

Alderman Fenwicks, Newcastle Upon Tyne



Client: Tyne & Wear Building Preservation Trust
Year: 1998

Simpson & Brown was appointed by the newly formed Tyne & Wear Building Preservation Trust in 1980, to deliver a strategy for the repair of two buildings for office use. A first stage of work, including structural and external repairs, was completed in 1983. Funding then failed and the buildings stood empty for thirteen years. With new support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the work was resumed and completed in 1997-98. The house, now a hub for small businesses in Newcastle, remains in the ownership of the Trust.

This house at 98 Pilgrim Street is one the most important mercantile town houses in any city in the North of England. With medieval origins, it occupies two burghage plots on the main route to the North and seems to have been substantially built in the mid seventeenth century. There was further work in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, including the introduction of sash windows and the panelling of the "Great Room". It became the Queen's Head, an important coaching inn on the Great North Road in the late eighteenth century, and the Newcastle Liberal Club in the 1880s, by which time it had been united with no. 100 next door. The Liberals left in 1962 and by the late 1970s the buildings, then owned by the City, was derelict and poor condition. Fortunately consent for demolition was refused, and the council Trust took the building on.

The work was philosophically and technically challenging and the quality of the result is a testament to the great goodwill which the project received, to the quality and traditional attitudes of contractors and tradesmen, and that the work was unhurried and, in the end, well funded.