

## VIII

### William Newton and Gibside

*Margaret Wills*

**W**ILLIAM Newton (1730–1798) was the first professional architect native to Northumberland who specialised in country houses.<sup>1</sup> Not all his work has as yet been recognised and one estate which was on the margins of his work for over forty years was Gibside, County Durham. Under the supervision of the owner George Bowes (1701–1760) the grounds of the estate were landscaped with garden buildings arranged to enhance its dens and sloping meadows. It is suggested in this paper that William Newton was responsible for a garden building completed at Gibside fifteen years after Bowes' death.

William Newton was not employed to design buildings at Gibside during the main expansion of the estate as his first architectural commissions were after the last illness and death of George Bowes in 1760. However, his connection with the Bowes family had begun with a letter to George Bowes' agent, William Leaton, in 1753 when he wished to buy stones from Crookgate Quarry near Gibside.<sup>2</sup> The stones must have been for the Newcastle Infirmary, which was completed that year. The young Newton's letter was assured and competent and showed that he had been well educated. At this time Newton was twenty three and acting as assistant to his father, Robert Newton, who supervised the building of Newcastle Infirmary according to Daniel Garrett's plans.<sup>3</sup> Bowes was one of the six Presidents chosen by Governors of the Infirmary and may have met the young William Newton at the Infirmary site. In 1759 when Bowes' "Little House" or lavatory needed repair, William Newton was contacted. He wrote to Bowes to tell him that the bricklayer had been instructed to begin work and "to have the wall Built [rather] than to Appear so Much in Ruins as it

now Does".<sup>4</sup> It was a confident letter, one written between equals, a quality which characterised his relations with other clients such as William Ord of Fenham.

By 1759 most of Bowes' garden buildings had been completed, and the Chapel, which was the culmination of Bowes' plans for his estate, became his main preoccupation. He had intended it should be built after his death, but when he became ill he wished to see the Chapel begun during his lifetime. Bowes chose James Paine (1717–1789), a well-respected architect, who had already worked for him, to design the Chapel. Stone was quarried for the Chapel at the end of 1759 and building began the following year.<sup>5</sup>

Although Bowes did not wish to employ a young, untried architect to design his Chapel, no such inhibition stopped his sister Elizabeth from employing Newton. She had bought a house in Old Elvet, Durham, for £500 in July 1758<sup>6</sup> and employed the same workmen to decorate it as those who worked on her brother's estate at Gibside. William Newton was the architect for the alterations,<sup>7</sup> with carving by Christopher Richardson,<sup>8</sup> who had sculpted the Gibside figure of Liberty on its tall monument, and undertaken delicate stone carving for Gibside Chapel. There was also plasterwork by Philip Daniel<sup>9</sup> and paintwork by Henry Smith,<sup>10</sup> both of whom had worked at Gibside. Before she could enjoy her new home Elizabeth Bowes died. After the initial payment of £100 to Newton by George Bowes, her executor, two further sums of £20 were paid for bargain work.<sup>11</sup> It was Newton's practice to provide plans and materials and to organise the day to day work of building, so that the total of £140 would cover both the plan and the work itself. Another payment

of £20 was made for the completion of the work in 1761.<sup>12</sup>

Newton's work was beginning to be known and his practice grew. He undertook the building of St. Anne's,<sup>13</sup> a Chapel of Ease to All Saints Church, for the Corporation of Newcastle in 1764. It was situated on the fields above the River Tyne outside the city walls. The building was beautifully sited and built. It was rectangular with a wide bow at the east end. Elegantly recessed windows, (fig. 1) distinguished all save the west side of the church. Here a Tuscan portico formed the entrance to the church, behind which a taller pedimented wall outlined the nave. A sturdy spire finished the composition.

