

Joseph Rowntree Memorial Library

Desk Based Assessment
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Joseph Rowntree Memorial Library

Desk-Based Assessment

Analysing Historic Buildings ARC00010M

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NOTE: All Figures are credit of the author, unless otherwise stated

1 Non-technical Summary

The following report is the product of a desk-based assessment (DBA) and primary visual analysis of the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Library, located on Haxby Road, York. It is a Grade II listed building (1392224), and occupies space close to the Nestle factory, formerly the Rowntree factory (Historic England, 2007).

The DBA element of this report will consider the historical context of the J R Memorial Library, and explore the history of the building, and its importance to the history of the wider site. It will also explore current development plans for the wider site, and where the Library sits within these plans.

The primary visual analysis will look at the external fabric of the building, and consider the internal space, and in combination with the DBA will be used to introduce a potential critique of current planning proposals for the Library, and make suggestions for alternative uses for the building going forward.

2 Introduction

This report looks at the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Library, located along Haxby Road just north of the centre of York. It is situated on, and strongly associated with the former Nestle factory behind it, which itself was formerly the Rowntree factory, until the company was bought out by Nestle.

When active, the earlier library collection was formed initially by Joseph Rowntree, beginning in the 1880s, to provide reading material for workers at the Rowntree factory. The J R Memorial Library was planned out in 1925 following Joseph Rowntree's death in that year, and it was constructed in 1927. It has Grade II Listed Building status as an intact surviving example of an inter-war library. The building remained in use as a Library for a period, operated by the City Council, though the building along with the rest of the site remained in the ownership of Nestle (Historic England, 2007).

Today the building is abandoned but in June this year new development plans were submitted to the City Council for the wider site, which includes proposals to develop the J R Memorial Library into a reception area and concierge building, with additional flexible spaces for meetings and some library space.

3 Site Description

3.1 Wider Site



FIGURE 1: SITE MAP WITH THE J R MEMORIAL LIBRARY MARKED IN THE CENTRE (SOURCE: [HTTPS://HISTORICENGLAND.ORG.UK/LISTING/THE-LIST/LIST-ENTRY/1392224](https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1392224))

The J R Memorial Library, Joseph Rowntree Theatre and the remaining elements of the historic Cocoa Works fall within Character Area 44 of York's Historic Environment Characterisation Project (MacRae, 2013). The character area straddles Haxby Road, and is bounded by the River Foss to the east, Wigginton Road (B1363) to the west, the Nestle/Rowntree factory to the south, and the University playing fields to the north. Beyond the Character Area to the north along Haxby Road is New Earswick, which is of notable interest in this context as a model village established by the Joseph Rowntree Village Trust. The Village Trust was one of three Trusts established by Rowntree, to which the majority of his wealth was ascribed in order that their charitable purposes could be carried out (Waddilove and Joseph Rowntree Village Trust, 1954, 3-4). The Village itself was an iterative development, which took place broadly in four phases between the late C19/early C20, and present day (Waddilove and Joseph Rowntree Village Trust, 1954, 13). It is reminiscent of the approach taken in garden suburbs of the late C19 such as Port Sunlight and Bournville; the latter being constructed by George Cadbury, who worked

alongside Joseph as an apprentice at Joseph Rowntree Seniors shop in York (Austin, Dowdy and Miller, 1997, 126; Titley, 2013, 17). Interestingly enough, in the context of the architectural styling of the Library, the designs for the houses in Bournville followed similarly in the Arts and Crafts style (Austin, Dowdy and Miller, 1997, 126).

The area is comprised of the historic industrial buildings utilised by the Cocoa Works, which dominate the landscape along Haxby Road, towering above the J R Memorial Library behind which they sit, back from Haxby Road itself. Only the Almond Block Extension, Cream Block and its later extension remain, as well as the single-storey amenity block which joins the works with the rear (west) of the Library (Bonnor, 2016, 12). Almond Block (now demolished) was built in 1907, with the extension being constructed in 1911. The Cream Room Block was built in 1904, with extensions being made in 1911 and 1915, and Cream Block and further extension proper being constructed in 1938 (Hall Grey Architects, 2006).



FIGURE 2: RED AREA SHOWS BUILDINGS WHICH HAVE BEEN DEMOLISHED IN CONTEXT OF REMAINING STRUCTURES CLOSE TO HAXBY ROAD (SOURCE: SITE MAP FROM (HALL GREY ARCHITECTS, 2006) OVERLAY BY AUTHOR)

There are also a small number of Victorian semi-detached housing rows, whilst more modern developments include those of the Nestle factory works and additional modern housing (MacRae, 2013). There are three designated heritage assets within the Character Area, which are the Library, Theatre (Historic England, 2003), and the White Stone Cross (Historic England, 1997). The Grade II Listed Rowntree Theatre was opened in 1935 and remains open as a functioning theatre today (Historic England, 2003). It was designed by Barry Parker, who was also the designer for the New Earswick Village, and who, similarly to the Library, designed the Theatre in Arts and Crafts Style (MacRae, 2013, 4).

