

Georgian houses

The eighteenth century has been called the age of elegance, and indeed the imaginative use of serenely classical forms in the houses of this period says it all. There were to be no major advances in house planning beyond the achievements of the previous two centuries. Plans that were in existence soon after 1600 and had become widespread by 1700 remained the mainstay of the house builder. The one significant exception was the design of the terrace, and even here a standard plan had been evolved well before George I came to the throne in 1714.

His accession brought the Whigs political power. They promoted a change in architectural taste that turned its back on the distinctive baroque style of Sir Christopher Wren and his associates, Nicholas Hawksmoor and Sir John Vanbrugh. In its place came the revived classicism of the devotees of the Italian Renaissance architect, Andrea Palladio, and his English follower Inigo Jones, with Lord Burlington and the Scottish architect Colen Campbell at their head.

None of these new men was involved in building houses for common people, but their influence on taste and consequently on the style of everyday houses was overwhelming. The vigorous style of the seventeenth century, in which medieval and Renaissance motifs came together in a bravura display of self-confidence, gave way to chastely correct classical forms. Occasionally, there was a playful Gothic touch that had no more to do with the Middle Ages than its courtly romantic inventors had to do with the clerical lords who had been the principal builders three hundred years beforehand.

However correctly the gentlemen of the eighteenth century pursued the classical ideal, there were marked changes in taste in the Georgian period, and these were fully reflected in house design. While Georgian England properly began with the accession of the first of the Hanoverians in 1714, and continued to the death of George IV's brother William IV in 1837, politically it was founded well before that with the 'Glorious Revolution' and the accession of William and Mary in 1689; and artistically its origins lay even earlier in the work of Inigo Jones. So long a period could hardly be without changes in taste and style.

Industrial and urban development

Developments in taste fade into insignificance as society itself changed through the consequences of the Industrial Revolution and an unprecedented growth in population. How this affected the way people lived was, for many, anything but beautiful and elegant, and it, too, showed in the houses of the period.

At the start of the eighteenth century the population stood at rather less than six million. By 1837, the population had more than doubled to well over twelve million, and was increasing at an extraordinary rate. No longer was a minority of this population living in towns; nor were the towns the same. The old market towns that had been founded in the Middle Ages were either growing to inordinate size under the stimulus of industries which had been revolutionized by the factory system, or were bowing to new industrial towns that had been no more than villages a few decades beforehand.

The whole emphasis of house building consequently changed. The new demand was for houses in town. Only the enclosure of once open fields to make new farms provided a great impetus to build new houses in the countryside. The attraction of many towns was so great that houses were fitted into every open space in the centre to accommodate a new industrial class. But for many people, paradoxically probably a declining proportion of the total population, there was money to be made, and this urban middle class looked to the healthier fringes of town for a place to live.

If the exuberance of the architectural styles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries reflects the bucolic confidence of yeomen and merchants who knew what they liked, the restrained classicism of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries reflects the gentility of an age that liked good manners and respected correct behaviour. The division between taste and the drudgery which supported it became more marked as the years passed, and this, too, is visible in the houses of the age.

Partly through tradition, partly through the greater mobility of urban life, even rich people seldom purchased a house in town, let alone a new house. Instead they leased one, completing the last link in a long chain of landlord, speculator and craftsman-builder who, between them, had organized its construction and physically built it.

The old days when country yeomen built for themselves and their descendants were largely over. Instead of people pleasing themselves in this way and mixing fashion and tradition in what they chose, they now chose from ready-made houses. These appealed to taste by keeping up with every whim of fashion, but, being inexpensive, they also appealed to the speculators who financed them, and so they were built to proved stock patterns, in both planning and decoration, because these would find a ready market. Fashion itself was promoted by an ever-increasing list of pattern books.

The terrace house

These are the reasons why the terrace house was so successful. It could be built in large numbers, even though by a process that seems to have been chaotically managed because so many people were involved in its construction and financing. In practice, the terrace house was anything but chaotic. It imposed regularity on a street where there might otherwise have been the chaos of individual, disordered building. So each terrace was more than the sum of its individual houses, and standardized ornament enhanced these qualities. The terrace exemplified the sense

of order inherent in the classical taste that then held sway, and its restrained decoration demonstrated the same taste through ornate door surrounds, fine chimney-pieces, rich plaster ceiling cornices, carved and turned staircase balusters, and all kinds of ornaments which added status without excessive cost.

As the eighteenth century progressed, this ornament increasingly became the subject of influential pattern books, many of them written by the leading architects of the day. They, the experts, publicized a great variety of classical forms, and showed how they could be applied to doorways, chimney-pieces and indeed all kinds of decorative features which introduced builders and the public alike to what would most fashionably adorn their houses. All the while the keynote was taste and order.

The terrace itself imposed another kind of order. It was increasingly built to a number of patterns described in the books, and in a number of standard sizes. Usually there would be one size in one street, another in another, so that there were good streets and less good streets. This was a clear reflection of the desire for greater physical divisions between the classes of society. These divisions were even reflected within the house itself, so far as the ground-floor and first-floor rooms were the most important and were the abode of the master and his immediate family, while the basement and attics were the least important and occupied by servants. No longer were servants members of an economic unit as they had been in the countryside. They usually played no part in the master's profession or trade, and so became a lesser breed, with divisions even among themselves that separated cook from skivvy.

On the outside of the house, these divisions were reflected in the size of the windows. The basement windows were small, and sometimes hardly visible, so low were they set. The windows above were large and clearly visible, but the uppermost windows would again be smaller as befitted classical ideas of proportion and the lowly status of the rooms they served; the top windows might even be hidden behind a parapet, an apt symbol for the scant regard shown to the lowlier servants.

Materials and decoration

Depending on the resources of the locality, houses were now generally made of brick or stone. These had more status than timber, and anyway were often cheaper. Where timber was still the major building material, houses were often tile-hung or plastered. Specially shaped tiles known as mathematical tiles gave a passable imitation of brick, and plaster could be grooved or channelled to look like masonry.

Before the eighteenth century was out, the taste for the picturesque on occasion oddly reversed these fashions, and brought the first *cottages ornées*, houses pretending to be the rustic cottages of the past, replete with timbering and thatch. In the Georgian period, these houses had a frivolous quality, but they were to lead to a more serious style in the Victorian period that would last to the present.

The main decorative feature of the outside of each house was its doorway. Doorways had always needed some form of emphasis, and, in a long terrace, each door needed even more of this, simply to indicate the individual houses. Up until the early part of the eighteenth century, front doors were usually emphasized by hoods

supported by ornately carved brackets. These served to keep the rain off the doorway, in the way that grander houses could rely on projecting porches. By the middle of the century, fashion rather than practicality dispensed with projecting hoods and instead required some form of classical entablature or even a pediment supported on a pair of pilasters or half columns, placed one each side of the door. These were usually made of wood, but the need to avoid combustible material and, once again, the working of fashion brought stucco into prominence later.

One of the most remarkable decorative features of the later eighteenth century was the use of a form of fired pottery called Coade stone after its manufacturer and designer, Eleanor Coade. She, uniquely, represented women in the male-dominated world of building. Her stoneware was used for all kinds of architectural decoration, none more characteristic than the keystones with moulded heads on them which appear ubiquitously in houses of the period.

Doors were now more elaborate. Apart from the cheap plank doors to servants' quarters, they were made from a frame of vertical and horizontal timbers called styles and rails; these were grooved to take panels, usually a pair at the top, another pair in the middle and a further pair at the bottom, though there were many variations.

In front of the house, wooden posts gave way to wrought-iron railings as the eighteenth century drew on, and these in turn gave way to cheaper cast iron, which allowed fashionable designs to be mass-produced in large numbers to meet an insatiable demand for decorative railings, lamp-holders, balconies and even porches.

Well before the end of the seventeenth century the sash window was taking the place of the casement. It consisted of a pair of sliding frames or sashes set in pairs of vertical grooves, an outer sash above and an inner sash below, to make the window weathertight. Only the upper one of these double sashes opened at first, and it had to be propped open, but soon both sashes could slide open and shut, and they were counterbalanced by weights hung from them on ropes running over pulleys. At the start of the eighteenth century, the boxes which contained the counterweights were set flush with the outer face of the window. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, largely through a greater desire to reduce the amount of visible woodwork, the sash boxes were rebated into the inner face of the wall and so became almost invisible from the outside.

The sash window was taller than it was wide, and its proportions were carefully graded to fit into the front of a house. The need to maintain the ordering of an elevation meant that sometimes a window was needed on the outside where there was no room for it inside, so a blank panel was put in its place. Windows were taxed from 1696 to 1851, and this has led to the idea that many of these blind windows were an attempt to avoid the tax, but it is rarely the case.

In the countryside some houses were too low for tall windows, and horizontal bands of windows continued in use, with opening casements set among them. A few houses were given horizontally sliding sashes, sometimes called Yorkshire sliding sashes, although they were not confined to that county, or even to the north.

At the start of the eighteenth century, the roof line of most fashionable houses

was marked by an elaborate wooden cornice, set under the eaves. It might be moulded but was often carved with rich classical decoration, even though the houses lacked classical columns or pilasters on their front elevations. These eaves cornices were a fire hazard as the flames could easily catch them and spread to a neighbouring house. In the City of London they were outlawed in 1707, and parapets were put in their place. Elsewhere it is debatable whether it was the risk of fire or attention to fashion that made the parapet popular, but, since parapets made it harder for rain to run off a roof, it is likely that fashion had most to do with their popularity.

Extensive guttering was now applied to the eaves of most houses to lead rainwater well away from the walls. Ornamental hoppers or rainwater heads made of lead became a prominent feature of many houses, and even the downfall pipe and its spout might be ornamented. By the end of the eighteenth century these were more usually made of iron and their decoration fell out of fashion until the Victorians revived it.

Interior style

Inside houses, the boarded floor became universal for all except the servants' workrooms, which generally had flagged stone floors. Very lavish houses might have decorative floors laid with stone or tiles set in geometric patterns. The stairs sometimes had stone treads, which were cantilevered from the wall that supported one side of the staircase.

Inside most houses, timber retained its usefulness for longer than it did outside. It was now seldom indigenous oak but imported fir shipped from the Baltic, and, in the nineteenth century, pine was coming from Canada as well. Wood panelling remained a common way of finishing walls, though the panels became much larger, and usually comprised a single panel stretching from the skirting up to about waist height to form a dado, and a second panel above that stretching up to a cornice. The panels were well proportioned, just as sash windows were, and set in moulded frames. As the eighteenth century progressed, the upper panels were omitted and the walls were plastered instead. They might be painted with tinted water-based paint, or they might be covered in patterned wallpaper, although this was expensive and, adding to its cost, was taxed. Eventually the lower panel was abandoned too, except where it might protect a wall from scuffing, such as in a passage or up a staircase.

