

THE BYRON FAMILY AND THEIR BUILDING WORKS AT NEWSTEAD ABBEY, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE, 1540–1640

by

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It is twenty eight years since my article ‘Newstead Abbey in the Eighteenth Century: the Building Works of the Fourth and Fifth Lords Byron’ appeared in the *Transactions*.¹ Since then a great deal more has been discovered, not only about the history of the building in the 18th century but also that dating from the acquisition of the priory by the Byrons at its dissolution in 1540 until c.1635.²

Building work done in the immediate post-Dissolution period – and indeed any undertaken before the 1630s – is difficult to establish, as no archival sources have come to light. However recent archaeological discoveries within the house itself have led to further if fragmentary knowledge of how and when the priory buildings were adapted to their future domestic use. Much of what follows is based on a Report prepared by the archaeologist Colin Briden during the extensive survey of the Abbey made in 1998 when the buildings and park were threatened by possible mining operations.³ I am greatly indebted also to Colin for his subsequent explorations of hidden parts of the building, often under considerable difficulties, not to mention some perils of access. These have made it possible to unravel some particular problems concerning construction and chronology, notably with regard to the early 17th century.

After the surrender of the priory to the king’s representatives in July 1539 it was ‘placed in the custody’ of Sir John Byron (1487–1567) of Colwick Hall, Nottinghamshire. On 28th May 1540 Byron was granted by Henry VIII ‘all the house and site, ground and soil of the late Monastery or Priory of Newstede within the forest of Sherwode’ and ‘all the Church, belfry and cemetery of the same

...together with other lands and manors’⁴ For all this Sir John paid £810. Although the priory church was subsequently almost entirely demolished and its stone and lead used for building materials, the priory buildings were preserved and adapted to domestic use. In this respect both Newstead and the former Augustinian nunnery of Lacock in Wiltshire are very important examples, but Lacock has been more often quoted than Newstead.⁵

Strangely, the west front of Newstead priory church was spared by Byron; of the rest only the south transept was incorporated into the east range of the house. (Figures 1 & 3) This retention of the church façade, a somewhat enigmatic gesture by the first Byron owner, has given Newstead its most distinctive and romantic feature. (Plate 1) Certainly it was not kept for practical purposes for its buttressing effect on the west range is minimal and as a fragile screen-wall it had – and still has – its problems. It has been suggested by some that maybe Byron had lingering religious qualms about obliterating this last relic of the church, with its late 13th century statue of the Virgin and Child in the niche at its apex.

The Byrons chose as their place of worship the domestic chapel installed in the former chapter-house in the east range (Figures 1 & 2). The prior’s hall and his quarters adjoining it to the north were adapted to form the customary great hall and family rooms found in houses of the period. The undercrofts beneath the hall and the refectory in the south range appear to have been left unaltered. Certainly this is indicated in a drawing by S H Grimm of the hall undercroft made in the 1770s. The refectory undercroft seems, at least since the

18th century, to have been used as the servants' hall. The long dorter (dormitory) of the canons in the east range was partitioned into chambers. In the 17th century the refectory in the south range was to be transformed into a 'great chamber' or 'dining room'. For what purpose, before that date, the Byrons used this large (and, certainly in monastic times, unheated) space is not known.

The most radical change of all made by the early Byrons was to the cloister and this was itself dependant upon the new means of entry to the house as a whole. This was now at first floor level, by means of an exterior stair on the west front (Plate 1) In monastic living there had been no need for access from the cloister walks to any upper level – save the hall, the short flight to the refectory and the dorter (dormitory). The prior most likely had, within his quarters, a private stair also giving access to his hall. The canons had their 'day stair' leading to the dorter (Figure 1B) in the thickness of the wall at the east end of the south cloister walk, and their 'night stair' from the south transept of the church to the north end of the dorter (Figure 3B) to enable them to perform the night offices in the choir. Finally, there appears to have been a flight of steps in the south cloister walk which led up from the west range undercroft to the hall.⁶

The Byrons' introduction of the main entrance into the house via the hall and their creation of chambers out of the former dorter meant that improved circulation was needed at first floor level. To this end they had built galleries over the four cloister walks. (Figure 4A)⁷ Of these, the northern one is named in 1738 'the great gallery'. This created a variation in width – achieved either by cutting back or rebuilding part of the south wall of the church – which may have been put in hand in the late 16th or early 17th century when the 'long gallery' came into fashion.⁸ To this upper area there was still access from the cloister by part of the old day stair into the south gallery.

By means of all these adaptations and alterations and considering also that there was a south-west wing and a large building on the north side of the forecourt, now gone, the Byrons obtained a good house even if not one of great size.

The creation of the new galleries may have improved circulation within the house but they also led to problems. The fixed height of the gallery floors together with the varying levels of the claustral ranges resulted in some awkward means of access to various rooms – especially after the later alterations in the south range in the 1630s. This was remarked upon by the Duchess of Northumberland when she visited Newstead in 1760 and described the house as being 'vastly up-and-down stairs'.⁹ More seriously, the new galleries robbed certain rooms of light formerly gained from the cloister garth. Some blocked-up recesses can still be found behind panelling in the interior. Among other solutions the Byrons found one which was somewhat startling – at least to modern eyes – and is well illustrated by Buck in his 1729 view of the west front of the building (Plate 1). Here a tall 16th century window has been punched into the south bay of the 13th century church façade, thus providing light in the rooms behind this bay. Curiously, despite exterior appearances, this part of the church front had never screened a south aisle, as might be expected, but a series of rooms. On the ground floor was a vestibule or parlour and the entrance to the north and west cloister walks. Above these were rooms which from the 13th century presumably formed the prior's quarters north of the hall.¹⁰ This highly intrusive window (divided to light one room behind the hall and one above it) remained in place until the early 19th century when Col. Wildman restored the gothic tracery of this part of the church front.

Almost nothing remains of the original 16th century interiors created by the Byrons, their arrangement and decoration having been so frequently changed in succeeding centuries. There is a large blocked Tudor window in the south east wing and a collection of carved and painted overmantels in various rooms. The one in the room directly north of the hall (now known as 'The Prior's Parlour') bears the date 1556. All of them were extensively restored and somewhat altered in their relations to the fireplaces by Col. Wildman after 1817.¹¹

In their 'new' house the 16th century Byrons led a life typical of their position, retaining a large



PLATE I: Newstead Abbey: west front. Engraving by Samuel Buck, 1726.

