



YORK
CIVIC
TRUST

Annual Report
2026



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1.
80 Years
of impact



Foreword

As York Civic Trust marks its 80th anniversary, this report is a reminder of just how much a passionate, committed organisation can achieve. From restoring medieval buildings to shaping major planning decisions, the breadth of the Trust's impact over eight decades is something every member and supporter should feel proud of.

This has been a year to celebrate and to build. Fairfax House enjoyed its most successful year on record, welcoming more visitors than ever before and earning national recognition for the way it brings its extraordinary collection to life. Our planning and conservation work has continued to shape York's future, most significantly through our engagement with the York Central development — our most substantial planning response in the Trust's history. And through our new Our Place project in Acomb and Westfield, we have begun to extend the benefits of heritage to communities who have not always seen themselves reflected in York's story.

None of this happens without people. I am grateful to our staff, volunteers, members, and supporters whose dedication sustains everything we do.

Delma Tomlin

Delma Tomlin MBE

Chair, York Civic Trust



Modern ambitions for an old city: York Civic Trust turns 80

Article / Andrew Morrison, CEO

York Civic Trust, at its inception in 1946, had three clear areas of concern: Preservation, Amenity and Design and an ambition to create a city that would prove an asset to the social and cultural activities of its communities.

Many of the city's surviving historic buildings and churches were often under threat of demolition or in a poor state of repair.

The Trust sought to defend the city's character while influencing the development of the city as a modern place to live, enjoy and work. Its founders JB Morrell (Chairman of Rowntrees), Oliver Sheldon, (Director of Finance, Rowntrees), Noel Terry (Chairman of Terry's of York) and Dean Eric Milner White (York Minster) used their influence and connections to raise significant funds, persuade the authorities and to convince the commercial world to invest in York's long-term future. It was not all advocacy though, the organisation got its hands dirty as well.

It is perhaps for the Trust's drive for preservation that the organisation is best known and, at times, has been most criticized. Over thirteen buildings in the city centre including Bowes Morrell House, the Dutch House (Ogleforth), St Sampson's, St John's (Micklethorpe), St Anthony's Hall, Peasholme House and Fairfax House were restored by the Trust and new lives found for them all. Where buildings could not be saved, some of their finest architectural features were repurposed elsewhere. Pioneering conservation work led to a seventeenth century ceiling being removed from a property due for demolition on North Street and installed in King's Manor.

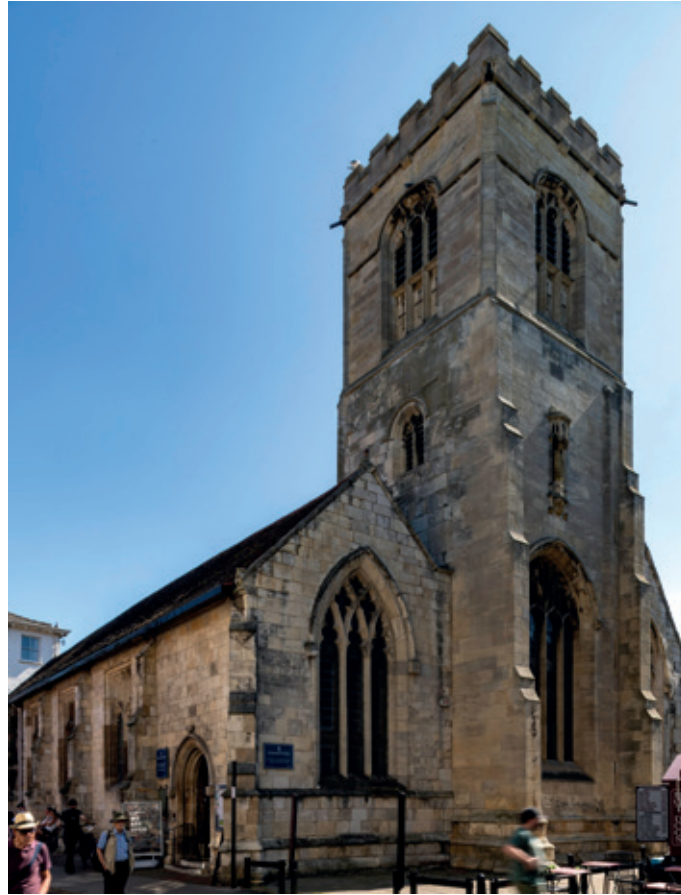
A photo from our first Annual Report. St Mary's Wall, Bootham, 1946.

At the time modernisation was creeping up on an often-neglected medieval city where large swathes of people lived in unhealthy conditions and the city's stock of medieval and Georgian buildings were in a poor state of repair. Neighbouring villages had been swallowed up and the land between infilled for modern housing programmes, new ring roads passing through York's suburbs had started to be built. Meanwhile, many of the city's historic buildings and churches were often under threat of demolition or in a poor state of repair.

Gifts to enhance the city's buildings, museum and gallery collections and the inception of a historic plaques scheme also marked the early years of the Trust's work.

Perhaps the largest ambition that the fledgling organisation undertook was for a university in the city. The city had petitioned, to no avail, for a university for nearly 400 years. The Trust realized that perhaps the most successful approach would be to demonstrate the city's capacity for academic teaching. Two summer schools were created – Archives and Historical Research, and Architectural History and Measured Drawing. Their success led them to obtain permanent bases. St Anthony's Hall and St John's Church on Micklegate were restored and furnished as the Borthwick Institute of Historical Research and the Institute of Architectural Studies. The Trust's academic committee finally saw the University of York established in 1963 with these two institutes becoming the first of the new university.

The General Committee, or Board of Trustees as it is known now, also realized that the everyday environment, or amenity as it is sometimes described, was just as important to the wellbeing of the city – something which is still as relevant now as it was then. The organisation sponsored design competitions, including for new bus shelters at York Station providing £75 in prize money, and grants aiding improvements to the environment including the planting of trees on Foss Island Roads, refurbishment of elements of public parks across the city and a wide range of city enhancement projects.



St Sampson's Church 2025
©Colin McLean

Lionel Brett (Viscount Esher), a leading post-war architect who combined modern design and conservation in his practice was commissioned by the Government, City of York Council and York Civic Trust to create a roadmap for the future development of the city. The Esher Report set out a development plan that in some ways is still in use today. The Aldwark area was highlighted as a particular blight in the city and the City Council and the Civic Trust led what was to become one of the most enlightened regeneration projects in UK.

Of course, the success of the Civic Trust relies on its members. June Hargreaves, a planning officer in York and a leading Civic Trust member, convinced the organisation to publish her groundbreaking work – 'Historic buildings: Problems of their preservation' which in 1967 heavily influenced the UK Government's Civic Amenities Act introducing Conservation Areas to the country.

Until 1982 there were only volunteers. With the appointment of Peter Brown as its first Director, under the long-standing Chair of John Shannon, to oversee the restoration and opening of Fairfax House as a public museum the Trust entered a new phase of its existence.

In 2002 the National Centre for Early Music occupied the last of the buildings that the Trust helped re-purpose. Darrell Buttery and Sir Ron Cooke continued in JB Morrell's and John Shannon's footsteps in their tenure as Chair of Trustees introducing a Members' events programme, a far-reaching City Enhancement Fund, amongst other modernising initiatives.

Dr Jane Grenville introduced in 2015 a unique partnership with the University of York in the form of 'Planning Club' offering career development opportunities for post-graduates drawn to York's international reputation for building conservation. Still running today, it is the envy of many historic cities.