Other non-designated heritage assets listed in the character area profile include Yearsley Pool, which was built in 1908 also by the Rowntree Company, which was then gifted to the City of York in 1909. It was originally an open-air pool but was covered by a permanent roof in the 1960s. Though it doesn't have a statutory designation it does feature on the York Local List (York Open Planning Forum, no date). Alongside the Pool, White Cross Villa, late 19th to early 20th century factory buildings, allotments, and possible pre-enclosure boundaries are amongst other non-designated heritage assets in the area (MacRae, 2013). Also of note is the Nuffield Hospital, which sits directly opposite the Library, and was previously the factory Dining Hall.

In terms of area archaeology, there is some reference to the discovery of Roman pottery, a wall and querns discovered during the late 1920s, but the area remained relatively undeveloped during the medieval period right through to the mid-19th century until the Foss Islands Branch line was opened in 1879; an important factor in making the area attractive for the Rowntree Company to expand their operations into (MacRae, 2013).

Following the construction of the works however, a number of independent reports indicate (some unpublished but referred to elsewhere) that any archaeological remains specifically on the land used for the Cocoa Works, will likely have been damaged or lost as a consequence of the construction of the works (Bonnor, 2016, 19).

3.2 Background and Context

The man for whose memory the Library was named was Joseph Rowntree, born in York in 1836 to Joseph Rowntree (Senior) and Sarah Stephenson, both of whom were Quakers. In 1822 Joseph Senior had travelled to York to purchase premises of the own, establishing grocer's, tea merchant and coffee roasting business at 28 Pavement in the centre of York (Titley, 2013, 9-10). The Rowntree family and their apprentices lived above the shop until, for reasons of capacity, they moved to Blossom Street in 1845 (Titley, 2013, 12). In 1850 Joseph Rowntree Senior took Joseph and his brother John on a business trip to Ireland, where he experienced first-hand the impact of the potato famine on the people there; an experience which would be highly influential to Joseph Junior's social and political agenda (Titley, 2013, 15).

Moving again in the 1850s, Joseph Junior soon after joined the family business (Titley, 2013, 15). His father passed away in November 1859, leaving behind a significant status and legacy; shops closed in respect on the day of his funeral, which was attended by the mayor and corporation. Joseph, now aged 23, and his brother John took on control of the business at Pavement (Titley, 2013, 22).

It was however, Joseph's younger brother Henry Isaac to whom the origins of the Rowntree confectionary business. Henry worked for a local business in Walmgate owned by the Tuke family, but soon after he bought up the cocoa and chocolate making department of the business in 1862 (Titley, 2013, 23), and established at Tanner's Moat in York (Vernon, 1958, 72-3). The business struggled under Henry's leadership and so at the end of the 1860s Joseph stepped into to help his brother. Along with his social and political astuteness, Joseph had an eye for detail, and so took over responsibility for the accounts, running them with "accuracy and [a] meticulous attention to small details (Vernon, 1958, 73-4)." The 'family' ethos that had characterised Rowntree's earlier business at Pavement carried over to the Tanner's Moat factory, and the Rowntree's ensured that their workforce was looked after from the beginning (Vernon, 1958, 75-6).

In spite of Joseph's intervention, the business struggled for virtually the next decade and by 1873 was still turning a loss (Vernon, 1958, 83). The business continued on; new products in the form of Gums and Pastilles, a change in policy around advertising (which both Henry and Joseph had dismissed previously), and the development of a new method of producing Cocoa (sold as 'Elect' cocoa from 1887) marked an ascent and the beginning of a period of massive growth (Vernon, 1958, 90-2). By the time of Henry Isaac's passing in 1894 the number of employees had grown to over 800 (Vernon, 1958, 92).

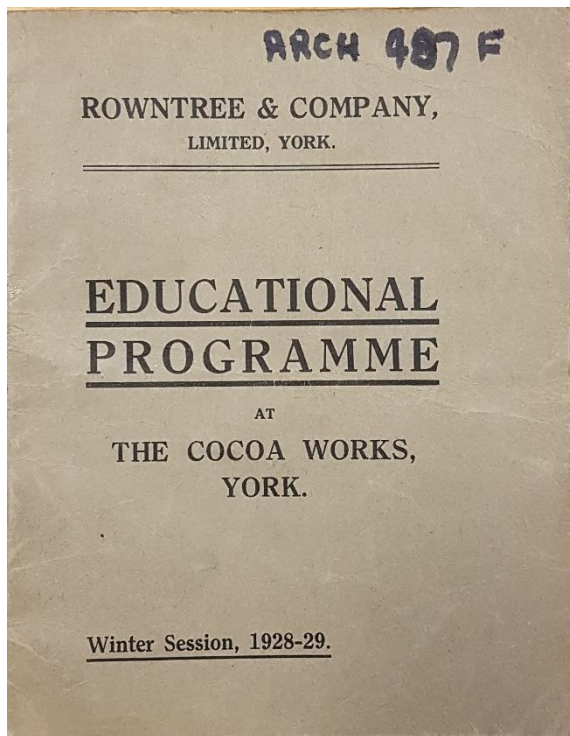


FIGURE 3: EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME 1928-9 (SOURCE: BORTHWICK INSTITUTE ARCHIVES, ARCH 487 F)

