

# ***Conservation Bulletin, Issue 14, June 1991***

## ***Framing Opinions supplement***

### **FOREWORD**

Lord Montagu of Beaulieu  
*Chairman, English Heritage*

Few would deny that the United Kingdom has an architectural legacy second to none. The variety and quality of its heritage is unique: the more so because many of its masterpieces remain in a context set by more modest structures which contribute to the general local ambience in a collective sense, as well as individually as buildings of intrinsic merit. Local authorities recognise this contribution and designate conservation areas where they see it desirable for the architectural or historic character to be preserved and enhanced.

However, English Heritage and other organisations connected with the protection and enhancement of the built environment have become increasingly concerned about the long-term insidious decline in the appearance of historic towns and villages brought about by the well-intentioned, but unwittingly misguided home improvements of their residents. Chief amongst the agents of erosion are replacement window and doors, purchased with the best of intentions to counter perceived maintenance loads and to improve levels of amenity in use. However, large numbers of these so-called 'improvements' are inappropriately designed and installed and detrimentally affect the special architectural or historic interest of older buildings, diluting the local vernacular character of historic areas. Perhaps as many as four million windows and doors are at risk.

We firmly believe that the general public has an innate sympathy with our cause of conserving historic buildings and districts and can be convinced of an argument, if dealt with fairly and given all the facts. Very often education and awareness, and not restrictions, will bring people around to our view.

A national campaign has therefore been devised to raise awareness of the issues involved and to propose alternative strategies for the retention of those traditional components that give our settlements much of their unique sense of place. The campaign is called '**Framing Opinions**'.



In this, we are joined by a whole host of interested parties too numerous to list here, but which include planning departments, professional institutes, national and local amenity societies, expert scholars, private individuals, and allies from the commercial sector. We believe that a better balance of information is needed to assist homeowners in the laudable and self-motivated task of maintaining the country's historic housing stock. We believe that old windows and doors are not always beyond repair and improvement at competitive prices, and that, if better guidance was available at local level on preservation and repair techniques, on maintenance procedures, and on appropriate methods of upgrading for thermal and noise insulation, consumers would approach home improvements in a more benign fashion. This education gap needs a large-scale cascade of information from expert bodies to the lay public and will require the cooperation and

resources of many organisations. In this campaign, there are challenges and benefits for everyone.

The Framing Opinions campaign will cascade constructive information down through planning departments and civic societies to consumers, specifiers, and builders. We also hope to influence product manufacturers, trade associations, and service companies through our activities.

Our campaign objective is to increase general awareness of the issues involved: of the importance of historic detailing in windows and doors in old houses and of the drastic effects which unsuitable alterations can produce over time. We shall provide technical and economic information on the retention, repair, and improvement of existing features that minimise the effects on the special character of historic dwellings and will advocate the continued use of the traditional building materials for these historic features at a time of adverse lobbying on ecological grounds.

This special supplement of our *Conservation Bulletin* describes the problems as we see them, illustrates examples of national good practice, and proposes joint objectives for the way ahead. English Heritage challenges planning authorities, civic societies, industry, and the public at large to consider their own response to replacement windows and doors in our historic towns and villages. We are confident that readers will be convinced of the need to pass on our message and to make their own special contribution to the campaign.

## **PROBLEMS, PERCEPTIONS AND PROFITS**

### **CHALLENGING FORCES FOR UNNECESSARY CHANGE**

Traditional windows and doors are architectural features and primary historical evidence of considerable value in our older towns and villages. The threat to their survival needs to be seen within the context of pressures affecting dwellings in conservation areas. There are powerful forces at work for largely unnecessary change which need to be challenged, resisted, and redirected if cherished familiar scenes are to be preserved and enhanced.

### **FACTS AND FIGURES: THE MARKET PLACE**

The UK's 8000 conservation areas contain around 4% of its total building stock. Whilst a good proportion of these properties are statutorily listed and protected from unsuitable alterations by legislation, perhaps around 3/4 million unlisted dwellings could be at risk from inappropriate home improvements.

The home improvement business is very popular – half the nation has carried out some form of work on their homes in the last ten years and 15% of adults say that they intend to undertake improvements in the next 12 months. Despite the recent downturn in the market place, houses still change hands every seven years on average and, at each change of ownership, capital investment in redecoration, repairs, and alterations averages £21,000 per house. Last year alone, owner occupiers spent £13bn on such works.

Across the country, 24% of those undertaking or commissioning 'modernisations' said that they would include for the installation of double glazing as the third priority after alterations to kitchens and bathrooms. At the same time, nearly half a million doors were replaced nationwide. This is great news for those who supply these products, but a cause for concern for those of us in conservation.

Total UK sales of replacement windows and doors stand at about £2.06bn per year. The number of suppliers is now 6350, and several companies have reported doubling their sales every year since the early 1980s. Cheap, mass-produced standard windows and doors are also sold through 2300 builders' supplies outlets, 630 builders' merchant chains, and through 1000 home improvement superstores. The total annual expenditure on all home improvement products purchased in this way is worth £1.36bn.

Predictions of the market trends in this area also rely upon an influx of an additional 2 million homeowners by the end of the century; a forecast relying on a 33% increase over the next 40 years in the numbers of people reaching pensionable age and with some spare capital to spend on their properties, as well as the addition of other potential homebuying groups (such as single parent families), all of whom will be attracted by the prospect of supposedly low-maintenance products.

## **BELIEFS AND NEEDS**

Consumers believe that new windows should be installed because:

- they replace existing ones which are old and rotten
- they will improve their home's appearance
- they will reduce heating bills and draughts
- they will reduce noise
- they will be maintenance free or low on maintenance
- they will be easily accessible for cleaning
- they will be more secure.

With the very best of intentions, consumers are therefore making value judgements about the welfare and efficiency of their traditional windows and doors and move into the most convenient market place in order to satisfy their needs. English Heritage has every sympathy with this approach to the maintenance and upkeep of old property. Whether it is draughtproof, well insulated, and weathertight can affect the appearance and value of a dwelling and rightly needs to be addressed.

