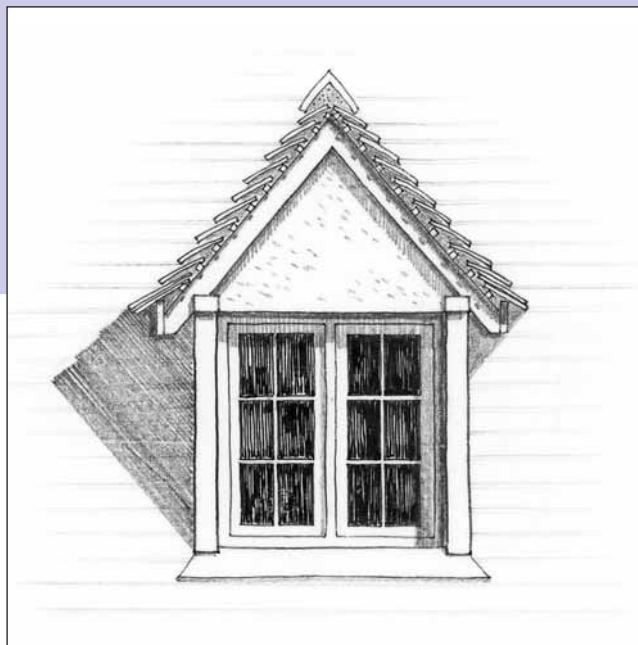


TRADITIONAL DORMER WINDOWS

Design Guide



Dormer windows are an important feature of traditional buildings in Tewkesbury Borough. These typical examples of local craftsmanship give a particular character to roofscapes and are a handsome and practical means of getting light into attics, bringing them into better use. This is a guide to their conservation, and the design and detailing of new dormer windows.



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Tewkesbury Borough Council

HELPING OUR COMMUNITIES FLOURISH IN A QUALITY ENVIRONMENT

History

The dormer window was developed as a means of bringing daylight into the attics of larger cottages. Set on top of the long side walls, they lit the central part of the roof-space not reached by light from gable-end casements. Timber dormers were probably used from the 16th century, although few built before 1700 survive. By their nature, timber dormers were usually replaced or rebuilt at frequent intervals in the history of a house.

Dormers with a gabled front were the most common pattern, being used throughout the seventeenth and much of the eighteenth century. However, with the arrival of a more classically-inspired building at the beginning of the eighteenth century, hipped dormers became a popular alternative. On a hipped roof, set over carefully-proportioned facades, these dormers echoed the main roof form and did not draw the eye from the more 'architectural' parts of the building.

More elaborate designs emerged as part of the Picturesque Movement during the nineteenth century, these being characterised by emphasised bargeboards, and often pointed finials. Sometimes the bargeboards could be shaped or pierced.

