these are preferable in the environment of an historic place, shopfront, Architectural Conservation Area or Protected Structure.

Colour

Paint colours in the Classical period were more limited than those available today and it was not until the mid to late 20th century that all colours on all surfaces became available. The limited availability in the 18th and 19th centuries was due to the rarity of some pigments. This created the simple palette employed in Irish architecture. The character of the colours available on shopfronts forms an integral part of the distinctive character of the specifically Irish town or village.

A Limited Palette

In the 18th and early 19th century strong pigments were not generally available. Hues of the earth from yellow ochre and umber were readily available. White was used generally and with little exception on external walls which may also have been left as unpainted plaster, or in the case of public buildings as unpainted cut stone, slate hanging or brickwork. Many whites were of light cream in appearance as oil and fat was used in the production of paint. Charcoal was added to whites to freshen the colour to a more light grey appearance to counteract the colour of the sizing agent.

Historic reconstruction without shutters.

Historic reconstruction with shutters in place.

FIGURE 29
MAIN STREET, MALLOW
The images show an early 19th century shopfront before and after the placement of timber panelled security shutters. The shutters were constructed in timber panels, much like those used internally around windows. They were fully integrated into the shop design and were used predominantly in the refined Classical shopfronts of the late 18th century and early 19th century.
The drawings from Main Street in Mallow show the delicacy of pilasters and detail with plain expression combined with symmetry and informed proportion, epitomising the County Cork shopfront

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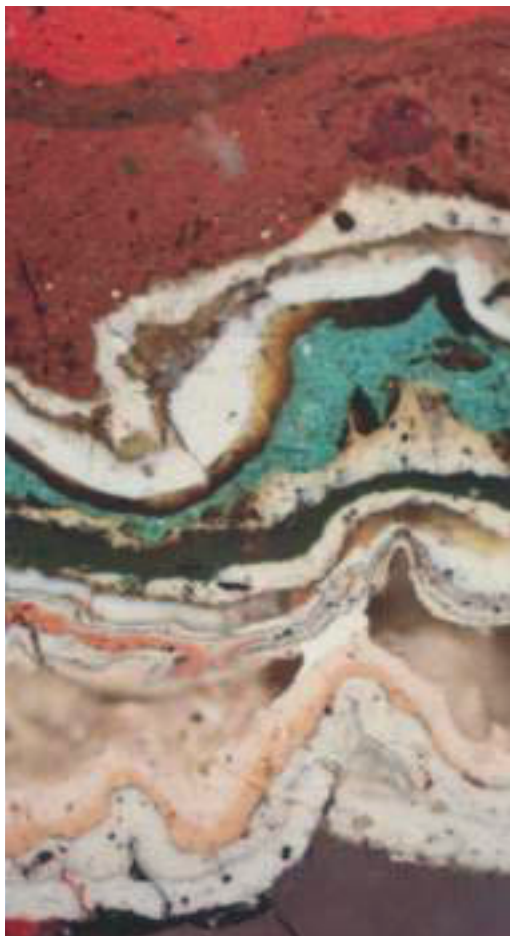
31

For oil paints discolouration could be overpowering to a pigment and generally more grey or muted colours were more easily available. While blue could be made in the later 19th century it would always be a little grey and could not be as vibrant as we might now expect. In the 18th century muddy colours of greens and browns predominated. By the early 19th century pale colours became more widely used but almost all in a lightly muted form. Strong black was an expensive colour to produce and considered for mourning. It became popular in the industrialised period of the later 19th century in polluted areas and through Victorian fashion. It predominated in England rather than in Ireland.

The colour green was significantly used in Ireland. Green continued as an Irish tradition long after it became less used in other countries (red was adopted in Britain from the early 20th century for civic use). In the later 19th century more colours began to be introduced, yet the palette still did not include deep blues.

The graining of timber elements like doors and windows both internally and externally was popular in the 19th century. Great effort was made to make softwoods look like oak, mahogany or walnut.

It is worth considering that the aesthetics of the period can be extremely surprising and have been studied through drawings and paint analysis. The decoration of painted Irish furniture contains a valuable source of indication of colour for shopfronts.

Recommendations

Shopfront colours always worked to emulate the colour of some natural material. Often copied were timber hues and the colours of local stones which varied between light grey, pale grey greens, strong brown green and deep red. All the browns and beige colours are represented by timber and stone. Pale grey blues to dark greens are represented by the patination of bronze and copper in the domes and doorways of Classical architecture. Creating colours based on natural materials sat well with the availability of colour pigments in the 18th and 19th centuries. Dark greys and charcoals exist in nature but never a pure black, red, yellow or blue as seen in the primary colours of today. Strong or primary greens, blues or very powdery colours without a grey base are not based on natural pigments and can look out of place in the historic environment.

Pale colours for shopfronts were usually of a grey origin and became lighter in the period from the 18th to the 19th century.

The colours of the patina of copper and bronze (various greens and dark browns) were used for ironwork in the 19th and 20th century as well as off-whites and greys.

Paint colours would not have been of high gloss finish. Historically, particles in paint would have prevented this. Less shine creates a more forgiving surface.

FIGURE 30
Grey brown and other stoney colours were frequently used on shopfronts throughout Ireland. This is a modern, urban example appropriate to any shopfront.

FIGURE 31
Paint sample analysis is a useful process that can be undertaken in order to reveal the history of paints used on an historic shopfront.

Traditional Signage & Advertising

Traditionally signs were of painted lettering and generally denoted the family name of the shop owner. The lettering was painted by a local sign writer who may have had a particular style that defined an area in a distinctive way. Lettering was usually with serifs (serifs are the small vertical and horizontal lines that contain and embellish simple lettering). In addition, shadowing was often applied to lettering to create added emphasis. Many family names remained through generations on shopfronts even though the premises had changed hands. Signs made of applied manufactured letters or glass-fronted, rebated letters were also used in the late 19th century.

Hanging or projecting signs were not a feature of the Irish townscape. They had been used in the late 18th century in cities and larger towns but were regarded badly by municipal authorities and removed over time due to the visual obstruction and the danger they posed if they dropped on passers by. They are not seen in the Lawrence Collection photographs from the turn of the 20th century. Projecting signs obscure the signage of front facing signs and often unfairly disadvantage surrounding businesses. Generally, in county towns and villages, signage was confined to the shopfront face only.

In the late 19th century elaborate advertising relating to products and lists of products could sometimes be found, hand painted to building facades in urban areas. Signage was also found within shopfront displays behind glass, in particular on walls within the display (perpendicular to the facade) or on removable boards. Sparsely painted lettering was also placed directly onto window glass from the interior.

Recommendations

In the modern environment of the towns and villages of County Cork, excessive signage can cause great confusion with no one trader being fairly represented. Simple front facing shop signage allows all to have a fair or equal opportunity for commercial advertising.

Sign writing should be applied directly to the fascia. The script should consist of individual raised lettering or ideally be hand painted. The height of the script should be proportionate. Plastic signs and or pre-finished boards should not be used.

The need for hanging signs should be carefully considered, as they add clutter to a streetscape and can greatly reduce the effectiveness of shopfront signage and can block the signs of others. With this in mind the following should be observed:

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Hanging signs should be discouraged. If necessary, and without obscuring the signage of other shopfronts they should be made traditionally and without modern lighting or materials.

Internally illuminated signage shall not be permitted to protected structures or in Architectural Conservation Areas and is discouraged in any historic areas.

Corporate signage, logos, branding and colour schemes may be used in a redesigned and/or simplified form to ensure they are sensitive to and enhance the character of historic areas.

Shop windows should have clear glass and not be obscured with advertising boards, or opaque, frosted or tinted coverings. Lettering or logos should not be affixed directly to the glazing, unless with reference to a historic precedent.

Where a business or practice requires a level of privacy and does not wish to have a full view into the property, carefully considered high quality and innovative display areas to the windows should be adopted, that allow for an element of privacy but do not entirely obscure the shopfront windows.

Sign displays inside the shop should be kept back from the glazing and are recommended not to exceed one quarter of the area of the window through which the advertisements are exhibited.

Awnings & Blinds

Traditional awnings had wrought and cast iron arms and frame supporting a robust fabric. They could be retracted into a timber box, often placed above the shopfront sign. Awnings were integrated into the design of late 19th century shopfront signage. They primarily protected goods and produce from excessive sunlight or light rain. Modern day awnings often tend to be oversized, which impacts on the character of the streetscape. Historically awnings or blinds were used in shops to protect fresh produce or goods, but would not have been applied to every shop.

Recommendations

Modern versions of awnings and blinds are often unnecessary and tend to be overly substantial in size and of inappropriate materials. These units may result in increased visual clutter within a streetscape and obstruct architectural details of shopfronts and buildings to which they are adhered. Such elements should only be used in specific cases where necessary. Specific and bespoke design, size and material specifications would be required for awnings within an Architectural Conservation Area or on an historic structure.

FIGURE 34
Simple painted lettering to the frieze of a shopfront. Image courtesy of Trevor Finnegan.

FIGURE 35
A simple, modern shopfront awning.

FIGURE 36
Historic shopfronts may often be lit from within to great effect.

Utilities / Services

The requirement for CCTV and alarm boxes can arise in certain instances on building facades. These need to be carefully located on the shopfront and consideration should be given to the size and colour of units. Wiring should always be concealed.

Satellite dishes, heating and ventilation systems should not be placed on the front or street elevation of a building. They should generally not be placed on a Protected Structure or building within an Architectural Conservation Area or within historic areas where they may diminish the area for other property owners.

Lighting

Lighting of shopfronts was primarily from within to display goods within the windows or to mark the entrance door to a shop. Doors were often glazed and at night, light from within proclaimed the presence of the shop and goods for sale.

Small identifying lettering may have been applied to windows and this was enough to identify a shop at night.

Recommendations

Lighting should be maintained within the shop front or flush with the wall surface. Signage should not be of an internally lit type. Multiple projecting lanterns or other lamps over the sign of a shop front should be avoided as they detract from the unity of the streetscape. The clutter of large external lighting for signs is unnecessary and invisible lighting may be sparsely placed under cornicing to light signage if necessary.

