



THE
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NEWARK TOWN HALL

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One of the more worrying aspects of local government reform has been its effect upon historic public buildings such as Town Halls, which, suddenly, became redundant. The successor district councils needed only one headquarters, which for the new Newark District Council was to be Kelham Hall. There followed an anxious debate over the future of the old Town Hall, a Grade I listed building that elegantly presides over the borough's spacious Market Place. The eventual solution was a revitalisation in partnership with a developer. The latter would create an enabling development of new offices and shops within the site, using some of the funds so generated to restore the principal elements of the Georgian building designed by John Carr of York in 1773.

Carr's scheme needed Parliamentary consent because the site involved the endowment of a charitable trust, and powers were sought to vary the terms of existing leases. The Corporation next obtained designs from John Carr, and from Kenton Couse, the latter an architect of the Board of Works, but Carr's plan was approved in October 1773.

The site, which links the Market Place and Middlegate Street, was long and irregular, and on it Carr proposed to fit two houses, a Corn Exchange, a Butter Market, A Shambles, a suite of rooms for Mayoral business, and an Assembly Room. The front was of seven bays with the three centre ones devoted to the Town Hall and two each to the flanking houses, all unified by the rusticated arcading of the ground floor and the full crowning Doric entablature. The Town Hall was, however, distinguished by a portico-in-antis. The houses overlooked courtyards, but the central vestibule led successively into a pillared Corn Exchange, a triple-aisled Butter Market, and finally into an open courtyard ringed by 22 single-storied butchers' shops or Shambles.

On the upper floor there was a loggia overlooking the Market Place opening off the

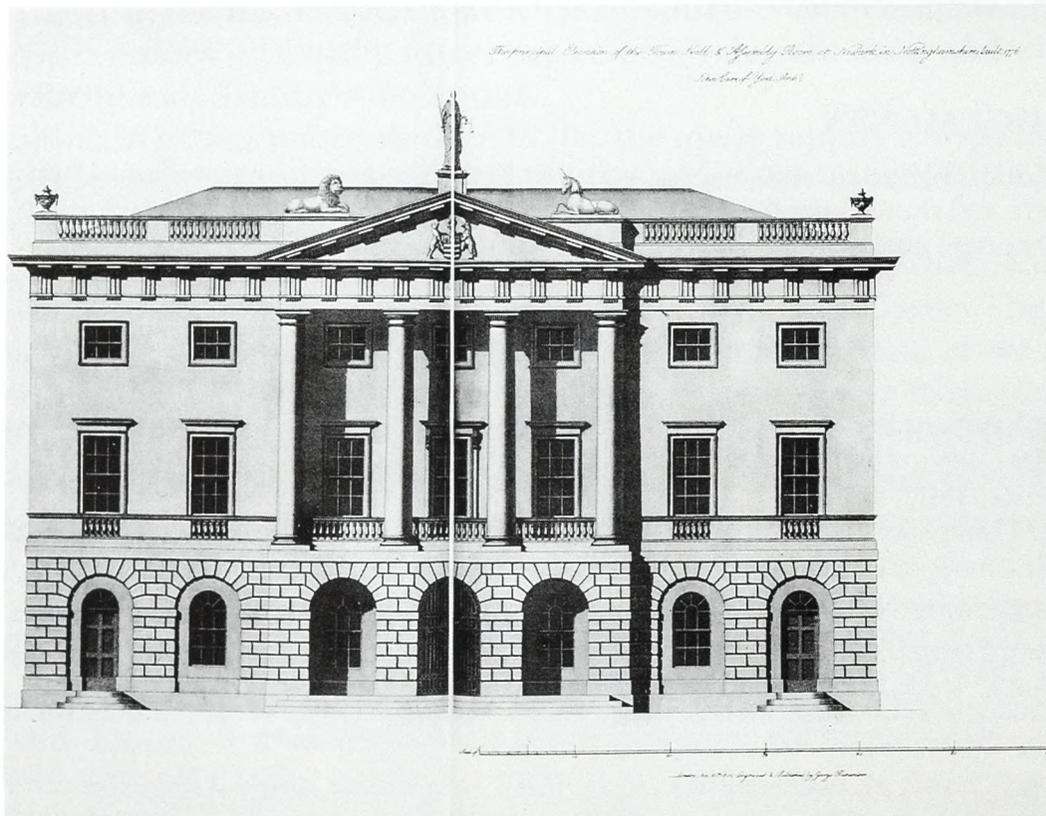


Fig. 1. John Carr's elevation of Newark Town Hall from *New Vitruvius Britannicus II* (1808). On either side of the entrance was an independent house built to help finance the project.