The cornice between wall and ceiling was an occasion for decoration even in the plainest of rooms. It might be no more than a moulding run out by the plasterer, but it could be set with preformed ornament of various classical types, and might even be integrated into a scheme of plastering that embraced both the walls and the ceiling, and emphasized doorways and window openings.

The windows on all but the top floors still had shutters, both for security and privacy. Increasingly shutters were made in two sets of folding leaves that could be housed in boxes each side of the window, and then gave the appearance of small panels angled to the window which diffused the light around the room. Occasionally shutters were arranged as rising sashes installed in a box at the base of the frame. It

was in the later nineteenth century that fabric curtains took their place.

During the seventeenth century, sea coal brought through local ports from collieries around the Tyne, the Severn and other rivers became the main fuel to keep town fires burning. Coal, unlike wood, does not benefit from burning slowly on a great heap of embers, and, since it burns at a higher temperature than wood, smaller fires were adequate. To provide a good draught, the fires were made in small iron grates, set into fireplaces seldom more than about 2 feet square. They were raised above an ash pit, and often fitted with hobs where kettles could be boiled for making pots of expensive but fashionable tea, and where small pans could heat snacks. These grates provided an opportunity for various decorative effects, contrasting with the surrounding chimney-piece, which might take the form of a tiled, fireproof surround set within a classical architrave, with a mantel shelf that gave them the common name of mantelpiece.

Since a fire was the centre of a room as well as a symbol of hospitality, it prompted the most decoration, and was always designed for show. In the cheapest of houses, there might be a plain wooden or stone surround, and only taste limited the ostentation that wealth could bring to a chimney-piece in a rich salon. The whole gamut of classical ornament was applied to their decoration, and this was augmented by carved panels on the chimney-piece itself and elaborate over-mantels with mirrors and much carving that extended right up to the ceiling.

Staircases became more elaborate so far as the individual treads extended slightly beyond the string that carried them, and this consequently had to be cut into the shape of the individual steps. These so-called open strings accentuated the tread ends, and they were often decorated with a scroll to highlight them even further. The treads themselves, rather than the string, carried turned balusters with elegantly refined curves or with barley-sugar twists. By the end of the century, such ornament was thought to be excessive and, increasingly, balusters were made of thin rectangular strips of wood that seemed to be hardly strong enough to support their elegantly curving rails.

With so much decoration, it was a simple matter to differentiate between the master's and family's quarters and the servants'. The stairs down to the basement and up to the attic would still have closed strings, while the main stairs had ornate open strings. The doors in the basement might still be no more than plank doors with latches, while the best doors were panelled and had mortised locks and elegant china handles. Upstairs there might be simpler and thinner panelled doors with their locks not mortised but attached to the face of the frame, and made of brass in the main rooms or iron in the lesser ones. The handles would possibly be of brass rather than china. In the attics there might be plainer doors still, perhaps with no more than latches. The attic rooms devoted to the most junior servants, such as the general servant or maid, would have no fire at all, while the most senior servant, such as the cook or butler, would have a small fire, but with a plain surround. Gradations of status were everywhere to be seen. There was a place for everyone, and everyone knew his place.



Detached houses

Although there were no significant new plans for houses developed during the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the appearance of houses varied extensively among already established types and as changes in style took effect. Tradition dies hard, and the styles of the seventeenth century lasted well into the eighteenth, especially in places beyond the influence of London and a few other important centres of fashion.

Provincial building

In the countryside this was especially the case whenever a house was built independently from the taste of a great landed estate. It could easily assume a style that was at least fifty years behind the latest fashions of the day. This is evident in an attractive farmhouse at Cobham in Kent (A), which was given a new front in 1712 and a plaque to record it. Cobham is not far from London, but, where style goes, it could have been built some thirty years before its date. Its plan was not at all new either, and takes the form of symmetrically disposed rooms each side of a lobby entry. In fact, the old lobby-entry plan continued for a long while into the eighteenth century for small houses, if only because it could easily be built in a fashionably symmetrical form.

Despite the longevity of the lobby-entry plan, especially among poorer houses that were still made from timber, the more useful plan with a central entrance vestibule and chimney-stacks on the end walls remained standard for smaller houses. It was particularly useful in villages where houses abutted each other or their farm buildings.

There were many ways of increasing the accommodation of these houses. One was to extend the rear service room into a fully fledged extension for a kitchen, scullery and wash-house. Another way was simply to extend the frontage as in an unusually grand farmhouse built on the granite of West Penwith in 1721 at Paul,

Cornwall (B). Right at the other end of the scale, a minimal variant of the plan was used for lowly wayside cottages in which the entrance opened straight into the living room and the staircase rose directly from it to bedrooms in what were, at most, lofts (C).

Urban influences

Now that towns were growing apace, they were in the vanguard of building. Fashion travelled from them to the countryside, not vice versa. This led to the appearance of a number of remarkably tall farmhouses, although they had the inconvenience of a second and even a third staircase to reach their top storeys. When they stand alone, like a farmhouse at Calverton in Nottinghamshire (D), they have an oddly urban appearance. They look more at home among the tightly packed houses of Midlands villages, where

farmhouses often took on an L-shaped plan, at once to shelter their farmyards and to make the best use of restricted sites.

In several parts of the north and the west, upper storeys were particularly favoured because they provided ideal accommodation for spinning and weaving wool. On the Pennines, between Halifax and Manchester, dozens of farmhouses were given new top storeys to house looms as yeoman farmers in the later eighteenth century augmented their incomes with the profits from weaving. They are immediately distinguishable by their long bands of windows, which provided essential illumination for the looms. At Diggle, high on the edge of Saddleworth Moor, a farmhouse was given a new, raised upper storey in the middle of the eighteenth century, and, about fifty years later, it was joined by a

purpose-built house with long bands of windows on all of its three storeys (E).

Double-pile plan

The double pile remained the most economic plan where building materials were concerned, so it was often built by landowners when they invested money in improving their estates. This type of house attracted good tenants, since they could reserve the front rooms for their own use, with the rear ones for their servants and the farmhands. Simultaneously, it attracted landowners because they knew that they could build a large house at the least cost. So popular was this type of house that it continued its life as the villa of the leafier suburbs of growing towns (F), where it brought the romantic aura of the countryside to the fringes of their increasingly squalid centres.

Just occasionally a house was built that had all the appearance of a large villa, or conversely of a short terrace, but was in fact a pair of semi-detached houses. There is an early eighteenth-century pair close to Greenwich Park in south-east London, and another pair, nearby at Blackheath (G), which were built in 1776, still a notably early date. It was only in the nineteenth century that the semi-detached house became popular, and in the 1920s and 1930s that it took over from the terrace as the firm favourite among speculative builders.



Terrace houses

Although the terrace was an old concept, it was not until the architect Inigo Jones was commissioned to design the principal buildings on the Earl of Bedford's Covent Garden estate in the 1630s that the terrace house began its long, fashionable career in earnest. The order that Jones imported from Palladian Italy to Charles I's London even then had to wait for the end of the Civil War and the Commonwealth that followed before it was widely used again. In fact it was the impetus for rebuilding after the Great Fire in 1666 that made all the difference. The Act for Rebuilding of 1667 emphasized the sense of order inherent in the terrace, and, in the hands of speculators like the notorious Nicholas Barbon, who also initiated fire insurance for buildings, it was set on its course.

Early plans

For a generation after the Great Fire, terrace houses were still built

with their staircases placed between the front and back rooms. In the houses of Bloomsbury Square, built about 1664, the space behind the staircase between the two main rooms was used as a closet where food for snacks could be kept, china and cutlery could be stored, clothes hung, or chamber pots hidden away until the servants came to empty them (A). There was some structural sense in this arrangement as the stairs could be easily supported, but little more than that. The stairs were hard to illuminate, and needed either a light-well or some form of lantern in the roof. Neither of these was particularly satisfactory.

By about 1700, a solution was devised. The staircase was removed to one side of the rear, to rise from the end of the passage leading back from the main entrance, and to turn rather more than half way up at a small landing, built against the back wall and illuminated by a window (B). The main difficulty with this arrangement was that in a small

house closets either became little more than poky cupboards, or they had to be built as small extensions projecting from the back wall, as they are here in a house built on Sir James Smith's estate in Westminster over sixty years later than the house in Bloomsbury Square. The placing of closets apart, the plan easily catered for everyone's needs, and served houses large and small thereafter. Size and style were to be the main differentiating features between them.

Elevations

The style of a terrace house was mainly expressed in its front elevation. In the middle of the seventeenth century, terraces took their cue from Inigo Jones's houses at Covent Garden, and so they incorporated pilasters into their design to articulate the two main storeys above the ground floor.

This is evident in a remarkable survivor from 1658, the terrace of four houses facing Newington Green in Islington (c, page 125), shown here as they probably were before unsightly shops were built into their ground floors, and other changes made. There are many old-fashioned features about their design, such as their plan and the gables, which sit rather more uneasily above the pilasters than a classical parapet would do. The window frames are again of the old type, with mullions and transoms dividing them like a cross, and the windows themselves have opening casements.

Despite all that, the pilasters are not mere decoration, but serve to articulate the façade, first by dividing it into classically proportioned bays and, secondly, by grouping the windows of the main storeys together, leaving the attic windows of the servants' rooms demonstrably separate in the old-fashioned gables. Even these windows do better than the windows of the kitchens and sculleries in the basement where the servants worked.

For the next two centuries and more, pilasters and even attached columns would continue to

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Looke Farm at Puncknowle, Dorset, has the symmetry and classical detailing of the eighteenth century but treated in so naïve a fashion that it seems that its mason was unfamiliar with it. Only when he came to the

huge ears of wheat supporting the urn over the blind 'fanlight' above the entrance does he appear to have felt completely at home. The house was built as early as 1700 when not all masons could practise the new style fluently.

But this house is odder still because the fireplaces and consequently the chimney-stacks are in the corners of the house, suggesting an upturned cabinet with its legs in the air.



The classical style took time to spread northwards across the country and downwards through society. Though only regular spacing and the architraves round the windows and main doorway of Hall Farm at Newbiggin, Cumbria (BELOW), show the arriving classical style, this farmhouse was built as early as 1695 and, moreover, in the far

north. At that time, manorial landlords like those who built this house were still building less fashionable farmhouses for their tenants in the more up-to-date south.

