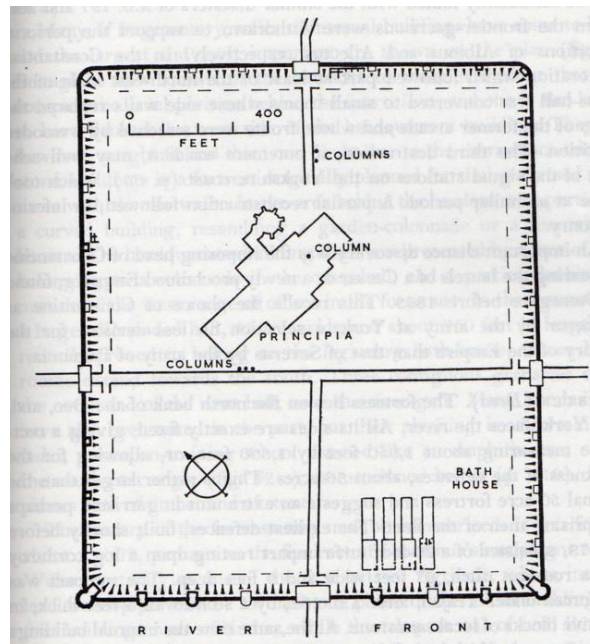


## 1-9 St Leonard's Place and 2-4 Museum Street, York

### Historical Desk Assessment

#### 1.0 York

The modern settlement at York was established in AD 71 when the new Roman governor of the province of Britannia, *Petilius Cerialis*, established a legionary fort there as a base for his campaign against the local Brigantes tribe (Fig\*1). Originally called *Eboracum*, the 21.5 hectare (50-acre) fortress was constructed at the confluence of the River Fosse and the River Ouse and at one time housed over 5,000 soldiers. The later civil settlement and the *colonia* developed outside the defences to the south-west and south-east and on the south bank of the River Ouse.



Figure\*1 – Plan of the legionary fortress at York, including the site of the medieval Minster (Collingwood and Richmond, 1969, 19)

Although most of the stone wall built by the Romans around the fort have been superseded by later, mainly medieval developments, stretches of it are still visible in places, most notably in the south-west corner where a 140 metre length of masonry runs from St Leonard's Place (Fig\*2) to the Multangular Tower (Fig\*3). Within the walls, much of the shape of modern York reflects the lay-out of the Roman settlement:

*A number of York's principal streets correspond to those of the Roman fortress: Stonegate is on the line of the Via Praetoria; the SW end of Chapter House Street is on the line of the Via Decumana; and High and Low Petergate lie above the Via Principalis. Church Street and the S end of Goodramgate are on the line of the Intervallum which ran behind the defences.* (Pevsner and Neave, 1995, 116)

*Eboracum* was one of the most important sites in Roman Britain. The Emperors Hadrian, Septimius Severus and Constantius all used it as a base during their campaigns, and it was

during his stay there that the Emperor Severus proclaimed York as the capital of the province of *Britannia Inferior*.



Figure\*2 – The Roman defences, St Leonard's Place (icosse, 2008)



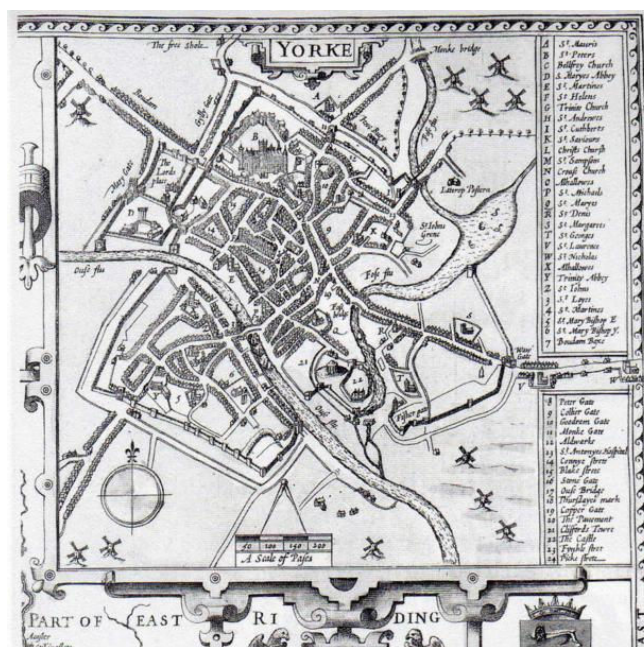
Figure\*3 – The south-west city defences (Nuttgens, 2001, 50f)

The site appears to have been occupied continually ever since. In the early medieval period it became *Eoferwic*, one of the most important centres of the Anglian kingdom of Northumbria. The first Minster church was built around AD 627: this was originally a small wooden building, but it was soon reconstructed in stone.

*Eoferwic* was captured by the Vikings in AD 866 and became the capital of the kingdom of *Jorvik*, controlling great swathes of northern England and all of modern Yorkshire. During this period the city became a major river port, its merchants trading throughout northern Europe.

The beginning of the end of Viking rule came in AD 927 when Athelstan incorporated York and Northumbria into his expanding Anglo-Saxon kingdom. It is believed that it was at this time that he also established what was to become St Leonard's Hospital on royal land to the west of the cathedral. The hospital eventually occupied a 4-acre site and was one of the largest hospitals in medieval England.

The city and the Minster were badly damaged during William the Conqueror's campaign around 1069, and a new church was erected on a new site (most of the current complex dates from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries). It was around this time too that the Benedictine Abbey of St Mary was founded to the south-west of the walled settlement: it became the the richest foundation of its kind in northern England, its walls enclosing some 12 acres of ground. The dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII saw the closure of all of the the monastic houses in the city including St. Leonard's Hospital and, in 1539, St Mary's Abbey.



Figure\*4 – John Speed's map of York, 1610

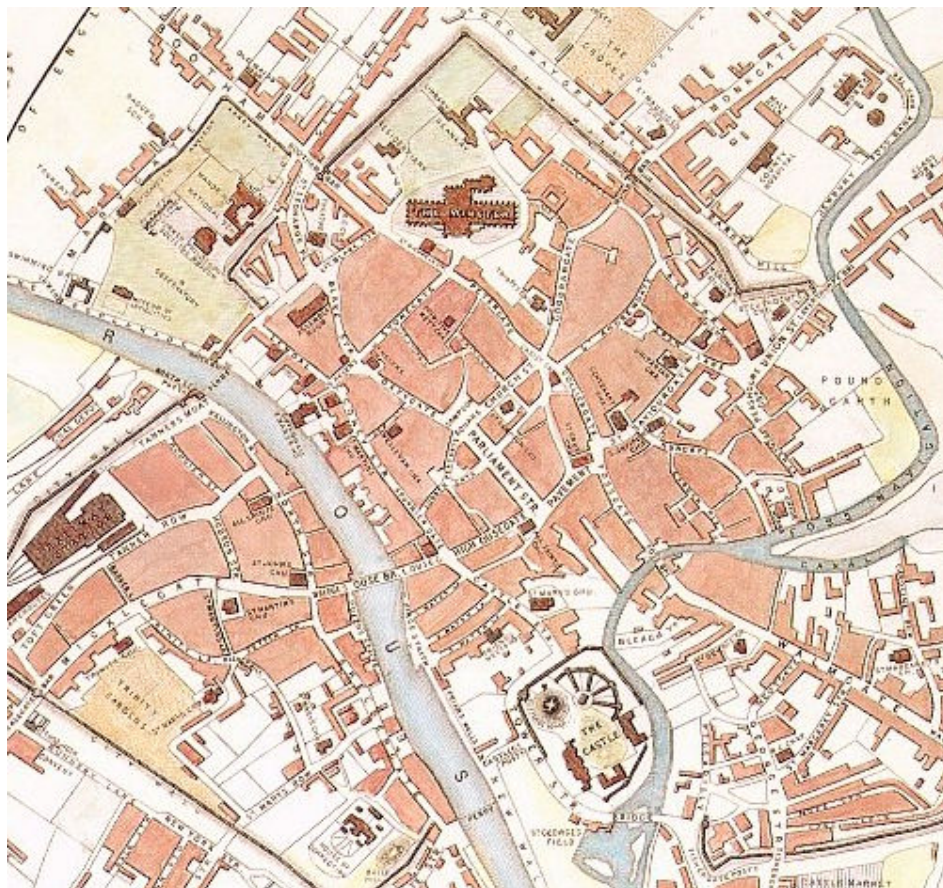
At this time York was still largely contained within the limits of the Roman settlement (Fig\*4). From the Restoration onwards, the city was gradually dominated by the local aristocracy and gentry and it developed into the social and cultural centre of the north with new architecture to match the population's growing aspirations. The Assembly Rooms were built in 1730-35 to designs by Lord Burlington and the Theatre Royal was constructed on part of the old St Leonard's hospital site in 1744, incorporating substantial sections of its fabric. Racing began at York race course in 1731, and a new grandstand designed by the architect John Carr was opened in 1755. Carr designed many of the new houses for the gentry including Castlegate House (1773-77), and he was also responsible for the interior decor of Fairfax House (1760-62).

However, while individual building projects were fairly common at this time in the city, there were few attempts at York of planned development on the scale of other social centres and regional capitals. There were no urban squares or crescents, although terraces were constructed on various sites: the most significant of these were at St Saviourgate and the appropriately named New Street, constructed between 1745 and 1746 and consisting of a block of six 30-storey brick houses with attics and basements.

Carr's contemporary, Thomas Atkinson, produced a design for a crescent of twenty houses for the Minster Yard, but this was never implemented. It was not until the end of the Georgian period and the beginning of the Victorian that major alterations began to be made to the streetscape of the city. One of the first of these was begun in the 1830s when a semi-crescent was laid out on the south side of the new St Leonard's Place to designs by John Harper (see Fig\*5):

*This was one of the numerous 'improvements' of the 1830s which included the laying out of the broad Parliament Street as a new market place for the rapidly expanding city. The population rose from c.17,000 in 1801 to c.30,000 in 1841 with many of the new houses outside the walls.*

(Pevsner and Neave, 1995, 122)



Figure\*5 - Detail from map of York, Tallis, ca.1855

The railway came to York in 1839 and the city rapidly became a centre for the industry: by 1905 over 6,000 people were employed on the railway and in the locomotive and carriage works. In World War II, York was bombed by the German Luftwaffe and the railway station was one of several important buildings that was badly damaged.