Construction

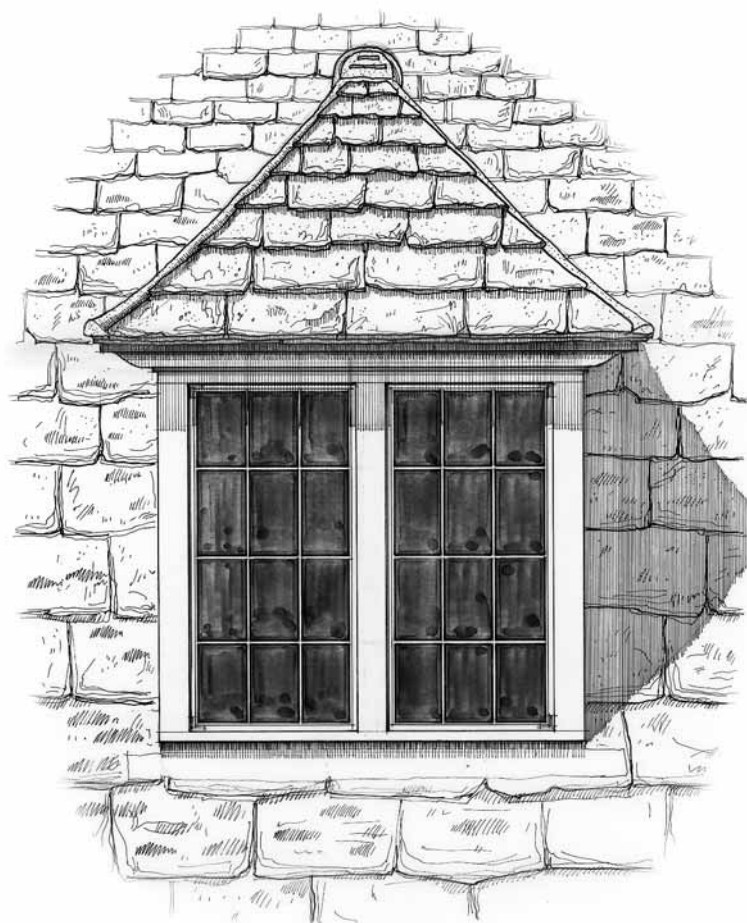
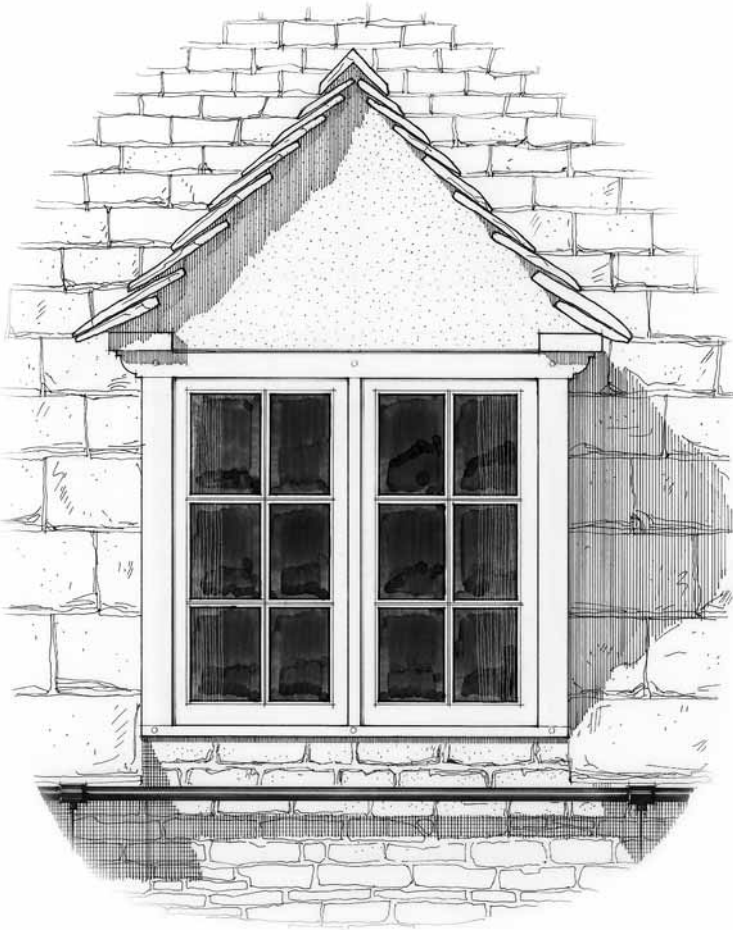
Timber dormer windows are often quite simple in their basic construction, being built from heavy timber sections designed to remain exposed around the window opening. The opening casement itself was, until the mid-nineteenth century, always made of iron and hung on pins driven directly into the dormer window frame. The window head would be protected, sometimes by setting the face of the gable forward of the window plane, and often by the use of slate or tile hanging on the gable and on the 'cheeks', the sides of the dormer, where they would often project beyond the front corner posts. Render and lead were alternative materials for the gable and cheeks.

