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# The Provincial Late-Victorian & Edwardian City

## *Some Selected Examples of Civic Desing and the Use of Urban Space c. 1880-1914*

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**Abstract**

The paper highlights the principles that governed civic design during the late-Victorian and Edwardian period, with particular reference being given to the environment about large-sized public buildings and urban space. Using the results of a detailed survey of the design, plan and environments surrounding more than 100 edifices erected within more than 20 large-sized towns and cities, the paper will note the nature of urban space as a facet of civic design. As results of the study will demonstrate, the best examples of British civic design were schemes that successfully amalgamated structure and urban space into a single composition. Thus open spaces could be established to augment harmonious accord and to introduce approaches to prominent parts of the principal elevations and any significant entrances. Additionally, the form of the internal arrangement, the structural form of the building and position of vertical elements were often bound together so that the inside and outside of each building are linked - the design and planning traits of one therefore affecting the position, configuration and appearance of the other. By using selected examples, the paper will reveal the true significance of open space to the development of British settlements during a period when modern British town planning emerged.

Keywords: civil design, late-Victorian and Edwardian period, public buildings, urban and architectural space.

**Resumen***

*El artículo resalta los principios que gobernaron el diseño cívico** durante los periodos tardío Victoriano y Edwardiano, con referencia particular al ambiente dado por los edificios más relevantes de la construcción pública y el espacio urbano. Usando los resultados de un estudio detallado del diseño, plan y ambientes que rodean más de 100 edificios erigidos dentro de más de 20 grandes pueblos y ciudades, el artículo denota la naturaleza del espacio urbano como una faceta del diseño cívico. Los resultados del estudio demostrarán, cómo los mejores ejemplos de la arquitectura cívica británica eran esquemas que con éxito amalgamaron la estructura y el espacio urbano en una sola composición. De este modo, los espacios abiertos fueron establecidos para aumentar el acuerdo armonioso e introducir acercamientos a partes prominentes de las elevaciones principales y a cualquier entrada significante. Adicionalmente, la forma del arreglo interior, la forma estructural del edificio y la posición de elementos verticales están a menudo delimitadamente juntos para que el interior y el exte-*

* Translated to Spanish by Elías Huamán.

** El concepto de diseño cívico (a falta de un término equivalente en español) no solamente apunta a su sentido literal, sino también a un significado mucho más amplio que alude a planes y diseños arquitectónicos urbanos ejercidos por el poder público edilicio, por lo que una traducción amplia estricta sugiere términos asociados a una arquitectura urbana edilicia. (Nota del traductor).



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*rior de cada edificio se unan; por consiguiente, el diseño y la planeación de los rasgos de uno afectan la posición, configuración y apariencia del otro. Usando los ejemplos seleccionados, el articulo revela la verdadera importancia del espacio abierto en el desarrollo de los asentamientos británicos durante el periodo en que surgió la planeación en los pueblos británicos modernos.*

*Palbaras clave: diseño cívico, periodo Victoriano tardío y Eduardiano, edificios públicos, espacio urbano y arquitectónico.*

## Introduction

In this work civic design is said to be:

*...a designer's attempt to purposefully associate at least one new, large-scale public building to its surroundings for the intention of obtaining pleasing effects and attaining convenience, to be achieved by employing various distinct design and planning techniques which give attention to the design and form so as to bring the public building and the local built environment into harmonious accord* (Morley, 2001: xxxii).

Given this definition of civic design, it may be seen to be attained by, for example, laying down open spaces other than that of roadways about the edifice(s), so as to augment harmony with the surrounding environment by may be introducing approaches to prominent parts of the principal elevations and significant entrances where possible. Of note too, the form of the internal arrangement, the structural form of the building and position of vertical elements, if used, are expected to be bound together so that any design and planning traits of the one may affect the position, configuration and appearance of the other (Morley, 2001: xxxii).

