

Case Name: University of York, Central Hall

Case Number: 1455634

Background

Historic England has been asked to assess this building for listing as part of a wide-ranging designation application that includes most of the buildings on the University of York's Campus West, some sculptural work, and also the designed landscape.

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	HE Recommendation
1	1456551	Central Hall, University of York	Listing	Add to List

Visits

Date	Visit Type
17 April 2018	Partial inspection

Context

The University of York is preparing a masterplan to inform estate and funding strategies up to 2027. Their aims regarding the estate are to update the campus over a 21-year period, maintain and enhance the landscape, improve the condition of the buildings, and enhance the student experience. In order to inform the masterplan they are seeking clarity regarding the designation status of the campus buildings and landscape. A programme of replacement has been prepared for those buildings that are not considered fit for purpose or viable to renovate. The draft development brief for the university has identified that new development should be focused on the replacement of existing buildings or construction on car parks in order to limit density and help retain the landscape setting.

At the time of writing Central Hall is undergoing a programme of refurbishment and alteration. It is not located within a conservation area.

Assessment

CONSULTATION

The owner, Local Planning Authority (LPA), local Historic Environment Record (HER), and the Twentieth Century Society were all consulted.

The owner's representative responded to say that the University would not object to the designation of Central Hall.

The Twentieth Century Society responded with thanks for the consultation report and stated that members welcomed the assessment of Central Hall. They had no further comment to make.

No other responses were received.

DISCUSSION

The Principles of Selection for Listing Buildings (DCMS, March 2010) states that after 1840, because of the greatly increased number of buildings erected and the much larger numbers that have survived, progressively greater selection is necessary for listing, and particularly careful selection is required when assessing

buildings constructed after 1945. The Historic England Selection Guide for Education Buildings (December 2017) provides further guidance in this instance and states that higher educational buildings of the post-1945 period include some of the most exciting buildings of their day, and can be of international importance. Sometimes architectural interest will be determined by questions of successful functionality, as well as consideration of design quality. The piecemeal approach that typified campus design up until the 1960s was then often replaced by greater coherence, which can justify a holistic approach to the designation of the heritage assets, perhaps including registration of the landscape.

The University of York was one of seven new universities founded in England between 1958 and 1961 (Sussex, York, East Anglia, Essex, Kent, Warwick and Lancaster). These universities provided the opportunity to experiment with new curricula and teaching methods, and to break new ground in architectural design and planning. In terms of ambition and architectural quality, the seven universities mark the high point of publicly-funded architecture in post-war Britain.

York has been described as a university 'more deeply pondered and clearly conceived than any of its potential rivals' (Saint 1987, 217). The exceptionally detailed development plan behind it was heralded as the beginning of contemporary university planning in Britain. The University of York Development Plan published in 1962 envisaged a series of colleges, specialist science buildings, and a few 'special' structures: Central Hall, which was constructed as part of phase III of the development plan in 1966-1968, is the principal example of these special structures and is also the most prominent. It continues a historic tradition established by late-C19/early-C20 'red brick' universities in featuring a great hall for special events. Later universities, including Hull and Sussex, sought to emulate this feature, but rarely realised their plans. Of the new universities, Warwick built a large hall as part of an arts centre, but apart from York, only Lancaster built a great hall, but this is not a prominent building and is in an unexceptional position. Architecturally and as the centrepiece of a new university, York's Central Hall is unique.

Central Hall was built to the designs of Robert Matthew and Johnson-Marshall and Partners (RMJM) with Stirrat Johnson-Marshall and Andrew Derbyshire as partners in charge. Sir Stirrat Johnson-Marshall was one of the most important and respected architects to emerge in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. He pioneered the CLASP (Consortium of Local Authorities Special Programme) prefabricated system for schools and also designed the Commonwealth Institute, Kensington, Greater London (listed at Grade II*, but now largely demolished). Sir Andrew Derbyshire is known for designing Hillingdon Civic Centre, Greater London (listed at Grade II), but his, and Johnson-Marshall's, best work is considered to be the University of York. Here they developed an extremely close and successful collaboration with the university. RMJM was the only architectural practice to design four universities in Britain: York, Bath, Stirling, and the University of Ulster at Coleraine.

