YORK HOUSE

York House has always occupied a strategic location within Malton – not militarily, perhaps, like the fort or the castle, but economically and in terms of trade. It is strategically located adjoining the medieval and later port area, but faces also directly into the market place and onto York Road. This is unlikely to be accidental.

It is my conviction that York House can once more become a similarly strategic component of the Malton economy – but not as offices: *as itself.*

York House is, without doubt, the most important historic house in Malton. It is certainly the building that carries within it more cultural significance – and does so more demonstrably than any other in town.

In its surviving – and legible – architectural elements, its archaeology and its historical associations, as well as in its equally historic and significant, if currently concealed garden, it is of national importance.

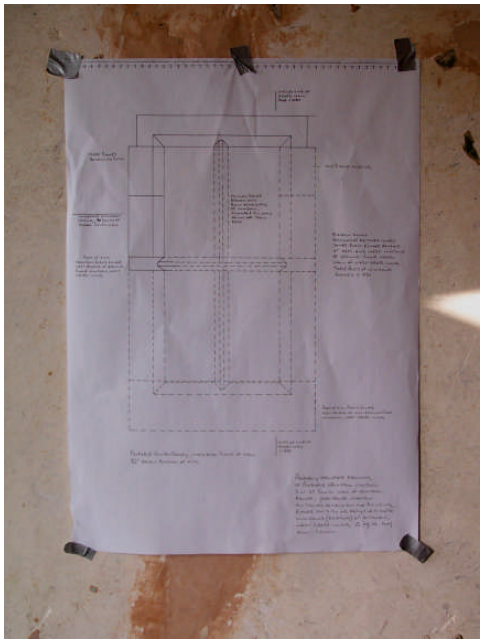
Our work, investigations and research so far has demonstrated that this significance far exceeds that already acknowledged by its Grade II * (soon to

be Grade I) listing and that the analysis offered by this listing is wholly inadequate and under-stated. The origins of York House lie much earlier than 1682 and much of this early fabric remains. The main phases of evolution are accessible to analysis and explanation. The house has existed through most of the town's history; its stones and timbers resonate with the joys and lamentations of this particular place. They speak to us in ways that no documentary remnant can; they offer insight to the inquisitive and sparks to the less exacting flight of our imagination.

The house was built in at least the mid-15th century, and quite possibly somewhat earlier than this, probably by the Gilbertine Priory in Old Malton. It may have been a 'customs house', in effect: controlling and overseeing the significant international trade in wool and other goods on the River Derwent and in the market place. It will also have controlled trade with York by road. It was always of high status. It may have been an important element of a much larger complex of monastic buildings, the vaulted undercrofts of which, at least, survive beneath the adjoining Talbot Hotel. There has been a commonality of ownership of these two sites since the Dissolution and probably since the construction of both, which may have been carried out at the same time, as have many of the changes wrought upon each building since.

As for York House, the putative date of construction of the 'Strickland Hunting Lodge', which the Wentworths bought and extended in all directions after 1739, is most unlikely to be accurate, and the surviving core of the building much precedes the ascribed date of 1684.

In the mid-15th century, York House was probably U-shaped, with cross-wings to east and west and a central open hall between to the south, around a courtyard that opened to the north and towards Yorkersgate and the market. There was probably a slight indent on the south side at this time, although the south walls of the cross-wings may have been extended southwards at a later date to form a classic 'H' house. The hall was lit at its south west end by a large mullion and transom window with four equal leaded lights. This was quite high in the wall. Some of it remains in situ, blocked by the staircase. All of its component parts were reused elsewhere in the building and remain. This window dates from the fifteenth century.



If the south walls of the cross-wings were brought forward at a later date – and there is some circumstantial evidence within the fabric of the existing

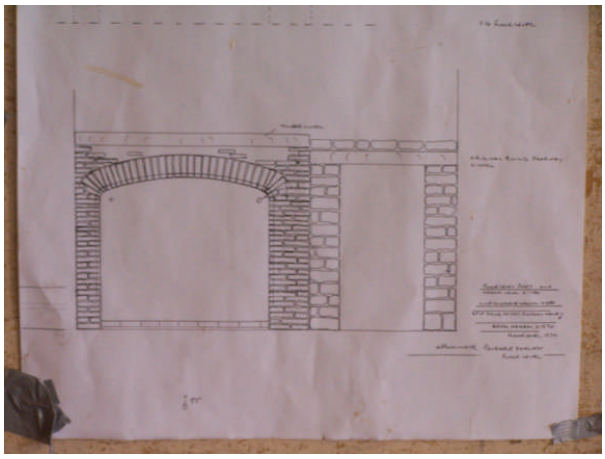
building to suggest that this was so, then this had occurred by 1728 and was probably carried out by William Strickland during the 1680s, before further major change to this elevation in the mid 18th century.

