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BURLINGTON'S PUBLIC BUILDINGS

Jacques Carré

Private villas and country-houses are the buildings one most readily thinks of in connection with the revival of Palladianism in 18th century Britain. As far as public buildings were concerned, however, the early phase of the movement was also a period of great expectations. In his Letter Concerning Design addressed to Lord Somers in 1712, Shaftesbury had expressed the hope that a new Parliament and a new Royal Palace would be designed by the rising generation of architects in what he called a "national taste":

Hardly, indeed, as the public now stands, should we bear to see a Whitehall treated like a Hampton Court, or even a new cathedral like St. Paul's (1).

Such contempt for the achievement of Sir Christopher Wren was shared by almost all the Palladians who looked back to the projects of Jones and his followers for a huge building in Whitehall combining Houses of Parliament and Royal Palace. In fact, as early as 1717, Campbell published some of these designs in the second volume of his Vitruvius Britannicus; and ten years later, Kent published a more extensive collection of Jonesian drawings for this project in The Designs of Inigo Jones. Meanwhile, most of the literary friends of the Palladians, from Berkeley and Pope to Thomson and Savage, advocated the construction of grand public edifices in their own writings. For example, in his Epistle to Burlington (1731), Pope urged the King to launch a programme of public works under the supervision of the architect-earl: "These are imperial works, and worthy kings", he concluded.

In fact, in the early 1730s, if not earlier (2), Burlington and Kent worked in close collaboration on a series of designs for a new Parliament (3). Such a large and complex building was surely the most desirable commission a British architect could dream of, and their disappointment must have been immense when the whole scheme was eventually dropped about 1740. Compared to this monumental Parliament, the two public edifices actually finished according to Burlington's designs may seem particularly modest. Moreover they were not so much in the public eye as a Palladian Parliament would have been: the Dormitory of Westminster School was (and is still) hardly visible from the neighbouring streets, and the Assembly-Rooms at York were too remote from the capital to pass for the prototype of the new national taste. Burlington's involvement in public buildings, however, was not limited to these two commissions. He also provided designs for the school and almshouses at Sevenoaks, which were published in 1727; and three years later, he drew some plans for the new Town-Hall at Chichester. In both cases, however, the buildings were erected with so many modifications that Burlington's

hand in them is almost unrecognizable. In fact, once he had provided a design for a public building, Burlington did little to ensure that it was executed faithfully, probably thinking that was not his proper province. There was however one exception to this attitude, in the case of the York Assembly-Rooms, the construction of which he superintended as he was a major sponsor of the project.

I shall be concerned, then, with these four designs, which in themselves are highly representative of Burlington's manner. I think it would be erroneous to believe they were, in the architect's opinion, minor works overshadowed by the magnum opus of the projected Parliament. He certainly devoted much care and enthusiasm to their preparation. I will show how in each of these four projects he broke new ground, largely ignoring British precedents for the same types of buildings, and clearly attempting to define his personal version of Palladianism, which I propose to call the Anglo-Roman manner.

Pl.1 The Dormitory of Westminster School was Burlington's first public building, the first stone being laid on April 24th, 1722. The initiator of the scheme was Bishop Atterbury, Dean of Westminster, who managed to obtain funds from various sources, to impose his favourite site in the College garden to the headmaster of the school, Dr. Freind, and also to choose the architect. According to Pope, it was he who "requested the Earl of Burlington to be the Architect, who carry'd on the Work till the Bill against that learned Prelate was brought in"(4). The nobleman's design, however, was not the only one; William Dickinson, a pupil of Wren, who was surveyor of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster, had proposed several elevations of his own (5). They had in common with Burlington's an open arcade on the ground-floor, to be used as a play-ground, and the choice of a piano nobile for the dormitory, with an attic story. The decoration of the façade, however, was very different: in all Dickinson's elevations, there was a projecting centre-piece of three bays; in one design this was surmounted by a carved pediment and framed by a giant order of double columns. Burlington's elevation, on the contrary, was remarkable for its absence of central emphasis and the plainness of its decoration: there were no columns of pilasters at all, and the ground-floor arcade had only the thinnest of mouldings. The first-floor windows (which were in fact blind) were topped with alternate segmental and triangular pediments.