Externally the building dominates the campus lake, which surrounds it on three sides, and is the focus of the campus' most dramatic views. Its imaginative and bold design has resulted in a striking architectural form and massing that is the university's architectural tour de force and most prominent building. As Pevsner & Neave declare: 'it is the one building of the University where - rightly - fancy is allowed free run' (Pevsner & Neave 2005, 466), whilst the Architects' Journal of 23 February 1972 remarked: 'the contrasting shape of the central hall with its cantilevers, and almost surrounded by the lake, is both highly modelled and highly effective'. Its reinforced concrete construction acts as a foil to the colleges and provides a striking contrast to their CLASP construction, whilst its canted sides, cantilevered upper floors and tubular roof with exposed members give it the appearance of an alien spaceship that has just landed at the side of the lake. The result is an eye-catching building with a strong presence and visual impact.

Both externally and internally Central Hall has incurred alteration since its original construction, such as the replacement of the original timber windows with aluminium windows, the subsuming of the first-floor eastern balcony into the main body of the building to create additional storage areas, and interior refurbishment, but this has not significantly compromised its character or its special interest, which remains intact. The building was designed as a flexible multipurpose space for use in examinations, lectures, film showings, exhibitions, and ceremonial occasions, and so it has proved to be. The main auditorium in particular, with its retractable seating and removable sectional stage, enables a versatile and flexible space, and original features still survive, including brick-paved floors and stairs, and moveable catwalks serving the exposed steel roof.

As well as its own intrinsic special interest Central Hall also has strong group value with other listed features on the campus site, including Heslington Hall (Grade II*), the numerous Grade II structures in the hall's formal gardens, Derwent College (Grade II), former Langwith College (Grade II), the covered walkway linking the former Langwith College to Central Hall and Vanbrugh College (Grade II), Grade II listed sculptures, and the Grade II registered designed landscape. Together they showcase the development and design ambitions of this significant campus site.

In recommending the extent of designation we have considered whether powers of exclusion under s1 (5A) of the 1990 Act are appropriate, and consider that they are not appropriate in this instance.

CONCLUSION

After examining all the available records and other relevant information and having carefully considered the architectural and historic interest of this case, the criteria for listing are fulfilled. Central Hall is therefore recommended for listing at Grade II.

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION DECISION

Central Hall, constructed in 1966-1968 to designs by RMJM, is recommended for listing at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

Historic interest:

- * it forms part of a wave of seven new universities that improved access to higher education and marked the high point of publicly-funded architecture in post-war Britain;
- * it is a physical manifestation of the University of York Development Plan, which was heralded as the beginning of contemporary university planning in Britain;
- * it continues a historic tradition established by late-C19/early-C20 'red brick' universities of featuring a great hall for special events.

Architectural interest:

- * it has an imaginative and bold design with a striking architectural form and massing that is the focus of the most dramatic views across the campus lake;
- * it is the university's architectural tour de force and centrepiece building;
- * its reinforced concrete construction acts as a foil to the colleges and provides a striking contrast to their CLASP construction;
- * it was designed by RMJM, the only architectural practice to design four universities in Britain, with the notable mid-C20 architects, Stirrat Johnson-Marshall and Andrew Derbyshire as partners in charge;
- * it successfully fulfils its design brief of being a multipurpose building with features, such as retractable seating and a removable sectional stage that enable a versatile and flexible space;
- * despite some later alteration it retains its overall character, form and key features.

Group value:

- * it has strong group value with other listed features on the campus, including Heslington Hall (Grade II*), the numerous Grade II structures in the hall's formal gardens, Derwent College (Grade II), former Langwith College (Grade II), the covered walkway linking the former Langwith College to Central Hall and Vanbrugh College (Grade II), Grade II listed sculptures, and the Grade II registered designed landscape.

Countersigning comments:

Agreed. As our advice clearly states Central Hall is the centrepiece of the University of York west campus both physically and functionally and is the University's tour de force. It is an accomplished and dramatic building, physically dominating the centre of the contemporary university lake and designed landscape. Strong group value and historical special interest claims add to its interest, such that it clearly merits inclusion on the List at Grade II.

V Fiorato, 10 July 2018

Annex 1**List Entry****List Entry Summary**

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: Central Hall, University of York

List Entry Number: 1456551

Location

Campus West, University Of York, Heslington, York, YO10 5DD

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County	District	District Type	Parish
	York	Unitary Authority	Heslington

National Park: Not applicable to this List entry.

Grade: II

Date first listed:

Date of most recent amendment:

Legacy System Information

This section only relates to older records, created before the introduction of the National Heritage List for England in 2011.

Legacy System: Not applicable to this List entry.

Legacy Number: Not applicable to this List entry.

Asset Groupings

This List entry does not comprise part of an Asset Grouping. Asset Groupings are not part of the official record but are added later for information.