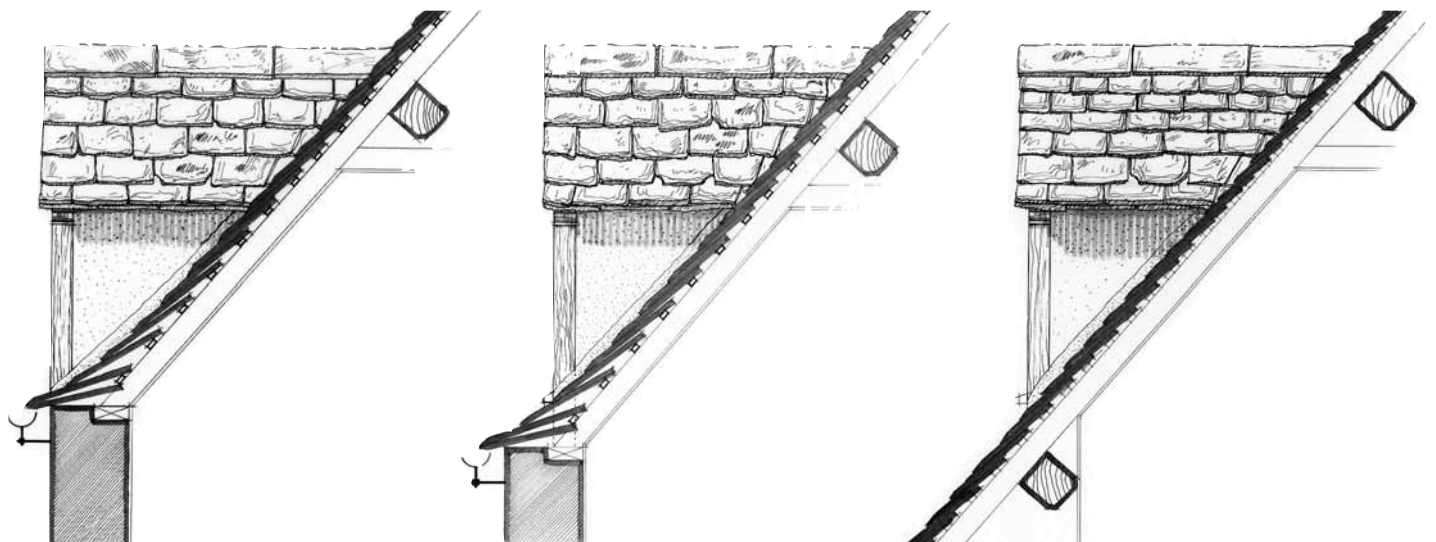
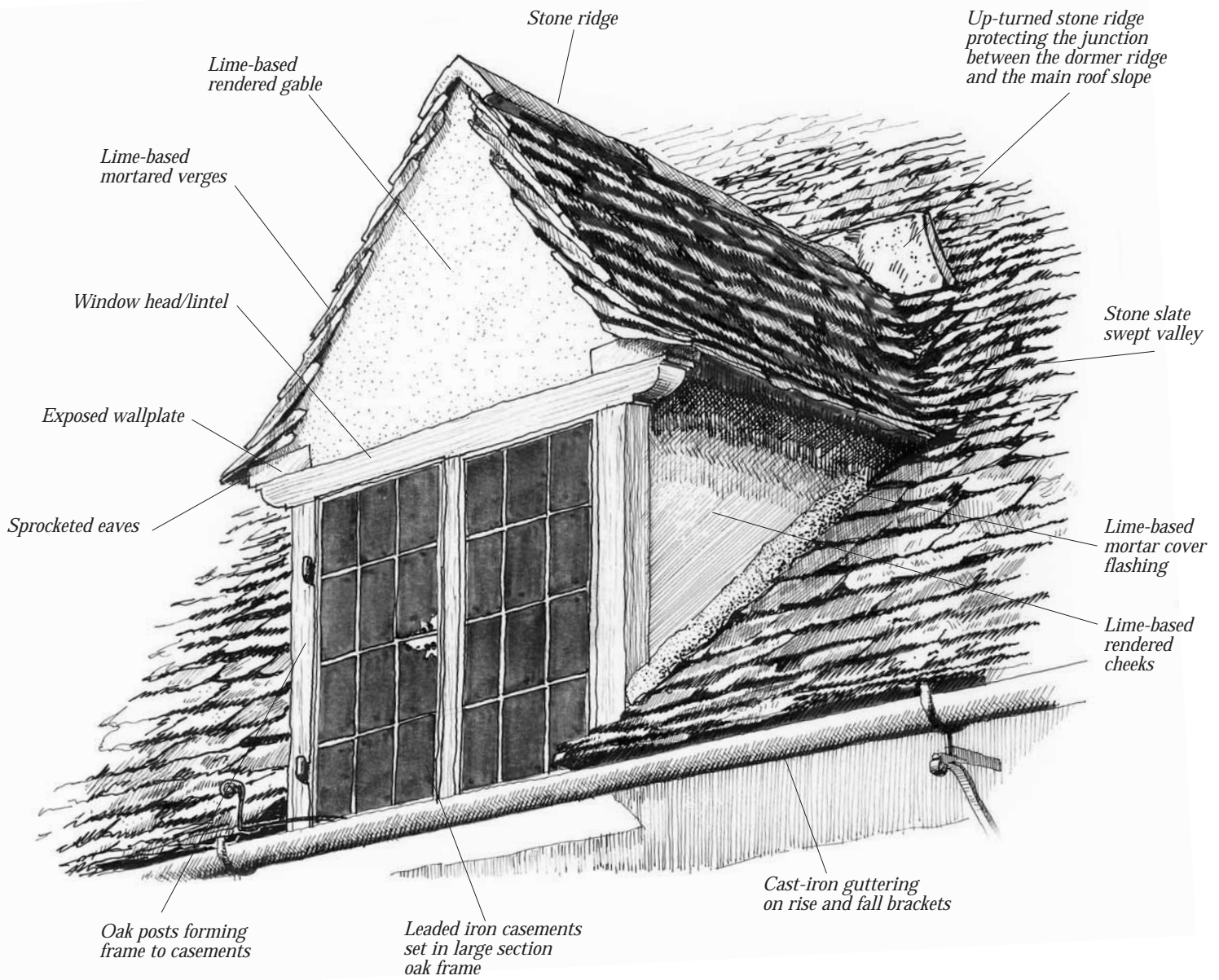
Dormers can be built in three possible locations on the roof:

- At the eaves aligned to the external wall face
- At the eaves aligned to the internal wall face, or
- Packed up off one of the purlins.