The Bailiff's House at Park Farm, Shugborough, Staffordshire (BELOW), is a typical late Georgian farmhouse, with symmetrical, widely spaced sash windows, a central door and fanlight set in a correctly detailed Doric portico, and a low-pitched roof. The Palladian wings of the house reinforce the classical effect and only the functionally placed chimney-stacks upset the overall symmetry. The house was designed about 1800 for the first Viscount Anson by an expert, Samuel Wyatt, the most successful farm architect of his time.



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articulate the façades of terrace houses in the same way, but builders soon learned how to do without them, implying their proportions in other ways. Fifty years later than the Newington Green houses, the bricklayer and speculative builder Thomas Lucas built a street of terrace houses in Deptford (D), and these were up to date in their planning. They had staircases built against their back walls with windows to illuminate half landings and small

projecting closets.

The fronts no longer had columns or pilasters for articulation, but instead were divided into a series of well-proportioned inset panels which articulate both the bays into which the windows and entrances fit, and the storeys between them. The blank panels above the entrances are not where windows were blocked to avoid the window tax, but a continuation of the pattern.

This pattern continues right up to the parapet, a novel feature, since the walls of most houses at this time met the roof with overhanging eaves. Here the parapet continues above the base of the roof so there has to be a gutter behind it. It also obscures the dormer windows of the attic. They are not shown in the drawing, nor were they meant to be seen. The attic rooms belonged to the servants, so their windows were not allowed too much



prominence and the parapet admirably kept them out of sight from the street.

Contemporary with Lucas's houses in Deptford are the earliest houses in Queen Square, Bristol (E). They make an interesting comparison. Instead of inset panels, here the houses are articulated by stucco quoining between them, bands of projecting brickwork between the storeys, and a boldly carved classical cornice beneath the eaves.

The house on Sir James Smith's Westminster estate (F) came twenty years later still, and is generally similar to Lucas's houses, but it lacks their panels and its front elevation relies for its proportions on the shape and position of the windows themselves. They articulate the front almost alone, although there is a band comprising three raised courses of brickwork to differentiate the storeys. In this case the ground storey was

stuccoed at a later date, probably in the early years of the nineteenth century, to bring it into line with later taste.

Building legislation

In 1774 Parliament at last passed an effective Building Act which regulated standards of construction so that jerry-building could be stamped out and houses simultaneously be made more fireproof. To achieve this, a number of standards were set. These included a detailed definition of four 'rates' of houses, each depending on their size, height, number of storeys, floor area, value and so on, and, for each, detailed requirements for wall thicknesses and joist sizes, and certain precautions against fire were made mandatory. Penalties included the demolition of any building which contravened the new building regulations.

As a guide, some of the flood of

copybooks which had guided builders already for half a century were now devoted to explaining the rates. There was a need for this since the Building Act seemed to be clear enough, but the definitions of the rates were full of contradictions. Nevertheless, the four rates that applied to terrace houses gained so much authority that houses could be advertised as First Rate, Second Rate, Third Rate and Fourth Rate, and everybody knew what this meant.

While the rates were differentiated by size, they shared the more restrained ornament of the last quarter of the eighteenth century, a restraint that lasted until the 1830s. For the sake of reducing combustibility, wooden decoration, in the form of cornices and door surrounds, and even the window frames were banished from sight, to be replaced by stucco and ironwork. For nearly half a century, fashion lingered with the forms of correct

classicism that architects such as the Adam brothers, James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, and Sir William Chambers had seen and drawn for themselves at classical sites around the Mediterranean, and now made available to all through their publications.

The four rates

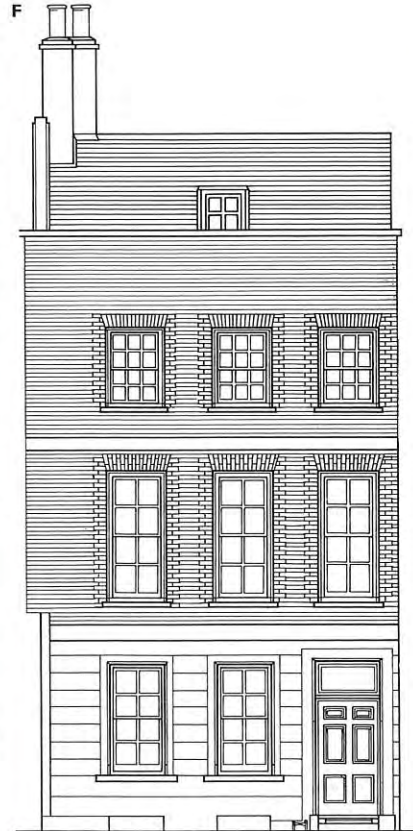
The rates of house are not always easy to identify in practice, but generally large houses with four full storeys above a basement and a width great enough to allow three windows across their fronts belong to the first rate. This first-rate house in St Marylebone (G)

has its ground storey stuccoed and a stucco cornice and parapet to complete the elevation. The second-rate houses in Cross Street, Islington (H) have three windows across their fronts, but only three main storeys above their basements. The attic is set within the roof and has dormer windows for light.

The third-rate houses in Stonesfield Street (I) were built much later with only two windows on each floor. As the houses were narrower, it was impossible to align the upper windows with the entrance door and window of the ground floor

because the windows had to be placed symmetrically in their rooms and the door had to align with the entrance passage. The round heads of the windows of the ground floor and the blind arches over the windows of the upper storey were one of the main features of houses built from just before the start of the French Wars in 1793 until well after Waterloo in 1815.

Finally, a short row in Liverpool Road (J) of some of the few remaining fourth-rate houses are different in their small size with only two storeys above the basement.





Town houses and villas

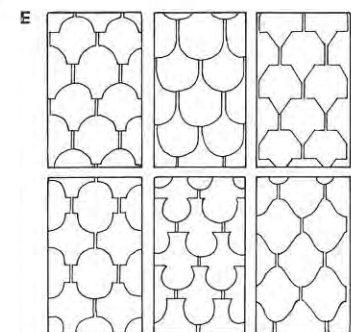
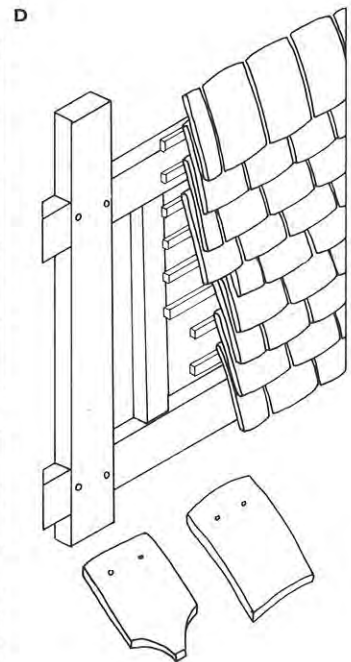
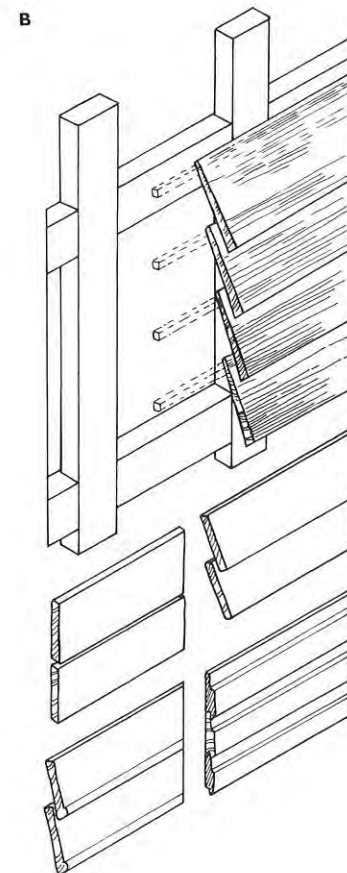
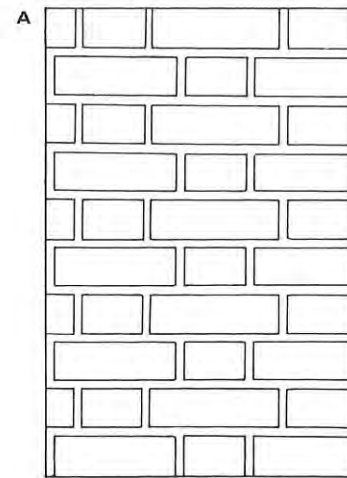
The Building Acts only applied to central London, because it was by far the largest city in the kingdom with the most pressing problems and so Parliament acted to solve them. Elsewhere the Building Acts had an effect only because they were bound up with changes in fashion, and builders looked to London in matters of style.

Just before the start of the eighteenth century, cross-shaped mullions and transoms were still how most windows were framed, and most houses still had wooden eaves cornices, both visible in the former Lewisham Vicarage in south-east London (A). Sash windows and rather more verticality in the proportions marked the houses of the early part of the new century, as a house facing Stepney Green (B) shows clearly. The London Building Acts of 1707 and 1709 forbade both timber cornices and windows set in frames flush with the wall face as they were fire hazards, and, although the Acts did not apply elsewhere, the parapets and recessed windows that they brought about became widespread fashions, for instance in a house of 1718 at Thaxted in Essex (C).

By the second half of the eighteenth century a new fashion for Gothic made its first popular appearance as a playful alternative to classical, for instance in the so-called Speedwell Castle at Brewood in Staffordshire (D). All the same, the classical style remained a firm favourite and developed from the Italianate style of a villa on Richmond Hill (E), built in 1775, to the neo-Greek of another villa, built early in the nineteenth century in Bathwick Hill, Bath (F).

The popularity of the villa did not leave the terrace unaffected. Several streets of houses were built as though they were linked semi-detached pairs, as in a terrace at Blackheath of about 1835 (G), or completely semi-detached at New Cross (H).





Building materials

By the eighteenth century, brick and stone reigned supreme as building materials, although that did not mean that they were used universally. Bricks were now generally laid with headers and stretchers alternating in each course, and with a header laid above a stretcher in the course below, a method known as Flemish bond (A).

Bricks

As fashion changed in London, the red-brown bricks of the earlier part of the eighteenth century gave way to yellow-grey bricks. They were thought to be closer to the colour of stone and therefore more acceptable, since stone was held in higher esteem than brick. The fine brighter red bricks used for quoins, arches and surrounds also fell out of fashion to be superseded by fine yellow bricks.

Outside London, local traditions withstood innovation, but during the last part of the century brick travelled quite widely by canal, and the railways helped this even further after 1840. Even in the 1830s greyish white Suffolk gaults were being used in London, where the market for bricks was insatiable.