Of course, not all the issues that interested the Trust at the outset have been solved. Whilst we can reflect on successfully pressurising for pedestrianisation in the city centre – the presence of heavy traffic still causes issues nearly two centuries after it was first mentioned as a problem.

The impact of the organisation on the city over 80 years has been significant and we are looking to the next 80 years with similar optimism of the impact we can make.

PLANNING CLUB
Students involved this year:

55

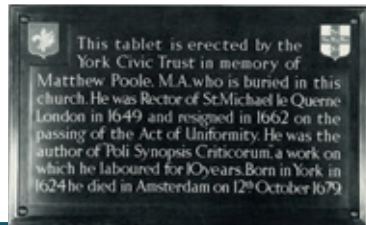


Aldwark
©Colin McLean

York Civic Trust timeline of major achievements

1947

The Trust begins its commemorative plaque scheme, one of York's most recognisable heritage initiatives. Surprisingly the Trust's first plaque to the theologian Matthew Poole was unveiled in 1947 in the English Reformed Church in Amsterdam.



1968-69

The Trust supported Lord Esher's conservation study of York (commonly known as the Esher Report), which became highly influential in shaping conservation policy for historic cities.

1974

St Sampson's Centre was officially reopened by the then Queen Mother, the current King's grandmother, as the St Sampson's Centre for Old People after being restored by the Civic Trust. The Centre today provides support and welcome for anyone who needs it.



1946

York Civic Trust is founded at the Mansion House by John Bowes Morrell, Oliver Sheldon, Eric Milner-White and Noel Terry.



1963

York Civic Trust led the campaign for the establishment of the University of York which opened its doors to new students on 9th October.

1971

Roman Column and Exhibition Square – To celebrate the 1900th anniversary of founding of the city the Civic Trust gifted a new fountain on exhibition square and a restored Roman column from the Eboracum's 'Principia' or headquarters building for the legionary fortress.

1998

York Civic Trust funded the complete refurbishment and redecoration of the Mansion House.

Constantine Statue

To celebrate the anniversary of Constantine being declared emperor in A.D. 306 the Trust commissioned sculptor Philip Jackson to create the bronze statue that now stands on the site of his declaration.

1984

Following extensive restoration works, the Civic Trust opened Fairfax House as a Georgian townhouse museum which it still operates today.



1991

Deangate closed to traffic – once designated part of the A64, the Civic Trust finally convinced the City of York Council to close Deangate to traffic. This allowed for fitting surroundings for York's most important building and for the Dean of the Minster and John Shannon to enjoy a celebratory lunch where cars once trundled by.

2015

The Trust established and developed the Planning Club partnership with the University of York, providing practical planning and heritage training to postgraduate students.



2018

Fossgate Banner

Working with the Fossgate Traders Association a steel banner was designed, manufactured and installed. This reflected the street's former function as the home of the city sea fish market on Foss Bridge and provided an appropriate welcome to the new vibrant and thriving Fossgate.

Meet the collector: Noel Terry

One of York Civic Trust's greatest achievements has been the rescue and revival of Fairfax House. By the early 1980s, after decades as a cinema and dance hall, one of Britain's finest Georgian townhouses stood empty and its future was uncertain. The Trust undertook an ambitious restoration programme, investing the equivalent of more than £2 million today.

The work took almost four years and was carried out by a specialist team of largely local craftspeople. The scale of the restoration was extraordinary: more than 20,000 hours were spent cleaning and conserving the plasterwork alone. Yet restoring the building was only half the challenge. To create a museum, the house also needed a collection to fill its rooms. That opportunity came through the extraordinary generosity of York collector Noel Terry, whose gift in the 1980s transformed an empty historic house into the award-winning museum visitors enjoy today.

Article / Dr Sarah Burnage, Fairfax House Curator

In the 1980s, the remarkable collection of Noel Terry, encompassing English furniture, clocks, porcelain and fine art, was gifted to York Civic Trust. Terry was fastidious in recording his purchases and, with an eye no doubt on posterity, gave each object, piece of furniture and painting a reference code detailing the year of purchase, the seller, and the price paid. His tastes were both distinctive and consistent. He favoured restraint over ostentation, rejecting gilded or overly ornate objects in favour of pieces of the highest quality and craftsmanship. This collecting ethos shaped the interiors of the Arts-and-Crafts-style home he and Kathleen built in 1927, designed by architect Walter Brierley.

While his reputation as a collector of furniture and clocks is well established, Terry's interest in painting is no less significant. Over the past few years, we have been able to clean and conserve thirteen of his paintings. The core of Terry's painting collection was acquired in the 1920s and 1930s and includes works by Johannes



and Abraham Storck, Harmen van Steenwyck, William van Mieris, and Willem van de Velde the Elder. Terry was particularly drawn to seventeenth-century Dutch painting; landscapes, seascapes, still lifes, and genre scenes. In the context of early twentieth-century art movements, his taste can seem conservative and patrician. Though, in many respects, they echo, and perhaps consciously emulate, the preferences of eighteenth-century English gentleman collectors, whose furniture he also avidly acquired.

Items donated
by Noel Terry
in the Drawing
Room at
Fairfax House
©Christopher
John Photography



The Village School,
P. Van Host (1707)

Typical of Terry's taste is 'Villagers Merrymaking' (c.1650s), after David Teniers II, which he purchased in 1928 (see image on p.22). One of his earliest acquisitions, the painting presents an idealised rural scene in which the poor eat, drink and socialise in harmony. This theme recurs across the collection in works such as 'The Village School' (1707) by P. van Host, 'Figures in a Courtyard' (c.1650s) by Thomas Wyck, and the pair of Dutch canal scenes by Johannes Storck. These paintings consistently depict ordered, balanced worlds – spaces in which work, learning, trade and leisure coexist without tension or disruption. For an industrialist like

Terry, who had experienced the upheavals of the early twentieth century, including the horrors of the First World War, the rising Trade Union movement, and the 1926 General Strike (which directly affected his factory), such scenes of quiet historical civility may have held powerful nostalgic appeal. They offered an, albeit highly romanticised, vision of stability and hierarchy, in contrast to the uncertainties of modern life. Much like his choice of an anachronistic style of architecture for his home Goddards, his choice of art can perhaps be read as a deliberate retreat from the modern world.



Yet Terry's collecting was not without its complexities. Alongside these reassuringly traditional works sit a small group of paintings attributed to the York-born artist William Etty R.A. (one now reattributed to James Sant R.A.). With the exception of a restrained portrait of the politician S. A. Banytum, these works depict sensuous nude figures, rendered in Etty's characteristically rich palette and fluid brushwork. They stand in striking contrast to the rest of the collection. Their inclusion suggests a more nuanced and perhaps private dimension to Terry's taste – one shaped not only by aesthetic preference and perhaps desire, but also by his admiration for Etty's connection to York and the artist's commitment to its cultural heritage. Significantly, these works were never assigned the reference numbers that Terry so meticulously applied to the rest of his collection, leaving their origins uncertain. Whether acquired informally, received as gifts, or simply regarded differently by Terry himself, they hint at a moment where his otherwise carefully controlled collecting impulses gave way to something more personal and less easily categorised.



Back View of a Woman,
William Etty, (c.1830)

2. Protecting York's heritage



Heritage & planning review

Report / Dr Duncan Marks, Planning and Heritage Manager IHBC

If there is a theme for this year's heritage and planning review, it is momentum.

After several years in which York seemed awash with major planning applications, 2025-26 has been noticeably quieter. Few significant city-centre schemes have emerged, reflecting wider economic uncertainty. Yet beyond the city walls, and often the ring road too, many of the strategic sites allocated in York's recently adopted Local Plan have begun to move from policy into reality.

