

Georgian Leaflet No. 3

GLAZING BARS

THE GEORGIAN GROUP

2, Chester Street, S.W.1

Belgravia 3081

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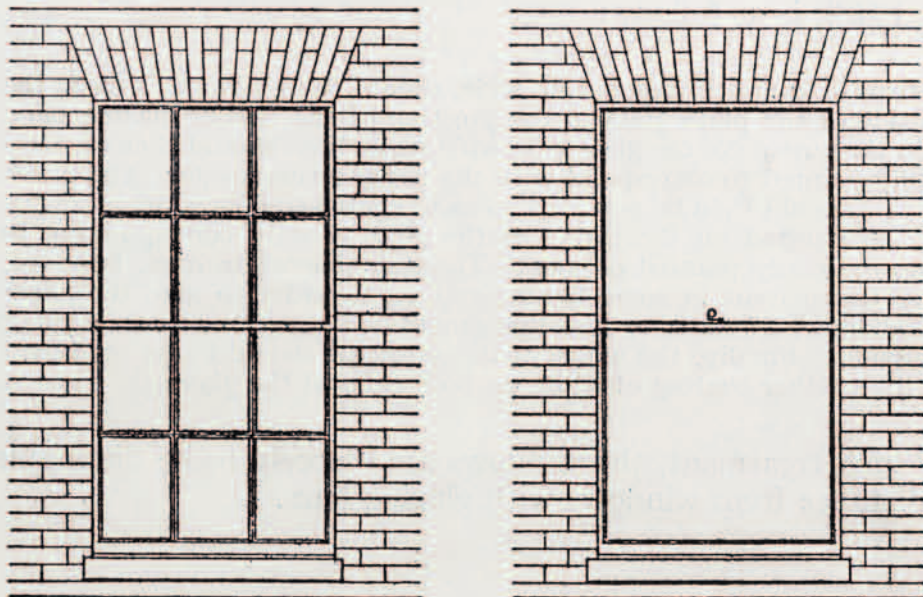
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GLAZING BARS

Fenestration is always an important element in architectural design: windows give a building expression, character and life. This is particularly the case with the familiar plain-fronted Georgian house which eschews ornament and relies almost entirely on the spacing, proportion and detail of its windows to obtain its aesthetic effects. The detail of a Georgian window is comprised in its glazing bars.

Glazing bars are the thin pieces of moulded wood which divide the frame of the Georgian sash-window into a number of smaller rectangles which take the panes of glass. These sash-windows with glazing bars became fashionable in the reign of William III, and they are found in all houses of importance built at that time; in the eighteenth century they became all but universal. At first, the glazing bars were relatively clumsy with heavy ovolo mouldings: later, owing to improvements in craftsmanship and the use of mahogany, they became more refined and reached perfection in the hands of Henry Holland and Sir John Soane. But whether crude or graceful in themselves, glazing bars were an essential element, aesthetic as well as structural, in the architecture of the Georgian house.

With the nineteenth century came the invention of plate-glass; and our Victorian forbears, who seem to have combined their taste for solid comfort with a complete lack of aesthetic sensibility, took to replacing the glazing bars and the six (or whatever the number might be) delicate panes of crown-glass by a single sheet of plate-glass. Of the disastrous effect anyone with eyes to see is only too painfully aware: how great a difference the removal of the glazing bars makes to even a single window is shown in the accompanying sketch:



However, in the years between the Wars, a greater interest in and understanding of Georgian architecture developed and such acts of vandalism became rarer—indeed, in many cases, house-owners were to be found conscientiously putting glazing bars back into windows from which they had been removed.

Then came the War, and this favourable movement was reversed—explosively. Thousands of windows were damaged by “blast” from HE and flying bombs, and in many cases all that was left of a Georgian sash-window was a heap of glass and splintered wood in the gutter outside. First-aid repairs inevitably took little account of glazing bars and when permanent repairs came to be carried out, the necessity of replacing them was too often overlooked. Builders were uninstructed or indifferent; householders were impatient to get the work done; and there was a dangerously attractive simplicity about a single sheet of plate-glass.

None the less, there has been gain as well as loss. The public is becoming more alive to the importance of architectural detail and in not a few cases glazing bars have been restored in windows in which they had formerly been removed. This is a process which must be encouraged; and all who value Georgian architecture, whether or not they are Members of the Group, are urged to use their influence with their friends, their neighbours, their local authority and the Press, to ensure that, as and when there is opportunity, glazing bars are restored to all the windows from which they have been tastelessly removed.

Considerations of expense, or other circumstances, may make it impracticable in some cases to put back glazing bars for the time being; if so, recourse may be had to a simple and inexpensive method of restoring the character of a Georgian house by the expedient of painting astragals upon existing plate glass. The actual procedure, particulars of which were given in a letter to *Country Life* (May 28th, 1948), is as follows:

Strips of gummed paper, 1 in. wide, should be lightly stuck on to the inside of the plate glass in the position of the former glazing bars. On the outside of the glass 1 in. wide white lines should then be carefully painted to correspond with the paper strips inside. The paper strips should then be removed so as to enable similar white astragals to be painted on the inside of the glass exactly corresponding to those already painted outside. These double white lines, however, are transparent in some lights; and so, in order to give the effect of shadow, a $\frac{1}{2}$ in. wide dark line should be painted in either inside or outside. Finally, the whole of the astragals should be painted over with another coating of white on both sides of the glass.

After such treatment, the windows are scarcely to be distinguished at a distance from windows with glazing bars.