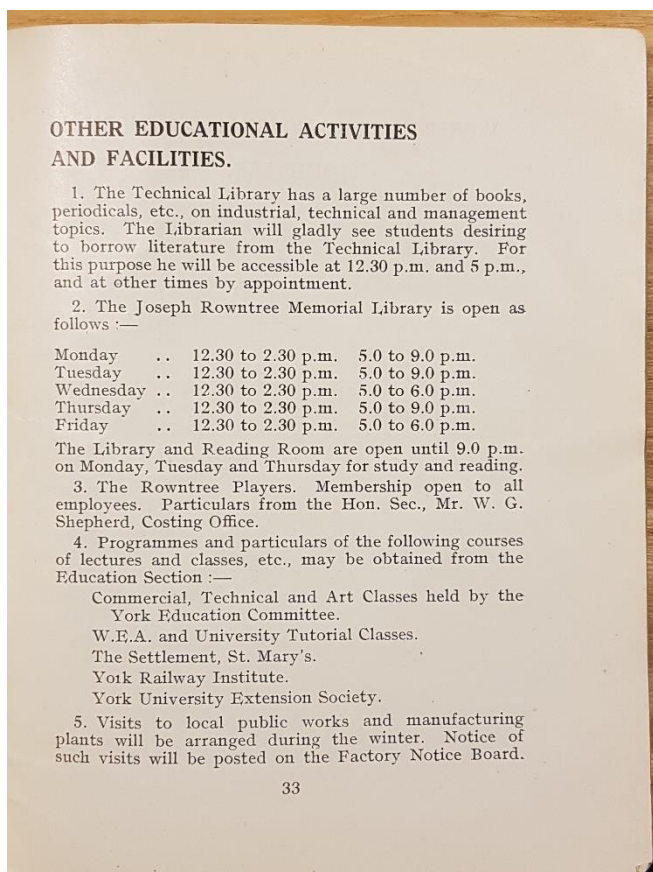


FIGURE 4 (SOURCE: AS FIGURE 3)

Rowntree's legacy in York was phenomenal, and his death had a profound impact on its people, with thousands lining the streets for his funeral procession (Tittley, 2013, 54-5).

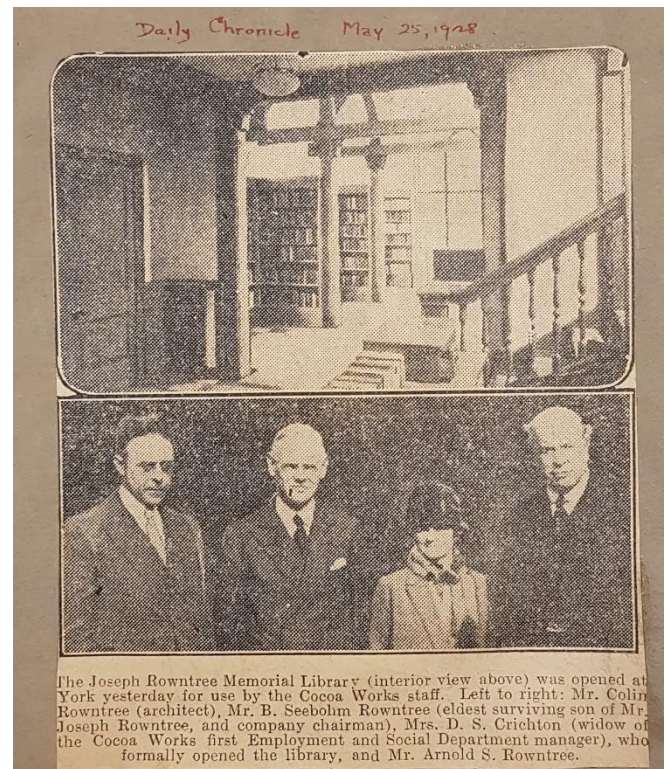


FIGURE 5: ARTICLE IN DAILY CHRONICLE, MAY 25 1928 (SOURCE: BORTHWICK INSTITUTE ARCHIVES, TECH LIBRARY BOX 1 – ARCH 471)

The Library was designed by Frederick Rowntree after Joseph's death. Frederick, a relative of Joseph was an architect by trade, and had already been involved in architectural work in York prior to this, having designed the Rowntree Park, York's first municipal park, which was laid out between 1919-21 (Archaeology Data Service, no date). Frederick Rowntree presented the park to the City of York as a memorial to Cocoa works staff who had served or been killed in the First World War.

3.3 Modern Planning Considerations

A range of planning applications have been submitted covering the former Nestle/Rowntree factory grounds in recent years, and at present Approved Listed Buildings Consent was provided for the 'Demolition of buildings to the rear and erection of rear extension to accommodate concierge, community room and cycle store' by York City Council with a number of conditions (City of York Council, 2017).

This has been a product of recent change in ownership as the remnants of the original Rowntree factory, the J R Memorial Library, and adjoining structures between the two have been sold onto a new developer. The result of this has been the new set of proposed developments outlined above.

Consultation with the Rowntree Society as part of this project indicates a wide range of differing opinions with regard to the current development plans, with a significant variance in perspectives around whether the developments are keeping in with the ethos of the Rowntree legacy, but also whether this is actually an important consideration.