Ideally lighting should be provided for inside shop windows. Overhanging bulk head lights, trough and strip lighting are not appropriate. Excessive lighting in any one property in the historic environment detracts from the calm of the existing business signage and presence and may be unfair to other businesses.

Historic reconstruction, (original facade) c.1740

Condition in 2013. Facade altered by the addition of fibreboard shopfront surrounds, PVC windows, roof overhang, wiring and light fittings. This building is now almost unrecognisable as an historic structure.

FIGURE 37
MAIN STREET, INNISHANNON

Shopfront & Facade Study

This house began life in the early 18th century in the silk and linen producing village of Innishannon. It forms part of a pair whose Classical expression is distinctly simple but robust and of Continental design origin as the reconstructed drawing shows. The current facade has had many introduced elements of PVC windows and roof windows, low-quality timber shop surrounds, cables and signage. The new elements do not display an understanding of Classical precedent or reference to historic pattern books and may disguise the real beauty of the building and reduce the retail potential. The house is part of a pair and the adjoining house is almost completely as it was constructed originally, showing that perceived improvements may not always be beneficial. A suggested study in the third image shows how a shopfront and roof lights could be added to such a building to maintain current function but respect its own origin and neighbour within the setting of the village.
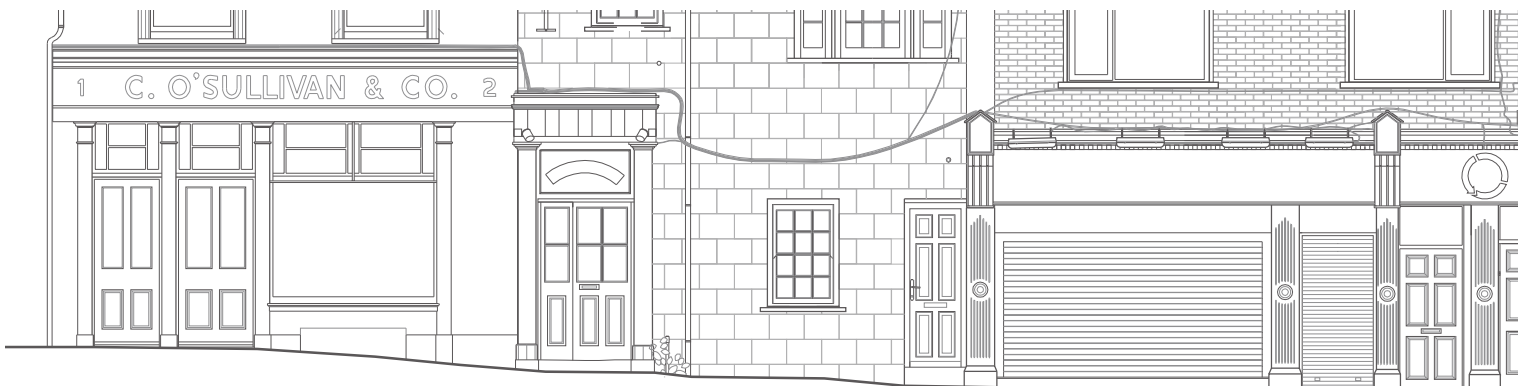
An alternative proposal for quiet restoration and new addition to incorporate shopfronts and reinstate 18th century building character, while maintaining the character of the 18th century building.

Historic reconstruction, c.1916

Condition in 2009.