In order to assess the novelty of this building more fully, one may compare it to contemporary collegiate edifices. The Upper School at Eton (1690), once attributed to Wren, but probably designed by Matthew Banckes, has indeed a comparable plainness of decoration and texture, but it has a slightly projecting centre-piece and coupled Doric columns on the ground-floor. As for Dean Aldrich's

Peckwater Quadrangle at Oxford, started in 1705, it is obviously Palladian in character, with its series of pilasters framing each bay of the piano nobile; but unlike Burlington's Dormitory, it has a central emphasis, with an applied temple front; also, like Banckes, Aldrich hides the roof with a balustrade, while Burlington, in this as well as in his other designs, considers the volume of the roof as an important element in the elevation. Altogether the architect-earl produced a strikingly austere design, considering its date.

The sources for the Dormitory façade are not easy to identify with any degree of certainty : Inigo Jones's arcaded terraces at Covent Garden do have the same general proportions, but their decoration and wall-texture are much more complex; in the cloister of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice, erected by Palladio alongside the church, one does find a similar absence of central emphasis and the same alternation of segmental and triangular pediments above the windows, but the proportions are different and there are columns on the ground-floor. In fact, Burlington may have had in mind the architecture of the ancient palestrae, with their uniform arcades, to which Vitruvius devotes a chapter in De Architectura. G. Lauro, in Antiquae Urbis Splendor (1612), provides an interesting reconstitution which may have inspired Burlington (6). The idea of associating the educational environment of the Ancients with a modern public school must have been attractive to such an admirer of classical antiquity as Burlington.

Whatever the sources of this building were, the architect already illustrates in his design the aesthetic values he will uphold throughout his architectural career, and which might be defined as plainness, proportion, and precedent. By this last I mean that he introduces a temporal dimension in architecture : when a stroller looked at such a thoroughly un-English sort of building as the Westminster Dormitory, he was bound to reflect on the relationship between the architecture of Renaissance Italy, or possibly Ancient Rome, and that of his own day. He could wonder whether he was gazing at a nostalgic, derivative edifice, or at a creative reinterpretation fit for his age. This ambiguity of Burlington's first public building, however, was soon to be dispelled by his second essay in collegiate architecture.

The 15th century school at Sevenoaks had received a royal donation of £.2500 in 1723 for its reconstruction, and for the provision of almshouses. One does not know who asked Burlington to submit designs, but one may conjecture it was Lionel Sackville, 1st Duke of Dorset, who lived at nearby Knole. The final design was ready by 1726, in time to be included by Kent in The Designs of Inigo Jones,

next to that for the Westminster Dormitory (7). This time, Burlington adapted the theme of the Palladian villa with barchesse (or service-wings) to the double aim of the promoters, which was to combine a school with almshouses. The monumental front proposed by the architect was to be 565 feet long - the largest building ever planned by Burlington, Parliament not excepted. The school was to be housed in a central, almost cubic edifice, while the almshouses occupied the long wings on each side. What is so attractive about this design is that its reliance on Palladian precedent does not stifle its inventiveness. Exactly as we may admire Pope's ability to remain idiosyncratic in his Imitations of Horace, we may point out Burlington's skill in adapting a casa di villa to an unexpected use. Indeed the Vicentine architect had designed neither schools nor almshouses, and the earl could not possibly rely on any precedent for such buildings in the Quattro Libri. But what is also very novel is the insertion of this rural type of building in an urban setting. Burlington achieved this by conferring a palazzo-like character to the school, with a mezzanine under the high piano nobile, and by transforming the plain barchesse into more substantial architecture. In the original manuscript design, he proposed an attic story in the wings containing the almshouses, thus heightening the barchesse to 25 feet; moreover, he decorated each bay with a Diocletian window derived from ancient Roman baths. While thus borrowing from various sources, Burlington succeeded in proposing a highly original edifice. Unfortunately, the building which was actually erected (and is still standing) did not correspond to the earl's designs, although the general idea of a high central block for the school flanked by low wings was retained. The school-house, however, was not built on a line with the almshouses, but on the old foundations which were further back; thus the monumentality of the original scheme was finally destroyed, as well as its cohesion.