## British Civic Design: A Synopsis of its Form

The findings that comprise this paper are based on a detailed survey[1] of a large number of public buildings[2] erected between about 1880 and 1914 in a number of large-sized provincial British towns and cities,[3] and a somewhat unsurprising outcome of the study was that civic design's occurrence varied from settlement to settlement with the biggest and strongest schemes[4] occurring in the largest places. Reasons for this include the Corporations' ability to establish bigger budgets to finance building schemes, due may be to their high civic status, a larger tax base, plus civic rivalry and the desire to be acknowledged as the 'second city of the empire'. Thus by civic designing areas of cities, by creating public spaces filled with statuary, for example, not only promoted civic pride but also emphasised the national significance of the place so that it could make a symbolic challenge to London's cultural and political supremacy (Morley and Caven, 2000). However, many significant schemes occurred in smaller sized places. Cardiff (Morley, 2003) developed from the late-1890s with an exceptional civic district that was formed with a heavy American City Beautiful influence (i.e. the use of scale, proportion and symmetry in the design of often large-scale buildings, placed in symmetrical arrangements governed by prominent axial lines). The close proximity of the many Cardiff edifices, their common size, style, form, building lines and other common features all contributed to making the Cathays Park district an outstanding example of civic design pre-1914. Despite variances in the amount of schemes undertaken from place to place, and the often smaller scale and use of less civic design features within smaller settlements, British civic design practice employed numerous universal elements. Significantly, just as contemporary American civic design practice was systemised, so too was practice it seems in Britain.

Given the findings of the investigation, the main elements of approaches to the treatment of the elevations that appeared in buildings in civic design schemes erected in the period under consideration may be listed as follows: symmetrical and non-symmetrical. Many prominent public structures erected during the period considered had their main and perhaps other elevations designed on fairly strict symmetrical lines. For many public buildings examined one side of the composition was usually given greater importance than the others. That side often contained the principal entrance of the building and perhaps faced an open space of some note, a space other than that of a roadway. Although the overall plan arrangements of the building might take many forms the symmetrical elevation was generally linked to an essentially symmetrically detailed plan and one, and sometimes more, lines of axis were in evidence.

A common feature of the plan of public buildings erected during the period selected for study was that a major element of the internal arrangement might be placed centrally on a line of axis and this was often reflected in the treatment of the elevations which might indicate its presence. Elements of plans that have been placed along a central line of axis include the main entrance, which would often be marked by details above it or beside it. Of the hundred or so buildings examined for this work over 90% of buildings studied were designed with a primary entrance located at the centre of a main eleva-

1. Various design and planning characteristics were identified in the period under concern and these formed the basis of eliciting those features which appeared to form elements of civic design. In total 25 elements of design relating to the building's setting and its structural and technical design components were examined.
2. Building types examined included Town Halls, City Halls, County Halls, Municipal Offices, Public Libraries, Post Offices, Cotton and Stock Exchanges, Museums, Art Galleries, University and College Buildings, Docks Offices, Central Fire and Police Stations, and Public Halls.
3. Aberdeen, Birmingham, Blackburn, Bolton, Bradford, Bristol, Cardiff, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Hull, Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Oldham, Portsmouth, Salford, Sheffield and Sunderland.
4. The strength of schemes was generally identified by the amount of design and planning features applied within a single undertaking. The number of elements used within individual design schemes was noted to vary considerably.





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tion placed along the main line of axis established within the plan. Of significance too was the practice whereby a building would sometimes be designed with its corner elements having a similar or identical form to each other, though occasionally just one corner might be emphasized. Other parts of the plan that could be placed along the central alignment established in the scheme include the entrance vestibule, a staircase or a prominent space within the internal arrangement of the building. Sometimes the central line of axis established in the plan would be marked outside of the building by an architectural feature such as a flight of steps, lamp posts, a statue or fountain, which could be placed at some distance away from the front of the structure, possibly in an open space of note. There was also a tendency in a number of public buildings to mark the central axis with a vertical element such as a dome or clock tower. Significantly too, the placing of features or spaces within a plan along a centrally established axial line may have suggested its presence upon the composition and design of the main elevations. As noted earlier this could be indicated by the placing of columns or pilasters at each side of the main entrance or the placing of a portico or gable above the main entrance from which regular bays would be placed along the elevations where details such as further columns or pilasters and fenestration would be placed. The common use of symmetrical elevations, regardless of the design style being employed, when linked with the comparatively large scale of the design scheme, produced a sense of formality that gave the building a dramatic impact and impression of importance.