During the year, York Civic Trust reviewed over 2500 planning applications in depth. Some demonstrated how contemporary architecture can complement York's

historic character, while others revealed missed opportunities for better design. The Trust has continued to champion growth that respects York's distinctive historic environment.

Total cases covered:

2708

Cases critically assessed:

408

York Central Illustration
©York Central

This year, the Trust submitted its most substantial planning response in more than eighty years

Celebrating and rescuing heritage

Elsewhere, the Trust continued its work to protect vulnerable heritage assets. Following the partial collapse of the former railway Canteen Building on Holgate Road in April 2023, collaborative discussions with Network Rail helped secure revised proposals that retain much of both the Canteen Building and Alliance House, rather than the demolition initially proposed. Now approved, the future of this important industrial heritage will continue within an operational railway setting.

Looking back. Looking forwards

The Trust also continued to develop York's Heritage at Risk Register, identifying buildings and sites that require attention before deterioration becomes irreversible. Given the initial plans for demolition, the Canteen Building and Alliance House were additions to the Register. As development momentum returns to the city and strategic projects advance, this proactive approach will become increasingly important.

The Trust also continued its Sustainable Communities Case Study series. Our Hungate study examined how closely the completed development matched the aspirations set out during the planning process, helping to inform future developments across York.

York's future depends upon balancing change with continuity. Whether creating new neighbourhoods or protecting historic buildings, the task remains the same: ensuring that growth enhances rather than diminishes the character of one of Britain's most historic cities.

York Central gathers pace

The clearest example of this approach has been York Central, one of the largest brownfield regeneration projects in the United Kingdom. This year, the Trust submitted its most substantial planning response in more than eighty years, supporting the £2 billion scheme following extensive engagement with the development team and drawing on the expertise of architects, landscape designers, urban planners, transport specialists and Civic Trust Members.

The Trust welcomed proposals for a major new public park, improved connections and a mixed-use neighbourhood. It also stressed the importance of design quality and integrated affordable housing. The success of York Central will ultimately be measured not by the scale of investment alone, but by the quality of the place it creates.

Total planning comments:

78

One of the most significant surviving Methodist sites anywhere in the world.



Aldwark Chapel

York's lost chapel: The remarkable survival of 60–62 Aldwark

Article / Dr Duncan Marks, Planning and Heritage Manager IHBC

At first glance, 60–62 Aldwark is unlikely to attract much attention. For many York residents it is remembered simply as the home of a long-established dental practice. Yet recent research arising from York Civic Trust planning casework has revealed that this modest building may be one of the most significant surviving Methodist sites anywhere in the world.

Long before dentists occupied the premises, the building served as a warehouse. Look closer, however, and traces of an even earlier history remain. Subtle brick arch details visible on the side elevation hint at the large windows that once illuminated a chapel gallery. The building's adjoined relationship with the former Methodist preacher's house – the Old Manse on St Saviourgate – offers another clue.

This was no ordinary chapel. Built in 1759 as the Peaseholme Green Chapel, it was York's first purpose-built Wesleyan Methodist chapel and, according to current understanding, the second remaining purpose-built Wesleyan chapel in the world. Only the famous New Room in Bristol, opened by John Wesley in 1739, predates it.

Its construction came during the remarkable early expansion of Methodism. The movement had first reached York in the 1740s through the preaching of early converts including stonemason and soldier John Nelson. Meetings were initially held in private houses and rented

rooms across the city, reflecting the movement's status outside the established Church.

By the late 1750s, the York congregation had grown sufficiently to require a permanent home. Land was secured at Peaseholme Green and work began on a new chapel capable of accommodating around 400 worshippers.

The project progressed with urgency. When John Wesley visited York on 19 April 1759, within weeks of the site being acquired, he chose to preach in the building while it was still under construction, referring in his journal to the 'shell of the new house'.

The chapel formally opened later that year and quickly became the centre of York Methodism. Although the congregation moved to the much larger New Street Chapel in 1805 and the Peaseholme Green building was sold the following year, the structure survives today. The chapel forms part of a wider early experiment in Methodism in York, when the movement was still establishing permanent urban footholds before the rapid expansion of purpose-built chapels across the city in the nineteenth century.

Altered almost beyond recognition, it nevertheless remains a remarkable survivor – a hidden piece of York's religious heritage and an early monument to a movement that would spread around the globe and today counts more than 80 million adherents worldwide.

From York to Scarborough: The extraordinary story of a collapsed bridge

When York Civic Trust submitted a report on the history of Lendal Bridge to the City of York Council ahead of planned conservation works in 2027, it drew on archival research carried out by Charlotte Trueman, a postgraduate student from the University of York's Department of Archaeology, during her placement with the Trust. Her research uncovered a dramatic story featuring a catastrophic Victorian collapse, five deaths, and a remarkable second life for the fallen ironwork on the Yorkshire coast.

Article / Charlotte Trueman

Today, Lendal Bridge is one of York's most familiar landmarks. Yet few people realise that the bridge we cross today is actually York's second Lendal Bridge.

By the mid-nineteenth century, York was undergoing dramatic change. The arrival of the railway in 1839 brought new prosperity and thousands of visitors, but also created a pressing problem. Ouse Bridge was the city's only road crossing of the River Ouse and regularly became congested. A second bridge was urgently needed to connect the railway station with the city centre.

Construction began in 1860 on an ambitious iron lattice-girder bridge designed by engineer William Dredge. It was intended to be a bold statement of Victorian progress and engineering. Unfortunately, disaster struck before it could open.

On 27 September 1861, while the final iron girders were being lowered into position, the structure suddenly collapsed. Around 400 tons of iron crashed into the River Ouse with a noise reportedly heard across much of York. Five workmen lost their lives – two crushed by falling ironwork and three drowned in the river. The tragedy shocked the city and immediately sparked fierce debate about the bridge's

The view of the ruins of Lendal Bridge, York, taken immediately after its fall (1861)



appearance and design. Many residents had already criticised the structure as heavy, unattractive and out of keeping with its historic surroundings.

The fallen girders were eventually salvaged and sold. Remarkably, rather than being scrapped, much of the ironwork found a second life in Scarborough, where it was incorporated into the town's Valley Bridge spanning South Bay. There it may still survive today, carrying traffic more than 160 years after its dramatic plunge into the Ouse.

Lendal Bridge was replaced in January 1863. Designed by the celebrated engineer Thomas Page, the new bridge boasted an elegant iron arch, decorative civic emblems and Gothic tollhouses. Page was no stranger to ambitious river crossings, he was also the engineer behind Westminster Bridge in London, completed earlier in 1862. It remains one of York's finest Victorian structures, and a reminder that the city's story is rarely as straightforward as it appears.

Conserving the museum's most vulnerable works

Interview / with Francis Downing

With over 56 years of experience, ICON-registered paintings conservator Francis Downing has spent the past three years carefully cleaning and conserving thirteen paintings from the Noel G. Terry Charitable Trust. Made possible thanks to generous support from the Friends of Fairfax House and the Noel Terry Trust, this ambitious programme has stabilised and revitalised some of the collection's most vulnerable works for future generations. We spoke with Francis about the process.

How long have you been working with the collection at Fairfax House?

I've been working with the Fairfax House collection for around thirteen years now, so it's a place and collection I've come to know very well over time.

Pre- and post- conservation work. *A Dutch Two-Decker and Other Shipping Vessels Offshore in a Choppy Sea*, Abraham Storck, (c. 1670s/80s)



What has been most rewarding about conserving the Noel Terry paintings?