The city's population peaked in 1951 at just over 105,000, a third of whom were employed in the railways and in the confectionery industry.

There were proposals in the 1960s and 1970s to build an inner ring road, but the decision was made to preserve the historic shape and fabric of the city and the A64 bypass was constructed instead, reflecting the importance of tourism to the city's economy in the late-20<sup>th</sup> century:

*York provides England's prime example of the economic benefits of preserving the historic fabric and the aesthetic benefits of positive conservation.*

(Pevsner and Neave, 1995, 126)

## **2.0 1-9 St Leonard's Place**

*The creation of a street for 'genteel private residences' was first proposed in 1831 but no positive progress was made until 1834. The street was thrown open to carriages in 1835, although building continued until 1842.*

(RCHME, 1981, 204)

St Leonard's Place connects Museum Street to Bootham and cuts through the Roman defences and the site of the medieval St Leonard's Hospital. The barbican of Bootham Bar and an adjoining length of city wall and rampart were removed at its northern end and the demolition of Bootham Bar itself was considered before being rejected. The land was bought by York Corporation from Lord Halifax for £800 in 1675.

## **2.1 St Leonard's Hospital**

As discussed above, St Leonard's Hospital (originally known as St Peter's Hospital) was one of the largest establishments of its kind in medieval England and occupied the whole of the west corner of the Roman fortress, reaching from the Roman wall on the south-west to the back of the properties along High Petergate to the north-east (RCHME, 1981, 93-95).

The existing site was given by William Rufus, who built a chapel dedicated to St Peter, but the hospital was damaged or destroyed in the great fire of 1137. King Stephen built a new church dedicated to St Leonard, and this became the name for the whole hospital during the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

In the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century a large building with a vaulted undercroft was built and remains of this survive incorporated into the fabric of the Theatre Royal. There are also above ground remains to the west of Museum Street which probably form part of the infirmary which was built by John Romanus, Treasurer of the Minster, probably in the second quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century (RCHME, 1981, 93-95).

After the Dissolution the site was granted to Sir Arthur Darcy in 1544 but he sold it back to the Crown in 1546. Following this the royal mint was transferred from the castle to the St Leonard's site: it operated there intermittently until 1698 with the result that part of the site was known as *Mint Yard* until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The south-east boundary wall and some of the buildings were destroyed when Museum Street was widened in 1782 and further destruction took place when St Leonard's Place was built in 1832 and during alterations to the Theatre Royal in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## 2.2 Planning and construction

The later-1700s saw the townscape of many major towns and cities in Britain subject to major alterations and additions both in the form of new streets and even new towns, often built alongside the older settlement:

*The demand for middle-class and upper-class housing seemed at times to be insatiable...there were a vast number of development schemes, ranging from a few houses in a terrace to new towns as large or larger than the original city.*  
(Stillman, 1988, 215)

As discussed above, however, similar development was limited in York until the 1830s when a number of 'improving' schemes were effected within the city walls, of which St Leonard's Place was probably the most significant. The 'original proposal, with its advantages', was made in 1831:

*House Book of the Commonalty of the City of York*  
3<sup>rd</sup> February 1831

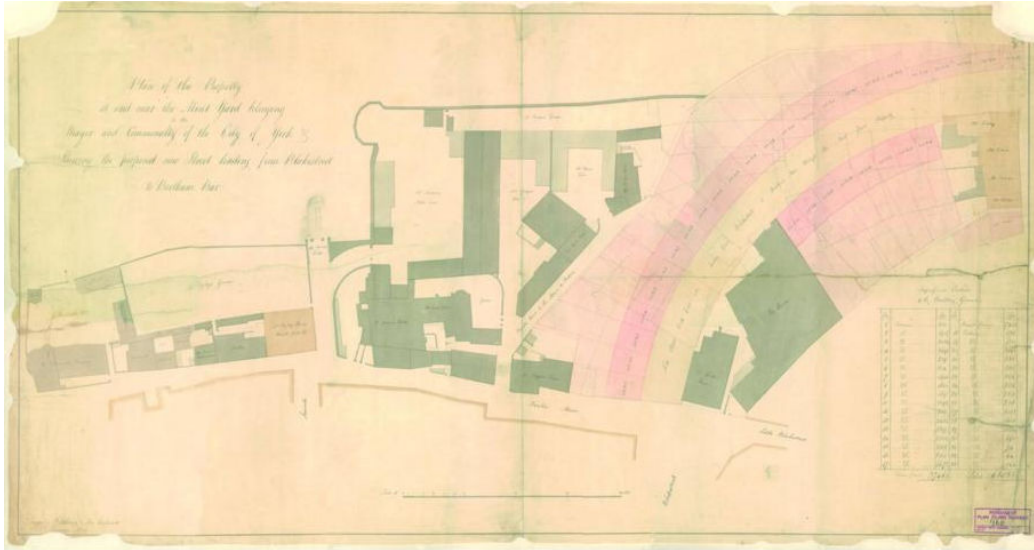
*The Committee appointed by the Mayor and the Commonalty on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of February 1830 to inspect the state and condition of the valuable and extensive Estates and property belonging to the Corporation, do report to this Meeting as follows, viz:*

...  
*Your Committee trust that they will not be accused of outstepping the line of duty deposited in them, if they call the particular attention of this Meeting to a great Improvement that may be made both to the convenience of the public, and to the value of the property in the immediate vicinity (belonging to the Corporation) by the removal of the Barbicans at Bootham and Walmgate Bar, as the property adjoining to the former, from great age, is in a very dilapidated condition, capable of being greatly improved, and rendered ultimately much more productive, by the above suggestion being carried into execution.*

*Your Committee further beg to suggest to the consideration of this Meeting, that a further great public improvement may be made by forming a spacious New Street from the Top of Blakestreet, through the Mint Yard, and ending at Bootham Bar, the whole line of which properly belongs to the Corporation.*

*In the opinion of your Committee this improvement is most desirable for many reasons, 1<sup>st</sup>. as obviating the difficulty and danger of carriages passing through Little Blakestreet, Secondly.-As opening a new communication into Mint Yard to a large extent of property at present of little productive value, and an excellent situation for genteel private residences. Thirdly.-as forming a handsome New Street through that part of the property at present of the least productive value, and lastly as greatly tending to improve the whole immediate neighbourhood, and thereby ultimately most materially improving the Annual Revenues of the Corporation.*

(York City Archives, B50/202)



Figure\*6 – Plan of the Property at or near the Mint Yard belonging to the Mayor and Commonalty of the City of York & Showing the proposed new Street leading from Blakestreet to Bootham Bar. Designed by P. Atkinson & Son Architects December 1831. (York City Archives, ACC 191/PH55/960)



Figure\*7 – Detail from Plan of the Property at or near the Mint Yard belonging to the Mayor and Commonalty of the City of York & Showing the proposed new Street leading from Blakestreet to Bootham Bar. Designed by P. Atkinson & Son Architects December 1831. (York City Archives, ACC 191/PH55/960)

It appears that the proposal did not find immediate favour, however, as exactly a year later the concept of a redevelopment of the area along with the construction of a new street was being raised again:

*Old property in Mint Yard much decayed;*

*Mr Atkinson's survey & proposals for new street 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1832*

*Your Committee further report that several of the Houses and other Buildings, belonging to the Corporation, in Mint Yard, are in a very dilapidated and ruinous condition; -that William Bradley the tenant of one part of the premises, at an annual rent of £30, has quitted without notice in consequence of the buildings being positively uninhabitable, and that other Tenants have signified that they must all necessarily quit unless some improvement be made in the condition of the buildings they occupy. Your Committee do not consider it within their province to inquire why this property had been permitted to fall into this state of decay, probably the great age of the buildings may sufficiently account for it; they are satisfied, however, that unless immediate steps be taken for putting the premises into tenantable repair and condition, the property will very soon become wholly unproductive.*

*It appearing that such repairs as may be considered indispensable could not be accomplished without the expenditure of a very considerable sum of money, Your Committee thought it right to take into consideration the expediency of adopting some plan by which the property in question might be turned to greater advantage than can be derived from it, in its present form, by any expense that may be incurred in it, Your Committee consequently directed Mr Atkinson to make a Survey and plan of the xxxxxx whole site of Mint Yard, (see Figs\*6 and \*7) and they feel confident, that the practicability of effecting a very important public improvement, and at the same time materially increasing the value of the property of the Corporation, without any serious diminution of its present income will be quite obvious, upon an inspection of the Drawings prepared by Mr Atkinson. The Plan, Your Committee would recommend to the consideration of the Corporation is, to form a New Street from the top of Blakestreet, to commence on the South side of the House occupied by Dr Wake, and to continue in a curvilinear direction as far as Bootham Bar, it will be seen from the Drawings, that a Street may thus be formed 40 feet in width, with sufficient space of ground on each side for the creation of Dwellinghouses having Gardens behind them. The greater portion of the site of this proposed improvement is at present open ground, and the buildings upon the remainder are principally those which Your Committee have described as being in a ruinous state. Your Committee calculate that the gross rental at present derived by the Corporation from the site, and the buildings now standing thereon, amounts to about £280, and when the annual expense of repairs, and the probable decrease of rental, are taken into account, a very considerable deduction must be made from that sum. By the adoption of the plan proposed, about 6000 square yards of building ground would be obtained, in one of the most respectable, salubrious, convenient and agreeable situations which the City affords, and Your Committee conceive that this might be divided into 28 lots for the erection of Houses of a superior Class, the superficial contents of each lot averaging about 214 square yards. ... It will be observed, that the Drawings produced shew the Street as continuing of an equal width from Blakestreet to the present site of Bootham Bar, where, in case that bar should be taken down, the Street would unite with Bootham and form a direct and spacious thoroughfare from the centre of the City to the Great North Road.*

(York City Archives, B50/269-271)

Atkinson's plan (Fig\*6) shows that the original intention was that the new street was intended to have three distinct sections:

- on the west side there were 19 lots (numbered 1-19) consisting of a crescent of large houses with gardens to the rear, the latter of varying sizes depending on the existing properties behind them;

- continuing this on the north were five smaller lots (29-33) with much smaller gardens to the rear;
- on the east side and abutting the theatre to the north were another eight lots (20-27) with house sites similar in size to lots 1-19 but with substantially larger gardens to the rear.

