



*Promoting City, Coast & Countryside*

## **A SIMPLE GUIDE TO LOOKING AFTER YOUR SASH AND CASE WINDOWS**

Windows are an integral part of a building's character which are often over looked. Just in the same way that it is important to retain original features such as fireplaces and cornices, traditional sash and case windows are also a historically important part of a building, which should be retained.

As well as being attractive features of a building, windows also need to function safely and efficiently. Given the proper care and attention, traditional sash and case windows can survive for hundreds of years. There are many examples of original sash and case windows throughout the Lancaster District which are over 100 years old, some are even earlier than this. This is primarily owed to two things. The fact that they are extremely practical, for example, they have an efficient ventilation system and can be cleaned easily. The wood used in their initial manufacture was high quality, close grained timber which means that the windows are also naturally durable provided they are given sensible and regular maintenance.

It is not unusual to find surviving historic glass in sash windows. Crown glass is a characteristic of eighteenth century windows and this is easily identified by its distinctive curved ripples. This was replaced with cylinder sheet and patent plate glass during the nineteenth century as glass technology became more sophisticated. These glass types are characterised by straight ripples and by occasional 'seeds' or bubbles. Old glass has a particular character which modern plate glass cannot recreate, therefore it is just as important to retain any surviving historic glass as it is to retain original window frames.

### **Maintenance**

If you are fortunate to have surviving original sash and case windows in your property it is important to retain these. If possible, it is normally aesthetically and economically preferable to repair rather than replace windows. Often, windows which have decayed, can be restored fairly easily. Timber decay is usually localised, commonly at lower rails and mortice joints, and can be remedied by indenting sections of new timber at the affected areas. Broken or damaged cords can be replaced and defective glazing putty renewed. There are a number of specialists who carry out such repairs but your local joiner should also be able to remedy these common problems fairly easily.

In circumstances where your windows have badly deteriorated and are beyond repair, they should be replaced with traditional style, timber sash and case windows. Having survived for hundreds of years in all types of buildings from castles to cottages, the traditional timber sash and case window fell out of widespread use in the 1950s. More recently, upvc windows have gained popularity. These alternatives to the traditional timber window lack the character and attractive appearance of their predecessors and should be avoided in historic buildings and conservation areas. There are several firms that supply traditional style, timber sash and case windows

which have the added advantage of double glazing. See the websites below or contact the Conservation Section for more information.

To avoid the need to replace time expired windows, follow the few simple guidelines in this guidance leaflet to ensure your windows stay beautiful and functional for many years to come.

## Cleaning

Regular cleaning of timber and glass surfaces will improve the appearance of your windows and ensure that they function effectively.

## Painting

Timber sash and case windows should be painted regularly to prevent deterioration of the timber and to improve their appearance. However, the build up of paint layers over time can also inhibit the opening and smooth running of sliding sashes. In addition, if painting has been carried out incorrectly, working parts can become stuck.

To avoid this problem excess paint layers can be easily removed by rubbing with sandpaper and a thin bladed scraper. Alternatively, if further layers of paint need to be removed, this can be done with an alkali paint stripper or gentle heat from an air gun. Care should be taken not to damage the glass with the heat.

**Be careful!!** Some traditional paints are often lead based and therefore pose a health hazard when stripping them. To be on the safe side, wear a protective mask and gloves.

When the surface is smooth, clean and dry, a new layer of paint can be applied. Ensure that the putty between the timber and glass surfaces is completely covered but avoid spreading paint on the glass itself.

**Tips:** Before painting the window frame it is a good idea to remove the sashes from the frame. Subsequently, when painting the sashes, pull the outer sash right down and push the inner sash up past it. Paint the three sides of the top and bottom meeting rails, the lower half of the stiles and glazing bars and the parts of the lower sash you can reach. Then, once the paint is dry swap the position of the sashes and paint the remaining parts. Do not paint parts of the runners (which contain the sash cords) which are hidden from view once the window is closed.

If you use a good quality paint system your windows will be well protected and reasonably low maintenance. Paint manufacturers such as Jotun, Sikkens, Akzo Nobel and Farrow & Ball have a range of decorative woodcare coatings available in microporous or non-microporous systems which have excellent durability and an attractive appearance. For further details of suitable paint systems and their suppliers, please contact the Conservation Section of the Planning Service at the address below or see the useful websites which follow.