Condition in 2016

Streetscape Study

These drawings illustrate 100 years of incremental changes to Coburg Street in Cork. The terrace, including three shopfronts and a large Greek Doric doorcase, has lost its detail progressively over time in the carrying out of perceived improvements. The doorcase was removed in 2014 in perceived facade upgrading. What is significant is that the most attractive element of the streetscape today is the shop named 'C. O'Sullivan & Co', which is almost entirely unchanged.
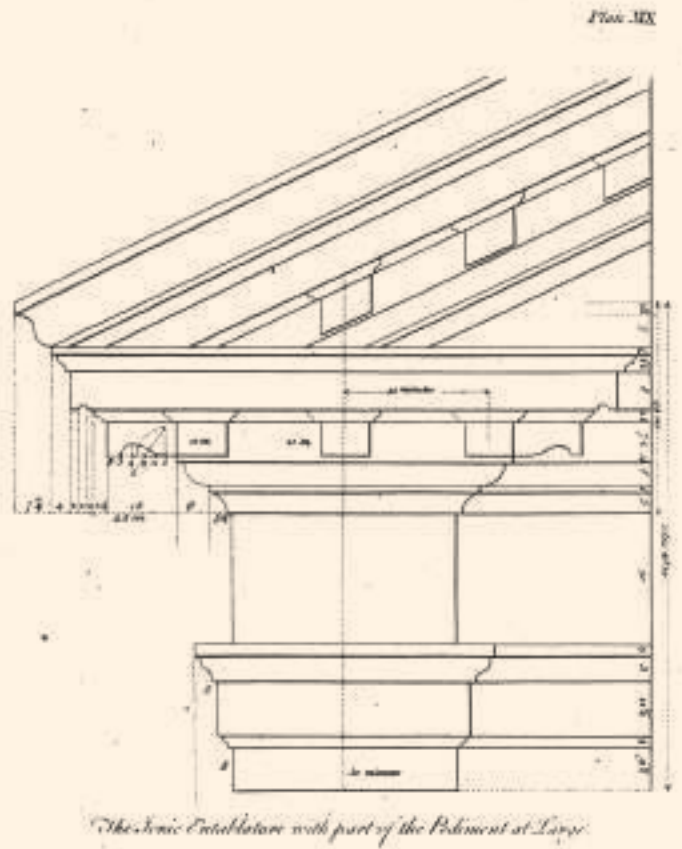
The incremental changes as can be seen, have significantly degraded the overall quality and character of the streetscape as a whole and effected other property in the street negatively.
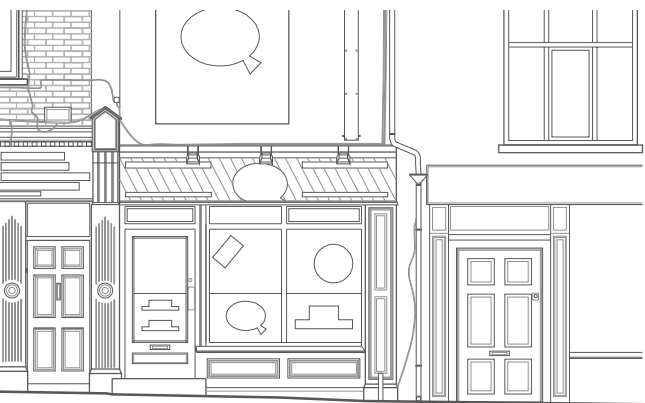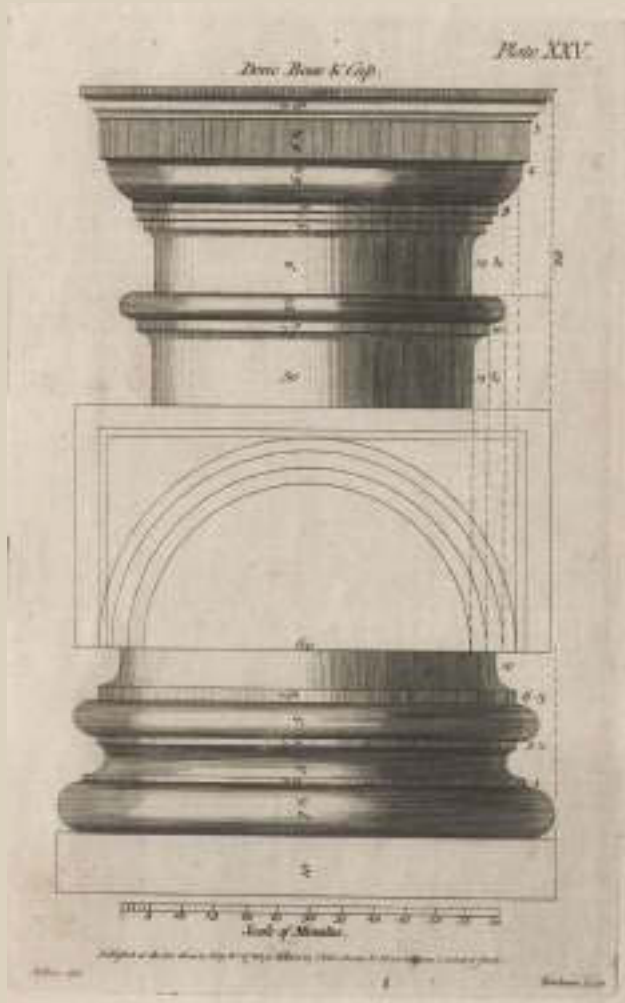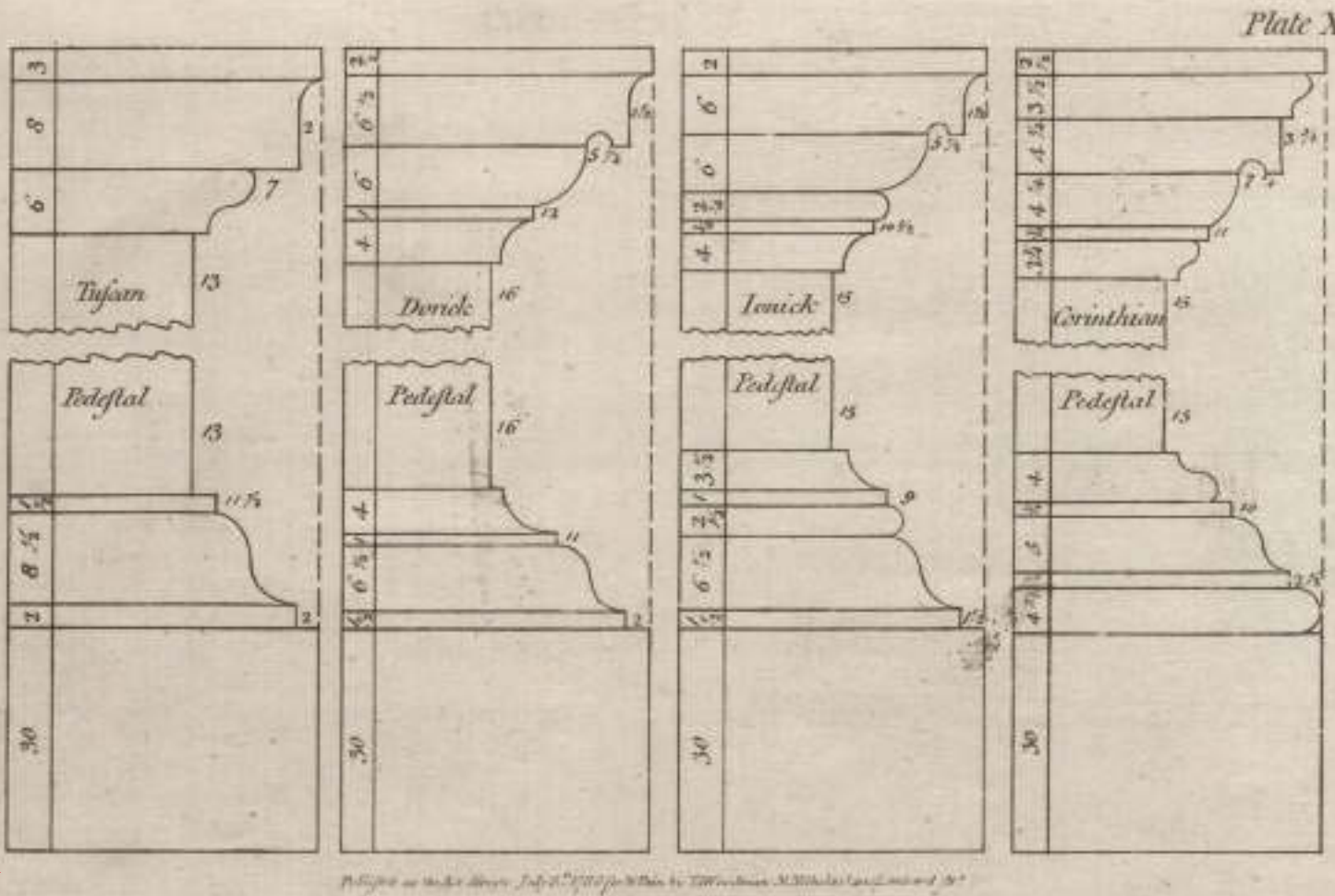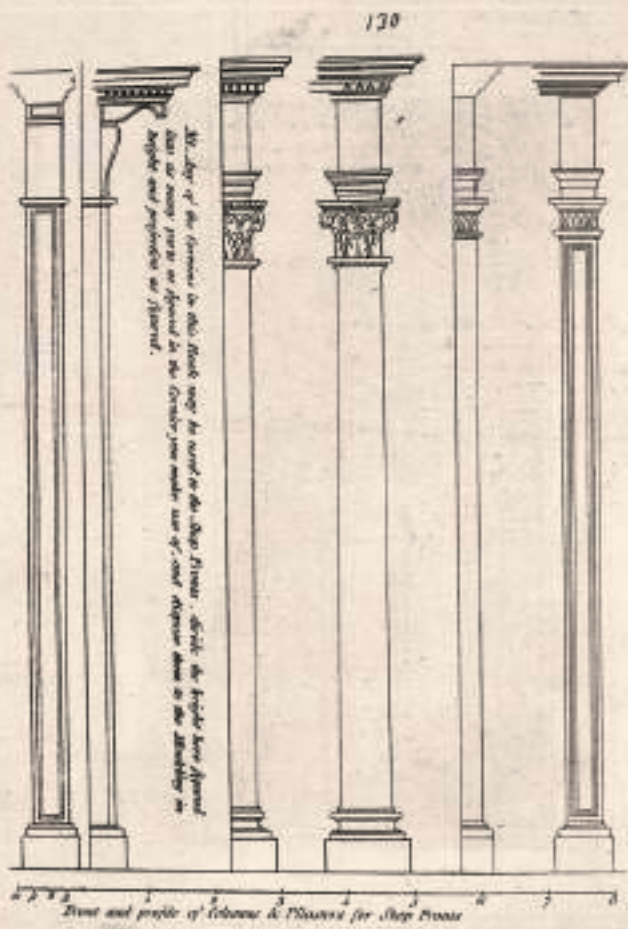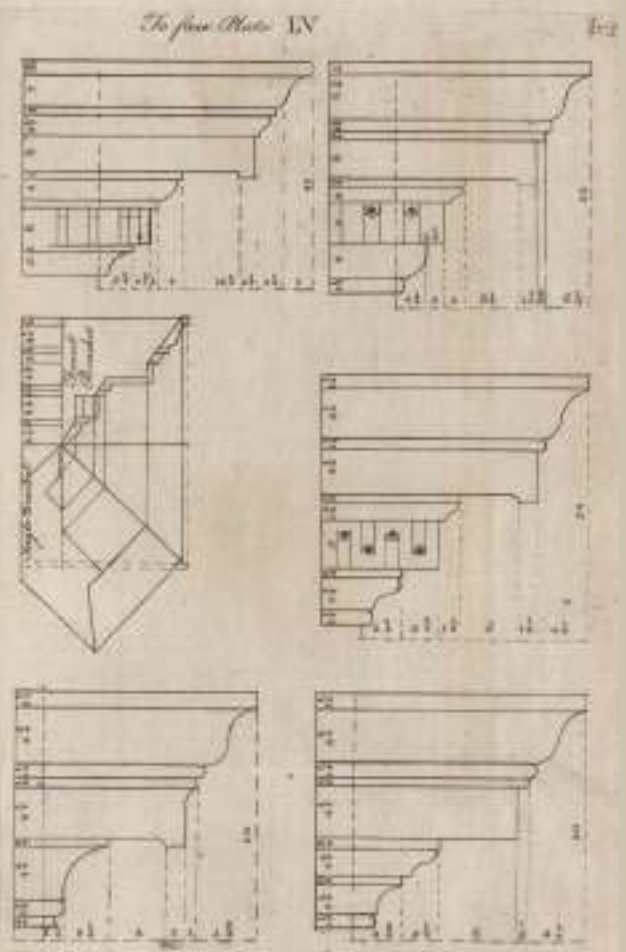
FIGURE 39
Detail of a Roman Doric column base and capital from 'The Builder's Golden Rule' (1782) by William Pain. This is a plain version of the fluted, Greek Doric order.

FIGURE 40
Entablature and pediment detail in Roman Ionic order, showing projecting dentils and seen in some early shopfronts. From 'The Practical Builder' (1789) by William Pain.
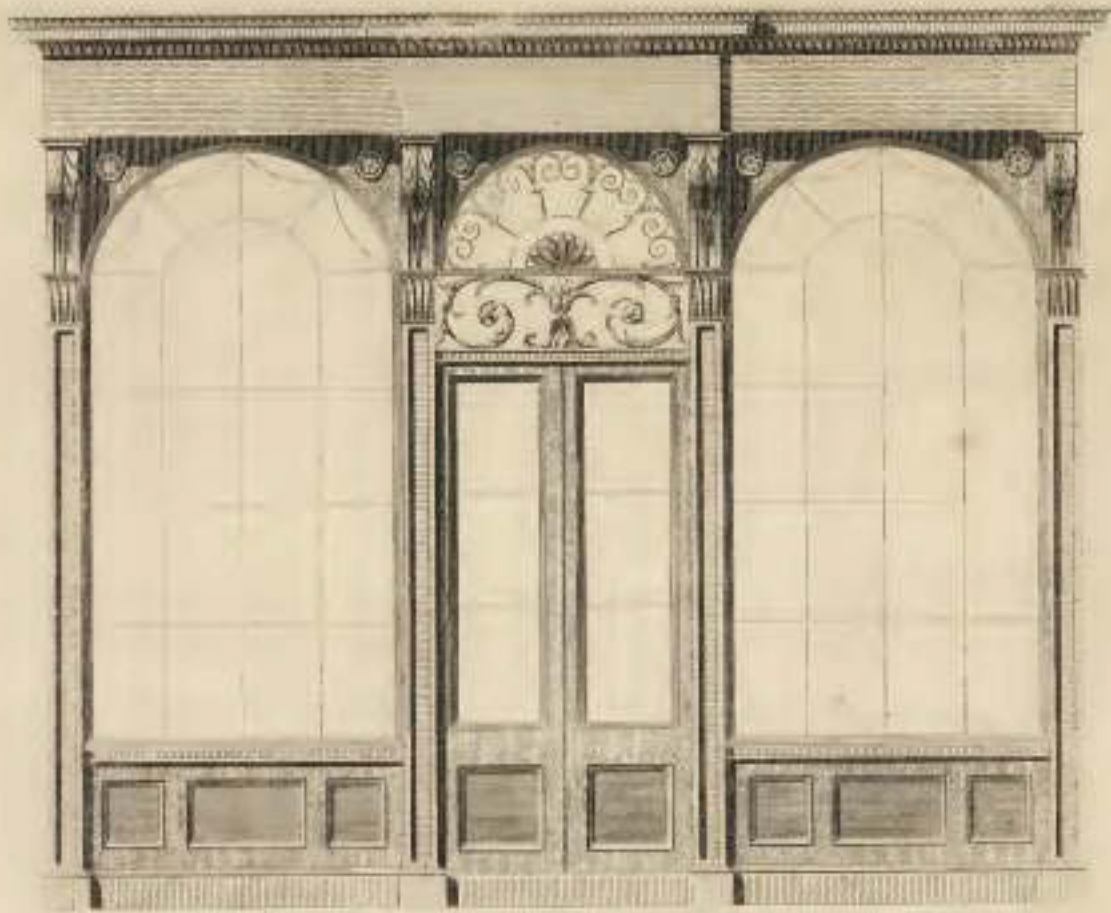
FIGURE 41
Pedestal details of four Roman Classical orders from 'The Builder's Golden Rule' (1782). Tuscan, Doric, Ionic and Corinthian.