Stucco and weather-boarding

By the later part of the eighteenth century, brickwork was often covered over with various patent cements, which generally went by the name of stucco. Stucco was often lined-out or channelled to look like courses of masonry and, at first, left in its natural grey-brown colour, in emulation of stone, but, as dirt clung to it and gave it a drab appearance, it was at first painted and even grained to look like stone, and later simply painted white or cream or some other light colour.

Timber-framed houses were altered again, in the name of fashion this time, rather than modernization. Horizontal weather-boarding (B) gave them a new appearance and removed the frame from view together with its connotations of age. The boards were usually made to overlap to

make them weatherproof. On occasion, for instance in The Pantiles at Tunbridge Wells in Kent (c), the boarding was laid flat instead, and rebated with horizontal grooves suggesting the appearance of stucco trying to look like stone, a complicated deception which deceives no one. Meanwhile pargetted houses could also be lined out so that their plaster coat looked like individual blocks of masonry.

Hanging tiles

More commonly the frame was hung with tiles (D), a good way of reproducing the colour of brickwork, though not its appearance. The tiles made a good weatherproof exterior, but the iron nails that fixed the tiles to the battens could eventually rust, breaking the holes in the tiles and causing them to fall away. The lower ends of the tiles could be shaped so that a number of patterns resulted, both on a roof or on a tile-hung wall (E and F).

One way of shaping tiles, widely used in the south-east, was the most deceptive of all the devices for changing the appearance of a house. So-called mathematical tiles were shaped with a step so that the tiles could overlap in such a way that they looked like bricks (G). The corners could produce problems, often solved by attaching wooden borders or quoining.

Roof tiles

Roof tiles were more varied than before, and, in the early years of the eighteenth century, some eastern counties took to pantiles (H), an ancient form imported in the later seventeenth century before home production began. Pantiles were double curved and this allowed neighbouring horizontal tiles to overlap. This greatly reduced the likelihood of water penetration and so the overlap between the tiles up and down could be reduced to a minimum. The pitch of the roof could then be reduced below the 50 degrees normally used for standard tiles, lightening the overall weight, and so allowing a lighter timber structure.

Modern cement tiles are a poor replacement for pantiles, lacking both their shape and texture. Indeed few other replacements for traditional roof covering are so deadening in effect unless it is the habit of covering old slate roofs with fabric and a rubber compound. This not only ruins the appearance of the roof, but also makes an airtight seal, trapping moisture inside the roof as well as keeping rain out. There is no surer way of making a new roof inevitable.

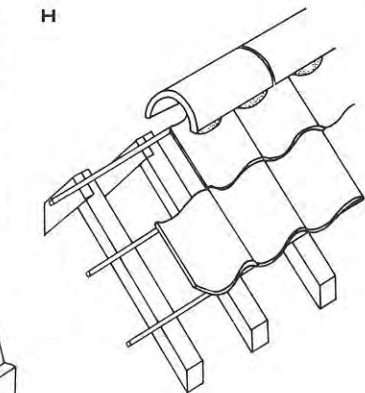
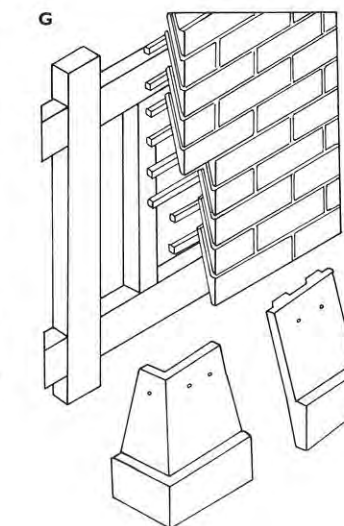
Wood

Oak was becoming increasingly expensive, and roofs were more commonly being made from imported fir from the Baltic. It was less strong than oak, size for size, and so a light roof covering, such as pantiles, was beneficial.

Nearly all the parts of the

house which formerly had been made of oak were now made of fir, pine or other kinds of soft wood. This included structural timbers, such as roof joists and floor beams, and also partitions, panelling, doors and carved decoration. Some of the more expensive woods, especially those with an attractive grain, were left in their natural state.

When soft woods were used on the exterior, they were always painted, both to improve their appearance and to preserve them. They were usually painted when used inside as well, again to improve their appearance. The modern craze for stripped pine is not a reflection of eighteenth-century taste.





Doorways

The attractions of both fashion and tradition, and the advances of fashion itself, brought great variety to the elevations of Georgian houses, and in particular to their entrance doorways. Style meant one thing in London, another high on the Pennines, as it always had done.

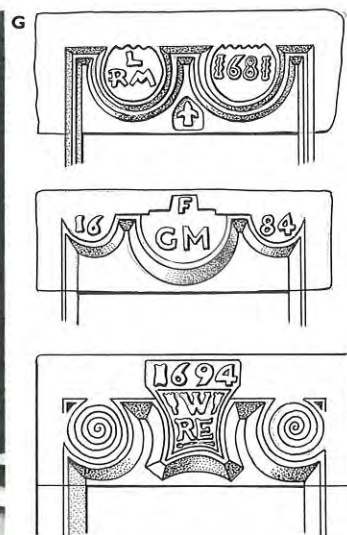
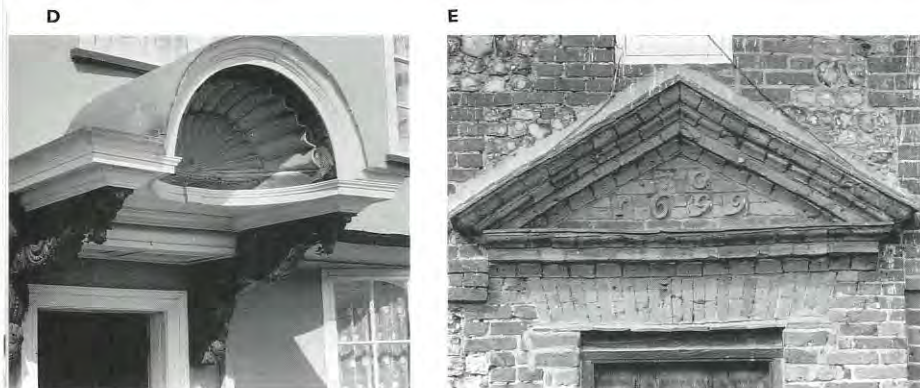
Door hoods

Around 1700, entrances were commonly protected by hoods. They were usually supported by brackets, which could be in the form of classical scrolls, often heavily enriched with swags of flowers and fruit (A), or putti (B). All these were heavily encrusted with paint until recent stripping and repainting. The carved porches of the houses in Queen Anne's Gate, Westminster, took ornament to an extreme of luxuriance (C). The porches were usually flat, but rounded ones with a shell set inside them (D), or, later, a fanlight, were a popular alternative.

Door cases

Increasingly, builders brought classical elements into the design of their doorcases, sometimes to the disadvantage of the hood. In 1699 a fine brick classical pediment was added to a cottage in Berstead, West Sussex, but however much fashion it brought, it added no protection against the pouring rain (E).

Practicality and the advancing taste for classical forms were not always pulling in opposite directions. But the absurdities of a preference for taste rather than practicality are clearly demonstrated by adjacent houses in Great James Street, Holborn, where a sensible hood supported by ornate brackets has been replaced by a classical door surround complete with attached half columns, entablature and pediment (F). Indeed there is a double absurdity here, for not only does the classical surround offer far less shelter, but it takes its form from the temples of classical antiquity in which these pedimented fronts were designed



as porches specifically to act as shelters from the weather.

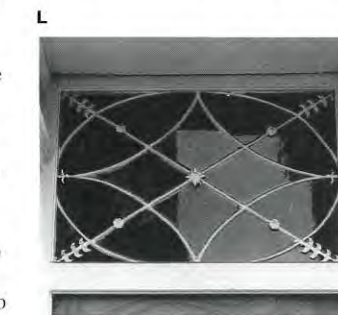
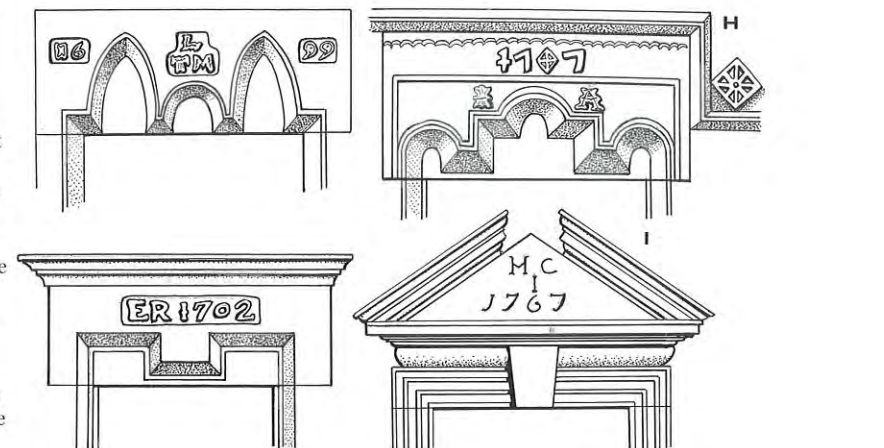
There was a similar preoccupation with fashion far away on the Pennines. Here the protection given by a porch might seem to be essential, but perhaps the weather is so bad that no one thought them worthwhile. If you are going to get wet, you are going to get wet. At all events, the Pennines went their own way with classical forms making only a desultory appearance. At the start of the eighteenth century, looping patterns were all the rage in the Dales (G), and some of these still had a Gothic flavour (H), but they were slowly repressed by straighter lines and, eventually, classical cornices and pediments of sorts (I).

Fanlights

The window set above the entrance to light the passage or vestibule that led from it to the staircase at the rear gave the doorway a whole new form of decoration. Fanlights were given more and more decorative leadwork, and sometimes were left without hoods over them so that they would not be obscured. This development went hand in hand with the removal of wooden doorcases and porches to avoid the risk of fire spreading from one house to another, and the introduction of stucco decoration in their place.

Fanlights were first introduced into houses with projecting porches, and, when these had a pediment, the base was opened to let in the light (J). By the 1780s, wooden porches had given way to stucco or Coade stone surrounds, leaving the decoratively patterned fanlights to speak for themselves, as, for instance, they do at Bedford Square, Holborn (K). Their semicircular shape gave great scope for radiating patterns, plain and fancy. Fanlights were often rectangular, but this did not mean that they were much less ornate than semi circular ones (L).