In 1765 he was asked to design a Lunatic Asylum, again by Newcastle Corporation. It was a plain building with its design only relieved by a columned entrance door surmounted by a pediment. There were twelve cells for patients on the ground floor with the keeper's room and kitchen. The upper floor had a cornice above and hipped roof. The design was simple and competent.<sup>14</sup> He also developed Charlotte Square, Newcastle, as a speculative development for himself from 1769.<sup>15</sup>

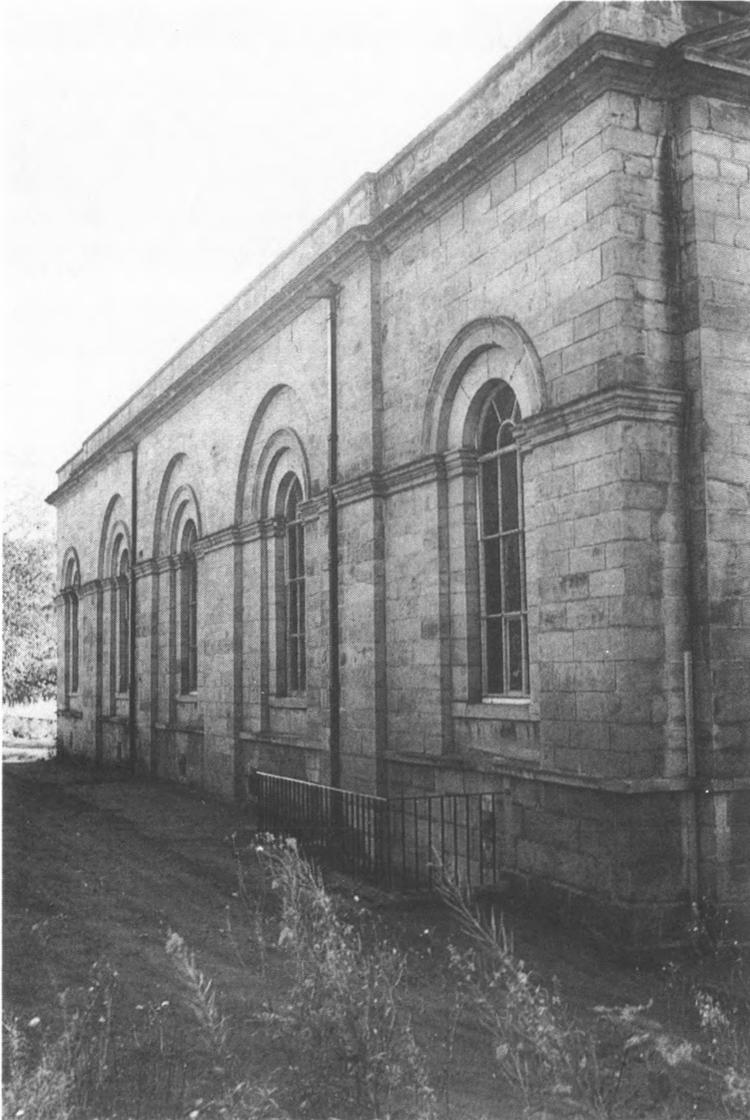
After George Bowes' death in 1760, the Gibside estate was administered by his widow and the trustees of his will until his only child, Mary Eleanor, came of age. She married the 9th Earl of Strathmore on her eighteenth birthday in 1767, and her possessions, including her aunt's house in Elvet, became the property of her husband. This conformed to the Married Woman's Property Act. Lord Strathmore wished to make improvements to those already carried out by Newton and a "Plan and estimate of the House and intended offices in Elvet, Durham 29 June 1772" was produced.<sup>16</sup> The drawing was not signed but the handwriting on the plan was Newton's. It showed the outline of the site with an entry from Old Elvet through a passage to a courtyard leading to a laundry, kitchen, stables, privy and garden. Mr. Salvin's garden was shown next door. The house is now part of the Royal County Hotel and Newton's alterations

were largely obliterated by later developments.

Once George Bowes' Chapel was weather-fast in 1768 Mary Eleanor ceased to take an interest in its building and it was left to her son to complete it. She had been an enthusiast of botany from an early age and later employed plant hunters to bring her exotic specimens. In February 1772 work on a Green House to contain these plants was begun (fig. 2).<sup>17</sup>

The architect is unknown, but as the plan bears some resemblance to James Paine's plan for the Temple of Diana at Weston Park, Staffordshire,<sup>18</sup> the Green House has sometimes been attributed to him. The Temple of Diana (1765-1770) was completed two years before the Gibside building was begun and is a much more complex structure than the Gibside Green House, having a cellar, four rooms on the ground floor and two on the floor above. In 1760 Paine had left his practice in the north-east and devoted himself to work in the south of England, where he largely built country houses. When the building of the Gibside Green House began Paine was engaged in work at Wardour Castle (1770-1776) which was one of the grandest of his country house designs.<sup>19</sup> At the same time he was building speculative housing in Salisbury Street, London, and was trying to provide a new exhibition room in London for the Society of Artists. It does not seem likely that when fully occupied with professional matters Paine would undertake the design of a relatively small building for Gibside. His first volume of designs published in 1767 was too early to show such a building, and it does not appear in the second volume of his designs published in 1783.<sup>20</sup>