It should be noted too that the practice of designing a symmetrical main elevation depended upon the shape of the building's site and not so much upon the choice of design style as balanced elevations were noted among the three most common design styles (Gothic, Classical and Baroque) employed about 1880-1914. The practice of designing in a symmetrical manner was also dependent upon having a fairly symmetrical plan being used and the role of the site therefore in the design process should not be overlooked. If the site was relatively open and unencumbered from surrounding structures then the possibility of the building having a symmetrical front elevation, and perhaps other symmetrical elevations too, was found to increase. In addition, if the size of the plot of land to be developed was large in extent then the designer could erect a structure, perhaps of a large size, that was much smaller than the area of the site. This situation had the effect of allowing a new building to fit well within the boundaries of its site, in so doing establishing space around the structure which allowed for the possibility of introducing civic design elements in front and about it.

## Some of the Architectural Details of the Schemes Studied

Due to space limitations a list of some of the primary architectural characteristics of civic buildings circa 1800-1914 shall be given subsequently:

- The many floor levels of a building were generally treated differently from each other. The principal floor level of a building identified within a civic design scheme was noted to be usually positioned on either the ground floor or the first floor level. Many elements were prevalent in the treatment of the principal floor levels from that of other floor levels and these included the larger floor to ceiling height of the main floor level, the handling of the fenestration in a different manner from the other floor levels and the use of added decoration.
- The handling of the corners of public buildings was a significant aspect of civic design during the late-Victorian and Edwardian period, and almost two thirds of buildings studied were noted to have a treatment of one kind or another. A number of different means by which the corners could be handled were identified. These included the rounding of one or both corners of the main elevation, the placing of a pavilion at the corners of the primary facade, the use of rustication towards the corners of the building and the placing a vertical element above one or all corners of the building.
- End pavilions were employed within a considerable number of civic design schemes.
- A feature of civic design that was identified by this study was that the building materials used within public design schemes were usually different to those materials used in the surrounding environment.
- The practice of civic design highlighted the common use of design elements along the main elevations which included gables, vertical elements, rustication, arched or semi-circular window openings, as well as pediments and porticos.
- The use of decorative features such as rustication tended to only be at particular places within the civic composition, such as the lower ground floor, the ground floor level and the ends of the main elevations.
- Window openings in a large number of schemes examined, regardless of design style used, were noted to be placed in an ordered pattern, positioned at regular distances along the main elevations often from the central axis of the elevation in symmetrically designed buildings and from features such as the main entrance in non-symmetrical compositions.
- Vertical elements were employed as part of a large number of schemes and were noted to be positioned in a variety of places within civic design schemes, e.g. above the main entrance, at the centre of a secondary façade, at the ends of the front elevation and to one side of the principal façade.
- The treatment of a main entrance was recognized to be a major element of late-Victorian and Edwardian civic design. Not only were main entrances generally noted to consist of double doors and be recessed from the line of the principal elevation but they were often placed towards the centre of the front elevation. Main entrances were also recognized on many occasions to be marked by a variety of design features in proximity to them which included vertical elements, sculpting, columns, pilasters, gables, pediments, a flight of steps directly in front of the doorway, and possibly an open space





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other than that of a roadway or the alignment of an oncoming roadway. Secondary entrances were often treated in a similar manner to main entrances although with smaller sized design features placed in proximity to them.

## Roads and Spaces

A significant number of buildings identified within civic design schemes were noticed to utilize the local road pattern. Roadways were recognized, for example, to influence the position of vertical elements and the handling of the corners of a building and where a roadway directly approached an end of an elevation it was sometimes seen that the corner was treated in a different manner so as to terminate the approaching vista. By way of example, one possible reason why Edward Mountford, the architect of Sheffield's Town Hall (1891-1897), put the clock tower towards the end of the front elevation was that it allowed the structure to associate with its surrounding, an important principle of civic design, with its position in the building's plan reinforcing the street pattern around the structure. Mountford's design report for the Town Hall (The Builder, 1890), noted that the placing of the tower at a corner of the front elevation was a result of the street pattern around the building which made the tower "conspicuous from all points", and gave views towards the site from along the number of roadways which approached the structure. Furthermore the choice of the corner location for the tower allowed Mountford to conveniently join together the Pinstone Street and Surrey Street elevations, the two most prominent outer walls of the building with each other and to mask the sharp angle at which they adjoined, instead taking the eye up to the top of the tower where a large clock was placed.