FIGURE 42
Pilaster designs from pattern book, 'The Practical House Carpenter' (1792) by William Pain, specifically illustrated for shopfronts.

FIGURE 43
Cornice details from pattern book, 'The Builder's Golden Rule' (1782). Usually used above the frieze (signage).

FIGURE 44
Shopfront design from pattern book, 'Designs for Shop Fronts and Door Cases' by I & J Taylor. Delicate pilasters, narrow frieze (signage), very small panes of glass with delicate carved detail above the door.

Historic Photographs

Historic photographs can be a great source of information showing shopfronts of different times and also the specific details applied to certain regions in the county. These regional differences were often based on economics, local joinery shops and local business distinctiveness. Images may be referenced to different places in the County and display the distinctive character of each place. The images also display the distinctive and significant quality and character of Irish Classical joinery in shopfronts of the 18th and 19th centuries. As the images are from the late 19th century they show shopfronts from the previous hundred and fifty years.

FIGURE 45
MAIN STREET - MILLSTREET
Very plain signage system of a panel for lettering not based on the Classical design principles. Mid and late 19th century.
Image from the Lawrence Collection.

FIGURE 46
QUAY LANE, YOUGHAL
Late 18th century and very early 19th century small shopfronts to plain, delicate, Classical detail. The signage is minimal.
Image from the Lawrence Collection.

FIGURE 47
NORTH MAIN STREET, YOUGHAL
Foreground: Projecting shopfront of small panes and delicate pilasters with delicate projecting ovolo cornice. Unique glazing above doorway. Late 18th century.
Middle: mid to late 19th century, highly detailed signage with elaborate mannerist console brackets. Vertical glazing and delicate curved-top between elaborate mullions.
Image from the Lawrence Collection.

FIGURE 48
SOUTH MAIN STREET - BANDON
Foreground: late 18th century shopfront based on the Greek Doric order. Architrave and lintel (signage) to Classical detail. Signage is handpainted.
Image from the Lawrence Collection.

FIGURE 49
MAIN STREET, MALLOW
Foreground: projecting shopfront; glazing is low to ground with robust detail and slender pilasters. Mid 19th century shopfront with late 19th century glazing. Projecting shopfronts of this type are distinctive to North Cork (Mallow and Charleville in particular).
Third from front: late 19th century signage with corbels and elaborate curved corbel heads on blocks. Chamfered / Gothic corners to pilasters.
Image from the Lawrence Collection.

FIGURE 50
MAIN STREET, KINSALE
Foreground: curved shopfront with extremely delicate pilasters and curved fanlight in mannerist pattern. Mid to late 18th century.
Background: mid to late 19th century shopfront of double pilasters with late 19th century glazing beside older, mid 18th century doorcase.
Right: late 18th century shopfront with projecting panel at entrance above door. Very fine detail.
Image from the Lawrence Collection.

FIGURE 51
MAIN STREET, CHARLEVILLE
Foreground: shopfronts projecting into walkway with slim pilasters. Late 19th century. Notably, signage is of individual letters.
Image from the Lawrence Collection.

FIGURE 52
BRIDGE PLACE, BANDON
Mid 19th century shopfronts with larger glazing and characteristic narrow, tall mullions with intricate column heads to glazing mullions. Note early, tall shopfront without console brackets to left of image.
Image from the Lawrence Collection.

FIGURE 53
SOUTH MAIN STREET, BANDON
Early to Mid 19th century shopfronts with large, vertical glazing (replaced to larger, planar glass in the centre shop). Console brackets may have been added in the late 19th century except to the shopfront to the right of the gas lamp. Note the very slender pillasters generally.
Image from the Lawrence Collection.

FIGURE 54
NORTH MAIN STREET, YOUGHAL
Shutter panels to shopfronts were held in place with iron bars. The glazing here is very low to the ground and particularly high towards the right of the image. Early 19th century shopfronts; the taller shop to the right hand side may be later, or have added console brackets.
Image from the Lawrence Collection.

FIGURE 55
NORTH MAIN STREET, YOUGHAL
Late 19th century shopfront with applied serif lettering. Characteristics include elaborate pilaster reeding and panelling, fine detail to door pilasters, large panes of glass, four-panel doors, curved-top to glazing, Irish romanesque glazing pillars and the use of cast iron internal columns to allow for a larger opening to the street .
Image from the Lawrence Collection.

BUTLERSTOWN, CO. CORK, 2016
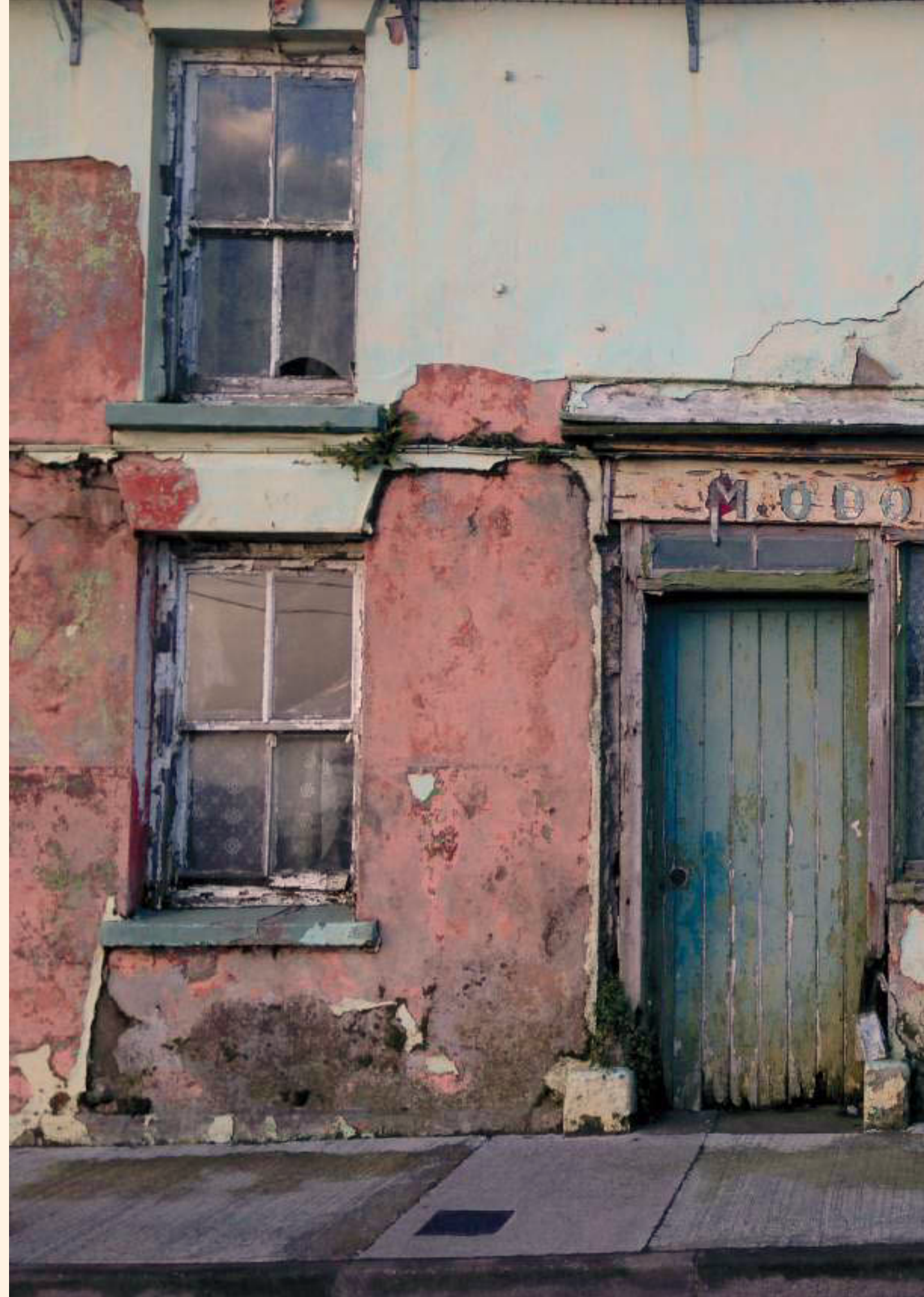
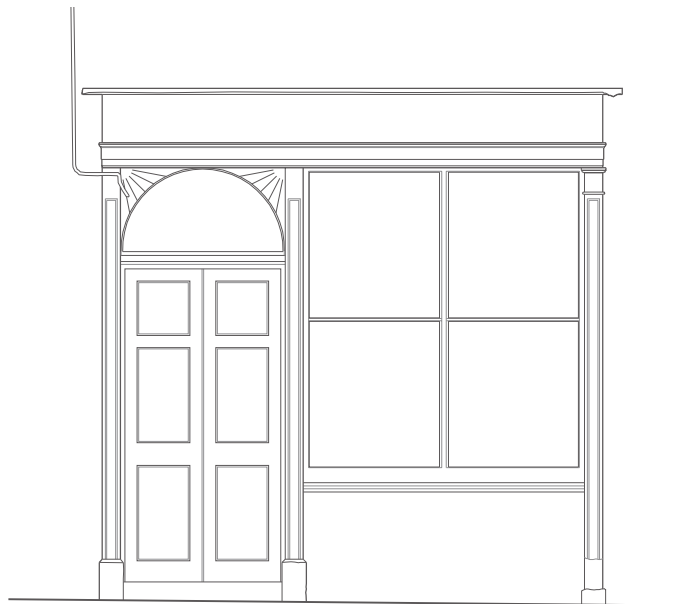# Comparative Studies