By 1772 William Newton was an established Newcastle architect. He had not yet designed a greenhouse, but had made drawings for garden buildings at Wallington in Northumberland. One of these was for a Rotunda (1769) which was not carried out.<sup>21</sup> He had acted as architect at William Ord's Benwell property near Newcastle from 1765, when he submitted a plan for a farmhouse<sup>22</sup> and also worked on the house, gateway and wall.<sup>23</sup> Ord bought an estate at



*Fig. 1 St. Anne's Chapel, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1764–8, by William Newton. North front.*

Whitfield, Northumberland, where Newton designed a Church, Parsonage and the Cupola Bridge across the River Allen in 1766–67.<sup>24</sup> He also acted as William Ord's architect at Fenham Hall, near Newcastle, where he added

two wings and a new north front in about 1770.<sup>25</sup> He began to build Kielder Castle on the North Tyne in 1772.<sup>26</sup> It was a hunting lodge in the Gothick style for the Duke of Northumberland. Having secured the richest

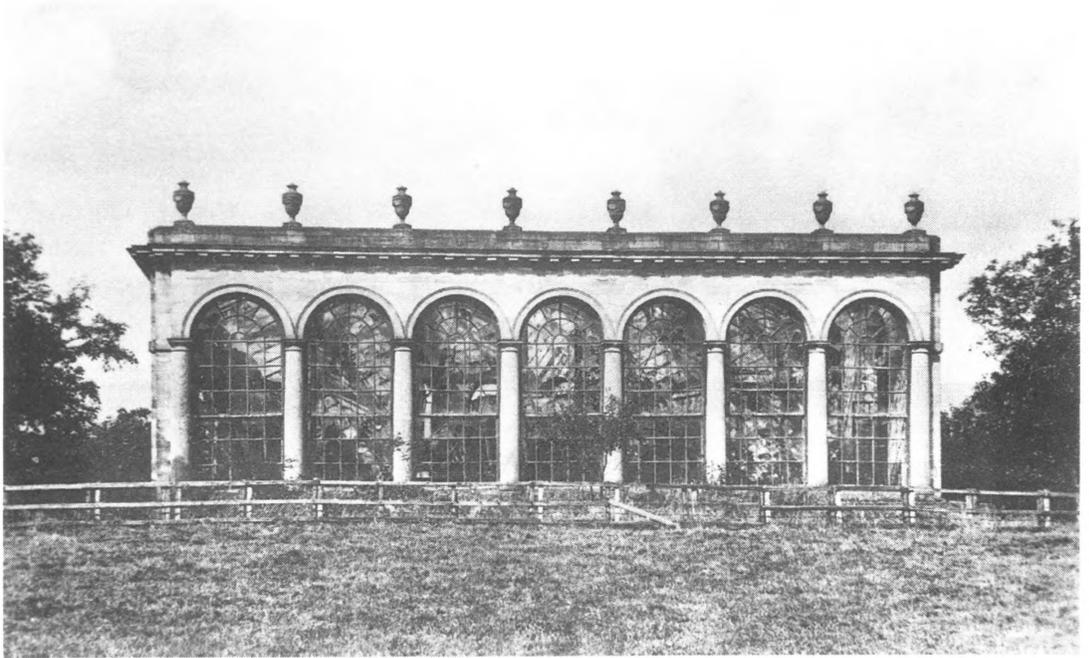


Fig. 2 *Gibside Green House* c.1911.

man in Northumberland as his patron Newton's position was secure. These commissions would have influenced Mary Eleanor's choice of architect. It is known that she paid great attention to the opinions of others.