With these ornamental surrounds came the new form of framed door, often with their panels emphasized by mouldings running along the edges of the



frames and the raised centres of the panels themselves (M). These doors never had glazed panels, a Victorian innovation that did nothing for security, and the modern fancy of glazing the top part of a door with radiating panes of glass to suggest a fanlight is a remarkable example of the modern need for contraction.





Windows

Sash windows had already made their appearance in important houses well before the start of the eighteenth century. They were then becoming standard in London terrace houses, but they still took much longer to reach the countryside, and then did so in a desultory way.

Early sashes were built flush with the exterior brickwork, allowing the full width of the frames to be exposed. The grooves in which the sashes slid often contained hinged props which supported the sash in either an open or closed position (A). When pulleys, cords and counterweights were introduced to make sashes open more easily, the frames were made wider so that they could contain the weights (B). This was seen as a fire hazard and the London Building Act of 1709 required the frames to be set back by the width of a brick, that is by $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches (C).

The Act may have been responsible for windows being set back in inner London, where it applied, but fashion came into it as well. A recessed window frame made a wall immediately look more solid, and emphasized the window openings in a very satisfactory way.

The 1774 Act went one stage further, and required the frames to be rebated into the inner face of the wall, so hiding them almost entirely (D). This brought the glazing bars into prominence. They helped to determine the window's proportions and the proportions of the individual panes of glass, which were all part of the reigning classical fashion. When the glazing bars are removed and the panes are replaced by plate glass, the window not surprisingly loses its character and looks empty.

Window heads

At the start of the eighteenth century, windows could have either flat or slightly curved heads, sometimes one type on one floor, the other on the next. By the middle of the century, flat heads had become far more

popular, but curves came back again, especially in semicircular headed windows, and they remained popular, particularly on the ground floor of a house when they could pick up the lines of an adjacent entrance door and its fanlight (E).

A late eighteenth-century house facing Blackheath (F) in south-east London is notable for the way the entrance on the left-hand side and the windows in the middle and on the right have been assembled into a symmetrical composition, with a blank arch over the right-hand window. This balanced the fanlight over the front door and was a popular device at the time.

Occasionally a window that needed emphasis would have one of these arches, perhaps filled with decoration, or, more usually, it would have an ornamental surround in the form of an architrave (G), a motif common in grand houses, but was to come into wider use as the Victorian era approached in the 1830s.

Provincial style

The world of fashion was one thing, the provinces another. Here tradition maintained a stronger grip on style. Often sash windows took the place of older mullioned windows in an attempt to bring a house up to date. This happened so widely that it no longer looks odd, although a bad fit makes sash windows clearly inappropriate on occasion. A farmhouse at Clitheroe in Lancashire manages to have the best of both worlds. The substitution of sashes in the upper – and lesser – windows even suggests that the old-fashioned casements set beside the front door in their mullioned and transomed frames were always thought superior (H).

On the Pennines, a sturdy independence remained the rule, and bands of small windows with closely set mullions (I) stayed in use right into the nineteenth century. They were particularly necessary because the requirements of domestic weaving made good, even lighting a necessity.



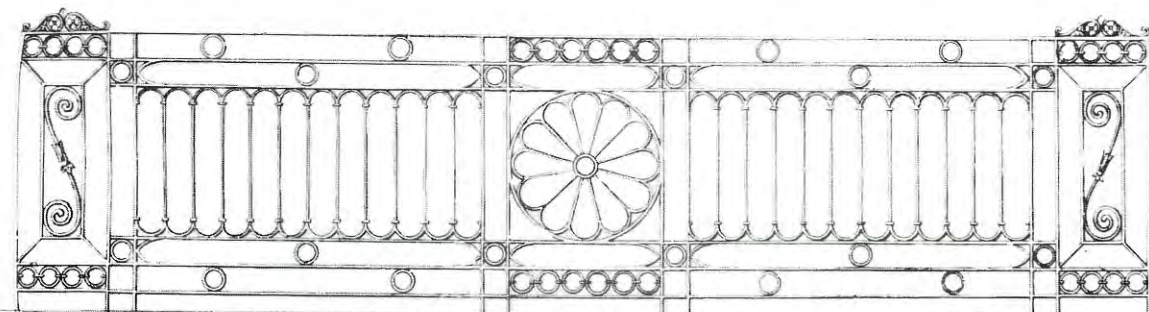
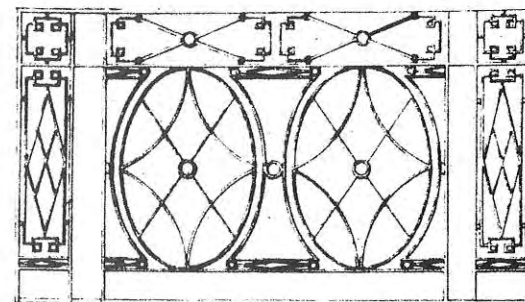
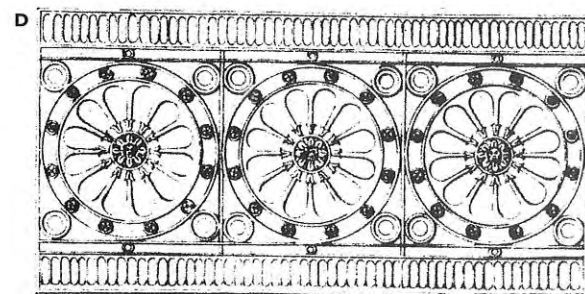


Details and decoration

The main trend in the decoration of the exterior of the Georgian house was the reduction of wood in favour of stucco and ironwork. There were two main causes for this, the first being the desire to reduce the amount of combustible material; the second was the ability to reproduce decorative forms by casting them from moulds. This was a reflection of wider advances brought about by the Industrial Revolution which allowed mass-production to become a reality.

Stucco and Coade stone

The wooden cornices that characterized houses at the start of the eighteenth century (A) were suppressed by a combination of law and taste. Brick and stone parapets took their place (B). The same process changed entrances. Here stucco and Coade stone, a form of fired earthenware, came into their own. Once a carver had produced a mould, its craftsmanship could be reproduced for as long as there was a market, and no one had a greater market than Eleanor Coade for her rusticated surrounds and keystones decorated with heads (C).



Ironwork

Wrought iron already had a long history in architectural decoration, but as the process of casting iron cheaply in standard moulds became available, the amount of decorative ironwork increased dramatically. Here, as in so many other things, pattern books showed what was possible (D), although any builder worth his salt could see the immense variety of ironwork available for railings, lamp-holders, and, above all, for window balconies. The spearhead railings at Royal Crescent, Brighton (E), complement the shiny black of the mathematical tiling.

Many railings were removed early in the Second World War, supposedly to help the war effort, but the metal was unsuitable for any purpose but railings, and they were dumped at sea to avoid embarrassment. The survivors are worth protecting; they form the best possible protection to the front of a house (F), and are not hard to replace, even though they are no longer as relatively cheap as once they used to be. At all events, they are far more attractive than the pressed and welded steel railings that sometimes take their place.

This is equally true of balcony railings (G), and even such things as cast-iron porches (H) that imitate wooden trelliswork for the sake of a rustic touch.



Privies

Most town houses had a closet where chamber pots were stored until the servants emptied them. In crowded towns this caused great problems. Many towns and suburbs followed the practice general in the countryside of having a privy built over a cess pit. This was not a particularly healthy way of going about domestic hygiene, but it provided a better alternative to overflowing gutters in the street.

The advent of mains drainage,

a reliable water supply, and, with them, the water-closet, have made the privy a thing of the past. Even so, many survive, especially in the north where the Industrial Revolution brought a great expansion of towns and villages with little advance in hygiene to compensate for this. A group of communal privies behind a short terrace of weaving cottages at Rawtenstall in Lancashire (BELOW) was converted into a wash-house, but it could easily be restored to its original state for devotees of Georgian life.