Historic reconstruction, c.1750

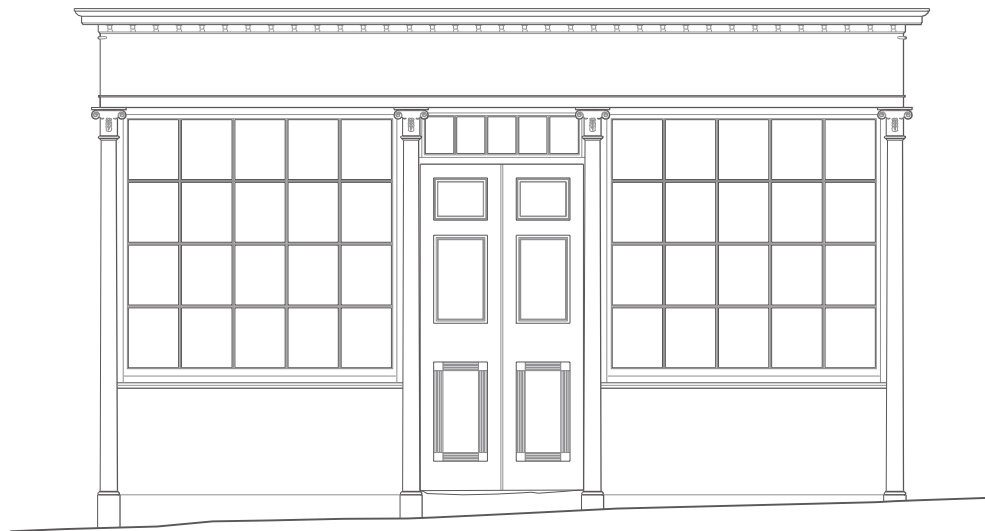Condition , c.1990

OLIVER PLUNKETT STREET, BANDON
Delicate Classical detailing and high quality joinery with curved glazing and delicate glazing bars, typical of mid Georgian period.

Historic reconstruction, c.1760
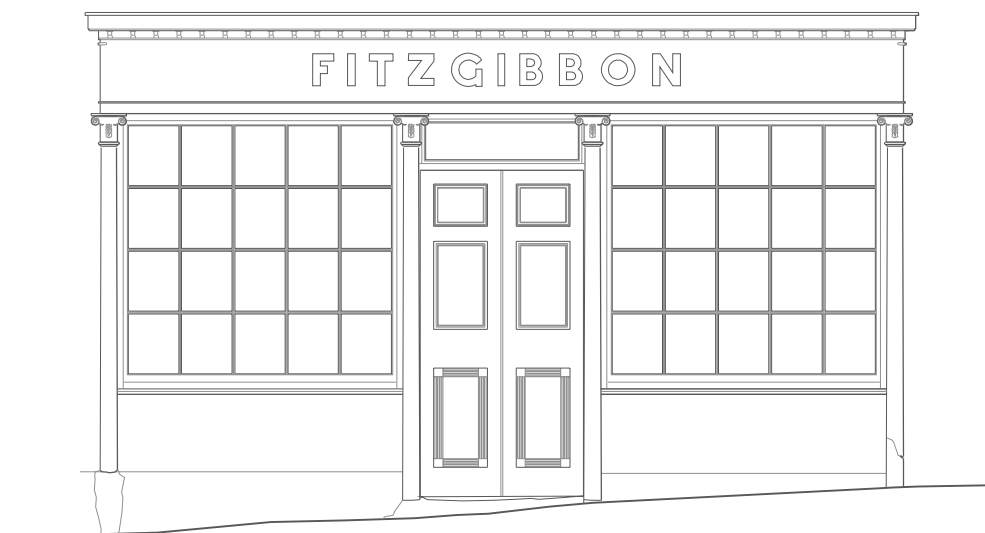
FITZGIBBON

Condition, c.1990

Historic reconstruction, c.1790

Condition in 2016

FIGURE 58

SOUTH MAIN STREET, BANDON

Closely referenced Greek Doric detail with seven engaged columns supporting a large lintel and cornice. The expense of panes of glass necessitated the use of smaller panes above the doors but these have been ingeniously set into a Classical pattern by the joiner to emphasise the points of entrance. The lower panels of the doors are flush with the frame for strength. The repair and restoration of such a shopfront could act as a demonstration project and increase civic awareness throughout the County.

Historic reconstruction c. 1790

Condition in 2016

FIGURE 59
KING STREET, MITCHELSTOWN
Shopfront in Greek Ionic order with five plain engaged columns supporting a lintel and cornice for signage. The complete Classical shopfront with long panel doors and glazing between the columns. Late 19th century doors replaced the originals and small pane glazing was removed.

Historic reconstruction, c.1840

Condition in 2013

FIGURE 60

MAIN STREET, INNISHANNON

Altered simple historic shopfront of mid 19th century. The doors originally may have accessed a shop unit and private household separately to create a strong symmetry. Classical signage was supported by brads and without pilasters. Door openings and window c.1800 with doors replaced in late 19th century. Current shop surround below in 2013 in generic format and materials and inappropriate strip lighting.

Historic reconstruction c. 1850

Condition in 2016

FIGURE 61

NORTH MAIN STREET, YOUGHAL

Original shopfront from mid 19th century in Classical style with early Victorian mannerism in the closing of the signage with projection above the outer pilasters and cover above the door. A spectacular shopfront. The shopfront in its current condition has a less accurate Classical reference in terms of proportion and detail. The joinery is much more crude than in the original. In such circumstances and for much less investment, this shopfront could have been repaired.
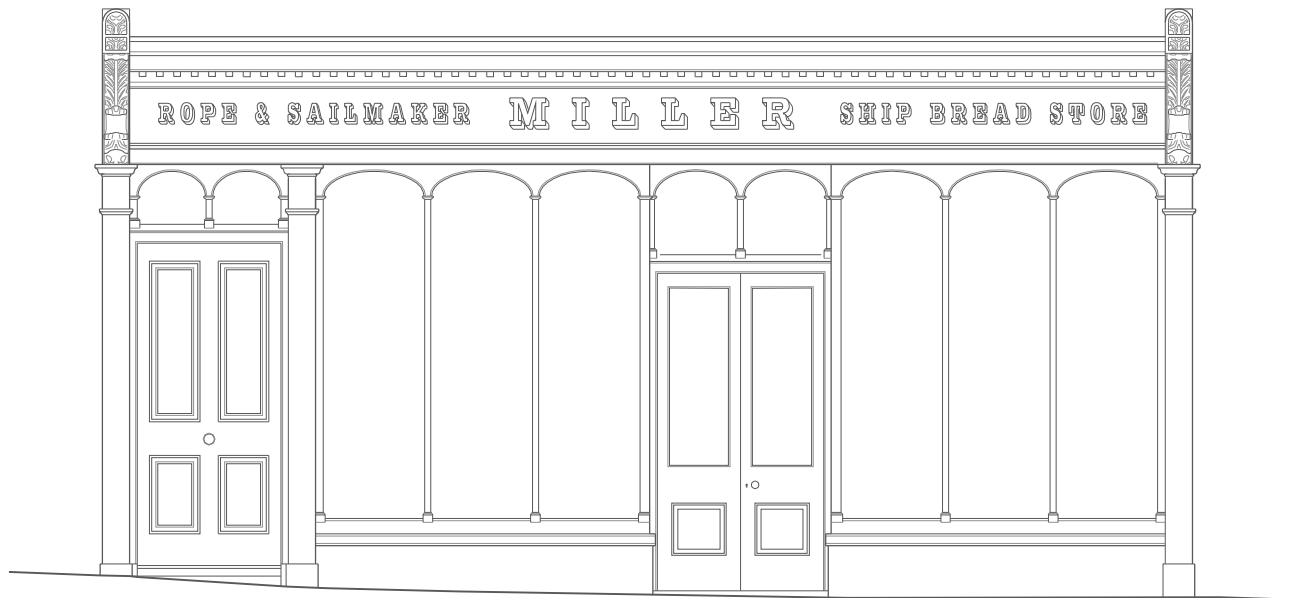
Historic reconstruction c. 1880

Condition in 2016

FIGURE 62
HARBOUR HILL, COBH
Late 19th century shopfront in Cobh with almost no reference to the original remaining. In the classical ideal, window mullions were not placed in the centre of an opening as this is the natural place to stand. The current form of the shopfront speaks well of the misunderstanding of design and conservation in current times. The original shopfront may have been lost as it is positioned on an elevated site.

A robust, Classical, mid 19th
century shopfront.

A delicate, early 19th century shopfront with curved facade. The glazing has been renewed to reduce the number of small panes of glass.

A late 19th century shopfront of large panes of sheet glass and timber mullions in Classical detail. Glass-covered painted signage.

FIGURE 63

Main Street, Mallow, c.1900. Lawrence Collection. The square, bay window and steep roof is characteristic of 18th century buildings in Mallow. Image from the Lawrence Collection.

Photographic Examples

Lack of fine detail, design consideration and knowledge of Classicism on historic joinery define the bad or post-modern shopfront. In many cases they are crudely put together and unambitious, These shopfronts lack any design consideration or knowledge. Their detailing is poorly executed and entirely exaggerated to a comical standard.

FIGURE 64
Basic and postmodern shopfronts in historic areas with scant reference to accurate Classical detail.
The form of elements is disproportionate and exaggerated.

By comparison fine detail, simplicity and knowledge of Classicism, combined with skilled joinery and building techniques define good shopfronts, both new and historic.

Exceptional historic and modern shopfronts in historic areas, defined by simplicity and reference to Classical detailing. Pilasters, where used, are slender and signage is narrow.

Mid 19th century shopfront with robust glazing mullions and arched top above glazing.

Late 19th century curve topped windows, plaster cornice and plaster quoin stones.

Mid 19th century shopfront with later console brackets added.

Early to mid 19th century shopfront pair.

Mid 19th century robust Classical shopfront with integrated original late 18th century window.

Mid to late 19th century shopfront with console brackets to signage.

Late 18th or early 19th century shopfront pair with small panes of glass and fan lights.