Nor can residents of conservation areas readily be expected to have an expert knowledge of architectural history, conservation ethics, timber preservation, surface coatings, cyclical maintenance costs, or of benign methods of component upgrading that do not affect the historic character of buildings. Very few of them will normally have the benefit of expert professional guidance, simply because the scale of operations is so small.

Owners of historic properties – whose custodianship of much of our domestic heritage is vital to its survival – cannot be expected to play their important role without better information about these issues and on the effects of the use of some replacement designs and materials.

## **REPAIR AND IMPROVEMENTS**

Signs of ageing, patination, and surface deterioration in window and door components are not necessarily symptoms of irreparable decay. In many cases, maintenance and remedial treatments can be applied at relatively low cost to ameliorate damage, stave off decay, repair defective material, and generally extend the useful life of the elements involved.

English Heritage advocates a policy of minimal intervention to save as much as practicable of the original material and design to pass on to the future. In serious cases, local surgery (dismantling, piecing-in, and making good) is preferable and practically achievable instead of wholesale amputation, replication, or remodelling. Inevitably, some ancient components will come to the end of their useful life due to neglect and decay and will need replacement. However, elements within the component, for example, crown glass and ironmongery, may survive intact and may be salvageable for local reuse.

Salvaged components from other buildings of the same type and date might be reusable as replacement fittings for damaged windows and doors, at relatively low costs after basic overhauling. Where upgrades or improvements are required for draught-proofing, thermal, and noise insulation, proprietary draught-proofing strips and secondary glazing can and should be used as a first option instead of wholesale replacement. Where requirements are made to improve accessibility for cleaning, the original windows can and should be kept and upgraded with the 'Simplex' kit of ironmongery, used commonly in Scotland.

Ultimately, some windows and doors will be so badly decayed or damaged that they require replacement. We believe it is extremely rare to find all openings in a building which simultaneously require new parts. However, where replacements are needed, they should match the original as near as possible (and exact facsimiles are possible) in proportion, shape, profile, section, texture, and colour. Where frame connections use modern joints, their elevational treatment should match the traditional shape and section of original windows. For installation, the frames should be fixed in the wall so that the reveals, head, and cill details match those originals extant elsewhere on the property or on similar buildings adjacent.



*Difference in the detailing: in these unusually bold nineteenth-century window mullions and transoms, the moulding profiles and clever geometry have been totally eradicated in the plastic 'replica' (J Fidler)*

Where there is a requirement to provide partial glazing to a front door, an historical precedent from pattern books should be considered for use as a model, rather than adopting modern designs inappropriate to the character of the building or area. Doorways should include frames, architraves, and ironmongery of similar period style to that of the door itself.

## **PRODUCTS AND SERVICES**

An increasing number of small companies are focusing on the market for repair and upgrading of windows and doors. It is scarcely feasible for a national organisation like English Heritage to track down such local concerns: there is a role here for local planning authorities and civic societies to seek out the expertise in their areas and establish contacts with consumers. A review of current architectural joinery catalogues reveals that many traditional designs are already being made: many of these are highly appropriate for use in historic properties. It also reveals, however, that some of the compromises between traditional details and manufacturing convenience which have been attempted, because of competition with companies offering metal and plastic replacements, have been most disappointing.

Particularly distressing from English Heritage's point of view are top-hung casements, centre-pivot and bottom-hinged hopper systems which crudely attempt to mimic traditional sashes. Their opening light junctions with their frames are necessarily different in appearance from the sash counterpart and fail to convince as a lookalike. Poor facsimiles also fail to replicate the narrow proportions and elevational section of the sash meeting rails that overlap to provide a single thickness. These are admittedly small details, but they are important if the character of historic areas is to be preserved. Wood, after all, is the traditional material for these elements of doors and windows: it ought to be possible to use the correct material in an appropriate way.

## REPLICA COMPONENTS IN SUBSTITUTE MATERIALS

English Heritage has yet to find one metal or plastic system that can faithfully match historic detailing in wood. Methods of production of plastics are geared to provide simple straight sided multi-celled sections for stiffness, rigidity, and as a thermal barrier. In addition, because they are factory-made with snap-fit parts, a whole range of sophisticated peripherals including gaskets, mastics, and beads are needed to hold things together in a composite component. When combined with internally silvered double-glazing unit spacer frames, cover beads, and other auxiliary items, windows and doors in plastic and metal become exceedingly complex multi-component systems, whose appearance is primarily governed by the needs for interconnections and weathertightness rather than by aesthetics.

English Heritage applauds those companies who are trying hard to get the details right, but we doubt that they will be successful in the majority of cases because of inherent difficulties in the production process. The real problem stems from firms that honestly believe that they already have products that match the originals. Trade and brand names often evoke history and periods of elegance and style. We must be careful that consumers are not taken in by marketing which does not deliver on its promises.



*Alexandra Cottage Estate, Bromley: the lefthand semi-detached house has all the authentic historic detailing intact, while in the one on the right a host of alterations have dramatically eroded the original character*

## AESTHETICS, UTILITY, AND VALUE FOR MONEY

Government Circular 8/87 (Appendix IV) sets out the broad principles for our approach to the conservation of buildings which are statutorily listed. The majority of planning appeals and legal cases which have arisen from the replacement of windows and doors and which challenged these principles have failed, resulting in prosecutions and enforcement action to restore the building's special interest.

Raising visual awareness, however, and encouraging a sense of aesthetic values amongst the residents of conservation areas and with local replacement window firms is not the only criterion at issue. Questions of utility and value for money also come into play.

Several companies advertise their products as being 'completely maintenance free' or 'low on maintenance' and this greatly appeals to consumers. Studies of published literature show, however, that metal and plastic systems do have mid- to long-term maintenance loads and that their flexibility for major component failure is often far more limiting than for traditional timber construction. In 1987–8, the Northern Consortium of Housing Authorities published *uPVC windows: the facts*, a document soon to be updated and republished. The figures which it contains on costs-in-use showed that over a 30year period, pressure impregnated painted softwood windows with consequent maintenance cycles were slightly cheaper to maintain than plastic equivalents.

