

Case Study: The Shop in the Lawnmarket and other Edinburgh Shop Frontages

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Introduction

We were asked to get involved in this particular shopfront in 1997. We had never been involved in shopfront work before and we were unsure at the time if we wanted to be involved in such a small project but the reality is that it led on to many other things including being here today so it was very significant and worthwhile.

The Lawnmarket shop is just down from the Castle Esplanade. It is located at the side of the entry to Milne's Court designed in 1690 by Robert Mylne. The shop is one of a few commercial units within a primarily residential building.

Background Research

Researched archives photos from RCAHMS were particularly useful and these provided little pieces of information. Digital photography means that they can be enlarged easily so details can be reviewed and the shop assessed. Standard photos from RCAHMS are only A4 size so the detail is not visible so digital photography is a great bonus.

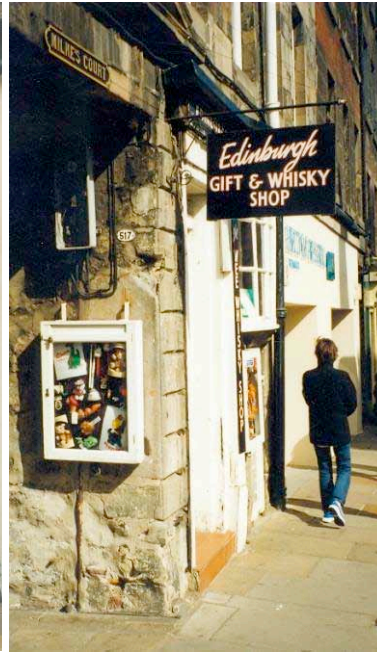
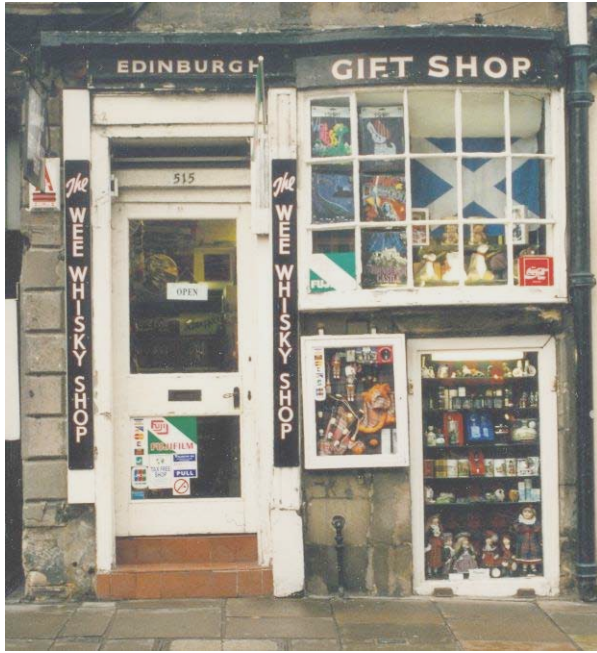
Grant-funded Works

The shopfront was in a poor state and the owner was interested in increasing his revenue. He was a tenant with a long lease and this length of lease probably encouraged him to be involved in a conservation project.

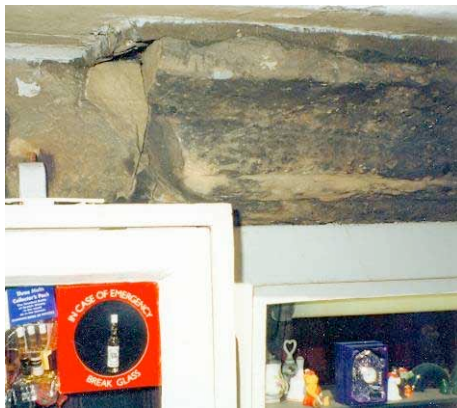
Most elements of the shopfront were intact but there were some more modern additions. Essentially underneath these was a picturesque and attractive property but with later alterations which affected the inherent character including signage and a modern door. The shop had deteriorated but the shop owner had salvaged a pilaster which had fallen off.