After the Dissolution of the Gilbertine Priory in 1539, the house probably fell to the Eure's, who owned a significant estate in Malton and were builders of the house of which the Old Lodge Hotel on Old Maltongate is the only remnant. It may instead have belonged to the Stricklands through this period – but was associated with both families by the marriage in 1682 of Elizabeth Palmes, heiress of the Eure estate, and William Strickland. This union, as well as their residency of York House is recorded in the overthrow of the surviving C17 wrought iron railings to the front of York House, in which the initials W.S. are enclosed by the Eure family motto, 'Vince Malum Bono'.

By the time of their occupancy, the house had probably already undergone one major transformation: the courtyard had been enclosed, the current north wall of the hall being raised entirely in calcareous sandstone. The grand and very high status staircase had been introduced into the former medieval hall.

The cross-wings had been raised (in calcareous sandstone also, atop the oolitic limestone of the earlier gables) as well as the south wall of the hall. Fireplaces had been introduced into all rooms at the west end, blocking earlier windows. The earliest service end of the building – in the east cross-wing – with high-end of the hall and solar to the west (the solar window survives, if not in its original form), was made the high, 'polite' end. A 'great chamber' was created on the first floor, over what had been the courtyard and was entered immediately from the head of the stairs. Former windows onto the courtyard from east and west cross-wings became doorways out of the great chamber. Earlier doorways from the hall were blocked. A chamfered

brick fire surround was built into the south side of the older chimney stack, the hearth of which lies 13" below current floor levels. This fire surround survives, currently obscured by a later, baroque chimney piece and by oak wainscot and plaster.



To the other side of the stack there was a stone-sided fireplace with chamfered oak lintol. This is probably older still, and the earliest, kitchen fireplace in the building. The oak was butchered in the C18, its central section replaced with brick, but the ends survive.

Major reconstruction work took place at the west end of the building, associated primarily with the introduction of flues, and especially of the massive flue of the kitchen fireplace. The huge 3-centred arched Hildenley limestone fire surround that this flue served was probably introduced at this time and may well have been pilfered from the Priory kitchen.

It is probable that the brick vault beneath the west cross-wing was constructed at this time, perhaps replacing one of stone from the earlier period, as well as at least the most northerly brick cross wall which rises from vault to attic. This detail is absent from the east cross-wing, which has a large early, stone and brick chimney stack in a similar location. The bricks of the stack differ from those of the cross-wall, the latter being the same as those above the carved stone surround, however.

William and Elizabeth Strickland made further significant changes after 1682. The house was almost entirely wainscoted to full height, using pitch pine, although incorporating some earlier oak wainscot in the south rooms of the east cross-wing. The kitchen and hall were likely not panelled. The west doorway from the west cross-wing into the hall was blocked and earth-rendered at the same time that an arcade was built at the foot of the stairs along the line of the north wall of the medieval hall, some of which may previously have survived, pierced by the C16 stairs. This has highly accomplished oak graining beneath a darker, C19 treatment.

The mud mortar and aggregate fill from this – or another – wall was used to infill the floors of the east cross-wing, raising them some 10" at least. The decorative stone floor of the main hall was perhaps already in situ. If not, it was added at this time.

The wainscot covered earlier decorative finishes: earth plaster beneath a haired lime finish coat and limewash, which remains today. The central great chamber over the hall was fully wainscoted and continued to be entered at the head of the stair.

The south panelled wall was moved to its current location in the mid C18, mounted on a stud wall of this period, creating a separate landing from which the cross wings are now accessed and disrupting the effect of the earlier (and probably original) 9-bay coffered ceiling

This room is the only one that retains its wainscot to full height, although lower levels and timber cornices survived the mid-C18 alterations in most rooms. Paint removal has shown very clearly that when installed, the wood was seen, varnished, and that the olive green and other colours came later, although the olive green is likely to pre-date the purchase of the property by the Watson-Wentworths. It would be entirely feasible to reassert the original dimensions of this room, using the existing wainscot, reversing the C18 change of position and layout, creating a splendid and authentic space once more.

New chimney pieces were introduced everywhere, within the probably earlier C16 surrounds, which were much more simple and of brick. These chimney pieces had overmantles of wood, fixings for which survive. A semi-circular doorway arch of pitch pine was added to the east doorway from the great chamber, as well as fitted cupboards beyond, against the chimney stack.

The effect of this is currently diminished by a doorframe inserted in 1967, as well as by the C18 stud wall against its north side.