English Heritage has updated this work, adjusting the figures to take account of the more complex designs found in historic buildings and modelling maintenance costs in a slightly different fashion. Instead of presuming a replacement of the existing windows with new ones either in softwood or plastic, we have modelled the retention of existing material and accounted for its repair and consequent maintenance for comparison with replacement systems. The figures show that repairing windows is cheaper than replacing them. If

existing windows are in fair condition, then a basic overhaul and the purchase of draught-proofing or secondary glazing might be a better option than installing new material. Certainly there will be conservation value added in this response, since the replacement products so far available cannot accurately meet our criteria for appearance.

### **Comparison (in £s) of refurbishing existing softwood sash windows with cost of installing modern uPVC replacements**

|                      | Existing | Replacement |
|----------------------|----------|-------------|
| Initial repair costs | 7500     | 0           |
| Supply and fit       | 0        | 12000       |
| Replacement costs    | 0        | 1104        |
| Regular maintenance  | 2007     | 717         |
| Regular redecoration |          |             |
| external             | 2232     | 0           |
| internal             | 735      | 0           |
| TOTAL                | 12474    | 13821       |

Figures assume a house with 30 windows (1760x1060), on a 30-year mortgage at an annual interest rate of 10%

## **CONCLUSIONS**

A responsible attitude towards the issue of repair or replacement of historic features can have benefits for all parties concerned, especially if we open the dialogue between consumers, suppliers, regulators, and educators. English Heritage is already in constructive discussions with the relevant sectors of the British Woodworking Federation, the British Plastics Federation, the Glass and Glazing Federation, and the Aluminium Windows Association with a view to finding common ground and ways of ameliorating these problems. Above all, we wish to encourage understanding and fruitful cooperation between diverse and often unconnected interests in a common cause. There are benefits for all in the preservation and enhancement of this country's conservation areas.

JOHN FIDLER

*English Heritage*

## **THE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF CONSERVATION AREAS**

### **THE ROLE OF ARTICLE IV DIRECTIONS**

The question of alterations to buildings within conservation areas has recently become a focus of public concern. The concept of area conservation, introduced by virtue of the Civic Amenities Act 1967, remains as popular as ever, but the deterioration in the character and appearance of individual conservation areas has become so marked that local authorities are now hinting that, unless urgent measures can be found to halt this long-term decline, de-designations cannot be long delayed.

The report stage of the Planning and Compensation Bill took place in the House of Lords earlier this year. During the debate on 21 February 1991, Baroness Hollis of Heigham introduced an amendment dealing with conservation areas and alterations within them. She noted that listed buildings were 'protected from demolition and alteration'. The 7000 or so conservation areas in England covering 'villages of character' and the 'historic quarters of towns' were also protected from demolition, but they were not protected from 'the do-it-yourself alterations and defacements which [were] rapidly eroding the quality of the very

areas [where there was a statutory requirement] to conserve or enhance'. She went on to refer to the 'horror stories of concrete roofs replacing stone slates and of plate glass windows replacing Victorian sash windows'.

Put rather more technically, whereas alterations to listed buildings for the most part require listed building consent, there is no equivalent control over alterations to unlisted buildings in conservation areas, because the need for conservation area consent only arises where demolition is involved. Outside the law of landlord and tenant, the sole means, by which a local authority can exercise control over development significantly affecting the character or appearance of a conservation area, lies through the requirement to seek planning permission in such cases. Unfortunately however, if, as in the case of replacement windows for unlisted dwelling houses, the development proposed constitutes 'permitted development' (General Development Order 1988, Schedule 2 Part 1 Class A), then the local authority forfeits all rights of control, unless it makes a direction under Article IV of the GDO, which would have the effect of withdrawing the permitted development rights covering the development and type of property concerned.

During the early stages of the debate on the Planning and Compensation Bill in the House of Lords, a proposal which would have resulted in further curtailment of the scope of permitted development rights applicable within conservation areas was opposed by the Government. Subsequently, at the committee stage, it had been hoped that there could have been agreement to extend to unlisted buildings 'the same protection against significant or material extensions as [applied] to all alterations of a listed building'. In reply, however, the Government contended that this change would be too far-reaching in its effects and would give rise to an 'unacceptable [administrative] burden' for local authorities.

English Heritage, for its part, in response to representations from local authorities, and as an expression of its own concern at the piecemeal removal of historic features in conservation areas, had also been minded to press the DoE for a reduction in permitted development rights. On reflection, however, following informal discussions with the Department, English Heritage agreed, as a first step at least, to pursue a more selective approach, which involved targeting specifically those unlisted buildings that could be shown to contribute significantly to the character and appearance of conservation areas. In practice, of course, the only way to achieve this objective was through the medium of the Article IV directions, yet it was quite apparent that the past experience of local authorities in this field had been far from satisfactory.

Article IV directions are made subject to approval by the Secretary of State, an administrative process normally carried out on his behalf by the regional offices of the DoE. Guidance on the procedure to be followed by local authorities, and on the criteria to be exercised in the approval of such directions, is set out in Para 64 and Appendix II of DoE Circular 8/87. Ostensibly, the Secretary of State is 'generally in favour of approving directions', but past experience has shown relatively high rejection rates, which have discouraged order-making authorities, and have served to inhibit others from entering the field at all. In the period 1988–89, for instance, of 43 Article IV requests only 19 (44%) were actually approved (House of Lords debate 21 February 1991).

In an attempt to remedy this unsatisfactory situation, English Heritage is currently seeking DoE endorsement of the text of an Advice Note on Article IV directions in conservation areas, for distribution to local authorities throughout the country. Originally prepared in March 1990 in collaboration with the Department's Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Office, the Advice Note has already been instrumental in securing an improved regime for the approval of Article IV directions within that region, and it is hoped that by making the document generally available, similar improvements can be achieved elsewhere.

One of the most common reasons for the rejection of Article IV directions has been that an area has lost its 'historic or architectural integrity' and, ironically enough, in a recent case

in London, this was directly attributed to 'the plethora of alterations such as modern porches, new roofs, different replacement windows, different boundary fences, and obtrusive telegraph wires'. This unsatisfactory state of affairs is compounded by the fact that one of the preconditions for the approval of an Article IV direction is the need to substantiate a known or potential threat to the character of the area.