## Further Repairs

It is unlikely that you will be carrying out extensive repairs to sash and case windows yourself. It is important however, that you regularly inspect your windows for early signs of deterioration and then contact a joiner if any faults occur. Below is a checklist of possible defects, which you may find useful for this purpose. For details

of a suitable contractor to do the work, again, please contact the Conservation Section.

**Window No. & Location:**

**Date:**

**Defects:**

- Visible gap at cill
  - Gaps leading to draughts
  - Meeting rails not level
  - Joints in sashes opening up
  - Broken sash cords
  - Broken or cracked glass
  - Flaking or missing paint
  - Timber missing or damaged
  - Missing or defective glazing putty
  - Missing or defective mastic btwn window and wall
  - Missing or defective cill bedding mortar
  - Window will not stay open (closes by gravity)
  - Timber decay in cill, parting beads or sash frame
  - Shutters (if applicable) will not open
  - Split panels to shutters or lining
  - Timber decay to shutters or lining
  - Damp plaster in recess behind shutters
  - Other defects or general comments
- (e.g. timber profiles, ironmongery, type of glass etc)

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**Upgrading sash and case windows**

Double glazing

In recent years the government has introduced a number of measures in an attempt to reduce the amount of energy loss from Britain's homes. As a result, more and more traditional single glazed windows are being replaced with thick upvc double glazed units in order to meet the new thermal efficiency targets. This is resulting in a rapid erosion of character in many of Britain's historic buildings and conservation areas.

Whilst the replacement of single glazing with double glazed panes may be physically possible, there are easier and cheaper ways to reduce energy loss and lower fuel bills as a result, for example, installing roof insulation or draught stripping doors and windows. An alternative to consider is internal secondary glazing of existing traditional style windows. This will allow the existing windows to be left in place and will reduce heating bills and noise without adversely affecting the character or appearance of the building or area.

Draught stripping

This can be fitted easily and economically to timber sash and case windows to bring them up to modern performance standards. Several proprietary systems are available which the local Conservation Officer will be able to advise on.

### Security and safety

Where possible, original ironmongery features should be left in place even if these no longer meet modern requirements of security. Additional locks can be inserted into the meeting rails and blocks or stops can be fitted to prevent sashes opening beyond the required height. This can also prevent accidental falls through the window from inside. With very low windows, internal barriers can help prevent accidents.

### Other upgrading methods

Shutters can reduce heat loss at night time as well as providing extra security. Heavy, lined curtains can also provide significant reductions in heat loss.

### Permissions

Proposals to undertake any work which may change the appearance of windows in listed buildings or unlisted buildings in some Conservation Areas, will be subject to listed building consent or require planning permission. Works likely to require consent include changes of frame material, change of timber glazing bar profile or the arrangement of panes, change of operating method or the provision of double glazing or ventilation. Contact the Planning Service in the first instance to discuss any proposed work which you wish to undertake and they will be able to advise you if any consents are required.

### Grants

Occasionally grants may be available towards the cost of repair and upgrading of historic windows. Again, contact the Planning Service for further information.

For further information contact:

Stephen Gardner, Senior Conservation Officer, Telephone 01524 582340  
or Elaine Clark, Assistant Conservation Officer, Telephone 01524 582535  
Conservation Section,  
Planning & Building Control Service,  
Palatine Hall, Dalton Square,  
Lancaster,  
LA1 1PW.