Without doubt, it's the transformation in how the paintings can be seen and enjoyed. Cleaning away layers of discoloured varnish and past interventions allows the works to speak again. It's also been a real pleasure working with such an enthusiastic curatorial team and having the opportunity to share the conservation process with the Friends of Fairfax House.

Cleaning away layers of discoloured varnish and past interventions allows the works to speak again.



Were there any unexpected discoveries along the way?

There always are. Discovering an artist's technique is one of the great joys of conservation, it brings you closer to their hand and intention. At the same time, uncovering and, where necessary, removing earlier restorations reveals a kind of 'timeline' of care, showing how attitudes to conservation have changed over the years.

Did any painting present a particular challenge?

Each painting is unique and must be treated on its own terms. One of the most demanding was 'Villagers Merrymaking' by David Teniers. It had become seriously degraded and had undergone extensive past restoration. Much of this had aged poorly, so we had to carefully remove earlier additions, including a lining canvas and old adhesive. It was then relined using modern conservation methods, with controlled heat and vacuum pressure to ensure long-term stability.

How do you balance preservation with restoration?

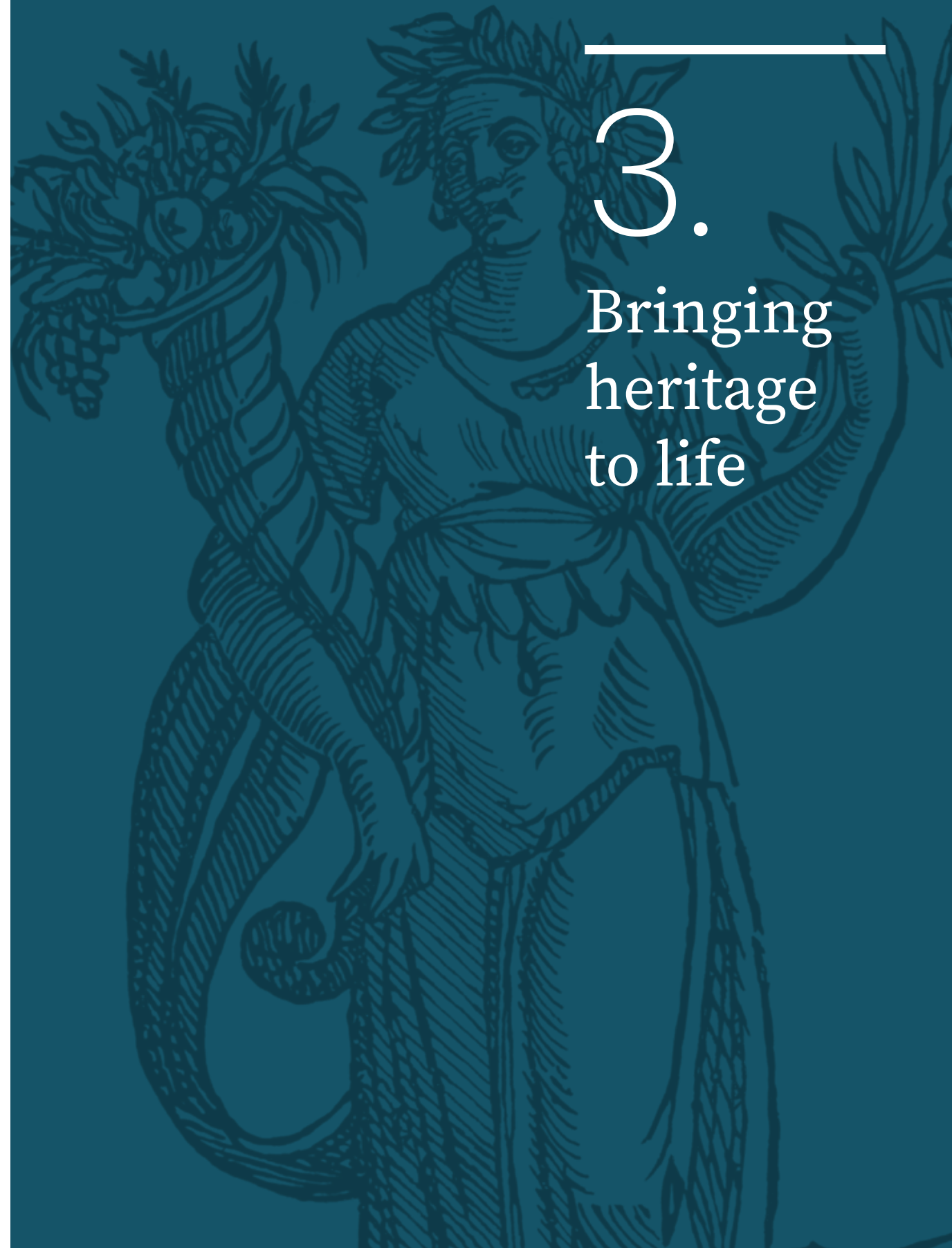
The artist's intention is always paramount. Conservation is about revealing, supporting and preserving that intention, not altering it. Our role is to maintain the visual harmony of the painting while ensuring its physical stability, without adding anything that changes the artist's original work.

A Village Scene with Peasants Merrymaking outside an Inn, David Teniers II (1610–1690) (style of)



3.

Bringing heritage to life



A record year for Fairfax House

Report /

2025 was a remarkable year for Fairfax House, all the more impressive when you consider the apprehensive mood of the tourism sector nationwide. In November, we were recognised by the hugely prestigious Historic Houses Collections Award – a national award for innovation in the way collections are displayed to engage the public. Our Curator, Dr Sarah Burnage, continues to find new ways to enhance the immersive environment at Fairfax House by bringing seasonal flowers, fruit, vegetables, smells and sounds into the House. One visitor noted 'I really appreciated all the tiny details – playing cards, plates of food, books and letters – that brought the house to life', another said 'I loved the way the house is presented as if I had only been a moment earlier I would have met the residents'.

This immersive approach continued to underpin a successful seasonal programme. Candlelit evenings during the winter months proved especially popular. In October, our collaboration with York Ghost Merchants returned with 'Fortuna Fatum', an interactive Allhallowtide experience set in 1764. This was followed in November by 'A Christmas Mousquerade', which transformed the House into a festive Georgian home preparing for a grand ball.

Alongside public programming, we completed the final phase of the Noel Terry Collection painting conservation project. Between 2023 and 2026, thirteen paintings and their frames were conserved, securing their long-term preservation and enabling many works to return to display.

Digital engagement continued to grow through Bloomberg Connects, which recorded 1,143 users this year. The platform provides multilingual interpretation, with English, German, French, Italian and Chinese proving most popular. We also improved the visitor booking experience by replacing our online ticket platform and upgrading our till system after more than a decade.

The Fairfax House Instagram surpassed 10k followers this year and its reach (the number of people who viewed our posts) grew from 37k the previous year to 161k – an increase of over 300%.

Visitor numbers:

21,984

New followers on the Fairfax House Instagram

3300



The Dining Room at Fairfax House
©Christopher John Photography

Mice sold in gift shop:

1824

Competition entries in Fairfax House:

1500



Curator's top picks from the collection

Article / Dr Sarah Burnage

Fairfax House Curator, Dr Sarah Burnage introduces you to her top three objects in the museum's collection.

John Wilson Carmichael, *Shipping offshore in Stormy Sea*, 1845

I am ashamed to admit that I never really took much notice of this work until it returned from conservation. Restored to its former vibrancy it has become one of my favourite paintings in the entire collection.