Burlington's next project for a public building was doomed to a similar fate, for equally obscure reasons. The decision to erect a new town-hall, or "Council-House", at Chichester was taken in 1730, and a public subscription opened. It was a close friend of Burlington, Charles Lennox, 2nd Duke of Richmond, whose seat at Goodwood was in the vicinity, who patronized the whole venture. In June 1730, he wrote two pressing letters to the earl, asking for his plans - and also mentioning designs by another architect (8). Two Burlingtonian elevations for this commission have been preserved (9). One of these shows the side of a rectangular building, 86 feet long, ornamented with plain arcades both on the ground and first floors; there is also a half story above, lit by Diocletian windows. The roof has strongly projecting eaves

in the manner of ancient Roman temples. This elevation is striking for the nakedness of the wall, the simplicity and uniformity of the arcades, and the complete absence of ornament. Of course, Burlington did not ignore the usual disposition of English town-halls, as he respected the combination of open ground-floor arcade and first-floor council-room. But he evidently looked back to the basilican form so often used by Roman architects of the republican and imperial periods. Palladio himself had indeed provided the aldermen at Vicenza with a self-styled "Basilica"; but Burlington, for the first time in his architectural career, relied more on antique than on Palladian precedent. Of course Roman basilicas were not well preserved, and if their rectangular plan and often absidal ends were well known, their elevations were left to conjecture. What Burlington did was to provide a tentative restitution of this sort of building, with the help of the various source-books on Roman antiquities he had in his large architectural library. I would suggest he borrowed the superimposed arcades from amphitheatres; but he may also have been inspired by the more utilitarian Roman buildings such as baths, covered markets or even aqueducts, which often features plain brick arches. This antiquarian version of Palladianism was particularly appropriate in Chichester, which in the days of Roman occupation had been an important city. One should not forget either that the new "Council-House" site was close to that of a temple dedicated to Neptune and Minerva which had been discovered in 1723 (10). The association of the new edifice with the brilliant Roman past of Chichester is undoubtedly an important aspect in the significance of Burlington's design. In intention, if not in actual fact (it was Roger Morris who eventually designed the existing town-hall), I would argue that this basilican design is the first neoclassical elevation for a public building in 18th century Britain.

York is another city with Roman associations, of which Burlington was quite aware, especially as a Roman road crossed his own neighbouring estate at Londesborough. His ambition in creating the Assembly-Rooms at York was explicitly to emulate the splendours of ancient Eboracum, as the Latin inscription commemorating the laying of the first stone on March 1st, 1731, tells us (11). Francis Drake also made this point very clear in his dedication to Burlington of his history of the city:

Your Lordship's great knowledge in this art soars up to the Augustan age and style; and that Protorian palace, once in old EBORACUM (...) must, if now standing, have given place to your Egyptian hall in our present York (12).

Egyptian hall was the name given by Vitruvius and Palladio to a large rectangular hall decorated on all sides by detached columns. In Palladio's restitution in the Quattro Libri (13), this hall is lit from above by win-

dows inserted between a second order of columns. For the decoration of the inside of the York Assembly-Rooms, Burlington followed this design only with minor modifications. In his choice of dimensions, Burlington had to make the best of an irregular site, deep and rather narrow. He skilfully managed to connect the dimensions of the various rooms of the edifice through a simple system of proportion: 22 feet was the width and height of a series of rooms situated alongside the main Assembly-Room, and it is interesting to note that the length of the latter was 110 feet, five times that dimension. As far as volumes were concerned, a striking effect was achieved by the repetition of the triple-cube motif: thus the "Common Assembly-Room" was 66 feet long, 22 feet high and 22 feet wide; two other rooms had approximately the same proportions, the "Grand Tea-Room" being originally 43 feet long, 15 feet high and 15 feet wide, and the main Assembly-Room itself 110 feet long, 40 feet high and 40 wide (at floor level) (14). Here Burlington was not merely following the Palladian and Jonesian practice of linking different rooms through a system of proportions; he actually innovated in his handling of architectural volumes, by manipulating scale within a single building.

Pl.4

But what is also quite original in the Assembly-Rooms is the entrance-front, so unfortunately altered in the early 19th century. Here the architect borrowed several motifs from the imperial Roman baths, which he really idolized; a few months before, he had published in a limited edition Palladio's drawings and reconstitutions of these baths under the title Fabbriche Antiche Disegnate' Da Andrea Palladio Vicentino e' Date In Luce' Da Riccardo Conte' di Burlington. The vestibule of the Rooms was contained within a semi-elliptical space defined by a convex arcade with three openings. Inside each of them were inserted Corinthian columns supporting a free entablature surmounted by a Diocletian window. The same motif was repeated in the lateral windows. Another thermal motif was the thin pediment with an interrupted base decorating the roof-line above these windows. All these "quotations" of ancient architecture did not prevent Burlington from being highly personal in the treatment of this entrance front; in fact he selected those motifs which helped him achieve his ultimate ambition - that of creating a new relationship between wall and opening. While in most classical buildings from the Renaissance onwards doors and windows were commonly decorated with projecting ornaments such as pediments, cornices, &c., Burlington's idea, already illustrated on the North-West front of Chiswick Villa, was to dispense altogether with them, or rather to push them back, so to speak, inside each opening, so as to leave the outer wall entirely flat up to the roof-line. This aesthetic choice had far-reaching consequences on the