Early 19th century shop conversion with original window retained.

FIGURE 66

Pearse Square, Cobh, c.1900. from the Lawrence Collection. 18th century terrace of houses with 19th century additions. Image from the Lawrence Collection.

Principles of Repair & Alteration

The softness and gentility of many Irish towns and villages is retreating in an incremental manner. Cars and noise predominate. Yet the greater sound produced does not assault your ears but your eyes. Little that is special is left on first glance. Original buildings groan unheard behind the screams of additions to once gentle and civilised places.

The Character of Historic Irish Architecture

Examples of Irish design of the 18th and 19th centuries are becoming more rare in the setting of Irish towns. Furniture from this period is highly valued and individual, but shopfronts and historic detail generally is being lost over time.

Palladian principles of the new age were imported in the 17th century, well before the Act of Union of 1800. Ireland had much to prove as an emerging, modern state in this time. Waste was minimised and Irish influence was incorporated into almost every object in a subtle, pure interpretation that created a rare character of balance and consideration. In Ireland, the material shortages of wars and the prosperity provided at the same time, created architecture of balanced simplicity and fine detail combined with great consideration of economy. This. together with local methods, traditions, history, materials and with influences through direct trade with the Continent, created a distinctive Irish architecture of unforeseen distinction and integrity.

This Age of Reason in architecture formed the Ireland that we know and recognise and that is the character that has drawn so many here in the 20th century seeking the romantic character of our country. Our design approach of the 18th and early 19th century is known visually throughout the world and until recently has been highly evident in the expression of our towns and villages and in no

FIGURE 67
Detail from a painting of Stradbally, Co. Laois, c.1740.
Private Collection.

small part through the shopfronts of County Cork. It is this distinct character that we need to understand and, through understanding, repair it that we may benefit socially and economically from the asset that may result. Reference to historic photographs and images can be invaluable.

Historic Shopfronts Today

Some of the historic shopfronts of 18th and 19th century Ireland survive. It is a testament to how well they were constructed and how good the materials were. Up to the middle of the 20th century, people had the skills and the will to maintain these shopfronts and understood the simple process to do so. The introduction of modern building materials and the post-war rejection of Classical training in design caused a great loss to the historic architecture of Ireland and no less to timber shopfronts throughout the country which were particularly vulnerable. This has resulted in the dilution of the identity of our towns and villages, and a confusion in how they are perceived visually.

Having survived well for hundreds of years, the introduction of modern finishes to Irish historic buildings has accelerated their decay in the late 20th century. In the last forty years, the delicate joinery of our streets has almost disappeared and our historic shopfronts have become rare items reflecting a bygone age of unsurpassed sophistication. This rarity and complexity is particularly appreciated when viewed next to the often crudely conceived versions of shopfronts employed today.

Damage to shopfronts may have been fuelled by an excess of resources in recent times, combined with a lack of skill to make repairs. Ill-conceived methods of repair have caused acceleration of decay. Our greatest asset in the modern globalised world is that which makes us distinct and the pressures of accelerated commerce may prove too much for the maintenance of our shopfront heritage. Perhaps the combination of authentic repair of historic buildings with the needs of small scale space for commerce and technology may help to create a secure life for historic towns and villages and their shopfronts.
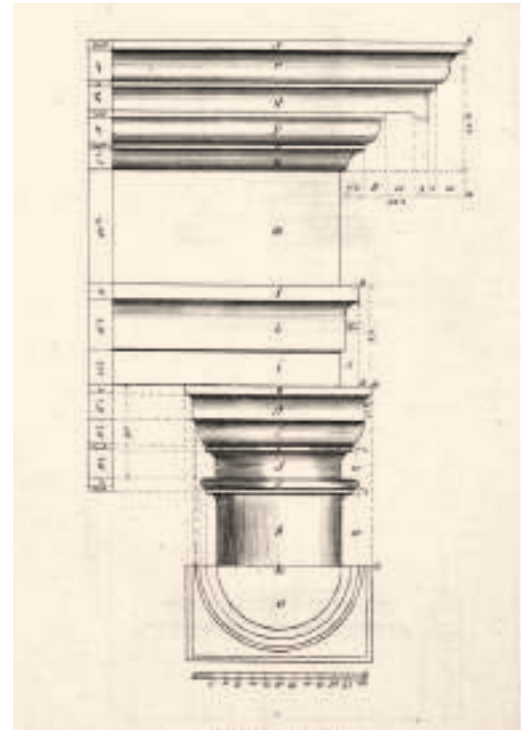
68

FIGURE 68
The entablature and column capital of the Roman Doric order from 'The Practical House Carpenter' (1792) by William Pain

The Future for Historic Shopfronts

In the 18th and 19th centuries Ireland produced world class modern design in many areas. Furniture and silverware are recognised globally, yet our architecture from this period is not viewed with the same concern. The distinctive nature of the County as seen in historic joinery may be protected and restored in our effort to regain our identity into the future. Our visual identity and distinctiveness may be greatly important in relation to our economic development as amenity, sense of place and authenticity become strong forms of attraction to a business location. The greatest attraction to any village, town or city may be the visible expression of how they are individually protected, loved and developed. Nothing is more distinctive in any County Cork town or village than the joinery of its buildings and in particular the expression of its historic shopfronts and landscapes.

Financial & Cultural Value

Why repair our Irish shopfronts in County Cork? One reason to do so is their absolute financial value as assets. This may be viewed as the value it costs to rebuild, repair or restore a shopfront. Ignoring the cultural values as an exercise we see that very often items that are disregarded contain great value to the county in terms of previous financial investment and those that replace them are sometimes the cheapest of their kind. The erosion by crude replacement of shopfronts is slow enough for the decay to go almost unnoticed or at least unchallenged but it does reduce the financial value of our individual and collective assets.

In cultural terms looking at a typical lost shopfront, the loss represents a great amount of information about our ancestors. The items discarded represent the values of past society and the level of refinement in design and craftsmanship present in the work. The loss of any highly detailed and considerate item of joinery that represents the identity and past excellence of the county is a great loss to current and future society. We feel the loss in terms of amenity and in disconnect with our environment as it ceases to reflect a recognisable connection to the past. The setting in which we live our lives becomes eroded and we sense this whether we are aware of the loss or not. The loss of expertise in making and repairing such items also represents a loss in cultural and financial value.

When we lose examples of fine joinery our built environment loses something rare and thus the value of the environment goes down. This cannot easily be replaced without a greater financial and intellectual investment. This erosion is the erosion of value in all its terms and that distinctive character that makes us feel a sense of wellbeing or attracts others to our distinct county may be slowly disappearing and is unnerving to many.

FIGURE 69
A view of Main Street, Innishannon, c.1900.
Image from the Lawrence Collection.

FIGURE 70
The same view, today, demonstrating the increased noise of the visual environment.

Protection of Our Townscapes

Our villages, towns and cities are becoming less attractive places to be. The comparison between the images of the historic village or even images from the 1980s and those of today is surprising. What was once an ordered environment, is now often chaotic in character. The more rapid the nature of the change combined with a globalisation of ideas and available materials is the reason why we need to intervene in modern times. We need to help to preserve and maintain the historic authenticity of our environment and the distinctive character of our individual towns and villages. The need for intervention is based on our need for wellness and our desire for long-term economic stability. There is an element of fair-play in the conservation of shopfronts in that it protects the majority of invested interest in our towns and villages from the actions of the few that may badly affect that economic or social interest. Shopfronts form a major part of the character of our townscapes. They are born from a highly developed commerce that allocated careful investment in combination with thousands of years of design development. The World Bank has highlighted the importance of the restoration and maintenance of distinctive character in historic centres of towns and cities in maintaining authenticity and local distinctiveness, as a means to ensuring economic growth in a globalised society.

Technology As a Way Forward

As technology progresses it opens up opportunities for remote businesses and industries until now considered too loud or polluting for village and town environments. Distinctive environments and improved quality of life mean that our historic buildings and shopfronts can find new life through the freedoms of new technology, by becoming places for progressive businesses.

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Advice for Shop Owners

A little information on historic joinery and building technology may easily eliminate existing problems without much investment. Sadly many large and expensive projects have been initiated based on concerns that have been misunderstood. It is worth remembering that issues that appear largest often have the simplest solutions. A small amount of appropriate professional advice may prevent great wasted expenditure and loss of character, attractiveness and value. General contractors or designers often require supplementary or specialist advice to the great benefit of property owners and cannot be assumed to know the best course of action for expedient or economical repair of any aspect of an historic building and, in particular, the repair of historic joinery where strict reference to the original is the only way to achieve good results.

Possible Changes

Simple changes to shopfronts and signage may first be put into place in a quest for restoring cultural and economic significance. The repair of elements and the introduction of exceptional consideration for new additions may be viewed as cultural improvement and as a means to create economic significance and stability as well as improving amenity. While repairing damage to the distinct nature of the environment of cities, towns and villages there may be great benefit from the restoration of significant shopfronts and the recreation of distinction between not only the county and the rest of the country but between the different areas within the county. Local pride in terms of history and environment may be greatly increased and investment may be attracted through demonstration projects.

Projects may be carried out which grow gradually into a significant and noticeable result. One or two shopfront projects in each town or village can have a great influence on understanding of the greater nature and significance of County Cork and in promoting a new solution for the historic environment.

Step by step Improvements

1 Removal of unnecessary elements of signage from building facades to reduce visual noise and return fair and equal shopfront signage. In particular, plastic elements of signage and projecting signs can be removed.

2 Removal of plastic film or advertising stickers from all glazed areas of shopfronts. Allowing etched film or sympathetic lettering painted or in film on glass (individual letters only). Generic or branded shops may be approached to create a collective solution for the historic context.

3 Decoration of shopfronts and building facades with colours that are considerate of the historic environment and become prominent by their own simplicity.

4 Removal of unnecessary lighting elements. Good lighting should be encouraged from within buildings and from window display and not to project from building facades.