English Heritage's Advice Note aims to establish a set of clearly expressed ground rules for common usage by DoE regional offices and local authorities, recognising that past difficulties have been caused by both parties following different interpretations of the existing criteria, rather than by any fundamental unwillingness to confirm directions on the part of the regional offices. The note recommends prior consultation with regional offices and lays down guidance on the scope of the controls, the need for a precise definition of the area to which the direction is to apply, and on the general presentation of the case. More particularly, because the need to apply for an Article IV direction is commonly a condition precedent to the provision of grant-aid from English Heritage under Sections 77 and 79 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the Advice Note emphasises the importance of showing how a direction would assist a positive policy for enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area. This latter course of action may be sufficient of itself to substantiate the need for a direction.

Looking to the future on a more hopeful note, it is indeed possible that English Heritage's Advice Note may have an important role to play in arresting the qualitative decline of conservation areas. Replying for the Government during the House of Lords debate on 21 February 1991, Baroness Blatch for the first time acknowledged publicly that the Department had received proposals from English Heritage, which were being considered 'with a view to issuing further guidance to local authorities on Article IV directions and clarification of the Secretary of State's criteria for approving them'. More importantly, however, she indicated that there was no difference as to objectives between the Government and its critics on this issue, it was simply that the Government considered that the existing Article IV direction route provided the best means of achieving the common goals of conservation area preservation and enhancement.

MICHAEL COUPE

*English Heritage*

## TECHNICAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

Architect's Journal *Construction risks and remedies: timber decay*, Architectural Press, London, 15 October 1986, 69–83

Architect's Journal Focus *Product review: windows, lintels and blinds*, Architectural Press, London, September 1989, 35–50

Architect's Journal Focus *Windows and glazing*, London, 1987

Architect's Journal Information Library *Products in practice: windows*, London, June and July 1979, and April 1985

Bickerdike, Allen, Rich, and Partners *Design failures in buildings*, Sheet No 18, 2 ser Building Research Establishment *Assessing traditional housing for rehabilitation*, BRE Report No 167, Watford, 1991

Building Research Establishment *Domestic draught-proofing: materials, costs and benefits*, BRE Digest No 319, Watford, 1987

Building Research Establishment *Durability and application of plastics*, BRE Digest 69, 2 edn 1979, HMSO, London

Building Research Establishment *Insulation against external noise*, Digest 128, Watford

Building Research Establishment *In-situ treatments for existing window joinery*, BRE Information Paper 1P21/81, Watford, 1981



Building Research Establishment *Maintenance and repair of window joinery*, Technical Note No 28, BRE, DoE, Princes Risborough, reprinted 1972

Building Research Establishment *Painting plastics*, Information Paper 11/79, Watford, 1979

Building Research Establishment *Preservation of building timbers by boron diffusion treatment*, Technical Note No 41, Princes Risborough, 1973

Building Research Establishment *Surveyor's checklist for rehabilitation of traditional housing*, BRE Report No 168, Watford, 1990

Building Research Establishment *Wood windows – arresting decay*, Defect Action Sheet (Design) 13, Watford, 1983

Capron, E, Crowder, J, and Smith, R (BRE) *Appraisal of the weathering behaviour of plastics*, Paper 5, Conference on Testing Polymers for Service, Buxton 5 October 1989, Institute of Physics, Materials Science Club, UK Plastics Institute and the Institution of the Rubber Industry, 1979

Centre Scientific Technical Construction *Notebook of maintenance of exterior woodwork*, Note d'information technique 133, Brussels 1980

Cooper, R and Buckland, J *A practical guide to alterations and improvements*, International Thomson Publishing Ltd, London, 1985

Cuprinol Ltd *Specifications for the preservative treatment of timber*, Cuprinol Ltd, London, 1975

Department of the Environment *Historic buildings and conservation areas – policy and procedures*, Circular 8/87, Appendix IV, HMSO, London, 1987

Eldridge, H J *Common defects in buildings*, Property Services Agency, HMSO, London, 1976

English Heritage, *Principles of repair*, leaflet, English Heritage, London, 1989

Brereton, C *The repair of historic buildings—advice on principles and methods*, English Heritage, London, 1991

Feiesleben, W (European Council of Vinyl Manufacturers) *PVC and the environment – priorities for industry's actions*, Paper delivered at PVC '90 Conference, 24–26 April 1990

Fern, G *Getting to know your plastic windows*, *Journal of the Institute of Clerks of Works*, April 1988, 6–7

Fidler, J Glass reinforced plastic and cement facsimiles in building restoration, *Transactions of the Association for Studies in the Conservation of Historic Buildings (ASCHB)*, 12, 1987

Fidler, J *The problems of substitute materials in conservation*, *Building Trades Journal*, 182, No 543, November 1981, 26

Forrest, J W (BRE) *Durability of GRP in buildings*, Paper No 44, Reinforced Plastics Congress, Brighton, 14–16 November 1978, (British Plastics Federation, Reinforced Plastics Group), 1978

Graystone, J *The care and protection of wood*, ICI Paints Division, Slough, 1985

Greater London Council *Plastic windows 3: block evaluation*, Development and Materials Bulletin No 146, Item 4

ICOMOS *International charter for the conservation and restoration of monuments and sites* (The Venice Charter), International Council on Monuments and Sites, Venice, 1966

ICOMOS *Australia Charter for the conservation of places of cultural significance* (The Burra Charter), Australia ICOMOS Inc, Sydney, 1981

Myers, J H *Aluminium and vinyl siding (weather boarding) on historic buildings*, Preservation Brief No 8, Preservation Assistance Division, US National Park Service, Washington DC, 1981

Neiman, N *Ageing and stabilisation of polymers*, Consultants Bureau, New York, 1975

Northern Consortium of Housing Authorities *uPVC windows: the facts*, Chesterle-Street, 1988

Northern Consortium of Housing Authorities *Wood windows and doors: the long-term future*, Chesterle-Street, 1989