This guidance note has been informed by existing guidance from Historic Scotland, English Heritage & SPAB

### Useful Websites

Sash window specialists

[www.mumfordwood.com](http://www.mumfordwood.com)  
[www.blairsofscotland.com](http://www.blairsofscotland.com)

Sash window repairs and upgrades

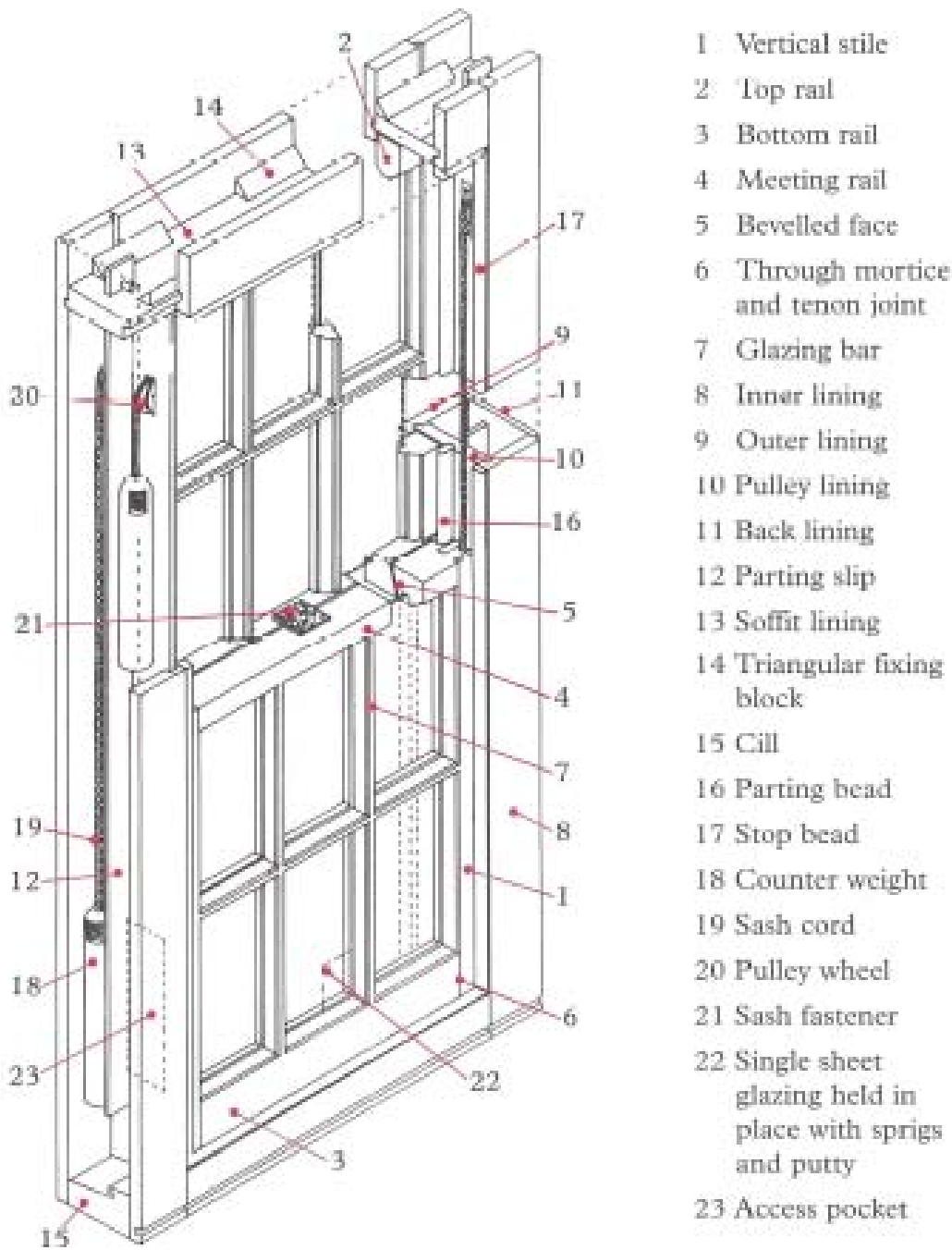
[www.ventrolla.co.uk](http://www.ventrolla.co.uk)  
[www.sash-restoration.co.uk](http://www.sash-restoration.co.uk)

Paint systems and suppliers

[www.jotun.co.uk](http://www.jotun.co.uk)  
[www.sikkens.co.uk](http://www.sikkens.co.uk)  
[www.farrow-ball.com](http://www.farrow-ball.com)  
[www.decoratingdirect.co.uk](http://www.decoratingdirect.co.uk)



A typical sash and case window, including some of the terms used in this leaflet



Source: Timber Sash Windows, Guidance Leaflet, English Heritage (2004) [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)