

Early Years of the York Georgian Society: Preservation, Education, Betterment and Design

by
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A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Oliver Sheldon".

*This image of the Assembly Rooms was chosen as the first symbol of York Georgian Society
Underneath is the distinctive signature of the first Chairman, Oliver Sheldon*

Before the Second World War, the tall Victorian house at 6 Driffield Terrace, York, was home to Lt. Col. John Acton Brooke, eldest son of John Kendall Brooke of Sibton Park in Suffolk and his wife Daphne, daughter of the late Mr Henry Darley, of Aldby Park in the North Riding of Yorkshire.¹

On 24 April 1939, Mrs Brooke hosted a drawing room meeting at her Driffield Terrace home. About 20 people were summoned, and we know that among them were Alderman JB Morrell and Canon Chancellor Frederick Harrison, both of whom were keenly interested in York history. Mrs Charles Needham was doubtless there, because she had helped Mrs Brooke arrange the meeting; Mrs Needham's husband would also have been invited. Other invitations had probably gone out to a local solicitor, Lt. Colonel H.C. Scott, to a local consultant surgeon G.S. Hughes, to the architect J.H. Rutherford, to the local historian and archivist Rev Angelo Raine, and to several other interested parties, including a director of Rowntree and Co. called Oliver Sheldon.² The special guest was Mr Rupert Alec-Smith, who had been invited to address the company on the threats then posed to Georgian architecture. Alec-Smith was the founder, and honorary secretary, of the Georgian Society for East Yorkshire, and the real purpose of the meeting was to discuss the possibility of founding a new branch of his society in York.³ In the event, Alec-Smith's address proved highly successful: fired with enthusiasm, the meeting concluded with the appointment of a committee. A few days later, Paul Crombie, a young local solicitor, agreed to become acting secretary, and Oliver Sheldon became acting chairman. The first meeting of the provisional committee of the York Georgian Society took place - as is recorded in the still surviving handwritten minutes - on 16 May 1939.⁴ Mrs Brooke thus made a vital, but brief, contribution to the York Georgian Society, before passing out of the society's annals. Two months after her drawing room meeting, her husband succeeded to his Suffolk inheritance, and the couple left York.

The events which led up to this drawing room meeting are worth examining closely for what they reveal about the society and its future role. A taste for Georgian architecture and art was a new thing in this period. Until then, Georgian buildings had been little regarded - neither old nor venerable enough for preservation or protection.⁵ But between 1937 and 1939 no fewer than three societies, including the one in York, were founded with the aim of protecting Georgian architecture and promoting Georgian taste.

The Georgian Group was founded in London in 1937, initially as a section of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB). Smart, militant, with a band of energetic, well connected youthful founders, it was established to protest, and fight, against the rapid disappearance through redevelopment of London's fine Georgian architectural heritage. Through publicity and high profile cases (not all of which it won) it did much to raise the Georgian profile, in London and nationally.⁶ A smaller organisation, but one founded at almost exactly the same time, was the Georgian Society for East Yorkshire, founded under the auspices of the East Riding Antiquarian Society by Rupert-Alec Smith, then aged only 24, whose family owned a timber-importing business in Hull. Alec-Smith was appalled by the destruction and threats to Georgian buildings in Hull and the surrounding county and he determined to save as many of them as possible.⁷

These two societies shared the same aims, though they were very different in character. Their simultaneous founding was no accident, since Rupert-Alec Smith had begun corresponding with one of the future Georgian Group founders in 1936. This was Lord Derwent of Hackness Hall, in the North Riding of Yorkshire (1899-1949). On 2 December 1936, Lord Derwent had raised the question of endangered Georgian buildings in a speech to the House of Lords, where he suggested that the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments should list important Georgian buildings worthy of preservation. This speech triggered much publicity in the national press about the threats to Georgian buildings evident throughout the country. During the early months of the following year, Derwent and others founded the Georgian Group and he became chairman.⁸

Meanwhile, Rupert Alec-Smith had written a letter to the *Yorkshire Post* on 9 December 1936 about the dangers to Georgian buildings locally. Lord Derwent read this letter and wrote to Alec-Smith, encouraging him to set up an East Yorkshire Georgian Society, to complement the Georgian Group in London. Over the next few months the two corresponded regularly about their new societies and Lord Derwent became president of the Georgian Society for East Yorkshire.⁹

Both Lord Derwent and Rupert Alec-Smith, were keen to set up another Georgian society to cover the North Riding. They decided that the East Riding Georgians should set up a North Riding branch (they already had a branch at Beverley) and Lord Derwent set to work gathering names for a provisional North Riding committee. One of those he lobbied was C.W.C. Needham. Charles Needham was an architect and town planner, resident in York. He promised to find a prospective branch secretary, but despite his efforts, no-one would accept. The North Riding plan then fell into abeyance, and the focus shifted to York. In December 1938 Alec-Smith told Derwent: 'I am trying to persuade Needham to get on with the formation of a committee in York, but he doesn't seem to be doing a great deal'¹⁰.

It was at this point that Oliver Sheldon stepped in. Sheldon had been a director of Rowntree and Co. since 1931. He was then aged 45, resident in a Georgian house in Bishopthorpe and a collector of Georgian antiques. He was greatly interested in the history of York and he was a great friend, colleague and protégée of his fellow Rowntree director and lover of old York, J B Morrell.¹¹ Sheldon, however, had his own agenda. In late January 1939 Sheldon wrote to Rupert Alec-Smith, whom he knew, if only slightly. The ostensible reason for writing was to ask for a copy of the first annual report of the East Yorkshire Georgians, so that he could 'put in a proper application for membership'. But the real purpose of the letter soon became clear. 'Incidentally', he wrote, 'I enclose a copy of a letter I've sent to the Yorkshire Evening Press'. The letter was in response to a Press report that the York City Council was to earmark £7000 for a

scheme of restoration of Lord Burlington's magnificent Assembly Rooms. While welcoming the scheme, Sheldon was worried that the rooms would be insensitively modernised. His Press letter said:

May I express the earnest hope that the new scheme of decoration and lighting will harmonise with the original conception of the architect... The City is not dealing here simply with 'one of the oldest and most central dance halls' to use the words of your notice; it is dealing with a fine piece of Georgian architecture in which the interior decorative and lighting effects are more than incidental.

Sheldon told Alec-Smith:

The article in the Yorkshire Evening Press about it refers to 'a modern system of lighting' which fills me with apprehension, though, of course, it could be done quite suitably if the Corporation took good advice on the scheme. They may have done but I think a little correspondence in the papers would make sure that it was done.

The real reason for writing, then, was that Sheldon hoped to raise a campaign to ensure that the Council did nothing to the Assembly Rooms without first taking expert advice. Alec-Smith's Georgian interests, authority and contacts, were what Sheldon wanted.¹²

Sheldon's word in the ear of Alec-Smith bore fruit. The latter passed Sheldon's letter directly on to the powerful Lord Derwent who replied to Alec-Smith:

The person you want to get hold of in York... is Alderman Morrell. See if he is there now and ask for an interview, in my name, if you like. Let me know (at Hackness) if that's any good, and if not, then I'll write to the Press.¹³

Minutes of a meeting held at the Office of Col
Scott, 38th Street in the City of York on Tuesday the 16th day of
May 1939 at 6.00 pm.

Present. Colonel Scott
Mr H. Retford
Mr O. Sheldon
Mr ~~Walter~~ Neilson
Mr G. N. Paul Chamber

Acting Honorary Secretary.
On the proposition of Col Scott and seconded by Mr H. Retford
Mr G. N. Paul Chamber was unanimously elected Acting Honorary Secretary.

The Society, after careful consideration, was given the title of "The
York Georgian Society".

After discussion and many suggestions it was decided that the Society
should be independent from any local Society i.e. The Georgian
Society for East Yorkshire but should be affiliated with the parent
Society in London. It was decided, if possible, to combine with the
Georgian Society for East Yorkshire for publishing expenses.

It was decided that the subscription of £1.1.0 per annum or more
should entitle a member to become a Patron of the Society.
The minimum subscription for an adult member should be 5/-
per annum. That there should be junior members of the Society

The handwritten minutes of the first meeting of York Georgian Society, 16 May 1939

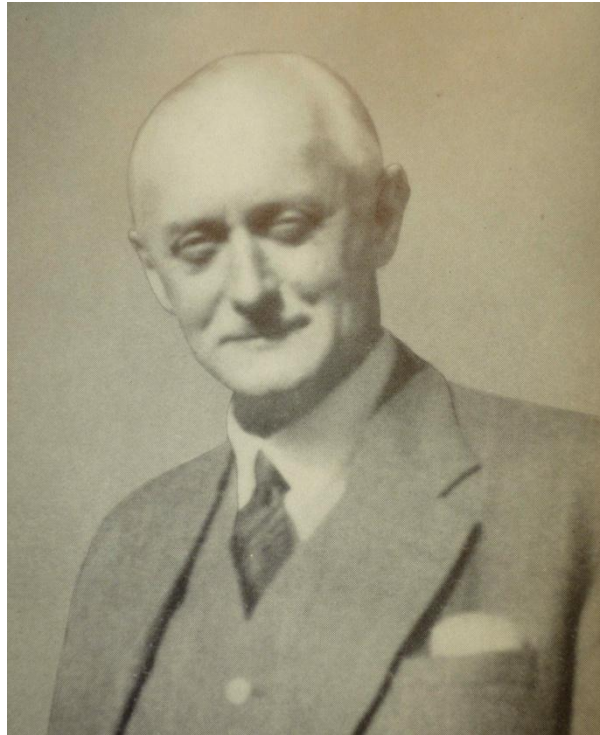


Lord Derwent (left) and Oliver Sheldon (right). This picture was taken in 1947 when the York Georgian Society visited Hackness Hall in the North Riding, Lord Derwent's seat.

JB Morrell no doubt supported Sheldon, and soon Alec-Smith had met the York City Engineer and got an agreement from the City Council that the East Yorkshire Georgians could submit a memorandum of advice about the decoration of the Rooms. Although the outbreak of war halted the scheme, the memorandum remained a key document when restoration went ahead twelve years later.¹⁴

Sheldon thus succeeded in his objective. But his actions had fateful consequences. By bringing his interest in Georgian buildings and his undoubted powers of persuasion to the notice of Alec-Smith and Lord Derwent, he was swept into their scheme to set up a branch of the Georgians in York. By March 1939, Rupert-Alec Smith was reporting to Derwent that things were at last moving: 'The thing has got going largely due to the efforts of a Mrs Brooke, and a certain Mr Sheldon, a director of Rowntrees has been appointed secretary'. But this was premature. Sheldon was not keen on a new society. It was at this point that Mrs Brooke and Mrs Needham made their crucial intervention. Their enthusiasm brought Rupert Alec-Smith to address Mrs Brooke's drawing room meeting and Sheldon finally agreed to be chairman of the York Georgian Society.¹⁵

This story is worth retelling at length because it raises some interesting points about the new society. First, unlike the other Georgians, it was not established as a response to threats to Georgian buildings. Despite apathy and neglect, Georgian buildings in the city were not disappearing on a large scale or at a rapid rate. There was concern about important buildings like the Assembly Rooms, but no groundswell of public opinion for a preservation society. Without the intervention of Alec-Smith and Lord Derwent, there would have been no society. Secondly, because the York Georgian Society was not founded as a protest organisation, it was able to focus to a greater degree in its early years on the task of bringing Georgian art and architecture to the widest possible public. The enthusiasm in York for a Georgian Society, once kindled, was intense. This perfectly showed that the new interest in the Georgian period was not just about preservation: it was about taste and fashion, and, further, about how Georgian planning and design could have vital lessons for the present day. Thirdly, Oliver



Oliver Sheldon, Chairman of the York Georgian Society, 1939-1951



Miss Isabella Pressly, Honorary Secretary of York Georgian Society, 1942-1961

Sheldon, the inspiration and guiding light of the York Georgian Society during its first twelve years, was clearly not its founder. But he was perceived as its natural leader. His talents were obvious: an interest in the Georgian period, knowledge of how to get things done, and a keen eye for publicity. Lastly, the York Georgian Society was from the first entirely independent. It refused to be a branch of Rupert Alec-Smith's society, and Alec-Smith was even left off its committee.¹⁶ The concentrated remit of York meant that the society could readily be directed by its leaders towards a specific vision for the city.