Park, S *The use of substitute materials on historic building exteriors*, Preservation Brief No 16, Preservation Assistance Division, US National Park Service, Washington DC, 1987

Property Services Agency *Maintaining exposed woodwork*, Property Services Agency Advisory Leaflet 62, HMSO, London, 1976

Property Services Agency *Windows: technical guidance*, Property Services Agency, Croydon, 1981

Ranby, B and Rabek, J F *Photodegradation, photo-oxidation and photostabilisation of polymers*, John Wiley, London, 1975

Rappe, C, Marklund, S, and Fangmark, I *Formation of dioxins and dibenzofurans during incineration of PVC*, Paper delivered at PVC '90 Conference 24–26 April 1990

Ruskin, J *The seven lamps of architecture* (particularly Chapter VI, The lamp of memory), London, 1849

Spindler, E *PVC, heavy metals and the environment*, Paper delivered at PVC '90 Conference 24–26 April 1990

Suddards, R W *Listed buildings: the law and practice, section 6 (problem operations and features – the nuts and bolts of listed building control)*, 2 edn, Sweet and Maxwell, London, 1988

Swedish Council for Building Research *Proceedings of windows in building design and maintenance: conference in Gothenburg, Sweden*, Stockholm, 1987

## SASH WINDOWS IN SCARBOROUGH



*Nos 10 and 12 East Sandgate, Scarborough in 1985 and in 1987, showing how restoration to character can be carved out using traditional materials (G Noble)*

All unprotected joinery deteriorates, if it is exposed to the elements. When these include damp and salty winds from the North Sea, even the most regularly painted surfaces are put to the test. In seaside towns like Scarborough, evidence of problems of neglected maintenance are all too apparent in the ranks of crumbling sash windows and rotting front doors, alongside unsuitable modern replacements.

Until recently, Scarborough provided rich pickings for the merchants of proprietary replacement doors and windows. Standard plastic or aluminium replacements are commonly installed on promises of 'maintenance-free' performance, yet invariably look out of place in the town's formal nineteenth-century terraces. The Borough Council was sufficiently concerned about the problem to ask English Heritage for help and, as a result, a special grant programme was set up to support traditional repair work.

Owners of buildings in the conservation area can apply for 50% grants for work to sliding sash windows or front doors. Grant funding is shared between the Council and English Heritage. The emphasis is on repair rather than renewal, although grants are also given for reinstatement in authentic facsimile in appropriate cases. Close attention is given to the standard of work, ensuring that timber sections and moulding profiles are accurate copies of original details and that sashes operate by traditional counterweighting. Double-glazing is usually unacceptable, as it changes the appearance due to the increased section of timber required to carry the sealed units. If applicants wish to install secondary glazing at their own expense to improve thermal insulation, then technical advice is given on suitable detailing. Day-to-day operation of the scheme is carried out by the Borough Council, using model specification clauses drawn up by English Heritage.

The scheme has only been operating for five years and there has been steady, if unspectacular, progress. Over 80 grants have been given for work totalling some £150,000. Almost all of this work has been for repair or like-for-like replacement, as the Council has had little success in persuading owners to take out recently paid-for modern doors or windows, even where they are most disfiguring. The enhancement of the conservation area has so far therefore been modest.

However, the benefits of the scheme are more subtle and far reaching. By limiting grants to doors and windows, the modest annual budget of £20,000 can help many more buildings than if the full range of building repairs were eligible. The Scarborough Town Scheme, which is confined to a small, but key part of the conservation area, is the main instrument for such comprehensive repairs.

The doors and windows scheme stresses attention to detail and there has been a perceptible improvement in craftsmanship as more joiners develop skills through the scheme. This is having benefits elsewhere, as the same skills are applied further afield. The Council's development control has also been helped by the scheme, with close links being forged between the conservation officer and the planning development control staff in dealing with building alterations.

Scarborough Borough Council and English Heritage have been encouraged by the scheme and are repeating it in the West Cliff area of Whitby. The Department of the Environment has recently confirmed an Article IV Direction for West Cliff, tightening planning control over alterations and ensuring that controls and incentives for conservation go hand in hand.

GEOFF NOBLE

*English Heritage*

## **STICKS, CARROTS, AND A HELPING HAND – THE LOCAL AUTHORITY EXPERIENCE**

### **STICKS**

In law, the responsibility for protecting the country's built heritage rests with the local planning authorities and principally the district councils. Above them, county councils have a duty to produce strategic plans for their area on a ten-year cycle. Recently Derbyshire revised its 1979 Structure Plan. This gave an opportunity for the county's small team of specialists within the field of historic buildings and archaeology to review the effectiveness of previous policies to protect listed buildings and conservation areas over the previous ten years.

During the period, much effort had gone into addressing the problem of the threat to historic buildings posed through neglect and decay – mainly through the work of the Derbyshire Historic Buildings Trust. However, it became clear that, by contrast, very little

progress had been made in addressing the less obvious, but more serious, threat of incremental destruction through unsympathetic alterations.

Out of a total of about 6000 listed buildings in Derbyshire, and many more unlisted buildings in the 166 conservation areas, about 250 (around 5%) are known to be under serious threat by virtue of dereliction or disrepair. By contrast, a considerable proportion – at least 25% – of the county's historic buildings, affecting 81 out of 166 of its conservation areas, have suffered a very significant degree of damage as a result of unsympathetic alterations.

In Derbyshire (with the exception of Derby where controls have been successfully imposed to deal with satellite dishes), the planning constraint – the 'stick' – of Article IV directions has sadly been only sparingly used. The operation of applying for and bringing in such 'directions' is a time consuming process, and one which, although attempted, has not until recently in all cases won the approval of the regional civil servants by whom each new order has to be approved. In order therefore to convince the regulators and the public, we need to show clearly what is happening to our historic areas and persuade them that our concerns about the erosion of the character of historic buildings are justified.



