

Doorways



Key Issues

- 1. The external doorways of a listed building form an important part of its character. Listed building consent is required for any works affecting that character.**
- 2. Age, design, materials, and associated features are amongst the numerous factors that contribute to the interest of historic doorways.**
- 3. In planning works to doorways it is important to understand and protect their key characteristics.**
- 4. Repair rather than replacement is usually the best means of safeguarding the historic character of a doorway. This also reduces the requirement for new raw materials and energy.**
- 5. Where a door cannot be repaired, the replacement should replicate the original design and detailing.**
- 6. Significant improvements in energy efficiency can be achieved by discreet draught-stripping.**
- 7. Local authorities give advice on the requirement for listed building consent, conservation area consent and other permissions.**

INTRODUCTION

This is one of a series of guidance notes on managing change in the historic environment. The series explains how to apply the policies contained in the *Scottish Historic Environment Policy* ([SHEP](#), PDF 312K) and *Scottish Planning Policy 23: Planning and the Historic Environment* ([SPP23](#), PDF 192K).

This note sets out the principles that apply to alterations to the external doorways and associated features of listed buildings. It replaces the equivalent guidance in *The Memorandum of Guidance on Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas* (1998) and should be afforded equal weight in drawing up planning policies and determining applications relating to the historic environment.

Monuments scheduled under the Ancient Monuments & Archaeological Areas Act 1979 require scheduled monument consent for any works. Where a structure is both scheduled and listed, the scheduling controls have precedence. Separate advice is available from Historic Scotland's website: [Scheduled Monuments: Guidance for Owners, Occupiers & Land Managers](#) (PDF 718K).

Separate guidance in this series is provided on improving accessibility.

WHY ARE HISTORIC DOORS AND DOORWAYS IMPORTANT?

Doorways, and their associated features, such as entrance steps and platts, make a substantial contribution to the character and physical integrity of most historic buildings. They are usually an important element of a building's design, weatherproofing and security: their style, detailing and fixtures help us to understand when a building was constructed or altered, and how the building was used. The design and arrangement of doorways can be a notable component of groups of buildings or streets. Doorways can have symbolic or ritual importance. Many historic doors are extremely durable, remaining in use for a century or more.

IDENTIFYING THE INTEREST OF HISTORIC DOORS AND DOORWAYS

The significance of a historic doorway is derived from a number of factors including its form or shape, the pattern of design, the materials and details of construction, the finish, the method of opening, the use of fanlights and glazing, associated fixtures, and associated features.

Forms of doorway

There are many shapes and sizes of historic doorway, from simple rectangular openings to elaborate types of arch and surround. Sometimes doorway openings are randomly sized and located for



The exceptional 12th-century Romanesque doorway at Dalmeny Parish Kirk. Like many early church doorways, it is decorated with symbolic carvings. The door and inner stone frame are 20th-century replacements. © N Haynes.



Albert Terrace, Aberdeen. Designed by the architect Archibald Simpson in about 1840, the paired doorways form part of a consistent architectural pattern throughout the terrace of houses. Additional features include the steps and decorative iron railings.



The doorway, with its stair, stone surround, decorative fanlight and heraldic panel, is the principal feature of this symmetrically designed Ross-shire house of 1760. © Crown copyright: RCAHMS. Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk.



Sliding boarded doors on a late 18th-century granary building in Banff, Aberdeenshire. © N Haynes.



A late 19th-century two-leaf outer door and an inner vestibule door with decorative leaded glass panels in Falkirk. Associated fixtures include the brass letterbox and door handle to the outer door and the brass doorknob and decorative finger-plate to the inner door. © N Haynes.

purely functional purposes. However, in most cases doorways are carefully sized and located as part of a broader design for a building or group of buildings. Doorway proportions and spacing frequently relate to other elements of the building, such as the overall dimensions of an elevation or other features (e.g. windows). Doorways are often important components of an architectural design, perhaps expressing different parts of a building through variations in size, positioning and design.

Door materials and design

The materials and construction of doors can reveal much about local joinery traditions and stylistic fashions of the period and the historical status/use of the building. The predominant material of traditional historic doors and frames is timber, usually painted pine or oak.

The simplest historic doors are of vertical timber boards held together by horizontal boards. Early improvements in security resulted in some doors of more complex construction that incorporated metalwork to achieve their strength and decorative qualities. Variations on the boarded design were popular into the early 20th century.

Panelled timber doors were in common use on important buildings by the late 17th century. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries the various forms of panelled door became standard for the main entrance of most types of domestic building.

Apart from iron 'yetts', or security gates, early metal doors are rare. The early 20th century saw an increasing use of metal or metal-framed doors, particularly alloys such as bronze.