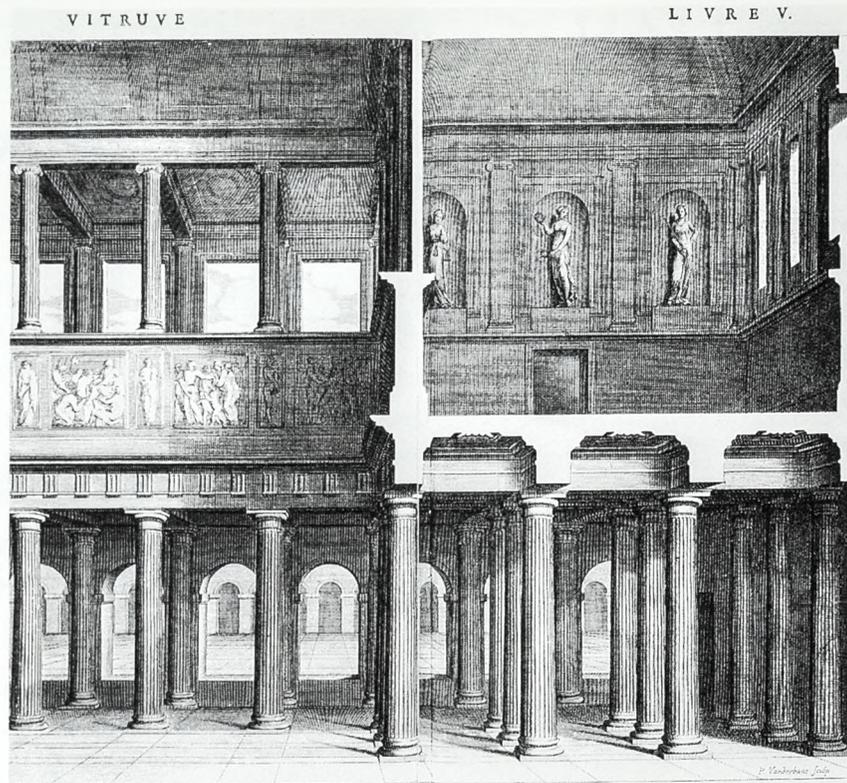


Fig. 4. Reconstruction of the Vitruvian basilica from Perrault's edition of the Ten Books (1684). This provided Carr with the model for the colonnaded Cornmarket.

ordered to be delivered at the rate of 10,000 per month. Topping out followed in July 1775 when five guineas were 'allowed' the workmen, and in June 1776, with the Town Hall essentially complete, work began on the first of the two houses, and Thomas Sheppard of Mansfield began the painting contract.

The Shambles was then started, and all the necessary iron gates and staircase balustrades were also put in hand by Jarvis Rouse, to Carr's designs, to be followed in the summer of 1777 by the furnishing of the Great Room. This was to have moveable benches covered with green cloth and nailed with brass nails, three 'Lusters' to light the room, and a painted floorcloth was made for the floor. The matter of the chandeliers was soon solved, for they were to be the gift of the Duke of Newcastle and Lord George Sutton to such design 'as they might think proper'. Finally, eight settees were supplied by Mr Key of Nottingham, but these were to be covered in Crimson Morine. By late 1778 only the right-hand house remained incomplete, a finishing touch that had to wait until 1786-1789.

Carr's multifunctional building reflects the fact that while no single purpose demanded a building on its own, the space allotted to each use could complement the other. Moreover, some were revenue producing, some not. If, as a neo-Classicist, Carr had studied Antique precedents, he was also 'modern' enough not to force an absolute symmetry where function honestly suggested otherwise. Thus the alignment of the great windows of the Assembly Room does not correspond to that of the market arcading below. This approach to a multi-purpose building became an asset when the building's future came into question, for there were few weak elements, and none that called for any radical change.

Thus after an intensive restoration programme the Corn Exchange is now a room again, and the new principal staircase is far handsomer than the post-war one it replaces. Upstairs a team of students from the Lincoln College of Art undertook a painstaking paint scrape of the Assembly Room walls and ceiling to discover Carr's original colour scheme and, as in Carr's day, a local firm was employed to decorate it, though the students returned to renew the gilding of capitals and the mouldings. Such fruitful partnerships between enthusiastic students — albeit closely supervised — and established firms deserve further encouragement.