4 Analysis and Interpretation

4.1 Exterior

The walls are of uniform red brick arranged in running bond, formed entirely of stretchers. Based on the bond pattern, and the time at which the Library was designed and built, it is probable that it is a cavity wall construction, with two walls of stretcher bond with wrought or cast iron, or steel ties joining them. This pattern of building became more common after the First World War, particularly for residential developments (Historic England, 2015, 444-5); use of the metal ties made the use of headers unnecessary (Austin, Dowdy and Miller, 1997, 72).

The choice of the red brick in runner bond is fairly typical of Arts and Crafts architecture of the period, certainly falling within the Redbrick strand of this styling (Austin, Dowdy and Miller, 1997, 124-5), and is consistent with Fred Rowntree's own approach to architectural styling, and one which he used in other buildings he designed and can be found in York, including elements of nos. 308 to 312 on Tadcaster Road, and the Park Keeper's Lodge which can be found in the Rowntree Park of his design (and which he is indicated as the probable designer in the Local List) (York Open Planning Forum, no date).

The pointing is flush to the brick, however the lower portion of the external mortar pointing has a range of issues at various points around the building, as examined on the southern and eastern elevations. Figure 7 shows an example of these issues, which include black stains, suggesting algal growth, as well as weathered, eroded and open mortar joints suggesting a failure in the mortar following weathering (Historic England, 2015, 539-41).



FIGURE 6

Around the Library there are several brick columns, from which a metal fence runs around the perimeter of the south, east and north elevations, terminating in columns



FIGURE 7

which adjoin the large entrance gates to the facilities behind the Library itself (Figure 8).



FIGURE 8



FIGURE 9

4.1.1 East Elevation

The eastern elevation faces outward onto and parallel with Haxby Road. The elevation is comprised of three distinct elements; the central gable end and two pitched gable wings running perpendicular to the central hall (see Figure 6).



FIGURE 10

The main features of the central gable end are the large Venetian Window, and the vestibule and doorway below (Figure 9 & 10). The gable follows the shape of the standard pitched roof of the centre of the structure, however it features a parapet or gable step, which follows the shape of the roof and is topped with a coping of stone slabs. The gable step is squared off at the ends, reminiscent of a gable kneeler, though with no decorative stone beneath (Figure 12).



FIGURE 12

The decorative vestibule is fronted by two square pilasters which have wide rectangular recesses in both visible surfaces, which stretch most of the length of the column, beginning at the bottom from just above the level of the top step of the entrance-way, up to a few inches from the top of the stone brackets. The recesses in the pilasters feature decorative moulding on the internal angle running around the entire recess (Figure 15). The stone brackets also feature a fluted pattern on the outward concave outward facing surface, with the profile showing a floral design (Figure 16). The brackets support the entablature above, which has a chamfered cornice, decorative modillion frieze, and the architrave is engraved, reading 'Joseph Rowntree Memorial Library' (Figures 11, 13 & 14). The architrave is in fair condition; however, the cornice and frieze are showing signs of damage with deep cracks along the front edge stretching vertically.

FIGURE 11



FIGURE 14



FIGURE 13





FIGURE 15

The pilasters and entablature are likely constructed from limestone, as the stone work has indications that the exposed elements are being kept clean when the soluble magnesium sulphate is washed away by rainwater. Correspondingly, the recessed areas and areas more protected from the rain have accumulated pollutants, forming black deposits on the structure (English Heritage, 2012, 68-69).



FIGURE 16

Significant surface detachment has occurred in elements of the pilasters (particularly in the lower right portion of the right pilaster), and in the steps (Figure 17). There are areas of the pilasters and entablature that are relatively exposed but still have a noticeable build up, which could be a product of the proximity of the entranceway to the main road, making it easier for pollutants to build up during the crystallisation process.



FIGURE 17

Reminiscent of contour scaling in sandstone, the erosion to the pilaster may be a product of extensive exfoliation of the surface layers (English Heritage, 2012, 110). It could also have been exacerbated by frost action, though this raises questions as to why similar erosion has not occurred in the left pilaster.



FIGURE 18

The stone steps have also been subject to significant erosion, particularly the top step, which again has the appearance of contour scaling (Figure 18 & 19). On closer inspection, it would appear the steps are possibly rendered stone, with the lower step demonstrating initial cracking in the surface, which in the case of the upper step has, through frost action, wear or some other erosion (or all the above), resulted in significant spalling and degradation of the surface, exposing the stone underneath.



FIGURE 19

The central section is flanked by two more gabled cross wings running perpendicular to it, and are symmetrical in their design. The eastern elevations of both these wings feature three round-headed windows reminiscent of the style seen in the centre portion of the Venetian window of the centre gable end. The central gable protrudes forward from the cross wings; in the side walls of the central section are two further square-headed windows (Figure 20).



FIGURE 20

Even by this point of the analysis, what is becoming clear by the fenestration considered already is that Fred Rowntree demonstrates great foresight in his design in ensuring that the interior is well-lit with natural light throughout the day.