Mary Eleanor had studied botany from the age of twelve and was later called "the most intelligent female botanist of the age".<sup>27</sup> She wished to collect rare plants and to preserve them in her new Green House. Her father had in his library a copy of a two volume folio edition of *The Gardeners' Dictionary*, by Philip Miller, published in the 1730s, which showed how a green house should be built.<sup>28</sup> During her teens she often stayed with her Aunt Jane in London and was left to amuse herself with literary pursuits and her study of botany. Philip Miller, the author of *The Gardeners' Dictionary*, was in charge of the Apothecaries' Garden in Chelsea and was one of the most

successful plant growers of the day. No doubt Mary Eleanor sought his advice and by 1772, when the opportunity came to build her Green House, she knew exactly what she wanted.

The new Green House measured 60 × 40 feet 9 inches and stood on a podium (fig. 2). It was rectangular in shape save for a canted bay at the rear. The front of the building faced south-east and here seven tall windows formed an arcade of Tuscan columns. The arches sprang from pairs of attached columns which clasped the stone jambs to which the sashes were fixed. The opening of the large windows at the front and sides was complex in order that air could be directed to various parts of the Green House, while at the back there were five smaller windows on the exposed north-west side. There were two small lobbies at the rear of the building used to prevent draughts reaching exotic plants. The lobby nearest the



*Fig. 3 The arcade fronting Gibside Green House in 1987.*

house had a fireplace with four decorative niches, making a reception area for visitors, while the other lobby housed a furnace to heat the Green House. The room in between the two lobbies acted as a buffer against the cold northern climate. The structure was faced in

ashlar with a brick interior to the walls and lath and plaster finish. The floor of the largest room was made of wood and had a wooden stage in the centre to display plants.<sup>29</sup> The Green House stood at the top of a steep slope and there was no room for the customary

