



Segmental headed dormers on a house of the early 1700s. Richmond upon Thames



Five light dormers on houses built in the 1720s. These dormers are probably later alterations and were possibly added to provide well-lit workshop areas. They are not suitable additions to houses. Meard Street, Westminster

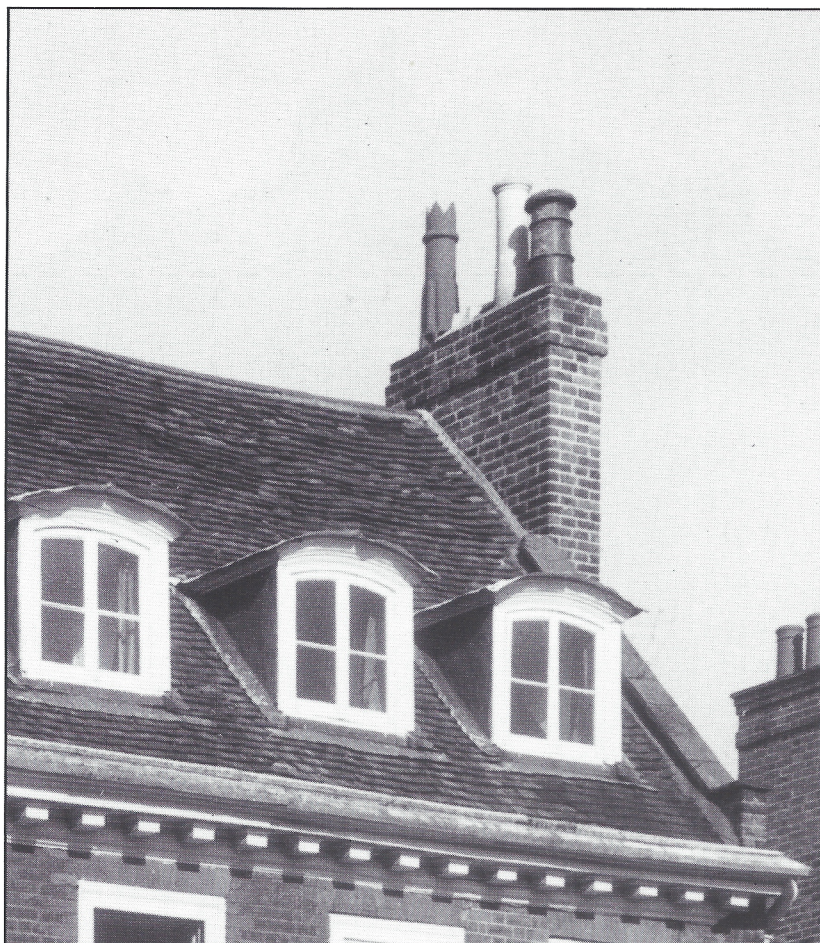
The dormer window has been a feature of European architecture since at least the mid-fifteenth century. As a method of lighting a roof space it is usually aesthetically superior to a rooflight parallel with the roof slope and has the additional advantage of increasing the area of headroom available.

Dormers take several different forms depending on the status of the building, local materials and tradition, date of construction, the use made of the roof space, and whether the dormer is part of the original design or a later addition. There can be a wide variation in quite a small locality.

Where dormers are behind a parapet they may pass almost unnoticed in a terrace of relatively plain houses. However, a wide, modern, heavily detailed dormer with a large area of plate glass can seriously detract from the appearance of an historic building, and indeed may upset the composition of the entire terrace or street in which it is situated. There is a modern tendency to add dormers that are too bold and too high.

It follows, therefore, that the renewal of dormers or the provision of new windows in the roofs of historic buildings are operations requiring very considerable care in design and detailing to ensure an acceptable appearance.

This is particularly important when the building is listed by the Secretary of State for the Environment as being of special architectural or historic interest. It should never be assumed that listed building consent will be granted for the insertion of a dormer window where none has previously existed.



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INTRODUCTION

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A house of the 1740s with flat topped dormers in a mansard roof. Soho, Westminster

This leaflet is intended to show the range of traditional dormer types and provide some guidance in design where no better evidence exists. The drawings are not intended as standard details to be copied in every case and are not therefore dimensioned.