The scene depicts the wild and treacherous coastline of Northumberland. Ships battle with the elements, whilst the rugged cliffs compete for attention with the swirling turbulent sea. The artist cleverly offsets these cool blue tones with flashes of colour – the yellow sail, the red flag, and the jacket of a sailor in the foreground (a subtle nod perhaps to J. M. W. Turner's infamous *red buoy* in his 1832 painting 'Helvoetsluys').

Based in Newcastle, Carmichael's art consciously emulated Dutch seascapes of the seventeenth century, relocating them to the shorelines of Britain. The painting, as such, would have provided an interesting point of comparison with works in Terry's collection by Dutch masters such as Willem van de Velde the Elder, Hendrick J. Dubbels and Abraham Storck.

Since returning from conservation, the work has been relocated to the hallway, where it sits beautifully against the cool blue walls and thematically complements the series of engravings of *The Four Elements* by Francesco Bartolozzi.



Shipping Offshore in a Stormy Sea,
John Wilson Carmichael (1845)

William Greatbatch, Staffordshire Creamware Fortune Teller Teapot (c.1770–1782)

Produced by William Greatbatch (c.1735–1813), a potter working at Fenton, Staffordshire, this beautiful teapot was kindly bequeathed to Fairfax House by Barbara Huebener in 2022. It is a delightful example of creamware which, while functional, offers a fascinating glimpse into fashionable Georgian society. I would simply love to have a cup of tea out of it – though with a lead glaze I'm not entirely sure it would be advisable.



On one side of the pot is a transfer-printed and enamel-coloured scene entitled 'The Fortune Teller'. It shows two ornately dressed women at a fortune-teller's desk. One holds a slip of paper bearing the words 'never married' while the other, apparently more fortunate, is being handed a note inscribed 'a husband' along with what appears to be a date. The fortune teller sits at a desk complete with astrological instruments and a pile of money paid by the gullible clients. Behind the chair, as if to underscore the quackery of the practice, another figure crouches and appears to pocket something.

The opposite side of the pot depicts 'The XII Houses of Heaven', the astrological framework used to construct personalised horoscopes. Together, these scenes suggest that the piece was intended not only for practical use but also to spark conversation and amusement – perhaps even offering a gentle warning about placing one's fate in the hands of a fortune teller.

I would simply love to have a cup of tea out of it – though with a lead glaze I'm not entirely sure it would be advisable.



George III Silver Tea Table, c.1760

This is a work which for many years was so badly damaged that it could not be displayed in the museum. Noel Terry purchased the table in 1935 from Charles Thornton of York, and it was once proudly displayed at Goddards. It is not clear when or how the damage occurred – whether during transport or shortly afterwards – but the incredibly ornate fretwork around the top and legs had been catastrophically broken. As a result, the piece sat unloved and largely forgotten in the loft at Fairfax House for many years.

That is, until one of our volunteers, Agnes Winter, kindly offered to fund its restoration. David Podmore oversaw the painstaking process of piecing the table back together, work that took over a year to complete, and it now takes centre stage in the Drawing Room.

This is one of my favourite pieces, not only because it is an exquisite example of craftsmanship, but also because of the story and people connected to it. Agnes sadly passed away before the work was completed, but I know she would have been delighted with the result. Every time I walk past the table, I am reminded of Agnes, and it always makes me smile.

Artist collaborations at Fairfax House

Interview / with Nick Ellwood

Artist Nick Ellwood is in the process of bringing the past back to life at Fairfax House through a new series of window and shutter artworks, offering visitors a glimpse of York as it might have appeared in the 1760s. Installed in the Kitchen and Saloon, the commission, funded by the 2025 Historic Houses Collection Award, will invite visitors to gaze out of the house's windows and imagine life as it would have been during Ann and the Viscount's time.

For Nick, the project draws on a lifelong fascination with historic imagery; "Since I was a child, I've loved looking at historical drawings, and throughout my career I have spent a lot of time studying and drawing inspiration from William Hogarth and Thomas Rowlandson. In particular, I have always been fascinated by the drama, vitality, and storytelling in their characters and depictions of human life."

Collaborating closely with the Fairfax House team, Nick has immersed himself in the history of the house, combining period maps, archival material and visual sources to help "plot the bones of the composition."

One element that particularly captured Nick's imagination was the River Foss, which once ran along the back border of the property. Nick notes how "fascinating it is to see how the river shaped the landscape and life of the city."

Nick, however, intends his work to be more than just topographical reconstruction. He weaves in human stories to animate the past, inspired by real-life figures such as Father Bolton, the family's chaplain, and Mary Bentley, a servant dismissed for improper conduct. Nick hopes that visitors will feel immersed in these reimagined views:

"I would like people to be able to relate to the scenes and realise that, in many ways, we are not so different from those who lived before us. At the same time, I hope they enjoy the historical details that are unique to York and Fairfax House."