Also at this time, the flues of the west wall were diverted diagonally towards the centre of the building to meet new stacks almost certainly of brick, with Hildenley limestone plinths. The west wall was raised once more, some 18", a heavy cornice installed, encasing roof truss ends and the earlier wall-plate in masonry. Where these met the brickwork of the inside of the new chimneys, they were simply sawn off.

The only chimney piece that survives from this period is the Black Hoptonwood limestone bolection mould surround of the (now reduced) great chamber.

The Baroque fireplace in the south groundfloor room of the east cross-wing probably dates from the late 1600s but has been imported from elsewhere, probably after the house fell to the Wentworth-Fitzwilliams, from either Wentworth Woodhouse or Milton Hall. Each underwent Palladian transformations under the direction of Henry Flitcroft. It may have been installed by William Strickland but is, in truth, of much higher status and

accomplishment than the bolection moulded surround and would surely have taken precedence in the Great Chamber had they arrived in the house at the same time. By the time that it did, probably in the mid C18, the Great Chamber itself would have ceased to have been the focal point of the building.

William Strickland also oversaw the closing of the south bay of the 'H', thereby creating closets in all adjoining rooms to the south end of the cross-wings, in keeping with late C17 fashion and status. A semi-circular arched doorway gave access to the garden, the stair being lit, from a distance, by a window above. This will have allowed a viewing gallery over the garden. There was a doorway in the south of the central gable at this time also, giving access to a roof terrace.

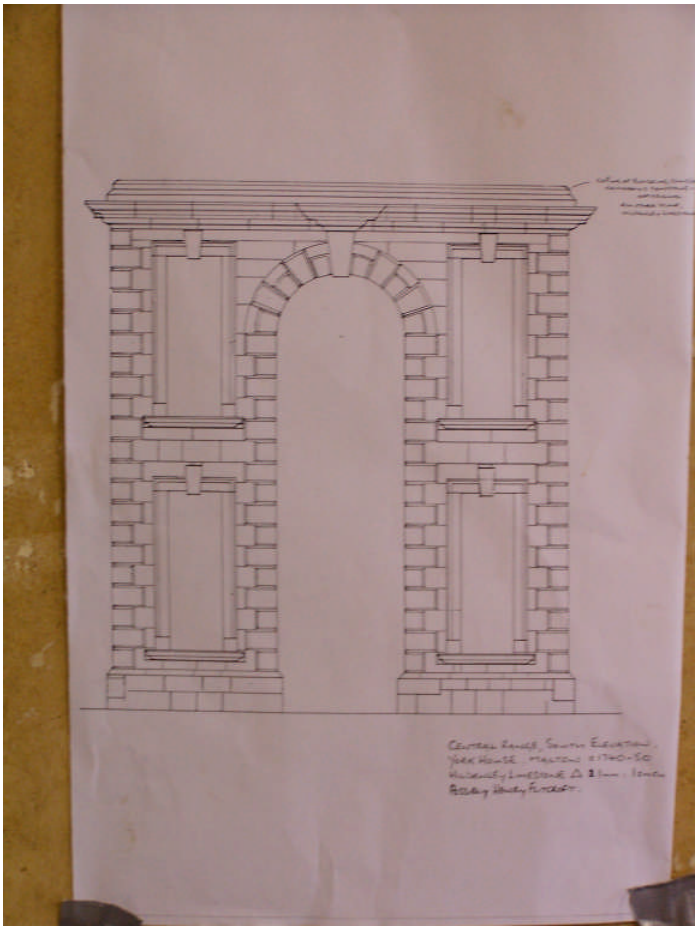
The final high status intervention at York House was made shortly after its acquisition by the Watson-Wentworth family, whose seat was at Wentworth Woodhouse in South Yorkshire. The Watson-Wentworth's had bought the manors of New and Old Malton from William Palmes, whose wife Mary was a Eure, in 1713, and consolidated their ownership of the town in 1739 with the purchase of all Strickland holdings locally, including York House and what would become the Talbot Hotel. In the mid-C18 also, the Watson-Wentworth and Fitzwilliam families were joined by marriage and in 1769 the estates of

both were formally combined by inheritance. After the purchase of the Strickland properties in Malton, major construction and alteration work was begun in the town and by 1782 the Strickland hunting lodge had been transformed into a very swish hotel by the Wentworths, serving the races nearby. It is probable that work upon York House took place almost immediately and that York House provided occasional accommodation for the family during the major upward and inward extension of the Hunting Lodge. By 1787, Charles Smithson was the tenant of York House and its gradual decline in status – if not in cultural significance – had begun.