perception of buildings: they were now seen in terms of simple geometric forms or volumes such as cubes, triangles or cylinders, rather than in terms of structure and texture. The traditional orders, if used at all, were reduced to a purely decorative role, without any pretence of structural function. In my opinion, this is the most seminal aspect of Burlington's contribution to Palladianism, and it is particularly well illustrated in his public buildings.

The extraordinary novelty of the Assembly-Rooms at York led Rudolf Wittkower to believe that Burlington had then reached the ultimate stage of his architectural evolution. He wrote in 1954:

We are probably correct in saying that Burlington regarded the Assembly-Rooms as an achievement beyond which it was impossible to go (15).

I would argue this is a somewhat pessimistic assessment of his activities after 1731. Surprisingly, Wittkower underestimated the Parliament designs, which he interpreted merely as an elaboration of motifs already found at Chiswick, while they are in fact a new departure in his Anglo-Roman manner (16). Also Wittkower was not aware of Burlington's involvement in later public commissions, to which I will now turn briefly.

In 1733 a subscription was opened for the transformation of Lanesborough House, at Hyde Park Corner, into an "Infirmarium", soon to be called St. George's Hospital. Burlington was one of the governors of the institution from February 1734, and we may surmise that he was instrumental in the selection of his disciple Isaac Ware as architect (17). This was in fact the latter's first commission ever, and it is most likely Burlington collaborated with him in the design of the new front, which was engraved and published in February 1735 in An Account of the Proceedings of the Governors of St. George's Hospital. The two pavilions on each side of the façade use the same thermal vocabulary as the York Assembly-Rooms, and a similar treatment of the wall-surface, in which the unadorned Venetian and Diocletian windows seem to have been carved with a knife. There is also among Burlington's papers an unsigned plan for a hospital which might well be an alternative project by Burlington himself for St. George's (18).

A few years later, the earl seems to have had an interest in the design of the new Mansion-House in the City of London. There is an amusing anecdote reported by James Stuart in 1771, according to which Burlington "sent down an original design of Palladio"; this design was supposed to have been rejected by the City councillors because the author was a notorious Papist "and incapable of course" (19). This story is impossible to verify, but it may be connected with Isaac Ware's submission of a design featuring an "Egyptian Hall", which he later published in his Complete Body of Architecture (20). Such a design, however, did not please

the councillors, who selected George Dance senior as architect. Such an affront to the Palladians must have infuriated both Burlington and his disciple Ware.