The plan also clearly indicates the amount of demolition of existing structures that this original scheme would have required had it been effected: apart from all of the medieval and post-medieval buildings that were on the site, it was also proposed that both Bootham Bar and a large section of the Roman and medieval walls were to be removed. Atkinson shows that on the site of the development as finally built in 1834-5 there were existing structures on lots 4-9, and buildings on all of the rear gardens (Fig\*7).

It appears that the project was approved, but only to the extent that the site should be offered to private investors to allow them to develop the plan. However, one year later this approach was clearly not working too well:

*Proposals for letting property in*

*4<sup>th</sup> February 1833*

*Your Committee are desirous of again drawing the attention of the Corporation to the situation of their property in Mint Yard. In pursuance of directions given to Your Committee in the early part of last year, they took the necessary measures for offering the Ground to be let on building leases, with a view to the formation of a Street to lead from Blake Street to Bootham Bar. Notices and conditions of letting were published, accompanied by plans and elevations of the proposed Street, but no offers were received. Your Committee think this may be attributed in some degree to the depression universally felt throughout the City, during great part of last year, but perhaps more particularly to the circumstance of the ground offered to be let remaining inclosed, and in a great measure inaccessible to the inspection and observation of the public; and they are not at all inclined to deviate from the opinion before expressed that it is practicable, as well as most desirable, to carry the project into execution. If the line of a Street to a certain extent were to be marked out, and the ground exposed to public view, so that its situation and advantages could be distinctly seen, Your Committee think that many persons would be induced to come forward with offers who have hitherto been deterred from doing so by the cause above alluded to.*

*(York City Archives, B50/339)*

The local authorities obviously saw the need to become leaders in the project, as by the following year work on the development of the new thoroughfare had begun:

*3<sup>rd</sup> February 1834*

*The line of the intended New Street through Mint Yard having been cleared, and the Site of the contiguous building ground sufficiently exposed to exhibit the numerous advantages of the situation; Your Committee gave notice by Public Advertisement that on the 31<sup>st</sup> Ultimo, proposals would be received for taking the ground on Building Leases. Your Committee are sorry to report that no specific proposals have been received, but they have reason to hope that scites will be let before the spring shall be far advanced. Application has been made by several highly respectable Gentlemen, who are Subscribers to the Library at present in Lendal for information as to the terms on which the Corporation would be willing to let the corner lots opposite Dr Wake's House, for the purpose of erecting a New Library. Your Committee beg to recommend that the General Committee for the ensuing year should be authorised to treat on liberal terms for letting the corner lots for the purpose alluded to, as Your Committee conceive it is obviously very desirable not only to forward a measure calculated to promote the advantage and convenience of the Public, but also to give every*

*encouragement to the erection of a Building intended for a Public Institution as the commencement of the projected New Street, which, when it shall become a public thoroughfare, Your Committee are satisfied will prove to be one of the most useful improvements of that description which has been effected in this City for many years past. Your Committee are able to report that the Main Drain or Sewer for the projected New Street is now completed; and although it is to be regretted that the expense of the work has been considerably greater than was expected, there can be no doubt that the increased outlay was occasioned by circumstances wholly unforeseen and unavoidable.*  
(York City Archives, B50/409-410)

The York Subscription Library were offered the plot at the corner of St Leonard's Place to build a new library and pay 'an adequate rent':

*15<sup>th</sup> July 1834*

*Report of the General Committee relative to the Building of a Library in Saint Leonard's Place*

*In consequence of this suggestion the Library Committee apprised the several Architects resident in York, that they would give a Premium of Ten Pounds for the best plans, and out of the number sent in to them they have selected those designed by Messrs. Robinson and Andrews, which they submitted to the inspection of Your Committee at a Meeting held on the 10<sup>th</sup> instant.*

(York City Archives, B50/427-428)

These plans were approved by the Corporation, who must have been relieved to see some development on the new street which continued to cost money for its construction with no sign of the hoped for private investors.

*3<sup>rd</sup> February 1835*

*Besides the ordinary annual expenditure above stated the following payments have been made since the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of February 1834...*

*Further expenses incurred in the formation of the New Street...597.11.2*

(York City Archives, B50/453)

However, 1834 was to be the year that the St Leonard's Place project finally came to fruition:

*In the Report of the Proceedings of Your Committee during the past year, the alterations already made, and still in progress, on the site of Mint Yard, claim the most prominent place. It is now three years since the General Committee in their annual Report adverted to the ruinous state of the houses and buildings still standing in Mint Yard, and recommended the Corporation to form a New Street from the upper end of Blakestreet to Bootham Bar, and to offer the contiguous ground to be let on building leases. The suggestion was approved by the Corporation and authority was given for carrying the proposed improvement into effect, but during the two succeeding years, although favourably viewed by the public, the project received no practical encouragement, and it was not until the early part of last year that a proposal was made to Your Committee which has since led to its satisfactory accomplishment.*

*In the month of February last, your worthy Recorder, Charles Heneage Elsley Esq., proposed for the consideration of your Committee, that the ground on the west side of the projected New Street should be divided into Nine Lots; and that an architectural Elevation designed, at his request, by Mr John Harper, should be adopted for the Houses or Buildings to be erected thereon, which would then present the handsome appearance of a Uniform Crescent or Terrace. And, in order to commence and encourage the execution of his plan, the Recorder offered to take a building lease of the lot nearest to Bootham Bar, and to erect the first House*

*at that end of the terrace for his own residence, upon the following conditions, viz. First: That Mr Harper's design and elevation should be strictly adhered to. Second: That the Corporation should form and complete a spacious Carriage Road and footpaths from Blakestreet to Bootham. Third: That the ground belonging to the Corporation on the North side of the Theatre, to the extent of 97 feet, should not be built upon, but laid out as a garden or pleasure ground. and Fourth: That such improvement as might be practicable, should be made in the exterior appearance of the Theatre and adjoining Buildings opposite to the intended Crescent.*

*After due consideration and enquiry, Your Committee were satisfied of the propriety of acceding to Mr Elsley's proposal; and as soon as they had come to that determination offers were made to take the three adjoining lots upon similar conditions. An agreement was thereupon entered into with the four parties; viz. Mr Elsley, Mr Davies, Mr Willoughby and Mr Harper, whereby the Corporation engaged to grant building leases for ninety nine years of the respective lots at ground rents, amounting together to £38 per annum, under such conditions as are usual in leases of that description, and also subject to the special stipulations already mentioned: And the lessees undertook that the houses to be built on their respective lots should be completed during the present year.*

*Your Committee have the satisfaction to report that the lessees have thus far fulfilled the Agreement on their parts, the four houses having been covered in during the Autumn, and being now in a state of great forwardness; and by general consent the Crescent and Street are called St Leonard's Place.*

(York City Archives, B50/454-457)

The report makes clear that other properties were also under construction at this time:

*Your Committee has also to report that on the 11<sup>th</sup> September last, Mr Thomas Kirby entered into an Agreement to take a Building Lease of the lot adjoining to the Library, upon similar terms with the other four Lessees;-and that Mr Kirby's house is now roofed and covered in, and nearly in as forward a state as the other buildings. Thus, Mr Elsley's plan has proved so far successful that, in the short space of ten months, six of the nine Houses intended to form St Leonard's Place have been actually built; and it is not very unreasonable to anticipate that the ensuing Summer will witness its further progress, if not its entire completion. The Corporation and the Citizens in general will hence be indebted to the taste and liberal spirit of the Recorder, not only for having led the way to the attainment of a great public accommodation and improvement, which has long been anxiously desired, but also for having introduced into our Northern Metropolis (already unrivalled for the beauty and interest of its antient edifices) an elegant specimen of the modern style of domestic Architecture which forms so great an ornament to many parts of London and other cities in the South.*

(York City Archives, B50/454-457)

The new plans prepared by Harper and Elsley obviously did not include the design previously prepared and accepted for the new library, and 'the Members of the York Subscription Library having received Notice to quit the Apartments occupied by that Institution in St Helen's Square, directed their attention to the New Street as an eligible situation for the erection of a Library'. However, they could not raise the money required, and the Corporation instead, 'resolved to propose to the Members of the library to erect a building adapted for their accommodation at the Blakestreet end of St Leonard's Place, in case the Institution would engage to occupy the same at an adequate Rent'. This new plan was approved:

*Architectural designs for the interior arrangement of the intended Building were advertised for by the Library Committee, and amongst several presented for their choice, they selected the plans of Messrs. Robinson and Andrews as the most appropriate...*

*The subject was again brought before the Corporation at a Court held on the 15<sup>th</sup> July last, when your Committee was empowered to proceed with the Building, and to borrow the sum of £3000 for the purpose, and also to conclude an agreement with the Library Committee as to the terms of their tenancy. Your Committee forthwith advertised for, and obtained tenders for the execution of the different works, under the superintendence of Messrs. Robinson and Andrews as Architects, and Contracts being entered into, Your Committee were enabled to treat with the Library Committee as to the amount of rent to be charged for such part of the building as would be required for the accommodation of that Institution. The rent was ultimately fixed at £100 per annum, it being agreed that the Library should not occupy any part of the Ground Floor or Basement Story, except the entrances, and the necessary conveniences for fuel and ashes.*

*Conformably with the Resolution passed by the Corporation, Your Committee directed the Architects to construct the ground floor of the building in such a manner that it might either be one large Room to be appropriated for a News Room, or other public purpose, or if necessary be converted into smaller Apartments to be used as Offices, or otherwise. The first stone was laid on 11<sup>th</sup> September last, and it is creditable to the Architects and Contractors that the Building is already roofed and covered in.*

(York City Archives, B50/454-457)

The actual street itself was still under construction:

*The line of the New Street from Blake Street to Bootham Bar is now marked out, the carriage way being thirty three feet in width. It is intended to be macadamised, and is already covered with the requisite substrata of coarse materials, and Your Committee have no doubt that under the directions of your Surveyor the road will soon be completed in a very superior manner.*

*A footpath, seven feet wide, is made in front of the new buildings, it is covered with the best Elland Landings of large dimensions, and five inches thick. In order to complete the footway in front of the ground on which houses are not yet erected, it was necessary to build the Area Vaults for those Houses. This has been done with old materials at a light expense which will be repaid when the lots shall be disposed of.*