5 Remove all unnecessary services from facades where possible (wiring, telephone junctions etc.).

6 Identify shopfronts in danger within towns and villages and propose demonstration projects. Initially create one or two demonstration projects to show what may be achieved.

7 Encourage the recording of shopfronts and shop interiors photographically and engage directly with shop owners on the economic benefits of repair and maintenance of a more calm environment and informed designs.

8 Approach the repair of the historic landscape of paving, street furniture and public signage and lighting. The retention and integration of historic elements of paving and kerbing is vital to the historic streetscape. Concrete kerbing is for motorways.

Repair of Historic Shopfronts

Imagine your historic shopfront is an item of historic furniture, perhaps a dining table from 1800. If it was missing a leg, you would have a replica made, because any other approach would compromise the whole object. If it was a fine table you would probably not cover it in a plastic cloth or drill holes in it for the addition of a light fitting. These kinds of decisions relating to furniture also relate to shopfront alterations and additions in historic areas, both in terms of design and in terms of repair.

Any approach to the conservation and maintenance of historic shopfronts should preserve the authenticity and the setting of the shopfront. Historic shopfronts represent a great deal of evidence of their physical construction and the workings of past societies. Historic timber usually far outweighs the quality of currently available hardwood and softwood.

The approach to the repair of any aspect of a building requires careful consideration. Evidence of the passage of time in terms of patina, colour, texture, form and material quality can be retained. The patina or aged quality of a building (as distinct from disrepair) is often welcome in the historic environment and brutal repair techniques become very obvious in such a setting. Individual repairs need to be in harmony with the whole building or shopfront and quietly in deference to it.

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FIGURE 73
A 19th century shopfront in poor repair in Butlerstown.

FIGURE 74
An elegant, mid 19th century shopfront with additions from the late 19th century, including addition of console bracket, glazed doors and larger glass panes.

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Visually the patina of age in historic shopfronts tends to be preferable to a perfectly restored new form. As the repair of any historic element may be specific and individual, complete renewal is often carried out over repair, to the detriment of authenticity or character. Renewal of building elements may often introduce generic and imported aesthetics that dilute the authenticity of the county.

Often what is spent on the repair of buildings is more than is necessary and funds are directed to unnecessary work. Historic buildings tend to develop specific problems over time and repair is often misguided with a resultant cause of further damage. Without doubt the loss of cultural character and authenticity has been great but much evidence still exists in Ireland of the simple forms of the past.

Considerations for Owners of Historic Shopfronts

Shop owners face great difficulty in maintaining, repairing or replacing a shopfront. The skills required to repair historic joinery are hard to find. Many joiners will propose replacement of an entire shopfront over repair. Replacement may not come close to producing even a near replica. Joiners may be concerned with financial loss due to undefined work when carrying out repairs. If a new shopfront is proposed it cannot be made to the detail of the original without great skill and investment and thus a poor replica is often produced as a result. Owners sometimes follow the path of replacement out of exasperation with decay and few local resources to carry out skilled, economic repair.

In other cases there is no desire to invest in good work and the crudest form of shopfront results from the minimium of ideas, skill or resources.

Attempts are made to replicate or design classically based shopfronts, but efforts don't often produce an object of refinement due to lack of reference to Classical pattern book detail or employment of modern joinery techniques. Regardless of the desire to create something accurate, the result is often generic and inaccurate. To compete with experienced master craftsmen of the past, much research must be carried out, combined with a constant questioning of design methods of joinery and a painstaking knowledge of historic precedent. The best approach repairs and retains as much as possible of an existing shopfront.

Research & Reference to Historic Examples

The restoration or reconstruction of shopfronts is possible only if evidence exists of the original form, layout and material composition. Restoration is an exact science and should not permit assumption or guesswork. Where the addition of elements may be necessary or the exact form of a shopfront part is unknown a judgement must

FIGURE 75
A clearly visible repair of joinery to a late 18th century door.

FIGURE 76
An honest repair to the frame of a mid 18th century window.
The close grain of the high-quality original baltic pine can be clearly seen in contrast to the modern softwood available now.

be made on the form and material quality of any replacement. No harshly new materials should be introduced. Generic, modern details should be discouraged. Often we have preconceived ideas about what a traditional shopfront was like or how it was conceived. We are used to the information or signals we see around us in our own time. Sometimes the areas we remember become exaggerated on attempted reconstruction and become out of scale or even comical. Careful research and the questioning of our assumptions is crucial in achieving accurate repairs or additions or even new designs.

Exercising Restraint

It is possible to repair shopfronts sensitively and can often be done in a manner that results in great saving when compared with complete rebuilding. A more minimal approach may be financially more viable and may retain the character of our Irish Age of Reason much more easily. A restrained approach is always welcome. Repair should be carried out instead of replacement. All historic elements of a shopfront are antiques and should be repaired with great concern for their qualities and minimal alteration. Repair and restoration does not necessarily mean expenditure. The resources put into repairs, if spent wisely, will lead to an exceptional result in comparison to the replaced element.

Retaining Valuable Materials

Historic timber is often of far better quality than that available today, even when compared with available hardwoods. Simple products exist, however, like two-part resin spirit that may harden and secure decayed timber and ensure longevity in modern timber repairs. Highly specific timber fillers exist which may allow for reconstruction of damaged areas. Modern materials of fast growing softwood and particle-board usually have a short lifespan and should not be used.

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FIGURE 77
Plain signage and clever display define this late 19th century shopfront.

FIGURE 78
A late 19th century shopfront maintained in a restored manner.

New Shopfront Design

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New Design in the Historic Environment

It is clear that new building within our historic environment has not always been well enough considered. Many countries have retained the Spartan character of their towns and villages as great resources. Examination of the Lawrence Collection photographs demonstrates beautifully what may be recreated in our historic environments and through care in repair and design of our shopfronts. This valuable resource for designers may also inform our approach to the new work that is created. All repairs, additions or new designs may help to repair the essence of characteristically Irish town and village settings as seen in the photographic images of the past.

The historic fabric of our towns and villages can be of exceptional and world class quality. New shopfronts need to be exceptional in their consideration of design and in addition need to understand their role in the context of existing shopfronts, even lost historic shopfronts, and of the abstract nature of the simplicity of the design of Ireland and of County Cork. This is a matter of careful and complete consideration of context and setting. Reference to local distinct design influence and national and international charters is important.

New Shopfront Design

Before constructing a new shopfront an appraisal of the character of the existing setting should be made to inform any proposal. In the past. towns and villages in County Cork had specific influence from different industries and circumstances and this developed separate and distinctive expression in shopfronts through different briefs, budgets and access to local joinery shops. The differences should be quietly recognised in order to maintain a sense of place.

FIGURE 79
An elegant, modern shopfront with large display area in an historic environment.

FIGURE 80
A simple plaster surround has framed the joinery of an historic shopfront, integrating with existing door and window.

In design terms, to construct new frontages between the 18th and 19th century shopfronts of our towns and villages requires exceptional consideration and skill. It may be that truly researched and accurate replicas may be considered appropriate due to the maintenance of overall setting or that a simple, modern abstraction would be best in order to maintain distinctive character. Much of what is seen of the ill considered pastiche shopfront today is unwelcome as it erodes the picturesque simplicity and distinctiveness of the environment that we all wish to maintain.

It's worth saying that minimalism requires a good understanding of detail if it is to be successful. Simple designs may still be classically influenced and any understanding of precedent will make a resultant design more successful. Minimal design intervention can apply to a whole new shopfront or even new minimal parts of a shopfront set within retained historic elements.

When building a new shopfront the design influence should come from the surrounding area as it is now and as it was historically in order to maintain local distinctiveness. This will help to ensure that the same design is not repeated over and over, leading to dilution.

Sources of Information & Advice

Websites

Cork County Council	www.corkcoco.ie
The Heritage Council	www.heritagecouncil.ie
The Irish Georgian Society	www.igs.ie
The National Monuments Service	www.archaeology.ie
The Royal Institute for the Architects of Ireland	www.riai.ie
Irish Landmark Trust	www.irishlandmark.com
Cork City and County Archives	www.corkarchives.ie
Irish Architectural Archive	www.iarc.ie
Dictionary of Irish Architects	www.dia.ie
National Inventory of Architectural Heritage	www.buildingsofireland.ie
Ordnance Survey Ireland	www.osi.ie
National Library of Ireland Online Catalogue	www.catalogue.nli.ie
The International Council on Monuments and Sites	www.icomos.ie
Historic Environment Scotland	www.historicenvironment.scot
The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings	www.spab.org.uk
The Georgian Group	www.georgiangroup.org.uk
Europa Nostra	www.europanostra.org

Guidance Documents

Guidelines for the Management and Development of Architectural Conservation Areas
Available from Cork County Council.

Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2011)
Available from the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

Archives & Databases

The Cork Archaeological (UCC) Post-medieval Archive
The archive is available to view in digital format at Cork County Library.

Cork City and County Archives
The collection is available to view at the Seamus Murphy Building, 32 Great William O'Brien Street, Cork.

Cork City Central Library Local Studies Department
The collection is available to view at the Central Library, Grand Parade, Cork

Support from Cork County Council

Any part of a town or village in County Cork may be locally interesting, whether part of an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) or not. Information on the heritage status of a building, shopfront or streetscape is available in the current Cork County Development Plan, which is available online at www.corkcoco.ie. Planning permission may be required when making any alteration to a Protected Structure either internally or externally. In an ACA, any alteration to the external part of a building requires consultation with the Local Authority and may require planning permission. Protected Structures and Architectural Conservation Areas are defined in the Planning & Development Act, 2000.

Forms are available online from the Cork County Council website if you wish to make an observation to the County Council on any works you may feel are unauthorised. Unauthorised work may greatly, negatively affect the quality of the environment in proximity to the businesses and assets of other individuals and it is these others that the process aims to protect against the degradation of the environment by individuals that may not have a local vested interest.