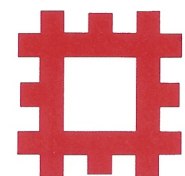
DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

With such a wide range of designs available it is important when inserting a new dormer or repairing an old one that the detailing and form are suitable for the building. If the building already has dormers *and these are of a suitable design* then they should be copied. Otherwise, investigate local buildings of a similar type, character, and date. It may be that these have dormers which are part of the original design or were added soon after completion. Copy the details as closely as possible taking particular care to reproduce accurately any mouldings. Dormers on adjoining houses should be of a similar size and type.

However, note that the presence of unsuitably designed new or altered dormers on neighbouring properties will not be allowed to serve as precedents for further disfigurements of the same kind. Consent for wide dormers or penthouse glazed roof storeys is rarely granted.

Vertically sliding sashed dormers with segmental heads, reflecting the segmentally headed windows, doors, and arches on the ground and first floors. London Borough of Southwark





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Dormers with double-hung sash windows in a house built in 1824. London Borough of Lambeth



Early nineteenth-century terrace houses with a single flat-topped dormer centrally placed between the windows on the main facade. London Borough of Lambeth

In the absence of suitable exemplars, consult pattern books and other illustrative sources contemporary with the building or obtain advice from your local conservation officer or other expert. Many local authorities publish guidelines relating to this and other topics. Loss of valuable time and manpower can be avoided if consultation takes place at an early stage.

The most commonly made errors in detailing a new dormer are the oversizing of the structural members and the provision of an unnecessarily deep fascia and eaves gutter. A gutter is rarely needed, since the roof can be made to fall back from the eaves. Dormers on small houses are traditionally lightly constructed. The small loads and the shortness of the members call for only small section timbers, provided they are well framed, while the frame of the joinery window itself can often be made part of the supporting structure.

Where there is more than one dormer they should be so spaced as to appear as separate small projections from the surface of the roof and not set so closely together that they appear to be an imperfectly finished additional sheer storey.

In number, form, and scale they should be related to the facade below. They should be regularly spaced, not necessarily immediately above the windows below. Often the number of dormers in a roof is less than the number of windows on the floors below. Thus a three-bay house may have two dormers and a two-bay house may have one. In size they should be clearly subordinate to the windows in the top main storey. In the smaller and plainer terraces the dormers will need to be particularly small and free from elaboration. A simple eaves moulding is all that is needed to cover the edge of the lead roof at the front.

Listed Building
Guidance Leaflet

Dormer
Windows

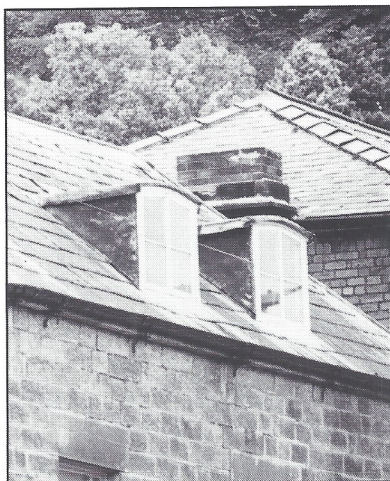
The thickness of the dormer cheeks should always appear to be little greater than (and may be almost entirely concealed by) the face of the joinery frame. The apparent thickness of the frame can be slightly increased in the manner shown (EXAMPLES ONE and THREE) by using a flat beaded architrave to cover both the frame and the cheek boarding. This will permit the insertion of a layer of insulation in the cheek. The width of the flat exposed face on either side should be equal to that of the flat member across the head.

All mouldings should follow established classical precedents and when dormers are tiled or slated the material used should match the main roof covering.

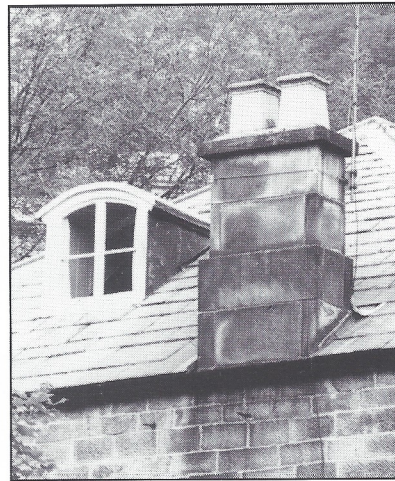
Access to dormers for maintenance purposes is often difficult. Therefore all flashing should be carefully fixed and be of sufficient size and durability to avoid future problems with water penetration.

