

## **THE NESTLÉ / ROWNTREE FACTORY**

### **Conservation Area No 35 (4.25 ha)**

#### **Introduction**

This Conservation Area was designated in 2007. It lies 1.5 kilometres north of the city centre, centred on Haxby Road, and encompasses some of the earliest and most distinctive buildings erected in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by the Rowntree family, either as part of the Rowntree chocolate factory or for wider public enjoyment. The factory has been a major employer in the city for over 100 years and the Rowntree family has been a major public benefactor.

#### **History**

Until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century this area of York consisted of open fields, with few features other than the 14<sup>th</sup> century 'White Cross' (now at the junction of Haxby Road and Haleys Terrace) which marked the grazing boundary between the City and St Mary's Abbey. The construction of the Foss Islands Branch railway line in 1879 accelerated the spread of the suburbs along Haxby Road, and the first building - Whitecross Villa - was built as a house for the Chief Constable of the city police in the 1880's.

In 1890 the firm of HI Rowntree and Co bought and developed the land between Haxby Road and Wigginton Road as a factory for its gum-based confectionery, utilising the good railway connections, and in 1907 moved all its remaining operations to the site from its premises in the city centre. By 1920, under the chairmanship of Joseph Rowntree, the business had expanded to employ 6,000 people.

Many of the factory buildings were of pioneering reinforced concrete construction, and the Rowntree family (as committed Quakers) also pioneered good working conditions and general care for their workforce. The work of Joseph Rowntree and his son Seebohm prompted the government to introduce the Old Age Pensions Act and the National Security Act. In 1909 the Yearsley Baths were built by the company and presented to the city for public use, as one of many philanthropic gifts.

Following the Second World War little further development took place, and in 1969 the company merged with John Macintosh and Sons to become Rowntree Mackintosh Ltd; development thereafter concentrated on building new production lines, requiring a reduced workforce. In 1988 the company was purchased by the Swiss firm Nestlé but the site has retained its former name as the Rowntree Works. It is still one of the largest employers in York, with a workforce of around 1,800.

The work of social reform started by the Rowntree family still continues through the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (which addresses housing and poverty in the United Kingdom) and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (which operates internationally).

#### **Important Buildings**

The earliest building on the site is Whitecross Villa, which is a distinctive white brick house of the 1880's with a decorative corner turret and Gothic detailing.

The earliest factory building is the Almond Block Extension of 1911, whose decorative brick corner tower next to Haxby Road is a major landmark. Adjoining it is the equally distinctive Cream Block of 1936, which is the largest surviving building on the site, distinguished by the moulded and light-painted render band around its roof. Well-detailed and large free-standing clocks mark the factory site entrances.

The Dining Block for the factory workers (now the Nuffield Hospital) was built in 1913 on the opposite side of Haxby Road; this pioneering reinforced concrete building included some of the longest concrete beams in the country, and included a gymnasium and school facilities for the workers.

Other buildings in the area are not part of the factory but were built for wider public use. The Yearsley Baths (originally open-air) were built by the company and presented to the city in 1909, the original frontage building survives as does the original pool, within a modern envelope. The stone giving its name to the 'White Cross' lies in the foreground.