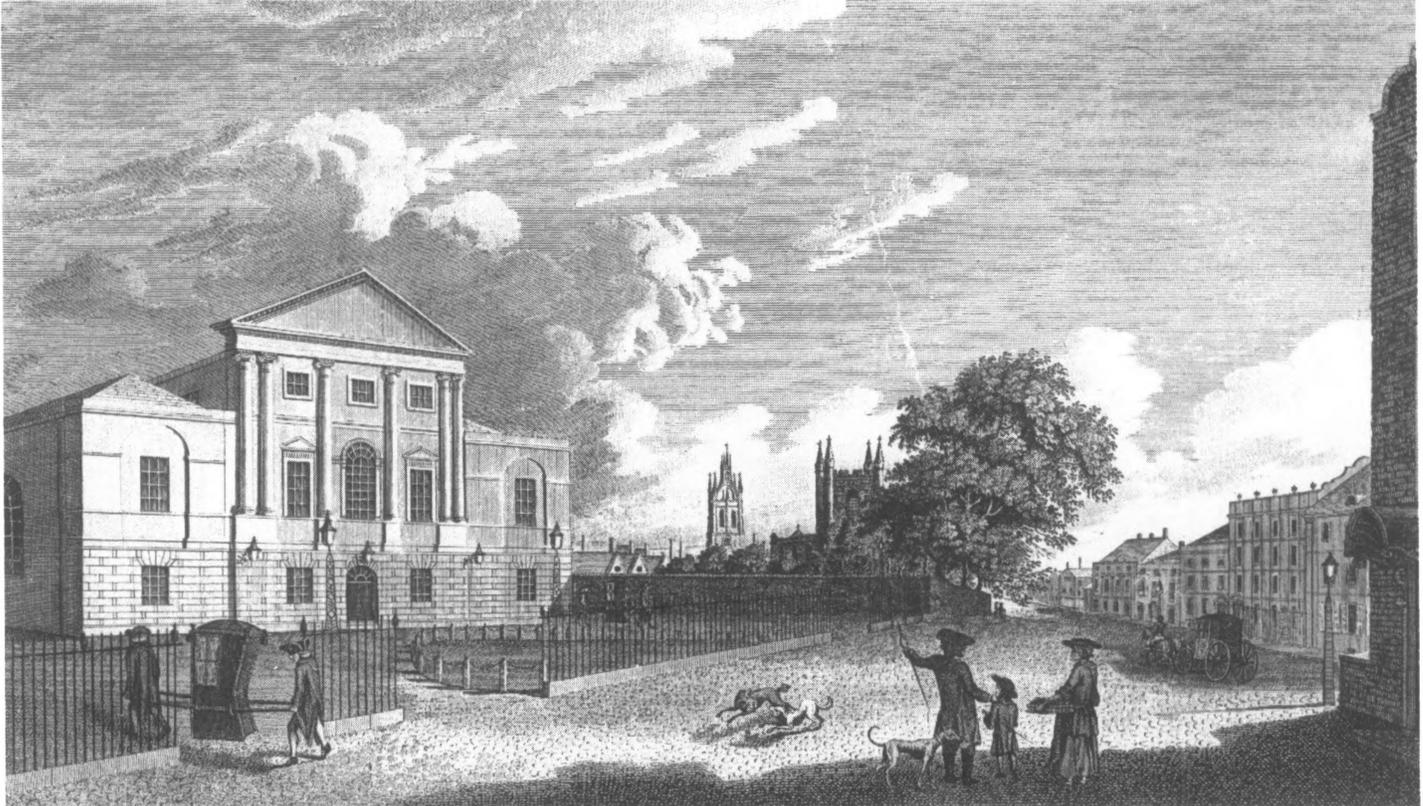


Fig. 4 *The Assembly Rooms, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1774–6, by William Newton, taken from Brand's History of Newcastle (1789).*

lean-to potting sheds at the back of the building. The Green House was a place to display plants and work on their cultivation would be undertaken in the Walled Garden or the out-houses abutting its north wall. It was of up-to-date green house design, save for the fact that its roof was of slate not glass. It can be suggested that Newton undertook this work because he had the necessary skill, he knew the estate and had formerly been employed by the family. The fact that an architect is not mentioned in the Strathmore Archive at Durham Record Office leaves the question open. He was an admirer of James Paine's work and it is possible that he visited, or had some knowledge of, the building at Weston Park.

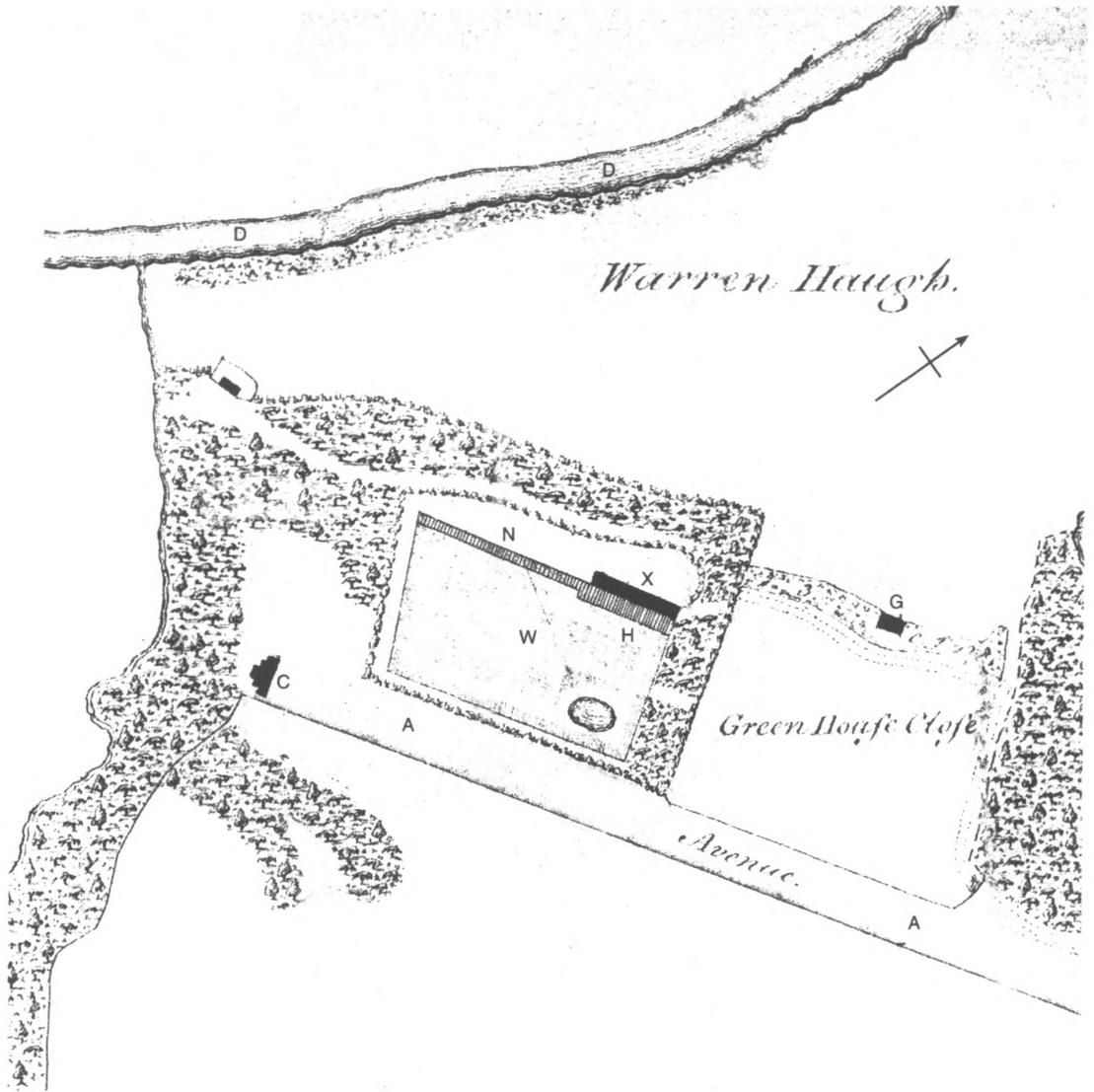
Newton's recessed windows of St. Anne's Church (fig. 1) bear a distinct resemblance to the arcade of the Gibside Green House (fig. 3) leading one to suppose that they were designed by the same architect. The canted bay at the back of the Green House was not a necessary part of the plan, but gave a view of the water meadows leading to the River Derwent. It was an element of design often used by Newton. He was a competent architect and guided by Mary Eleanor's knowledge of botany and the cultivation of plants he could have planned a Green House to suit her requirements.