The Building Regulations set standards relating to the resistance to passage of heat. The requirements vary according to building use and other parameters. Newly inserted dormers may be subject to these controls. Insulation and a vapour barrier can be inserted into the cheeks and roof of the dormer. The provision of double glazing in the windows can be a problem with small section glazing bars and internal secondary glazing should be considered. However, there may be occasions when it is appropriate to apply to have the controls waived in order to achieve an acceptable historical appearance.

There are some types of dormer which rise directly above the front facade, sometimes separated from it by a cornice. These are usually part of the original building design and new dormers of this type would not make a suitable addition to a listed building. Likewise the addition of ornate dormers of the Victorian type is unlikely to be approved. Always obtain advice before adopting special or unusual details.



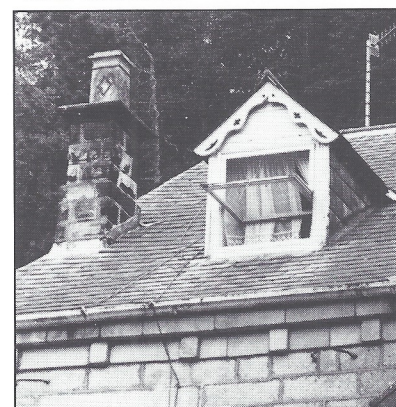
Simply detailed dormers with side-hung casements and lead roof and cheeks. Matlock Bath, Derbyshire



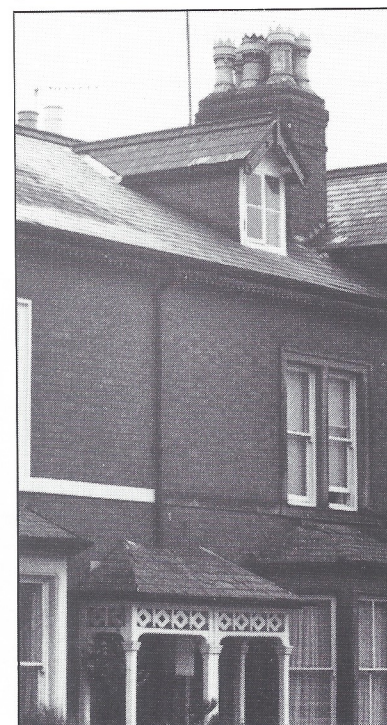
Dormers with hipped gables on a timber-framed building. Coventry, West Midlands

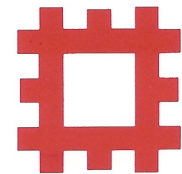


A dormer with pitched roof and glazed cheeks. Buxton, Derbyshire



Dormers with pitched roof, decorated barge boards, and slated roof and cheeks. The insertion of the horizontally pivoted centre-hung casement is unfortunate. Side-hung casements would have been more suitable. Derbyshire





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WINDOW FRAMES AND GLAZING

The proportions of a dormer window are ruled by the same simple numerical relationships controlling the proportions of windows in walls. The simplest form of dormer is often square faced. Dormers with sliding sashes require particular care if they are not to present a clumsy appearance, and should be proportioned and detailed in the manner appropriate for the building of their period. Please refer to the Sash Windows Guidance Leaflet for details.

Usually casements will be acceptable. They should be of the type shown, large windows being divided into panes of appropriate proportions by bars whose thickness is no greater than that of the bars of the main facade sashes. EXAMPLE FOUR shows a central mullion. A lighter appearance can be obtained by omitting the mullion and having 'folding styles' at the centre, as in EXAMPLE ONE. Leaded glass quarries were sometimes used to glaze casements in more modest early buildings.

In some areas of the country large dormers may have glazed cheeks.

Where original windows are being repaired and frames are being renewed, the new work should replicate the original design and every effort should be made to salvage the original glass for reuse.