*The improvement of the exterior of the Theatre and the other buildings opposite to the new Houses in St Leonard's Place, has been commenced, and is now in progress under the management and superintendence of Mr Harper, who was appointed by the Corporation at a Court held in June last, to be their Architect for that purpose, and generally for the completion of the New Street.*

(York City Archives, B50/454-457)

At the beginning of 1835, however, there were still three plots to be taken up in order that the development could be completed, but this was also resolved in that year in two separate agreements:

*16<sup>th</sup> June 1835*

*That the proposition for taking Building Leases of Lots 6 and 7 in St Leonard's Place which the General Committee report to have been made to them by several gentlemen who have entered into a subscription for building houses upon those lots in order to complete the Crescent prior to the Festival, appears to this Meeting to be highly satisfactory and ought to be acceded to.*

(York City Archives, B50/475)

*24<sup>th</sup> December 1835*

*That the Houses forming the Crescent in St Leonard's Place have been completed during the present year is attributable to the influence of that liberal and public spirited conduct which*

*has been the characteristic of the Recorder since he became connected with the City. At the beginning of the year, three Lots remained undisposed of, Mr Elsley agreed to build the Centre House, and stimulated by his example and desirous to fill up the vacant space prior to the Festival, several members of your Committee joined by other Gentlemen to the number of sixteen, were induced to enter into Subscription for building the Houses on the other two lots. It scarcely need be added that all the parties had a public object in view, and were actuated by wholly disinterested motives.*

(York City Archives, B50/503)

As built, therefore, the original list of occupants is as follows (N.B. the street numbers are the reverse of the plot numbers):

Number 1	York Subscription Library
Number 2	Thomas Kirby
Number 3	Built by subscription
Number 4	Built by subscription
Number 5	Built by Charles Elsley
Number 6	John Harper (the architect)
Number 7	George Willoughby
Number 8	Robert Davies, the Town Clerk
Number 9	Charles Elsley, the Recorder of York

It appears that No.5 was either sub-leased by Elsley to the Yorkshire Club in 1835, or they took on the development themselves as they are registered as occupants of the building until they built a new home beside the new Lendal Bridge in 1863:

*The hub of elite social life in nineteenth-century York was the new St Leonard's Place with the Subscription Library, the De Grey Rooms, the new entrance to the Theatre and, nearby, the Yorkshire Museum, the Assembly Rooms and the Festival Concert Room, so it is not surprising that the central house on the crescent was the first location of the Yorkshire Club, established in 1835 'for the nobility and gentry of the County'. With an entrance fee of 10 guineas and an annual subscription of £5, there were about 250 members in 1857.*

(Nuttgens, 2001, 298)

Each of the houses was subject to a 99-year lease from the Corporation, with the result that the crescent reverted to the Corporation in the 1930s and has been used as local authority offices to the present day. Further research is required to establish the individual histories for each house and any consequent alterations or additions that were made to the original fabric.

## **2.3 Design**

### **2.3.1 The architect**

Very little is known about John Harper, the architect of St Leonard's Place, or about the relationship with Charles Elsley which resulted in him being chosen to design such a high profile and prestigious project before other more established architects:

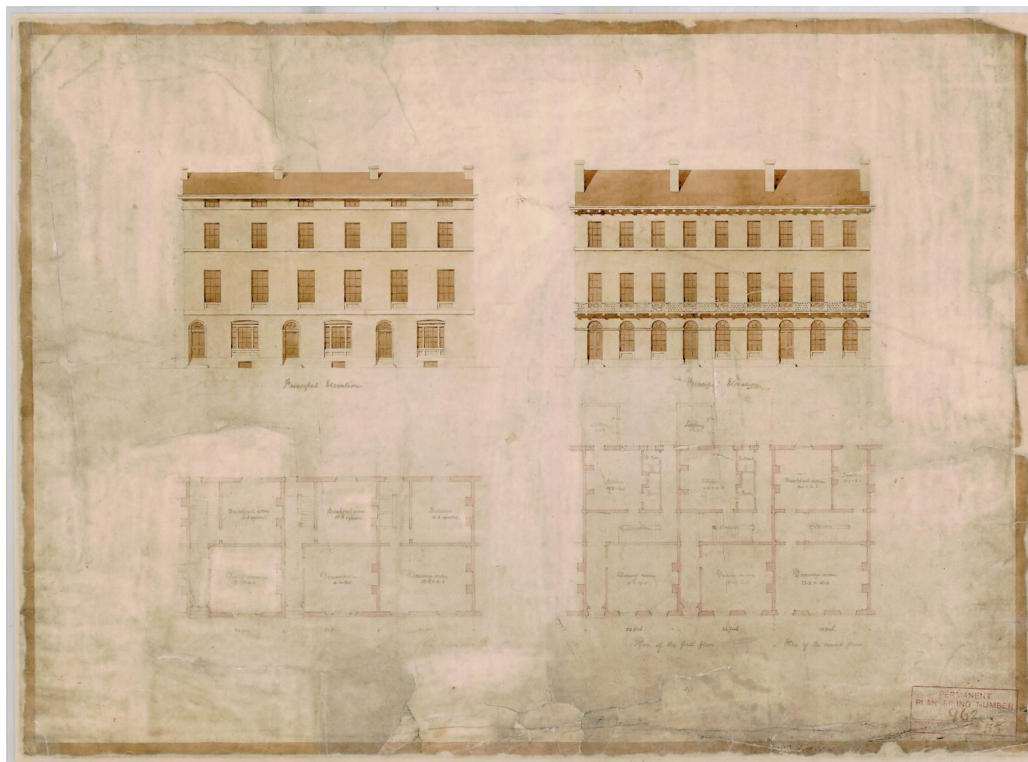
*Just before the accession of Queen Victoria the best work in the city was being carried out by James Piggott Pritchett (1789-1868) and John Harper (1809-42). ... Harper, a most accomplished young architect, designed both the Classical stuccoed terrace St Leonard's Place, 1834, and the Gothic St Peter's School at Clifton, 1838, before his early death.*

(Pevsner and Neave, 1995, 90)

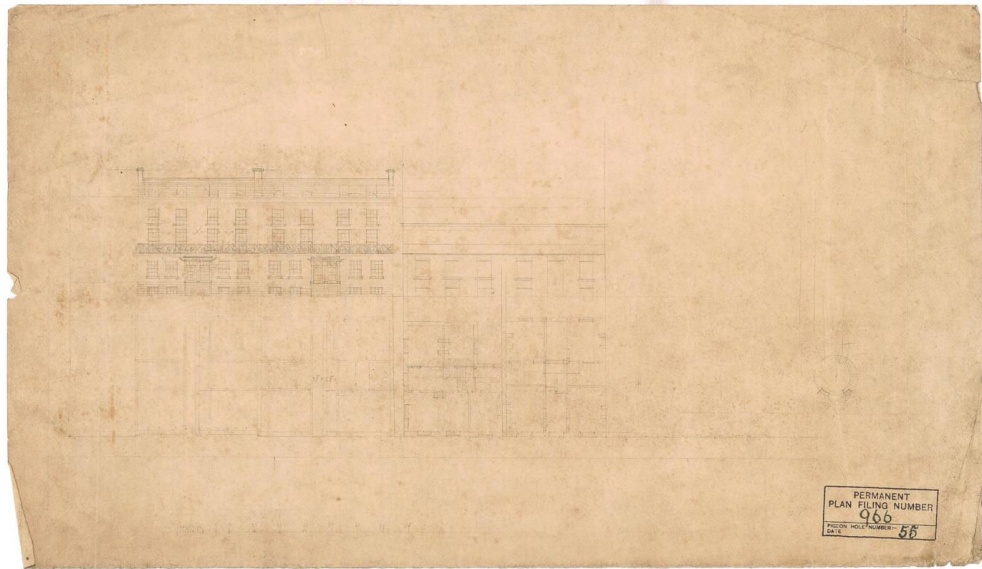
Amongst the few works attributed to him is the new Tudor-style façade for the Theatre Royal (1834-35) that was part of Elsley's conditions for the new development in St Leonard's Place. As mentioned above, he was also responsible for the ornately Gothic St Peter's School (1844) half a kilometre outside Bootham Bar, and the Italianate Kirkham Hall (1838-9). He was also responsible for the rebuilding of the Holy Trinity Church in Blacktoft, and was supervising architect for the construction in Everingham of the Chapel of the Virgin and St Everilda (1836-9, Category I), an early example of a Roman Catholic church erected after the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829.

### 2.3.2 The external design

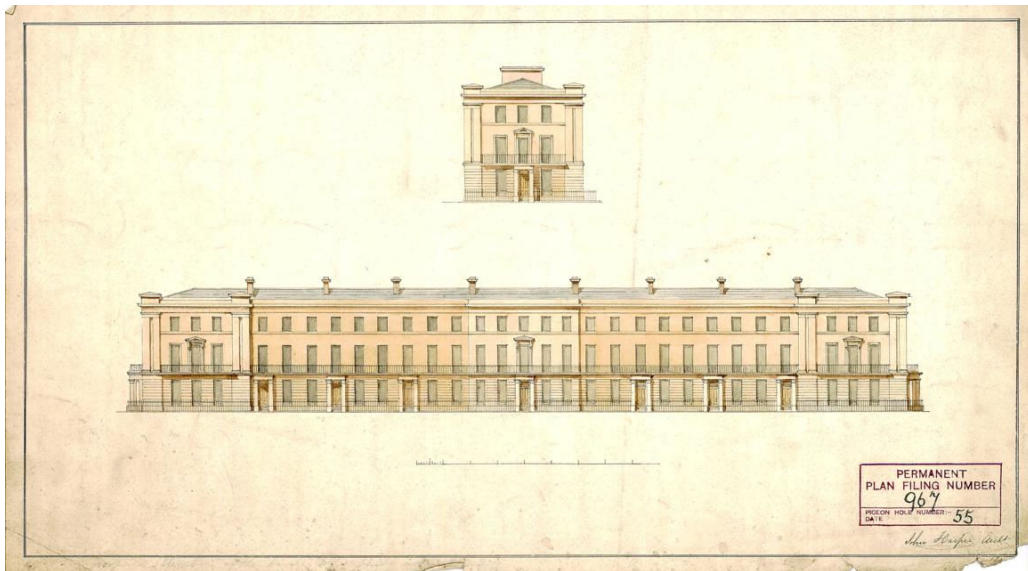
It appears from the collection of drawings in the York City Archives that 1-9 St Leonard's Place underwent a number of design phases (Figs\*8-\*11) before the final scheme (Fig\*12) was agreed and signed off by the clients: *J.R. Willoughby, Corporation Surveyor; C.H. Elsley; Rob. Davies; Geo. Willoughby; Thomas Kirby.*