Terrace house interiors

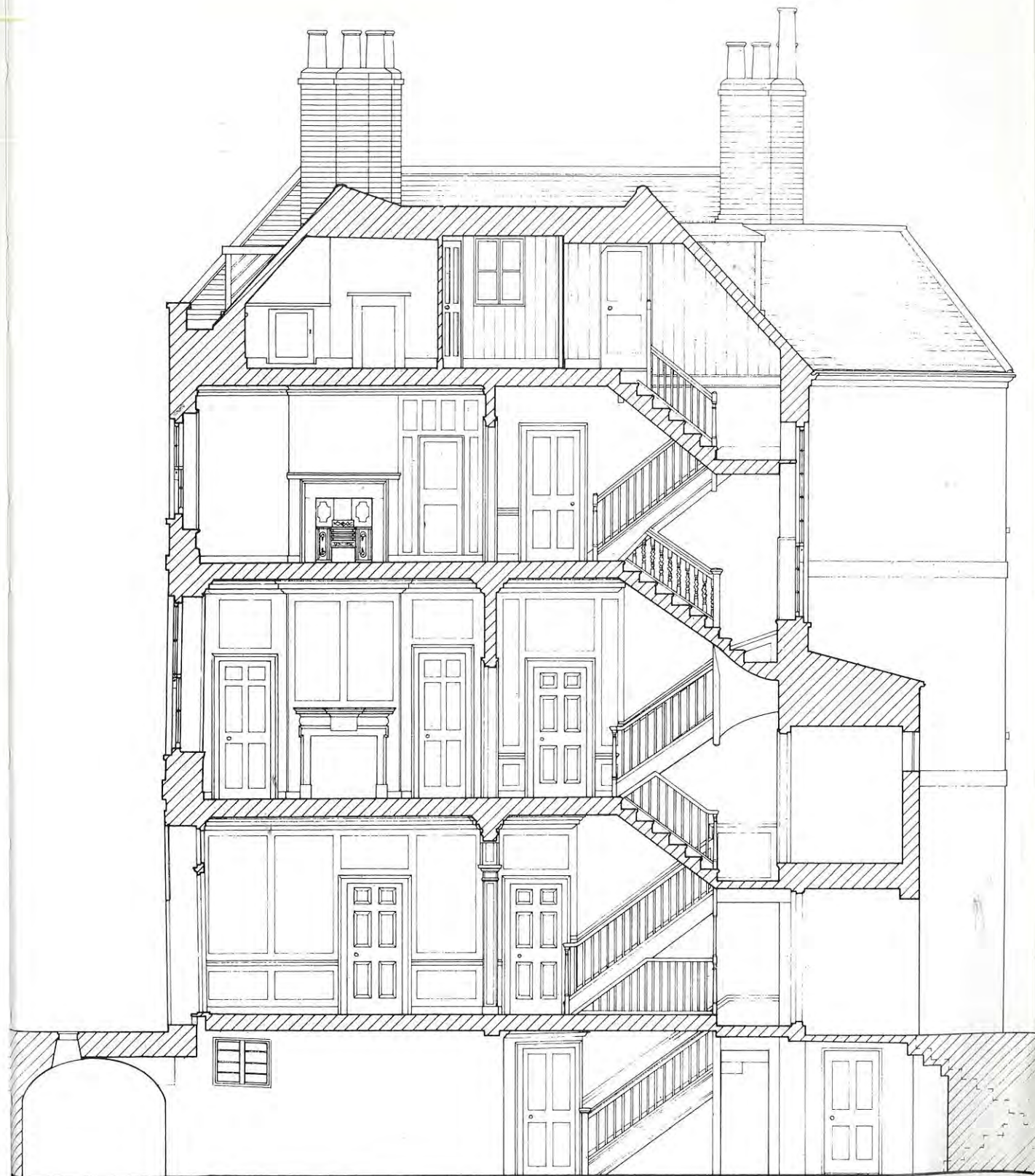
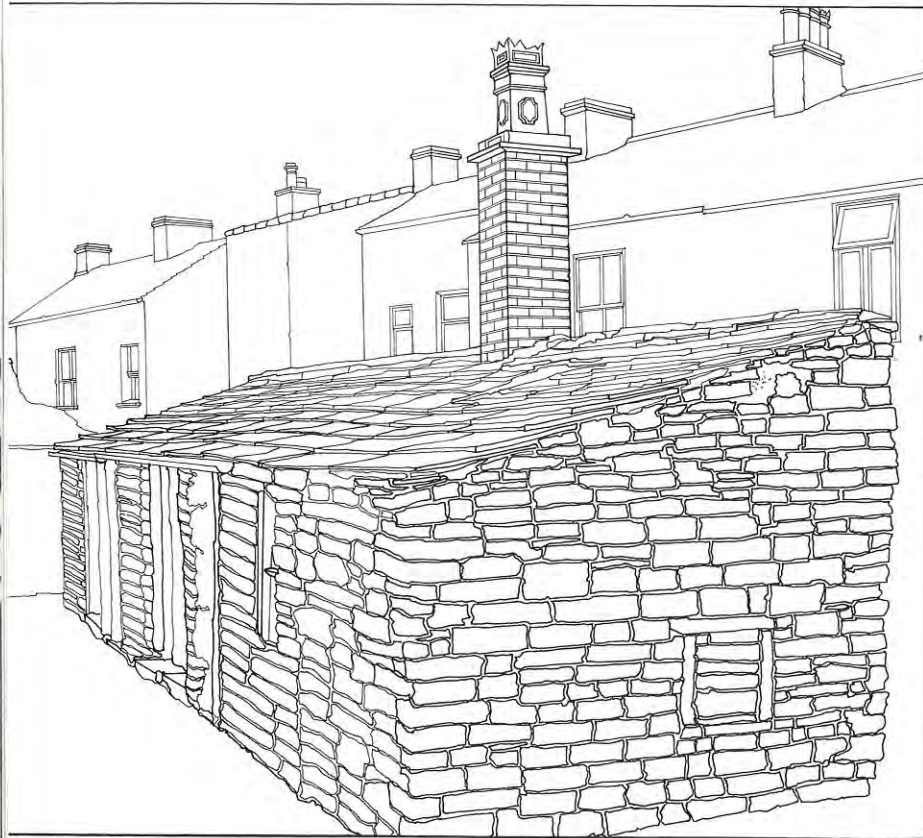
This section through an early eighteenth-century terrace house (RIGHT) shows how the passage leads from the front door to the staircase at the rear. On the way, it passes the doors of the front and back rooms. The passage, like the rooms of the floor above, is fully panelled, and an archway divides it into front and rear parts.

The ground and first floors contained the principal rooms of the house, hence the panelling, while the remaining rooms were reserved for sleeping or for the use of the servants. Consequently their walls were only plastered or limewashed, and in the attic, only took the form of the flimsiest of partitions.

A stairway leads down to the basement and a cellar under the front of the house, which has a coal hole beneath the pavement. The basement was entirely devoted to stores and cooking, and here the servants spent most of their working lives.

The staircase leads from the entrance passage up to a half landing with a closet opening off it in a small back extension to the house. A second flight then leads up to a full landing, with doors to the rear room, and to the front room, which runs right across the house. In the centre of its further wall there is a fireplace with a classical surround comprising an architrave, a bolection (or bulged) moulding for a frieze with a panel in the centre, and a cornice forming a shelf over it. Each side of the fire there are the doors of shallow cupboards.

The rooms in the storey above are simpler and were probably used as bedrooms, and the even simpler rooms above them would almost certainly have been for servants. The front room has a fireplace, perhaps for a head servant, but the other rooms in the attic are very small and only have the comfort of what warmth comes up the stairs.





Walls and ceilings: panelling and plaster

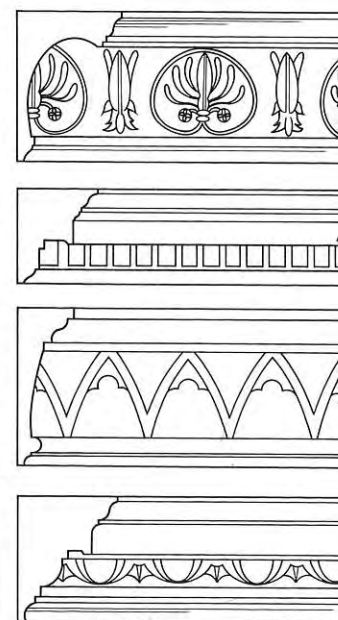
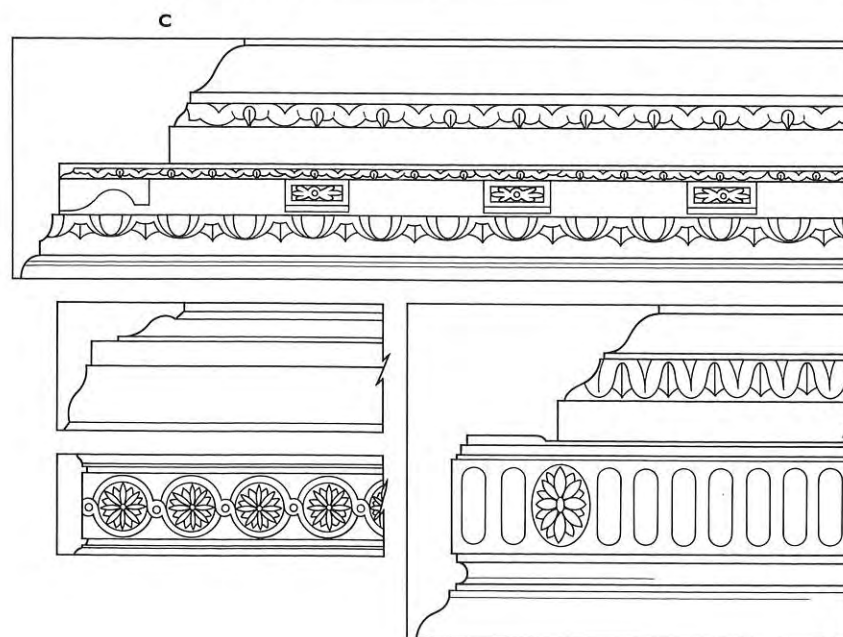
The eighteenth century began with fully panelled walls. These now reflected classical ideals and were arranged to suggest a plinth, pilasters and entablature (A). Chimney surrounds, curved recesses for shelves, and cupboards with doors, made up the most ornate of the walls, while doors and windows fitted into other ones. By the middle of the century, such ornate timber panelling was a thing of the past. Grand rooms might still be panelled, but much of it was made from plaster, leaving dado rails and door frames made of wood, and chimney surrounds made of stone, often marble or various substitutes for marble (B).



Cornices

While dado rails remained for some while and skirting-boards have lasted until the present as vestiges of this panelling, the main decorative feature to continue was the cornice. Wooden box cornices went out of fashion soon after wooden panelling was abandoned because plaster cornices were easier to make. Temporary runners were set near the top of

continued on page 143



Lesser merchants and professional men lived in terraces, the most commonly built form of house in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The north London suburb of Islington is famed for its terraces of elegant houses set in spacious streets or lining formal squares such as Gibson Square shown here. The houses are not

particularly large, however; with basement and attic, there are eight fair-sized rooms, enough for a family and two or three servants. Because the entrance leads into a narrow passage to give as much room as possible for the front room on the ground floor, the doorway has to be squeezed against the party wall.

The window beside it has to be placed centrally in the front room, with the result that they do not line up with the pairs of windows in the wider rooms above. To hide this, the ground floor is stuccoed and cast-iron balconies decorate the upper windows, thus drawing a line between the two storeys.



The same difficulty can be seen at this Georgian house in Old Steine, Brighton (RIGHT), refronted by local architect, Amon Wilds, in about 1820. He gave the front an elegant bow in the most up-to-date fashion and, because the house is wider and has three windows, not two like the houses in Gibson Square, only the front door itself is out of line. Again a balcony hides this, but here the stucco is treated differently, with channelling to provide a firm base for the attached classical pilasters that embrace the top three storeys. Instead of the normal volutes of the Ionic order, newly discovered fossils of ammonites form the basis of the decoration of the capitals, surely a reference to the architect's forename, and used by him on other houses nearby.



The kitchen fireplace of the Bailiff's House at Park Farm, Shugborough (BELOW) has a grate for coal with hobs each side, and a battery of pots and pans and a kettle ranged about it. Beside the hearth is a warm, dry cupboard where flour, salt, spices and tea could be kept. By 1800 tea was ousting beer as an everyday household drink, so much so that within a generation cottagers no longer brewed their own beer. They soon forgot how to brew, a fact bewailed by that champion of the common man, William Cobbett. He believed that tea not only led to a general enfeeblement but, for women, was a first step to prostitution.



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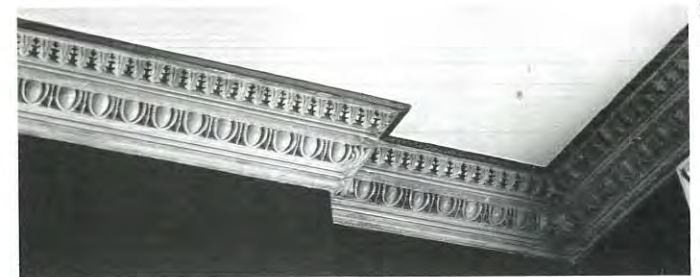
the wall, plaster was pressed into the angle and a template run along it until the cornice was fully shaped. It could then be enriched with precast ornaments, such as modillions or patera, or any of the countless other forms belonging to the classical repertoire. When they no longer pleased jaded tastes, there was Gothic, Chinese and Hindoo, and yet more exotic styles (c. page 140).