SUMMARY

When working with historic buildings, the evidence of the original fabric provides the best guide for the design detailing of replacements and wholly new works. In the absence of evidence on the building itself, details could be copied from neighbouring buildings of a similar date and type.

SEE ALSO GUIDANCE LEAFLETS FOR SASH WINDOWS AND MANSARD ROOFS.



A remarkable house with unusual dormers by the Victorian architect Sextus Dyball. Upper Norwood, London Borough of Croydon



Distinctive segmental headed dormers are an integral part of the design of this house designed in 1902 by Detmar Blow. Mayfair, Westminster

English Heritage
Fortress House
23 Savile Row
London W1X 1AB
(071-973-3000)
June 1991

EXAMPLES

These details are for guidance only and generally show types of dormers found in Georgian and early Victorian buildings in London. Other traditional forms and methods of construction may be more applicable in particular cases in other areas.

EXAMPLE ONE

A flat-roofed and casemented dormer with the window frame forming part of the structure, that would be suitable for a fairly substantial terrace house with a bold eaves cornice. The dormer cornice should follow established classical precedents using the correct profiles. The detail shows a glazing bar dating from the early eighteenth century.

EXAMPLE TWO

This simply detailed dormer would be suitable for a late eighteenth- to early nineteenth-century building. The window frame forms part of the structure.

EXAMPLE THREE

There may be occasions when a more elaborate type of dormer is appropriate. This detail shows a dormer with a pedimented head. The vertically sliding sash is hung on spring balances, obviating the need for pulleys and wide box frames. Advice should always be sought before adopting this or any other unusual detail. The roof slope indicates the lower slope of a mansard roof and the details show lamb's tongue glazing bars dating from the early nineteenth century.

EXAMPLE FOUR

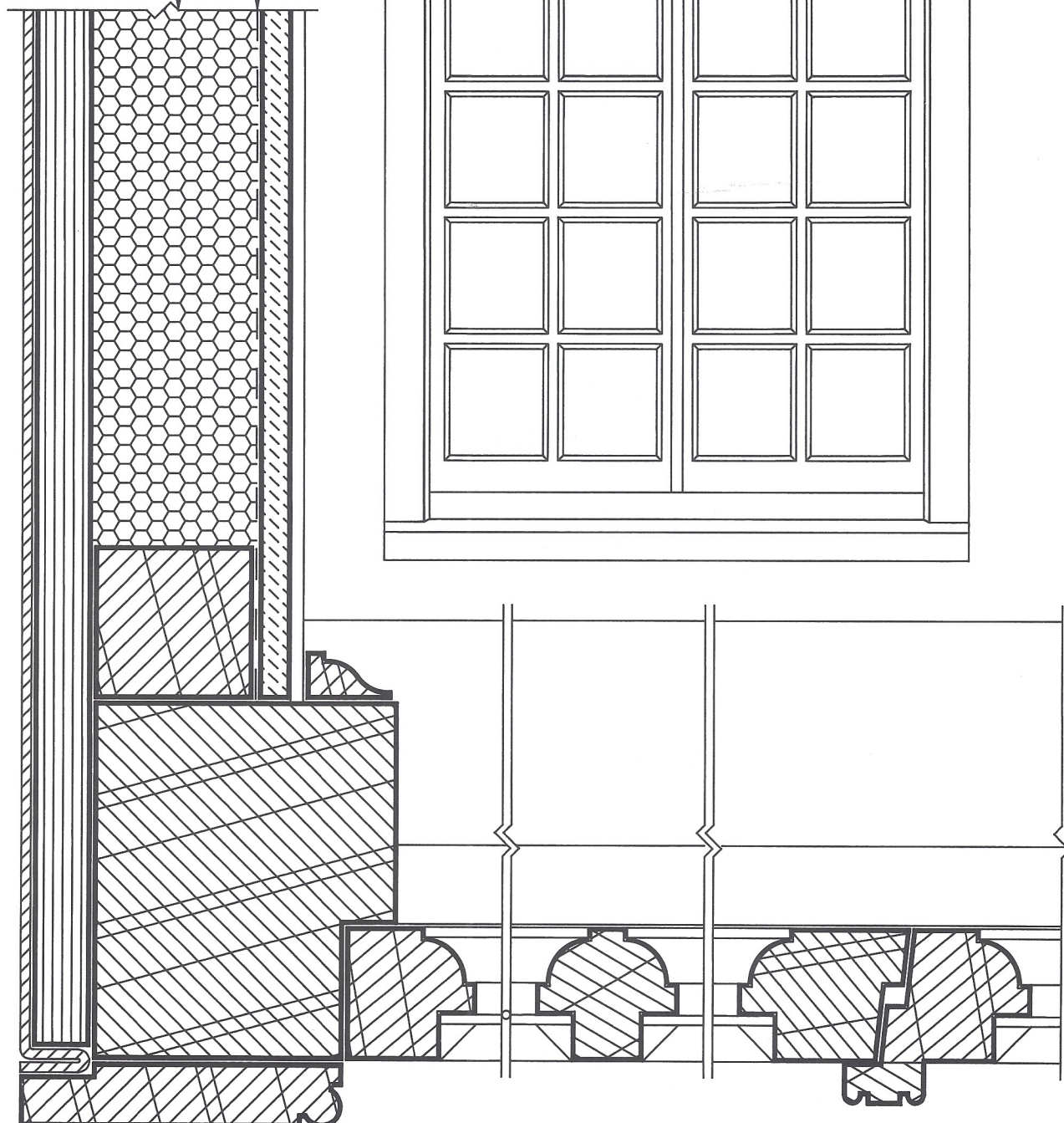
A casemented dormer suitable for a late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century Victorian building. The very thick centre mullion can be a useful device to conceal the edge of an internal partition.