*Two cottages at Cromford built by Arkwright for his millworkers c 1780: the left-hand one was given bogus leaded lights in wooden frames c 1989; listed 1990 (DCC)*

## **CARROTS**

Although the 'stick' is not generally available or applicable, some progress can be achieved by the use of positive encouragement, the most effective form of which is the Town Scheme grant. Town Schemes are achieving wonderful things up and down the country and not nearly enough is made of the great benefits that they bring. Through partnership funding between English Heritage and the local authorities, 40% grants are made available for the repair of the most significant buildings in a conservation area.

Although the rules of the schemes limit grant aid to repair (not improvement or enhancement), fortunately much of the replacement off-the-peg joinery installed in the 60s and 70s is now thoroughly rotten and needs replacement. To turn the tide of disrepair and defacement in a town or village, a scheme needs to run for at least ten years. Within a modest annual budget of £26,000 a year, Ashbourne and Wirksworth – two of Derbyshire's finest historic small towns – have been transformed since 1978 when their Town Schemes began. The use of the 40% grant can ensure a presumption in favour of repair rather than replacement and, where replacement is inevitable, can ensure high standards of historical and architectural accuracy in detailing and decorative finish.

Town Scheme grants may also be favourably compared with house improvement and repair grants given under the Housing Acts which more often than not result in the destruction of historical joinery and its replacement with doors and windows of an unsuitable design and finish. In some cases, inappropriate alterations have been positively encouraged in the past through the availability and deployment of 90% house improvement grants.

Tragic though it may be, little of this damage is intentional. The irony is that people who install windows with 'stick on' leaded comes and garage doors with linenfold panelling in GRP may well consider themselves conservationists!

## **HELPING HANDS**

Historic Building Preservation Trusts have an important role in tackling the problem of listed buildings threatened with dereliction. They can also provide expert advice and lead

by example. The Derbyshire Historic Building Trust carried out such a scheme in 1982 at a late eighteenth-century mill worker's cottage at Belper. Although this cottage was not threatened by disrepair, there was every likelihood that it would be bought by someone who would – perhaps unwittingly, and copying other similar developments nearby – spoil its special character through unsympathetic alterations. With help from the County Council's Design and Conservation Team and with sponsorship from the Halifax Building Society, the Trust carried out a scheme which showed to the people of Belper that it was quite possible to install a new kitchen and a new bathroom and generally create an attractive home without any significant damage to the building's historic character. The Trust opened the cottage as a showhouse for several weeks on completion and published a series of technical fact sheets on different aspects of the work – including door and window repairs and door and window replacements. It also published the costs of the scheme to show it was done within a perfectly reasonable budget. The knock-on effect of this example has been considerable. With the extra help of the establishment of a Town Scheme, the tide of destruction has been stemmed. Many building preservation trusts – especially those in the south of England – claim that they cannot find suitable schemes to take on. Here is a major new role which they could be playing in winning over the hearts and minds of the misguided 'conservationist'.

The County Council carried out a similar scheme in 1989 in Whitwell – a conservation area village near Worksop, which was being comprehensively despoiled by the relentless substitution of attractive traditional doors and windows by plastic and crude wood replacements. The scheme included building-craft demonstration days, while the repair and conservation work was in progress. Fact sheets were published and made available for housebuilders within the whole portion of the county, where these particular vernacular building types are found. In this case, the Derbyshire Building Society sponsored the publications. The cottages were opened as showhouses at the end of the contract. It was clear from comments in the visitors' book that the approach worked and that there is a great need for householders to have better access to specialist advice – some of which needs to be area specific.

One of the most useful services offered by the Derbyshire historic buildings team is the maintenance of a register of building craftsmen who have carried out good-quality work on historic buildings. This kind of advice needs to be much more readily available and individual building craftsmen need to be able to make their special skills more widely known. There is doubtless also a very considerable opportunity for the standard 'off the peg' window and door manufacturers to improve their products, so that they are more suitable for use in historic town and village properties. There will always be a role for the local joiner who can repair as well as replace and who can respond to the rich variety of regional joinery styles by continuing practices which are already centuries old.

BARRY JOYCE

*Planning Department, Derbyshire County Council*

## **VALUE ADDED TAX**

### **A DISINCENTIVE TO SENSITIVE REPAIRS**

The Chancellor of the Exchequer's recent Budget decision to increase the standard rate of Value Added Tax (VAT) to 17.5% will unfortunately add to the financial burden already being suffered by conscientious homeowners who maintain their historic properties.

Ironically, repairs are taxed, whilst 'improvements' are exempted.

New works and alterations for domestic and charitable buildings are zero-rated, a situation which encourages the removal or drastic amendment of existing components and fittings

and thereby contributes to the long-term erosion of historic character and interest referred to elsewhere in these papers. How did this state of affairs evolve?

When VAT was extended to general building alteration work in 1984, the Government allowed for zero-rating of approved alterations to protected buildings. In this context, 'approved alterations' means any work for which listed building consent, or scheduled monument consent if applicable, is required and has been obtained. 'Protected buildings' are listed buildings, buildings within the curtilage of a listed building, or scheduled ancient monuments. However, unlisted dwellings within conservation areas do not qualify as protected buildings within this definition and still therefore remain outside the scope of this concession.

In addition, the sale or long lease of a 'substantially reconstructed protected building' was zero-rated. 'Substantially' in this context is taken to mean one of two things: either that more than 60% of the actual cost of the building operations is attributable to the 'approved alterations' which would be zero-rated, if they were carried out by a contract building

or that the reconstructed building incorporates no more of the original protected building than the external walls, together with other external features (such as roofs, domes, colonnades, or entrance arches) of architectural or historic interest.

These definitions, particularly the latter, refer to tax exemption for drastic works, which are hardly conducive to English Heritage's tenet of minimal intervention.

All other works of maintenance or repair are charged at standard rate. In this sense, the situation is unsatisfactory in that it militates against the proper conservation of historic buildings where there is encouragement to owners to undertake major reconstruction works in order to obtain the tax advantage rather than follow the course of more minimum repair that we would advise.

In line with European Commission policies, the concession on those buildings, where a non-domestic end use is envisaged, was withdrawn in April 1989. The imposition of the full, standard rate of VAT to previously approved works has eliminated the anomaly between repair, alteration, and new build of non-domestic structures. However, the anomaly continues for houses and especially those in conservation areas.