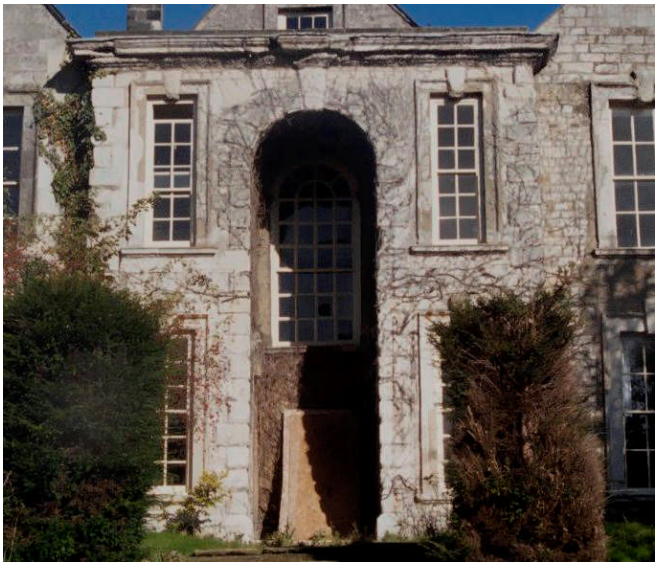
At the time that the Wentworths acquired York House, the Palladian assault upon the Baroque was in full swing. Although Giacomo Leoni's English edition of Palladio's Four Books On Architecture had been published in 1715, and the works of Inigo Jones very much informed by his own, much earlier study of Renaissance architects, including Palladio and by his own study of Roman architecture, it was Isaac Ware's 1738 edition that was pivotal in the sweeping success of this new movement in architecture and to which both Earl Fitzwilliam and Earl Malton were subscribers. Before and after this date, arch-Palladian ideologue Henry Flitcroft was supervising the construction of the main front of Wentworth Woodhouse. He went on to oversee the construction of the south front of Milton Hall. It is highly likely, therefore, that he played a significant role in the Palladian overall of York House, probably designing the new and very academic central range of the south elevation (for all that it has a certain flavour of Inigo Jones and even of Wren, the latter having married into the Fitzwilliam family in 1677, and having two children with the sister of Lord Fitzwilliam of Lifford).

However, any direct association of the south elevation with either Wren or even Hawksmoor (which some have fancied, due to his association at Castle Howard during the first 30 years of the C18), is contradicted by the isometric sketch of the south front upon the 1728 Malton Estate Terrier map, which shows it still in the form it took under Strickland's direction.

It is most likely, therefore, that Flitcroft was the architect responsible for the changes and that these were made upon the Wentworth's purchase of the property.



The central range was brought forward once more, in the form of a meticulously designed and academic Palladian elevation. The surviving south wall of the medieval hall was exposed to the elements once more behind a giant order semi-circular arch in the centre of the range.



The cornice of this is a transparent combination of two drawings from one page of Isaac Ware's edition of Palladio.

The south face of the west cross-wing was refaced in high bed Hildenley ashlar. Perplexingly, that of the east cross-wing was not, retaining a coursed Malton oolite rubble face, which has subsequently been repaired with a cornucopia of different stones and materials. Rusticated quoins, matching those of the new central range were added to the west cross-wing, but not the east, which latter retains its probably C16 Birdsall calcareous sandstone quoins (these appear on the north elevation also), themselves an addition. Palladian window surrounds, with a simple cyma-recta architrave were inserted across the south front and are entirely symmetrical, in their disposition across the elevation as well as between themselves, unlike the window surrounds of the north elevation, which only pretend to be, varying in position, height and width, and which are formed of local calcareous sandstone. These latter may date from the C16, although the C17 is perhaps more likely.

A similarly architraved stone window was added to the west wall, probably occupying an already altered opening that originally contained a medieval solar window. A new stone doorway was added from the central range to the garden, this time within the arch and at right angles to it, in the west wall of the 'H'. A new stone window with semi-circular head, reflecting that of the arch, was added to the stairs in a newly made, or what may by that time have been an already existing, opening.

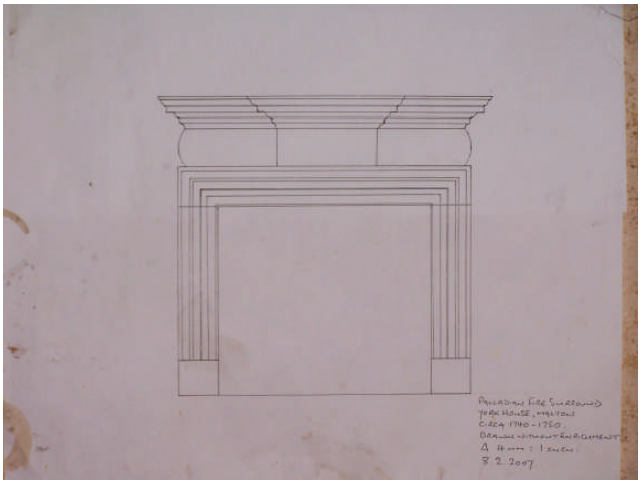
Within, and perhaps because of this intervention, the walls on the stair were replastered in a lime mortar very rich in ox hair, this being applied over the earlier two coat plaster of earth and haired lime. This same plaster was used elsewhere at this time – primarily in place of the upper levels of earlier wainscot, which was removed except for its outer framework, this being retained as a frame for lath and two coat lime plaster, as well as in order to attach permanent fabric wall-coverings.