Method of opening

As a moving component of a building, a door can impact on the appearance of a building in both its open and shut positions. The method and direction of opening are important characteristics of a historic door.

There are three principal methods of opening: side hung, sliding and revolving. The opening methods are usually appropriate to different types of building, e.g. revolving doors are usually found on civic buildings. Most domestic side-hung doors open inwards from the outside, but some specialised situations, for example in agricultural or industrial uses, require outward-opening doors. Some doors are divided vertically to form 2-leaf doors (hinged on both jambs of the doorway, opening at the centre), and some are divided horizontally (e.g. a stable door).

Fanlights and glazing

Glazed features frequently form part of the design of historic doorways. The introduction of glass fanlights above doors in the 18th century and ornate glass panels within doors in the 19th century increased the decorative possibilities of doorways whilst also permitting more daylight.

Finish

From the 18th century most timber doors were treated with a durable paint finish. Doors on a single building or groups of buildings (e.g. country estates) were often painted a uniform colour. It is sometimes possible to sample underlying layers to establish the original colour.

Associated fixtures

Door furniture often reflects the period and character of a building, from simple iron handles and latches on a cottage door to elaborate strap hinges on a church door. The range of door fixtures is enormous: whilst some are of unique artisan creation, the use of uniformly produced brass door furniture can be an important element of an area's architectural character. Historic door-bells, brass plaques and other fixtures into the surrounds of a doorway can equally contribute to the character of the entrance.

Associated features

The treatment of an entrance can make a powerful statement about the status of the building or elevate one entrance over others in the same building. The construction of entrance steps and platts to tenements and houses from the 18th century allowed the creation of basements and the regular spacing and positioning of doorways, even where ground levels varied. Heraldic panels, pediments, doorcases, porches, porticos, and porte-cochères (carriage porches) are among the many other features associated with entrance doorways.



Detail of a delicate cast-iron fanlight dating from the 1790s in Edinburgh. © N Haynes.

PRINCIPLES FOR REPAIR AND ALTERATION

Character and interest of the building

Repairs and alterations to a historic building should protect its character. The contribution of the doors and doorways to that character should therefore be understood before considering how to alter the building. The form, pattern of design, materials and details of construction, finish, method of opening, use of fanlights and glazing, associated fixtures, and associated features are all important considerations. A brief description of the interest of the doors or doorways and an explanation of the impact of the alterations are always helpful in assessing such proposals.

Repair

In almost all cases, repair of components on a like-for-like basis is preferable to replacement of whole units, as this will best maintain the character and historic fabric of the door or doorway. More detailed advice on the repair of traditional timber doors and glazing can be found in our Inform Guides: [External Timber Doors](#) (PDF 342K) and [Decorative Domestic Glass](#) (PDF 424K).

Replacement

Where there is no alternative to the replacement of an original or historic door, the new elements should match the original in all respects. This should include exact replication of the opening method, maintenance



Associated fixtures (clockwise from top left): tenement door release (1890s); brass handle and lock (1880s); door-bell pulls (1820s); door-bell (1890s). © N Haynes.



Removal of the left-hand doorcase has unbalanced this pair of entrances. © N Haynes.



Glazed upper panels form an original feature of this Glasgow tenement door. © N Haynes.



The door on the left is redundant following the internal amalgamation of two villas, but retained in place to maintain the character of the building. © N Haynes.

of the relationship of the door plane to the plane of the external wall, and reuse of door furniture and historic glass where this contributes to a building's character.

Replacement doors may be appropriate where woodwork is beyond repair or in instances where historic doors have previously been replaced using inappropriate designs or materials. Any new replacement proposals should seek to improve the situation through designs and materials that are sympathetic to the character of the building.

Glazing

Glass can make an important contribution to the character of a doorway and should not be removed. Plain, opaque, stained and patterned glass are important details, whether part of the door, fanlight or sidelight. Where replacement is required, new work to match the existing should be specified.

New doorways

New doorways in historic buildings should only be considered where they can be incorporated into the existing architecture and designed and detailed in a way that is compatible with the existing historic fabric. Great care should be taken to retain existing design patterns or architectural details.

Blocking up doors

The character of a listed building is usually best maintained by retaining redundant doors in situ rather than blocking them up. If they are part of a terrace of uniform design they are a particularly important element of the architectural character and can normally be fixed closed in a manner that is reversible.

Converting doors to windows

Conversion of doors to windows is usually difficult to achieve without disruption to the architectural character of the building. Such alteration work should only be considered in subsidiary locations and where it will not involve the loss of historic fabric of quality. In these locations it is sometimes possible to glaze the upper part of the existing door to allow the necessary light.

Reinstatement

Generally, restoration of a door or doorway to a particular period should only be considered when the proposed style is appropriate to the building in question, it matches a documented earlier pattern, and it does not result in the loss of existing historic fabric that contributes to the character of the building.