A significant number of civic buildings examined exploited the local road pattern to assist with the civic design process primarily through the handling of vistas, using the direct alignment of the oncoming roadway to meet with prominent features on the main elevations. At the Guildhall, Portsmouth, for instance, roadways that approached the southern elevation of the building were utilized to establish views toward the centre of the elevation with their alignments corresponding with the position of an entrance. At Leeds a similar event occurred in the design of the Town Hall although the axis of an oncoming road, Park Cross Street, did not meet directly with the building. Instead statuary was sited in front of the main elevation at the place where the oncoming road alignment met with the central axis of the edifice. The Docks Office, Hull, was formed with domes placed at the end of the front elevation so as to help terminate the vista along a thoroughfare that came directly towards it. Also in Hull the change in the alignment of one of the settlement's most prominent roadways, Alfred Gelder Street, was used to determine the position of the entrance to the Law Courts section of the Guildhall. At Cartwright Hall, Bradford, the road pattern around the building was laid out as part of the building's scheme and showed the influence of the building's form upon it. Not only was a symmetrical road layout employed but all roads were laid out in accord





with the central axis of the building. The side roads in front of the building approached each end of the principal elevation, in so doing adjoining with the longitudinal axes established in the wings of the building.

To illustrate how space about a civic building was used within British civic design attention shall now be given to Bolton Town Hall (1866-1873 by William Hill). The Town Hall at Bolton was composed in a Corinthian Order based upon attached and detached columns supporting a balustrade and entablature. Mawson and Atkinson (1911:429-432) commented upon their admiration "for the noble proportions of the Town Hall and the sense of scale in its parts". The building, added Mawson in, was "magnificent", and presented the settlement with an "air of quiet dignity so often lacking in a manufacturing town" (Mawson, 1911:267). The orderly disposition of the columns and pilasters on the walls of the building, and the formal rhythm established by their placing, was noted (The Builder, 1873a:417) as giving a stately impression.

The principal elevation of the Town Hall faced eastwards and was marked in the centre by the main entrance which was distinguished by a projected building line that provided a degree of emphasis in the composition which was further enhanced by the introducing of design features in front of the double doorway. This included a large portico consisting of Corinthian columns surmounted by a pediment within which lay sculptured decoration. The main entrance and portico were reached after rising up a broad flight of more than 20 steps, some over 100 feet in length which although large were in proportion to the long front elevation (204 feet in length) which added to the overall impression of the edifice. Thus by placing the building on a platform, a common practice in British civic design, the new public building was made more visible within central Bolton, in so doing reinforcing its importance to the town's fabric. The Town Hall's visibility in the town was further enhanced by the edifice's site being situated within one of the more lofty parts of Bolton (The Builder, 1873b:442) and secondly, the scheme incorporated a 200 feet high clock tower, a feature that allowed the building to become a conspicuous architectural object from all parts of the settlement. Importantly in planning terms the position of the clock tower was towards the east of the plan along the central axial line along which were placed the main entrance, portico and flight of steps. The extra masonry used to support the feature had little impact on the building's plan and was used to form the walls of the entrance vestibule which was positioned to the rear of the main entrance. Additional vertical elements, ventilation shafts that were richly decorated so as to disguise their practical function, were placed at equal distances from the central axis of the front facade which thus further reinforced the symmetrical impression of the elevation. Significantly too in terms of civic design, a space other than that of a roadway, known as Town Hall Square, was established as part of the scheme in front of the principal facade. This space was later filled with architectural elements that helped further enhance the overall impact of the building within central Bolton and strengthened the

design success of the scheme. Yet by providing open space about the Town Hall, particularly to the front of the main elevation, the building had a considerable effect on the on-looking eye. By creating a scheme that involved both the planning of space close to the building as well as the design and plan of the structure, Hill allowed the space and structure to form a coherent composition. This combining of a public building and open space within the single design scheme was important to civic design and as a result of means successfully employed to unite the building and its surroundings, principally Town Hall Square, Bolton's Town Hall must be recognized as being a civic design piece of much significance. Such a view is further enhanced when the setting of the building are studied in more detail.