When the Green House was nearing completion in 1774 William Newton began the work for which he is most famous. The building of the Newcastle Assembly Rooms (1774-1776) made his reputation. Thomas Sopwith described the structure: "The building has a stone front adorned with wings, and having a pediment in the centre, supported by six Ionic columns. A spacious entrance-hall leads to a handsome staircase. The apartments used as assembly rooms are equal, if not superior, to similar towns in the Kingdom."<sup>30</sup> The skill shown in the columns of the Gibside Green House (fig. 3) is matched by the engaged columns of the Assembly Rooms (fig. 4). Newton made his name with this design funded by public subscription and the Northumbrian gentry and wealthy merchants hastened to com-

mission him to design their country houses. He provided houses which were usually plain with canted bays reaching to the full height of the building or columns at the entrance to give distinction to the design. They were elegant, compact and tailored to the needs of their owners. If Gothick details or more decoration were required he would provide them.

On 11th December 1792 Newton was again referred to in the Gibside Cash Books when John Redshaw was claiming "a bill of expences at Newcastle for Materials for Mr. Newton from 11 Aug last to this Inst P Account [£]1.11.0."<sup>31</sup> The only entry on the 11th August referred to the New Hot House, which may mean that Newton was also concerned in this building. This may be the hot house shown on John Fryer's map of 1803 (fig. 5, letter N), which reached from the west side of the walled garden to the Garden House.<sup>32</sup> At the Garden House the width of the hot house range doubled until it reached the east side of the walled garden. William Newton later appeared in the Gibside records on December 31 1793, as having sent a letter to Gibside, but unfortunately there is no record of its contents. By 1795, when he was asked to remodel the Exchange and Guildhall for the Newcastle upon Tyne Corporation, Newton's health had deteriorated. The signatures of both William Newton, then sixty-five, and David Stephenson, aged thirty-eight, were on five of the original drawings.<sup>33</sup> It may be that Newton was the designer and Stephenson supervised the construction of the building. Poor health meant he could give less time to architectural work and had to withdraw from his last commission at Hexham Abbey house and he died in May 1798. The record of a final connection between Newton and Gibside occurred some time after his death. In November 1802 the Gibside accounts record "By Mr Wm. Newton Excu Paid Mr. Thos Harvey The Balance of their Account for Mason Work as settled by the Arbitrators [£]106. 13. 10".<sup>34</sup>

William Newton was concerned with Gibside, or the Bowes' properties, at intervals during his life and he may have designed the Green House which completed the layout of



- |   |               |   |                               |
|---|---------------|---|-------------------------------|
| A | Avenue        | H | Old Hot House                 |
| C | Chapel        | N | New Hot House                 |
| D | River Derwent | W | Walled Garden                 |
| G | Green House   | X | Garden House and outbuildings |

Fig. 5 Plan of Gibside, by John Fryer, 1803. Detail of Walled Garden and Green House.