The purpose of this paper is to look at the first twelve years of the York Georgian Society, under Oliver Sheldon's chairmanship. This may not seem a long period, but it was a crucial one. It established a pattern of activity, to be followed in the years to come. It was also a distinctive period. One aspect, which may seem puzzling, and so is worth investigating, is why the society, after this uncertain start, came to be so popular. Numbers of members rose from 58 in 1940, to 941 by 1951 (see figure 1)¹⁷. This growth was phenomenal. How can it be explained?

The society was founded during difficult times. Between the first provisional committee meeting in May and the public inaugural meeting - with Lord Derwent as guest speaker - in October, war had broken out. But one of the strengths of the society was that its committee members were a small group who knew each other well, often through activity in other cultural organisations. About two thirds of the committee were Yorkshire Architectural and York Archaeological Society (YAYAS) members, with around half on, or formerly on, YAYAS council. About three quarters of the Georgian committee were also Yorkshire Philosophical Society members, with around a third on its council. YAYAS covered the architectural, historical and archaeological heritage of York and the county, while the Philosophical Society covered social and natural sciences, including archaeology. The Georgian Society thus complemented these other societies. When York Civic Trust was formed in 1946 it too attracted Georgians as members and officers.¹⁸

The leaders of York Georgian Society were drawn from business and the professions. The first committee included two solicitors, two architects, two businessmen, two clergymen, a doctor and a teacher. Their combined interests embraced Georgian buildings, art, history and antiques (there were several collectors). They included GS Hughes, a consultant surgeon, who hosted most of the early committee meetings at his house in St Leonards; JB Morrell, who as a City Alderman was an influential link between the society and the city administration; and the architects JH Rutherford, JS Syme and CWC Needham who provided expert architectural knowledge.¹⁹ But the two key figures in the early development of the society were undoubtedly Miss Isabella Pressly and Oliver Sheldon.

In 1939, Miss Pressly had just retired after thirty years teaching history at Queen Anne School. She was a pioneer of York local history and had considerable standing in YAYAS. She became The Georgian Society's honorary secretary in 1942, at the age of 63. With her unflinching cheerfulness, energy and enthusiasm she remained in office until 1961. Warm hearted, vivacious, humorous, full of common sense and always interested in people, she was the perfect public face of the society.²⁰ Oliver Sheldon, who had been resident in York since 1919, when he came to work for Rowntrees, was interested in York history, and in the cultural potential of the city. He had a genius for organisation, and a fertile imagination and vision; he worked unflaggingly. He was diplomatic, helpful, courteous, urbane and charming – the very model of a Georgian.²¹

The new society needed a plan of action. Its remit was fixed as the period 'from Restoration to Regency'. A memorandum by Sheldon in November 1939 set out a number of objectives, which were similar to those of the other Georgian societies. Compiling a register of local Georgian architecture and taking action when buildings were threatened with spoliation or destruction were immediate priorities.²² The listing of buildings was particularly important since no lists of Georgian buildings then existed. The society got down to this task at once, and their vigorous work during the next few years met with much success.

List all annuals paper *O.S. Copy*

PRELIMINARY REGISTER OF GEORGIAN HOUSES IN YORK

STREET	HOUSE OR BUILDING	DATE	GRADE	COMMENTS	PRESENT OWNERS OR OCCUPIERS
Bootham and Clifton	No. 35	33			<i>O.S. Coll. 1844</i>
	No. 39-43			This fine example of a block of Georgian Houses used to extend to No. 45. No. 39 is a specially fine example of a Georgian doorway. No. 43 is a modern doorway of poor design. No. 45 was refronted about 60 years ago in the worst possible taste. Only the doorway is old and is a fine example.	<i>39. Sheldon</i>
	No. 47				<i>Bootham School</i>
	No. 49			Queen Anne	Bootham School (Masters.)
	No. 51				Bootham School
	No. 53				<i>Bootham School</i>
	No. 55				<i>Bootham School</i>
	Bootham Park Asylum			<i>By John Carr.</i>	
	No. 75				<i>Mrs. Cannon</i>
	No. 77				<i>J. J. Standley (Cleric)</i>
	No. 46				<i>J. H. Rutherford Esq.</i>
	No. 48				<i>Dr. Hudson - Peffer</i>

*Listing in progress:
an early draft of the Society's list of York Georgian buildings, annotated by Oliver Sheldon*



The first Annual General Meeting of York Georgian Society in 1940, at Gray's Court.

Mrs Gardner, who lived there, is centre. Miss Pressly is behind (fourth from left). Oliver Sheldon is on the right. Canon Harrison is extreme left and G.S. Hughes is third from right, holding papers.

Protection for Georgian buildings in 1939 was very slight. The Ancient Monuments Act 1931 scheduled only unoccupied buildings. The Town and Country Planning Act 1932 permitted local authorities to stop the demolition of historic buildings, but the need to compensate owners acted as a deterrent. More usefully, in York the Corporation had adopted powers to control new elevations and preserve existing buildings of architectural, historic or artistic merit, with a panel of architects, including some who were now Georgian members, to act as advisors.²³

The York Georgians were ambitious, wanting not just a listing, but a photograph, a history and drawings or plans of each identified building. Miss Pressly provided much historical information. JB Morrell, as Chairman of Westminster Press, went out with his Northern Echo photographer to photograph exteriors and interiors. The architect members looked out plans from architects' offices. Sheldon followed up opportunities. The Leeds School of Architecture was persuaded to let its students draw Georgian buildings with the incentive of a prize. Photographs were exchanged with the National Buildings Record. The work extended into other things, for example a Georgian map (which ultimately proved too expensive to produce) and the idea of plaques on important buildings (eventually done by the York Civic Trust).²⁴ A related outcome was the society's first publication, *Some Hints on the Maintenance and Repair of 17th and 18th Century Premises* (1945), originating in notes made by Captain Braxton Sinclair, a Georgian Group member briefly stationed in York, and revised by the York Georgian Society architects. It was very well received in architectural circles and in demand from all over the country and overseas.²⁵

This early recording work was overtaken by the needs of the Town and Country Planning Acts of 1944 and 1947, which gave local authorities powers over listed buildings and made listing a statutory duty of the Minister. The York Georgian Society submitted a draft list of Georgian buildings to the City Council in February 1946; this complemented the listing work done later by the Ministry officials. The first statutory published list of 1950 thus acknowledged the help of the Georgians.²⁶

Much of the rest of the early work of the Georgian Society was quite low key. Miss Pressly later remembered:

We did very little that first year. Our numbers were 58. I do not remember any lectures, but I do remember our first General Meeting. There were only 18 of us in Gray's Court and I happen to have a photograph of that early meeting.

Activity developed slowly during the war – but the society did progress, and suffered much less war time dislocation than the other Georgian societies²⁷

An early task was to advise on the Georgian Room at the York Castle Museum. The Georgians drew up plans for how the room should look, and spent much time sourcing furnishings. Another task was to protect Georgian and early Victorian railings from the salvage drive. The society liaised with the City Engineer and successfully advised and inspected. The Georgians kept a watching brief over the Assembly Rooms – now the Food Office – and Fairfax House – part of Castlegate Picture House but now occupied by the NAAFI. The society was also keen to advise on taste and correct decoration. In 1941 Paul Crombie reported to Oliver Sheldon on the Bay Horse Inn, which was ‘painted in the worst possible taste, in a design that would make camouflage experts shudder!’ Advice was given to the occupants of a number of buildings and JB Morrell invited the society to advise on the furnishing and repair of the Mansion House. Where buildings could not be saved, recording and salvage of important features was the aim. John Carr’s house on Skeldergate was damaged irretrievably in the 1942 air raid, and it was recorded and demolished, with a mantelpiece, the portico and a bow window being saved.²⁸

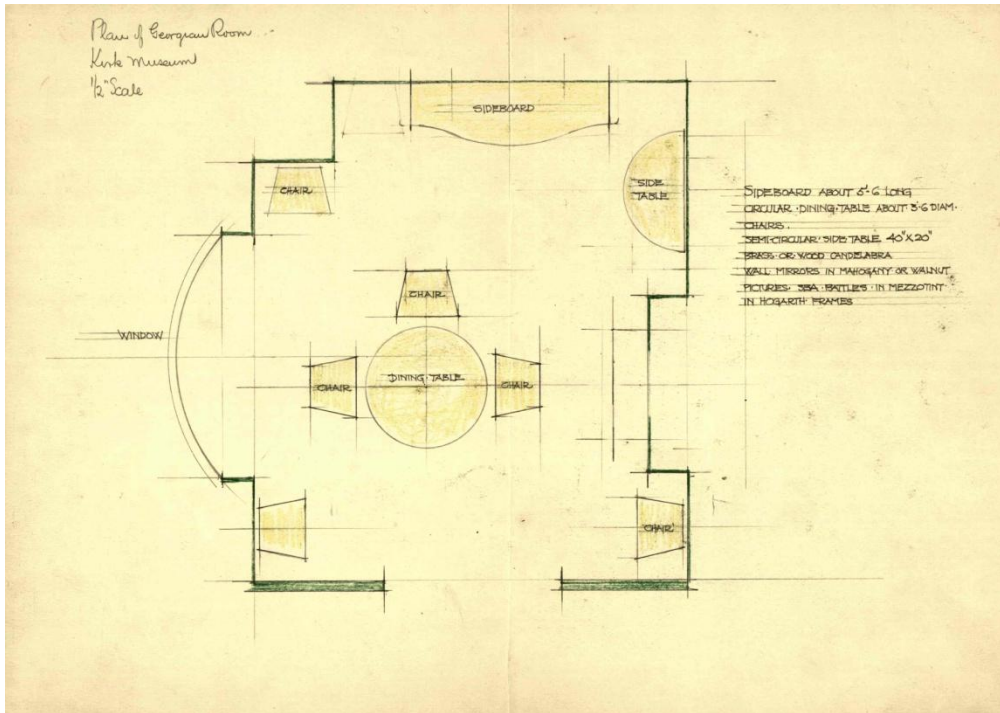
The air raid affected other Georgian properties. 46 Bootham, the house of the architect JH Rutherford, with its green and gold drawing room and his collections of antiques, had been the venue for the Georgian Society’s second AGM the previous year. It was one of the worst casualties, and both it and its

neighbour had to be demolished. Rutherford's colleague JS Syme later designed a replacement block of flats, incorporating a staircase and a panelled room from the older building.²⁹

Activities were relatively limited. The lectures at annual general meetings were usually by 'home grown' speakers with an occasional guest lecturer, like Sir William Milner in 1942, who outlined the legal position in relation to the preservation of Georgian buildings. There were a few excursions. The very first was a walk down Micklegate on 20 June 1942, with Miss Pressly tracing the history of the houses and JS Syme the architecture. Members visited Micklegate House, the house of Miss Walker on Micklegate Hill, St Margaret's School in Garforth House, the church of St Martin-cum-Gregory with its Georgian monuments and the Queens Hotel, where they had tea. The outing produced a splendid early photograph and press report. Further visits were mainly limited to the City, but Middlethorpe Hall and Bishopthorpe Palace were visited in 1943, and Nun Appleton Hall in 1944, 'an expedition not too easy to arrange in war-time', noted Sheldon, 'but all the difficulties were overcome by the pertinacity of our secretary, and two busloads of us thoroughly enjoyed an outing reminiscent of pre-war days'. A trip to Fulford Hall followed in 1945.³⁰

At the end of the war, York Georgian Society had a respectable membership of 250 and a solid amount of activity under its belt. But little indicated that it would grow so spectacularly during the following six years. By 1947 its membership had surpassed the well supported Yorkshire Philosophical Society and it was more than double that of YAYAS. By 1950 it was nearly three times more than the Georgians in East Yorkshire (see figure 2).³¹

The reasons for this growth are fascinating and illuminating. One explanation is, undoubtedly, the subtle differences both in aims and approach between York and the other Georgian societies, giving York Georgian Society a special character in these early years.