List Entry Description**Summary of Building**

Central lecture and recreation hall to the University of York, 1966-1968 by Robert Matthew, Johnson-Marshall & Partners (RMJM) with Stirrat Johnson-Marshall and Andrew Derbyshire as partners in charge, and John Speight as job architect

Reasons for Designation

Central Hall, constructed in 1966-1968 to designs by RMJM, is listed at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

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History

After several previous attempts at establishing a university in York had failed, in 1953 York Civic Trust and the Rowntree Trust launched the Institute of Archives and the Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies (IAAS), which became key components of the York Academic Trust founded in 1958 in King's Manor in the city centre. The administrator appointed to run both courses was John West-Taylor, who saw them as a stepping stone to the founding of a new university.

In April 1959 the University Grants Committee (UGC) set up a Sub-Committee on New Universities and invited applications from cities or groups of authorities wanting to promote new universities. York's application was approved in April 1960, along with that of Norwich, with further approvals in the following year. The seven new universities in England (Sussex, York, East Anglia, Essex, Kent, Warwick and Lancaster) differed from older institutions in that they were full universities supported by the UGC and setting their own degrees from the outset. All appointed well-respected architects to prepare detailed masterplans and to design the most important buildings, giving each a sense of unity and a distinctive identity.

In York the C16 Heslington Hall about 1.5 miles south-east of the city centre, which had been secured in 1958 by local benefactor John Bowes Morrell, was chosen as the site for the university and Robert Matthew, Johnson-Marshall and Partners (RMJM) were appointed in 1961/1962 as masterplanners with Stirrat Johnson-Marshall and Andrew Derbyshire as partners in charge, working alongside the vice chancellor, West-Taylor and incoming professors to produce a detailed development plan. The hall was adapted as the administrative centre of the university in the first phase of building work in 1963-1965. More grounds were then acquired to the west and it was agreed on the need for a lake as a balancing reservoir to lower the dangerously high water table on the site. A younger RMJM partner, Maurice Lee, specialised in landscape design, which he produced here in conjunction with Herbert Francis (Frank) Clark, previously landscape architect to the Festival of Britain and a co-founder of the Garden History Society.

All the new universities experimented with new course structures, particularly in the growth area of social sciences, and this shaped the movement seen at Sussex, UEA and Essex towards pushing the teaching buildings together as megastructures. By contrast, York's course structure was relatively traditional and collegiate, but enabled daytime teaching facilities and residential accommodation to be combined together so that they could share catering, common rooms and bars, encouraging a 24/7 atmosphere and maximising their usage and the available UGC grant. Buildings were to be of no more than four storeys so that the landscape remained dominant and the overall sense of place palpable.

The masterplan included groups of loose-knit college ranges, with the science laboratories behind them and landmark buildings, such as the library and Central Hall set within a careful pattern of circulation. The university was built in phases that progressed westwards from Heslington Hall, with development becoming more piecemeal as funding became more restricted. A shortage of building labour, expensive materials, and waterlogged ground required a lightweight construction solution in order to avoid expensive piling. In 1946-1947 Johnson-Marshall had devised a prefabricated system using steel frames and concrete panels used by Hertfordshire County Council for building schools, a critically acclaimed programme from which six surviving examples are listed. Its ideals informed the CLASP (Consortium of Local Authorities Special Programme) system developed by Nottinghamshire County Council in 1954-1956. CLASP was designed as a lightweight and flexible structure that could 'ride' the mining of coal seams below them; the first CLASP building, Intake Farm School, Mansfield (Grade II) of 1955-1957 was called the 'rock and roll school'. When York was designed CLASP was at the peak of its success and it was used for fire stations, health centres, libraries and offices. It is used in the design of many of the university's buildings at York.

RMJM was the only architectural practice to design four universities: York, Bath, Stirling, and the University of Ulster at Coleraine, and it specialised in public sector work throughout the 1960s. It began to work outside Britain in the late 1960s and today is a massive international practice with offices in the Middle East, Asia, Africa and the Americas, as well as Europe.

Central Hall was designed as a multi-purpose assembly hall to be used for lectures, examinations, concerts, drama, ceremonial occasions and conferences in 1966-1968 by John Speight of RMJM with Michael Gibbs as assistant, Robert Owston as structural engineer and Henry Robert Humphreys as acoustical consultant. In contrast to the CLASP construction of the other original university buildings Central Hall has a reinforced concrete structure as CLASP could not be used because of the very large spans involved. RMJM's Andrew Derbyshire's preference was also for in-situ structures for the university's one-off buildings.

