

Case Name: 17 - 21 Piccadilly, York

Case Number: 1419106

Background

English Heritage has been asked to assess the former trolley bus depot and Airspeed aircraft factory, York for listing.

Asset(s) under Assessment

Facts about the asset(s) can be found in the Annex(es) to this report.

Annex	List Entry Number	Name	Heritage Category	EH Recommendation
1	N/A	17-21 Piccadilly	Listing	Do not add to List

Visits

Date	Visit Type
20 February 2014	Full inspection

Context

The building is currently owned by York City Council and has been vacant and deteriorating for a number of years. There has been a proposal promoted by the Yorkshire Air Museum to reuse the depot as a museum or visitor attraction based on its former use by Airspeed. However, the council has recently voted to redevelop the site, despite its identification as being a building of merit in the conservation area appraisal and its proximity to the historic buildings of Walmgate to the rear.

Assessment

CONSULTATION

Information and comments were received from the applicant, the local authority (both as owner and as curator for the Historic Environment Record), York Civic Trust, the Yorkshire Air Museum, and the Nevil Shute Norway Foundation.

The local authority response noted that councillors had recently voted to redevelop the site and thus they could not support listing. All other responses were strongly supportive of listing. Responses queried why the consultation report did not make more mention of the significance of Airspeed and associated individuals such as Nevil Shute. The description has been amended accordingly, although the Discussion section below explains why the focus of the consultation report was more directed towards the trolley bus aspect of the case.

DISCUSSION

The Principles of Selection for Listing Buildings (March 2010) sets out how the Secretary of State determines whether a building is of special architectural or historic interest and therefore merits listing. Most buildings pre-dating 1840 are listed, with selection required for post-1840 buildings because of the greatly increased number of buildings erected and the much larger numbers that have survived. This assessment has been carried out with reference to both English Heritage's Transport and Industrial Buildings Listing Selection Guides (April 2011), as well as research into the development of the aviation industry (including A D George (1986) "Aircraft Factories - Origins, Development and Archaeology" (Manchester Polytechnic Research

Paper) and Michael Stratton (1996) "Skating Rinks to Shadow Factories: the Evolution of British Aircraft Manufacturing Complexes" in *Industrial Archaeology Review* Vol 18 no2 pp 223-244).

York has such a rich resource of Georgian and medieval buildings, not to mention the archaeology of earlier occupation all the way back to the Romans, that it is understandable if more recent heritage is often over-looked. Piccadilly was only created as a new through route in about 1912 and it retains a number of relatively modest early C20 buildings, of which the restrained Art Deco detailed trolley bus depot is probably the most notable. York's many narrow streets had proved to be a hindrance to the development of a tram network in the late C19, but by the First World War there was a reasonably extensive radial network in operation. A need was seen for further public transport and the Corporation was granted permission to develop four trolley bus routes (probably chosen as a cheaper alternative to laying further tramlines). However, the First World War delayed implementation and post-war finances saw to it that only one route was created. The simple design and detailing of the depot needs to be seen in this context, the Art Deco exterior being both fashionable and relatively economical. Nationally, very little infrastructure related to trolley buses is listed because trolley buses generally date to the C20 and were rarely recipients of civic pride and generous expenditure. Trolley bus systems were also generally short lived in this country, mainly replaced by motor buses, with their depots demolished or altered to other uses. In contrast, buildings associated with tram systems are slightly better represented by listing as they were generally earlier and were often given a more impressive architectural treatment.

York's trolley bus depot is relatively unaltered in overall form and can be seen as a relatively rare national survival, which offers it a good deal of interest. However, it is architecturally modest in comparison with other public transport infrastructure, and unfortunately, its Art Deco treatment has been marred by the application of roughcast render and the loss of some parts of its detailing through decay.

The building's use in 1931-33 as the first premises of Airspeed is of historic interest. The company and the people involved with it (especially Cobham, Tiltman and Shute) made significant contributions to the development of the British aviation industry in the 1930s and to the later war effort. That such a comparatively small building in the heart of York could have been at the cutting edge of aviation technology is surprising, but is strongly redolent of the earliest aviation companies of circa 1907-1917 which also generally used second hand buildings including ice rinks, railway arches and mill buildings. However the depot was effectively used as a shed to provide protection to portable work benches, equipment and the aircraft under construction: the only modification to the building was the construction of a small office which no longer survives. In listing, historical special interest needs to have some tangible connection to the building for it to justify a recommendation to list. Consequently, although the connection with Airspeed is undoubtedly of historic interest, it is difficult to cite it as a factor in the building's listability, because of the lack of physical manifestation of this part of its history in the fabric of the building.