FIGURE 21

4.1.2 North Elevation

The north elevation (Figure 21) is the gable end of the north wing of the Library itself, which is styled similarly to the central gable end, comprising a gable step with kneelers. The main feature of the gable end is a large round-headed window, similar in style to the central portion of the Venetian window seen on the east elevation. The window is partially boarded up, with the upper half being exposed, showing that one of the panes within the leading has been broken, presumably as a consequence of vandalism (Figure 22).



FIGURE 22



FIGURE 23

4.1.3 West Elevation

Due to access issues discussed in 4.2, little of the west elevation has been seen first-hand for the purposes of this

visual analysis. What can be seen are the profile of the square headed dormer windows which have flat rooves, and three per wing (Figures 24 & 25). Given the extent of the single-storey structure to the rear these windows are likely to be largely obscured when viewed from ground level.



FIGURE 24

Original plans (see Appendix 1) indicate that on the upper floor of the west gable end are two three-panel square headed windows with the highest just below the level of the internal ceiling, which is the shorter of the windows in height. The second window is below this, and taller in overall height.



FIGURE 25

4.1.4 South Elevation

Features of the gable end are as per the north elevation, with a single large round-headed window being the main and only feature. It is worth noting that unlike the north elevation, the entire window is covered in the black wooden protective panelling as per all other windows on the ground floor (Figure 26).



FIGURE 26

Of additional note, not included in the listing, but included in the Nestle Rowntree Conservation Area, is the Rowntree factory clock (Figure 27), facing southward along Haxby Road, and situated close by to the J R Memorial Library along Haxby Road to the south of the Library. A similar clock can be seen opposite the north elevation, though it is obscured somewhat by plant growth (Figure 23).



FIGURE 27

4.2 Interior

As mentioned in section 3.3 above, the J R Memorial Library has been sold on to a property developer recently. This has meant that, as confirmed in consultation with the Rowntree Society, securing access to the interior of the building, even without the deadline for this report, is highly unlikely. As such, other sources have been used to describe aspects of the interior of the building, including third party photos and the original architectural plans (see Appendix 1).

A report produced in 2006 indicated that the interior had been “recently refurbished,” though did not mention which elements had been altered and which had not (Hall Grey Architects, 2006, 4.4.12.5).

4.2.1 Ground Floor

Internally, we are presented with exposed timber frames throughout the building. The central hall of the Library features four oak posts topped by four oak beams which support the upper floor; a feature of this section only. Opposite the entrance way is a stairway leading to this upper floor, and in the original designs a reception counter was situated on the ground floor in front of the staircase. Based on recent internal images (Figure 28), it would appear this counter is no longer here, with a contemporary replacement counter at the end of the north wing (Figure 29).

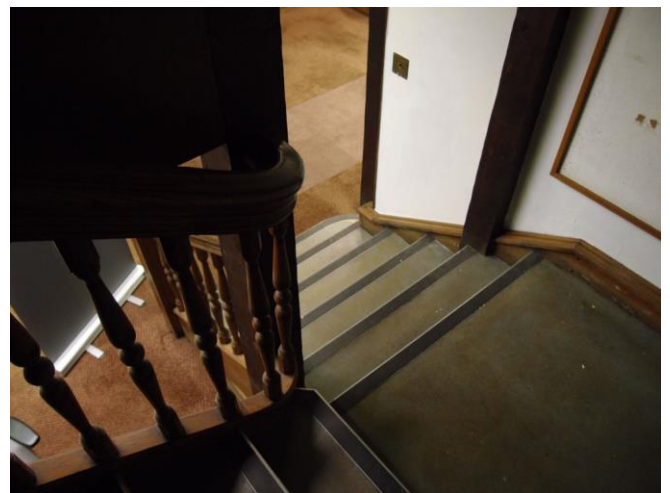


FIGURE 28 (CREDIT: LISA @ YORKSTORIES; SOURCE: [HTTP://YORKSTORIES.CO.UK/JOSEPH-ROWNTREE-MEMORIAL-LIBRARY-INTERIOR-JAN-2017/](http://yorkstories.co.uk/joseph-rowntree-memorial-library-interior-jan-2017/))



FIGURE 29 (CREDIT: BRIDGET MORRIS, ROWNTREE SOCIETY)

The wings are virtually identical with the exception of the above, and again feature two pairs of posts, in this instance supporting tie beams which run between internal projections from the brick wall structure which support the beam ends. The construction initially has the appearance of a clasped purlin roof, however, the lateral purlins run through the principal rafters and are as such not tied into the curved posts which sit upon the curved oak posts projecting up from the tie beam. Furthermore, collar beams run from the level of the purlins in line with the curved posts and principal rafters, supporting the ceiling rafters above.