The York Georgian Society's plan for the layout of the Georgian Room at the Castle Museum.

HISTORIC HOMES OF MICKLEGATE

YORK GEORGIAN SOCIETY'S WALK

Members of York Georgian Society took a walk on Saturday through Micklegate, a street which contains a large number of 18th century houses of great dignity and interest.

Much of the story of these spacious Georgian residences, many of which were the town houses of county families, was told by Miss I. P. Pressly, honorary secretary of the Society, who has carried out in recent years a considerable amount of valuable research into 18th century York. Mr. J. Stewart Syme described the architectural features and gave much attention to the rare wood carvings and other interior decorations that were seen.

SIGNED A KING'S DEATH WARRANT

The first call was at Micklegate House, the town house for many years of the Bouchiers, of Benningbrough. The house was built in 1752 by John Bouchier, whose grandfather was one of the regicides who signed the death warrant of Charles I. It is known that this regicide lived in a house in Micklegate, probably on the same site as the 18th century house, which has a good deal of an older dwelling incorporated into it. The Bouchiers lived in houses on the site from Elizabethan times to the end of the 18th century.

Miss Pressly gave an account at Henry Gyles's House, nearby, of

Members of York Georgian Society visited 18th century houses in Micklegate, York on Saturday. Examining two beautiful houses in Micklegate Hill. -- [N.E.]

Publicity for the very first York Georgian Society outing: the walk down Micklegate in June 1942. Oliver Sheldon is walking in front and Dean Eric Milner-White and J.B. Morrell are among the party.

The objectives of York Georgian Society, as outlined in 1939, were similar to those of its fellow Georgians, but also included an objective distinctively its own: 'The arousing of public interest in architecture by means of publicity in the Press and by personal contact'. This was not quite the same as the Georgian Group's intended education of the public: 'in the value of English architecture with a view to averting... threats in the future'. The York Georgians aimed to: 'conduct activities which would develop interest in Georgian buildings in the area and in Georgian Art generally'. This showed both a broader ambition and a lighter touch.³²

If one compares the printed annual reports of the three Georgian societies, those of the York Georgians have a different tone. The reports of the Georgian Society for East Yorkshire and the Georgian Group contained a greater sense of threat. The Georgian Group were famously vituperative and combative. Their 1939 annual report declared:

The more powerful or more sanctified... are the interests that threaten a monument, the more vehement is the Group's determination to expose those interests to the execration they deserve.

The annual reports of the East Yorkshire Georgians were generally very sober and serious, but occasionally an underlying anger burst through, as in the words of Rupert-Alec Smith in 1956:

There remains, however, and probably always will remain, an undiminished phalanx of philistines who are not at all interested in visual beauty – at any rate of an inanimate nature – where this happens to conflict with their financial advantage either real or imagined.

Rupert Alec-Smith had bitter experience of what had happened to buildings in Hull. In contrast, here are Oliver Sheldon's words at the first York Georgian Society AGM in 1940:

It would be a matter of regret and distortion of the facts if the impression were to get abroad that the objects and work of the Society necessarily involved a running battle against the Philistines. No doubt there were Philistines to be met, though some of these might only be so by ignorance. The bulk of the property owning citizens, however, were ready to be advised, were conscious of the heritage which York possessed and would go some lengths to play their part where they themselves were involved. Their task therefore was primarily educative, advisory and persuasive.

The York Georgians were confident; their approach was conciliatory, persuasive, and inclusive.³³

One might think that the East Yorkshire Georgian Society was an exact comparator to York, but in reality there were significant differences. The East Yorkshire Georgian Society had a much more difficult remit. The county area included country houses with uncertain futures, coastal districts with undesirable speculations, rural roads experiencing ribbon development. In Hull there was more pressure on buildings and less sympathy for historic architecture; after war time bomb damage, a major post-war planning scheme was another potential threat. With members from a wider regional area, the East Yorkshire Georgians were a less cohesive group (though the smaller Beverley branch was much more like York). In York, the City might be neglectful, but it was aware of its past, even when it took it for granted. Commercial development pressures were not yet very evident. The membership of York Georgian Society was more cohesive. Though a watching brief was kept over the North Riding, the focus was mainly on York, where activity could be well targeted, and there were some key links with councillors and city officers.³⁴ And at this period, things could be accomplished by persuasion, behind the scenes. Here, for example, is Oliver Sheldon writing to JB Morrell in March 1945:

Dear JBM.

I see the Fairfax House in Castlegate is being cemented all round the base of the front, where there was fine stonework.

Also, Miss Rogers [curator of the Castle Museum] tells me she saw the fireplace being taken out of the house, so asked for it, & was given it for the Castle Museum!

I'm away all week – but if you saw any chance of protesting pleasantly, it might stay the process of dissolution. I wonder if Mr Minter would be so good as to go round & see how the place is, & what is happening. It is one of the few really fine Georgian buildings in the way of internal decoration, & my ultimate idea is for the learned societies of York to rent it – from the Cinema people.

If Mr Minter could call - & let me know the result – I would call & see the Cinema folk later on – week after next, maybe.

Yours,

Oliver

This was not the first, nor the last, time that the York Georgians had a 'word in the ear' of Charles Minter, the City Architect and Engineer. In this instance, Minter reported to Morrell that this was just the re-application of an existing cement rendering, and no further repair or alteration was intended. The fate of Fairfax House, not resolved in Sheldon's time, was a constant source of concern.³⁵

The building cases with which the York Georgians dealt were not major battles. Patient negotiation with Messrs W Rowntree and Sons Ltd, who wanted to demolish four Georgian shops next to the Mansion House and construct new premises, led to a compromise, with the Georgian frontages above the ground floor retained. Some cases were outside the City, for example Bedale Hall in the North Riding, where the Georgians were involved in negotiations to save the damaged and empty house for local authority use. The society was not always successful. In 1950 a Georgian door case at 71 The Mount was removed with



The York Georgian Society enjoying an Arcadian idyll during a visit to Ebberston Hall in 1947.



A gathering of members, and their cars, at Aldby Park, 1948.

permission from the City's Streets and Buildings Committee, without the Society's knowledge. It could not prevent the destruction of the remainder of St Martins Coney Street Almshouses, despite a promise that the façade would be retained. Sometimes the Georgians acted in collaboration with other societies, for example lobbying alongside the Civic Trust over the fate of the clock and bracket from the bombed St Martins' Coney Street.³⁶

A major issue which involved a number of York societies in the 1940s and 50s was the restoration of the Shambles area. The Georgians persuaded the City's Shambles Committee in 1945 that Georgian features should be preserved when Shambles properties were restored, and the Council agreed to commission a report from the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. The Georgians' use of gentlemanly persuasion was a stark contrast with modus operandi of Bernard Johnson, then chairman of YAYAS, who later publicly criticised the work of the Shambles Committee in the YAYAS annual report. He achieved his desired aim of a re-think of the Shambles scheme, but at the expense of dividing his society over his methods, and pre-empting a pre-arranged meeting of societies with the Shambles Committee which would probably have led more peaceably to the same conclusion.³⁷

But it was not so much the work done by the Georgians to protect buildings which made the Georgian Society so phenomenally successful. Rather, it was the social activities it conducted after the war: an imaginative programme of talks, visits, exhibitions and publications. To be a Georgian was educational, interesting, and also – fun. Here again, there was a contrast between the York Georgians and the East Yorkshire society. The latter also had excursions – though they ran at a loss at first. When they did become popular in the early 1950s, members were warned sternly:

It is apparent, however, that many members regard the organisation largely as an excursion Society and tend to overlook the main object, the preservation of good Georgian buildings. Whilst your Committee is very grateful for the many letters of appreciation of the

visits programmes received from members, it is stressed that the visits, by themselves, no matter how desirable, can only be a side-line.

It is clear that the East Yorkshire Georgians were much more focussed on the protection of buildings. Their annual reports showed photographs of interiors and exteriors of buildings – but never the society members enjoying themselves. In contrast, the York Georgians regularly photographed themselves on excursions, having a good time: the annual reports show members listening to tour guides or posing en masse for the camera in front of Georgian houses.³⁸

Undoubtedly, the York Georgians' social activities boosted numbers and support. Summer excursions were particularly popular, and were well arranged to make an entertaining day. Often two properties were visited, with tea in between. Paul Crombie described the outings to Rupert Alec Smith in 1945:

Miss P[ressly]...has a wonderful grasp of things Georgian and generally gives a resume of the life of the people who have lived in a particular Georgian house or mansion. This coupled with a talk on the architectural features of the place makes a tour most enjoyable.

Huge numbers of members took the opportunity to visit country houses, in this period when comparatively few were normally open to the public. Getting bus transport was often difficult, but many members used their cars, providing lifts for others. In 1946 about 120 members visited Sheriff Hutton Park; in 1947 nearly 200 members visited Hackness Hall and Ebberston Hall; in 1948 200 went to Sledmere and Aldby Park; and in 1949 just over 300 went to Harewood, in four motor coaches and a 'veritable fleet' of 40 cars. The Harewood trip was a major event, as this was the home of the Society's President, the Princess Royal; a talk was given by the Director of Leeds City Art Gallery, and four parties toured the house, before having tea at Harrogate. In 1950 a new innovation was a residential excursion – a three day visit to Edinburgh. As Chairman of Duncans of Edinburgh (a Rowntrees' associated company), Sheldon was able to arrange for the party of 45 members to be treated as VIPs, with a civic reception and the

castle specially floodlit in the society's honour. The type and nature of visits established by Sheldon and Miss Pressly in the first twelve years set the pattern for years afterwards – in the later 1950s, for example, under the chairmanship of George Howard, there were residential visits to Bath (in 1954), to Dublin (in a chartered plane!) in 1956 and to Brighton (in 1958).³⁹

There were also other events. Three touring exhibitions of photographs on Georgian themes were brought to York and shown at the City Library. A novel Arts Council exhibition on 'Art in the Georgian Home', which displayed pictures and furnishings together, came to the City Art Gallery in 1949. Lecture programmes continued with a wide range of topics, many on Georgian social life: for example, 'gossip about sculptors', 'Coaching and Post Horse Roads in Georgian Yorkshire', the craft of the plumber, York memorials, Georgian social services, costume, cookery books, an 18th century wine merchant, heraldry, York churches in Georgian times, 18th century reading, the portraits in the Mansion House, fakes in English furniture, and many others. The lecture programme was entertaining, not dry. There was a Georgian musical evening in 1947 and in 1950 a trip to see "Miss Elizabeth Bennett", a play performed by the Rowntree Players. There were also scholarly talks about architecture. Dr Wittkower, of the Warburg Institute, came to talk about Lord Burlington and William Kent in 1948, and he was later the first speaker at the restored Assembly Rooms in 1951.⁴⁰

A characteristic of the Georgians' popularity was its large number of women members. This seems to be linked to its extensive social activity programme, since other societies with social activities also had a large female membership (see figure 3). An interesting contrast here is the York Civic Trust, which by the 1960s and 1970s, well after Sheldon's heyday, outstripped the Georgian Society in terms of membership numbers, but without the same level of women members (see figure 4). The Civic Trust had a membership which supported its stance and outlook as a campaigning, conservation society. In practice this would mean membership of a single family representative, usually male; without social activity it did not attract couples or families.⁴¹



York Georgian Society members outside Holyrood Palace during their Edinburgh trip, April 1950.