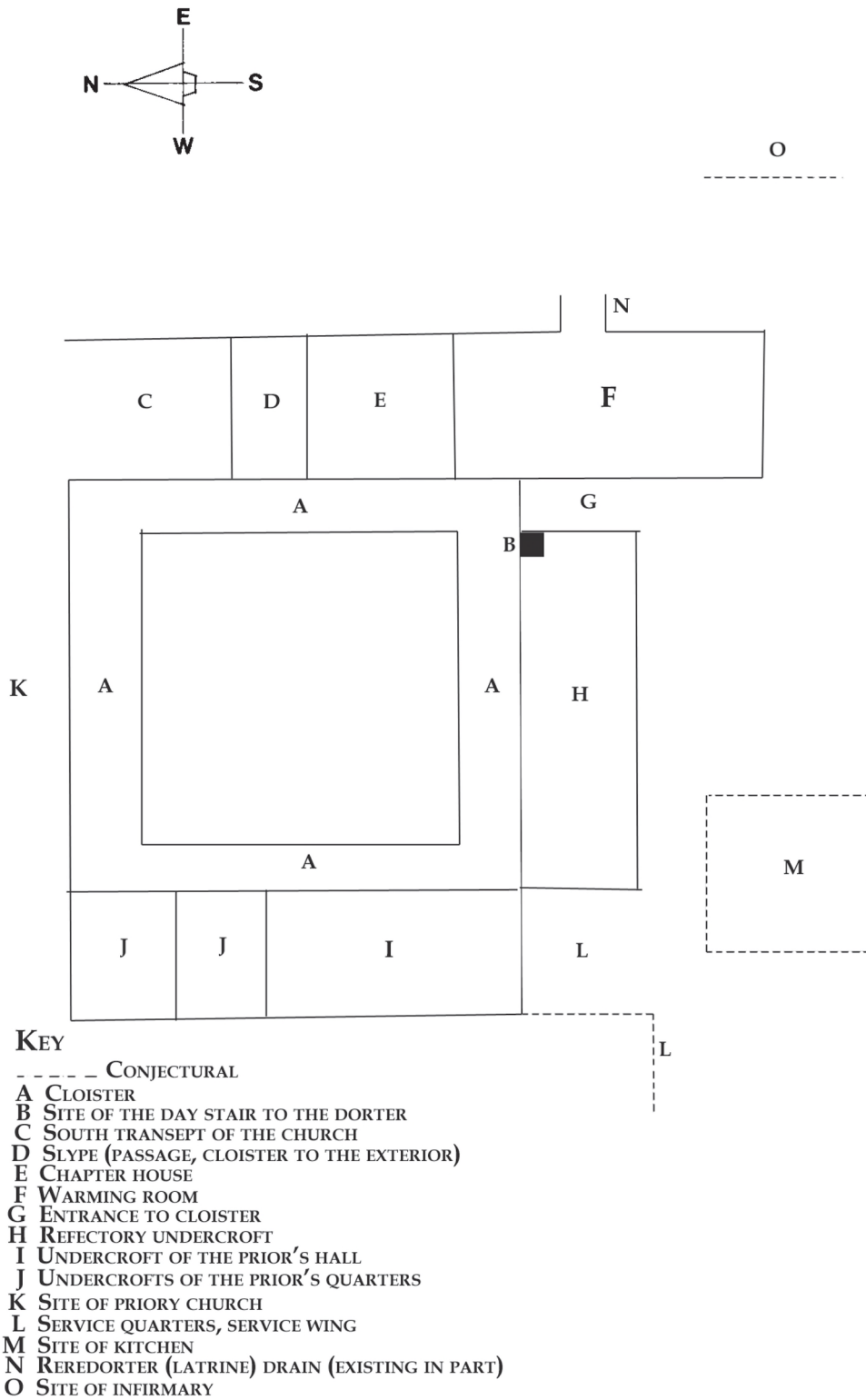


FIGURE 1: Newstead Priory: Diagrammatic plan of the claustral buildings before the Dissolution: ground floor.

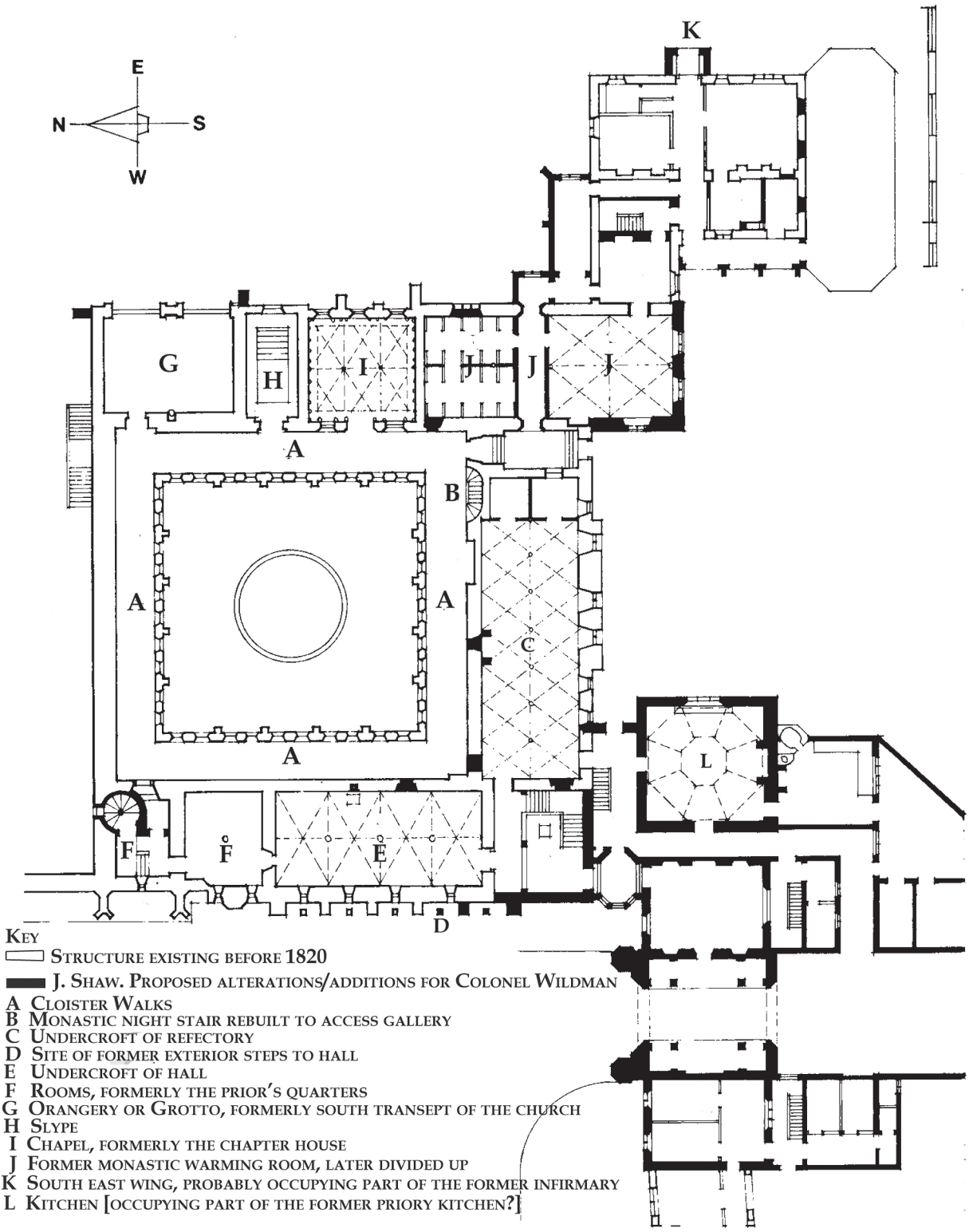
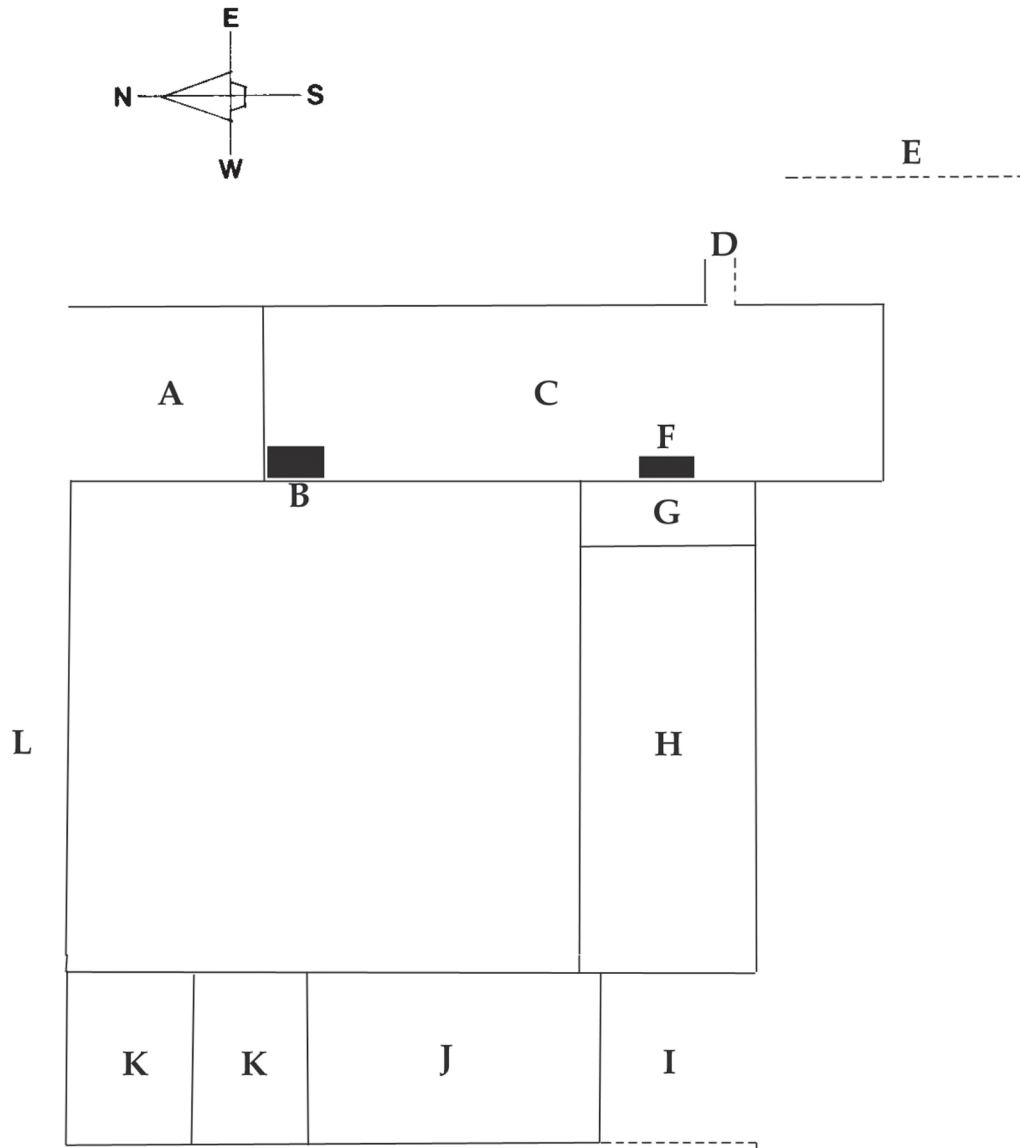