Evidence suggests that this type of frontage was an 'off the shelf' frontage. The original building consisted of a plain traditional frontage with a single window above a moulded lintel which gave access to commercial business at the lower level. Over time the pavement had increased in height which probably reduced the headroom so that the lower level doorway became unusable.

The Edinburgh Old Town Renewal Trust funded the project to restore the shopfront with a grant of 66%, which was the level 11 years ago. Our Client advised that we must reinstate the display boxes. Our particular concern was with the defective lintel caused by water running off the window resulting in the stonework becoming cracked and spalling off.



Shop prior to works



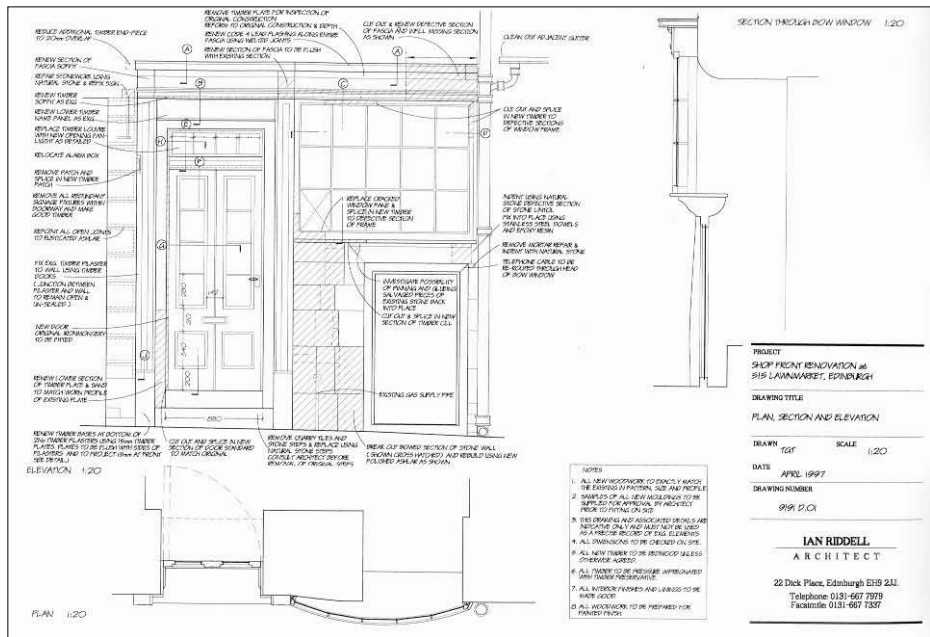
Damage to lintel above basement door

Assessment of Property

A full assessment of the frontage as appropriate was undertaken by preparing a series of scale drawings. The frontage consists of a large masonry pier set between a original openings and a timber bow front projecting across indicating that the bow frontage was an addition to the building.

Our drawings record that the lintel has a curious curved back which allowed access to the lower level. There is no clear reason for this so we are not sure why it was curved.

For the actual works, we thought we had analysed everything but there were a few surprises, which is perhaps inevitable. We learnt from this and subsequently in other shopfront projects that to carry out a thorough investigation from day one is very important including taking pieces apart where necessary. This gets around the surprises that may otherwise arise.



Measured scale drawings prepared prior to conservation work

The fascia and cornice were completely rotten but we prepared drawings recording the construction including tongue and groove joints. Prepared working drawings for use by contractor were also drawn up. It was important to be faithful to the original construction and materials and we sourced the best timbers using Douglas Fir as pine was used in the original construction.

There was an inherent problem with timber rot arising from condensation so we introduced for ventilation holes between timber soldiers behind the cornice and we also included ventilators into the roof, constructed in lead, to allow permanent ventilation and to preserve the life of timbers.

The contractor wanted to take the bow window back to his workshop but we were concerned that this was more likely to lead to some damage if it was off site so we insisted that any repairs were done on site. Even elements like the putty which had built up over the years were important and we were concerned to preserve this as this told a little bit about the history of the shop.