FIGURE 31 (CREDIT: LISA @ YORKSTORIES; SOURCE: [HTTP://YORKSTORIES.CO.UK/JOSEPH-ROWNTREE-MEMORIAL-LIBRARY-INTERIOR-JAN-2017/](http://yorkstories.co.uk/joseph-rowntree-memorial-library-interior-jan-2017/))



FIGURE 30 (CREDIT: LISA @ YORKSTORIES; SOURCE: [HTTP://YORKSTORIES.CO.UK/JOSEPH-ROWNTREE-MEMORIAL-LIBRARY-INTERIOR-JAN-2017/](http://yorkstories.co.uk/joseph-rowntree-memorial-library-interior-jan-2017/))

4.2.2 First Floor

The first floor is a single room (the 'Joseph Rowntree Room') entered by the staircase at the rear, with a recessed space above the staircase being used as a storage cupboard. In common with the ground floor section, the upper floor features again four oak posts, which are supported by the posts in the ground floor. Large oak brackets attached to these posts support the tie beams, though unlike the ground floor, there is no collar beam, allowing a higher unobstructed ceiling level at the height of the through purlins. The ceiling rafters above are supported by the tie beam.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

Consultation with the Rowntree Society has indicated that in the context of considering the building for other uses, it is worth noting that the Library has no connection to running water; an important consideration if turning the building into a café or a reading café similar to the one at Rowntree Park.

Other indications are that the subway which joined the factory with the dining block over the road (now the Nuffield Hospital) is flooded to some extent. It is possible that water drainage issues under ground level may have contributed to the erosion around the lower portion of the building.

Further investigation into the above is therefore recommended moving forward.

6 Bibliography

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7 Appendix 1 – Images of Architectural Plans

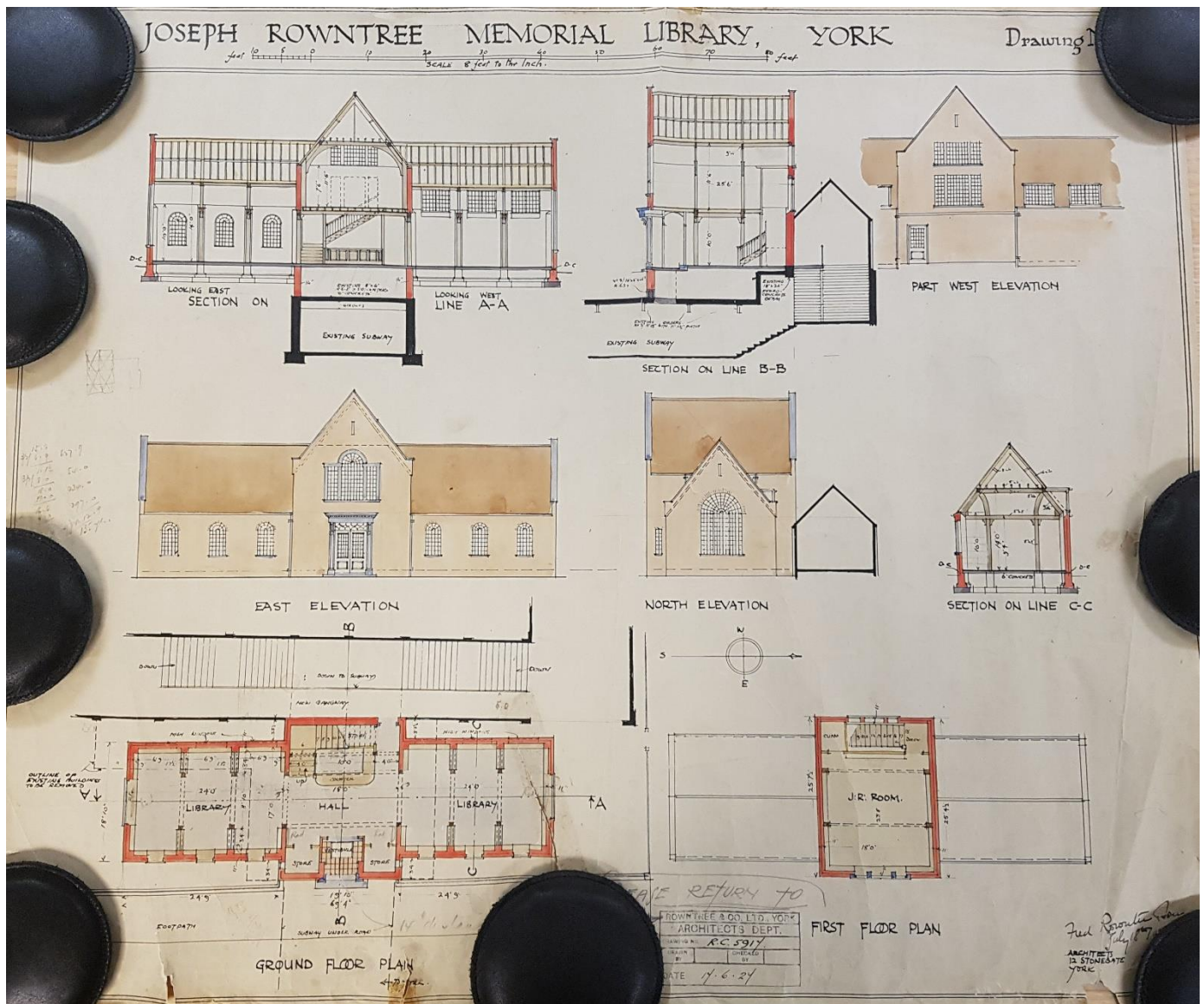


Figure A2.1 (Source: Borthwick Institute Archives, R/DT/EB/9)