Wainscot had begun to slide in status and wall-hangings to rise. These were no longer loosely attached, but were nailed in place. The nails for this fabric remain in York House, in what had been the outer edge of the ground of C17 wainscot. This ground itself retains the earliest olive green colour scheme of the later C17 house, perhaps uniquely in Britain. The plaster never received, and still lacks a fine finish coat, since this was never the intention, and was subsequently wallpapered. Only relatively modern lining paper survived, earlier wallpapers having been removed. (A hand-written message from the decorators, found upon the wall of the downstairs south room of the east cross-wing, dates the application of the lining paper to May 1903. It is most

likely that the anaglypta to ceilings, as well as the opc stucco architraves applied to the north window surrounds date from the same year. The 'paperers and painters were James E. Thompson and Steven Hill').

New chimney pieces were installed. A well-proportioned Palladian surround of Portland stone survives in the front first floor room of the west cross-wing, as well as parts of two others from this period. These were painted, but have now been stripped to their original surfaces.

The bolection moulded surround of the former great chamber survived, but a portland stone insert was added within.



The Baroque lingered in the fire surround of the downstairs groundfloor room of the east cross-wing, it's carving a rich mixture of fine, formalised roman enrichment and baroque naturalism. Although it would be satisfying to imagine this as the work of a baroque craftsman being asked to work with new Palladian ideas – artisan mannerist in sensibility – and therefore seductively resonant of a cultural transition and the tension between an architect-led revolution and a craft-led resistance to it, this is sadly unsustainable. Henry Flitcroft is highly unlikely to have tolerated such a failure to grasp the essentials of Palladian proportion or such baroque naturalism in the leaf carving of the pulvinated frieze or of the central garland was it made under his direction. It seems most likely, therefore, that the chimney piece is authentically Baroque and, as evidenced by the fact that when carved it was intended to be 2" deeper into the wall (all enrichment of the returns stops two inches short), it was almost certainly recycled into York House from elsewhere.

As discussed above, this was most likely from Wentworth Woodhouse, although possibly from Milton Hall. If the latter, it may have been designed by Christopher Wren. It is of a very high quality of design and workmanship. Its flower garland is very similar in content and style to those upon the Dean's door of Wren's St Paul's Cathedral. The carver of this was one William Kempster. Whatever the provenance of this chimney piece (which is also of Portland stone, although subsequently blackened, sadly), its motifs are reflected in the plaster cornice above, which clearly took their lead from its introduction.

This may be the earliest intervention by the Wentworths, predating Flitcroft's earnest involvement. It may even be earlier still, reflecting William Strickland's relatively close association with both Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor. This room retains its earlier oak wainscot at lower levels and has finish plastered walls, which were limewashed. This was not the finish in those rooms which were more substantially altered in the mid-C18, although the plaster is of the same character and period as in these rooms, but finished and limewashed. There is every reason to allow a Baroque scheme of decoration to remain or be reasserted in this room, adding another layer of evolution to the house as a whole, alongside the earlier C17 and Palladian interiors elsewhere.

In the same room, a semi-circular headed recess with pine architrave was formed in the west wall against an older stud and brick blocking of what may have been an earlier medieval doorway from the hall to the service end of the house. A similar, much less refined detail was introduced in imitation in the east wall of the front room much later, probably in the late C19. Opposite this, there is a semi-circular and half-domed niche which extends to floor level which is likely older than both and probably a design element introduced by William Strickland.

It is formed of lath and plaster and retains (beneath modern lining paper) all coats of paint applied to the walls of this room, but since removed everywhere else. It is unlikely that this removal could have been carried out to the C18 plaster without seriously damaging it, and this has not occurred. It pre-dates the plaster. A similar colour sequence survives upon the unusual low level panelling, which is formed of long horizontal boards.

Colour schemes from the later C17 onwards survive upon the woodwork of the interior. The earliest pigments were two shades of olive green, followed by a pearl grey and then a yellow ochre. The same colours were applied throughout the house at the same time and on each occasion until well into the C19. The paints were mainly matt distempers. Since 1967, multiple layers of thick, modern gloss have been lathered on, seriously obscuring and consuming often very fine detail in the joinery. Olive green was very fashionable during the first decade of the C18, and probably the last of the C17, but it certain that at least some of the original wainscot was seen and simply varnished in the first instance. This survives and may also survive paint-stripping, depending upon its make up.

