

Design matters: Berwick-upon-Tweed, Spittal and Tweedmouth

Doors and windows in the historic environment

In Berwick, the majority of domestic doorways are emphasized in one of three classically inspired ways:

- raised dressed stone surrounds or hoods
- full decorative door cases, most in stone

- more elaborate, grander porches providing strong architectural emphasis





Most traditional doorways incorporate an over-light (also known as a fan light) above the door: glass panels in the door are not common. Typically doorways are set back in a deep reveal and have a few stone steps up to the door.

Access alleys from the street to backyards (vennels) are often slightly wider than front doors, and are generally plainer with either a panelled or ledged and braced construction.



Landmark and institutional buildings make great play of doorways, emphasizing grandeur and status with enlarged proportions and enhanced detailing.

Most arched openings are either segmental or rounded (semi-circular); some are three-centred or elliptical.

In Tweedmouth, most doorways are uncomplicated features but are nonetheless prominent in the buildings' plain elevations. In the older parts, domestic doorways are emphasized as in Berwick, but generally in a more restrained way. Most over-lights are square, some with simple glazing bar arrangements.

External staircases to upper level doors are also traditional early features.

Plenty of original timber front doors survive, particularly heavy unglazed panelled doors in dark, rich colours (some with a central bead to resemble double doors as a show of importance), and these are integral to the historic presence of doorways.

The same is true of surviving traditional door furniture such as knobs, knockers, keyholes, letter boxes, bell-pulls and pushes, foot scrapers and lanterns.



Windows



In Berwick, the large number of surviving historic windows is crucial to the area's character and appearance. Window openings are strongly vertical and, like doorways, the openings are often emphasized.

Windows are spread evenly across elevations, usually symmetrically, and are mainly single but can also be in pairs or, in later buildings, in groups of three. Many window openings have Classical proportions, with first and/or second floor openings smaller than the first and/or

ground floor ones.

One or two windows have decorative iron balconettes to add grandeur (e.g. No.4 Palace Street East). Original crown glass adds extra historic character where it survives.

Many windows from all periods survive in Tweedmouth. Window openings are again strongly vertical and, like doorways, the openings are often emphasized. Windows are spread evenly across



elevations, often symmetrically, and are mainly found singly but can also be in pairs or, in later buildings, in groups of three. In contrast to Berwick, only a few window openings have classical proportions.



Across the whole area, the dominant traditional window type is a pair of double-hung vertical sliding timber sashes, earlier ones being subdivided with glazing bars, later ones having larger panes (perhaps with one vertical glazing bar) and therefore horns for added strength. Most would have been off-white. Some later Victorian and Edwardian ones have unequal sashes, taller lower ones and shorter ones

above, the latter often with stained glass. Edwardian windows can also be timber casements with smaller stained or leaded glass top-lights.

All windows would have been set back from the face of the building in a reveal which adds depth and life to elevations.

The majority are either emphasized with large dressed stones around the entire opening or have complete raised stone frames, some moulded.

Bay windows are not a common feature of the dominant period of development, but some later and grander houses have them. Casements are found in many nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings.



Most buildings in the area were designed with, and still have, uncluttered roofscapes, particularly to the front. The earliest dormers are cat-slide in form. Later original dormers are mainly small, vertically proportioned timber features protruding midway up the main roof slope, or from the wall head, which have curved or hipped pitched roofs typical of Victorian and Edwardian alterations.

New constructions and repair Points to consider

Article 4 (2) Directions require planning permission to be sought for certain types of development which would otherwise be permitted without the need for consent. Directions are made to further protect character and appearance from minor incremental changes which, over the years, can accumulate to cause considerable harm to character. Berwick has an Article 4 direction to cover alterations to windows and doors, for which owners must obtain Planning Permission. Repairs that are strictly like-for-like do not need consent.

Roof-lights are not a traditional feature of the





area's architecture, but a few original ones can be seen on rear slopes. Where they have been introduced, the least intrusive are positioned on rear roof planes. The best examples are small, with low profile frames and positioned in line with the windows below. Prominent, highly visible roof planes to the front, rear and side should be kept free of modern roof-lights.