FIGURE 2: Newstead Abbey: Plan of the ground floor, 1818/19, after John Shaw.



- KEY**
- CONJECTURAL
 - A SOUTH TRANSEPT OF THE CHURCH (UPPER SPACE)
 - B SITE OF THE NIGHT STAIR, DORTER TO THE SOUTH TRANSEPT
 - C DORTER (DORMITORY)
 - D REREDORTER (LATRINES)
 - E SITE OF THE INFIRMARY
 - F ENTRANCE OF THE DAY STAIR INTO THE DORTER
 - G CHAMBERS TO THE NORTH OF THE REFECTORY
 - H REFECTORY
 - I SERVICE QUARTERS: POSSIBLE UPPER FLOOR, SOUTH WEST WING
 - J PRIOR'S HALL
 - K PRIOR'S QUARTERS
 - L SITE OF THE PRIORY CHURCH

FIGURE 3: Newstead Priory: Diagrammatic plan of the claustral buildings before the Dissolution: first floor.

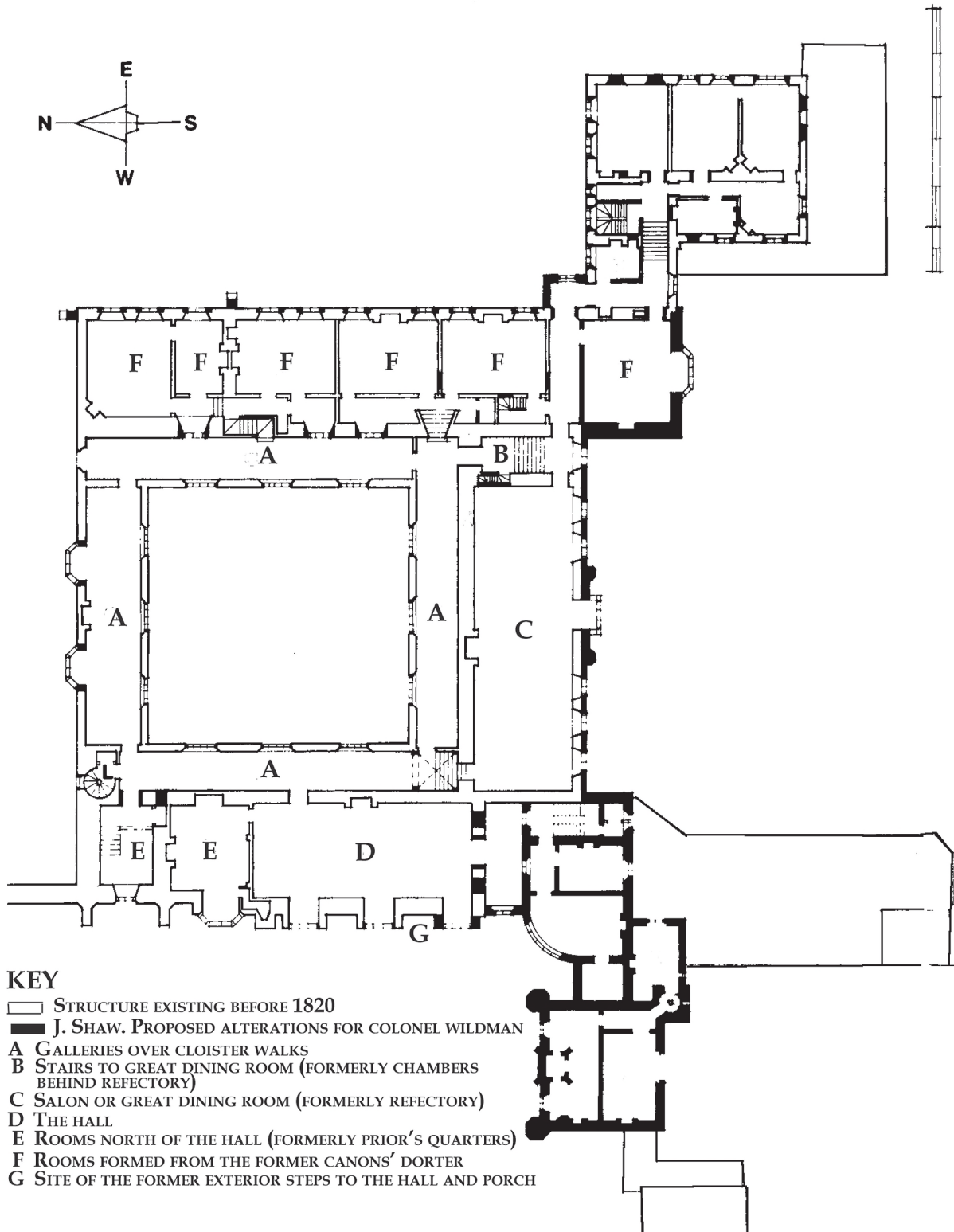


FIGURE 4: Newstead Abbey: Plan of the first floor, 1818/19, after John Shaw.