The timber-frame roof is of exceptional importance. Very few original timbers survive in the roofs of buildings in Malton, almost all buildings having been raised over time. Most buildings in town were still thatched in the early C18, York House having been one of the few that was not (it had a stone tile roof, but not the one that exists today, which is later and probably Victorian). The timber frame is likely – at least in part – to be the original medieval roof, but it has been lifted and turned, re-framed and recycled within itself in response to the various alterations that have occurred beneath it.

Most unfortunately, re-roofing works in 1989 led to the inappropriate and ill-informed use of tannelised soft wood timbers for repairs, as well as the laying on of an impermeable plastic roofing felt. This has serious long-term implications for the rate and likelihood of decay in the historic timbers of the roof. As soon as the building is brought into occupation once more, and heated, there will be significant and ongoing condensation upon the underside of this plastic, facilitating insect and fungal attack of all timbers

within this space. There is no question that this should be undone as soon as possible. No restoration of the historic interior of the attic space, re-plastering the stud walls and rafters, would be advisable before this issue is resolved.

Timbers within the roof were sampled for dendrochronological analysis in October 2006, The draft report is due in early March. Results from the roof, of course, will not reliably date the building as a whole. Timbers that have been uncovered since October, and the stairs also, might be approximately dated to within a few decades, at least, using this method.

York University have won funding for brick dating analysis to be carried out within York House by the Archaeology Department of Durham University and sampling is imminent. This is very recent technology, trials of which upon known-age brickwork having only just been completed. York House will represent the first 'blind' test of the technique.

York University Archaeology department propose to investigate the lay-out and evolution of the historic garden by geo-physical analysis, as well as scanning the floors of York House itself with radar equipment to explore the very real possibility of lost medieval vaulted spaces beneath the earlier hall and east cross-wing. Several MA students have asked for work placements over the Easter break; SPAB fellows and scholars are likely to work on the project around this time also. English Heritage have sounded me out about a six-month placement for an EH-funded apprentice, largely on the basis of what they have seen at York House and the manner in which the work is being carried out. Simon Holmes of the National Heritage Training Group has requested that association with and hands-on experience upon the project form part of the piloting of new NVQ Level 3 'heritage' qualifications which are on the point of introduction nationally.

It is to be hoped that training courses in traditional building skills, currently being discussed by the Estate, Derwent Training and Craven College will form part of the imminent Heritage Training network and that hands-on work upon historic buildings within Malton will form a core component of such training in the region.

Depending upon the chosen future for York House, it may form an important part of such heritage training.

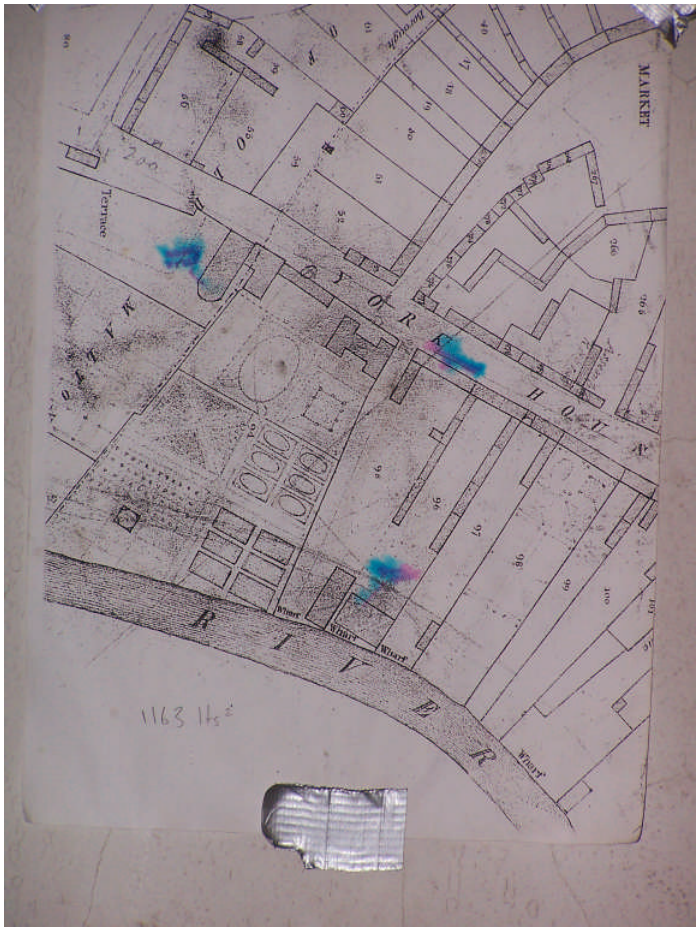
The conservation of the house has generated a large amount of local, professional, as well as academic interest, therefore, and has the potential to generate much more.