Cornices of any age are usually partly lost under layers of paint. If they are to appear as crisp as they first did, they need to be carefully stripped (D). Then the original colour may become visible, and sometimes there is evidence of gilding as well. Stripping down a cornice is a long, arduous job, but the results can be surprising (E).

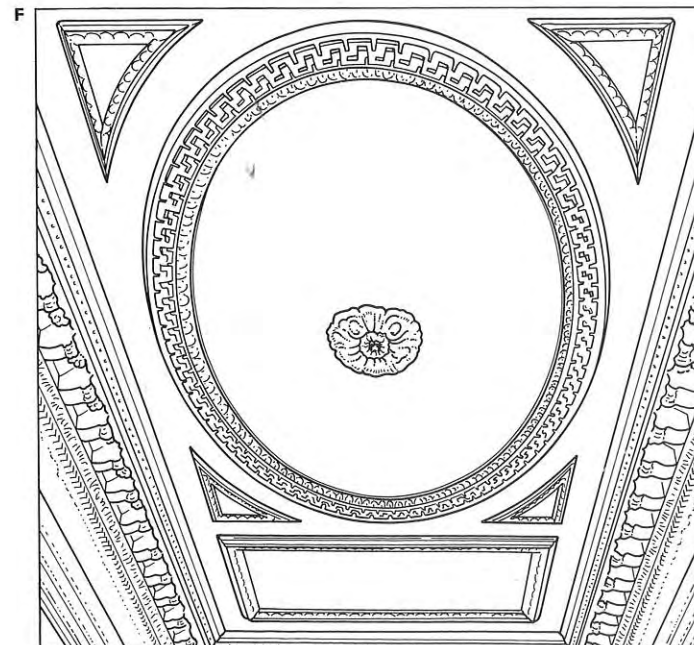
Only the grander houses had ornamental plasterwork ceilings. These comprised geometrical patterns with raised rectangles and circles decorated with swags of foliage and fruit and, later, with classical mouldings such as fretwork or guilloche bands (F). Robert Adam revolutionized the plasterwork of ceilings by introducing lighter patterns suggested by what he believed was common decoration in Roman houses (G).



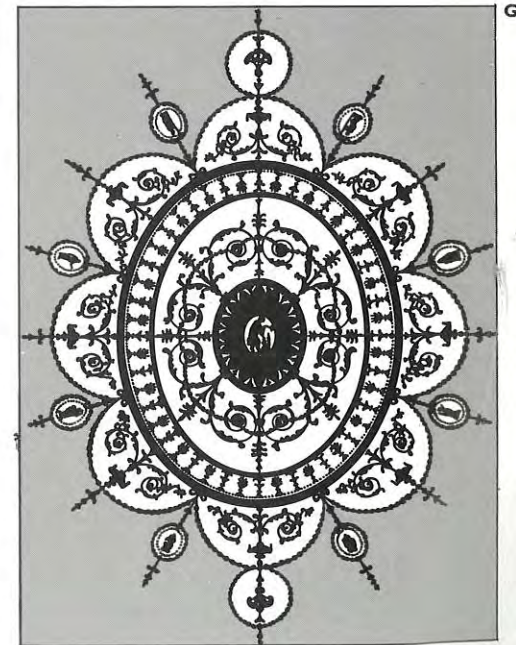
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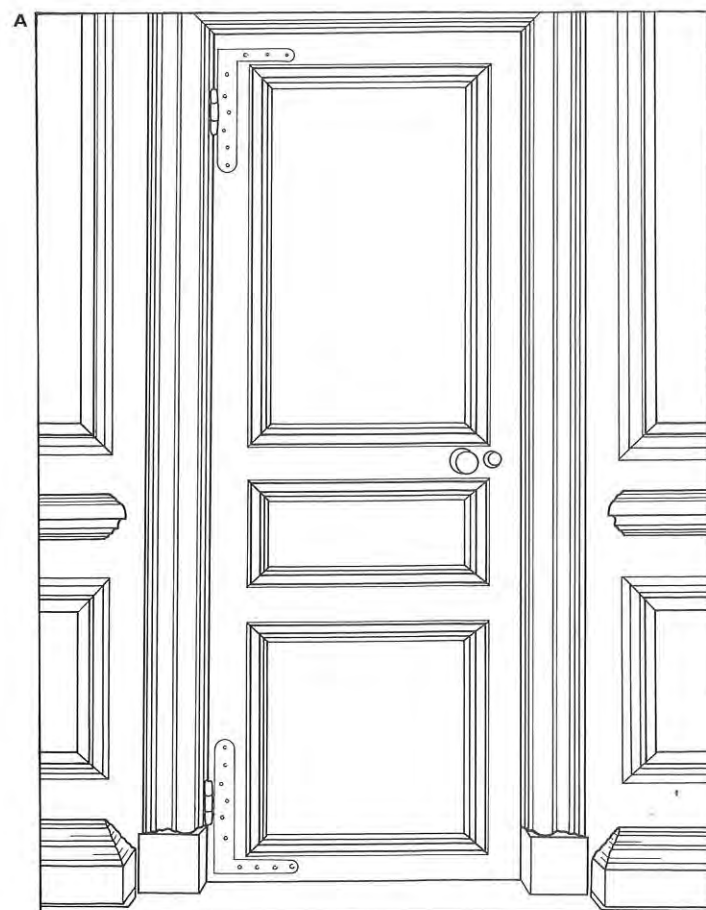
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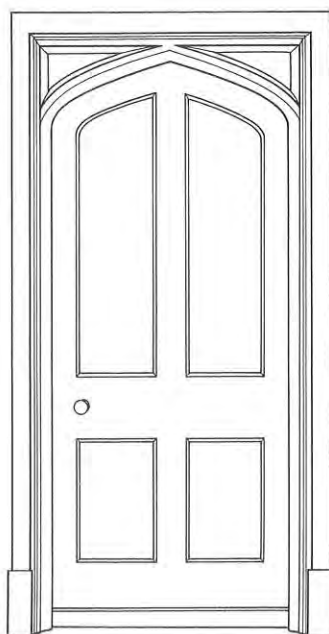
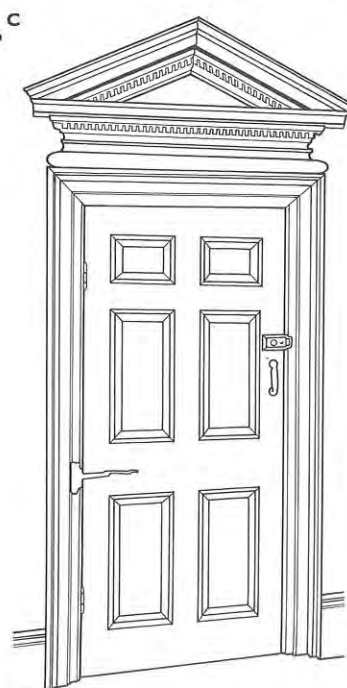
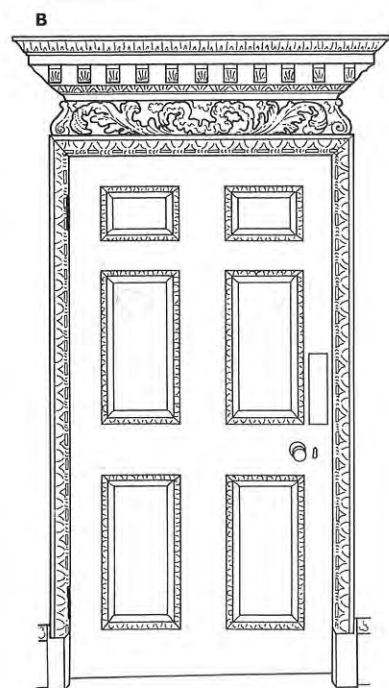
G



Doors and doorways

By the eighteenth century, panelled doors were almost standard indoors. The main exceptions were in secondary doorways in the servants' quarters, and in poorer houses in the countryside. Most principal doors were solidly built with panels arranged in various ways. Early in this period, door panels fitted in with the pattern of panelling in the room. Each panel was set in a raised frame (A).

When wall panelling dropped out of favour, major doors had six panels, arranged in pairs, top, middle and bottom, with the top pair wider than deep, and the lower pairs deeper than wide and roughly equal in depth. The mouldings, which might be carved, were inset from the frame, and, in the best doors, the panels might be raised and fielded (B). Later in the century, even major doors had only four panels in all, the upper ones being the taller to compensate for the loss of the small top panels. Enriched mouldings were less favoured, but they might be gilded instead. Occasionally a doorway might have a pointed head to give a room a Gothic flavour (C).



Door frames

The door frame was usually in the form of a classical architrave, and it might include some classical mouldings of the kind that surrounded the door panels, for instance egg and dart, and, later, fret or key patterns. To emphasize grand doorways, the frame might be surmounted by a frieze and cornice, and, for important doorways, there might be a pediment.

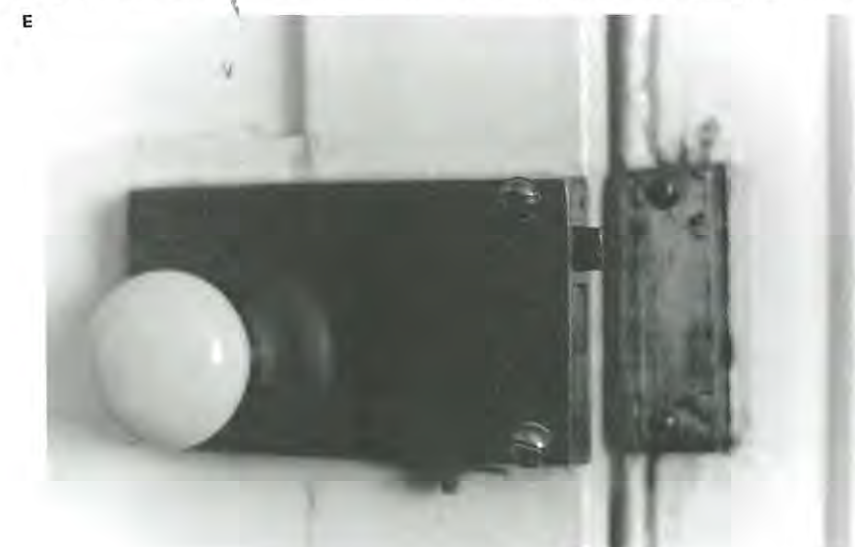
Locks

At the start of the eighteenth century, it was still common to

find locks attached to the face of the door, and the lock case might be elaborately chased with floral or other patterns (D). These soon gave way to mortised locks for the most important doors with glazed porcelain or brass knobs.