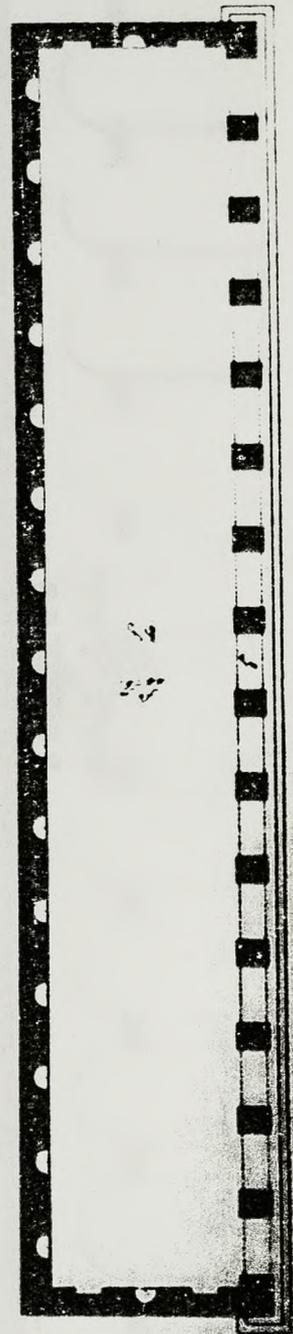
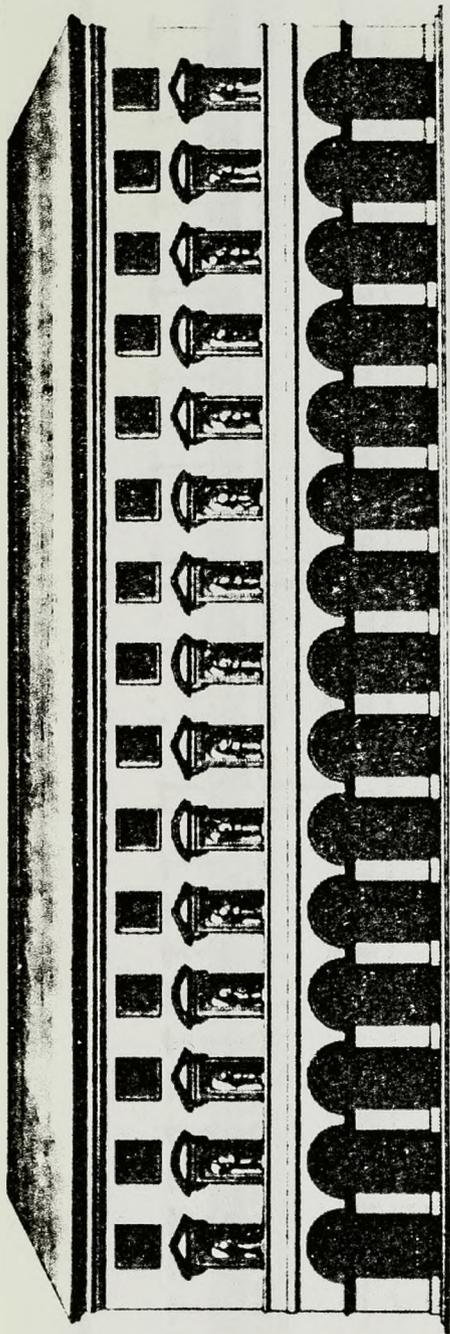
The last public commission I would like to mention is that of Westminster Bridge. In the early 1720s, Burlington had already encouraged Colen Campbell to submit a design, and had even discussed its effects on river navigation with such distinguished scientists as Halley and Arbuthnot, as we know from the third volume of Vitruvius Britannicus (21). In 1736, the project was taken up again, and received the Royal assent. A Parliamentary Committee of two hundred members was formed, among which Burlington seems to have been influential. In the summer of 1737 he is known to have entertained them at Chiswick (22). It is possible he may have patronized John James, whose design for the bridge is among Burlington's papers at Chatsworth (23). But it was eventually the Swiss architect Charles Labelye who obtained the commission, with the help of another architect-earl, Lord Pembroke. Henceforward Burlington seems to have lost interest in the project, over which he could have no control (23).

Altogether, Burlington's involvement in public buildings after the construction of the York Assembly-Rooms led to disappointingly small results. This seems to be the effect of chance rather than of any weakening of his creative powers. Had a Palladian Parliament been erected, this would surely have been the crowning achievement of his architectural career as well as Kent's ! Also the earl may have felt that the time had come for his numerous protégés to display their own talents, and he probably enjoyed tracing ideas and motifs he had first used, in the plans of Flitcroft, Garrett, Ware and Kent. Indeed, overarched windows, saucer-domes, incomplete pediments and other features of his Anglo-Roman manner were to be seen more and more frequently in new buildings. But he may have regretted that among his disciples none really appreciated the main drift of his aesthetic development, which was towards increasing plainness of wall and simplicity of volume. In that respect, some of Kent's later Parliament designs are curiously Jonesian rather than Burlingtonian (24). I would argue, therefore, that Burlington's public buildings, so remarkable for their inventiveness, were to have no immediate posterity. It was only in the late 18th century, in the age of Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, Friedrich Gilly and Sir John Soane that their avant-gardist quality came to be appreciated.

References

1. Shaftesbury, Second Characters, ed. B. Rand, (Cambridge University Press, 1914), p. 22.
2. J. Ralph (A Critical Review...., London, 1734, p. 57) suggests Burlington had been thinking of a new Parliament for many years.
3. See H.M. Colvin, The History of the King's Works, V, (London, H.M.S.O., 1976), p. 416-424, with numerous plates.
4. A. Pope, The Dunciad Variorum, III, (London, 1729), note to l. 323.