Listed Building
Guidance Leaflet

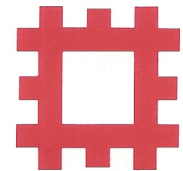
Dormer
Windows

EXAMPLE ONE

VAPOUR BARRIER
INSULATION

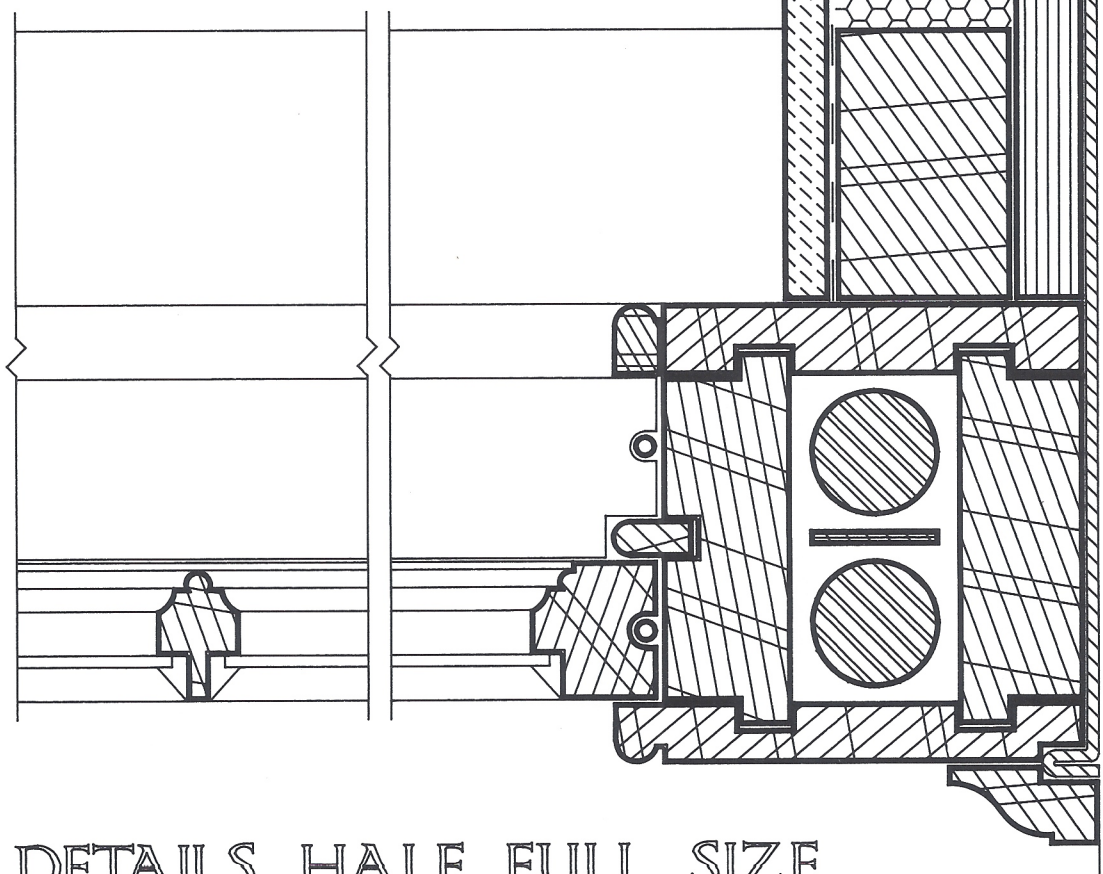
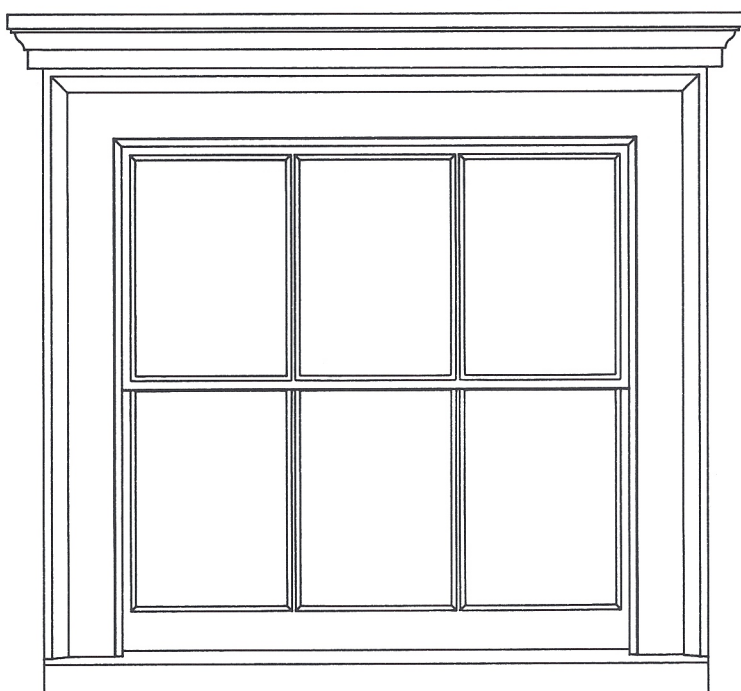


