The style of the exterior of the Georgian townhouse is derived from a variety of sources and influences including the classical tradition in architecture, the materials used and the economics of building. An examination of these elements shows how this distinctive architectural form evolved and helps to explain its enduring appeal.

Classical architecture

Classicism, a style based on the architecture of antiquity, was the predominant architectural style of the whole Georgian period. It was most influential in the design of great houses, palaces and churches. These building types are known as 'palace architecture'. Many Georgian townhouses, especially in the big cities, can be classed as 'palace architecture' as they were designed by architects or builders who carefully followed the latest fashions.

But townhouses derived from these examples, sometimes referred to as 'vernacular' architecture, may be found in towns and cities across the country. There were two main forms of classical architecture in the Georgian period: Palladianism and Neoclassicism.

Palladianism

Palladianism followed the rules of classical architecture as espoused by the Italian architect Andrea Palladio (1508–80). Although introduced to this country by Inigo Jones (1573–1652) in the early seventeenth century, this style was most popular in polite architecture during the first half of the Georgian era. Palladio's Four Books of Architecture, originally published in Italian in 1570, appeared in an English translation in 1715. Palladio confirmed his study to ancient Roman architecture and his own designs but his Four Books provided an excellent guide to rhythm and proportion. More abstractly, his concept of proportional relationships, based on classical models, greatly influenced the design of the facade of the Georgian townhouse.

Neo-classicism

Neo-classicism exerted most influence on the interior and exterior decoration of the Georgian townhouse. The style demonstrated the greater knowledge and awareness of the ancient architecture which had been an impressive point of the history of design. Hence, the townhouse was considered to have a similar relationship to the man as the Parthenon to the Greeks.

Proportions were generated from the square and the circle. The proportion of 2:3 in the townhouse facade could only be one and a half times the width. This system worked best in houses with only three storeys above ground level, the third floor (fourth storey) was usually removed from the composition by the use of square windows and often a strong curve. The same proportional relationships can be found in the sizes of the windows on the remaining floors and the pierces (vertical spines) between them. The ground floor was considered to have a similar relationship to the man as the Parthenon to the Greeks.


Fig. 1, Ablution of a Roman (c. 29-39), attributed to James Russell, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection. The Grand Tour had become the usual fashion for a young gentleman's education by the mid-eighteenth century. Rome was the focal point of the tour. On arrival, the 'English caterers' would arrange to show the sitters here. The dress is in front of the Colosseum and the Arch of Constantine.

Fig. 2 An order in architecture is made up of a column comprising the base, shaft and capital plus an entablature specific to each particular order running horizontally across the top (not shown). This illustrates the five different types of columns: Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian and Composite, as added by Giacomo Leoni in his 1715 edition of Palladio's Four Books of Architecture. They are distinguished by their different capitals and proportions, both of which bear many variations. For instance, here, the height of Doric columns is around eight inches at the bottom of the shaft. This was based on the proportions of a man whose feet measurement or breadth was considered to have a similar relationship to his total body height. This was complemented by the feminine Ionic column with the proportional relationship of 1:3.
The layout of the Georgian townhouse was one room front and back, a small closet and a staircase on each floor. In height, the house would usually number four or five storeys, including the basement. The top floor was either in the garret roof space or incorporated into the facade of the house, which afforded better internal proportions. This latter system became increasingly popular as it augmented the overall size and value of the house.

The basement was situated in only a shallow excavation, although from the front of the house it appeared to be completely underground as the road was built up above ground level. The road was raised on a system of arcades constructed of brick which could be entered from the basement through openings in the retaining walls. These vaults were used for the storage of fuel which was easily delivered through coal holes in the road. This arrangement gave the house its sloped appearance as the garden at the back, reached directly from the basement, was the natural ground level.

The kitchens were situated in the basement, where any direct water supply would enter the house. Cooking was mostly done on an ordinary fire and grate. Conditions were cramped as this floor was often also used as the servants' quarters. Throughout the period the uses of, and relationship between, the ground and the first floors was not fixed. According to the Palladian principles of design, the most important rooms should be on the piano nobile (first floor). The most formal room in the Georgian townhouse was the dining room but this was found on either floor. There were two main reasons for this. In smaller four-storey houses the first floor may have had to be used for bedrooms. But there was...
WOOD and brick were the main building materials used for domestic architecture in the pre-Georgian period. Of the two, wood was more popular as it was cheaper and more readily available. But its easy combustibility, coupled with the chaotical nature of building at this time, made it less than ideal. After the Great Fire of London attempts were made, through legislation, to avoid such a disaster happening again. Many of these laws affected only London but had a more general effect upon patterns of house building in this country.