The general plan of Bolton's Town Hall was rectangular in shape being almost 205 feet in length and 177 feet in breadth. The building's plan was composed along symmetrical lines and was laid out in a simple manner that largely mirrored itself across the central east-west axis formed to the rear of the primary entrance at the centre of the principal elevation. The most dominant feature of the internal arrangement was a space known as the Albert Hall, a room 112 feet long and 56 feet wide. This space, to be used for

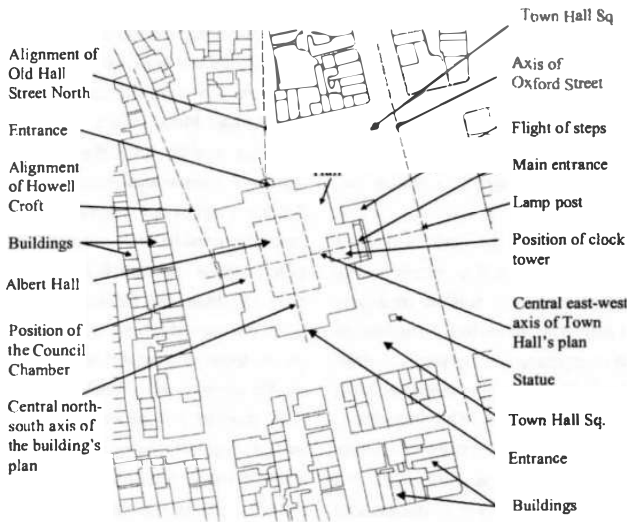


**Figure 1**. The Town Hall and setting in 1882 (Source: Ordnance Survey)





public meetings and concerts, was positioned at the centre of the building's plan but was turned at 90 degrees to the central east-west axis from the main entrance in so doing helping form a north-south axis through the centre of the building. This alignment was also marked by secondary entrances which in the case of the entrance positioned at the centre of the north facing facade corresponded with the alignment of an approaching roadway (Old Hall Street North). Thus the road's axis was continued inside the plan of the building and only in the more successful examples of Victorian and Edwardian civic design does such a situation occur. Additionally, the portico at the centre of the western elevation, which formed the outer wall to the Council Chamber, was also a resourceful civic design feature in that it too met with the alignment of an approaching roadway, Howell Croft, in so doing terminating the approaching vista. In this context the grandiose scheme in Bolton is distinctive and can be seen to allow the town to punch above its civic weight in terms of population size and resources. Furthermore, the importance of the open space known as Town Hall Square to the Town Hall scheme was demonstrated in 1873 when a statue was placed to the south of the space in proximity to the flight of steps located at the front of the edifice's main entrance. In 1900 another statue was added and this feature was positioned at the (opposite) northern side of the Square, also in proximity to the building's steps. But its position, like the first statue, bore little association to the plan of the Town Hall and the alignments of oncoming roadways, only loosely corresponding to the building line of the north and south facing elevations' central sections. This lack of association between the statuary and building was disappointing and did little to how the structure and its surroundings enjoyed a coherent alliance. However, somewhat significantly, after the Town Hall was completed the central east-west axis of the main elevation was marked in Town Hall Square by a lamp post whose position also directly corresponded with the north-south alignment of Oxford Street. While in civic design terms the marking of the road and building's principal alignment was significant its importance was arguably reduced by the fact that the axis was marked only by a lamp post. Had an architectural feature of a greater artistic value been placed upon the selected site for the lamp post then the overall civic design worth of the Town Hall and Town Hall Square scheme would have been higher. Instead the relating of the lamp post with such a monumental building and its most conspicuous compositional axis makes for a somewhat unusual, albeit successful, civic design situation.

## Roads and Civic Design: Some Additional Comments

A significant number of civic buildings examined as part of the study, almost 25 in total (about 20%), utilised the local road pattern to assist with the civic design process primarily through the handling of vistas, using the direct alignment of the oncoming roadway to meet with prominent features on the main elevations. Despite local road patterns only being influential upon a relatively small proportion of public buildings erected from 1880 to 1914 its importance

to the practice of civic design should not be ignored, for in many schemes it formed an integral component of the design and planning process. For instance, at the Guildhall, Portsmouth (see Figure 2) roadways that approached the