Planning Permission

In the case of buildings that are protected structures or located in an Architectural Conservations Area (ACA), any works which would materially alter the character of the protected structure or the Architectural Conservation Area will require planning permission. In the instance of a shopfront such works can include changes and alterations to the layout of the shopfront, changes to or the introduction of new signage, lighting, advertising and utilities. Where there is any doubt as to whether or not works would materially affect the character of an Architectural Conservation Area or the exterior of a protected structure, clarification should be sought from the Council's Planning Officer or Architectural Conservation Officer.

If you wish to establish if your building is a protected structure or located in an Architectural Conservation Area you should refer to Cork County Development Plan or in the instance of the former nine Town Council Areas (Clonakilty, Cobh, Fermoy, Kinsale, Macroom, Mallow, Midleton, Skibbereen and Youghal), the relevant Town Development Plans. The relevant Development Plans include maps of the designated Architectural Conservation Areas as well as maps and a corresponding list for the Record of Protected Structures. The relevant development plans will contain planning policies and objectives relating to Protected Structures and Architectural Conservation Areas. Cork County Development Plan and the relevant Town Council Development Plans are available online at www.corkcoco.ie.

Further information relating to protected structures is available online at www.corkcoco.ie/heritage. For further information relating to Architectural Conservation Areas, Cork County Council has published a guidance document for the 'Management and Development of Architectural Conservation Areas', which is also available on line at www.corkcoco.ie/heritage or a paper copy can be obtained free of charge from the Planning Department, Floor 3, County Hall, Cork.

Register of Protected Structures

The Register of Protected Structures for County Cork is maintained by Cork County Council. A protected structure is 'a structure or a part of a structure that a planning authority considers to be of special interest from an architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical point of view'. The owner of a protected structure is legally obliged to ensure that no damage is caused to the structure and that it is well maintained. The Register of Protected Structures is available on Cork County Council's website, www.corkcoco.ie as part of the County Development Plan.

National Inventory of Architectural Heritage

The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) is a state initiative under the administration of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The purpose of the NIAH is to identify, record, and evaluate the post-1700 architectural heritage of Ireland, uniformly and consistently as an aid in the protection and conservation of built heritage. NIAH surveys provide the basis for the recommendations of the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs to the Planning Authorities for the inclusion of particular structures in their Record of Protected Structures.

Record of Monuments and Places

The Record of Monuments and Places is maintained by the National Monuments Service, which is part of the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Recorded Monuments are protected under Section 12 of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act, 1994. A person intending to carry out work in relation to a Recorded Monument is required to give notice in writing to the Minister two months before commencing work.

FIGURE 81 (OPPOSITE)
Traditional shopfronts as part of a streetscape in Bantry, co. Cork, c.1900.
Image from the Lawrence Collection.

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Glossary of Architectural Terms

Architrave
The lower part of the entablature in Classical orders. In renaissance times, this particular form was used to surround openings in buildings and became the recognised form for a door or window surround. The original form of the architrave is often found in the lower part of the signage of a classically based Irish shop front. In modern times the term is used to describe a door or window surround of almost any form.

Brad
A large, cut nail of constant thickness and a square head, often used to describe the long nail used to support an historic rainwater gutter at eaves level.

Bowed
Where the facade of a building or the portion of wall containing windows through each floor is built to a symmetrical curve.

Capital
The crowning feature of a vertical column or pilaster whose function it is to appear to carry the load from a horizontal lintel above.

Cill
A shelf below a window, often of stone, designed to prevent water ingress and to throw water from a building.

Column
An upright pillar designed to support a horizontal load. Often used as a decorative element in Classical Ireland

Console Bracket
A carved bracket usually in the form of a scroll. Commonly used on 19th century shopfronts to frame the nameboard.

Cornice
In Classical architecture, the top, projecting section of an entablature, positioned above a lintel. The cornice usually projects further than the sign on a shopfront lintel and sits above the sign to protect from weather.

Distemper
A heavily pigmented matt water-based paint bound with glue, size, largely superseded by emulsion paint in modern times.

Doorcase
An elaborate timber door surround or enclosure, creating a deliberate architectural expression of threshold and interface between a streetscape and the interior of a building.

Eaves
The under part of a sloping roof, which overhangs a building's elevation. Usually very small and of masonry, specifically in Irish architecture.

Edwardian
Edwardian is the name given to the architecture that was current during the reign of King Edward VII of Great Britain and Ireland, from 1901-1910.

Entablature
The upper part of a Classical order, consisting of three parts: the Architrave, immediately above the supporting column, the Frieze, in the centre and the Cornice at the top. In a shopfront this is where signage is displayed.

Facade
The principle front of a building or also the front elevation.

Fanlight
A window, often semi-circular, over a door, with radiating glazing bars suggesting a fan. It is often seeen in 18th and 19th century buildings and is synonymous with the Age of Reason in Irish architecture from 1700 to 1840.

Flashing
Usually in lead, the flashing joins and protects projecting shopfronts from weather damage or from water entering a building at the point of joining.

FIGURE 82
A carved, timber console bracket on an historic shopfront.

FIGURE 83
A late 18th century timber doorcase including semi-circular fanlight above the door.

Fluting
A moulding found on pilasters and columns in timber or stone and in the shape of extended, vertical, concave grooves.

Georgian
A style of architecture from the reign of the Georges from 1714 to 1830. Generally Classical in spirit, following the ideas of Palladio. In Ireland, this period represents the Age of Reason in architecture and design.

Gutter
A gently sloping channel to collect water and lead it to an outlet or drain. Roof gutters can be run along the eaves, down a valley, behind a parapet or chimney, or led to a flat roof.

Lime
Chalk or limestone burned in a kiln. The anhydrous product is quick-lime, which is slaked with water to make lime putty. It is a slow setting binder used in mortar for plastering and bricklaying.

Lime render
Render containing lime and aggregate or sand.

Lintel
A horizontal beam or stone over a window, door opening or supported by a column.

Mannerism
The use of Classical elements in deliberate opposition to their original significance or context.

Mullion
A vertical bar dividing sections of a window to support panes of glass or give structure to a frame supporting glass.
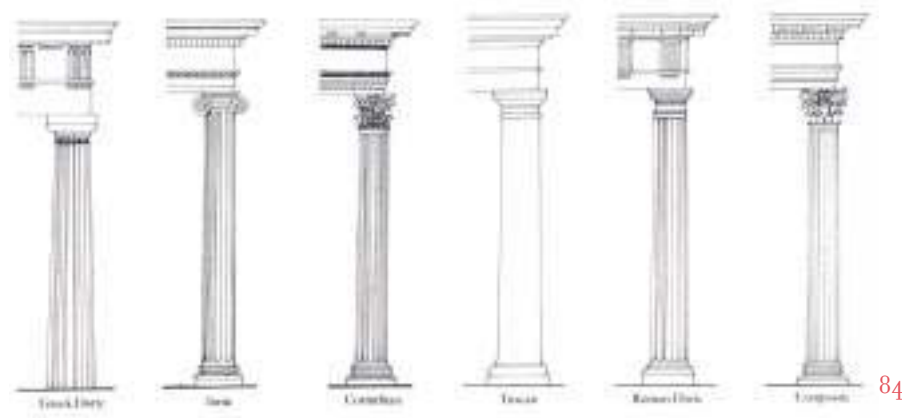
Order
The Classical order consists of a column with its base, shaft and capital which supports the Entablature with its Architrave, Frieze and Cornice.

> **Doric Order**
> One of the earliest columns of the Greek orders. It has no base but the shaft is fluted. The Roman Doric has a base and the shafts are plain.
>
> **Tuscan Order**
> A Roman order that is a simple and plain version of the Doric.
>
> **Ionic Order**
> The Ionic order is characterised by its distinctive capital in the shape of flowing volutes and a fluted column shaft.
>
> **Corinthian Order**
> The Corinthian order is characterised by its foliated capital, often as acanthus leaves.
>
> **Composite Order**
> The Composite order is a Roman order combining the Corinthian and Ionic orders.

FIGURE 84
The origin of the Greek Classical orders (which we see today in masonry only) was in timber construction. Much of the detail that remains relates to the original joining of timber elements of structure. Ironically, through shopfronts, the language was reapplied in its original material having been abandoned by the Greeks thousands of years before.

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Palladian
Architecture influenced by Andrea Palladio (1508-80). Representing early application of Renaissance Classical detail at a domestic scale.

Patina
The sheen or wear on a surface produced by age and exposure.

Pilaster or Engaged Column
A vertical post with a flat surface, deriving from Classical architecture, and featuring Classical detailing. It is usually engaged with a building wall and designed to be percieved to support load only. The pilaster is the predominant form of Classical expression of support in the Irish traditional shopfront.

Plinth
The slightly projecting base of a wall or column, often in tooled stone to protect the base of a building element above. In shopfronts at the base of a pilaster.

Render
A plaster finish to an external wall.

Sash
A fixed or movable framework, as in a window or door, in which panes of glass are set.

Shutter
A timber framed and panelled element designed to sit in front of a window or shopfront as protection from sunlight or as a security device.

Size or Sizing Agent
A liquid sealer, usually transparent, with which wood or plaster is coated so that adhesive, paint or varnish applied over it will not be too much absorbed. Glue size is made from adhesive diluted with water.

Spandrel
A triangular space between the side of an arch, a horizontal line taken from the top of the arch and a vertical line taken from where the arch springs.

Spartan
Suggestive of the ancient Spartans; sternly disciplined and rigorously simple, frugal, or austere.

Stall Riser / Stall Board
The area of a shopfront below the display window.

Vernacular
A term usually applied to the traditional style or building method of a particular region.

Victorian
Victorian architecture is the name given to the architecture that was current in the middle to late 19th century, during the reign of Queen Victoria, from 1837 to 1901.

FIGURE 85
Typical timber panelled shutters covering the window of a shopfront.
Image courtesy of Trevor Finnegan.

FIGURE 86
A carved spandrel in the top corner of a window.
Image from the Lawrence Collection.

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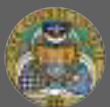
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Shopfronts of County Cork
A Design Guide for the Historic Setting

Cork County Council 2017