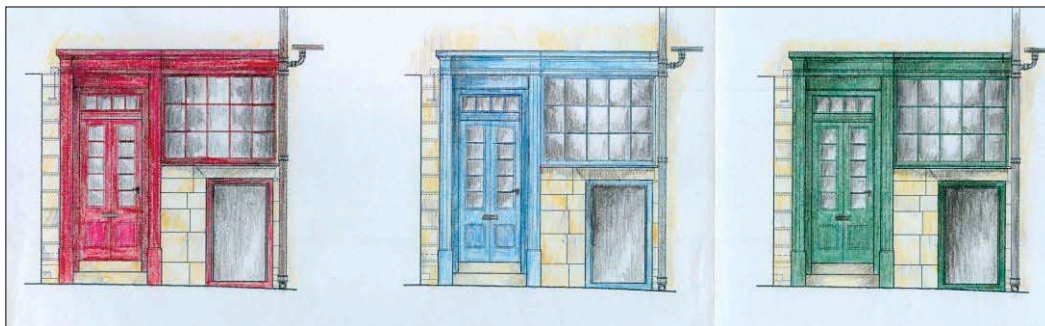
Shopfront under repair

Our Client required a limited contract period of 4 weeks. The work itself was to be carried out between the end of December and the beginning of January in what was a quiet trade period.

In addition to the shopfront, we were also asked to look at the stonework at the entrance to the building. Evidence on site did not exist so we obtained details from Robert Mylne's diary held in RCAHMS which had some drawings of the entrance. We undertook research into other Robert Mylne buildings and the Classical Orders of Architecture so we could put back the stonework which was appropriate to this building. In the end, the whole project came together in a successful way including the stonework.

As a further development, a feasibility study was undertaken on how access to the basement could be achieved so that the business could be extended to include that area for retail. The study demonstrated that a staircase would have to extend out into the very narrow pavement which is currently impossible to achieve. The study could only be implemented if incorporated within the proposed 2nd phase of Royal Mile streetscape improvements and road widening works. The Edinburgh Old Town Renewal Trust were to grant assist this work so the stair construction and to be incorporated into the streetscape works which remain to be implemented.

The client was shown a choice of colours for the shopfront and he liked a burgundy colour. The signage and lettering were also considered. There was an existing hanging sign and this was replaced with a new design inspired from details of metalwork available through the Edinburgh Conservation Manual as used in William Street which was constructed about the same time.



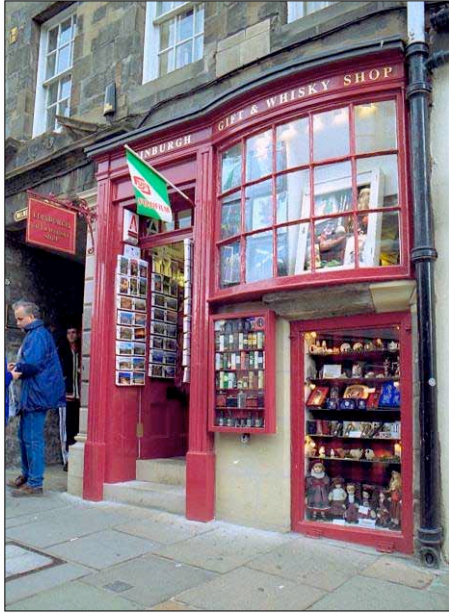
Choice of colours proposed

The End Result

The client was very happy with the end result. Turnover increased by 10-15% and we understand that in some projects this increase can be much higher. However, our Client recovered his costs within 1 year and year on year has benefited so overall it is a success from his point of view and also a benefit to the community.

The vertical signage has crept back in but it is difficult to manage this kind of alteration otherwise the character of shop is very much the same.

An honest repair of the defective stone lintel over the doorway was carried out. It was decided that it would be better for the future of the building to curve the lintel back to the line of the bow frontage rather than to project in front of the window to improve the weathering of the stone although this was different from the original construction.