5. See "The New Dormitory, Westminster School, 1708-1731" Wren Society, XI (1934), p. 35.
 6. See plate 98, "Palestrae Gymnasia".
 7. W. Kent, The Designs of Inigo Jones, II, (London, 1727), pl. 52-53/
 8. Chatsworth Mss., 201.0, 201.1.
 9. R.I.B.A. Drawings Collection, Boyle (2) 2 (elevation of side); (2) 3 (alternative project, entrance front).
 10. See The Victoria History of the County of Sussex, III, (Oxford University Press, 1935), p. 13.
 11. "...Quo (dilatante negotio) gloria pristina novo Eboraci splendore obumbretur".
 12. F. Drake, Eboracum, I, (York, 1736), dedication.
 13. II, x.
 14. According to different sources, there are slight variations in the dimensions of the rooms; these, however, do not affect the validity of my remarks.
 15. R. Wittkower, "Burlington and his Work in York", Studies in Architectural History, I, ed. W.A. Singleton, (York, 1954), p. 60.
 16. See for example the Boullée-like elevation reproduced in Colvin, op.cit., pl. 61 B.
 17. See the successive Accounts of the Proceedings of the Governours of the Hospital near Hyde-Park-Corner, (London, 1734).
 18. Burlington Drawings, Chatsworth, D 20.
 19. J. Stuart, Critical Observations..., (London, 1771), p. 6.
 20. I. Ware, A Complete Body of Architecture, (London, 1768), pl. 50.
 21. C. Campbell, Vitruvius Britannicus, III, (London, 1725), p. 10.
 22. See The Correspondence of Alexander Pope, IV, ed. G. Sherburn, (Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 82.
 23. A curious anonymous poem of 1748, The Downfall of Westminster Bridge, or, My Lord in the Suds, contrasts the alleged incompetence of Pembroke and Labelye to Burlington's architectural talent:
O, B---n ! pardon the Use of your Name,
On a Subject inferior by much to your Fame;
Your Fame, which shall last long as Inigo Jones,
Whilst others decay, like their Mortar and Stones.
 24. See for example pl. 61 A in Colvin, op.cit.
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Scale in feet

11 Westminster Lodge

Westminster Dormitory

Plate 1 The Westminster Dormitory
 from The Designs of Inigo Jones (1727) Vol II p 51

