SUSTAINABLE LISTED HOMES

The Club looks at ways in which listed property owners can make their homes more environmentally friendly, contribute to reducing carbon emissions and make the most of new technologies and innovations.

LOTS OF LOVE FOR SECONDARY GLAZING AT WINDOWS CONFERENCE

Bowed windows with magnetic secondary glazing

Sometimes great things happen – and that is just what took place in June this year on the edge of the Cotswolds in Cirencester. "Through the Looking Glass", was a conference coordinated by TV personality and author Marianne Suhr (co-author of Old House Handbook and Old House Eco Handbook) where over 180 delegates with a professional interest in Listed Buildings gathered to discuss windows. Over two days the conference discussed all aspects of traditional windows from how they have evolved, their construction and materials, through to how Conservation Officers, academics and professionals can reduce the pain for property owners in ascertaining what can and can't be done.

The speakers came from every aspect of windows, and even from overseas: architects, skilled woodworkers explaining window repairs, conservation officers and authorities (including Historic Environment Scotland), window manufacturers stressing traditional wood species, design & repairability within their products, secondary and vacuum glazing specialists, historians explaining improvements through the ages, glass manufacturers with centuries of expertise, and even academia critiquing the science in numerous glazing options.

A few threads that ran through both days included the following:

- in general there was a very positive attitude towards secondary glazing. One specialist conservation advisor summed up her speech: "Why would you not do it?". Marianne also gave her emphatic support for magnetic secondary glazing, explaining why she chose it above other options for her own home.
- a desire to make 'eco' – or sustainable - choices. Well designed and carefully fitted secondary glazing can be discreet, and even equal to or better than new replacements and double glazing in terms of heat loss.

Restored then "museum cased" behind secondary glazing

A specialist installation will 'disappear' on large windows

- 'oldish' does not necessarily make a window significant – which is what conservation officers consider when assessing whether a window can or cannot be replaced. "In with the new" can sometimes actually be considered appropriate, or indeed best.
- windows must be considered on a case-by-case basis, including what is important about them (in some cases not much), what to restore (or not), honesty in repairability, how best to insulate them, and the part they play in the life of the building, whether preserving its period style, some aspect of craftsmanship and design history, the aesthetic contribution it makes to its environment, or more practically in retaining warmth, and providing daylight, privacy and ventilation.

There were over 20 presentations, and questions from the audience. Amongst the exhibitors on stage presenting their products were:

- for magnetic secondary glazing: Extraglaze (offering DIY and nationwide installation services), Cocoon (installations, mainly Scotland and Borders) and Mitchell and Dickinson (installations, mainly south west England)
- for other types of secondary glazing: Storm Windows, Gecko Glazing.

While it was clear the professional audience had a common passion for our heritage about 15% of delegates actually lived in listed properties.

Marianne spoke passionately about how she came to make this conference happen, largely through her own drive to raise the profile of the importance of old windows, and help owners of listed buildings find solutions for retrofit. She opened with a news story in The Times of a listed property owner who wanted to replace his Georgian sashes with new, double glazed windows and felt it was a great injustice that he had been refused Listed Building Consent. At no point in the article was there any reference to other options available to him such as secondary glazing. To this end she hoped the conference would enable owners dealing with external specialists to discover pathways, instead of obstacles.

A strong feature of the exhibits and talks was secondary glazing. Nic Irvine from Extraglaze spoke twice on the second day, firstly about the scientific research he had commissioned last year into the effectiveness of secondary glazing then, more generally, he explained how secondary glazing offers a very good method of preserving precious windows - in fact describing it as a means of "museum casing" them, especially after remedial work (whether general maintenance or sensitive, and expensive, repairs).

Marianne, who appeared alongside Griff Rhys Jones in the BBC TV series "Restoration", said to her audience "I have put a lot of time, money and effort into repairing and retrofitting the historic windows in my own listed home. My own experience turned me against the invasive nature of routing for draught-seal insertion into historic window frames and sashes. My preference would always be for well-designed secondary glazing. This option not only deals with the draughts by making a seal, it dramatically reduces heat loss through conduction and furthermore usually stops condensation. But, as was commonly talked about over these two days, every window needs to be considered individually. Our conference demonstrated a whole range of valid options, including replacements and even some of the latest technologies, so the best option for one window could be very different for the next."

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