118 Micklegate: leased as the York Georgian Society HQ in 1949.

The Georgians made education 'fun' but with serious intent. Self-education in the culture and architecture of the Georgian period was important at a time when much less was in print. This self-education extended to its officers – and its chairman, too. Still surviving, in the York Georgian Society archive, are some of the notebooks on Georgian topics which Oliver Sheldon drew up for his own reference.⁴²

But the greatest reason why the York Georgians became so popular in this era was, without a doubt, because of the publicity which Oliver Sheldon generated. While the Georgian Group in London were also great publicists, it was more unusual for a provincial society to be so aware of the value of newsprint. A surviving newspaper cuttings book in the Georgian Society archive reveals nearly 350 articles about the Georgians over its first 12 years, or 29 per year or nearly two and a half per month. Most coverage was local, with regular articles in the *Yorkshire Evening Press*, the *Yorkshire Gazette* the *Yorkshire Post* and the *Northern Echo*, but occasionally the society was reported in the nationals. As important was the regularity of news stories. From the first, publicity was Sheldon's overriding aim. He was an early believer in the regular press release – thus, no AGM or visit or talk passed without press coverage. Sometimes Sheldon masterminded occasions designed with an eye for publicity. The society presented a framed letter by David Garrick to the City Council, and the story reached the national press. The bicentenary of the visit of the Duke of Cumberland to Gray's Court in 1946 was celebrated with a special ceremony, attended by the Mayor, with speeches, a toast to the House of Windsor, and a celebratory drink (procured rather deviously by Sheldon in that era of rationing) - all extensively reported. Sheldon was good at writing for the press. Here for example is the beginning of a piece about York Assembly Rooms in 1948:

As the harassed housewives of York, clutching their precious ration books, stand at the counters of the Food Office, joining the appropriate queue for extra milk or emergency ration cards, I wonder if they have time or inclination to listen to fairy music, or see ghosts?

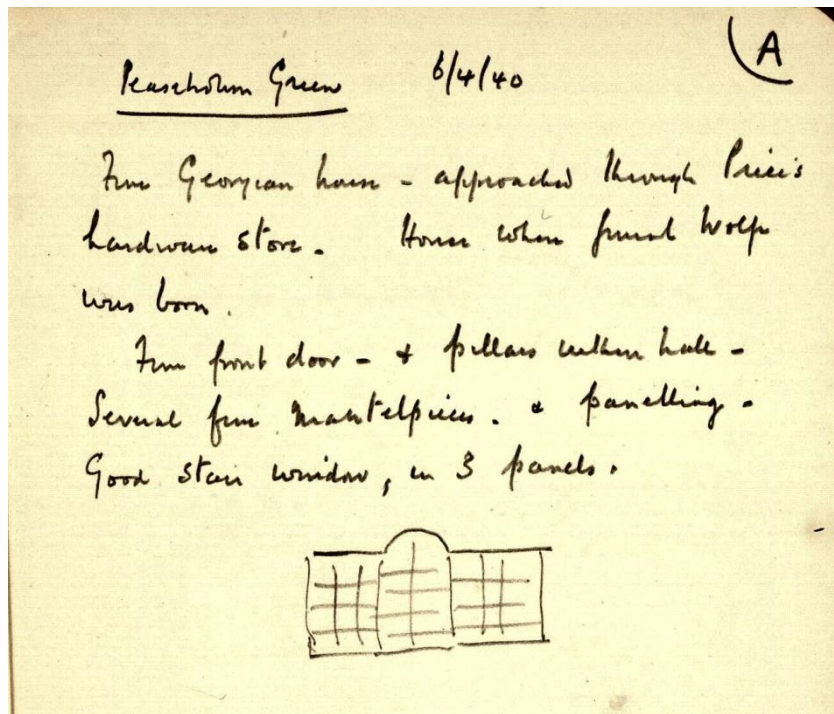
*Very charming ones – the Duke and Duchess of Ancaster, the Earls of Carlisle, of Coventry, of March, of Thanet, and their Countesses, and the lovely Countess of Northumberland. It is a Ball at the York Assembly Rooms...*⁴³

The York Georgians were kept in the public eye, through many and varied means. From the start Sheldon was keen to have an HQ, to provide a physical centre for the society which would also make it more visible. A couple of anonymous donations enabled the society to lease 118 Micklegate from 1949.⁴⁴ After the war, an ambitious publications programme was planned, and six 'Occasional Papers' (short monographs) were published between 1945 and 1950. The series of *Annual Reports* began in 1943/4, and from 1946 onwards there were annual Christmas cards. Sheldon was a stickler for detail, as Miss Pressly later recalled:

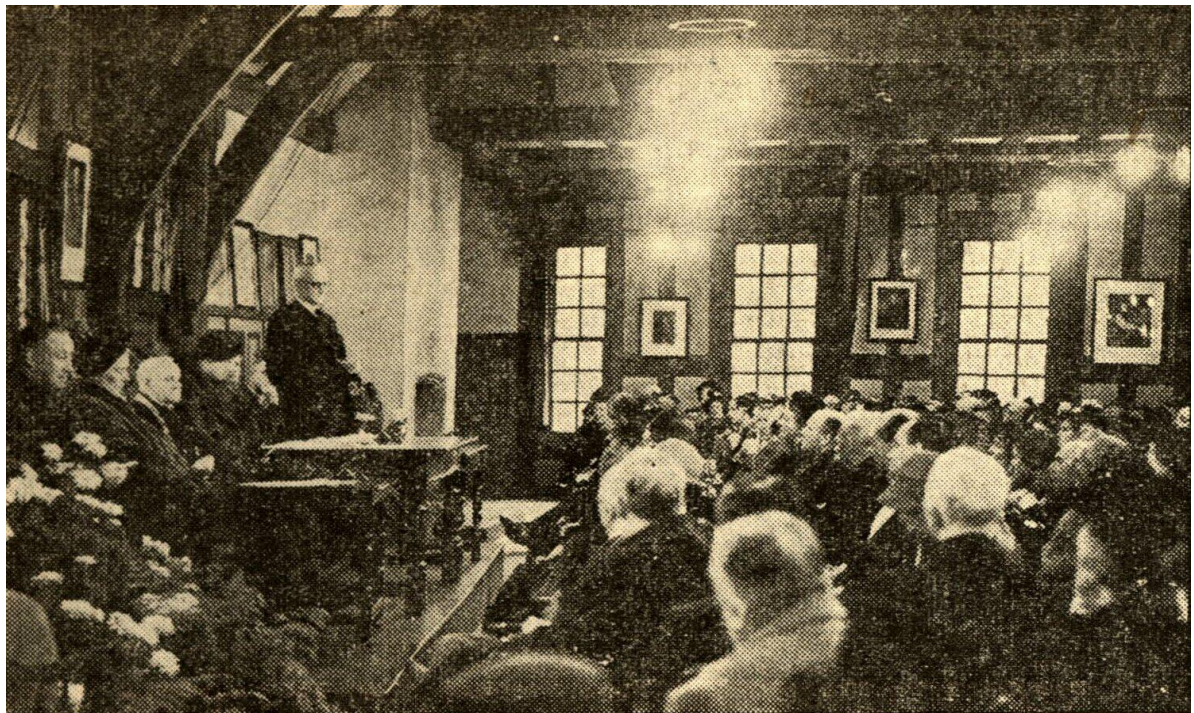
*He had a remarkable gift for drawing up resolutions, framing appeals etc. No detail was too small for his attention. The lay-out of a programme, the size and colour of the type, were to him of the utmost moment...*⁴⁵

So the York Georgian Society was distinctive in its early years, in its approach, its activities, in the popularity it enjoyed and in the publicity it generated. But there was yet another aspect which marked it out from its contemporaries. Not only did the society aid the development of Oliver Sheldon's ideas about the potential of York, but in turn the society was used by Sheldon, and by others, to further their vision of the City's future.

The relationship of the past and present in architecture, townscape and planning was important, but not just in terms of preservation. The architecture and design of the past might have lessons for the present and future. By 1942 Sheldon was already considering this:



An extract from one of Oliver Sheldon's own notebooks.



The York Georgian Society Annual General Meeting, 1950, with Oliver Sheldon speaking.

*the task of our Society in the years ahead should not only be to study, and to encourage the study, of the Georgian era in art, as so profusely illustrated in York, but also to encourage the application of its principles and designs in modern art and architecture, such as may, in the post-war years, add to the beauties of York.*⁴⁶

Such sentiments were not unusual at that time. Rupert Alec-Smith told the East Yorkshire Georgians in 1939:

*Present day architects and those for whom they work do well to realise that there are few styles of architecture so adaptable or so well suited to modern needs as that style which we have learned to call "Georgian. Strictly speaking, this Society is a preservation society. It is, in some cases, found possible to preserve individual buildings, but there is no doubt that the subject should be approached from the wider angle, that of harmonious Town Planning. What we erect to-day becomes thus as important to us as that which we are striving to preserve..."*⁴⁷

One might suppose that preservation societies would naturally be opposed to forces of modernism and change, but during this period, when town and country planning became serious business, planners were often interested in the lessons provided by the past. Patrick Abercrombie, perhaps the best known town planner in the country, was heavily influenced by English Georgian design, traditional English landscapes and historic country towns and was a co-founder of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England. Charles Needham, of the York Georgian Society, was a town planner, and a co-author of *A Plan for the City of York* (1948), the post-war plan for the City's development. Those interested primarily in the preservation of the past were not afraid to embrace the design of the future, as seen in JB Morrell's book: *The City of our Dreams*, first published in 1940, as a forerunner of the official 1948 *Plan*.⁴⁸

In the early 1940s, the Georgian Society brought together on its committee a number of key cultural figures – Sheldon himself, Dean Eric Milner-

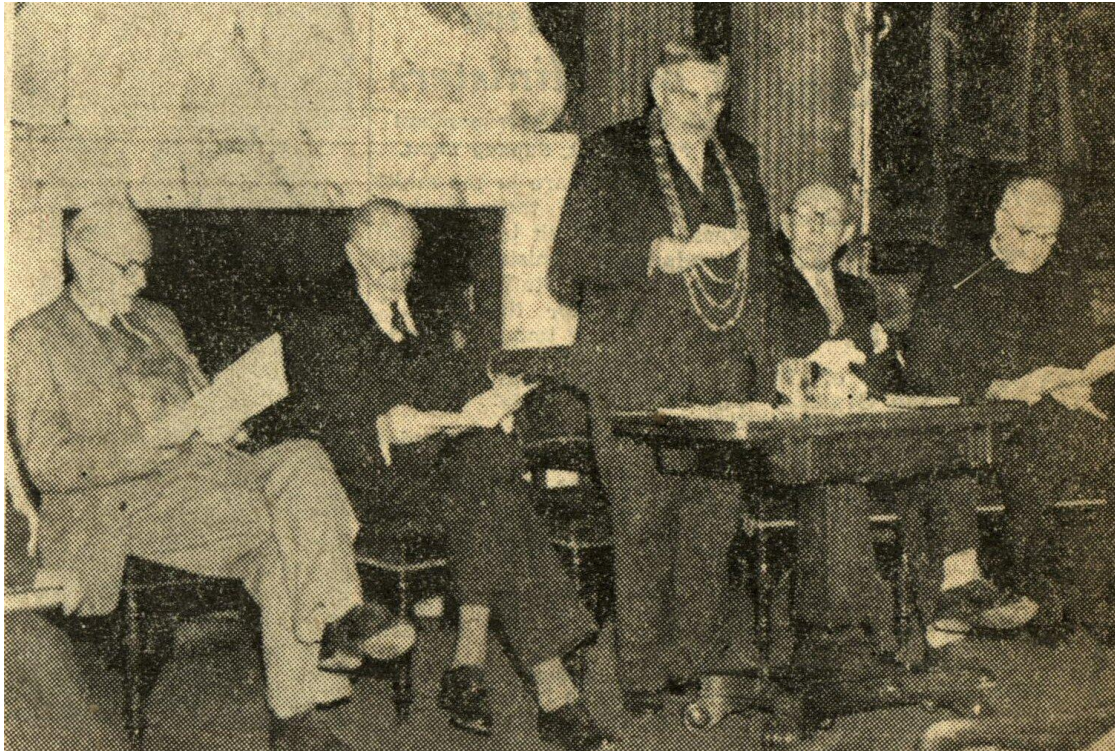
White (who had arrived in York from Cambridge in 1942), Noel Terry, and J.B. Morrell. These soon became influential not only in the Georgians but also in the development and planning of the post-war policy for York.

