

# Medieval Shops

As in other towns, Burford's earliest shops were probably market stalls. Some may have stood in the centre of the street or under the Tolsey colonnade, others in front of the house where the owner worked: a craftsman or butcher, for example. Over time, such stalls became permanent structures: lock-up booths at first, then part of the main building. Fifteenth-century shops are recognisable by their wide four-centred arched windows (Figure A), which allowed display of goods and provided good light for the interior. Wooden shutters often opened upwards and downwards, the lower shutter (or 'stall-board') acting as a counter when opened.

Some evidence of such a shopfront survives in Castle's butcher's shop at 111 High Street (Figure B). The framing still includes the empty mortices and rebates of the medieval shop windows, brackets for the jetty bressumer (a long horizontal timber which would have supported the projecting first-floor jetty), and the site of hinges for shutters. Constant rebuilding has destroyed the evidence for Burford's other early shopfronts, though in the Middle Ages many of the houses in the centre probably had a shop facing the street. These would have sold the goods made or marketed by the craftsman or merchant living on the premises.

Lock-up shops also existed, and can often be found along popular routes. A pair of blocked 14th-century arches at the George Inn (Figure C) may once have opened to such small shops or booths: a shop and cellars there were mentioned in 1495.



**Figure A** Fifteenth-century shopfront at Lavenham (Suffolk); note the typically narrow 'coffin' doorway, which increased security. Many Burford shopfronts probably looked much like this.



**Figure B** Evidence of a medieval timber shopfront inside 111 High Street. The modern shopfront is several feet forward, typical of the way many shopfronts have been progressively extended out onto the pavement.



**Figure C** Blocked 14th-century arches under the carriageway of the George Inn. Possibly they lit small lock-up shops.

*Further Reading:* Clark, D R, 'The Shop Within? An Analysis of the Architectural Evidence for Medieval Shops', *Architectural History*, 43 (2000), 58-87.