English Heritage and other bodies have campaigned for this situation to be remedied and have suggested that a possible compromise might be to impose a rate lower than the standard tax for historic buildings, but on repairs as well as alterations. This may be more palatable to the Treasury, as it may not risk an adverse ruling by the European Court. So far, the Government has resisted these arguments. In the light of recent public debate, however, and especially the Prince of Wales's speech last year and now the DoE White Paper *This common inheritance*, there may be a better climate of opinion in which to reopen the debate.

STEVE NELSON

*English Heritage*

## **TACKLING IGNORANCE, DISINTEREST, AND ANTIPATHY**

### **THE ROLE OF A NATIONAL AMENITY SOCIETY**

The Georgian Group was founded in 1937 as a direct response to the demolition of much of Georgian London. Partly responsible for the introduction in 1947 of the concept of 'listing' buildings of historic or architectural interest, the Group is one of the five National Amenity Societies of England and Wales which were given legal consultative status by the 1971 Town and County Planning Act. This means that the Group must be consulted by the appropriate planning authority on any works which involve demolition or substantial

alteration involving part demolition (however this may be interpreted in practice) of listed buildings approximately within the 'Georgian' period, which in practice extends from about 1700 to about 1840.

Approximately 8000 planning applications a year are referred to the Group's single London and three regional caseworkers. Their operations are funded solely by the national membership of 3200, who also benefit from the Group's lecture and meetings programmes. In addition, the Group runs a series of educational programmes funded entirely by a grant from the Monument Trust, which includes courses for homeowners; the production of advisory leaflets aimed not at professionals, but at the average homeowner; lectures on key conservation issues given to local societies, colleges, and professional bodies; liaison with other amenity societies and with local authorities around the country; and articles on conservation issues written for the specialist and the consumer press.



*St Albans: well-meaning though misguided home improvements are changing the character of these Victorian houses (S Parissien)*

Many of these activities are related to specific Group campaigns; of these, the issue of the erosion of historic detail – seen most graphically in the case of replacement windows and doors – is one of the most crucial. Any success which we can achieve in stemming the flood of inappropriate replacements or additions will benefit Britain's rich heritage of historic buildings and will also have the far more immediate effect of helping to reduce our crushing caseload of advice on an increasing number of local authority consultations involving the unauthorised installation of such unsuitable features.

The threat to historic buildings from unsuitable replacement windows and doors is real and growing. Manufacturers frequently rely on misleading terminology to sell their wares, associating (in the case of windows) the concept of wood with that of inevitable decay and stressing the 21st century technology of 'uPVC' plastic and aluminium. Exaggerated claims regarding longevity and maintenance which arise from such marketing strategies pose a serious threat to genuine historic features and to the properties in which they are found. Equally worrying from the Georgian Group's point of view is the deliberate abuse of historical terminology in order to give poorly designed modern products and relatively untried modern materials the veneer of historical respectability. A 'Georgian' or, more insidiously, a 'Georgian-style' window is often little more than a bleach-white plastic frame with an internal grid of intersecting white, plastic strips. Words such as 'Georgian' or 'Regency' are thus wholly devalued, and period detailing confused to create hybrid styles which never existed. Such abuse is not, of course, restricted to uPVC: aluminium and even timber versions get it wrong.

Marketing concepts such as these are aggressively promoted and conspicuously well-funded. Given the conservation lobby's comparative lack of resources (the Georgian Group, like so many organisations in the conservation world, is a registered charity of decidedly limited means) it often appears difficult to fight back effectively with a counterbalancing argument.

Encouragingly, an increasing number of local authorities are now producing their own written guides on issues such as window and door design, which are made freely available to homeowners and building-related professionals in their area. Such enlightened authorities are, however, still in the minority; many other councils find that they have insufficient time, manpower, financial resources, or political will to produce their own advisory material.

This is where the Georgian Group attempts to play its key educational role. Its first three advisory leaflets, covering *Windows*, *Brickwork*, and *Doors*, summarise for the interested

layman simple dos and don'ts with regard to historical development and methods of repair and maintenance. *Windows*, for example, proffers practicable alternatives to window replacement: the piecing in of wooden repairs, secondary glazing, and draught-proofing – solutions which are all substantially cheaper than wholesale substitution. A key message with regard to new windows in historic buildings is that unsuitable replacements can not only look aesthetically hideous, but can also seriously affect the value of your house, both through the structural damage which they can cause and through the resulting disappearance of valued genuine 'period' characteristic.

The Group's leaflet series currently comprises nine titles, all of which are sent free to every local authority in the country, in the hope that conservation officers and their planning department colleagues will be able to use them to alert the public to the issues involved when they apply for listed building consent, and, of course, to spread awareness of these issues among owners of unlisted properties, too. Later in 1991, the Group's revised *Windows* guide will be complemented by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings' Technical Pamphlet on *The repair of timber windows*, which details simple and cheap alternatives to the philosophy of instant replacement.

There is obviously a clear need for local societies and professional institutions to become involved in campaigning as well. The Georgian Group (nor English Heritage for that matter) cannot hope to make their nationally-targeted advisory material applicable to every local situation or building tradition. There is thus a pressing need for local branches of the RIBA, the RICS, and the RTPI, as well as for local civic societies and other concerned local amenity groups, to produce their own advisory guidelines.

Unless we can stress the benefits of sympathetic restoration and refurbishment, the situation for our historic buildings will not improve. We need to communicate the increasingly obvious fact that houses which have been robbed of most of their original features – houses, moreover of all periods – are now proving very difficult to sell; that local alternatives, in the form of traditional craftsmen and impartial advisers, do exist; and that our built environment is at risk, and, once gone, is wholly irreplaceable.

STEVEN PARISSIEN

*Education Officer, Georgian Group*

## **REPLACEMENT WINDOWS AND DOORS IN CONSERVATION AREAS**

### **THE HOVE EXPERIENCE**

The Borough of Hove has over 500 listed buildings, the majority of which are in the Brunswick Conservation Area which contains mainly Regency and early Victorian terraced buildings. In addition, a further 150 acres of the town centre lie within designated conservation areas where there are very few listed buildings.