In 1942-44 all four were involved in the City Council's Civic Committee (chaired by J.B. Morrell) to 'discuss questions affecting the future planning of York in all its aspects'. The reports of the Civic Committee fed into the City's post war development plans. This activity, which saw Morrell, Milner-White, Sheldon and Terry working together to consider the future of York, clearly stimulated ambitions and ideas, and by the end of 1944, these four were planning a 'Standing Committee of Preservation, Amenity and Design'. After a long period of planning, this was launched as the York Civic Trust Association (later York Civic Trust) in 1946. Morrell was chairman, Terry, treasurer and Milner-White and Sheldon, joint secretaries.⁴⁹

The York Georgian Society, under Sheldon, had already been considering issues which would later be covered by the Civic Trust. Sheldon realised what an opportunity post-war planning could offer to a society like the Georgians, telling a correspondent in 1944 that:

...plans are well in hand, under the City Corporation, for the replanning of the City after the war, and one of the major tasks of our Society is to guide public and official thinking to bring about the best combination of improvement and preservation. The two are not incompatible.⁵⁰

In October 1944, Sheldon produced a second memorandum about the purposes of the Georgian Society. This showed how his aims had developed since 1939. He outlined four purposes: 'Preservation' – guarding the Georgian treasures of architecture, arts and crafts; 'Betterment' – planning for their better use, and enhancement of their features and surroundings; 'Education' – guiding public interest and taste in Georgian art and architecture by every means possible and 'Design' – the encouragement of good design in the city's layout,



The four founders of York Civic Trust at a Civic Trust AGM in 1949. These four had previously been able to hone their ideas through the forum of the York Georgian Society.

Oliver Sheldon is on the left, with Noel Terry next to him. Dean Eric Milner-White is on the right and J.B. Morrell is speaking. The other figure is Lord Halifax, their guest on that evening.



York Georgian Ball, June 1951.

The figure in the left foreground, with sash, is Oliver Sheldon dressed as Lord Burlington.

architecture and local craftsmanship so that the new would blend with the old. The last aim, 'Design', was firmly focused on the present, and was new. The discussion of this memorandum at a Georgian committee meeting in October 1944 revealed that by then, the society was providing a broad discussion forum for the Civic Trust's future founders. The new Civic Trust's role as a 'Standing Committee of Preservation, Amenity and Design', was a curious echo of Sheldon's memorandum for the Georgians. At the Georgian Society AGM in November, Sheldon also seemed to look towards a Civic Trust: 'Like the Civil Defence of war-time, we shall need a Civic Defence for the peace – a Wardens Service, to watch over all that this Society treasures'.⁵¹

If the Georgian Society provided a rehearsal space for the new Civic Trust, then the new Trust was also a natural development for other ideas which Sheldon had developed through the Georgians. For a long time, Sheldon had seen that York's societies needed to act together to have a larger, campaigning profile. He initially hoped that a Georgian Society HQ, perhaps at Fairfax House, would provide a venue for combined activity. The Civic Trust would now act as a unifying body, with all York's preservation societies and guilds represented on its council.⁵²

So in the early 1940s, with the Civic Trust promoters serving on the Georgian Society committee, the York Georgian Society had become almost a 'dry run' for the Civic Trust. It would be no exaggeration to say that the York Civic Trust was a child of the York Georgian Society. In the years following, when there was still great optimism about how York's historic and artistic potential could be unlocked, the Civic Trust and the Georgian Society provided complementary platforms for Sheldon, Morrell, Milner-White and others as they worked towards these ambitions.⁵³

The Civic Trust soon became a springboard for a new campaign of Sheldon's, for a university at York. This is a complicated story, but it had links to the ambitions of the Georgians. When it became clear that York would never achieve a university unless it developed long term academic activity, one of the

first ventures suggested was a school of architecture. Georgian Society members had been involved in discussions about founding a school of historic architecture since the mid 1940s. When the Summer Schools on Architectural History began in 1949, followed by the Institute for Architectural Study in 1956, they were a satisfying fulfilment of these early aims.⁵⁴

In 1948, Sheldon played a key role in encouraging York City Council to put York forward as one of the regional centres for the projected Festival of Britain in 1951. Sheldon's aim was to provide huge publicity: a chance for the City to show off its magnificent architecture and cultural potential to the world. He thought it would also: 'help forward our plans for a School of Architecture in York'. The York Festival of 1951 provided further great opportunities for the Georgian Society. The City Council requested its advice on the use of colour and decorative schemes for the City's Georgian buildings. The Mansion House, St Leonards, the De Grey Rooms, the Red House, the Judges Lodgings and the Law Courts were all spruced up for the Festival in accordance with Georgian Society proposals.⁵⁵ These were opportunities denied to their East Yorkshire brethren, who offered their local authorities help in Festival year, but reported glumly 'Whilst all the authorities concerned have welcomed the Society's approach, it seems unlikely that any important projects will result therefrom at present'.⁵⁶

In York the story was quite different. Sheldon took full advantage of the publicity the Festival offered. It was his idea that there would be a Georgian Ball in the Assembly Rooms. The plan was fraught with difficulties, not least the huge amount of work needed on the Rooms themselves. Three Georgian members were co-opted onto the City's Assembly Rooms sub-committee. The completion of the restoration was touch and go, with the new Venetian glass chandeliers being hung only days before the Festival began. Sheldon visited the premises practically every day, 'smoothing out difficulties, helping with advice, always encouraging the diffident.' The Ball took place on 15 June 1951, when descendants of the eighteenth century subscribers to the Rooms danced a stately minuet. It was a magical social event. Many of the participants arrived on foot, watched by thousands of spectators held back by police. Sheldon dressed as Lord

Burlington. The Georgian Ball was a high point for the Society. Its membership reached nearly a thousand in Festival year. The restoration of the Assembly Rooms was not only a triumph, but also a fitting conclusion to the issue which had first fired Oliver Sheldon's passion and led him to become involved with the Georgian Society. For Sheldon, things had come full circle. But even as they did, tragedy struck. He was taken ill as the Festival ended, and died seven weeks later. The Georgian Ball really did mark the end of an era.⁵⁷

Oliver Sheldon's death was a great loss. But although he had guided the society very closely and firmly, he had established a superb sense of purpose. So the work of the Society went on smoothly. George Howard, a different character from Sheldon, but equally 'high-powered', succeeded him as chairman, and Miss Pressly remained as honorary secretary for a further ten years.⁵⁸ In summing up Sheldon's legacy, one can see that these early years really were a distinctive era. Sheldon's leadership and publicity boosted the society, but by the 1950s, that age of 'gentlemanly consensus', in which the early Georgians operated, was passing. Sheldon himself, musing in 1949 on the Society's early achievements, had already sounded a warning:

...it has made York citizens more aware of the Georgian buildings in the City... To that extent, all has been worth while; but it is not enough... Present-day restrictions have largely held back the flood of "improvement" but it is beginning. That will be the time when the work of the past ten years will be put to the test.⁵⁹

Times were changing. The later 1950s, 1960s and beyond, witnessed mounting building development and increasing threats to the streetscape of the city, as well as the insatiable demands of the car and consequent road development. There were more numerous and increasingly complex planning problems, as well as changes in the economic and political climate of York. The amount and scale of vigilance had to grow. In 1964, George Howard wrote:

The time has now come when we begin to be seriously alarmed...York is one of the places that has lost more listed buildings than any other town... York is so rich in its Georgian heritage that many applications for replacements or demolition of such buildings are likely to arise...many of them are not of first rate importance; but the collective effect of their disappearance will be much greater than the sum of their individual losses.⁶⁰

There were other changes too. George Howard remarked in 1961 that numbers attending day-trips had dwindled. By then, the Georgian period was no novelty; car-ownership was expanding; greater numbers of historic buildings were being opened on a regular basis; and competing attractions were available. More information was in print on the art and architecture of the Georgian period.⁶¹

In Sheldon's time, his outstanding talents for organisation and publicity, allied to his personal vision for York, and the backing of the supremely able Miss Pressly, created a society which was perfectly and superbly attuned to the world around it, but which also pushed forward a programme of what was achievable. In all of this, he gave the society a firm basis for its future existence. Every society must re-invent itself to cope with the demands of its age, and this is what happened in the years after Sheldon's death. Yet, seventy years on, his timeless and passionately expressed sense of purpose, has probably never been bettered. It is appropriate to end this brief survey of the York Georgian Society's early years with the words of Oliver Sheldon – as true now as when he spoke them:

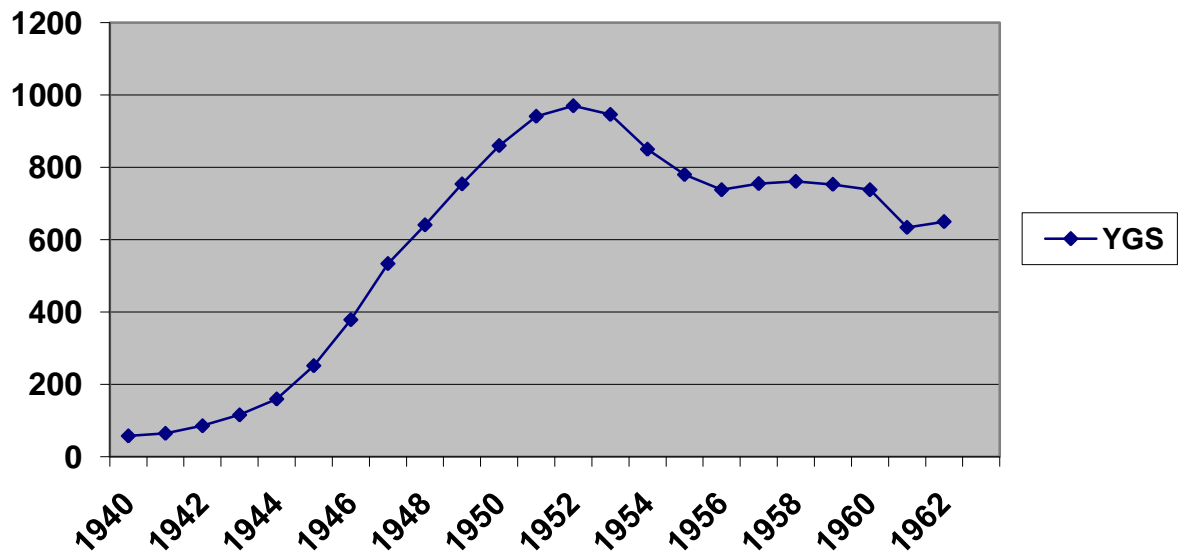
In what we have as a dowry from that era, let us take pride; care for it, and study it; that what we add may be worthy to place beside it, and what we inherit may live on to guide what we do.⁶²