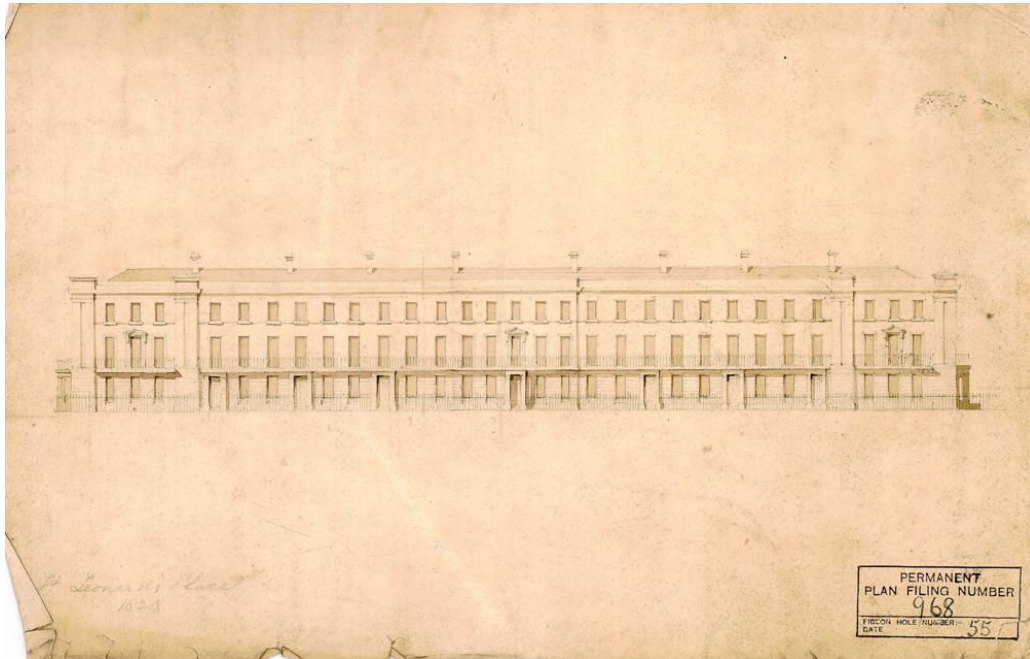
Figure\*8 – Designs for the principal elevation and plan of houses in St Leonard's Place (York City Archives, ACC 191/PH55/962)



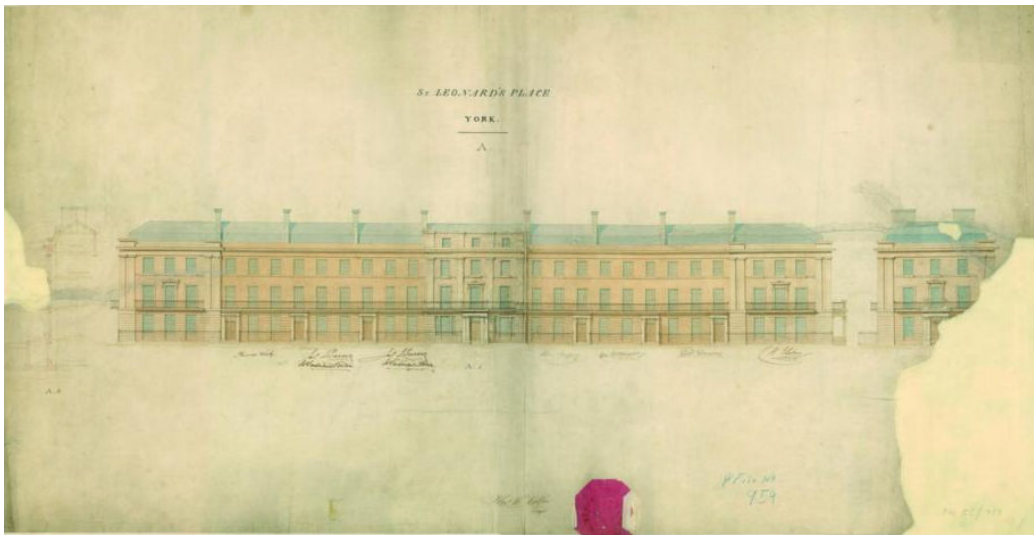
Figure\*9 – Designs for the principal elevation and plan of houses in St Leonard's Place (York City Archives, ACC 191/PH55/966)



Figure\*10 – Design for the principal elevation of 1-9 St Leonard's Place (York City Archives, ACC 191/PH55/967)



Figure\*11 – Design for the principal elevation of 1-9 St Leonard’s Place  
(York City Archives, ACC 191/PH55/968)



Figure\*12 – Final design for the principal elevations of 1-9 St Leonard’s Place  
(York City Archives, ACC 191/PH55/954)

The crescent as built consisted of nine, 3-storey houses of 3 bays each with attics and basements (Figs \*12 and \*13). The central (No.5) and two end houses (Nos. 1 and 9) had larger footprints than the six others and their position was emphasized by giant, paired pilasters on the façade. The front and side elevations were rendered and the ground floor was given horizontal rustication.

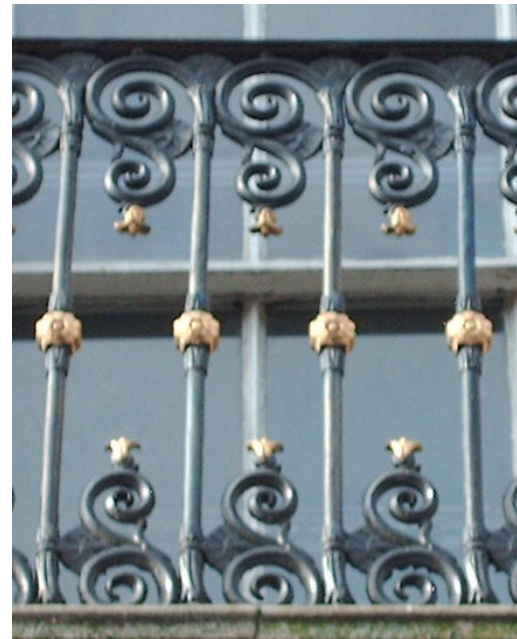
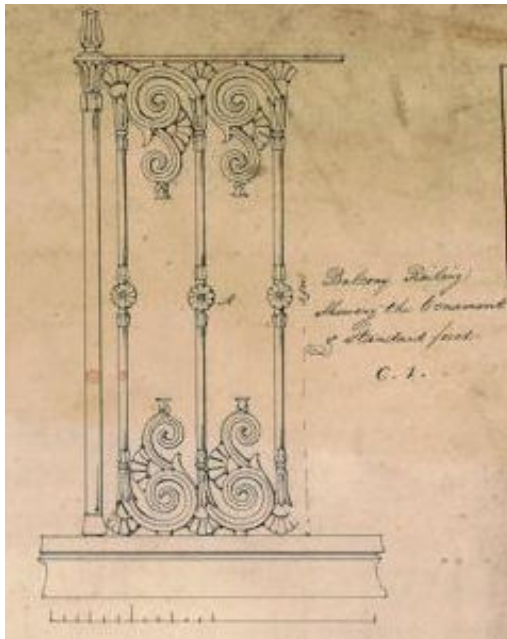
Despite the uniform front elevation, the internal arrangements of each property were left to the individual leaseholders: as a result, the brick-built rear elevations are irregular. Further

research is required to ascertain how many of the properties retain their original rear elevations and how many are later developments, e.g. the extensions to the rear of the Yorkshire Club must date from an early period in the history of the crescent.



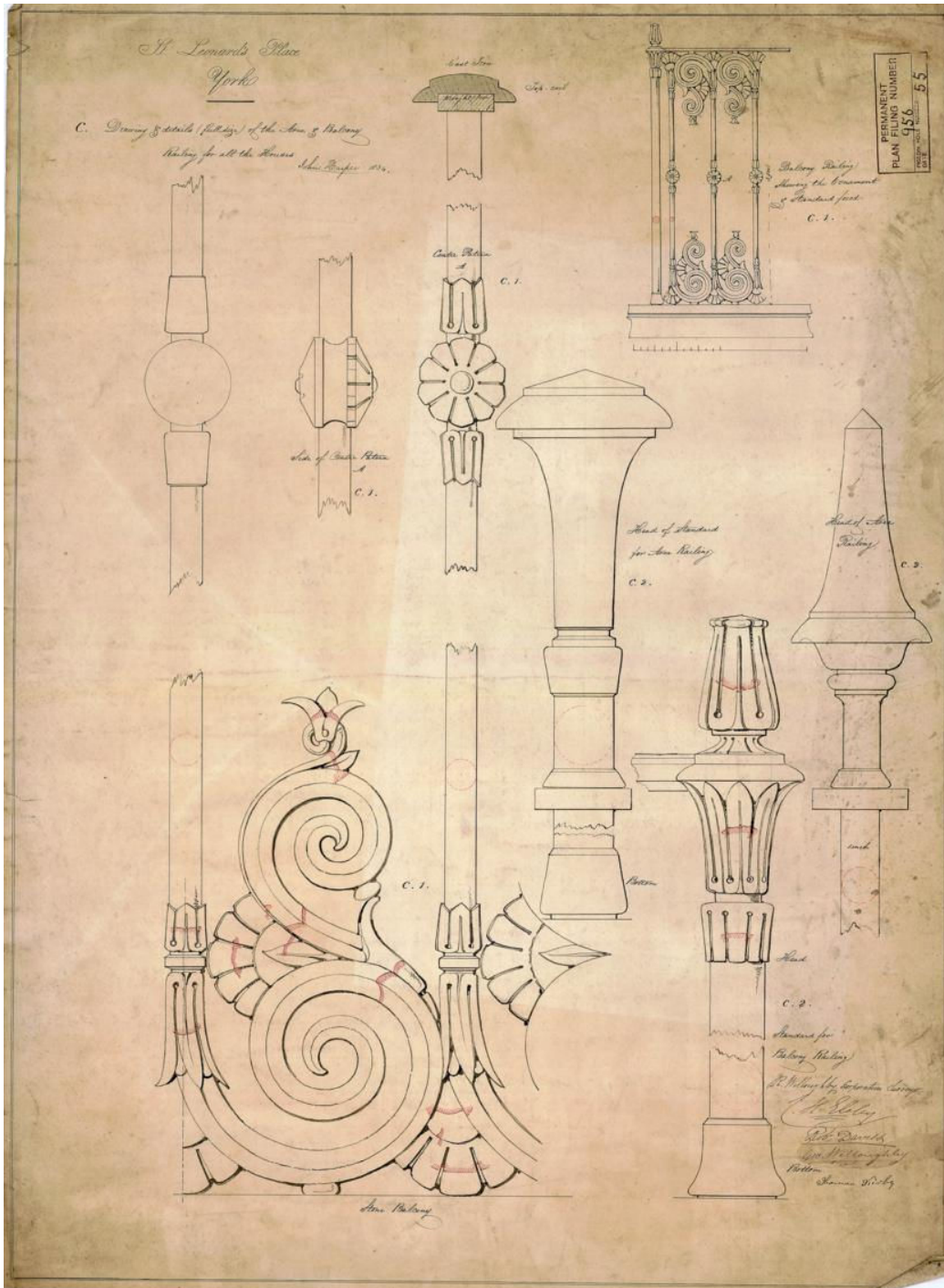
Figure\*13 – 1-9 St Leonard’s Place (RCHME, 1981, plate 154)