Subsidiary doors were made of thinner timber and the locks, therefore, still had to be mounted on the outside. This gave some scope for a whole hierarchy of fittings. While the doors of the main reception rooms had mortised locks, the bedrooms might have theirs attached to the

door, and, for the sake of status, would have brass cases and glazed porcelain knobs (E). Subsidiary rooms would have cheaper locks with iron cases and brass knobs. Meanwhile, the servants might have simple catches without locks, or old-fashioned latches, made either of iron or wood, depending on their status. The entry to the service rooms from the main body of the building, similarly, might have a good lock because the head servant and even the master and mistress of the house would pass this way.



Windows

When window frames were set flush with the exterior of the wall, and the interior of principal rooms was panelled, the inside of the window appeared in a reveal, which continued the form of the panelling. The base of the reveal could contain a small cupboard and support a convenient seat at the level of the window sill. The sides of the reveal formed a pair of shutter boxes for leaved and hinged shutters. Alternatively, a pair of shutters hung like sashes could be mounted beneath the inside of the window and rise

upwards to close the window.

With window frames set back and rebated into the rear surface of the wall, and, at the same time, with the abandonment of panelled rooms, the window frame could be treated like a door frame and take the form of an architrave. The shutters would still fold into boxes set each side (BELOW LEFT). Some sash windows had side lights, making a very wide window. The shutters might then have to hinge in three places to fold away into the small space of the shutter box, but still extend far enough to cover the whole window (BELOW RIGHT).

Even well into the nineteenth century, hanging window curtains were not at all common, so shutters served the double function of making a window secure and providing some privacy after dark. They also kept cold down-draughts to a minimum. Nevertheless, with the advent of curtains, the habit of shuttering windows dropped out of fashion and shutters were often either screwed shut in their boxes or, worse, carelessly stuck fast with succeeding coats of paint – a lazy remedy for warped and sagging shutters. They are well worth bringing back into use.



Chimney-pieces

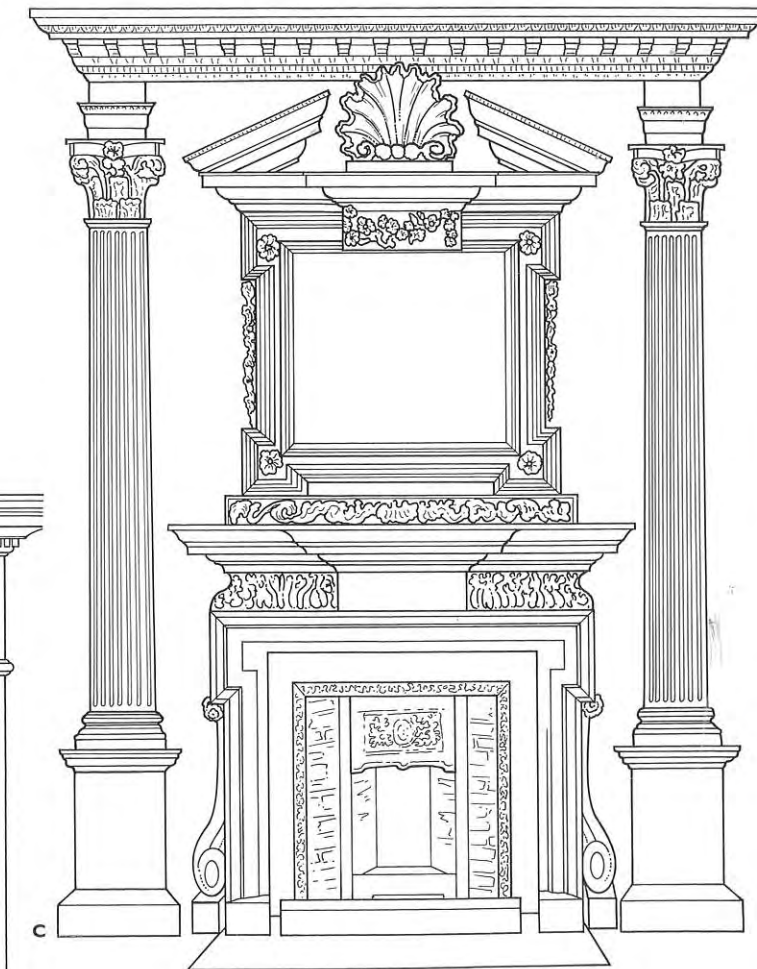
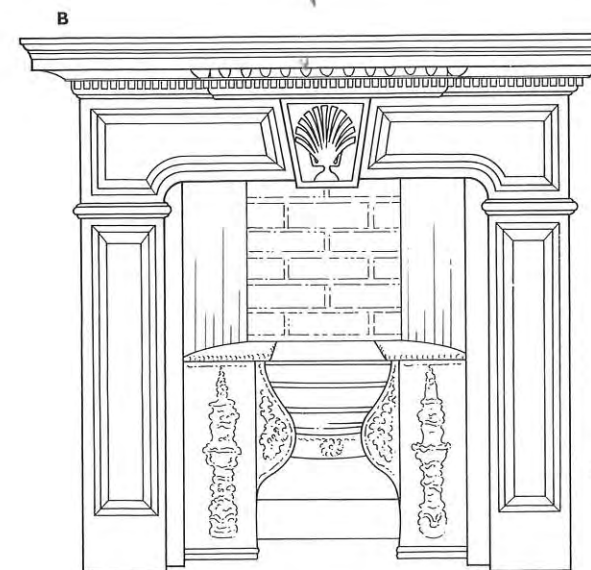
The widespread adoption of coal for the fires of most towns during the eighteenth century led to a revision of the form of a fireplace. Coal produces more heat than wood, but needs a draught if it is to burn properly, and can be smothered by its own ash. A coal fire, therefore, can be smaller than a wood one, for the same amount of heat, but it needs to be raised in a grate so that its ash can fall away. A coal fire can easily be fitted in a grate only one foot square. Few grates were over 2 feet wide and 1½ feet deep.

Traditionally, a fireplace was the focus of a room, and so the diminution of the fire with the advent of coal made an imposing chimney-piece a necessity. The iron grate could stand in a fireplace alone, but usually it was built into a stone or tiled frame which linked it to the surround itself. Early surrounds were in the form of a stone or wooden architrave, grooved perhaps to suggest pilasters and a lintel, over which was placed a shelf (A).

These simple forms were sometimes elaborated, perhaps by the insertion of a decorative keystone and block cornice

beneath the mantelshef (B). In a really grand room the chimney-piece might extend into a full classical treatment that embraced the whole wall: the surround itself could take the form of an ornate architrave, frieze and cornice, the latter forming a mantelshef. All this could then be framed by pilasters and an overmantel complete with an architrave of its own and perhaps a pediment as well (C).

Most eighteenth-century fireplaces had chimney-pieces based on the idea of an architrave or, otherwise, columns or pilasters and an entablature to provide the



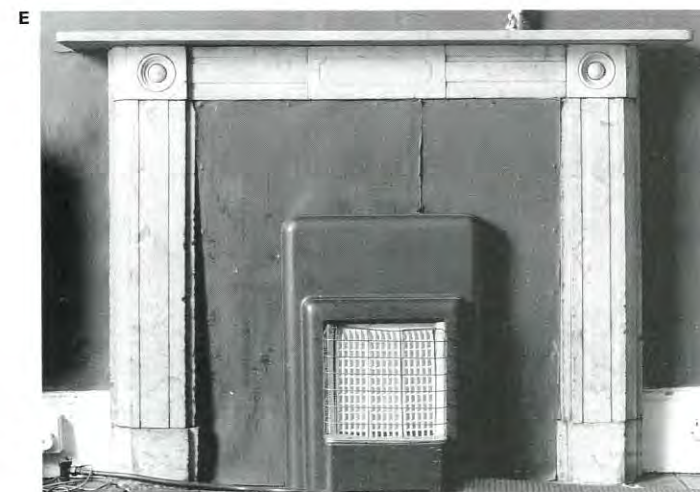
mantelshelf. The best chimney-pieces were made of stone, and could be decorated with coloured insets and carved panels. But most were of wood, and built up, like a door frame of separate pieces, for instance for the sides and top of the architrave, for the mouldings flanking it, for the reeding of a pulvinated frieze, and again for the moulding of the cornice beneath the mantelshelf (D).

By the last quarter of the eighteenth century, these classical forms were giving way to the lighter decorative forms introduced by Robert Adam, with swags, urns and classical motifs rather than those originally used for doors and windows.

Early in the nineteenth century, these forms gave way to plain shapes, often built up from separate pieces of polished hard stone or marble, and they could

be machine-cut and mass-produced for the fireplaces of rapidly expanding towns.

The soot that these fires produced brought about the Clean Air Acts of the 1950s and the change to convenient forms of heating, such as gas, electricity and central heating with water-filled radiators. Coal fires became a thing of the past, needing hard work to keep them going, as well as causing a generally condemned nuisance. Their fate, blocked to provide a mounting for gas fires or simply to keep dirt from coming down the chimney, left them as a blank reproach where once a room had its focus (E). If few people want the trouble of an open fire, even a blocked fireplace can make an attractive feature in a room if the surround is still intact.



Staircases

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, staircases still relied on heavy posts with rails supported by turned balusters rising from a closed string. These ornate forms were progressively refined in the first half of the eighteenth century, so that the staircase rapidly assumed its full role as an object of status. An open string (A) rather than a closed string (B), carved tread



ends, and turned and carved balusters with a grand newel post supporting elegant rails that swept up the staircase made it the most ornate part of a house (C).

Such staircases were only provided to link the best rooms on the principal floors, and so the staircase up to the bedrooms and, beyond that, to the attic had progressively less ornament. For instance, the main staircase might have an open string, the next flight a closed one, the two of

them with twisted and carved balusters, the attic stairs with only plain, turned balusters.

Balusters

The variety of balusters was as endless as the number of joiners willing to turn and carve them (D), and the mouldings for rails nearly as great (E). To these were added the balusters made from wrought or cast iron which graced lavish staircases. Towards the end of the century, these

forms became lighter as a consequence of the reforms of Robert Adam. Instead of turned balusters, plain square strips supported thinner rails that curled their way up a staircase (F). The carved tread ends were reduced to templates (G).

Elegance of restraint matched the times in which craftsmanship was slowly giving way to mass production, whether it was in carpentry, plasterwork, or ironwork.