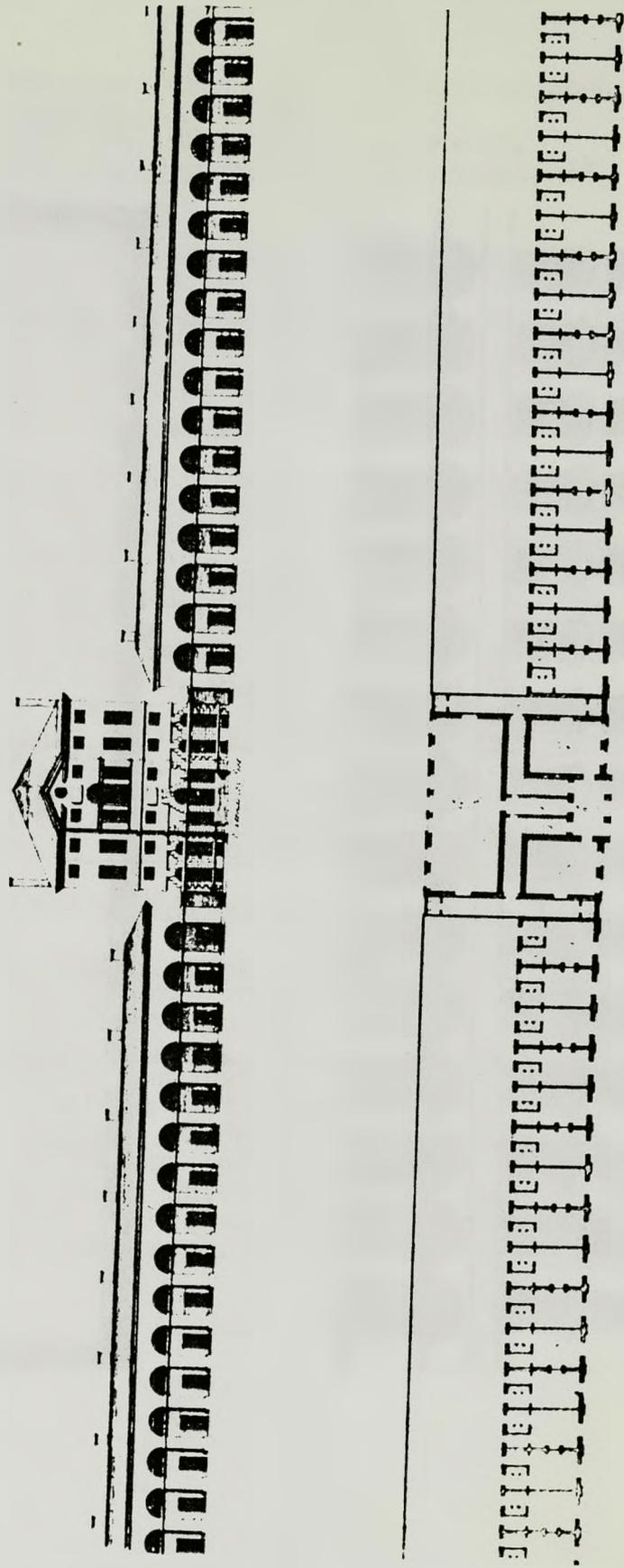


Plate 2 The Sevenoaks Almshouses
from The Designs of Inigo Jones (1727)