The former trolley bus depot is clearly of historic and architectural interest in the local context of York, as has been recognised by its identification as a building of merit in the conservation area. Not only is the Airspeed connection of interest, but the building also appears to be the last significant structure to survive representing the tram and trolley bus network. However, in terms of statutory listing, for which the context is national, because of the lack of physical evidence of aircraft manufacturing, and because of the damage to the Art Deco detailing, it is considered that the building falls just short of the criteria for listing.

CONCLUSION

After examining all the records and other relevant information, and having carefully considered the architectural and historic interest of this case, the criteria for listing are not fulfilled and 17-21 Piccadilly is not recommended for listing.

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION DECISION

The former trolley bus depot and Airspeed factory, 17-21 Piccadilly, York is not recommended for listing for the following principal reasons:

- * Architectural interest: the restrained Art Deco detailing of the building has been marred by the application of roughcast render and the physical loss of some detail through decay;
- * Lack of physical evidence: the use of the building as the start-up premises of Airspeed, and its association with individuals including Cobham, Tiltman and Shute (significant in the 1930s development of the British aviation industry) has left no significant identifiable evidence within the building.

Countersigning comments:

Agreed: this modest building does not retain sufficient features relating to its use as a either a trolley bus depot or an aviation workshop to merit designation in the national context.

NFB 2.v.14

Further Comments:

Agreed, no do not list. Tony Calladine. 30 May 2014

Annex 1

Factual Details

Name: 17-21 Piccadilly

Location: Former Reynards Bus depot at 17-21 Piccadilly, York

County	District	District Type	Parish
	York	Unitary Authority	Non Civil Parish

History

The building was constructed in 1920 as the depot for a trolley bus service. This opened on the 22nd December 1920 with a fleet of four single deck cars operating along a 2km route between Pavement and Heworth to the north east of the city centre. In 1914 the York Corporation had been granted permission to develop four trolley bus routes to supplement its existing electric tram network, however the Heworth service was the only one developed. The depot was built with a single tramline with inspection pits; however it is thought that this was never connected to the rest of the tram network, even though a tram line did run south along Piccadilly and onto Walmgate via Merchantgate, just to the north of the depot. The trolley bus service did not prove to be a success and was discontinued at the end of 1929. It was revived briefly (finally ending in January 1935) but during this second period of operation, the three remaining trolley buses were garaged at the Fullford Cross tram depot.

In 1931, the redundant trolley bus depot was rented to Airspeed Ltd., a new company set up by ex-employees of the Airship Guarantee Company which had been wound-up following the R101 airship disaster in 1930. Airspeed's founders included Nevil Shute Norway, Sir Alan J Cobham, Robert Tiltman and Lord Ralph Grimthorpe, all significant players in the expansion of the British aviation industry in the 1930s which in turn had a significant impact on the country's involvement in the Second World War. One of the investors in the company was the celebrated flyer, Amy Johnson. The company developed and built three designs of aircraft in York, (the AS.1 Tern glider, AS.4 Ferry and the AS.5 Courier). Only one Tern and parts for a second were built, although it set new international gliding records and influenced the design of the Horsa troop carrying glider which played a significant role in the Normandy landings and subsequent allied advance in 1944. Four examples of the AS.4 Ferry were built, these being 10 seat biplane airliners with an unusual configuration of three engines. The first two constructed were used by Cobham in his National Aviation Day displays (also known as Cobham's Flying Circus) which toured the country in 1932-5 giving thousands of people their first experience of flying, leading many to take up aviation, many pilots then joining the RAF in the late 1930s. The prototype of the AS.5 Courier (a revolutionary high performance design being a single-engined, six-seater monoplane; the first British aeroplane to feature a retractable undercarriage) was also built at York, although its maiden flight was in the month following the company's move to larger premises in Portsmouth in March 1933 and the subsequent production run of 15 aircraft were built at this new factory in Hampshire, including one used by Cobham in his experiments to develop aerial refuelling. From 1940, as part of the de Havilland Aircraft Company, Tiltman and the Airspeed design team played a significant roll in developing aircraft used by the RAF during the Second World War, however this was conducted from Hatfield. The former trolley bus depot was not retained by Airspeed after 1933, but reverted to being a public transport depot for motor buses. An interior photograph of the building as an aircraft factory shows that the inserted platform and first floor office at the southern end was a later alteration. Neville Shute's office (mentioned in his autobiography "Slide Rule") is thought to have been built towards the centre of the building's western wall and no longer survives.

The building was classified as a building of merit in the York Central Historic Core conservation area appraisal (approved in November 2011) mainly for its historical association with Airspeed.

Details

Trolley bus depot 1920-1929; first premises of Airspeed Ltd 1931-33.

MATERIALS: steel framed building with brick infill panels covered in smooth stucco, but mostly with a later course-textured render. Roof covering of corrugated sheeting.