The principal public rooms were on the first-floor and these had cast-iron balconies: the metalwork was designed by John Harper (Figs\*14 and \*15) and Pevsner and Neave (1995, 230-1) state that these were supplied by the foundry of Gibson & Walker.



Figure\*14A - Detail from *Drawing & details (full size) of the Area & Balcony Railing for all the Houses. John Harper 1834.* (York City Archives, ACC 191/PH55/956)

Figure\*14B – Detail of balconies and ironwork at St Leonard’s Place (icosse, 2008)



Figure\*15 - Drawing & details (full size) of the Area & Balcony Railing for all the Houses. John Harper 1834. (York City Archives, ACC 191/PH55/956)

Harper also produced design drawings for the porticos and doors 'of all the houses' (Fig\*16): the doors are four-panelled and many of the originals may have survived to the present day.

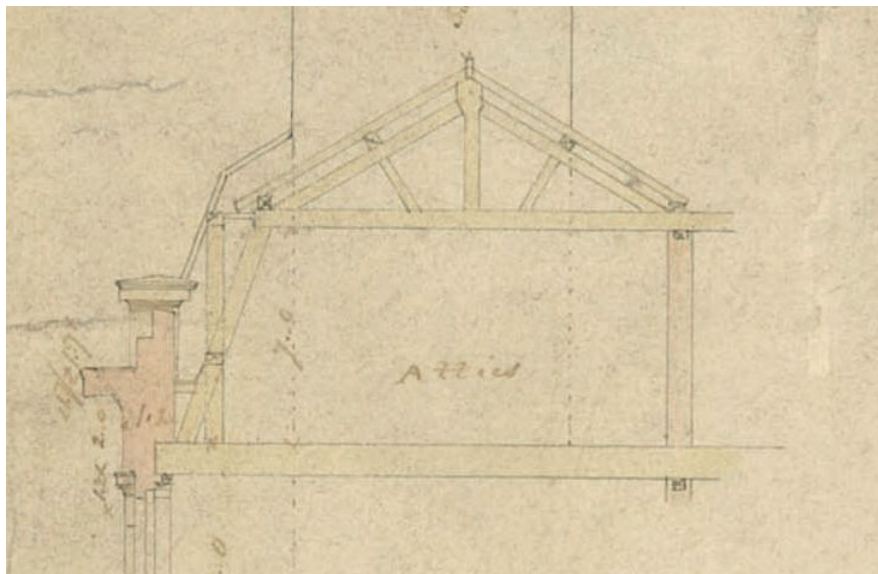


Figure\*16A - Drawing & details (full size) for the Porches of all the Houses. John Harper 1834. (York City Archives, ACC 191/PH55/961)

Figure\*16B – No.7 St Leonard’s Place (icosse, March 2008)

The houses were roofed with Lancashire slate, and there appears to have been an alteration to the design that was responsible for an over-spend that was noted in 1835 (Fig\*17):

*About £100 extra charge was incurred by the roof being constructed in a more expensive manner than at first designed.*  
(York City Archives, B50/504).



Figure\*17 – Detail of the roof design from Harper’s final scheme (York City Archives, ACC 191/PH55/954)

So far as the craftsmen and suppliers are concerned, Thomas Kirby supplied the bricks (RCHME, 1981, 204-206) and amongst the tradesmen employed were:

- *Richard Powell and Son, bricklayers*
- *John Bacon, carpenter and joiner*
- *William Crabtree, plasterer*
- *Thomas Hodgson, plumber and glazier*
- *C J Hanson, painter*
- *Leonard Overend, slater*

### **2.3.3 The interior design**

As discussed above, the interior arrangements and decorative schemes were the responsibility of the individual properties' owners. As such, while there is a uniformity to the lay-out of the internal spaces, there is a variety of fixtures and fittings throughout the nine houses, many of which have survived to the present day. Most of the properties have a decorated fireplace in the principal first floor rooms, but the majority of these are relatively restrained.

#### **2.3.3.1 The staircases**

Cast-iron balusters had become common by 1800 in better properties, usually constructed with mahogany handrails and sometimes using cast lead or brass for the more complex details. With small areas of damage or loss, all of the original balusters at St Leonard's Place have survived and constitute an important collection of domestic ironwork (Figs\*18-\*26).



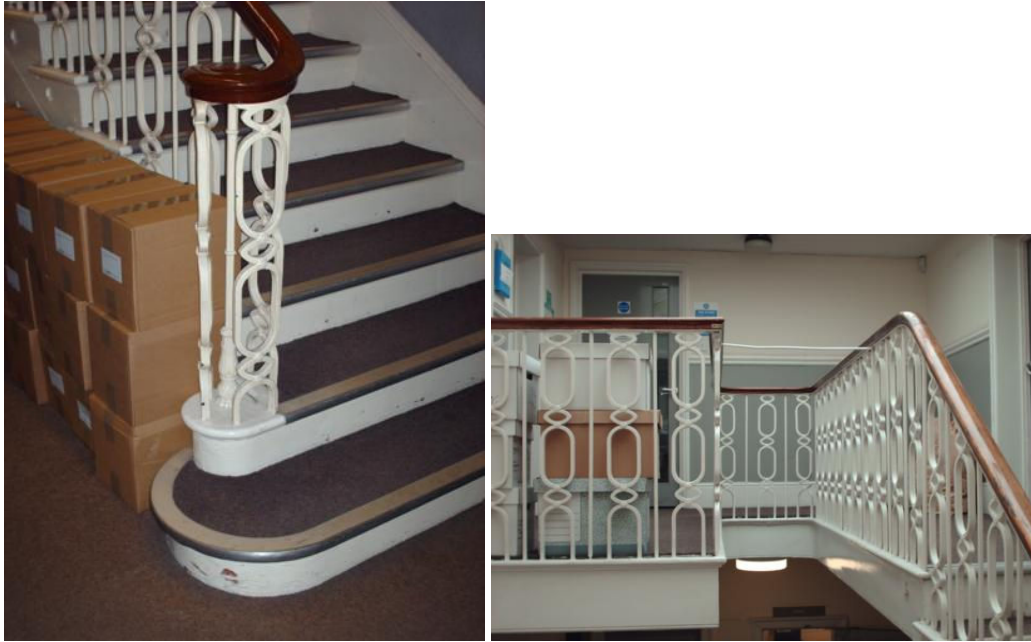
Figure\*18 – Staircase in No.1 St Leonard's Place (icosse, March 2008)



Figure\*19 – Staircase in No.2 St Leonard's Place (icosse, March 2008)



Figure\*20 – Staircase in No.3 St Leonard's Place (icosse, March 2008)



Figure\*21 – Staircase in No.4 St Leonard's Place (icosse, March 2008)



Figure\*22 – Staircase in No.5 St Leonard's Place (icosse, March 2008)



Figure\*23 – Staircase in No.6 St Leonard's Place (icosse, March 2008)



Figure\*24 – Staircase in No.7 St Leonard's Place (icosse, March 2008)



Figure\*25 – Staircase in No.8 St Leonard's Place (icosse, March 2008)

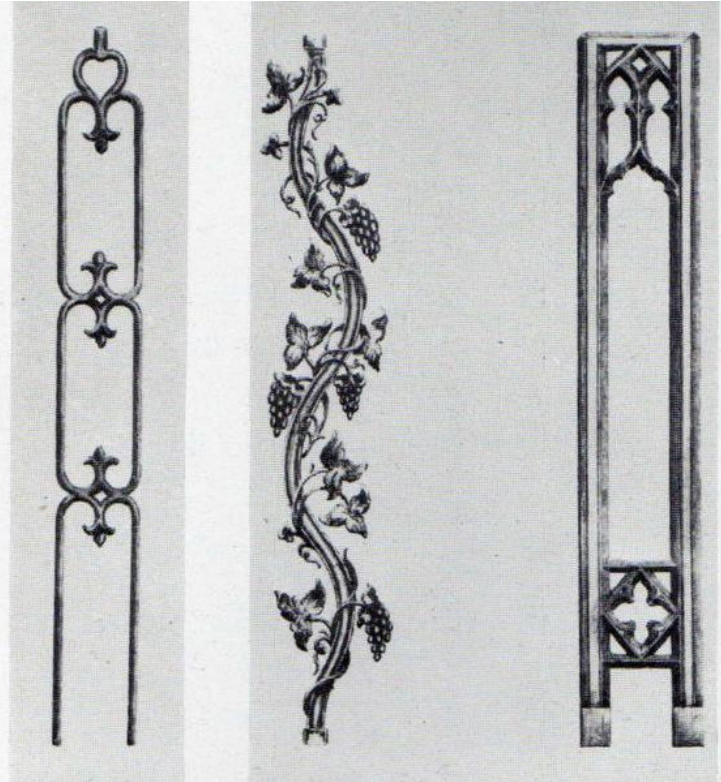


Figure\*26 – Staircase in No.9 St Leonard's Place (icosse, March 2008)

Items of interest are:

- four of the houses (nos.2,3,4 and 8) have the same, simple, geometric design of baluster: as the simplest this would have probably have been the cheapest design available so most appropriate for the two properties that were built by subscription (nos.3 and 4);

- the baluster designs in no.1 (the Library) and no.7 (George Willoughby) are taken from one of Gibson & Walker's catalogues (Fig\*27): it seems likely that all of the ironwork (e.g. railings, balconies and staircases) were produced at their Walmgate foundry;
- the balusters in John Harper's house (no.6) appear to be a more complex variation of the design he produced for the external first-floor balconies.