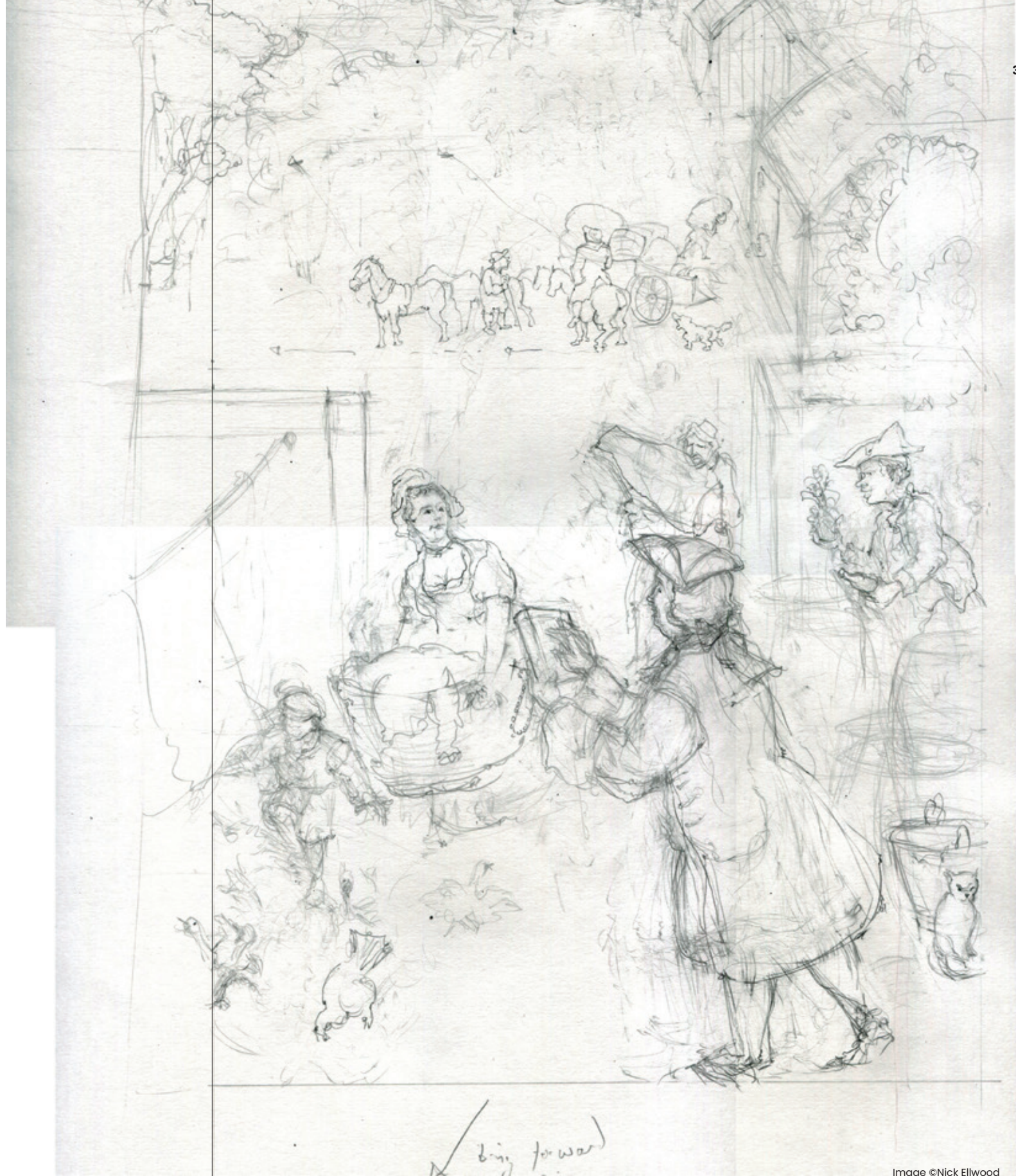




Image ©Ruth Beloe

Artist in Residence: Ruth Beloe

Article /

In 2025 Fairfax House welcomed contemporary art into its historic interiors for the first time, when Ruth Beloe joined us as our first Artist in Residence. Over several months, Ruth worked within the rooms of the house, drawing inspiration from its interiors, collections, and atmosphere.

Trained at the Charles H. Cecil Studios in Florence, Ruth's practice is rooted in the sight-size method and a commitment to observing and painting what she finds beautiful, whether in everyday domestic objects or more striking decorative features. This approach proved ideally suited to Fairfax House, where small details sit alongside moments of more theatrical display.

Through a series of intimate oil paintings, Ruth captured the distinctive character and mood of the house. These works were displayed in situ, offering visitors a fresh and personal perspective on the interiors. Sales of the paintings also directly supported the museum, with a proportion of proceeds contributing to the conservation of the Noel Terry collection of porcelain.



Reflecting on her time at Fairfax House, Ruth noted:

"Fairfax House is a wonderful period townhouse, and a favourite place of mine since moving to York. I have enjoyed escaping into this Georgian world, surrounded by beautiful objects, paintings and furnishings, curated in such an appealing way. The displays are constantly evolving, and I could find inspiration here for many years."



Telling York's stories: Blue plaques

From the Archives: Designing the Cocoa Works Plaque

This year York Civic Trust installed a blue plaque at the Cocoa Works on Haxby Road, the former Rowntree's factory that once employed more than 6,000 people and produced some of Britain's best-loved chocolate brands, including KitKat, Smarties & Aero. The plaque continues the Trust's tradition of innovative blue plaque design, following plaques such as our Anne Lister LGBT rainbow plaque, the first of its kind in the country. We drew the Cocoa Works plaque's design from archival research into the factory's history. The distinctive blue KitKat wrapper, introduced in 1941 when milk rationing forced a change in recipe, inspired both the plaque's colour and its form.

To find out more about the archival research that shaped the plaque, we spoke to the Borthwick Institute, whose archivist attended the installation ceremony in April.



Andrew Morrison and Duncan Marks holding the new Cocoa Works plaque

Interview / with Sally-Anne Shearn, Collections Information Archivist at the Borthwick Institute

How did the Borthwick Institute come to hold the Rowntree and KitKat packaging collection?

The Rowntree company archives, which includes extensive advertising material and original product packaging, were deposited at the Borthwick Institute by Nestle UK in 1992, in the wake of their 1988 takeover of Rowntree Mackintosh. Since then, we've continued to receive small additions from the Haxby Road factory and in 2019 the entire archive was generously gifted to us by Nestle, meaning it will remain in York forever. In everyday life, chocolate wrappers end up in the bin, but thanks to the archive we can chart changes in the appearance of key brands like Kit Kat from the 1930s to the 1990s.



©Borthwick Archives

Why is the 1940s KitKat wrapper blue?

The introduction of milk rationing during the Second World War made it impossible for Rowntree's to make their famous Kit Kat Chocolate Crisp to the same recipe. So in 1941 they announced it would be replaced for the duration of the war by a new version made with plain chocolate and sold in a blue wrapper, so customers would know the difference! This wartime version was named 'Kit Kat', dropping the 'Chocolate Crisp' part of the name for the first time.

What can historic packaging tell us about the people who made, bought and enjoyed chocolate in the past?

Historic packaging captures changing tastes (no pun intended). Their design, the colours and fonts used, the information included, tell us what was considered important at that time. For example, early Kit Kat wrappers always include the Rowntree 'Guarantee of Satisfaction' printed in full on the back, informing customers they can return the product if it is 'out

of condition'. This was not a legal requirement at the time and so was something of a selling point for Rowntree. Equally, a modern shopper might be surprised to find there was no requirement to print lists of ingredients on wrappers and in fact this only started appearing in the 1980s!

Additionally, selling points and core messaging changed over time. The Kit Kats of the 1930s were advertised as a cheap and filling snack for the working man or woman. Post-war, the emphasis shifts to the health benefits of full cream milk following years of rationing and the creation of the NHS. From the 1960s the emphasis changes again to the Kit Kat as a sweet treat for all the family with the launch of the six pack of two-finger Kit Kats, a product heavily marketed to mothers.

Were there any particularly surprising or unusual discoveries you made while researching the collection?

The most surprising discovery was that the name 'Kit Kat' had been used before by Rowntrees, albeit spelled slightly differently. In 1911 the company trademarked both 'KitKat' and 'Kit Cat' and they used the latter for a boxed chocolate assortment, which was sold between 1915 and 1932 and seems to have had no similarity to our favourite Kit Kat, besides the name. When researching this, I learned that the name 'Kit Kat' was very popular in this period, with Kit Kat shoes, arm chairs, ladies coats advertised in newspapers and even a Kit Kat night club in London.



The York man who introduced the world to the Dodo

Article / Andrew Morrison

Most people assume the dodo belongs to natural history's more celebrated institutions, the great museums of London or Oxford. Few would think to look for its origins on the streets of York.

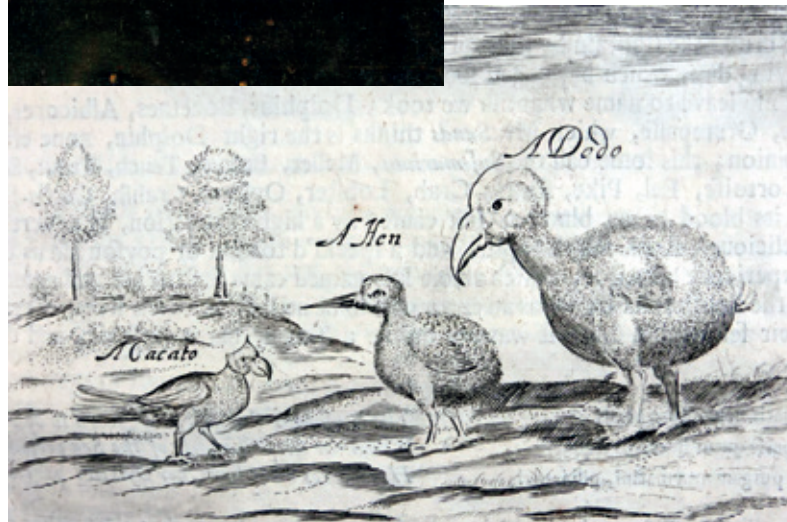
Yet it was a York man, Sir Thomas Herbert, who gave English audiences their first printed encounter with the dodo. Born in 1606, Herbert was a traveller, courtier and diplomat whose journeys through Persia, Madagascar and Mogul India in the early seventeenth century produced some of the period's most vivid accounts of the wider world. His 1634 publication, 'Some Yeares Travels into Africa and Asia the Great', contained an illustration depicting a broad-billed parrot, a red rail – and a dodo.