York House has the potential to be exemplar and nucleus for future conservation and education facilities in the town, available to professional, crafts person and interested layman alike.

The widespread interest and active involvement is all indicative of the relative uniqueness of what we have in our hands.

It is not simply the importance of the building that offers unique opportunity. It is also the legibility and clarity of its evolution, and the accessible interpretation that this allows, as well as its close association with important families or groups, locally and nationally, throughout its existence and the fact that each of these owners made their own significant, but demonstrable contribution to its structure, form and character in readily interpretable ways.

In rendering up this architectural and social history to the record and in maximising the opportunity it offers to execute the works in an appropriate and sustainable manner, we are in a position to make a rare contribution to its cultural value and to guarantee its authentic survival well into the future. Ours will be the most important contribution to its evolution and character since the 1750s and will consolidate its cultural value. This endeavour extends as easily and essentially to the historic garden, which, with available archive material, research and on the ground investigation, may be authentically restored to an earlier form.



That this potential exists; that so much survives, is uniquely exciting and, perhaps, uniquely challenging.

The skills and the commitment exist, however, to deliver such a project. It remains only to engage the will.

To carve the building up once more as offices would represent, in my opinion, a huge and even a reckless waste of opportunity. It would damage, compromise or disguise a wealth of historic fabric from many periods and would be highly unlikely in any case to deliver a sustainable use for the building.

York House was office space from 1967, having previously been a dwelling. The west cross-wing formed a separate flat.

(The house had been let by the Wentworth Fitzwilliam's to Richard Smithson by 1784. He was the tenant until 1829. His son Charles, such great friends with Charles Dickens, and the reason for Dickens's association with Malton, was born in the house in 1804).

Not all the offices were let and before the building fell vacant around 14 years ago, there was a tenant in only one. The flat has been empty for at least 20 years.

Despite – or because of – the location and historic character of the house, its availability as office space and the readiness of the Fitzwilliam (Malton) Estate to carry out necessary refurbishment works subject to serious intent from a prospective tenant, the building has remained empty.

This has been detrimental to the Estate's image locally, since of all the buildings in town, York House is widely and readily recognised as historic. It is a very real part of the cultural identity of the people in the town, who have regretted its apparent neglect. Local people crave access to this building and to its garden. This engagement of local people with so resonant a part of the town's cultural property is the real meaning of, for instance, the definition of 'cultural heritage' in the UNESCO Draft Medium Term Plan of 1989:

" *Cultural Heritage* may be defined as the entire corpus of material signs – either artistic or symbolic – handed on by the past to each culture and, therefore, to the whole of humankind. As a constituent part of the affirmation and enrichment of cultural identities, as a legacy belonging to all humankind, the cultural heritage gives each particular place its recognizable features and is the storehouse of human experience."

There are significant numbers of vacant office spaces in Malton, including those recently refurbished on the old Travis Perkins site, adjoining York House. New, high-tec offices are proposed for the Manor Farm in Old Malton.

As part of making York House more desirable to prospective tenants, a car park upon part of the lower terrace was proposed – and permission for this granted by Ryedale District Council. However, the construction of access to this car park would be severely destructive of the historic garden walls, as well as of the lower terrace of the historic garden itself. Beyond this, the probably mid-C18 steps would not meet necessary building regulation requirements, necessitating the construction of new steps alongside these, as well as possibly a disabled access ramp that would cut through the remainder of the terracing (this issue may be addressed by the provision of disabled access from the west courtyard, of course).

It is my personal opinion that parking issues, whatever the end use, would be more suitably and adequately addressed by the provision of parking in the west courtyard and alongside the east wall of the house.

There are various 'strategic' plans for Malton in the offing – 'Food Town', for example. But food alone will not attract more visitors to the town and what Malton needs most of all is a significant and reknowned visitor attraction, after visiting which, people might wish to remain and to eat.

It is abundantly clear, and becoming more widely known through articles and public lectures of mine, at least, and on-going recording and research by the Archaeology and Medieval Studies departments of York University, that Malton possesses a very rare and nationally significant stock of vaulted medieval undercrofts as well as a large amount of medieval fabric in standing buildings. The redevelopment of the C18 and, in all likelihood, roman and

medieval port area will allow for further opportunity to enhance and promote the historic character of the town, and may well compliment a more open and accessible destiny for York House itself.

So much survives in Malton from the medieval period and so relatively little disturbed, that it offers unique insight into the working practices and sensibilities of the craftsmen of the time. Much more than has been suspected remains to be discovered, analysed and understood.