Note: for clarity, plot numbers and acreage figures have been omitted and an approximate North indication added.

the estate. While no documentary evidence has come to light to confirm this idea, the fact that no other architect has been associated with buildings on the estate at this time, must lead one to think that William Newton was the designer.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Earl of Strathmore and Kinghorne for permission to study and quote from the Strathmore Archive at Durham Record Office and to thank the staff there for their help. The staff at Northumberland Record Office have also been helpful in the preparation of this article and Tyne and Wear Archives have made some useful drawings available. The photographs illustrating this article are by Alec Wills.

### REFERENCES

#### Abbreviations

- DRO Durham Record Office, Strathmore Archive  
 NRO Northumberland Record Office  
 TWAS Tyne and Wear Archives Service

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Phoebe Lowery, "William Newton—An Eminent Architect?", *Northern Architect*, Winter 1994–95, 5th series, issue 1, pp. 15–17. Gives a useful introduction to Newton's work.

<sup>2</sup>DRO D/St/C2/3/20 (2) Letter dated March 27 1753

<sup>3</sup>Margaret Wills, "One of its Kind. The Newcastle Infirmary", *Country Life*, October 10, 1991, p. 124. Gives the early history of Newcastle Infirmary.

<sup>4</sup>DRO D/St/C1/3/31 Letter dated December 1 1759

<sup>5</sup>Margaret Wills, *Gibside and the Bowes Family*. (Newcastle upon Tyne, Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1995) pp. 50–60

<sup>6</sup>DRO D/St/E5/5/9 Cash Books 31 July 1758 "By Mrs Eliza Bowes. Paid for the Purchase Money of her House in Elvet Durham [£]500"

<sup>7</sup>DRO D/St/E5/5/9 Cash Books 4 December 1759. "By George Bowes Esq. Execr. of Mrs. Eliz. Bowes. Paid Mr. Thorp he paid Mr Wm. Newton on Accot. of Bargn. Work. [£]100."

<sup>8</sup>DRO D/St/E5/5/9 Cash Books 21 July 1760 "By George Bowes Esqr. Execr. of Mrs Eliza. Bowes. Pd. Christ Richardson Carving at the house in Elvet [£]13. 12."

<sup>9</sup>DRO D/St/E5/5/9 Cash Books 21 March 1760 "By Philip Daniel. Paid him on Account [£]3. 3. 0."

DRO D/St/E5/5/9 Cash Books 18 March 1761 "By the Execrs. of the late Mrs Eliza. Bowes. Paid ditto [Philip Daniel] in full for Plastering &c. at the House in Elvet Durham [£]10. 7. 0."

DRO D/St/E5/5/10 Cash Books 17 May 1762 "By Mrs. Eliza. Bowes execrs. Paid Philip Daniel for White washing and cleaning the house before painted [£]2. 14. 10."

<sup>10</sup>DRO D/St/E5/5/10 Cash Books 27 March 1761. "By the executors of Mrs E. Bowes. Paid Henry Smith in full for painting at the house in old Elvet, Durham [£]4. 15. 0."

<sup>11</sup>D/St/E5/5/9 Cash Books 2 February 1760. "By Geo Bowes Esqr. execr. of Mrs. Eliza Bowes decd. Pd Vizt. Mr Newton on Accot. [£]20. 0. 0."

D/St/E5/5/9 Cash Books 16 February 1760. "By Ditto.[By Geo Bowes Esqr. execur. of Mrs Eliza. Bowes] Paid Willia. Newton on Accot. of Bargain work [£]20."

<sup>12</sup>DRO D/St/E5/5/10 Cash Books 18 March 1761 "By Mrs E. Bowes Execr. Paid Wm. Newton in full for bargain work done at the late Miss Betty Bowes in Durham [£]20."

<sup>13</sup>St. Anne's Chapel is now known as St. Ann's Church, City Road, Newcastle upon Tyne.

<sup>14</sup>NRO, ZBL 269/69 "A Sketch of a Ground Plan of an Hospital for Lunatics". Drawing signed by William Newton.