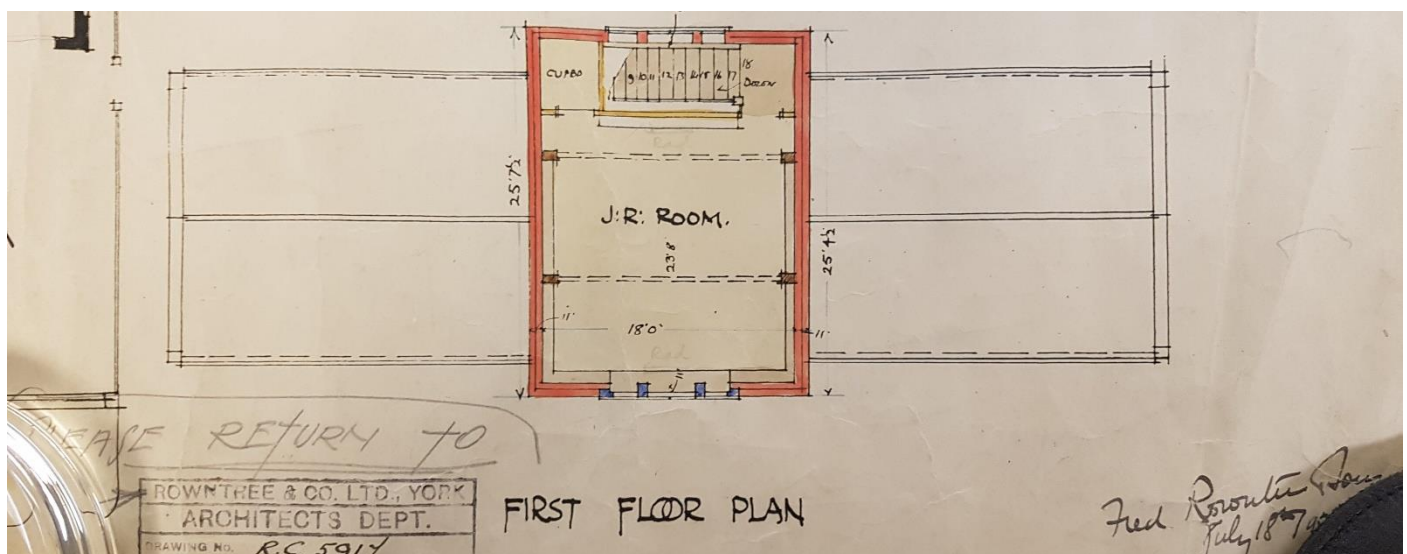


Figure A2.2 (Source: Borthwick Institute Archives, R/DT/EB/9)