EXTERIOR: the exterior is embellished with restrained Art Deco detailing. The side elevation, along Piccadilly, is expressed as 8 bays, the bays being flanked by broad pilasters with simple double bands

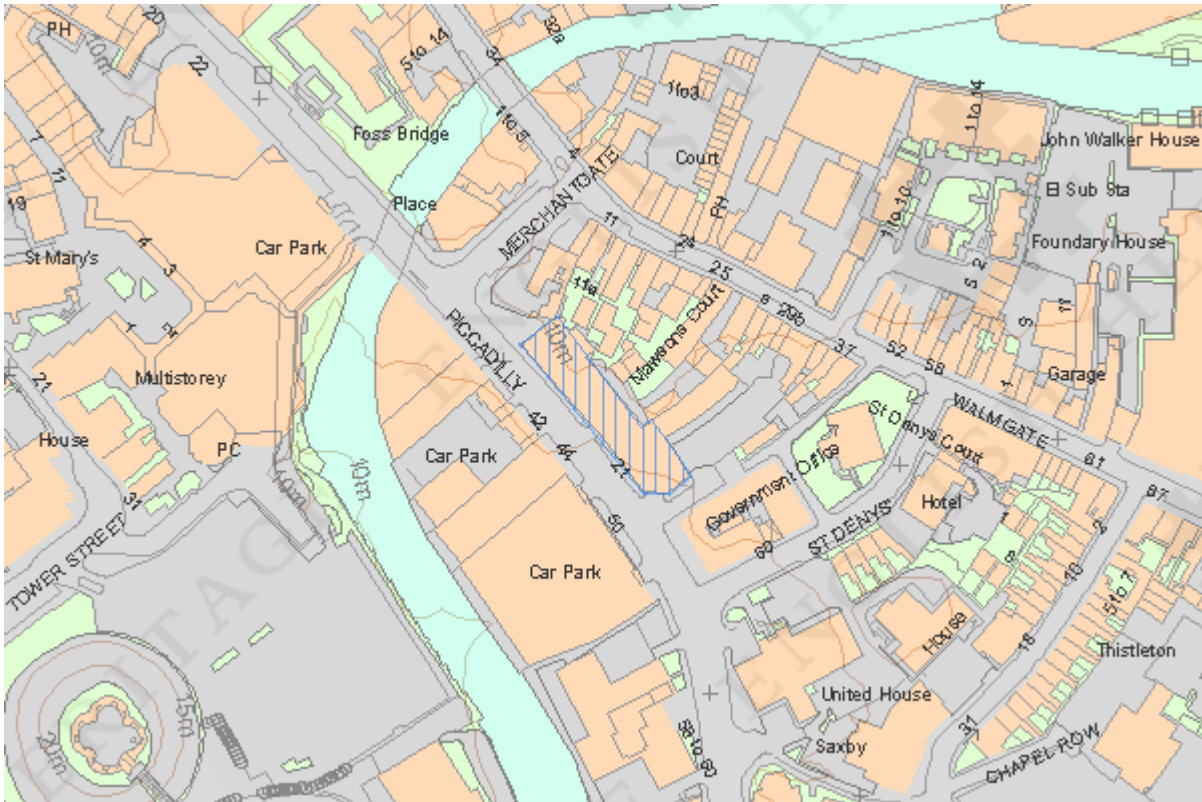
forming capitals. The southern-most bay is canted backwards (thus forming an angled corner to the building) and rises to a shallow gable. It is filled by a large garage entrance with stuccoed decoration to the lintel, this being in the form of a band of short, vertical fluting which flanks a plain roundel. The fourth bay from the south is a similarly treated entrance (but which is now mainly blocked by later blockwork). Bays 2, 3 and 7 retain paired window openings, some blocked and boarded retaining joinery internally. The remaining bays appear to have had their openings altered. The northern gable has a pair of garage entrances (that to the east being blocked), each with a horizontal lintel supported by moulded corbels, with a brick relieving arch above. In the top of the gable there is a round opening with keystones, this being for a louvered ventilator.

The long elevation to the rear is now missing a number of infill panels. At the southern end there is an original side extension taking the form of a side aisle to the main structure. Extending at right angles from this there is a long low range which was a later addition and is not regarded as being part of the building.

INTERIOR: the steel framed building is of 18 bays internally with light-sectioned cambered roof trusses supporting timber purlins. In the floor along the rear wall of the building there is a tram line. At the southern end of the building there is a later inserted upper floor or raised platform formed from girders. On this there is a blockwork built office.

Selected Sources

Marsden, B, York Tramways and Trolley Buses, 2006

Map**National Grid Reference: SE6063851583**

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The above map is for quick reference purposes only and may not be to scale. For a copy of the full scale map, please see the attached PDF - 1419210_1.pdf