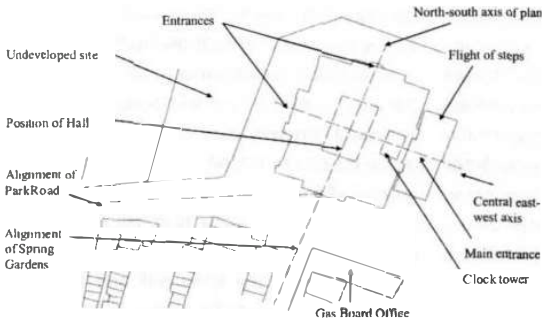


**Figure 2.** A plan of the Guildhall and its setting at the time of construction (source: Ordnance Survey, 1896)

southern elevation of the building were utilised to establish views toward the centre of the elevation with their alignments corresponding with the position of an entrance. At Leeds a similar event occurred in the design of the Town Hall although the axis of an oncoming road, Park Cross Street, did not meet directly with the building. Instead statuary was sited in front of the main elevation at the place where the oncoming road alignment met with the central axis of the edifice. At Sheffield roadways around the Town Hall influenced the position of the clock tower in the building's plan which was subsequently placed at the corner of the front elevation towards a prominent road junction rather than at the centre of the elevation, and the Docks Office, Hull, was formed with domes placed at the end of the front elevation so as to help terminate the vista along a thoroughfare that came directly towards it. Also in Hull the change in the alignment of one of the settlement's most prominent roadways, Alfred Gelder Street, was used to determine the position of the entrance to the Law Courts section of the Guildhall. At Cartwright Hall, Bradford (Figure 3), the road pattern around the building was laid out as part of the building's scheme and showed the influence of the building's form upon it. Not only was a symmetrical road layout employed but all roads were laid out in accord with the central axis of the building. The side roads in

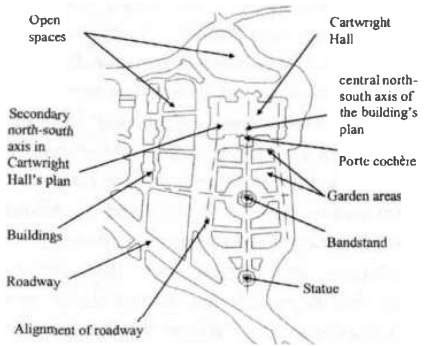


**Figure 3.** Cartwright Hall and its surroundings (source: Ordnance Survey, 1908)





front of the building approached each end of the principal elevation, in so doing adjoining with the longitudinal axes established in the wings of the building.

## British Civic Design: An Example of How More Could Have Been Done

The history of large scale public architecture and civic designing in late-Victorian Leicester begins with the Town Hall scheme (1874-6), arguably the grandest public edifice to be constructed in the town during the period examined. Designed in a Queen Anne style by F. J. Hames, the winner of the design competition established in 1873, assessed was T. H. Wyatt, the Town Hall was a substantial piece of architecture which measured 216 feet in length and 118 feet in breadth. Pevsner (1960:150) described the building as being "remarkably free and comfortable-looking for its date and its official purpose". The Builder (1897) remarked that the building was a "structure of good character; not, perhaps, very imposing or monumental, and rather too much based upon domestic examples to have a very official expression; but designed in quiet, good taste, for the most part, and well grouped". Cunningham (1981:53) recognised that the chosen design by Hames was "chiefly impressive for its facade, but none the less was not grand in the traditional way, and in any case the architect, F. J. Hames, was Leicester born". Thus the selection of Hames not only provided a means to promote locally based design talent, perhaps a desire of the Corporation, but also to produce an impressive structure for a relatively modest cost, £53,000. The result was distinct piece of civic design: "something extraordinary: a transcendent demonstration of the spirit of the age, and of the town at its best" (Simmons, 1974:49). However its design bore little relation to the existing design vernacular of the town in terms of both its character and scale although a sense of association was established thorough the building materials used, red brick with Rutland stone for the window dressing. Tiles were used for the rooftop.

In terms of its design Leicester Town Hall was a model providing "something of a breakaway in stylistic terms, being the first and only major town hall to be built in the Queen Anne style, making full use of the freedom of layout but without Gothic dressing" (Cunningham, 1981: 125). Furthermore the Leicester Town Hall (see figure 4) broke from convention in that it was the first large scale building of its type to be constructed not from stone but red brick, a building material not commonly used for such a prominent public building type in the Victorian period. But the use of the material did much to promote its use in the following years: "After Leicester, though, brick was established as an acceptably grand material even in other styles" (Cunningham, 1981:165). However as brick was a commonly used building material, for a broad range of buildings too, erected within the central area of Victorian Leicester, the new building fitted in somewhat comfortably with the edifice's setting.