The image predates Captain Cook's better-known Pacific voyages by well over a century. Herbert's publications are thought to have introduced not only the first reference to the dodo in print for English readers, but also the first illustration of a penguin and a drawn depiction of a shark attack.

The house in which he was born still stands on Pavement, a Grade I listed timber-framed building that has been a merchant's townhouse, a draper's shop, and is today home to York Gin, now owned by York Conservation Trust. Herbert had a close relationship with Charles I and became the sole gentleman of the bedchamber remaining with Charles I throughout his captivity and was present until the moment the king stepped onto the scaffold.



Sir Thomas Herbert, British 17th century unknown



A plaque on High Petergate and Pavement marks his connection to the city. Herbert's story is one of dozens explored in York Civic Trust's new blue plaque book, available to buy this summer, a companion to the plaques that mark the city's most remarkable lives.

Sketch showing a broad-billed parrot, a red rail, and a dodo, Sir Thomas Herbert, (1634)

4. People behind the Trust

Our staff



Summer Adams
Front of House Officer



Evie Andrews
Operations Manager



Julie Bunney
Housekeeper



Sarah Burnage
Curator



Christina Henzel
Heritage Engagement Officer



Emily Heywood
Communications Officer



Duncan Marks
Heritage and
Planning Manager



Andrew Morrison
Chief Executive Officer



Imogen Myles
Front of House Officer



Heidi Pickett
Front of House Officer



Louise Precious
Finance Manager



Linda Scarbro
Front of House Assistant



Natalie Yemelyanova
Administrative Assistant

Our trustees



Helen Dobson



Gillian Fleming



Nicky Milner



Sue Palmer



Matthew Seddon



Richard Smith



Richard Thompson



Delma Tomlin (Chair)



Christopher Webb



William Woolley



Volunteer Gary Bateson
with young visitor
©Olivia Brabb

Volunteers

Report /

In the last year Fairfax House volunteers gave an impressive 7134 hours to the museum – hours which allow us to open our doors. As usual reviews for the museum highlighted how much our volunteers enhance visitor experience, 'Guides are attentive, unobtrusive, very well-informed and genuinely enthusiastic'. Additionally, we had over 30 applications from students wanting to join the third year of our Winter Student Placement. Nearly all of these applicants were taken on and given some behind-the-scenes work experience.

**Hours contributed by
Fairfax House volunteers:**

7134

Equivalent to:

or, 3 - 4 full time members of staff

£87,000

Placement students at York Civic Trust:

29

From Yorkshire to Melbourne and back again: Meet Diana English, Fairfax House volunteer

Interview / by Evie Andrews, Fairfax House Operations Manager

Fairfax House is privileged to receive the support of a dedicated team of volunteers whose time, enthusiasm, and expertise allow us to open our doors and share our story with visitors.

One such person is Diana English, who has been a volunteer Room Host for the past eight years. I was fortunate to read Diana's life story, a project she undertook during the pandemic. Through its pages, she reflects on almost 93 years of a life marked by resilience, change, and adventure.

Born and raised in Yorkshire at her family home, Bolton Hall, Diana's early childhood was shadowed by the turmoil of the Second World War, her parents' divorce, and frequent relocation due to bombing.

At the end of the War, Diana talked to me about the challenges both she and her elder sister, June, faced in getting on the career ladder.

"There were no training courses, no apprenticeships, not even work experience. June and I couldn't get ahead! We couldn't get the experience and thought, 'to hell with it, let's go and see the country', and so we cycled from where we lived in Bournemouth down to Land's End, up to John O'Groats and back again, and it was a wonderful experience."



Mature age student Diana English graduated Fine Arts La Trobe University (Melbourne, 1985)

This initial taste of adventure for both sisters let them stretch even further, considering a full relocation to Australia.

"We had no opportunities in the UK. Both of us tried everything, and it didn't work. We had friends who had been to Australia and came back for a trip, and they said, 'It's the land of opportunity.' Sold!"

Diana and June spent over 50 years in Australia, building careers and a home together in Melbourne. Alongside this, Diana attended university as a mature student, graduating with a degree in Fine Arts.

"We had no opportunities in the UK. Both of us tried everything, and it didn't work. We had friends who had been to Australia and came back for a trip, and they said, 'It's the land of opportunity.' Sold!"

"I always wanted to go to university, but of course, although father could've paid for it, he refused because he was a strange man who always maintained that girls were not worth educating. I did it on my own volition, I had to wait quite a few years to save for it, and I didn't want to live with a huge debt at the end of it, so I saved up and paid for my course as I went through it."

"Another reason why I went to university is that in the back of my mind I always wanted to join the family firm R. M. English and Sons, but of course, father was the director, and he said no, 'Over my dead body.'"

Despite her family's refusal to let her work with the family firm, Diana had a successful career with Beechams and the Melbourne Royal Agricultural Society before retiring in 2005. Finding several volunteering opportunities to pass the time, she joined the Johnston Collection as a Room Host, a charity for disabled girls, and Melbourne Tourism.

"Those three jobs kept me fully occupied!"

Moving back to Yorkshire in 2017, Diana attended an open day at Fairfax House and signed up on the day. When I asked her what keeps her coming after eight years, she replied:

"I think it's the buzz, I like to get up in the morning and think 'I'm going to Fairfax House today'. Otherwise, I am almost 93, and I've only got a house to clean and a garden to do, and a few social engagements, but that's not fulfilling, whereas coming here is fulfilling. I enjoy it tremendously."

Asking if she had a favourite room, she said:

"Yes! The Dining Room! I think it's lovely. It reminds me of Bolton Hall, where I was born, we had a dining room very similar, and although as children, we didn't often go in there, on special occasions, we were invited in."

I want to thank Diana English for sitting down with me for this conversation. Her story, like so many connected to Fairfax House, reminds us that history is not only found within the walls of a museum but also in the lives of the people who help preserve it.



Right: Diana (c.5 years old). Left: her sister June (c.9 years old)

Meet our mouse makers: An interview with Paula Linklater



Interview / by Evie Andrews,
Fairfax House Operations Manager

Paula Linklater joined our volunteer team just over a year ago. In that time, not only has she been a wonderful Room Host in welcoming our visitors, but she has also undertaken the tremendous task of dressing close to 100 mice for our summer and winter displays. To learn more about Paula and her creative talents, I had the pleasure of interviewing her for this year's annual report.

Could you tell me a little about yourself and what got you into sewing?

"From ten years old, I was sewing. I learned to use a sewing machine, and that was it; I was launched! Before I retired, I was a teaching assistant in a secondary school, so I did all the DT and worked in learning support, supporting children with autism. Before that, it was theatre design."

Why did you start volunteering at Fairfax House?

"When we moved to York, I went to sample all the places you could go and just fell in love with Fairfax House. And then I saw the email, 'Volunteers Wanted – Open Day' and I thought, oh my god, this is perfect. Then the mice came, and I was hooked!"

What is the biggest challenge you face when dressing the mice?

"The challenges are fabrics, actually, because getting things thin enough to make to scale is so hard! Silk off-cuts I love and find

in charity shops. Fur is the latest challenge as it's so thick! And doing everything so tiny."

Which is your favourite mouse to have made?