Figure\*27 - Examples of cast-iron balusters from the Walker pattern book in Castle Museum (RCHME, 1981, Plate 195)

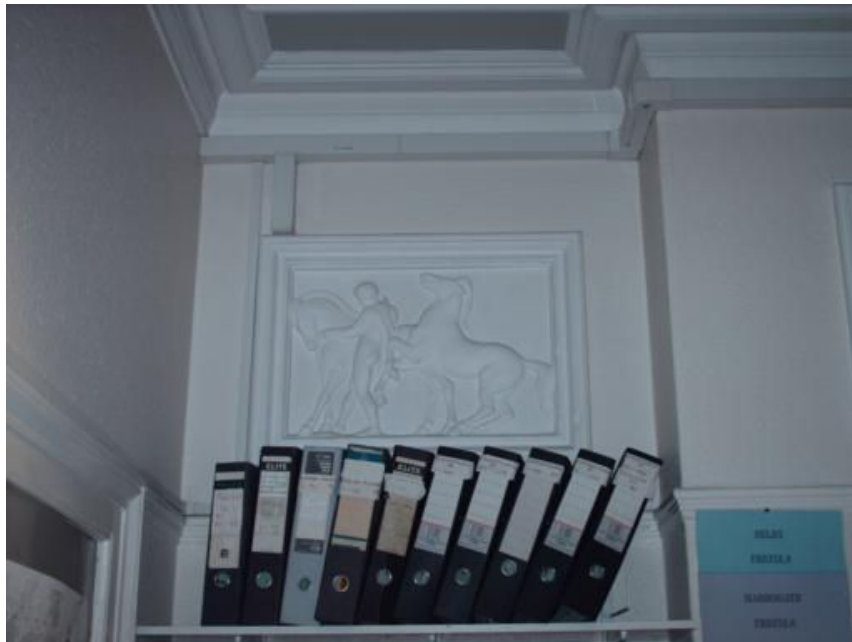
### 2.3.3.2 The plasterwork

The decorative plasterwork in most of the properties is simple and restrained, but there are exceptions to this rule:

- the architect John Harper's house (no.6) has a number of panels depicting classical scenes (Fig\*28-\*31);
- Harper produced a design drawing (Fig\*32) for a *Truss &c... to the Centre Window of the End & Centre Houses* (i.e. nos.1, 5 and 9), and this appears in various forms in a number of the houses (Figs\*33-\*35): the motif can also be seen decorating one of the doorcases in no.9 (Fig\*36);
- the hallway in the Yorkshire Club (No.5) is the most elaborately decorated of all of the properties, with a range of Neo-classical plasterwork motifs (Figs\*37 and \*38) complementing the cast-iron balusters and the double-height window on the half-landing.



Figure\*28 – Decorative panel, No.6 St Leonard’s Place (icosse, March 2008)



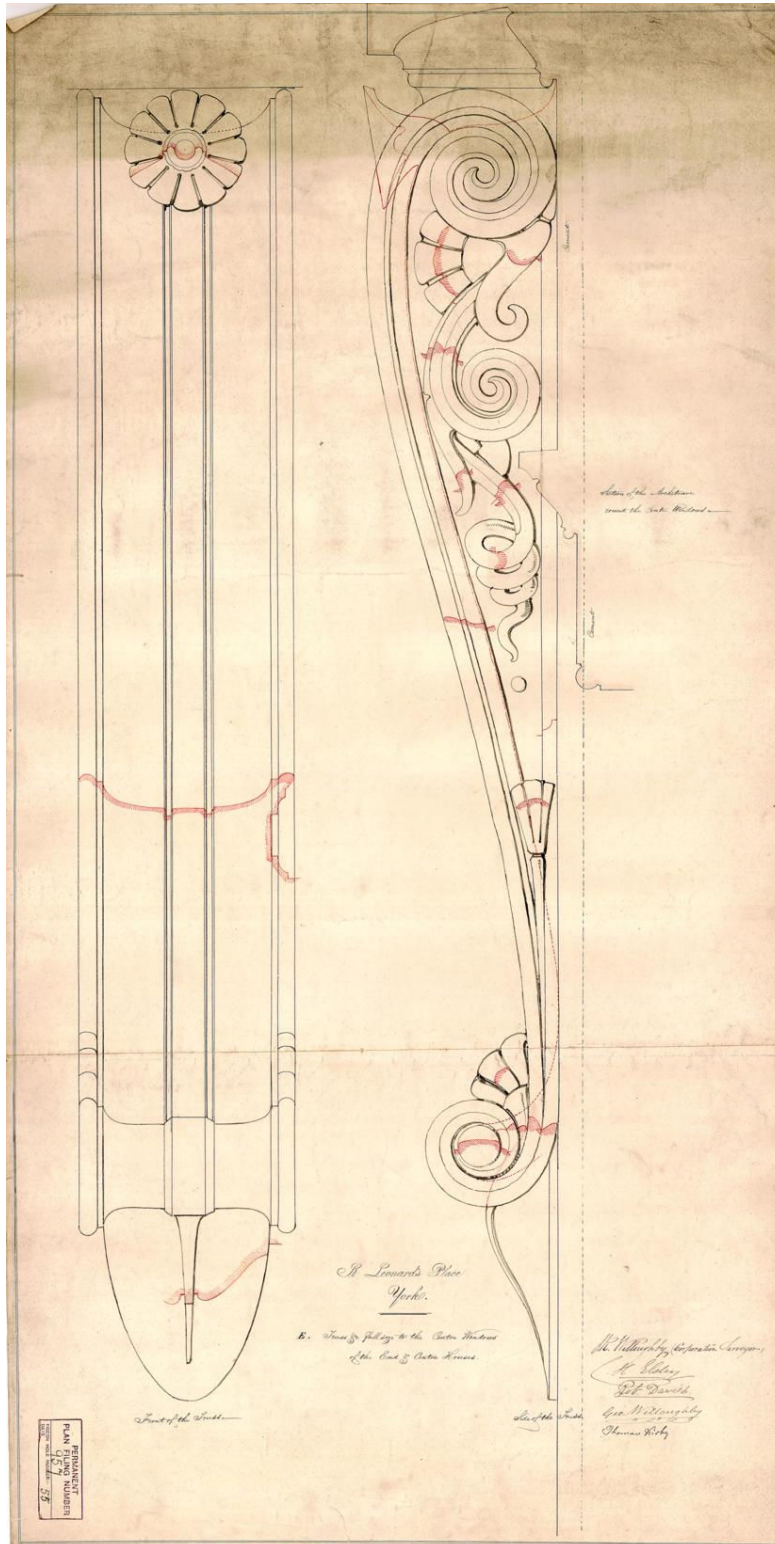
Figure\*29 – Decorative panel, No.6 St Leonard’s Place (icosse, March 2008)



Figure\*30 – Decorative panel, No.6 St Leonard’s Place (icosse, March 2008)



Figure\*31 – Decorative roof panel, No.6 St Leonard’s Place (icosse, March 2008)



Figure\*32 - Truss &c. full size to the Centre Window of the End & Centre Houses. John Harper 1834. (York City Archives, ACC 191/PH55/957)



Figure\*33 – Plaster bracket, No.9 St Leonard’s Place (icosse, March 2008)



Figure\*34 – Plaster bracket, No.6 St Leonard’s Place (icosse, March 2008)



Figure\*35 – Plaster bracket, No.5 St Leonard’s Place (icosse, March 2008)



Figure\*36 – Detail of doorcase, No.9 St Leonard’s Place (icosse, March 2008)



Figure\*37 – First floor hallway, No.5 St Leonard's Place (icosse, March 2008)



Figure\*38 – First floor hallway, No.5 St Leonard's Place (icosse, March 2008)

### 2.3.3.3 Doorcases and entrances

As with the plasterwork, most of the doorcases are simple and restrained, but again there are notable exceptions:

- the entrance into the main ground floor hallway from the front door in Robert Davies' house (No.8) is flanked by a pair of Ionic columns (Fig\*39);
- a doorcase in the first-floor of John Harper's house (No.6) has very elaborate decoration (Fig\*40);
- two doorcases in No.4 and No.7 have decorated pediments (Figs\*40 and \*41).



