



Memorandum

Design, Conservation and Sustainable Development

To: Derek Grant, Street Lighting Delivery Manager
From: Edward Freedman, Conservation Officer

Date: 10/05/22

Re: Historic lamppost, Minster Gates

Ref:

Subject: Heritage appraisal of the historic cast iron lamppost at Minster Gates, demolished by vehicle impact 21/3/22.

The casting in ornate late-Victorian/Edwardian-era Art-Nouveau-influenced design, with octagon-section heavily moulded base supporting round-section shaft with intermittent studded collars, surmounted with swan necked lamp bracket with elaborate scrolled ironwork, acanthus leaves to base, terminating with a down lantern.

Context: Minster Gates lies to the northern end of Stonegate, originally the Via Praetoria, the central street of the Roman fort leading to the headquarters on the site of the Minster. By the medieval period Minster Gates was the principal gateway to the cathedral close, aligning with the south door of the Minster. The gate was removed during the eighteenth century. All of the buildings in the immediate vicinity are listed and span a wide time depth from the medieval to the nineteenth centuries, and the street channels views towards the South front of the Minster. Minster Gates lie in the centre of the Central Historic Core Conservation Area. The context is of the very highest possible heritage significance.

History: The lamppost has a makers plate which has not been deciphered due to build-up of paint. York was home to the distinguished Walker Iron Foundry, John Walker being appointed iron founder to the Queen in 1847, and much of their high quality work survives in the city including the gas lampposts and railings to the Minster fronts and St Leonard's Place. The firm operated until 1926. Other foundries also operated in the city.

John Shaw, the chairman of the Yorkshire Architectural & York Archaeological Society (YAYAS) has researched the history of street lighting in the city. He has identified examples of the distinctive iron Art-Nouveau lampposts across the city centre, from Ouse Bridge to Parliament Street, Deangate and Goodramgate in images from the early decades of the twentieth century, installed following the opening of York Electric Lighting Station in Foss Islands in February 1900 (prior to that lighting would have been gas, and the Minster Gates example replaced a gas lamp in the same position).

The exact design of the Minster Gates example has not been identified elsewhere, albeit the scrolled swan neck form is similar to other patterns of the period, and it may now be the sole surviving example, certainly in York, of the first phase of electric street lighting in the city. Photographic evidence suggests that the other examples in the city centre had been replaced by the 1940s, but the Minster Gates lamppost has survived in its original position for c.120 years.

Assessment: The lamppost has significant aesthetic, historical, evidential and communal interest. Aesthetic value lies in the Art-Nouveau design of the casting and the contribution the historic fixture makes to the setting of the adjacent listed buildings, including the Minster against which it appears as a foreground feature in views from Stonegate, as part of the richly layered historic environment in this location, and as an illustration of the changing design of local streetlighting with reference to the earlier gas lampposts which survive adjacent in Deangate.

Historical and evidential value lies in the sense of the historic streetscape as a multi-layered urban place which retains contributions from past generations of citizens, with two thousand years of structures being visible within metres of the lamppost. The lamppost may constitute the last surviving example of the first phase of electric streetlighting in the city and therefore has a particular technological value.

Communal value lies in the 'familiar and cherished local scene' of the streetscape made up of its enduring components, local feeling being demonstrated by the concern of local businesses, civic groups and the press coverage following the recent demolition.

Legal & policy context: In exercising planning functions within conservation areas the local planning authority has a general duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving and enhancing the

character or appearance of the area (s.72 of the Planning (Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings) Act); and to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the setting of listed buildings (s.66). It should be noted that these legal duties are not applicable in this instance because the erection of a lamppost does not require planning permission, but the local authority should consider the wider regulatory framework for development in the management of the streetscape in this sensitive location.

Historic England advises that historic street furniture *can all enrich our streetscapes. Their familiarity and historical associations reinforce a sense of local identity (Streets for All: Advice for Highway and Public Realm Works in Historic Places, Historic England, 2018, p.23)*. The guidance promotes general principles including to:

- *Encourage the preservation and maintenance of historic street furniture;*
- *Identify and conserve street furniture that contributes to the area's significance or that may be a heritage asset in its own right;*
- *Consider recasting local designs, ensuring details are accurate and authentic*

The *City of York Streetscape Strategy (2013)* states that *Historic columns should be retained wherever practical and possible (p.39)*.

The CYC Street Lighting Policy Form Ref No: SLP/2 V2: May 2018 Anexe A p.6 states that *Existing equipment with historic merit or forming part of a listed structure should be retained and restored by a competent accredited specialist.*

Conclusion & recommendation: The Minster Gates lamppost is an irreplaceable historic asset as a sole surviving example of early electric street furniture. If it was made in York it has additional significance. It contributes to the character and appearance of a site of the highest heritage sensitivity.

Specialist assessment has confirmed that restoration of the lamppost is possible, but it is highly specialised and hence expensive.

Every effort should be made to repair the existing fabric and reinstate the lamppost because replacement with an alternative design would not preserve the heritage values of the asset.

Should repair be impracticable, recasting to the existing pattern should be considered.

Further consideration should be given to whether the remains of the existing lamppost can be salvaged for appropriate reuse in the event that restoration and reinstatement in situ cannot be secured.

Edward Freedman
Conservation Officer