household and dispensing lavish hospitality. For entertainment the first Sir John Byron of Newstead at one time kept a group of ‘players’ (actors) and musicians. On the death of the second Sir John Byron of Newstead (1527?–1603) his heir, another Sir John (c. 1583–1625) received a letter from his father’s friend the Earl of Shrewsbury counselling economy, for debts were becoming serious and there had to be retrenchment:

‘I take it you are in great debttts and have many children to provide for, so unless you take some present and speedy course to free yourself of debttts, which will eat into your state lyke a moth in your garment, (and until then shall live warely and not begyn with that state of housekeeping & countenance wher your father left you) you will be further plunged within a short tyme.....I do therefore advise you, that so soone as you have in suche sort as shall befytte finished your father’s funeralles, to dispose and disperse that great household, reducing them to the number of fortye or fyftie, at the moste of all sorts.....¹²

Whether or not Sir John took Lord Shrewsbury’s words to heart he soon became plagued by financial cares and debts. In fact he led rather a retired life, taking little part in public activities, devoting himself to the care of his wife who after a difficult childbirth became mentally unstable and never fully recovered her equilibrium. To add to his troubles he was for a long time in contention with the King’s Commissioners for the Compounding for Defective Titles. James I, as always seeking to increase his own revenues, had declared that over time many estates had been enlarged by illegal encroachment on Crown Lands. The commissioners were to ‘compound’ with the owners of such lands to pay a specified sum for new grants of leases from the Crown – or to forfeit these lands to the king. Sir John contested every last acre and his case dragged on for several years. In the end he had legal costs to pay and in 1615 had to ‘compound’ for a good part of his estate to the tune of £1000.¹³ In view of all this it seems a little ironic that James I paid two visits to Newstead, both before the ‘compounding’ case was settled. The first was from 14th to 17th August 1612 and the second from 15th to 17th August 1614.

Entertaining the king – who on his first visit may have been accompanied by Henry, Prince of Wales

– was an expensive and complicated privilege. On both occasions James used Newstead as a convenient hunting base between Rufford Abbey and Thurland Hall in Nottingham during his habitual summer progresses. These progresses required a great deal of prior organisation and if the king were to grace with his presence the house of a subject that house and its owner were subjected to close scrutiny of all sorts. This duty fell upon the Ushers of the King’s Chamber who were charged to act as follows:

‘to make your undelayed repair unto the houses set down in a paper hereunto annexed containing the Gestes of his Majesty’s Progresse, to view them and to acquaint the Owners of them that are interested in them with his Majesty’s purpose to come thither and whether the towns and villages neire them be free from the Plague or other dangerous diseases that may prove dangerous to his Majestie and his Trayne; and after the performance of this service to ritorne to me to the Courte to the end that I may be informed how conveyentlie his Majesty may be lodged.....and if any Howse mentioned in the Gestes be not sufficient to lodge his Majestie I would have you to mention the next Houses to them to the end that his Majestie may be better served’.

There was a good deal besides which had to be inspected but in all respects Newstead passed muster and James and ‘his Trayne’ duly arrived. This included the ‘king’s dogges’, for James had an absolute passion for hunting, and Newstead’s position in the heart of Sherwood Forest would have been a prime attraction. While James was on progress he was continually hunting en-route and from the houses he chose to visit; when travelling from Newark to Rufford he was reported to have ‘been hunting as before, all the way he rode’. When he ‘took up his lodging at Sir John Byron’s Newstead’ it was to hunt in the forest and to ‘explore the haunts of Robin Hood and his merry men’.¹⁴

Sir John Byron died in 1625 and was succeeded by his son, yet another John (c.1600–1652) who was to be created Baron Byron of Rochdale by Charles I in 1643. By the time of his father’s death he had studied at Cambridge, made the Grand Tour and been elected MP for Nottingham (1624). In 1626, as a Gentleman of the Bedchamber, he attended Charles’s coronation and was made a

Knight of the Bath. Like his father and grandfather before him Sir John suffered from precarious finances. Nevertheless he made some important changes to his house at Newstead. These date from the 1630s after his marriage in 1629 to Cicely, daughter of Thomas, 1st Lord de la Warr, and widow of Sir Francis Bindloss of Borwick Hall, Lancashire. Unfortunately, though her late husband had been a very wealthy man and his son by Cicely was reputed to be 'the richest of them all', Cicely did not bring much money to her Byron marriage.¹⁵

On the exterior of the Abbey, at the southern end of the west range, Sir John erected a fine stone porch at the head of the exterior steps leading to the hall (Plate 1). The porch survives, though it was moved in the 19th century to the east front of the south-east wing (Figure 2K). The spandrels of the arch bear – or rather bore for all is now nearly obliterated by air pollution – coats of arms and the date 1631. On the keystone, fortunately more visible, is the Byron crest of the mythical mermaid with her comb and mirror.

Whether or not it was Sir John who built the exterior steps leading up to the porch in the 1630s, there must have been such a stair from the time the Byrons first converted the priory for domestic occupation. The prior's hall, which had been completely re-ordered by Prior Sandall (who held office 1504–26) may then have had an exterior entrance, but if so it would not have been of the same importance or significance. To the prior it would only have been an entrance for his guests to his hall. For the Byrons with their new first floor chambers and galleries it was the main entrance to their house and as such signalled much more than simple convenience. A parallel has been drawn with the post-Dissolution transformation of Norton Priory in Cheshire, also a former Augustinian house. They had built just such a prominent exterior stair from the forecourt up to their first-floor hall in the west range of the cloister buildings. Apart from the practical reason for this there was, as at Newstead, a symbolic one as 'the construction of an imposing external staircase leading to a first-floor hall re-enforced the visual reminder to all visitors that a new regime now prevailed'. Quite so, likewise for the Byrons of Newstead.¹⁶

In the interior of the south range there is a certain, dateable and very important contribution made by Sir John. This is the transformation of the space within the range formerly occupied by the priory's medieval refectory and by two superimposed chambers beyond it at its east end. (Figures 3H–G & 4C–B) Here he created an entirely new room (now known as 'the Salon') and a new internal approach to it by a flight of steps from the east gallery, occupying the space of the former eastern chambers which were demolished.¹⁷ I formerly believed that the greater part of this transformation dated from the 18th century and was initiated by the 4th Lord Byron (1669–1736). In this I was much mistaken. Despite subsequent changes to such feature as fireplace and panelling, new internal archaeological evidence proves that Sir John was responsible for the whole scheme and not, as I previously supposed, only the ceiling (Plates 2 & 3).¹⁸