Figure\*39 – Ground floor hallway, No.8 St Leonard's Place (icosse, March 2008)



Figure\*40 – First floor doorcase, No.6 St Leonard's Place (icosse, March 2008)



Figure\*40 – First floor doorcase, No.4 St Leonard’s Place (icosse, March 2008)



Figure\*41 – First floor doorcase, No.7 St Leonard’s Place (icosse, March 2008)

### **3.0 2-4 Museum Street**

#### **3.1 The architects**

2-4 Museum Street was constructed in 1851 to designs by J.B. & W. Atkinson:

*The successor to John Carr's practice, Peter Atkinson senior (1735-1805), was joined as a partner in 1801 by his son Peter Atkinson junior (c.1776-1843). He in turn took his sons John Bownas Atkinson (1807-74) and William Atkinson (c.1810-86) into partnership c.1828 and 1837 respectively. Before their father's death the brothers had taken over and for the next thirty or so years they were the most prolific of the city's architects, producing many accomplished Classical buildings and a few less assured Gothic churches.* (Pevsner and Neave, 1995, 230-1)

The Atkinson dynasty of architects were responsible for a large number of buildings in York and across Yorkshire as a whole. They operated for over a century, their commissions ranging from domestic houses to great institutions, the latter often involving refurbishment or reconstruction works to existing historic structures:

- Holy Trinity, Micklegate
- St John the Evangelist, Micklegate
- St Martin-cum-Gregory, Micklegate
- St Martin-le-Grand, Coney Street
- St Mary Bishophill Junior
- St Michael, Spurriergate
- The King's Manor (restoration from the 1870s)
- Assembly Rooms (alterations in 1859)
- St Peter's School, Clifton (additions in the 1850s and designed the new chapel in 1861-2)
- St Anthony's Hall, Peasholme Green (added the east wing in 1870-77)

Amongst their larger new-build projects in York were contracts for the church, commercial clients, and local organizations, both public and private:

- St Clement, Scarcroft Road (1872-4) – constructed in red brick with blue brick bands
- St Paul, Holgate Road (1850-51) – brick-faced with ashlar dressings
- Fire Station, Clifford Street (1856) – red brick with white brick and stone dressings
- Trinity National School for Girls (1852) – red brick
- York Union Workhouse, Huntingdon Road (1848-9) – grey brick
- Varvill's Warehouse, Queen's Staith (1849) – red brick and stone
- Institute of Popular Science and Literature, St Saviourgate (1845) –stuccoed Classical
- County Hospital, Monkgate (1849-51) – red brick

The Atkinsons were also responsible for many new domestic properties throughout York, most of which were built with brick, often with stone dressings.

### **3.2 2-4 Museum Street: the design**

Further research is required to place 2-4 Museum Street in the context of the architects' output and contemporary houses in York, but current work indicates that it is exemplary of the Atkinsons domestic canon and of the architecture of mid-19<sup>th</sup> century York.

The official listing states that 2-4 Museum Street (Fig\*42) was designed by J.B. and W. Atkinson for Thomas Laycock, M.D. and was constructed in 1851. Laycock (1812-76) was the house surgeon to the York County Hospital, another building designed by the Atkinsons and which was also completed in 1851 (Fig\*43). Both were constructed in brick with stone dressings, the style favoured by the practice.

English Heritage's records state that J.B. and W. Atkinson had previously designed another house for Thomas Laycock. Fishergate House (Fig\*44), built in 1837-40, is a large, 5-bay house of grey brick: Pevsner and Neave (2002, 251) state that it has impressive interior, possibly influenced by Sir John Soane's plan for Tynningham Hall (1792). A significantly more impressive structure, it is not clear if Laycock continued to occupy Fishergate House when the new house in Museum Street was finished, or whether the latter was a speculative development on his part.



Figure\*42 – 2-4 Museum Street (icosse, 2008)



Figure\*43 – County Hospital, Monkgate (www.imagesofengland.org)



Figure\*44 – Fishergate House (www.imagesofengland.org)

One other building which is worth noting at this point is the Dean Court Hotel (Fig\*45) which is located in Duncombe Place, some 150 metres from 2-4 Museum Street. Another brick building with stone dressings, it was originally three houses and Pevsner and Neave (2002, 215) state that it was designed by J.B. and W. Atkinson in 1865. However, the official listing does not mention the Atkinsons, recording that it was produced by *'Lewis Cubitt for the Dean and Chapter'*.



Figure\*44 – Dean Court Hotel, Duncombe Place (www.imagesofengland.org)

### 3.3 2 Museum Street

2 Museum Street has been subject to extensive alterations internally and to the rear of the property, including a 2-storey modern extension which has enclosed older features such as doors and windows (Fig\*45).



Figure\*45A – Extensions to rear elevation of 2 Museum Street (icosse, March 2008)  
 Figure\*45B – Relict window, 2 Museum Street (icosse, March 2008)

The original entrance from Museum Street is no longer in regular use, but the vestibule is largely intact, including the encaustic tiling and the cast-iron balusters on the staircase (Fig\*46). The staircase has been terminated, however, at the second floor by 20<sup>th</sup> century alterations by the local authority (Fig\*47).



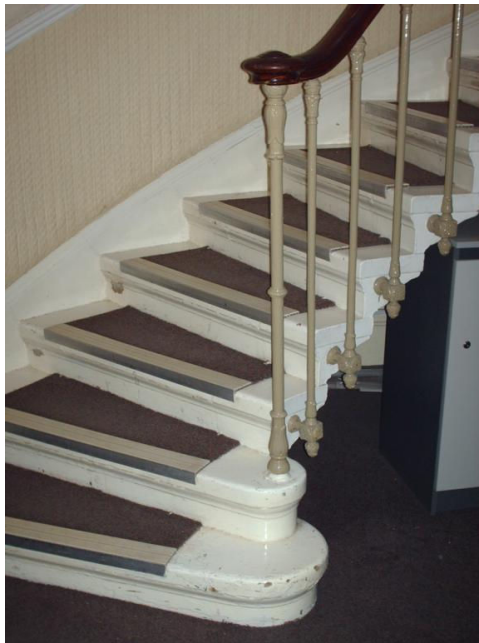
Figure\*46A – Encaustic tiling in entrance vestibule, 2 Museum Street (icosse, March 2008)  
 Figure\*46B – Main staircase, 2 Museum Street (icosse, March 2008)



Figure\*47 – Staircase, 2 Museum Street (icosse, March 2008)

### 3.4 4 Museum Street

The principal feature of 4 Museum Street is the main stairwell which is lit by a circular roof-light in the attic floor (Fig\*48).





Figure\*48 – Principal stairwell, 4 Museum Street (icosse, March 2008)

The interior decoration is largely simple and functional, but there are some notable exceptions:

- the doorcases to the principal, south-west rooms on the ground and first floor have pediments decorated with Classical scenes (Figs\*49 and \*50);
- the principal ground floor room has a decorated bookcase/fitted shelving unit (Fig\*51), a decorated fireplace (Fig\*52), and decorative roof plaster (Fig\*52).



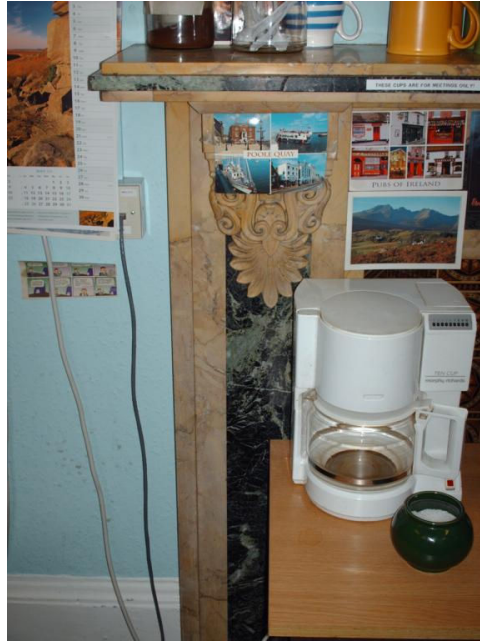
Figure\*49 – Doorcase, ground floor, 4 Museum Street (icosse, March 2008)



Figure\*50 – Doorcase, first floor, 4 Museum Street (icosse, March 2008)



Figure\*51 – Bookcase/shelving, ground floor, 4 Museum Street (icosse, March 2008)



Figure\*52 – Decorated fireplace, ground floor, 4 Museum Street (icosse, March 2008)



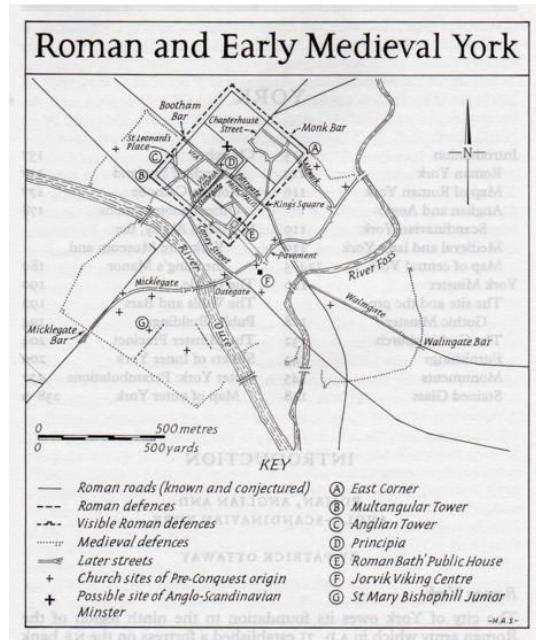
Figure\*52 – Decorative plasterwork, ground floor, 4 Museum Street (icosse, March 2008)

#### 4.0 Summary

St Leonard's Place is located in the south-western corner of the Roman legionary fortress (Fig\*53): this area was later re-used as the site of a major medieval complex, St Leonard's Hospital, and was created by demolishing a substantial number of medieval and post-medieval buildings. As such, the below-ground archaeology on the site is probably amongst

the most important in the city and any proposed development should be structured to factor in the potential for substantial archaeological survival:

*A few structures, such as the Multangular Tower in Museum Gardens, can still be seen above ground, but for most part Roman York is buried many feet below the modern city. It survives as demolished buildings interspersed with countless layers, up to 10 feet (3m) thick, of rubble, refuse and other material derived from an enormous range of human activities.*  
(Nuttgens, 2002, 3)



Figure\*53 – Map showing the relationship between St Leonard's Place and earlier developments (Pevsner and Neave, 2002, 116)

So far as the upstanding, 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings are concerned, both 1-9 St Leonard's Place and 2-4 Museum Street form important elements of the streetscape of the city: the former in particular represent an important phase in the architectural history of York. Both groups have substantial surviving original fabric and original architectural features, and the St Leonard's Place development houses a number of high quality fixtures and fittings such as the staircases and decorative plasterwork.

Both groups have been subject to alterations to their fabric, but further research is required to identify to what extent this has taken place. This is of particular importance for the rear of the properties where there are significant brick-built extensions for which very little information exists, e.g. the back-rooms of the Yorkshire Club.

### Select bibliography

Collingwood, R.G. and Richmond, I. (1969) *The Archaeology of Roman Britain*

Nuttgens, P. (2001) *The history of York from earliest times to the year 2000*

- Pevsner, N. and Neave, D. (2002) *Yorkshire: York and the East Riding, The Buildings of England*
- RCHME (1981) *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of York*
- Stillman, D. (1988) *English Neo-classical Architecture*