Lawnmarket shop after completion

Other Shopfront Projects

75-83 Lothian Road

This was an Edinburgh World Heritage Trust scheme which involved stonework repairs to a tenement which included a public house on the ground floor. At the end of the project there was money remaining for shopfront improvements and underneath later alterations we found remnants of a cast iron shopfront which provided sufficient evidence of the original frontage to be able to reconstruct it.



Cast iron uncovered during investigative survey

EWHT were keen on the shopfront project and offered a 75% grant and the tenement co-owners contribution towards the total project costs of £125000, the publican was to pay £5000 but they declined. We asked EWHT if Historic Scotland would contribute and with this the grant increased to 90% so the publican's contribution was reduced to about £2000.

However, despite offering to phase the work so that the pub would only be shut for 2 days the publican to try to keep business going he would not agree to proceed. The publican recently

came back saying they were still interested and EWHT agreed that the grant remained available. However the publican's company went bust and the work has never gone ahead. For the time being we have lost what would have been a unique cast iron frontage in Edinburgh.



Design proposal reinstating cast iron shopfront

14-19 East Norton Place

This was a comprehensive scheme for the whole building which included Edinburgh Dry Cleaners. Research was undertaken into local frontages of a similar age to put together an appropriate design for the dry cleaners new frontage. Repairs and restoration works to the Post Office frontage were completed using correctly sourced stone cladding and bronze elements for which specifications were found through information researched using the Council's Drawing Archive.



14-19 East Norton Place, Edinburgh after completion of work to stonework and shopfronts

Chessels Court, 240 Canongate, High Street

This was a shop/ restaurant set back behind an arcade occupied by a Mexican restaurant chain, Pancho Villa's. It had a modern frontage but required disabled access and the brief was for a new shopfront using natural stone and oak and steel inspired by the nearby Scottish Parliament.

The solution uses oak and granite and a sloping pavement to allow wheelchair access. The frontage slides back for summer use. Materials included stainless steel for the balustrade and support for lettering with neon backlighting were used to try to advertise the premises because of its location tucked away behind the arches.

It is often appropriate to follow traditional shop front design if good evidence is available.. However, where this does not exist, there is an opportunity to introduce a modern design for the building using high quality details and good detailing.



240 Canongate, Edinburgh

1-11 Nicholson Square

This is a residential block with ground floor shops. We were keen to apply lessons we learned from our past projects for the benefit of this project. We carried out research into the architectural development of the buildings using good archive evidence from the city archives. There was also an opportunity to investigate internally within the existing shops. The archives showed alterations to the different shopfronts over the years and from these and other evidence we could prepare CAD drawings to help reinstate in the future some of the shopfronts.

With the benefit of grant assistance from EWHT, a contractor was employed to open up the frontages of shops where we considered parts of the original features might exist that would help us to understand the building and to inform the work. We have determined there is sufficient information to allow us to restore some frontages that would be very close to the original for some of the shops.

Where there is no surviving detail there is a choice of what to do. A modern shopfront is probably the right thing to do and to reflect the spirit of the time. What is important is for any new frontage to be well detailed using good quality materials. In doing so, this will allow the frontages to last for the decades to come when they are likely to be used by a whole host of different businesses.



1-11 Nicholson Square, Edinburgh

Points to remember

- Check if there is grant assistance
- Agree the fee in two parts; one for the research which is potentially very time-consuming and then for the proposals
- Research using historic maps and city archives
- Carry out a thorough investigative survey by opening up the building
- Prepare restoration proposals based upon good evidence and research or, prepare an appropriate contemporary design
- Agree the full extent of the proposed works
- Agree the probable costs for the proposal works
- Agree a fee for developing proposals through to completion
- Understand the significance of 'history' in elements of existing construction, materials and finishes and retain these wherever possible, even down to the putty on the windows.
- Adopt traditional methods of construction in restoration works
- Adopt simplicity of design and careful detailing in contemporary works- the essence of good modern design
- Use high quality materials
- Work with experienced reliable contractors who understand what is required of them.