Security

Additional security measures can normally be incorporated without affecting the character of a door. Extra mortice locks, rimlocks or bolts are usually easy to fit. Permanent external security shutters or roller shutters should not be used as they are likely to damage or obscure architectural detailing.

Colour

Many manufacturers produce ranges of traditional paint colours that are suitable for use on historic buildings. Where consistency of colour with other features (e.g. windows) is important to the character of the building, this should be maintained in any redecoration scheme. The choice of paint colour may be subject to Local Authority conditions.

Alterations to fixtures

Metal door furniture is an important feature of a historic door. Historic ironwork and brasswork should be retained and reused if the timber door is being replaced. Replacements, where necessary, should match historic details, materials and positions. Historic Scotland's Technical Conservation Group may be able to provide details of manufacturers, suppliers or contractors who can supply or install replacement fixtures.

Alterations to associated features

Alterations to associated features should normally seek to maintain their character. Enclosure of open features, such as a portico or the space beneath an entrance platt, to create additional internal space should not be undertaken.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Energy conservation is necessary in addressing climate change. In many cases cost-effective and sustainable improvements to the energy efficiency of traditional buildings can be achieved without damage to their character.

Thermal efficiency

The greatest source of heat-loss in traditional doors is usually around the frame. It is normally possible to upgrade the performance by the introduction of discreet draught-proofing strips. In some cases, where the panels are particularly thin, thermal performance can be improved by adding a layer of insulation to the indoor side. The traditional 19th-century method of adding a thick internal curtain can be effective in reducing draughts.

Sustainable repair

Historic doors contain 'embodied energy' – the energy used in their original manufacture and installation. It is always important to consider the total energy cost of any particular proposal. The embodied energy lost in completely replacing a door, rather than repairing or upgrading its performance, will often be greater than the benefits. This is especially the case when replacements are manufactured from non-renewable materials, or are produced remotely and transported significant distances, or when the old units need to be disposed of in landfill.

Further information is available in Historic Scotland's [Inform Guide: Energy Efficiency in Traditional Homes](#) (PDF 715K).



The old conversion of the right-hand doorway to a window and removal of the main entrance steps is disruptive to the character of the building and the broader pattern of entrances and windows in the street. © N Haynes.



A house of 1776 in Morayshire before the removal of an 1870 porch. © Crown copyright: RCAHMS. Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk.



The same house with the porch removed and the principal elevation carefully restored to its 18th-century form on the basis of documentary research. © Crown copyright: RCAHMS. Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk.



A timber panelled door in the Seatown at Cullen, Moray. The detailing of this door is typical of the high-quality joinery of the area. Draught-proof strips have been applied around the door. © N Haynes.

CONSENTS

Listed building consent is required for any work to a listed building that affects its character. The local authority determines the need for consent.

Where listed building consent is required, an application is made to the local authority. This should include accurate scale drawings showing both the existing situation and proposed works in context. It is normally helpful to provide detailed technical information and photographs.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND ADVICE

Details of all individual scheduled monuments, listed buildings, designated gardens and designed landscapes, and designated wrecks can be obtained from Historic Scotland (see contact details below) or at: www.pastmap.org.uk. Details of listed buildings can also be obtained from the relevant local authority for the area.

Advice on the requirement for listed building consent, conservation area consent, building warrants, and other permissions/consents should be sought from local authorities.

Historic Scotland Inspectorate
Longmore House
Salisbury Place
EDINBURGH
EH9 1SH

Tel: 0131 668 8981 or 8717 Fax: 0131 668 8765

E-mail: hs.inspectorate@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

Advice on technical issues is available from Historic Scotland's Technical Conservation Group at the above address and website or at the following:

Tel: 0131 668 8715 or Fax: 0131 668 8669

E-mail: hs.technicalconservationgroup@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

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Cottage door, designed by James Maclaren, 1889, Fortingall, Perth & Kinross.

A 'Gibbs' architrave surrounding a late 18th-century doorway in South Street, St Andrews, Fife.

Decorative door handles at the former Barony Church, Castle Street, Glasgow, designed by J Burnet & J A Campbell, 1886–90.

Other selected Historic Scotland publications and links

[Maintaining your Home – A Short Guide for Homeowners](#) (2007) (PDF 1.4MB)

[Inform Guide: Energy Efficiency in Traditional Homes](#) (2008) (PDF 715K)

[Inform Guide: External Timber Doors](#) (2008) (PDF 342K)

[Inform Guide: Decorative Domestic Glass](#) (2007) (PDF 424K)

For the full range of Inform Guides, Practitioner Guides, Technical Advice Notes and Research Reports please see the Publications section of the Historic Scotland website.