Katherine Webb
December 2009

Figure 1

York Georgian Society (YGS) Membership

1940-1963

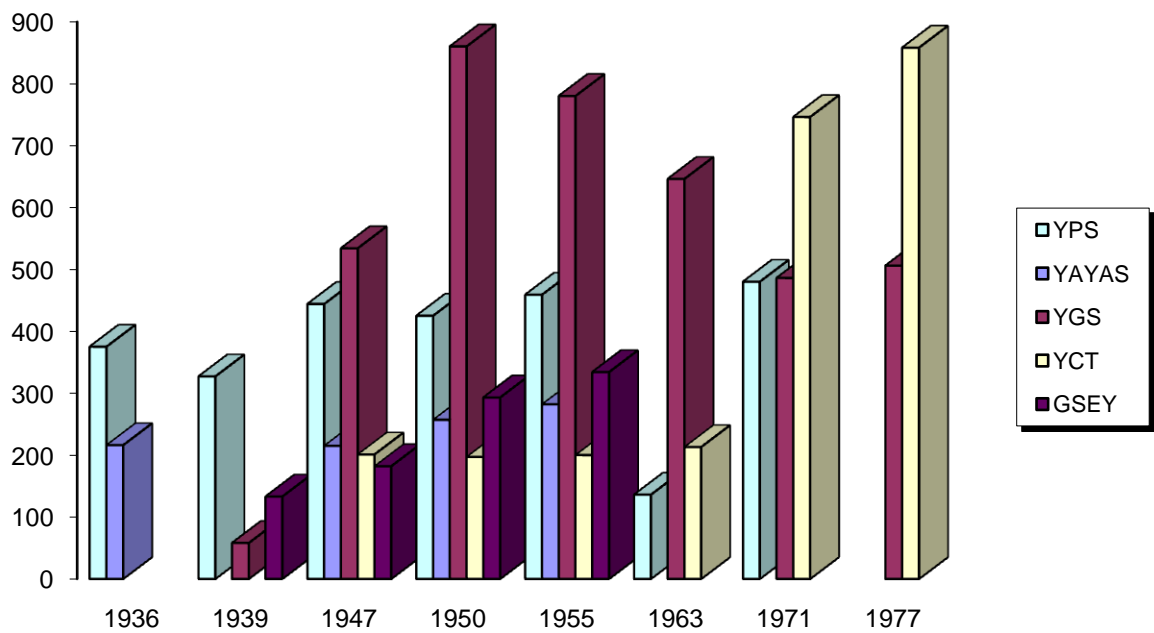


Sources: see Note 17.

Figure 2

Comparative Membership of York Georgian Society and other societies

Yorkshire Philosophical Society (YPS)
Yorkshire Architectural and York Archaeological Society (YAYAS)
York Georgian Society (YGS)
York Civic Trust (YCT)
Georgian Society for East Yorkshire (GSEY)

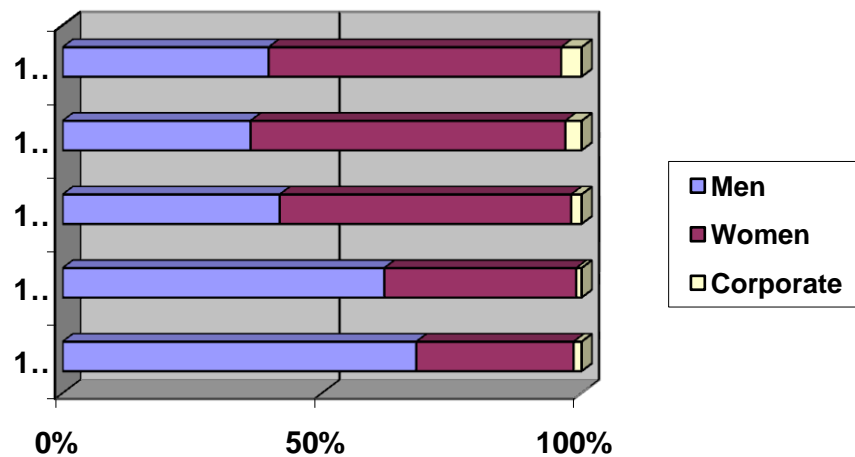


Sources: see Note 31

Figure 3

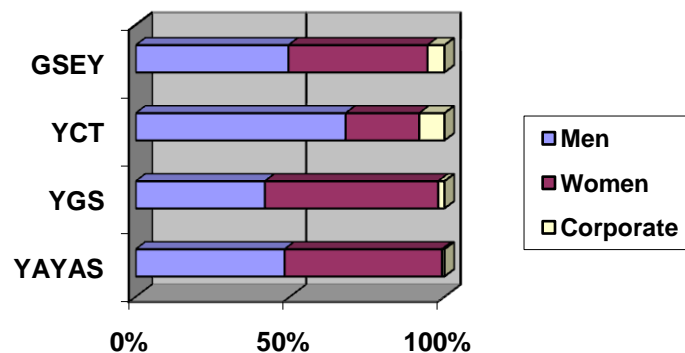
Gender Balance: York Georgian Society and other societies

1. York Georgian Society gender balance 1942 - 1971



2. Gender balance of societies compared, 1950

- Georgian Society for East Yorkshire (GSEY)
- York Civic Trust (YCT)
- York Georgian Society (YGS)
- Yorkshire Architectural and York Archaeological Society (YAYAS)

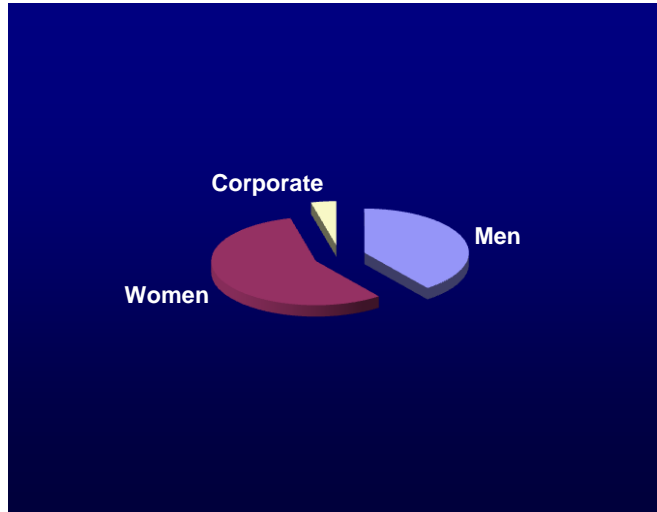


Sources: see Note 41.

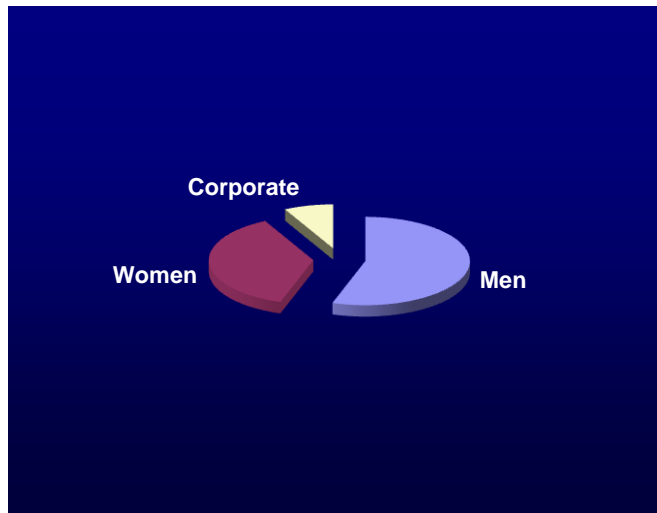
Figure 4

Gender Balance of York Georgian Society and York Civic Trust compared in 1971

York Georgian Society



York Civic Trust



Sources: see Note 41.

Notes

¹ Phone Books for York show Daphne Darley at 6 Driffield Terrace 1928-30 and York Trade Directories show John Brooke as occupant in 1931-2 and again in 1937-9. Daphne Darley and John Brooke were married in London on 30 April 1930, *The Times* 1 May 1930. For the Brooke family of Sibton Park, Suffolk, see *Burke's Landed Gentry 1937* (London, 1937) and *Burke's Landed Gentry 18th edition, volume 3* (London 1972). *Burke's Landed Gentry 1937* has details of the Darley family of Aldby Park. John Brooke inherited Sibton Park on his father's death in June 1939. Mrs Brooke died in 1954.

² Mrs Brooke's drawing room meeting is mentioned in *York Georgian Society Annual Report* (henceforth *YGS AR*) 1959-60, 'How it Began', pp. 18-19, though the address is erroneously given as Dalton Terrace (Driffield Terrace is off Dalton Terrace). Hull History Centre (henceforth HHC) (now the home of Hull University Archives), U DAS/24/13, Papers of Colonel Rupert Alec-Smith and Family of Winestead, 'Lord Derwent' file 1936-48: letter, Rupert Alec-Smith to Lord Derwent, 25 April 1939. This letter says the meeting was held 'yesterday', so it must have taken place on 24 April. The letter also mentions Morrell and Harrison as attending; my other suggested attendees are among those known to be the society's earliest supporters. The meeting at Mrs Brooke's house was also recalled by Rupert Alec-Smith in *YGS AR* 1965-6, p. 16, though he mistakenly remembered it as being held in summer.

³ 'How it Began', *YGS AR* 1959/60, pp. 18-19; *YGS AR* 1965-6 p. 16; HHC, U DAS/24/13, letter, Alec-Smith to Lord Derwent, 25 April 1939. For an obituary and appreciation of Rupert Alec-Smith see Captain A.J.C. Hildyard, 'Col. Rupert Alexander Alec-Smith' in David Neave and Edward Waterson (eds.), *Lost Houses of East Yorkshire* (Georgian Society for East Yorkshire, 1988), pp. 4-5.

⁴ HHC, U DAS/24/13, letter, Alec-Smith to Lord Derwent, 25 April 1939. Borthwick Institute for Archives (henceforth BI), York Georgian Society Archive (henceforth YGS), General Correspondence and Papers 1939-42: letter, Paul Crombie to Col. H.C. Scott, 5 May 1939 and letter, Col. Scott to Oliver Sheldon, 6 May 1939. BI, YGS, Minutes: 16 May 1939. These first manuscript minutes were signed by Oliver Sheldon, who must have been acting as chairman from the beginning. The published history of the York Georgian Society, written to commemorate its diamond jubilee, is: Darrell Buttery, *York Georgian Society 1939-1989* (York 1989).

⁵ The re-appreciation of Georgian architecture in the inter-war period was discussed by Rupert Alec-Smith in an address to York Georgian Society in 1965, *YGS AR* 1965-66, pp. 15-18. *The Georgian Society for East Yorkshire Transactions 1947-48* p. 12 noted that: 'Georgian is the fashion', which had not been the case when Rupert Alec-Smith's society was formed in 1937. A useful overview and context is provided in Michael Hunter (ed.), *Preserving the Past. The Rise of Heritage in Modern Britain* (Stroud, 1996), which includes an article by Gavin Stamp, 'The art of

keeping one jump ahead. Conservation societies in the twentieth century', pp. 80-86. The early reports of the Georgian Group (see note 6 below) also give a sense of the contemporary threats to Georgian architecture through lack of protection and poor general regard.

⁶ BI, YGS, file on Georgian Group: letter from secretary of Georgian Group to Miss Pressly, 5 Oct 1960, on the origins of the Georgian Group. Gavin Stamp, 'Origins of the Group' in *The Georgian Group. Architects Journal*, vol. 75 no. 13, 31 March 1982, Special Issue, pp. 35-38. Articles on the formation and early work of the Group appeared in *The Times*, 27 May, 23 June, 6 Aug 1937, 10 Feb 1938 and 16 May 1939. On 10 Feb 1938 *The Times* also had a related editorial entitled 'The Georgian Boom'. *Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, Annual Reports 1937-40* are also useful for the formation of the Group, as is *The Georgian Group. First Annual Report 1939*.

⁷ Hildyard, 'Rupert Alec-Smith' (see citation in note 3). *The Georgian Society for East Yorkshire Transactions 1937-38 to 1947-48* trace the foundation and earliest years. The foundation of the Georgian Society for East Yorkshire was also publicised in a letter by Rupert Alec-Smith in *The Times*, 7 July 1937. The archives of the Georgian Society for East Yorkshire, including minutes from 1937 onwards, are at Hull History Centre (HHC), U DX/99.