The inspiration for the creation of this remarkable room may have been Sir John's marriage to Cicely Bindlosse. Her previous home, Borwick Hall, built between 1590 and 1595, boasted a very fine 'great chamber' over the hall. Arriving at Newstead she would have found nothing comparable, no 'modern' room suitable for formal dining and entertainment; by that date dining in a 'Great Hall' was no longer fashionable. Whatever the inspiration Sir John so radically altered the former refectory that the only traces of it remaining are its blocked-up entrance at the west end of the south cloister walk and a preserved fragment of decorative wall-painting dating from the late 12th or early 13th century. This is now seen at eye level but would, in the old room, have been well above that for the floor of the present room inserted by Sir John is more than six feet higher than that of the monastic refectory.¹⁹ That had been a lofty room, measuring from its floor to its roof-peak nearly thirty two feet. The roof peak of the new room, over the new floor, was three feet higher than the medieval one but beneath it, instead of open timbers, there was inserted a new and very remarkable ceiling (Plates 2 & 3).

Into the north wall of this newly-proportioned room Sir John introduced a row of seven windows. These are now blocked and invisible from within but they can be seen from the north gallery, across



PLATE 2: Newstead Abbey: Great Dining Room (now Salon) looking east. Drawing by S.H. Grimm, 1775.

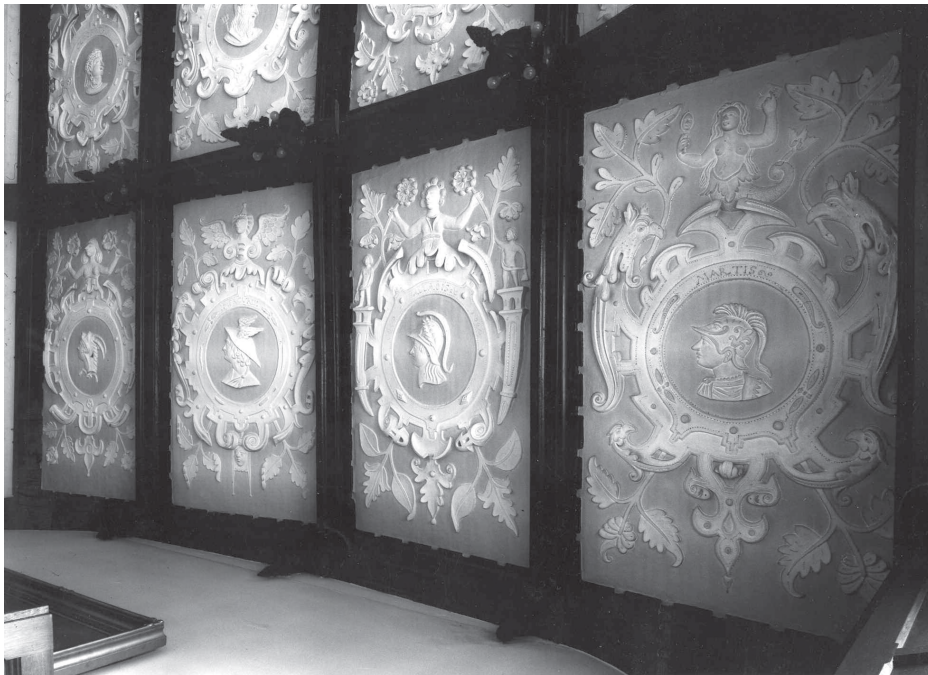


PLATE 3: Newstead Abbey: east end of the Great Dining Room ceiling (detail).

the cloister garth. Their proportions suggest that they held cross-mullion casements probably of timber – consonant in style for a date in the early 1630s. The seven-bay disposition of these windows corresponds to that of the spaces between the braces of the new timber ceiling and also to the secondary and common joists of the new higher floor. All these details are indications of a common date (Plate 4).²⁰ As the medieval refectory would not have been heated the new room required a fireplace.²¹ This was inserted into the substantial east wall at the ‘high’ or dais end of the room. Its flue can still be seen from the roof-space, its 17th century bricks badly blackened in a manner indicating a serious chimney-fire. This was presumably the cause of the fireplace being moved in the 18th century to the centre of the north wall.

The splendid ceiling of this room remains as Sir John’s outstanding contribution to Newstead. Fortunately it has survived with only minor restorations and alterations of 19th century date and even despite partial damage by fire and subsequent restoration in 1965. In Grimm’s drawing of the 1770s (Plate 2) we have the only visual record of the room and its ceiling as they were before the 1840s (although the panelling, door-cases and, probably the window embrasures, which he shows all date from the early 18th century).

The plasterwork of the ceiling is of high quality and the timberwork, despite persistent past attributions to an earlier date, is all of a piece with the plaster panels. These panels are thirty two in number. The first two bands of four panels each at the east end (well shown by Grimm) contain ‘antique heads’ surrounded by elaborate frames and cartouches. The remaining four panel bands, continuing down to the west end of the room contain very lively renderings of foliage, urns, vases, human figures and a variety of animals.

Plaster decoration of this period, like that in stone or wood, was often based on engraved sources. In this ceiling the ‘foliage panels’ show the plasterers using elements familiar in the workshop and typical of much decoration of the period – and very pleasing they are. The ‘antique heads’ however have recently been recognised as copies from a late

16th century book of engravings. The circular frames surrounding the Newstead heads are inscribed as follows, from left to right: In the easternmost bay: ‘*Junonis Sospitae March 1631*’; ‘*Mercurii*’; ‘*Palladis*’; ‘*Martis*’. In the next band (again left to right) are ‘*Cleopatra*’; ‘*Neptune*’; ‘*Dianae*’ and ‘*Vulcani*’. All these heads, with one rather mysterious exception, ‘*Cleopatra*’, are taken directly from the book *Deorum Dearumque Capita ex Vetustis Numismatibus...Ex Museo Abrahami Ortelii*. (‘Heads of Gods and Goddesses from ancient coins ... from the Collection of Abraham Ortelius’). The engravings were commissioned by Ortelius himself and the book was published in Antwerp in 1573 (Plate 5).²² This book appears to have been well-known in England fairly soon after its publication and was certainly so in the early 17th century.²³

Robert Smythson (d.1614), the reputed mason–architect of Wollaton Hall near Nottingham, made a drawing believed to be a design for the hall screen of that house but not actually executed. This includes a decorative panel in which appears another panel containing a circle around a crowned male head. Beneath this a label bears the name ‘*Serapidis*’ (Serapis, Lord of the Underworld). This encircled head and the inscription are taken from the Ortelius series. It has been suggested that the book may have been in the possession of Smythson’s patron at Wollaton, Sir Francis Willoughby, of whom it has been written: ‘at Cambridge he had the best classical education available in England, he was an avid reader and book collector...’ The book could certainly also have been known to, if not also owned by, the scholarly Sir John Byron of Newstead Abbey.²⁴

It is difficult to surmise what significance the gods and goddesses chosen for the Newstead ceiling may have had for Sir John. However, Juno – whose panel bears the date when we suppose the work to have been begun and the very first to be executed – seems particularly interesting. The wife of Jupiter and ‘queen of heaven’, Juno had among her titles ‘*Sospita*’ or ‘*Saviour*’. She was regarded in antiquity as the special protectress (‘*Sospito*’ – ‘to keep safe’; ‘to preserve’) of marriage and women. Could her appearance here perhaps refer to Sir John



PLATE 4: Newstead Abbey: the Salon. Photograph, c. 1905.