"The little Macaroni Fop Mouse with his painted cheeks and heart shaped lips, I loved him. But I did love the Twelfth Night Shakespeare set!"

Why do you think that people love the mice so much?

"I think because it's the element of fun! Like the hot tub on the stove, the snow angel in the flour, the humour is just delightful. It means people relax and talk to you so much more than! It's not a stuffy place behind a rope."

What can we expect coming up with the mice this Christmas?

"I learnt recently that ice skating was particularly popular in eighteenth century France. They tied bones to their feet and pushed themselves along with poles, so I have just been making, in polymer clay, some tiny bones to be put on skates."



5. Looking forward





Acomb Green
©Colin McLean

Our Place

Report /

What places matter to you, and how could they be improved? What features in the landscape tell you that you are home? These are some of the questions we have been asking residents of Acomb and Westfield as part of the Trust's Our Place project, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Based around a central display at Explore York Acomb, Christina Henzel, the Trust's Heritage Engagement Officer, has been speaking with residents of all ages in streets, shops, cafés, schools, churches and community groups across Acomb and Westfield. Local charity New Visuality has run Artcamp

workshops for young people, while Hidden Histories, an Acomb-based guided walking-tour group, has led walkshops through Foxwood, Acomb, Chapelfield and Westfield. Historic mapping, spray painting, mosaic making and archival research are among ways we have encouraged people to join in.

During the first four months of this two-year project, we have learned that residents of all ages share a strong interest in the availability and care of green spaces, the maintenance and appearance of local historic buildings, and local history more broadly. The response from young people has been particularly encouraging.



The Marcia Grey pub
©Colin McLean



Acomb Explore Centre
©Colin McLean

One participant, aged 11, said: 'The project made me more interested in local history and more confident sharing my ideas. I think lots of young people learned things about Acomb and Westfield that they didn't know before.' Two participants, aged 14, added: 'what interested me was the opportunity to look at local history through art and find out more about places I pass without really thinking about them' and 'the project has given young people a chance to contribute to the story and feel proud of where they live.'

Our Place display



In early 2026 we secured National Lottery Heritage funding for the project, allowing us to roll out an events programme to engage residents. These free events included creative workshops, guided 'walkshops', pop-up activities and community celebrations focused on local places and green spaces. Alongside this, we've had an interactive installation in Acomb Explore Library which invites residents to head to the library to share memories, nominate meaningful places, and highlight the buildings, spaces, and stories they feel deserve more recognition and care.

Since launching the project has engaged widely across the community. Over 1000 residents have shared their views. Feedback highlights strong interest in local history, alongside concerns about the protection and maintenance of heritage, access to open space, and how community voices are heard.

We will open up a community grants scheme in the late summer allowing the Civic Trust to invest in and work more closely with local communities in enhancing the places that are important to them.



Spray painting workshop
©Art of Protest, York



Digital views:

16,059

People have shared views
on Acomb's history*:

1,007

*Either digital or via in-person events/library display

Event attendance:

738

Children
attending events:

391



©Gareth Buddo

York Civic Trust

Report /

Approaching an 80th birthday brings a sense of reflection but also an ambition to move forward. We have achieved a great deal across the city installing over 150 blue plaques, extensive city enhancement and building restoration projects, alongside playing an active role in influencing the city's overall development but we cannot rest on our laurels.

To continue to move forward we have employed our first Heritage Engagement Officer, working with communities in Acomb and Westfield leading the Our Place project (supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund). A new publication allowing people to explore aspects of York's history including our Blue Plaques will be published in the summer.

In preparation for the 80th anniversary, last October the Civic Trust introduced a single brand identity for the first time in our history. We worked with York-based design agency Lazenbybrown to refresh our logo and pick brand typefaces and colours. Members will have seen the updated brand on their monthly newsletter.

Working closely with York BID and the University of York we have created interpretation panels that introduce the history of the city centre's Snickelways to commuters and people exploring the city off the beaten track.

York Civic Trust is part of a national network of civic societies. York hosted the Autumn meeting of the lively regional association of civic societies covering Yorkshire and Humberside. Delegates enjoyed a mostly rain-free guided tour of the city and lively meeting in the Medical Society's Rooms on Stonegate.

**Members bought
tickets for events:**

905



©Gareth Buddo

The Civic Trust's patron the Duchess of Kent sadly passed away on 4th September 2025. The Duchess had been our patron since 1966 and had honoured us on many occasions, most notably opening Fairfax House in 1984 and unveiling the plaque in St Helen's Square in 1989 to commemorate its reopening as a public square.

This year our Events Working Group delivered 28 events, welcoming members to places and organisations that are not always accessible to the public. Highlights included tours of York Minster's Centre of Excellence, Askham Bog, the Borthwick Institute for Archives, and a fascinating exploration of York's historic clocks.

Social media views:

916,495

Fairfax House:

847,442

York Civic Trust:

69,053

Membership

For 80 years, York Civic Trust has championed the heritage that makes this city extraordinary. Founded in 1946, we are a membership charity dedicated to protecting York's historic places, encouraging thoughtful development, and celebrating the stories that define this city.

Through our Blue Plaque programme, our award-winning Georgian townhouse museum Fairfax House, and an annual programme of events, we help people see the city differently.

By becoming a member, you'll help safeguard the city you love and enjoy special access to the best of York.

Coming soon:

- A York Civic Trust pin badge
- Exclusive access to York Civic Trust podcasts and videos

If you have any issues or questions about membership, please contact info@yorkcivictrust.co.uk

Refer a friend

Share York Civic Trust membership with friends and both of you can enjoy a special reward.

When an existing member refers a new member, both the referrer and the new member receive £10 off a York Civic Trust event or Fairfax House special event booking.

©Gareth Buddo

Members enjoy:

- **Priority access to our annual programme of events**
- **Free & unlimited entry to Fairfax House**
- **10% discount in the gift shop**
- **A bi-annual members' magazine**
- **A monthly digital newsletter, with the latest planning and heritage news**
- **A vote on the Blue Plaques we prioritise**



Accounts

The charity's income for the year, both unrestricted and restricted increased significantly on our income for the previous year.

Included in income from donations and legacies is a **£491,566** legacy from Mary Elizabeth Anderson. The restricted fund created by the legacy is for the benefit of Fairfax House. The trustees of the Friends of Fairfax House will be closely involved in the use of the fund.

It was a record year for income from admissions to Fairfax House with an increase of **£25,066** on the income achieved in 2025. The trading income from our shop was up by over **£6,000** compared to 2025, at **£51,734**.

Following the decision by the trustees in 2025 to identify a suitable discretionary investment fund manager, Yoke & Co provided independent advice during the selection process. After further due diligence, the trustees chose WIM (formerly Waverton Investment Management) to manage its financial investments.

The subsequent sale of the charity's remaining financial investments crystallised a **£196,416** gain. It also resulted in an increase in the General Funds with a corresponding reduction in the Revaluation Reserve.

Our total investment income, including the rent from investment properties increased to **£313,835** against income of **£274,987** in the previous year.

Expenditure on charitable activities declined to **£516,333** following the ending of the Trailblazers project. In contrast, our expenditure on raising funds rose to **£77,917** largely due to an increase in marketing and publicity.

York Civic Trust's full published accounts are available to download from the Trust's website.



Holgate Carriage Works
©Colin McLean

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ColinMcLean, Christopher John and
Olivia Brabb.
Artwork by Evie Andrews.
Edited by Emily Heywood.



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HOUSE



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Registered charity no. 229336. Museum no. 1233. Company no. 00486282.