The design of the Town Hall employed many elements that were common in civic design, which included the symmetrical form of its main elevations, the regular bays established along

**Figures 4.** Leicester Town Hall's front elevation as seen from Town Hall Square

its principal facades between which were placed window openings, the increased floor to ceiling height of the ground and first floors, the principal floor levels, and the different form of the fenestration along them so as to further emphasise them. A clock tower was positioned at one end of the main elevation, "well placed" according to The Builder (1897:497), which faced east towards an open space known as Town Hall Square. The placing of the vertical element not at the centre of the building was an uncommon feature of civic design at that time. But the most elevated part of the Town Hall clock tower was composed with sculptured detailing, in keeping with vertical elements used in other notable civic schemes in Britain, very much in contrast to the plain lower section. The centre of the building was not left open but was marked in a vertical manner at roof level by a large chimney structure and gable. At the street level the centre of the building's main elevation was marked by the main entrance and flight of steps in front of it. Significantly for the civic design of the building, the central axis was continued away outside of the building in an open area found in front of the building.

Situated on a site in central Leicester located between Bishop Street and Horsefair Street, a site was unencumbered from other structures, the Town Hall's setting included a public house, a





Methodist chapel, the Theatre Royal and a number of small scale industrial buildings. To the front of the Town Hall site was an open space developed as part of the Town Hall scheme by architect Hames, the space becoming known as Town Hall Square, with the Town Hall scheme, including Town Hall Square, fitting well into the existing urban form. Both the space and the symmetrically formed building were designed together yet neither the design of the building or the layout of the space related in an adequate manner to the surrounding environment, which in civic design terms weakened the scheme.

As highlighted earlier the Town Hall scheme did not merely involve the design and construction of the Town Hall. As part of the scheme Hames was asked by the Corporation to lay out an area of ground in front of the new building, subsequently laid out in a formal manner as a public garden (The Builder, 1897:497). The space was embellished thanks to Israel Hart who donated a sum of money for a bronze fountain, also designed by Hames, to be placed within the space at the time of it being laid out. This is significant in terms of the schemes' civic design as the fountain was positioned at the centre of the area, in so doing relating to the central axis of the front elevation of the Town Hall which was marked by the main entrance. Thus the building and the space in front of it were brought together in a coherent manner. This uniting of a building with surrounding space was noted by Mawson (1911) as being an ideal of civic design.

The shape of Town Hall Square was rectangular, similar to the shape of the Town Hall building. Similarly too, the space was about the same size as the site of the nearby building. The fountain, the primary architectural feature of the space, was surrounded by a small circular pond and a footpath, which led westwards towards the roadway positioned in front of the Town Hall, laid down as part of the scheme, and the main entrance of the Town Hall. A rain gauge was also placed within the space, located along the central north-south axis through the area, an alignment at ninety degrees to the one established at the front of the Town Hall's main entrance. The perimeter of the Town Hall Square was marked by trees, in contrast to the middle of the space that was left open, which helped soften the landscape.

The plan of the five storey Town Hall, including basement and attic levels, was noted in The Builder (1897:497) to be "convenient" even though by the end of the nineteenth century the building was already becoming too small for the needs of the Corporation (The Builder, 1897: 497). The main spaces in the internal arrangement were located within the plan of the building's principal floor, the ground floor level, and these rooms included the Borough Court, measuring over 60 feet in length and 40 feet in width, and another court room space known as the 'Additional Room for Court of Committee'. These two spaces were both located in proximity to the main corridor which formed a longitudinal axis parallel to the line of the main elevation, and occupied "nearly all the space within the main corridor"(The Builder, 1897:497), that is the area towards the centre of the internal arrangement. The Council Chamber, a significant room within any Town Hall composition, was situated in the north-west section of the

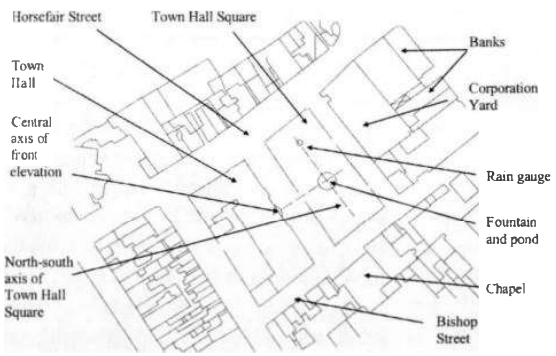


**Figure 5.** The Town Hall and Square (source: Ordnance Survey, 1902)

plan, that is towards a rear corner, on an upper floor level.