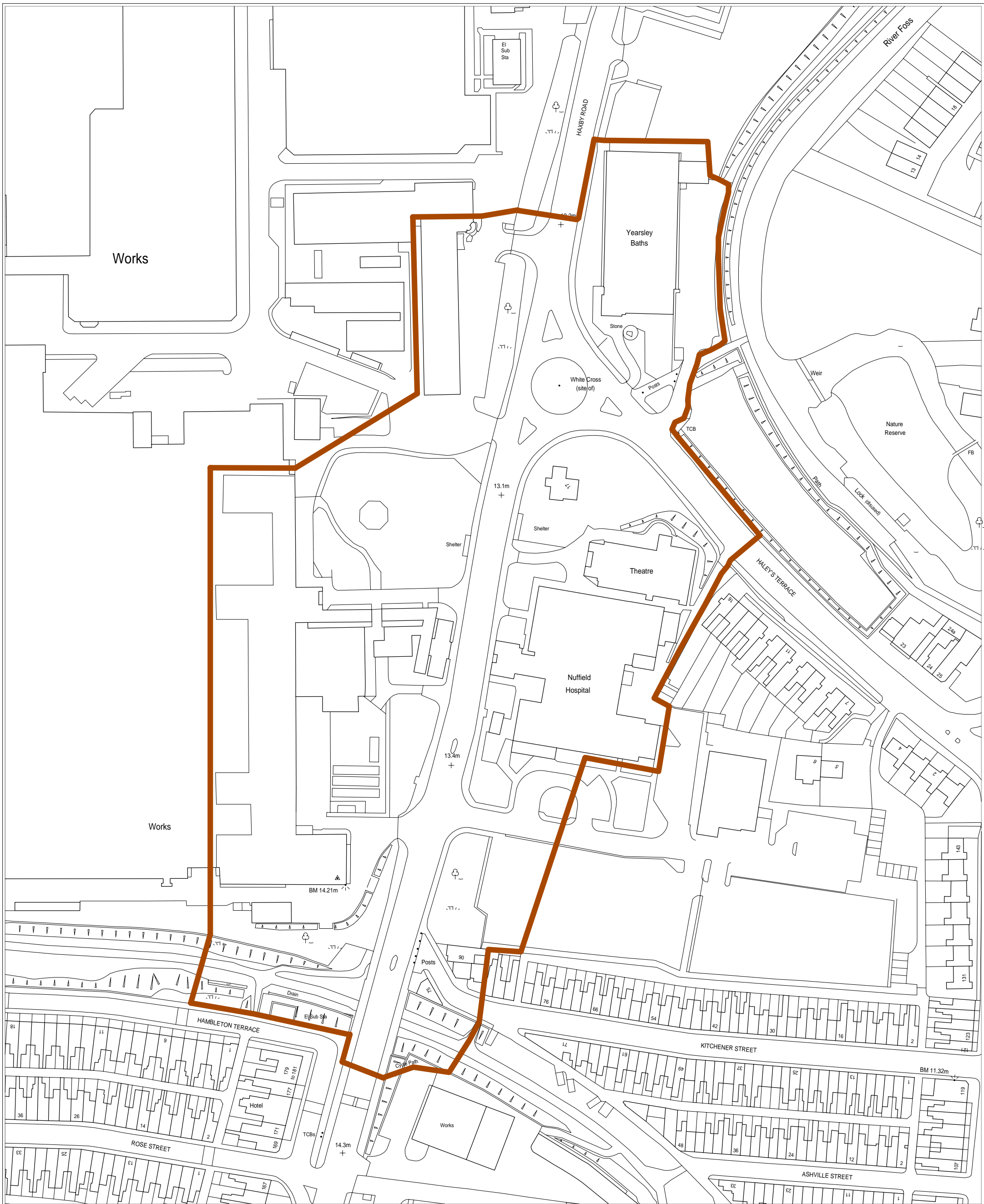
The Joseph Rowntree Memorial Library was built in 1927 after the death of Joseph Rowntree. In contrast to the modernistic Cream Block behind this is a small but distinctive building of Arts and Crafts Movement style design, Listed Grade II.

The Joseph Rowntree Theatre was built in 1935 as a facility for the factory workers and is also Listed Grade II. It is a rare example of a surviving theatre from the mid-1930's outside London, designed in Arts and Crafts Movement style by the architect Barry Parker, whose practice (Parker and Unwin) was responsible for the design of Letchworth Garden City and Hampstead Garden Suburb. The theatre is still in active use and managed by a charitable body.

## **Character**

The main elements of the character and appearance of the area are:

1. the self containment of the area, being well defined at the southern end by the railway bridge and at the northern end by the Haleys Terrace roundabout:
2. the variety, quality and technical attributes of the various buildings comprising the Conservation Area:
3. the high quality and consistency of planting, boundary treatment and other landscape features, which also unifies the area:
4. the creation of a working factory within a humane landscaped environment:
5. the association of the area with the Rowntree family, as local benefactors and social reformers of national status: and
6. the existing role of the area as a valued social and cultural centre in the city.



Conservation Area No. 35  
**NESTLE/ROWNTREE**  
 Area is 4.25ha



9, St Leonards Place, York, YO1 2ET  
 Telephone: 01904 551550

## NESTLE ROWNTREE CONSERVATION AREA

SCALE 1:1250  
 Originating Group

DRAWN BY PSL  
 Project

DATE 29/02/2008  
 Drawing No.

**CON35**

