

MUNICIPAL DEPARTMENT

MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS.*

(Concluded.)

The town clerk's department will be fixed by the position of the mayor's parlor, which the town clerk's private office should adjoin if it can be arranged, or if this is not possible the two rooms should be near enough to each other to render intercommunication easy. Departments should never be split or divided between two or more floors, unless there are some very special reasons for doing so, as in the case of a laboratory or photographic studio, which must be on the top floor, while the rest of the departments will be placed below. In this case there should be direct access by a private staircase.

The remarkable plan submitted by Messrs. Flockton & Gibbs in the competition for the Sheffield municipal buildings, marked what was practically a new departure in the planning of this class of building, and is worthy of the closest study and attention. The principle here adopted was that of a central hall, with the public office of each department opening directly from it, and surrounded by the private offices of the several officials. This arrangement is undoubtedly ideal, but to adopt it strictly would usually involve increasing the number of stories to an undesirable extent, as was the case in the design in question. The principle is, however, the right one, and in planning public offices should, I think, always be borne in mind; but it will be necessary to modify and adapt it to suit the special requirements of the site in each particular case. If I may venture to suggest a criticism, the design in question erred in this respect—that it was not adapted to the site.

In large buildings it is desirable that there should be a secondary or subsidiary entrance to the offices, in order that it may be possible to use the main entrance on state occasions without interfering with the course of public business. In some cases it might be an advantage to make the secondary entrance the usual office entrance, reserving the main entrance exclusively for state use. In any case, this point is worthy of careful consideration; but the peculiar circumstances in each instance will govern this, as many other details. The position of the strong rooms for the several departments, which are often of considerable size, present at times much difficulty. These should, as a general rule, open out or communicate with the clerks' offices. In the planning of most large buildings there are certain spaces where it is a difficult matter to introduce an adequate amount of light, and it should be en-

deavored to utilize these spaces for the strong rooms; otherwise there is no serious objection to their being placed in the basement, if convenient access from the clerks' offices is provided. The roofs or floors over should be specially constructed to secure the requisite strength. The thickness of an ordinary fireproof floor is quite inadequate for security. One of the finest methods of construction is a layer of cement concrete 12 inches to 18 inches in thickness on steel joists about 3 feet apart, and with a sheet of strong expanded metal embedded in the centre. This forms a practically indestructible floor. As a rule, it may be regarded as quite unnecessary to line these strong rooms with sheets of steel in the manner in which the bankers' safes are treated, as the chief, if not the only danger to be guarded against, is fire. Some arrangement should be made for inlet and outlet ventilation by small cranked flues in the walls or otherwise.

Where it can be conveniently provided a small museum or show-room for sanitary appliances, &c., will be a valuable addition to the surveyor or engineer's department. This should be placed in the basement if it can be fairly well lighted and is accessible, as in this position the drainage required can be arranged with a minimum of difficulty.

The position and amount of lavatory accommodation should be most carefully considered. I am inclined to think that in most instances this is very much overdone, as a great amount is not requisite if they are well and centrally placed. Where it can be avoided, they should never be placed on the front wall, as the difficulties of soil pipes and ventilators are practically insuperable.

The council chamber, committee-rooms, &c., may be regarded as the most important portion of municipal buildings, and it is here that the architect has the greatest opportunity for the exercise of his art. It is here, above all places, that he may with propriety give full play to his ability, and may introduce the richest materials and the most effective design. This being so, it is essential that the planning should be most carefully thought out in its most minutest details, as whatever elaboration may be introduced, and however lavish may be the expenditure, the effect will fall short if the planning be ill-considered. On the other hand, the plainest and least expensive materials may be combined into an effective and dignified composition if the plan and details be carefully studied and worked out, and it is in the consideration of the plan that the finest effects are conceived.

The main staircase should be treated as practically a part of this section, and should be planned with due regard to the position of the principal rooms, and to that of the main entrance and the offices of the town clerk or any other officials who may, from the peculiar circumstances of the case, be placed on the upper floor. In buildings where a public hall forms part of the scheme, another factor is introduced in the problem, as the main staircase will be required to serve also as the principal access to that, unless it be on the ground floor, which the restricted nature of the site in many instances precludes.

It would be manifestly impossible to lay down any hard and fast rules as to the planning of this department, and I can therefore only give in general terms a few of the points which it is desirable to keep in view.

The main-staircase will, of course, rise

from the entrance-hall, and should be of very ample width and easy rise, the minimum of which may be taken as 12-inch tread and 5½-inch or 6-inch riser. The foot of the staircase should be a prominent feature, and seen immediately on entering the building. It is very desirable that the head of the staircase should land into an upper hall of full as ample dimensions as the lower entrance-hall. It is here, at the head of the staircase, that the crowding at receptions, and on other important occasions, will be most severely felt, and the more space which can be given the better, both from a practical and architectural point of view.

The position of the cloakrooms for ladies and gentlemen is a matter which is often difficult to determine. In the consideration of these, the manner in which they are generally used must be taken into account. A lady and gentleman enter the building, separate for the purpose of leaving their cloaks, &c., and then rejoin. It appears from this that the two cloakrooms should not be far apart, and the doors should be almost in sight of each other, otherwise there will be difficulty in ladies and gentlemen rejoining after leaving them. All things considered, the best position appears to be opening out of the lower entrance hall, say one on each side of the foot of the main staircase. The upper hall will then be capable of being used as part of the reception suite, which would not be the case if the cloakrooms were placed upstairs. These rooms are often allowed to take their chance, and are consequently very inconveniently placed. I think, however, they should be regarded as of considerable importance, and worthy of some care and thought in their arrangement.

The upper hall at the head of the staircase should give access to the council chamber department, including banqueting hall, town hall, and any offices which may be on this floor. In the planning of these rooms, the same principle as that previously advocated, of avoiding corridors, or reducing them to a minimum, should be observed. It is always necessary that the council chamber should be provided with an ante or waiting-room of good size, and in most cases it will be possible to so arrange that the mayor's parlour and committee rooms shall be grouped around it, all more or less entering from it. Where this is done it will be found that there is great opportunity for architectural treatment, and at the same time considerable economy of space is affected. The anteroom thus becomes available as a waiting room for deputations to committees as well as to the council, and the whole department is centralized and concentrated. A councillors' lavatory is necessary, opening out of the anteroom; but this may be small, as it will not be in constant use.

As far as possible the whole of this section of the building should be self-contained and capable of being shut off from the public portions. The council chamber should be in a quiet position away from the main street where possible, and the mayor's parlour adjoining and communicating with the private office of the town clerk.

The access for the public to the gallery of the council chamber should be an entirely separate and distinct entrance and staircase from the street, and should be as direct as possible. In most cases a gallery to accommodate from twenty-five to thirty persons will be sufficient, as very few people attend the ordinary meetings of a town council. The only occasion on which there are large numbers is on the election of the mayor, and at these times no ordinary gallery would be sufficient to accommodate them.

* A paper read by Mr. H. T. Hare at a meeting of an English Architectural Association.