The effect which fenestration has on a building's character and appearance should not be underestimated. Even slight changes to details (such as glazing bar thickness and profile) can dramatically alter the character and appearance of a building.

Traditional windows, whether timber or metal, should normally be repaired not replaced. An existing window in a listed building or area covered by an Article 4 Direction (the whole of Berwick Conservation Area) should only be replaced after it has been agreed with

Northumberland County Council's Conservation service that it is truly beyond practical economic repair.

When a building element such as a window (which is classed as a controlled fitting under Building Regulations) is replaced, it will also need to comply with the requirements of the Building Regulations. Please check with the Council before replacing any window to establish whether Listed Building Consent, Planning Permission and/or Building Regulation approval is required.

Generally, the wholesale replacement of a 'traditional window' should match the form, detailing, style, material and operation of the window to be copied; including the profiles of all the window components; including head, jambs, cill of the frame; stiles, rails and glazing bars of the sashes or casements. Unfortunately, many 'replacement products' that claim to match historic designs do not do so.



Exact reproduction is possible and many specialist contractors, carpenters or joiners can

provide a bespoke service. They will accurately replace your windows in soft or hard wood, thus respecting the traditional character and period of the building. New windows will have the advantage of better draught proofing and might even benefit from discreet low-profile sealed glazing units, which are becoming slimmer and slimmer.

Pitfalls to avoid

Replacing traditional wooden sliding sash windows and timber doors with modern designs or mock reproductions in PVCu, aluminium and unpainted hardwood. The visual effect of modern materials with inaccurate design is invariably jarring against a well-aged building constructed in natural traditional materials.

PVCu frames with sealed double glazed units are thicker, more angular and lifeless than timber and cannot accurately incorporate details such as mouldings, horns, beadings and stained glass.

Plastic or lead glazing bars are often strips superimposed on or within sealed units, giving a flat, flimsy appearance. The result will almost always harm character and appearance.

Fake sash windows (top-hung casements) rarely reflect the particular style of the building. These and other modern window styles, including small top opening lights and those with horizontal proportions, often have clumsy, chunky proportions.

Too often they are placed flush with the face of the building, rather than being set back into an appropriate reveal, thus losing characteristic depth and shadow.

Altering or repositioning original window or door openings, e.g. by widening them or lowering window sills. This harms the proportions of elevations. Additional windows and door openings should be sympathetic in scale, design, and detail to the original building.

Painting sandstone detailing, particularly door and window surrounds, which destroys the rich historic patina of time that characterizes mature unpainted sandstone.

An over-dependence on the use of colour can give the building an unduly elaborate appearance, inappropriate for the area's often understated

architecture. This can make individual buildings stand out visually to the detriment of a group.

Designing extensions or new development without characteristic front doors (e.g. for flats developments). This confuses the straightforward relationship between house and street which defines the area's buildings (e.g.. Cleet Court), and can leave blank elevations at pedestrian level (e.g.. Nos.1-8 Bridge Court).

Large projecting flat-roofed box dormers that are horizontal in emphasis. Such projections dominate the layered roofscape that is characterised by slopes and pitches, and bear no resemblance to the vertical proportions and styling of the windows below.

Siting roof-lights eccentrically on the roof slope with no reference to the fenestration below, and which sit proud of the roof plane. Both of these interrupt the simplicity of the roofscape.

Porches which stand out visually in the street and over-dominate the host building.

To the right and below you will see five examples of Berwick conventions, all of which show the integrity of our local vernacular architecture.

Techniques like this combine to give a subtle but noticeable 'grain' to the town which makes it distinctive. It's part of how Berwick is not quite like anywhere else.



Find out more from

The Conservation Area Character Appraisals for Berwick, Tweedmouth and Spittal.

Guides on technical issues and traditional skills from English Heritage and Historic Scotland.

Northumberland County Council's Conservation Team

This is one of a series of guides to help designers, builders and homeowners. It is based on the official Conservation Area Character Appraisals for Berwick, Tweedmouth and Spittal.

There are other leaflets available or planned on
Roofs, chimneys and rainwater goods
Shopfronts
Conservation areas and listed buildings
New builds and extensions in the conservation areas.

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