⁸ HHC, U DAS/24/13, Lord Derwent file 1936-48 passim; the file also includes an appreciation of Lord Derwent by Rupert Alec-Smith. Lord Derwent's obituary in *The Times*, 14 Jan 1949, says little about his Georgian Group work, though it is mentioned in a short personal tribute by Sacheverell Sitwell, *The Times* 24 Jan 1949. For Lord Derwent's contribution to the founding of the Georgian Group, see Stamp, 'Origins of the Group' (see citation in note 6).

⁹ HHC, U DAS/24/13, letter, Lord Derwent to Rupert Alec-Smith, 20 Dec 1936 and subsequent correspondence between the two men about their current and future Georgian plans, including letter, Lord Derwent to Alec-Smith, 6 June 1937, accepting the presidency of the Georgian Society for East Yorkshire.

¹⁰ HHC, U DAS/24/13, letters, Lord Derwent to Rupert Alec-Smith, especially 22 March, 23 Sept, 25 Sept, 27 Sept and 4 Dec 1937 and 10 Feb 1938 and letter, Rupert Alec-Smith to Lord Derwent, 6 Dec 1938.

¹¹ For Sheldon's life, see Katherine A. Webb, *Oliver Sheldon and the Foundations of the University of York*, Borthwick Paper 115 (University of York 2009).

¹² HHC, U DAS/24/13, letter Oliver Sheldon to Rupert Alec-Smith, 31 Jan 1939, enclosing copy of his letter to *Yorkshire Evening Press* 31 Jan 1939.

¹³ HHC, U DAS/24/13, letter, Lord Derwent to Rupert Alec-Smith, 7 Feb 1939.

¹⁴ HHC, U DAS/24/13, letter, Rupert Alec-Smith to Lord Derwent, 15 Feb 1939. There is a copy of the Memorandum by 'The Georgian Society' [which must be the Georgian Society for East Yorkshire] dated '2.8.1939' in BI, YGS, Georgian Buildings: file on York Assembly Rooms. The Assembly Rooms remained an important cause for the York Georgian Society and an image of its interior in the eighteenth century was used as the society's symbol up to 1950, when it was replaced by a simpler image of the front of the Mansion House (still the logo today).

¹⁵ HHC, U DAS/24/13, letter, Rupert Alec-Smith to Lord Derwent, 6 March 1939. BI, YGS, General Correspondence and Papers 1939-42: letter, Oliver Sheldon to C.W.C. Needham, 22 March 1939.

¹⁶ The early twentieth century saw an increase in the lobbying of pressure groups and individuals in York in favour of the preservation of the City's historical buildings and of its special character. Of particular note was the work of the Yorkshire Architectural and York Archaeological Society (YAYAS), which had a vigorous revival under the leadership of Dr W.A. Evelyn. See Hugh Murray, *The Yorkshire Architectural and York Archaeological Society 1842-1992. A Sesquicentenary Retrospect* (York 1992). Although the early periods of York's built heritage were still emphasised in guide books, there was an increasing appreciation of the importance of its major eighteenth century buildings. See, for example, Christopher Hussey, 'Houses of the County Towns of England. York - II. XVIII Century', *Country Life*, 18 March 1922, pp. 372-80, which was a sequel to an article on York's earlier buildings. For the relationship of the newly founded York Georgian Society with the East Yorkshire Georgians and with Rupert Alec-Smith, see HHC, U DAS/24/13, letter, Rupert Alec-Smith to Lord Derwent, 27 Oct 1939 and letter, Lord Derwent to Rupert Alec-Smith, 28 Oct 1939. See also HHC, U DX/99/10, York Georgian Society file: letters, Paul Crombie to Rupert Alec-Smith, 1 June, 24 June and 20 July 1939.

¹⁷ BI, YGS, Minutes: 4 Nov 1944 including the Chairman's Review for the 5th Annual General Meeting, which gives membership figures for the society between 1940 and 1944 (58 in 1940, 65 in 1941, 86 in 1942, 118 in 1943 and 160 in 1944). Figures for membership 1945 to 1951 have been taken from *YGS AR 1947-48* (which gives figures from 1940 to 1948), *YGS AR 1948-49* and *YGS AR 1950-51*.

¹⁸ BI, YGS, Minutes: inaugural meeting at Mansion House, 1 Oct 1939 (this is with the manuscript minutes). BI, YGS, Press Cuttings Book 1939-51 contains the press reports of the inaugural meeting in the *Yorkshire Post* and the *Northern Echo*, 19 Oct 1939. Calculation of memberships of other York societies by York Georgian Society committee members have been made by looking at *Yorkshire Architectural and York Archaeological Society Reports 1930, 1932, 1936 and 1948-49*, *Yorkshire Philosophical Society Annual Reports 1939 to 1949*, and *York Civic Trust Annual Report 1946-47*.

¹⁹ Sources for biographical details of J.B. Morrell, G.S. Hughes, J.H. Rutherford, J.S. Syme and C.W.C. Needham are given in Webb, *Oliver Sheldon* (see citation in note 11), in endnotes 23 and 29, pp. 67-8.

²⁰ BI, YGS, Papers about the life and work of Miss I.P. Pressly, including tributes at her death and other cuttings and correspondence.

²¹ Biographical details of Sheldon are in Webb, *Oliver Sheldon* (see citation in note 11).

²² *YGS AR 1943-4*, p. 6. BI, YGS, Minutes: 3 Nov 1939, Chairman's Memorandum.

²³ For the background to the York Georgian Society's listing activities, see Andrew Saint, 'How Listing happened', in Michael Hunter (ed), *Preserving the Past* (see citation in note 5). BI, YGS, Minutes: 14 Oct 1942 (manuscript minutes) has with it a typescript copy of lecture by Sir William

Milner to the 3rd AGM, on 'The Legal Position as regards the Preservation of Georgian Buildings'. Murray, *The Yorkshire Architectural and York Archaeological Society* (see citation in note 16) describes the York Corporation scheme to control elevations, pp. 31-2. C.W.C. Needham, J.H. Rutherford and J.S. Syme were on the Corporation Advisory Panel of Architects.

²⁴ BI, YGS, Minutes, passim, for the progress of listing. Their comprehensive listing plan was outlined by Oliver Sheldon at the 3rd AGM, 14 Oct 1942. For J.B. Morrell and the photographing of Georgian buildings (and the eventual exchange with the National Buildings Record), see Minutes: 16 Aug 1940, 16 Feb 1941, 20 May, 14 Oct (in speech of Oliver Sheldon to 3rd AGM), and 2 Nov 1942 and 4 May 1943. For plans in architects' offices, see Minutes: 2 Nov 1942, 14 Jan and 28 Nov 1944. For architectural students and the drawing of Georgian buildings, see Minutes: 9 Sept and 2 Nov 1942, 4 May 1943, and 14 Jan 1944. For the Georgian map, see Minutes: 8 Feb, 25 March, 20 May, 29 July, and 11 Oct 1946, 5 June, 15 Sept, 8 Nov and 28 Nov 1947. For the idea of plaques (eventually ceded to York Civic Trust), see Minutes: 18 Dec 1939, 22 Jan, 5 April, 26 April and 14 June 1940 and 28 Jan and 5 June 1947. All these activities are also noted in *YGS AR 1943-44 to 1947-48*, passim.

²⁵ BI, YGS, Minutes: 29 Sept, 28 Nov and 28 Dec 1944, 8 Feb and 25 March 1946, 21 March and 5 June 1947 for mentions of the widespread demand for the *Some Hints* booklet. See also *YGS AR 1945-6*, pp. 13-14.

²⁶ *YGS AR 1944-45 to 1948-49*, passim, mention the new Planning Acts. The York Georgian Society used a rough list of Georgian buildings in York, which had been compiled by Captain Braxton Sinclair, as the basis for their work; the society formed a Register Sub-Committee, and the architect members created the finished list. For the progress of listing, BI, YGS, Minutes, passim, particularly 29 Sept and 28 Nov 1944, 9 March, 21 Sept, 9 Nov and 11 Dec 1945, 8 Feb and 20 May 1946 and 15 July and 7 Sept 1948. See also *YGS AR 1944-45*, *1945-46* and *1947-48* and BI, YGS, Georgian Buildings: file on Listing and Photographing of Georgian Buildings in York, 1941-50. The list was submitted to the City Engineer and then to the Corporation's Estates Committee which approved it and forwarded it to the Ministry of Town and Country Planning. The Ministry's provisional listing of buildings for York was later printed as: *Ministry of Housing and Local Government. Provisional list of buildings of architectural or historic interest. List 1. 1950*. The buildings in the Ministry's list which were marked 'YGSL' were taken from the York Georgian Society List.

²⁷ *YGS AR 1961-2*, pp. 37-41, speech by Miss Pressly reflecting on the early days of the society. The photo of the York Georgian Society AGM of 1940, which Miss Pressly mentioned, still exists in the York Georgian Society archive, and is reproduced in this paper. Due to the war, Paul Crombie resigned as Honorary Secretary in 1942, at which point Miss Pressly took over – the society went on to benefit from her hard work for the next twenty years. The Georgian Group suffered a major loss when Robert Byron, one of the Group founders, was killed in 1941. Other Georgian Group members were temporarily lost to war time service and the Group maintained only a skeleton

service. BI, YGS, General Correspondence and Papers 1943-44: letter, Hon. Secretary of Georgian Group to Oliver Sheldon, 18 Oct 1944, mentions that 'the Georgian Group has been relatively inactive during the years of war'. But Gavin Stamp also notes that the war time destruction of Georgian buildings helped its cause, Stamp, 'Origins', p. 38 (see citation in note 6). Rupert Alec-Smith, the founder of the Georgian Society for East Yorkshire, went off to war time service and the society's work lapsed for six years, see *Georgian Society for East Yorkshire Transactions 1939-46*, p. 8.

²⁸ For Georgian Room, see BI, YGS, Georgian Buildings: file on Georgian room at Castle Museum, with notes, plans and sketches; *YGS AR 1943-44*, p. 5; BI, YGS, Minutes: 3 Nov and 18 Nov 1939, 22 Jan, 23 Feb, 5 April, 26 April, 14 June, 16 Aug and 15 Oct 1940 and 14 Oct 1942 (Chairman's speech to AGM). For railings, see *YGS AR 1943-44*, p. 4 and BI, YGS, Minutes: 16 Aug 1940, 28 April, 29 Sept and 4 Nov 1944. The Assembly Rooms was mentioned in Oliver Sheldon's speech at the Georgian Society inaugural meeting and in his speech at the 3rd AGM in 1942 - see BI, YGS Minutes, 18 Oct 1939 and 14 Oct 1942; see also Minutes, passim, 1939-1951 and *YGS AR 1947-48*, pp. 24-25, *1948-49*, pp. 24-28. For Fairfax House, see BI, YGS, Minutes: 18 Dec 1939, 23 Feb, 5 April, 14 June and 15 Oct 1940, 9 March and 30 May 1945, 15 Sept and 28 Nov 1947, 12 Jan, and 27 Feb 1948, 31 Jan and 31 March 1949 and *YGS AR 1944-45 to 1950-51*, passim. See also BI, YGS, Georgian Buildings: file on Fairfax House, 1940-60. Paul Crombie's remark can be found in BI, YGS, General Correspondence and Papers 1939-42: letter, Paul Crombie to Oliver Sheldon, 23 July 1941. The giving of advice on buildings is detailed in BI, YGS, Minutes, passim, and *YGS AR, 1944-45 to 1950-51*. For the Mansion House, see BI, YGS, Minutes: 5 April and 16 Aug 1940. For Carr's House, see BI, YGS, Minutes: 18 Dec 1939, 9 Sept and 2 Nov 1942, 29 Sept 1944, 30 May and 21 Sept 1945.