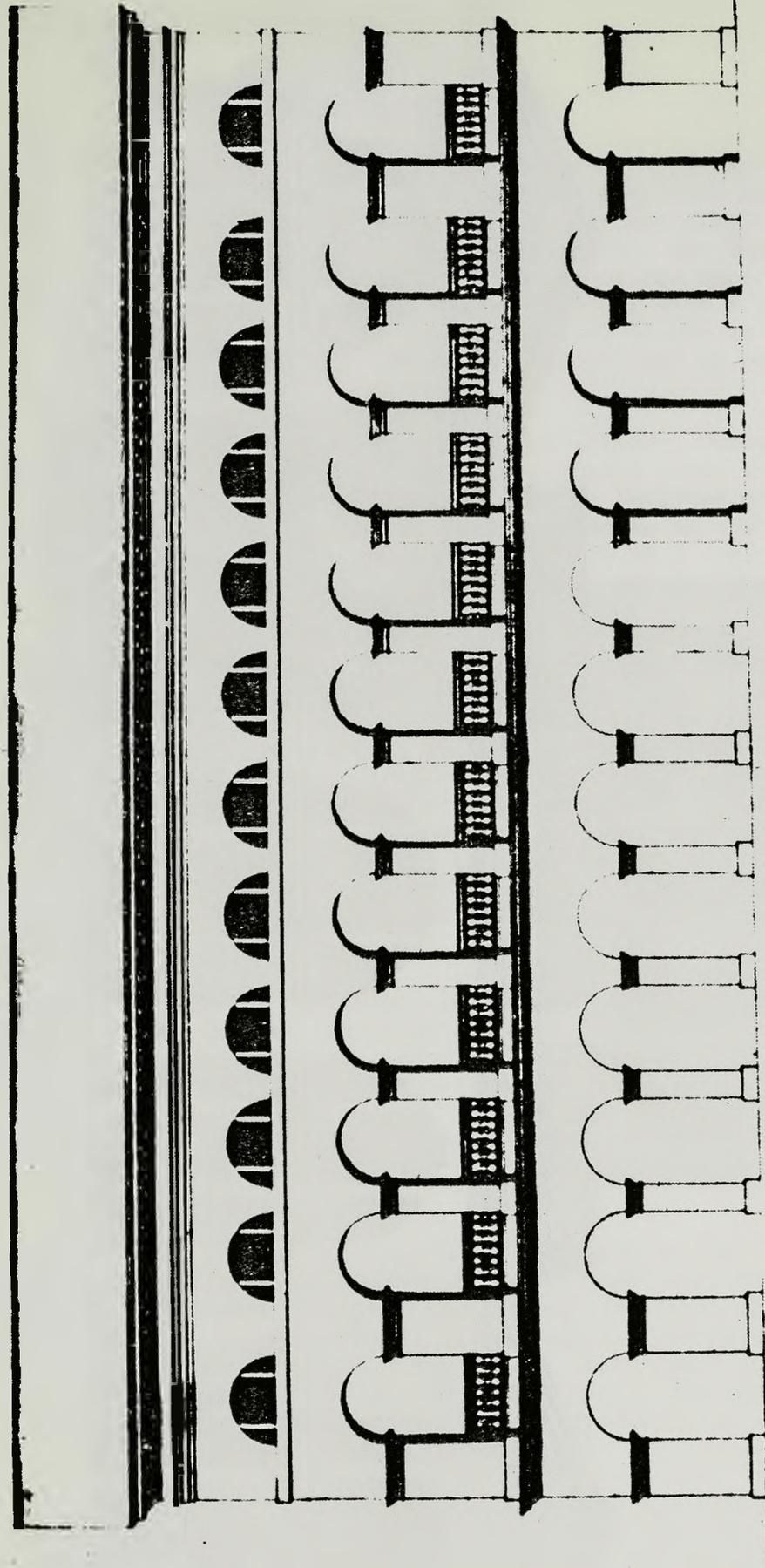


Plate 3 The Chichester Council House

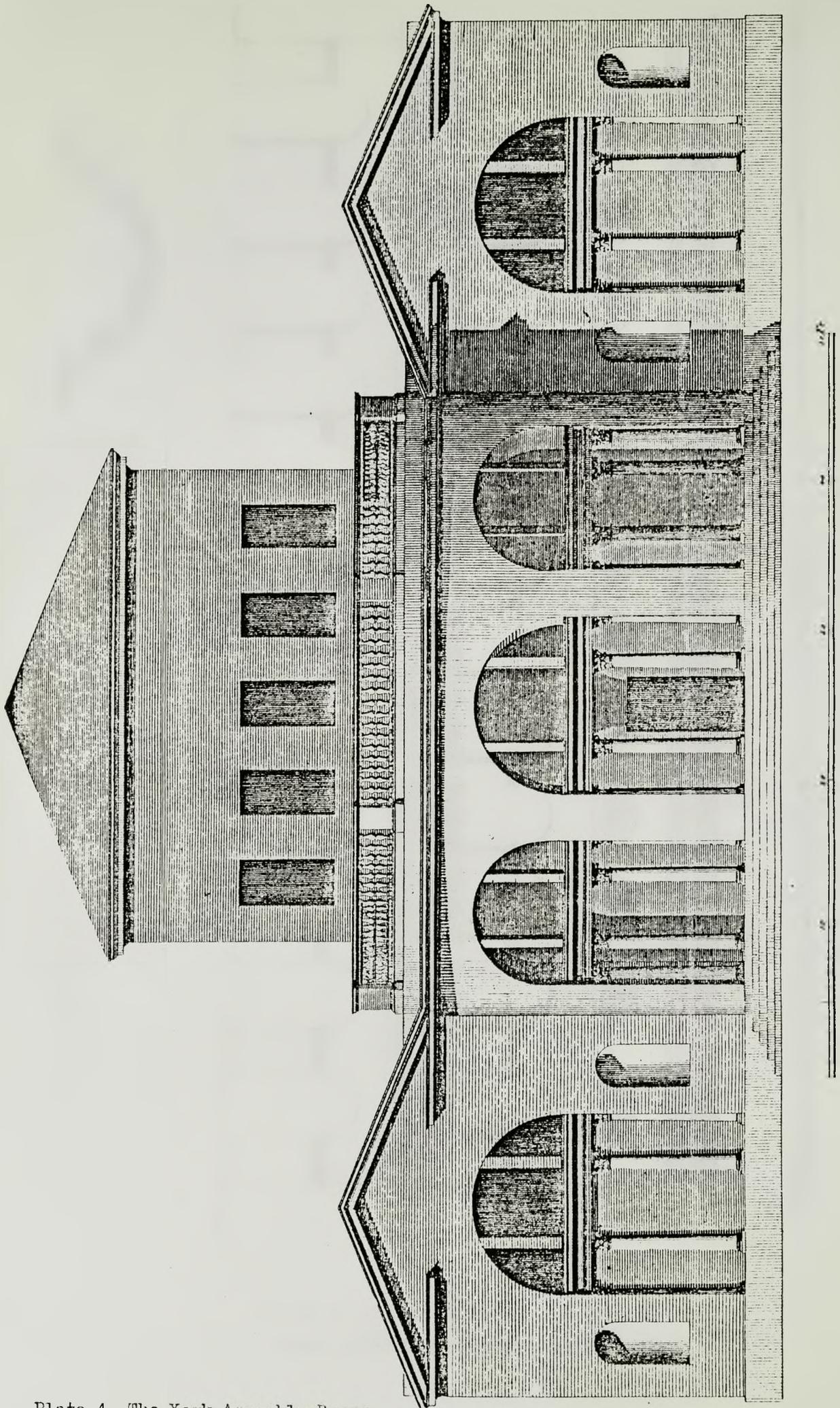


Plate 4 The York Assembly Rooms
from Vitruvius Britannicus (1767) Vol IV pl 79