During the 1950s and 60s, these conservation areas suffered greatly from unsympathetic alterations and from an epidemic of unauthorised development. They contain a number of 1950s tower blocks and other buildings which result from official redevelopment policies which prevailed over 20 years ago. Replacement of windows in these areas is a particular problem. There are many elderly and transient residents, and windows are often replaced in the numerous privately rented properties by absentee freeholders who have no knowledge of local planning policies. In some streets, non-original windows and doors (together with altered roofs and missing curtilage walls) exist in over 70% of properties.





*Osborne Villas, Hove: the insertion of a traditional door, put back after appeal, has retained the character of the terrace (Hove BC)*

Conservation in Hove is therefore an uphill struggle. It is not just aimed at maintaining or caring for the conservation areas, but at reversing earlier trends and arresting the process of decline. This situation demands a new and different kind of conservation area management.

The replacement of windows is permitted development on single private dwelling houses, but can be controlled if installed in flats or commercial premises. In a mixed area, therefore, it can be very difficult for the Council to enforce consistent policies.

Nevertheless, in 1983 the Council decided to take a hard, firm, consistent approach and published policy leaflets which were given wide circulation on doors and windows (and other subjects). These explained that plastic or aluminium windows were not acceptable in conservation areas, and that 'lookalike' (non-wooden) windows were not acceptable.

These leaflets are not 'design guides', as they did not offer advice, but gave a clear policy direction. They enabled enquiries to be handled swiftly and unequivocally, and enabled councillors to take clear and swift decisions on planning applications.

As these firm policies have become established, and decision making has become consistent, the number of unauthorised installations has begun to drop and the number of appeals won has grown. In the last six years, the Council has contested 14 appeals relating to windows. Three cases were lost in 1986/7, but since then, as the problem has been better recognised and the arguments better articulated, all 11 remaining cases have been won.

The existence of the policy leaflets and the fact that they are included in the Borough Plan are of fundamental value at planning appeals. The views of planning inspectors are critical at inquiries. The following quotations from their reports show that the Council's approach to policy and conservation area management in general is at least as important a factor as the individual merits of the case.

'The commendable efforts being made by the Council and others seem to be worthy of support'

'The Council has firm and clear policies widely circulated. The Council has gone to considerable lengths to inform both residents and local window installers that it is unlikely to agree to the installation of non-traditional materials in the Conservation Area'.

'The Council's recent imposition of tighter planning controls is fully justified'. It appears that most unsympathetic replacement windows and doors were installed prior to the Article IV Direction and were then 'permitted development' not within the Council's control. I am satisfied that the Council's current policies should lead to an eventual improvement of the street'.

Inspectors have also said that it is anomalous to grant-aid proper doors and windows, but at the same time not to enforce against unsympathetic doors and windows in the same area. Policing these policies requires effort, and all cases have to be pursued.

Photographic surveys of every property every few years helps in this process, as does a quick, 'no nonsense' approach to enforcement. On the positive side, the Council has published a leaflet which lists local companies who can install, repair, and overhaul wood sliding sash windows. All these leaflets are free and are given wide circulation.

The last of the excerpts from planning inspectors' decisions quoted above is particularly telling. It relates to the proposed installation of a modern door in a terrace of non-listed properties, where similar doors and plastic windows have been installed throughout the 60s, 70s, and 80s. The success of this case shows that a council can take action, even

though the street already contains a number of unacceptable alterations. It is therefore possible to 'stop the rot': councils do not have to accept the lowest common denominator or accept that decline in the street's appearance is inevitable.

GORDON SOMERVILLE

*Assistant Director of Planning, Hove Borough Council*

## **FRAMING OPINIONS: THE WAY AHEAD**

Lord Montagu's foreword challenges all those concerned with the quality of the built environment to consider their own response to the threat posed by unsuitable replacement windows and doors in our historic towns and villages. English Heritage and its allies will play their full part in developing and maintaining the momentum of this pioneering campaign which already, in its first few months, has reached 16 million people. But regional and local action is vital, if we are to be successful in stemming the tide of inappropriate change in conservation areas. What needs to be done?

At national level, we are in constructive discussions with the replacement window and door trade associations and hope to announce specific proposals in the near future. We have opened a dialogue with the emerging specialist draught-proofing industry and are meeting with ironmongery manufacturers, joinery companies, and other commercial concerns interested to align themselves with our initiative. Soon we will be contacting local authorities, banks, building societies, and estate agents, whose activities can influence home improvements, with a view to seeking their participation in our campaign. English Heritage is also discussing the possibility of regional conferences with its sister organisations and sponsors in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and the Channel Islands. Themed technical seminars are also being planned with the woodcare industry and with manufacturers of traditional steel windows and doors.

We are also preparing raw data for a *Framing opinions campaign pack* about which future announcements will be made. This information will help local authorities and civic societies to prepare locally focused technical, aesthetic, and economic information for use by consumers and home owners.

Local authorities are encouraged to use the full range of planning controls and incentives available to them, but they can also provide homeowners in conservation areas with guidance on visual appearance, historic detailing, repair, maintenance, and upgrading technology, as well as information on costs-in-use and local benign products and services. Provision of such advice can bring immediate short-term benefits in reduced development control casework loads. There may also be possibilities for commercial sponsorship of publications and certainly opportunities for local business generation and employment. Civic societies and local amenity groups can play their part by working with local planning departments to locate and promote local joiners or window and door repair services. Where local councils are unwilling or unable to help guide residents of conservation areas, there are precedents for local voluntary action to produce advisory publications, or, in the case of building preservation trusts, to set standards through exemplary restoration schemes.

We have plenty of ideas for local and national contributions to this campaign, and the articles in this special supplement of *Conservation Bulletin* are given as a few examples. Our 'Framing Opinions' campaign has only just begun. We believe that it offers challenges and benefits to everyone.

JENNIFER PAGE

*Chief Executive, English Heritage*