The 1707 Building Act banned the use of wood for eaves and cornices in the cities of Westminster and London and insisted that a party wall parapet should stand 18 inches above the roof line to stop the spread of fire. This was soon continued around the front and rear elevations. Although introduced for safety, the parapet influenced the proportions and form of the Georgian house.

In 1709 an act passed to reduce further the amount of exposed wood on the facade stated that windows now had to be recessed by four inches. This made the use of the usual casement windows more difficult.

Instead of sash windows, a Dutch invention which had been known about for some time, were adapted and became very fashionable—even replacing older casement windows. The dimensions of sash windows were quite flexible so enabling the fenestration of the townhouse to fit in with the overall proportion relationships of the facade.

The 1727 Building Act, drafted by the architects Sir Robert Taylor and George Dance, consolidated and enforced much of the preceding legislation. Once again, one of the main concerns of the Act was the prevention of fire. It laid down rules for construction, paying special attention to party walls. These rules were the basis for the categorization of building into 'rates' which were calculated according to the square area and value of the property. Each rate from first down to fourth had different structural and material requirements. This increased the standardization of the Georgian townhouse and encouraged the building of longer and more uniform terraces.

further reading
The most comprehensive account of the Georgian townhouse appears in D. Crickshank and N. Burton, Life in the Georgian City, Viking Penguin 1990. An extensive bibliography is available from the Georgian Group. More specific publications about local examples may be produced by branches of the Civic Trust or local preservation societies.
notes for teachers
The range and breadth of the material covered in the text makes the Georgian townhouse a suitable subject for the teaching of many subjects in the national curriculum at several levels, including history, mathematics, technology and geography. Local examples of Georgian townhouses may not always be accessible for field work. The general principles of its form and function can be used for classroom-based studies or as a back-up material for other projects. The booodle has been designed to ensure that the most relevant illustrations can be easily photocopied. Below are some suggestions on how to use the Georgian townhouse in the study of some history and ideas for classroom and on-site activities across a range of subjects.

History
The Georgian townhouse can be used to help pupils develop an awareness of the past through a range of sources, many of which may be available locally, e.g. artefacts in museums, buildings and sites as well as written sources. It can be used to connect with:

Key Stage 3, Level 3

The Georgian townhouse as a means of exploring everyday life, work, leisure and culture of a period in history.

Key Stage 4, Level 4

Describe different features of an historical period. Arrange a display of labelled pictures and/or models presenting life in a Georgian townhouse.

Supplementary Study Unit 2

A local Georgian townhouse can be used in conjunction with local museums, archives and maps to understand an aspect of the local community over a short period of time.

Key Stage 4, Level 3

The Georgian townhouse can be used in the teaching of:

- The making of the 18, 1750-1750.
- The information contained in the text on a system.

Experiencing the past - the Romano-British way

Roger Butts, an Advisory Teacher for Outdoor Education, describes an ambitious project to re-roof and inhabit a Romano-British house at Chysauster, Cornwall.

In these days of constant educational change and argument, I still believe that children learn best from an enjoyable and educational 'real experience'. With this as my main philosophy in education, I was delighted to leave Dr Peter Stone's office in February 1992 with his blessing and a grant from English Heritage. The Early Technology Project, to take place at Chysauster near Penzance in Cornwall, was under way!

We decided at an early stage on the following:
- that the project would last for one week in June 1993.
- that it would be cross-curricular as far as possible.
- that the schools involved would use the preceding term for a major project involving this period and in preparation for the Early Technology week. In this, they would have the help of the Royal Cornwall Museum, Truro, the Cornwall Archaeological Unit and various Advisers and Advisory Teachers should they wish to request such help (which, of course, most did).
- that four small primary schools all belonging to the same cluster would be invited to send their Year 5 and Year 6 children, totalling nearly sixty, on the project for two and a half days. They were to be followed by a similar number of Year 7 children from a secondary school for the next two and half days. We envisioned some overlap between the two groups.

Making preparations
The schools which were eventually invited were St. Eth, Gulval, Gwinear and Nansleda Primary Schools and St. Ives (Secondary) School. We held a lot of meetings, probably too many, though I made every attempt to keep them to a minimum, attended by various Advisers, Advisory Teachers, teachers from the schools involved, members of Cornwall Archaeology Unit and lots of other interested parties. Many ideas were discussed but the main sticking points seemed to be what actual activities would be undertaken by the children during the week. They met John and Jacqui Wood and their family. John and Jacqui are in the process of building an iron age village on their land just outside Truro. They had already built a roundhouse, were beginning their second and had experimented with many tools, meals and methods of working. A working a term since 1992, the village was a wonderful way of making anything from huts to mattresses by twisting wool on a half-looped wooden frame, and many other interesting and exciting activities.

The project in action
Then we decided a programme, permission would be sought from English Heritage to hatch a part of one of the huts at Chysauster. The general archaeological opinion was that the site had been root over and...