Byron's recent (1629) marriage to Cicely ? The head of Mars may have been the one most personal to Sir John for above the God of War the decorative surround bears the mythical mermaid with her mirror and comb, the Byron crest. Admittedly, at that date Sir John was better known for learning than for soldiering – though he had been made one of the Commissioners for Musters in the county in 1626.²⁵

The ultimate panel of the whole ceiling, in the north-west corner, bears the date 1633. It is unlikely that the plasterwork alone took two years to execute so this date may well indicate the time taken for the whole ceiling to be completed, timberwork and plasterwork together.²⁶ The wood was elaborately

carved and Grimm's drawing shows that the lateral beams were supported on braces springing from elaborate corbels. These corbels consisted of fantastic heads either of painted wood or painted plaster, but they have now vanished. They were replaced sometime after 1905, when they were last photographed, by the present dull unornamented ones (Plate 4).

Sir John's ceiling has been compared to the Jacobean hall ceilings at Audley End, Essex and Hatfield Hall, Hertfordshire.²⁷ All three combine timber and plasterwork, in all there is an element of 'medievalising' – exposed beams, elaborate carving. At this period such features were often introduced in allusion to ancient ancestry and

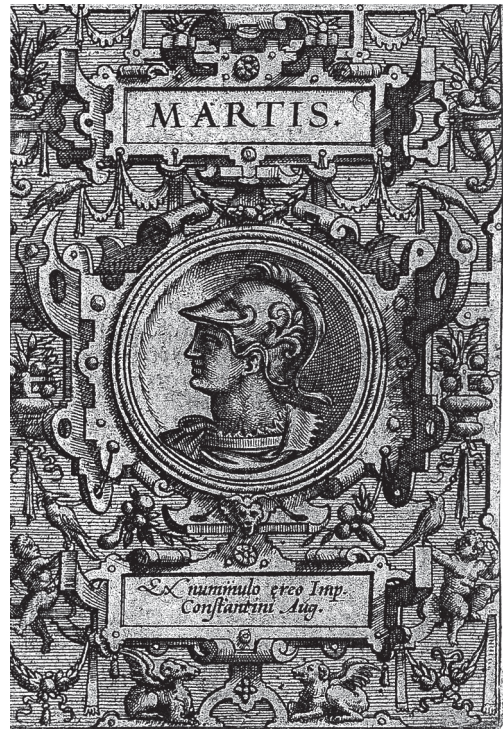
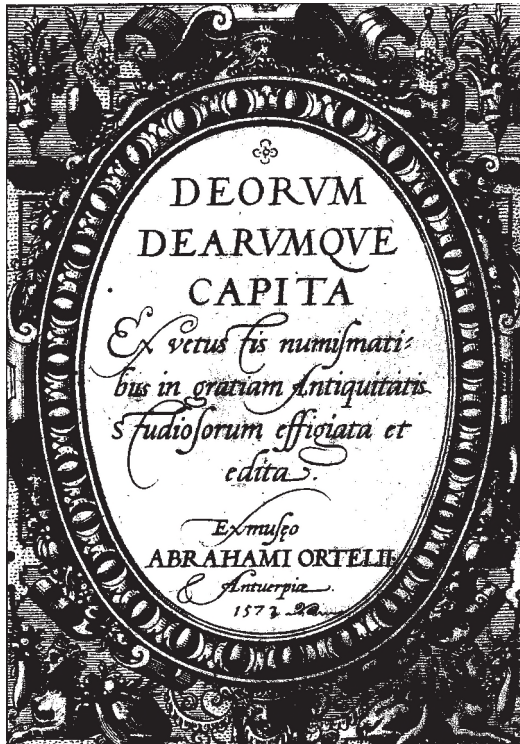


PLATE 5: *Deorum Dearumque Capita Vetustis Numismatibus ... ex Museo Abraham Ortelii, Antwerp, 1573*: title page and three engraved plates of classical heads.

possession, real or assumed. At Newstead there could also be an added reference to a medieval monastic past. In time this would be further romanticized. In 1760 Horace Walpole visited Newstead and clearly believed that at least part of the ceiling was a monastic relic: 'The refectory, the vaulted ceiling remains' and '...an old, rich vaulted ceiling'.²⁸ Given the classical nature of the plasterwork the whole ceiling would hardly have been deemed 'medieval' by this knowledgeable man, so it must have been the 'old rich' vaults of timber which he perceived as dating from the former canons' refectory.

The details of the not-too-serious modifications made to the timber work in the early 19th century do not belong to this story.²⁹ The fire of 1965 very nearly destroyed all the plaster panels though the timbers, mercifully, were not so badly damaged. Miraculously, the eight panels of antique heads survived unscathed (Plates 6 & 7). Equally miraculously a complete detailed set of slides of the entire ceiling had been made in 1964. Using these slides the panels destroyed could be superbly reinstated *exactly* to their original form. The work was done by craftsmen plasterers from the firm of H. H. Martyn of Cheltenham. They signed off their achievement in the final panel – the one in the north west corner – thus: 'original date 28 March 1633 ... reconstructed February 28th 1966'.³⁰

Not long after the completion of his ceiling Sir John commissioned a black and white marble chimney-piece and a black marble table, so it is tempting to suppose that these were intended for his fine new chamber, especially as they were to be made by an important artist. The commission was given to Nicholas Stone (1587–1647), acknowledged since the 1620s as the leading sculptor of the day and, by the 1630s, equally esteemed as a master-mason.³¹ He was in great demand in particular for funerary monuments and chimney-pieces. Unfortunately not many of the latter survive but one very fine example can be seen at Newburgh Priory in Yorkshire (incidentally, in 'the big dining room'). This dates from 1645 and is very elaborate with sculptured figures, a central relief, columns and swags. What Sir John ordered was much more sober but no doubt impressive.

Nicholas Stone's original account for supplying the chimney-piece and table has survived in his account book, and a transcript is in Appendix I.³² Of course we cannot be certain that the objects (which were transported by water from London to Hull and then presumably up the River Trent) were for the room with which we are concerned but it appears almost beyond doubt that they were destined for Newstead and not for another of his houses.³³ The clue to this assertion lies in Nicholas Stone's account where he notes 'more received of Brother Hendrek'. 'Hendrek' is Hendrik de Keyser II, one of Nicholas Stone's brothers-in-law, from the Netherlands.

Stone had spent six years of his training in the Amsterdam workshop of Hendrik de Keyser I (1565–1621) a master mason, whose daughter he married. He returned to England and in 1634 his wife's brother Hendrik II came to work in Stone's workshop in London. By 1639 he was in Nottinghamshire when he married at St. Nicholas church in Nottingham, both parties being recorded in the parish register as living in Newstead. By 1641 they were living in Nottingham but his wife died in childbirth and Hendrik returned to Amsterdam.³⁴ From all this I think we can fairly conclude that Hendrik de Keyser II was working for Sir John in some capacity, even before the date of Stone's account, and that he was responsible for the reception and presumably the installation of Stone's marble pieces at Newstead.