<sup>15</sup>NRO 660/1/3 (copy) "Charlotte Sq. 5 May 1769. Indenture bet. Mayor & Burgesses of the Town of Newcastle upon Tyne ... and William Newton of the Same Town and County Architect." Newton shall "make and finish eight at least good fashionable and commodious Dwelling Houses". At least four houses were to be completed within 6 years and the others within 14 years.

<sup>16</sup>DRO D/St/P9/3 29 June 1772

<sup>17</sup>DRO D/St/E5/5/11 Cash Books 29 February 1772 "By The New Green House Paid Do. [Labourers] shifting Mettle at Busty Bank Quarry [£]1. 2. 6." In the Gibside records the building was always referred to as the "Green House".

As late as 1855 when it was converted to a conservatory it was still referred to as the Green House. It

is only recently that it has become known as "The Orangery".

<sup>18</sup>James Paine, *Plans, Elevations and Sections of Noblemen and Gentlemen's Houses*, vol. 2. (London, published by the Author, 1783) pl. LXVIII.

<sup>19</sup>Peter Leach, *James Paine*. (London, A. Zwemmer, 1988) pp. 213–15, 198–201

<sup>20</sup>Paine, *Plans, Elevations*, vol. 1 (1767) and vol. 2 (1783).

<sup>21</sup>National Trust, Wallington Drawings Collection, Northumberland, No. 70. Drawing by William Newton, "Plan and Elevation for the Rotunda near the Lake".

<sup>22</sup>NRO Blackett-Ord [Whitfield] MSS 324 E14 Journal 1761–1768 p. 244, December 1765 "Benwell Estate for a plan for a Farm House 0. 10. 0."

<sup>23</sup>NRO Blackett-Ord [Whitfield] MSS 324 E14 Journal 1761–1768 p. 254, August 1766. "Benwell Wall for Wood and Workmanship at the Gateway and House P his Notes [£]8. 17."

<sup>24</sup>NRO Blackett-Ord [Whitfield] MSS 324 E 14 Journal 1761–1768. Expenditure on bridge and house summarised (p. 363):

"Dec. 1768 To Cupula [sic] Bridge for Balance  
225. 13. 7 1/2  
To the Parsonage House for Balance 162 3. 0 1/2"

<sup>25</sup>Eneas Mackenzie, *An Historical, Topographical and Descriptive View of the County of Northumberland*. (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1825) vol. II, p. 410. Mackenzie writes of Fenham Hall, "The late William Ord, Esq. added two wings and an elegant front, which was erected according to the plan of Mr. Newton."

<sup>26</sup>Kielder Castle is "a castellated shooting-box belonging to the Duke of Northumberland ... It is beautifully situated on a green knoll ..." William Weaver Tomlinson, *Comprehensive Guide to the County of Northumberland*. (Newcastle-on-Tyne, William H. Robinson, 11 ed. Reprinted Newton Abbot, David & Charles, 1968) p. 226.

<sup>27</sup>Jesse Foot, *The Lives of Andrew Robinson Bowes, Esq., and the Countess of Strathmore*. (London, Becket and Porter and Sherwood, Neely. and Jones, [1810]) p. 13.

<sup>28</sup>Philip Miller, *Gardener's Dictionary*. (London, 2nd ed., 1733 or 1731–39) 2 vols. folio. There were two 2 volume folio editions of this work. It is not clear which set was in George Bowes' library.

<sup>29</sup>DRO D/St/E5/5/11 Dec. 31 1773 "By the new Green House. Paid ditto [Cuthbert Palliser] at the Green House Stage. [£]1. 10. 6."

<sup>30</sup>Thomas Sopwith, an engineer, author and inventor, in *The Strangers' Pocket-Guide to Newcastle upon Tyne and its Environs*. (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1838) p. 66. This guide was written for the 1838 visit of the British Association to Newcastle.

<sup>31</sup>DRO D/St/E5/5/42 Cash Book of Francis Bennet, December 11 1792.

<sup>32</sup>DRO D/St/P6/1/6

<sup>33</sup>TWAS D/NCP/16/1/(1–8). Eight drawings for the Exchange and Guildhall, five of them signed by William Newton and David Stephenson, are held by the Tyne and Wear Archives Service. Their sizes vary from 26 x 18 inches to 25 x 20 inches.

<sup>34</sup>DRO D/St/E5/5/44 Cash Books 22 November 1802