Of these, the simplest to construct is the first - the dormer being framed directly off the wall. In the other two cases, packing is required to raise the dormer frame to the correct position in relation to the common rafters.

Dormer windows were nearly always two lights wide, three-light windows only being found in stone gabled dormers. The width was usually no more than about 1100mm (3' 6") and the overall height about 1900mm (6' 3"), with a roof pitch usually in excess of 45°.





Aligned to external face

Aligned to internal face

Packed off purlin



Details

Older dormers often retain original detailing which is lost when they are repaired or rebuilt. Some details are very local, often only seen on buildings in a group of villages. A very critical feature is the detailing of the dormer at the corners, where a simple heavy corner post supported the dormer roof, and provided a direct fixing for the opening casement. It is usually left exposed, rarely concealed behind any form of cover strip (a modern practice).

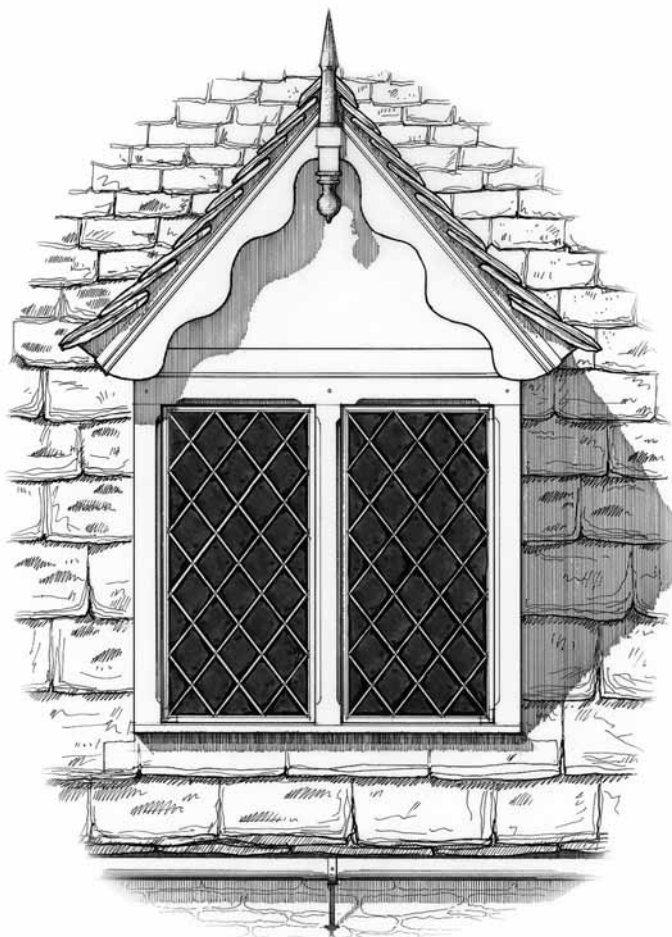
Traditional stone swept valleys were used where the dormer roof connects with the main roof. The potential weak point at the rear junction of the dormer roof ridge was often protected by the installation of an upturned stone ridge piece, acting as a small transverse gutter, throwing water clear into the valleys.

Conservation

Original dormers should be repaired wherever possible, although some modifications may be desirable especially where weather proofing has clearly been a problem. Changes may be required to incorporate insulation, and compliance with modern standards is likely to be required if an entirely new dormer is being installed.

With care, even a new dormer incorporating insulation and improved weather-proof flashings can be designed to blend in with the old. If the overall proportions are carefully controlled, and skilful detailing - particularly on the all important corner post - is incorporated, a convincing match can be achieved. Please note that the addition of new dormer windows to a roof will always require planning permission.

Before work on any existing dormers starts, detailed record photographs should be taken, guiding their reconstruction.



Listed Buildings

Most changes to dormers on listed buildings, other than very minor repairs, will require listed building consent. It is recommended that a member of the Council's Conservation and Design Section is contacted for advice prior to any work on listed buildings, and before an application is made.

Where prior permission is required, it is a criminal offence to carry out unauthorized works to a listed building.

For further advice and information contact:

The Conservation Section
 Planning & Development Services
 Tewkesbury Borough Council
 Gloucester Road
 Tewkesbury
 Gloucestershire
 GL20 5TT

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