There is another item in Stone's account with Sir John, described as 'one marble mortar of white'. This may be an object still surviving at the Abbey (Plate 8) and is discussed in Appendix II.

In inventories and correspondence of the 18th and early 19th centuries Sir John's new room is referred to the 'Great Dining Room' or sometimes 'The Great Room' and although its furnishings and uses varied with time the retention of the title 'dining' points to its original purpose. The 'high end' beneath the 'antique heads' probably had a dais and, for dining a high table, all set before the fireplace in the east wall. Ceremonial dining would be followed by clearing of tables and entertainments; during the clearing procedure the host and important guests could retire to the



PLATE 6: Newstead Abbey: the Salon after the fire, 1965.



PLATE 7: Newstead Abbey: the Salon after the fire, 1965.



PLATE 8: Mortar now in the kitchen at Newstead Abbey, possibly Nicholas Stone's 'marble mortar of white'?

'withdrawing room' adjacent. This room at Newstead was possibly situated at the extreme south end of the north range where is now the 'south drawing room'.

Sir John's creation and decoration of his great room at Newstead and his employment of Nicholas Stone entitle him to a place as a patron of the arts in early 17th century Nottinghamshire – if not on a grand scale nor in a very grand house. In this respect he can stand beside, for example, his exact contemporary Sir Gervase Clifton, who was also altering and embellishing his house at Clifton Hall near Nottingham in the 1630s.³⁵ Despite subsequent modifications two remarkable rooms created for Sir Gervase survive – 'the pages' room' and the 'great chamber' (now drawing room) with its splendid chimney-piece. No doubt, both at Newstead and Clifton, there were further rooms of the period, since utterly changed or demolished.

Sadly, the expenses of his projects ran Sir John into financial trouble and by 1642 he was in serious debt.³⁶ Lady Byron, who may have been the inspiration for all this work at Newstead, had died in 1639. The advent of the Civil War in 1642 and Byron's most active participation in it on the Royalist side would, in any case, have brought a halt to any further work.

One last commission given by Sir John (by then Baron Byron of Rochdale, the title granted to him

by Charles I in 1642) was for a portrait of himself. His choice of painter was characteristic of a discerning eye, one of the first rank in that period, William Dobson (1611–46). Dashing and flamboyant, the portrait shows his lordship as a military commander in the field. (Plate 9).³⁷ Unfortunately this perhaps faintly ludicrous image to the modern eye, belied Byron's actual lack of military success in the Royalist campaign.

By March 1646 Lord Byron was holding Caernarfon in North Wales, a last hopeless attempt in the king's service. He held out until 4th June, long after Charles gave himself up to the Scots on 5th May near Newark, by which time all fortresses still held for the king had surrendered. The surrender of Caernarfon was made on favourable terms and according to a contemporary record Byron benefited from these and managed 'with a notable escape or two, to rally the decayed and scattered spirits of the Kingdom into further attempts for his Majesty, travelling invisibly and with incredible speed from place to place for a year



PLATE 9: John Byron, first Baron Byron of Rochdale. Painting by William Dobson.

together, not sleeping four nights in one place for a year, till the fatal drowsiness hanging over The Kingdom, put him upon taking his rest too, and withdrawing to France, to follow his ingenious

studies, which the War had interrupted in the course, but not in the effect of them'³⁸ Lord Byron died in exile in 1652 without an heir and was succeeded by his brother Richard (?1605–1679)

APPENDIX I

*Nicholas Stone's account for the supply of marble objects to Sir John Byron, 1635
(with original spelling)*

1635	Agreed with Sir John Buren for one Chemney pece of blak marbell for the price of 45£ in Janeary 1635 and the 27 of march 1637 Receved in pres being the first mony I receved and thin by leter was bespoken on hath pace of whitt marbell stons and blak and promised satesfacion for him and the Rest as I cold send the work awaye.	£	s	d
		30	0	0
		45	0	0
July 1638	Sheped and sent awaye for Sir John Beron the abovesead chemney pece and 16 whit and blak marbell stons farly glased at 4s [3s] the pece for the hath paces comes to all so on tabell of Tuch with a marbll foot unto it all farly poleshed and glased agreed for the price one marbell mortar of whitt farly glased all so 3 chest to pak up the sayd work with hoopts stray and nayells and labor Carrege to the water sid 2 loods 8s and for warfed and crayned into the shept 3s for fraght from London to Hull	2	8	0
		14	0	0
			14	0
		1	0	0
			11	0
			<u>1</u>	<u>10</u>
		Som	65	3
		Recev	<u>30</u>	<u>0</u>
		Rest	35	3
		More Received		
		of Brother Hendrik	<u>10</u>	<u>0</u>
		Rest	25	3

Transcript with modernised spelling

1635	Agreed with Sir John Byron for one chimney piece of black marble for the price of £45 in January 1635 and the 27th of March 1637 received in 'pres' being the first money I received and then by letter was bespoken one hearth place [?] of white marble stones and black and promised satisfaction for him and the rest as I could send the work away.	£	s	d
		30	0	0
		45	0	0
July 1638	Shipped and sent away for Sir John Byron the above [s]aid chimney- pieces and 16 white and black marble stones fairly glazed at 4s [3s] the pieces for the hearth places [?] comes to	2	8	0
	Also one table of touchstone with a marble foot unto it all fairly polished and glazed agreed for the price	14	0	0
	One marble mortar of white fairly glazed		14	0
	Also 3 chest(s) to pack up the said work with hoops straw and nails and labour	1	0	0
	Carriage to the waterside two loads 8s and for wharfage and crantage into the ship 3s			11 0
	For freight from London to Hull		1	10 0
		Sum	65	3 0
		Received	30	0 0
		Rest	35	3 0
	More received of Brother Hendrik		10	0 0
		Rest	25	3 0

Source: Walter L. Spiers 'The Note and Account Book of Nicholas Stone', *Walpole Society* vol.vii (1918/19), 110 ff. I am indebted to Stephen Aspley, Drawings Curator at Sir John Soane's Museum, for the accurate transcription which corrected certain inaccuracies in Spier's version.

APPENDIX II

'The Marble Mortar of White'

It may seem odd that Sir John Byron should order a kitchen utensil – albeit an exceptionally large one – from the leading sculptor of the day. However, if Nicholas Stone had a suitable offcut of marble in his workshop it could have been fashioned from that? Such a mortar still exists in the 19th century kitchen at Newstead (Plate 8). The diameter of its basin is 64.5 cm., its depth approximately 28 cm. and its height 39.5 cm. Its size and weight alone may ever since have deterred anyone from either buying it or taking it away. Although exceptionally large it is not untypical of its period. In the kitchen at

Rockingham Castle, Northamptonshire, there is displayed a mortar of black stone or marble of probable 17th century date. It is smaller than the one at Newstead but still very sizeable. It stands on a high base and is complete with its wooden cover and pestle. The cover has a hole in the centre, through which passed the long wooden handle of the pestle. Grinding would have been done by a servant, standing up and manipulating the handle round the hole. Perhaps the Newstead mortar is a hitherto unknown work by Nicholas Stone?

