

Mansion House or Palace?

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The Mansion House must not only have seemed palatial but, in origin, its design was, quite literally, palatial. In producing his plans for Doncaster corporation, Paine had not created an original design, but had taken his design from Inigo Jones. Jones was a distinguished seventeenth-century architect who had worked for both King James I and his son, King Charles I. Jones had produced many plans for the rebuilding of Whitehall Palace for King James I. He had been an enthusiast for 'Palladianism', the style of Andrea Palladio, who worked extensively in north-eastern Italy, around Venice, in the sixteenth century. The architectural style of Palladio was strongly favoured by the Earl of Burlington who, as we mentioned earlier, was probably the man who first detected Paine's talents as an architect.

Jones was an important architect but relatively few of his designs were actually constructed. The only surviving building completed to Inigo Jones' designs for his royal patrons was the Banqueting House in Whitehall, restored in the mid-1990s to its original splendour.

Amongst the plans for the Palace of Westminster which never progressed beyond the drawing board was one which Paine adopted for the Mansion House. So Doncaster has a civic building whose facade was originally designed for a palace in London rather than a high street in Doncaster. (Paine was not attempting to pass off the design by Jones as his own. The design had been published earlier in the eighteenth century and would have been known to all those interested in architecture. Paine's adoption of the design would have been seen as an elegant tribute to his famous predecessor).

This illustration shows part of Jones design. Its similarities to the front of the Mansion House are unmistakable. Notice, for instance, the three windows, (the central one in the 'Venetian' style, with a semicircular head), the four pairs of Corinthian columns, the balusters (small columns) under each window and the huge pediment over the whole elevation.