DETAILS HALF FULL SIZE



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EXAMPLE TWO



DETAILS HALF FULL SIZE

Listed Building
Guidance Leaflet

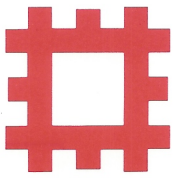
Dormer
Windows

QUARTER SIZE
SECTION THROUGH CORNICE

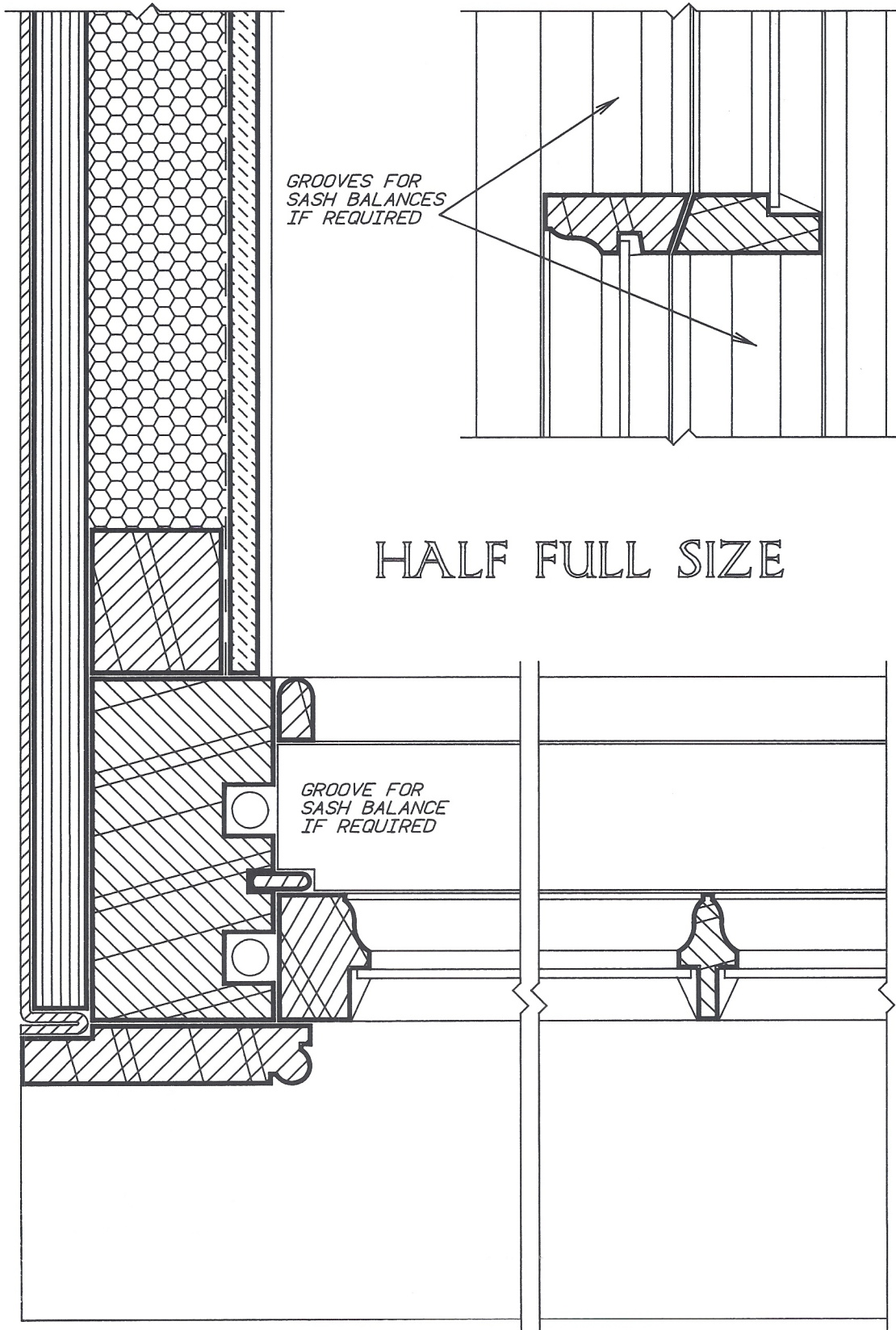


EXAMPLE
THREE