REFERENCES

1. R. Coope, 'Newstead Abbey in the Eighteenth Century: the Building Works of the Fourth and Fifth Lords Byron', *Trans. Thoroton Soc.*, 83 (1979), 46 – 62.
2. Newstead was a priory of Augustinian canons. Its description as an 'Abbey' was adopted for the house by the Byrons, certainly by the 18th century and possibly earlier.
3. 'Newstead Abbey and Park, Blackshale Seam Options, Stage I. Historical Environment Aspects, Initial Appraisal'. Unpublished report prepared by Midland Mining Holdings Ltd and Nottingham City Council in conjunction with Colin Briden, Consultant Archaeologist, March 1998. (Copy at Newstead Abbey). The Report is hereafter referred to as CB.
4. The original grant is preserved at Newstead Abbey, (NA 256)
5. For an important discussion on monastic conversions in general and those of Lacock and Newstead in particular see M. Howard, *The Early Tudor Country House, Architecture and Politics 1490 – 1550* (1987), 152 – 164, in particular: Chapter 7.
6. The existence of such a stair seems indicated by the presence behind later panelling of a 13th century arched doorway at the south end of the hall.
7. CB 5 & 6: 'The Problem of the Cloisters and Galleries'. Colin Briden's assessment of the structural evidence, here, appears to have finally laid to rest the contention that the Newstead cloister may have been of two storeys in medieval times. He has set out his conclusions in 'Notes on the Cloister Walks and Galleries at Newstead Abbey' (unpublished).
8. R. Coope 'The Long Gallery, its Origins, Development and Use and Decoration', *Architectural History*, 29 (1986), 43 – 86.
9. Alnwick Castle', Northumberland, 'Alnwick Notebook' (unpublished ms.)
10. Of this curious arrangement Pevsner wrote: '(the) whole of the s. side of the façade is a sham... This remarkable, early instance of preference given to aesthetic over functional consideration is worth remembering', N. Pevsner & E. Williamson, *The Buildings of England: Nottinghamshire* (1979), 204. Buck, usually accurate enough, has shown the north aisle window of the façade with open tracery. It had in fact blind tracery like the south bay, as now.
11. The other overmantels are in two rooms in the east wing and one in the south east wing. All have been modified to a greater or lesser extent, mainly by Col. Thomas Wildman in the early 19th century, and also often repainted. One of those in the east wing was drawn by S. Grimm as it was before these alterations. Col. Wildman was also a great mover of chimney-pieces from one room to another, so we cannot be sure if these are always in their original rooms. Tradition has it that the overmantels were brought here by the Byrons from Colwick, but on no evidence.
12. V. W. Walker, *The House of Byron* (1988), 34, 43.
13. Walker, 44 – 51
14. J. Nichols, *Progresses of James I* (1828). I am grateful to Emily Cole of English Heritage for indicating this book to me and for supplying me with a list of Nichols' documentary sources.

15. J. S. Wane, *A Short History of Borwich Hall* (local publication, n.d.), 7
16. J. P. Greene, 'The Impact of the Dissolution on Monasteries in Cheshire, the Case of Norton', in A. Thacker, ed., *B. A. A. Conference Transactions*, XXII (2000).
17. The arrangements at that date for entering the room at the west end are unknown. There must have been some access to the buttery, pantry and kitchen all lying at the south end of the adjacent great hall.
18. Coope (1979), 55. All the major structural discoveries concerning the building history of this room were made by Colin Briden. I am greatly indebted to him and also to Brian Ayers for his help with measurements and for many observations arising from his extensive knowledge of the house in general.
19. This wall painting fragment can be seen, under glass, on the right hand side of the present chimney-piece.
20. Observation by Colin Briden when floor-boards were temporarily lifted – a rare occurrence.
21. The only room to be heated would have been the monastic *calefactory* or 'warming room' to which the inmates had access on certain occasions. At Newstead this appears to have been on the ground floor in the (now divided) room at the south end of the east wing.
22. Only the actual roundels containing the heads, not the ornamental cartouches surrounding them in Ortelius's book.
23. Ortelius was a distinguished humanist, geographer and collector of Antwerp, and had a number of contacts in England. For the source of the 'gods and goddesses' see G. Luijten, ed., Holstein, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts (1450–1700)* XLVIII, part II (1572–1630), compiled by P. Fühling (1997). For the general influence of the *Deorum Dearumque* volume see A. Wells-Cole, *Art and Design in Elizabethan and Jacobean England* (1997), especially 77–79. This book is an unrivalled study of the graphic sources for English decoration in that period and the author has been immensely helpful to me over the Newstead ceiling.
24. See M. Girouard, 'Catalogue of the Smythson Collection in the Royal Institute of British Architects', *Architectural History*, 5 (1962), 38–39, illustration, 90, Gotch Cat. 66 (5); RIBA Cat. 1/25 (7). For Sir Francis Willoughby's book collecting see Girouard, *Robert Smythson and the Elizabethan Country House* (1983), 83.
25. For Sir John's local reputation for learning see Walker, 56
26. This is certainly the opinion of Dr Claire Gapper expressed to me in correspondence and on site. Also see her doctoral thesis on 'Plasters and Plasterwork in City, Court and Country, c.1530 – 1640'.
27. C. Gapper, in conversation on site.
28. W. S. Lewis, ed., *Horace Walpole's Journal of Visits to Country Seats, August 1760, and Correspondence*, 9 (1941), 299.
29. For Col. Wildman's transformation of Newstead after 1817 see R. Coope, 'Colonel Thomas Wildman and the transformation of Newstead Abbey, Nottinghamshire, 1817–1859', *Trans. Thoroton Soc.*, 101 (1997), 157–173.
30. These slides are now in the Local Studies Library, Central Library, Nottingham. The firm of H. H. Martyn, Ltd still exists and I am indebted to Mr John Morrison for much information concerning the restoration of the ceiling. The Nottingham City Council records of the fire and the restoration are deposited at Newstead Abbey.
31. A. White, 'Nicholas Stone, 1585/8–1647, Sculptor, Master Mason and Architect', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004–6).
32. Stone's account book is in Sir John Soane's Museum, Lincolns Inn, London.
33. Colwick Hall was no longer the principal seat of the Byrons and was sold out of the family in 1649, Walker, 88. Bulwell Wood Hall had been demolished in 1630 and was not rebuilt until the reign of Charles II, P. Jones, *Lost Houses of Nottinghamshire* (2006), 11.
34. Henty Louw, 'Anglo Netherlandish Architectural Interchange, c.1600–1660'; *Architectural History*, 24 (1981). 2, 18 (n 9).
35. John Smythson (d.1634), son of Robert Smythson of Wollaton, made designs for stables and other small exterior buildings for Sir Gervase at Clifton, Girouard (1962), 50, 51: III/2, 134, 135; and Girouard (1983), 269, 270 & 189. See also Pevsner (1979), 270–1.
36. J. V. Beckett, *Byron and Newstead, the Aristocrat and the Abbey* (2002), 27.
37. The portrait is in the Tabley Collection, University of Manchester.
38. D. Lloyd, *Memoirs of the Lives, Actions, Sufferings and Deaths of those noble, reverend and excellent personages that suffered by death, sequestration or otherwise for the protestant religion and ... allegiance to their Sovereign in our late intestine wars...* (1668). For the author's identity and whole title see Walker, 316 (bibliography).

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