²⁹ BI, YGS, Minutes: 7 Oct 1943, 7 Sept and 8 Oct 1948 and 23 April 1949. Miss Pressly's recollections of the green and gold drawing room are in *YGS AR 1961-62*, pp. 37-38.

³⁰ BI, YGS, Minutes: 14 Oct 1942 for a copy of Milner's lecture (with the manuscript minutes). *YGS AR 1944-45* onwards give reports on lectures to the society. BI, YGS, Minutes: 14 Oct 1942, Chairman's speech to AGM, mentions the walk down Micklegate, and the manuscript minutes for 1939-43 include a press cutting of the walk, with photo, from the *Northern Echo*, 22 June 1942. Darrell Buttery, *York Georgian Society* (see citation in note 4), p. 5 has another photograph of the Georgian members on their Micklegate walk. Visits in 1943 were reported in the Chairman's report to the AGM, in BI, YGS, Minutes: 6 Nov 1943. The Nun Appleton visit is reported in Chairman's report to AGM, in BI YGS, Minutes: 4 Nov 1944. For all visits after 1944 see *YGS AR 1944-45* onwards, passim.

³¹ Figure 2 is drawn up from *YGS AR 1947-48, 1949-50, 1954-55, 1962-3, 1971 and 1977*; *Yorkshire Philosophical Society Annual Report 1936, 1939, 1947, 1950, 1955, 1963 and 1971*; *Yorkshire Architectural and York Archaeological Society Report 1936, 1948-9, 1949-50 and 1953-4*; *York Civic Trust Annual Report 1946-47, 1949-50, 1954-55, 1962-3, 1970-71 and 1975-76*; *Georgian Society*

for *East Yorkshire Transactions 1939-46, 1947-8, 1949-51* and 1955-56. Occasionally the dates of the reports of each society do not exactly tally, in which case an estimate of membership has been taken based on figures for surrounding years and estimated rate of growth.

³² BI, YGS, Minutes: 16 May and 18 Oct 1939 and 3 Nov 1939 (in Chairman's Memorandum). *The Georgian Group. First Annual Report 1939*, p. 4.

³³ *The Georgian Group. First Annual Report 1939*, p. 5. *Georgian Society for East Yorkshire Transactions 1955-56*, p. 20. There are no surviving minutes for the first York Georgian Society AGM of 1940 but the meeting and Oliver Sheldon's speech were reported in the *Yorkshire Gazette*, 18 Oct 1940 p. 5.

³⁴ This paragraph is based on comparing and contrasting the content of the minutes and *Transactions* of the Georgian Society for East Yorkshire with the minutes and *Annual Reports* of York Georgian Society.

³⁵ BI, YGS, Georgian Buildings, file on Fairfax House: letter, Oliver Sheldon to J.B. Morrell, 18 March 1945 and C.J. Minter to J.B. Morrell, 25 March 1945. Minter was also a member of the Georgian Society so that the official relationship between Minter, as City Engineer, and the Committee of the Georgian Society was a warm and sympathetic one; see mentions of Minter in BI, YGS, Minutes, *passim*.

³⁶ For Messrs W. Rowntree and Sons' shop in Coney Street, see BI, YGS, Minutes: 8 Oct 1948, 4 Dec 1949, 14 Jan and 22 May 1950, *YGS AR 1949-50*, pp. 34-35, and *YGS AR 1955-56*, p. 11. For Bedale Hall, see BI, YGS, Minutes: 22 May, 12 July and 19 Sept 1950 and *YGS AR 1952-53*, p. 32. For 71 The Mount, see BI, YGS, Minutes: 14 Jan 1950. For St Martin's Coney Street:, see BI, YGS, Minutes: 8 Oct and 6 Dec 1948, 31 Jan and 31 March 1949, 22 May, 19 Sept and 27 Oct 1950. York Civic Trust also collaborated in the issue of Messrs W. Rowntree and Sons' shop.

³⁷ BI, YGS, Minutes: 28 Nov 1944, 26 Jan and 9 March 1945, 13 June 1946, 27 Feb and 18 May 1948 and 22 May 1950. *Yorkshire Architectural and York Archaeological Society Annual Report 1949-50*, pp. 3, 21-35. There is a Memorandum, probably by Bernard Johnson (though it is unattributed), in BI, YGS, Georgian Buildings: file on Little Shambles 1944-52. The controversy which arose over the YAYAS Annual Report is discussed in Murray, *The Yorkshire Architectural and York Archaeological Society* (see citation in note 16), pp. 41-43. BI, YGS, Press Cuttings Book 1939-1951 contains cuttings from May 1950 about the Shambles controversy.

³⁸ *Georgian Society for East Yorkshire Transactions 1955-56*, p. 30. Compare the *Transactions* of the East Yorkshire Georgians with the *Annual Reports* of the York Georgians for photographs and general emphasis. The *Annual Reports* of York Georgian Society also benefitted from Oliver Sheldon's elegant prose and attention to style and layout.

³⁹ *YGS AR*, *passim*. HHC, U DX/99/10, file on York Georgian Society: letter, Paul Crombie to Rupert Alec-Smith, 21 July 1945; letter, Miss Pressly to Rupert Alec-Smith, 18 Feb 1947. *YGS AR 1946-47*, p. 14, *1947-48*, pp. 13-14, *1948-49*, pp. 13-15, *1949-50*, pp. 20, 46-52. There are files in BI, YGS on the organisation of the visits to Sheriff Hutton Park, Hackness and Ebberston Halls, Sledmere and

Aldby Park, Harewood and Edinburgh. *YGS AR 1953-54*, pp. 24-29, *YGS AR 1955-56*, pp. 6-7, 33-44, *YGS AR 1957-58*, pp. 17-25.

⁴⁰ The exhibitions of photographs at York Public Library were all Georgian Group touring exhibitions. 'Four Phases of Georgian Architecture' opened in York in Nov 1946, 'American Colonial Architecture' opened in Feb 1947 and an exhibition on the works of William Kent opened in Oct 1948. The York City Art Gallery, under its curator Hans Hess, also ran an exhibition, at the request of York Georgian Society, on the works of Joseph Halfpenny – this also opened in Oct 1948. The 'Art in the Georgian Home' exhibition opened at the Art Gallery in May 1949. For lectures and other events of the society, see *YGS AR*, passim, where they were extensively reported. Wittkower's talk on Lord Burlington was reported in *YGS AR 1947-48*, pp. 12-13 and was subsequently published as *York Georgian Society Occasional Paper No. 5, The Earl of Burlington and William Kent* (1948) (copy in YGS archive). *YGS AR 1950-51*, pp. 20, 45-54 (which reproduces Wittkower's 1951 talk).

⁴¹ Data for Figure 3, no. 1 is from membership lists in *YGS AR 1947-48, 1949-50, 1962-3, and 1971*. Data for Figure 3, no. 2 is from membership lists in *Georgian Society for East Yorkshire Transactions 1949-51, York Civic Trust Annual Report 1949-50, YGS AR 1949-50* and *Yorkshire Architectural and York Archaeological Society Annual Report 1949-50*. Data for Figure 4 is from membership lists in *YGS AR 1971* and *York Civic Trust Annual Report 1970-71*.

⁴² BI, YGS, Reference Material: notebooks of Oliver Sheldon; these contain information he had gathered for his own reference. He kept a notebook on 'Georgian Arts and Crafts' (on Georgian architects, artists etc), one on 'Georgian York' (with a few notes on York buildings) and one entitled 'In Praise of York', containing literary quotations on York.

⁴³ BI, YGS, Press Cuttings Book 1939-1951. The special York Georgian Society events covered by the press were also of course later reported in the relevant *YGS AR*. The analysis is of cuttings about the society in its first 12 years – cuttings in the book which do not relate to the society have been excluded from the calculation. Sheldon's piece on the Assembly Rooms was published in the *Yorkshire Evening Press*, 16 Jan 1948; a typescript version is in BI, YGS, Georgian Buildings: file on York Assembly Rooms.

⁴⁴ BI, YGS, Minutes: 3 Nov 1939 (for the initial suggestion by J.B. Morrell that the society might seek a room for itself in the restored Debtors' Prison); Minutes: 14 June, 29 July 1946 and 28 Jan 1947 (for the anonymous donations towards the HQ), 31 March, 23 April and 15 June 1949 (for 118 Micklegate). See also *YGS AR 1945-6*, pp. 4-5, *1946-47*, pp. 7-8, *1948-49*, p.18 and *1949-50*, pp. 28-29. *YGS AR 1961-62*, pp. 3-5 describes how, after lengthy negotiations, the society acquired the freehold of 118 Micklegate. BI, YGS, Headquarters and Property, contains files on 118 Micklegate.

⁴⁵ BI, YGS has copies of the Occasional Papers and Christmas cards. *YGS AR 1950-51*, pp. 5-6.

⁴⁶ BI, YGS, Minutes: 14 October 1942, Chairman's speech.

⁴⁷ *Georgian Society for East Yorkshire Transactions 1938-9*, p. 8.

⁴⁸ ‘Abercrombie, Sir (Leslie) Patrick (1879-1957), town planner’, by Martin Miller, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004-9). Obituary: ‘Charles William Cashmore Needham’, in *York and East Yorkshire Architectural Society Yearbook 1962-63*, pp. 46-48. J.B. Morrell, *The City of our Dreams* (1st edition, London, 1940) (there was a 2nd, expanded edition in 1955). S.D. Adshead, C.J. Minter and C.W.C. Needham, *York, a plan for progress and preservation* (York 1948).

⁴⁹ Webb, *Oliver Sheldon* (see citation in note 11), pp. 22-28 for an examination of the York Georgian Society, York Civic Trust and the Civic Committee in relation to Sheldon’s vision for York (which soon included the idea of a university).

⁵⁰ BI, YGS, General Correspondence and Papers, 1943-44: letter, Oliver Sheldon to Rt. Hon. Harcourt Johnstone MP, 18 Nov 1944.

⁵¹ BI, YGS, Minutes: 24 Oct 1944, including Chairman’s Memorandum to Committee. Interview with Dean Eric Milner-White, in *Yorkshire Evening Press*, 3 Oct 1944. BI, YGS, Minutes: 4 Nov 1944, including Chairman’s Review to AGM.

⁵² BI, YGS, Minutes: 9 March 1945. *York Civic Trust First Annual Report 1946-47*.

⁵³ Webb, *Oliver Sheldon* (see citation in note 11), pp. 22-28.

⁵⁴ Webb, *Oliver Sheldon*, pp. 29-54, describes Sheldon’s campaign for a university, which included the development of summer schools.

⁵⁵ Webb, *Oliver Sheldon*, pp. 37-38, for Sheldon’s key role in getting the Festival for York. *YGS AR 1948-49*, pp. 21-23.

⁵⁶ *Georgian Society for East Yorkshire Transactions 1949-51*, p. 19.

⁵⁷ Webb, *Oliver Sheldon*, pp. 54-58.

⁵⁸ BI, YGS, Papers about the life and work of Miss I.P. Pressly: typescript tribute after her death in 1968.

⁵⁹ *YGS AR 1948-49*, p. 36.

⁶⁰ Chairman’s speech to AGM 16 Nov 1963, printed in *YGS AR 1963-64*, pp. 20-23, quote is from p. 21. George Howard gave similarly impassioned speeches at other AGMs – see, for example, speech to AGM 14 Nov 1964, in *YGS AR 1964-65*, pp. 16-20.

⁶¹ In Chairman’s speech to AGM 12 Nov 1960, in *YGS AR 1960-61*, pp. 33-35, quote is from p. 35.

⁶² These words appear in the last Annual Report written by Sheldon: *YGS AR 1949-50*, p. 45.

Note: All images in this paper are from the York Georgian Society Archive, at the Borthwick Institute for Archives, University of York.

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