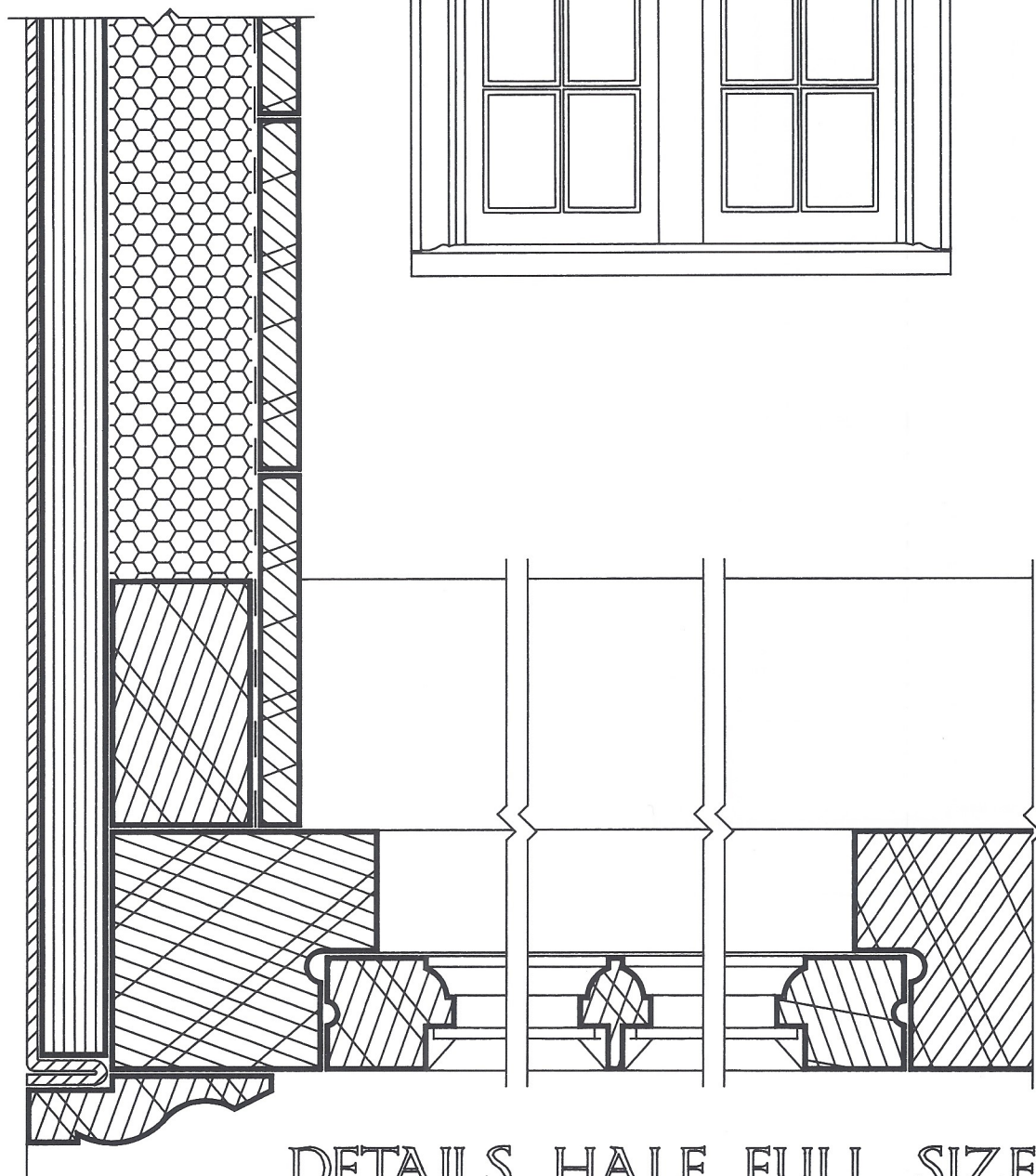
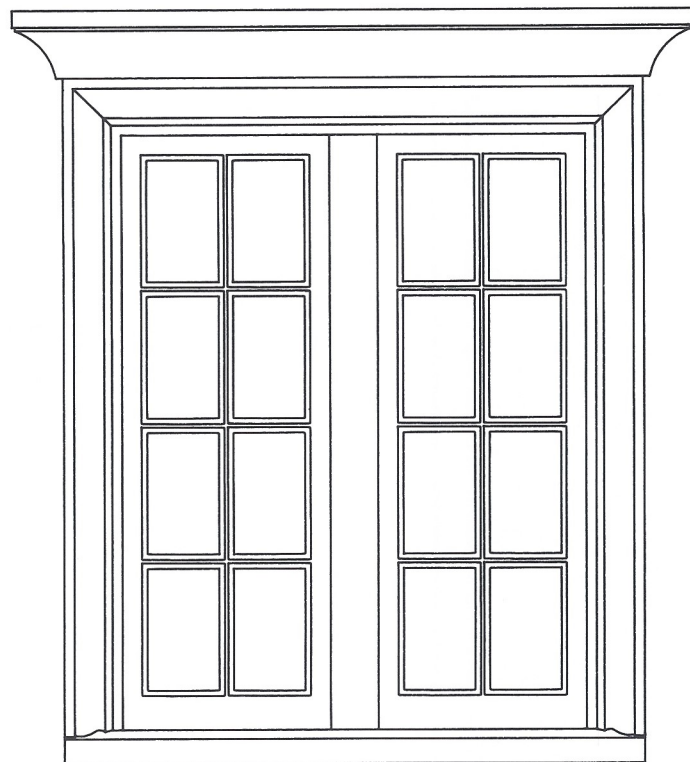




EXAMPLE THREE DETAILS



EXAMPLE
FOUR



DETAILS HALF FULL SIZE