The central west-east running axis of the plan, to the rear of the centre of the 230 feet long front facade, in effect divided the building's plan into two parts. The axis at the front elevation was marked by a number of features, as noted previously, and the Public Entrance, the main entrance, led directly into an entrance hallway and the Public Hall, a space with dimensions of 20 feet in width by almost 40 feet in length, which was used as a waiting area for the nearby court rooms. The first section was situated towards the middle of the internal arrangement where the Law Courts other spaces associated with it were placed. The other section of the internal arrangement, near to the Horsefair Street elevation at the northern end of the building, was the filled with spaces used by various departments of the Corporation.

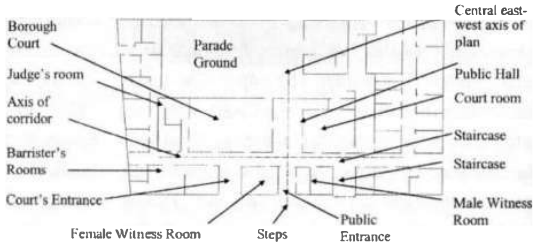


**Figure 6.** Leicester Town Hall's ground floor plan

The symmetry of the central section of the building's ground floor plan to the rear of the front elevation was also continued by the placing of two other features at equal distances from the centrally positioned Public Entrance. The first characteristic consisted of the Law Courts Entrance, directly behind which was located the Borough Court. The other feature was the Municipal Stairs, the grand staircase which provided access to the upper floor levels. Sandwiched between each of these staircases and the Public Entrance at the centre of the principal elevation were two equally sized spaces, the Female Witness Room and Male Witness Room.

A major criticism of the Town Hall scheme, including Town Hall Square, which in some ways was typical of British civic designing in that the rare opportunities for grandiose architectural and urban space planning were not often fully understood, was that is bore little relation to its surroundings (Simmons, 1974:50), which was composed of buildings of a various of heights and bulks by the end of the nineteenth century. It was not until 1905 that the Corporation attempted to redress this situation when the Public Library on Bishop Street was erected. Significantly too, the library was the first major public building to be erected in Leicester since the Town Hall project, such was the slow pace of public building in the town. Naturally this lack of public activity affected both the civic design and form of Leicester during the period considered even though this period of relatively little activity, between the mid-1870s through to the early 1900s, was when Leicester's population growth rate reached its peak and the pressures upon the Corporation to satisfy the needs of the local people were arguably at their greatest.

## Conclusion

The development of the urban form and the practice of civic design within a number of large British provincial towns and cities at the end of the nineteenth century and start of the twentieth century have been described in detail within the previous sections of this work. Major civic design characteristics that were in evidence at that time relating not only to the composition of the main elevations, the internal arrangements and the environments about public buildings identified in civic design schemes have been recognised. The importance of open spaces and roadways to civic design has also been shown, and through the example of Bolton Town Hall, the significance of open space has been shown to be integral in assisting a civic structure relate to its surrounding environment. In addition, this paper has shown that often when public spaces were established (usually after the completion of the nearby building) about civic edifices statuary was often placed inside the space in positions relating to the building's plan or primary elevations, in so doing helping bring the space and structure into complete accord, which as Mawson remarked in his groundbreaking work 'Civic Art' is an ideal of civic design.

To conclude, in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain a large number of new public buildings were erected and many that were built were of significance to the civic identity and design of urban places. Furthermore many of the built schemes represented very effective exercises in public expenditure, as numerous Corporation spent by today's standards relatively little finance on erecting a large sized buildings such as Town Halls. However, in civic design terms, the buildings that were constructed often were not related in too strong a manner to their settings, an





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element of the more convincing civic design schemes between about 1880 and 1914, apart from maybe a Town Hall scheme which was composed with an open space other than that of a new roadway in front of it. Yet, as was the case in many other provincial towns and cities, the selection of the sites for these buildings made the practice of civic design problematic. Buildings frequently were erected on a site which offered little possibilities for relating the edifice to its setting through civic design practices common at that time, apart from by small scale details such as a centrally placed main entrance or by stylistic association to its setting. In addition, the lack of public designing in some large-sized settlements, e.g. Nottingham and Leicester during the period examined, thus highlighted that the practice of civic design was not perceived to be a pressing matter by the local Corporations and this situation would only be addressed in the Inter-war period (1918-1939) when these Corporations for the first time made a significant attempt to erect a large number of new public buildings at both the centre and periphery of the newly established city in order to serve the needs of the local population.

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**Notes**

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