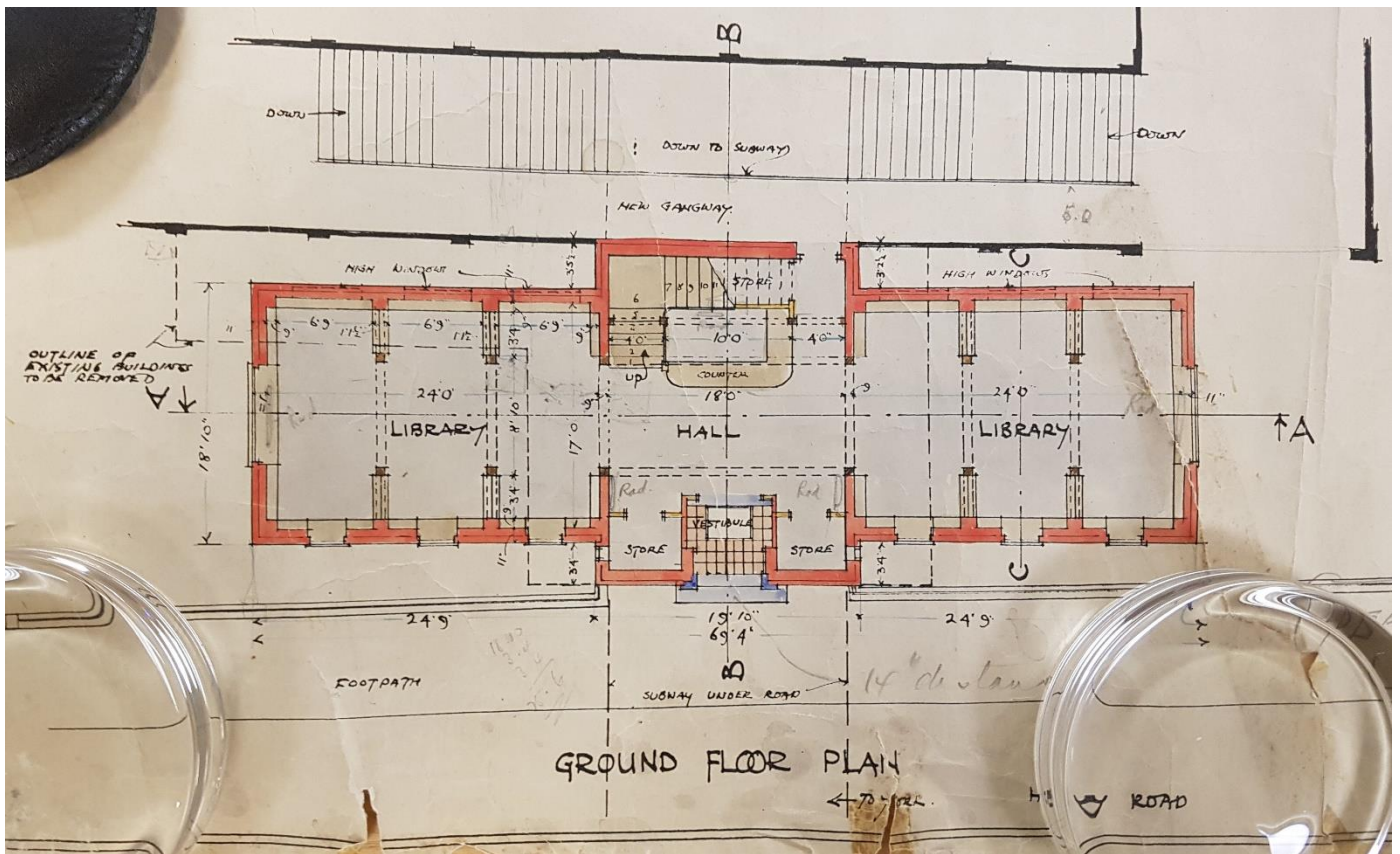


Figure A2.3 (Source: Borthwick Institute Archives, R/DT/EB/9)

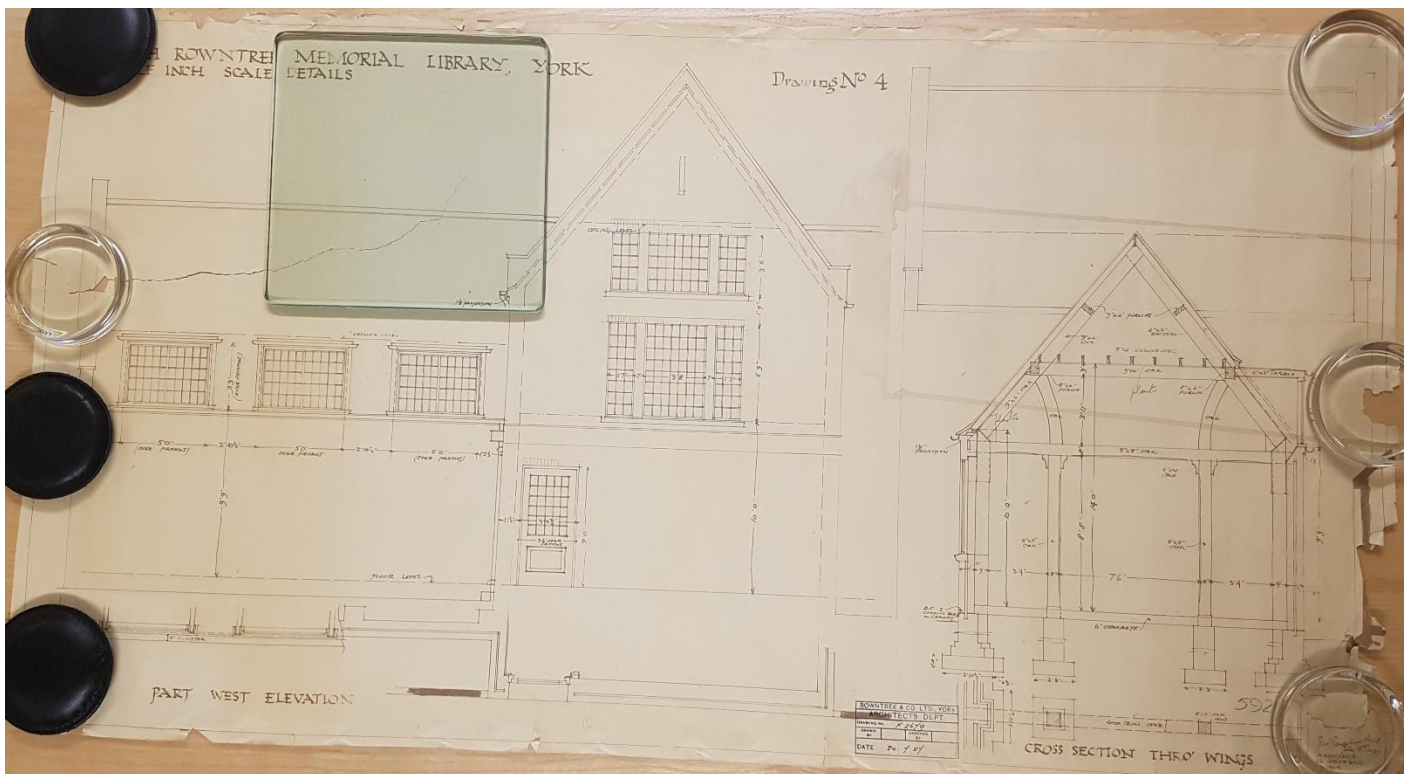


Figure A2.4 (Source: Borthwick Institute Archives, R/DT/EB/9)