As a focus for research into medieval architecture and craft practice, but, as importantly, as a developing exemplar of good conservation practice, heavily involved in the provision of craft training and ethical conservation practice, regionally as well as nationally, and possibly even internationally, Malton is perfectly placed. It already has an infrastructure suitable to the effective provision of such skills in a uniquely interesting environment with an ample supply of live and hands-on projects to service these needs and the requirements of developing heritage training.

York House could provide the pole of attraction and common denominator in these various equations. It could be exemplar, beacon and window upon all else: the gateway into Malton's past and Malton's future.

An appropriate use for York House would not only generate a sustainable income for the house and garden themselves, and for the town as a whole, but would make a huge contribution to promoting awareness of and interest in the historic town of New Malton as a whole. In the terms of several UNESCO recommendations, York House might play a pivotal role in the arousal and development of 'public affection, interest in and respect for the quality and value of the cultural heritage' of the town. The promotion of such awareness, to which the York House project might make a significant and ongoing contribution, can only be to the enhancement of the local economy and to the quality of life in the town as a whole.

People in and around Malton do not know the value of what they have and what they are a part of; they do not understand the richness of the canvas upon which their lives are framed.

I have no doubt that York House and its gardens, as well as adjoining medieval undercrofts beneath the west section of the present Talbot Hotel, sensitively and authentically conserved and restored, intelligently and accessibly displayed, and articulately explained and interpreted, would provide a valuable and popular attraction that will draw visitors into the town and engage sufficient imagination both locally and nationally to ensure their frequent return.

This would generate income within the micro-economic context of the house, but much more than this, it would lead to significant extra spending and business within the town as a whole and encourage further development and enhancement of the 'historic capital' of the area.

It would be a standard-bearer for the philosophy of the Estate.

And it would engage the support and enthusiasm of the residents of Malton also.

York House is little smaller than Nunnington Hall and no smaller than Fairfax House in York. Its garden is much larger and potentially much more interesting and enchanting than that at Nunnington or even that at Beningborough.

The kitchen garden project at Scampston Hall has garnered international attention; it is a new, albeit thoroughly modern, garden but has generated large and repeat demand, as people return to observe its growth and evolution.

The authentic recreation of a Rennaisance, or even a Jacobean garden at York House, fronting onto the river and with pedestrian access into the meadows beyond would, I believe, be a valuable and financially viable project in itself.

But add to it a medieval butcher's workspace and shop and the interest and enchantment of York House itself, then, I believe the combination to be irresistable.

Personally, I would envisage a mixed use for York House, that provided flexible exhibition and occasional meeting spaces for rent, but which also allowed for paying visitors to the house itself. The interiors would be faithfully restored (or revealed) to their Elizabethan, Jacobean, Baroque and Palladian form as appropriate and as informed by the archaeological evidence.

The house might be registered for marriage ceremonies and would, I am certain, become a much sought after location for such ceremonies, again providing follow-on income for businesses in the town. (The Great Chamber, expanded once more to its historic dimensions would provide the perfect context for this).

The aspect of the terrace immediately to the south of the house, and of the back garden as a whole is eminently favourable during most seasons of the year, attracting the warmth of the sun in a way no other part of town seems able to. The provision of a tea-room and outside terrace would provide further and significant income – and is a major factor in the profitability of most National Trust properties.

The scope of services would reflect these flexible uses.

It is my earnest conviction that an appropriate and authentic historic interior could be delivered for the same as, and quite possibly less than, the cost of providing contemporary office accommodation.

Were the office development to proceed, at huge expense in the provision of suitable services alone, and in meeting building regulations, and the spaces to remain un-let, then the house will neither generate income nor attract sustainable use, only opprobrium and regret.

Whilst much, and of course most, of what we have found in the house would survive its development into offices, this outcome would be no guarantee of its survival in the future. I am arrogant enough to say that little of it would have survived the attentions of most local contractors or professionals today, had it not been for my involvement.

I would venture that we have the opportunity and even the responsibility to make decisions now that will best guarantee the future survival of the building and its current authenticity. This lies not in covering up and losing everything once more; it lies not simply in recording, however thoroughly, and hoping that people who come to this building again many years down the line, bother to look for or to suspect that such records exist, but by giving the building the opportunity now to be its own record and to proclaim its own significance to the world.

"The architectural heritage is a capital of irreplaceable spiritual, cultural, social and economic value. Each generation places a different interpretation on the past and derives new inspiration from it. This capital has been built up over centuries; the destruction of any part of it leaves us poorer since nothing new that we create, however fine, will make good the loss"

Cultural significance is a non-renewable resource.

I truly believe that we can make this work to the benefit of everyone, now and into the future and I implore you to let us try.

nigel copsey March 2007