The hall's increased use for concerts led to the installation of an assisted resonance system in 1973/1974 to provide a longer reverberation time so that the hall could be used for music. The technique of linked microphone-amplifier-loudspeaker units called channels was the first commercial installation after Humphreys' associate Peter Parkin pioneered an experimental prototype at the Royal Festival Hall, London. RMJM adopted it in other public halls, notably the later Hexagon Theatre in Reading. Acousticians admire the system, but it has been disdained by purists and has since been removed from the Royal Festival Hall. Central Hall's concrete was painted in around 2004. The hall is currently (2018) in the process of refurbishment.

Details

Central lecture and recreation hall to the University of York, 1966-1968 by Robert Matthew, Johnson-Marshall & Partners (RMJM) with Stirrat Johnson-Marshall and Andrew Derbyshire as partners in charge, and John Speight as job architect

MATERIALS: in-situ reinforced concrete, mild steel, mellow-red and blue brick, and aluminium.

PLAN: as its name suggests, Central Hall is set roughly to the centre of Campus West and is set upon a stepped terrace of mellow-red and blue brick surrounded by the campus lake on the north, west and south sides. It has an irregular hexagonal plan with canted sides facing the lake and a straight side to the east, and comprises a large auditorium set above a smaller ground-floor containing entrance and exhibition spaces.

EXTERIOR: the building is an in-situ reinforced concrete structure with a suspended mild steel tubular roof clad in aluminium. The upper floors, which contain the auditorium, are cantilevered out on the lake sides and the structural members of the tubular roof are exposed at the apex. A gallery/balcony runs around the building at first-floor level on the east side (now enclosed and subsumed into the building on this eastern side), rising to second-floor level on the lake sides, with wide external concrete stairs with tiled coverings incorporated to the north-east and south-east corners and replaced aluminium fire doors. Ribbon windows on

the inside wall of the second-floor balcony light the auditorium in the style of a clerestory, and double doors provide access to the uppermost auditorium seating. The ground floor is mainly glazed; the windows on the lake sides were originally timber and cantilevered inwards at the top, but they have since been replaced by flush aluminium windows. Two glazed ground-floor projections to the north-west and south-west corners with mellow-red and blue-brick plinths contain stairs leading up to the auditorium. The main entrance is located on the eastern side of the building and is recessed underneath the upper floors and consists of a series of original timber glazed entrance doors, although at the time of writing these are due to be replaced by glazed aluminium doors. A canted lift shaft projection rises above the roofline on the east side and lies opposite the main entrance.

INTERIOR: at the time of writing (2018) the interior is in the process of being refurbished in three phases that are due to complete in June 2019 and works remain ongoing. Internally the main entrances lead into a central entrance lobby flanked by stair lobbies accessing north and south stairs that lead up to the first-floor auditorium. The central lobby leads through into a large foyer overlooking the lake on the ground floor with a brick-paved floor. The foyer has a dual function as an exhibition space and originally contained a central bar, but this has been removed. Brick-paved stairs in the north-west and south-west corners lead up from the foyer to the auditorium. A caretaker's office on the north side of the foyer entrance with a canted corner has been removed and a reception desk is due to be installed in its place. A correspondingly shaped former cleaner's store on the south side of the foyer entrance has also been removed and a new curved wall partition erected. Alongside the bare-brick east wall of the foyer are toilets. Above the main foyer is an auditorium, which is currently hidden from view by scaffolding. The auditorium has tiered seating for 1250 people on the canted sides of the building, which is arranged around a removable sectional stage and an orchestra pit cover. The exposed steel roof has moveable catwalks for maintenance and lighting. The seating is accessed by brick-paved stair flights and is retractable, enabling the space to be used for exhibitions and examinations when not in auditorium use. At the top of the seating tiers are doors leading out onto the second-floor wrap-around balcony. At the time of writing the seating is due to be removed and replaced by a new retractable system. The east wall of the auditorium is of mellow-red and blue brick with a central rectangular proscenium opening and beyond is the stage foyer. The foyer originally led out onto the external first-floor eastern balcony, but the balcony has been subsumed into the main building on this side to create storage areas. Above the stage foyer and former east balcony on the second floor are dressing rooms, toilets and a rehearsal room, along with an internal balcony overlooking the auditorium. On the third floor above are plant and storage rooms.

Selected Sources

Books and journals

Pevsner, N, Neave, D, Neave, S, Hutchinson, J, *The Buildings of England. Yorkshire: York and the East Riding*, (2005), 463-467

Saint, A, *Towards a Social Architecture. The Role of School-Building in Post-War England*, (1987), 214-222

'Assisted resonance at the Central Hall, York University' in *The Architects' Journal*, (31 July 1974), 297-300

'Building Revisited. York University' in *The Architects' Journal Information Library*, (23 February 1972), 415-426

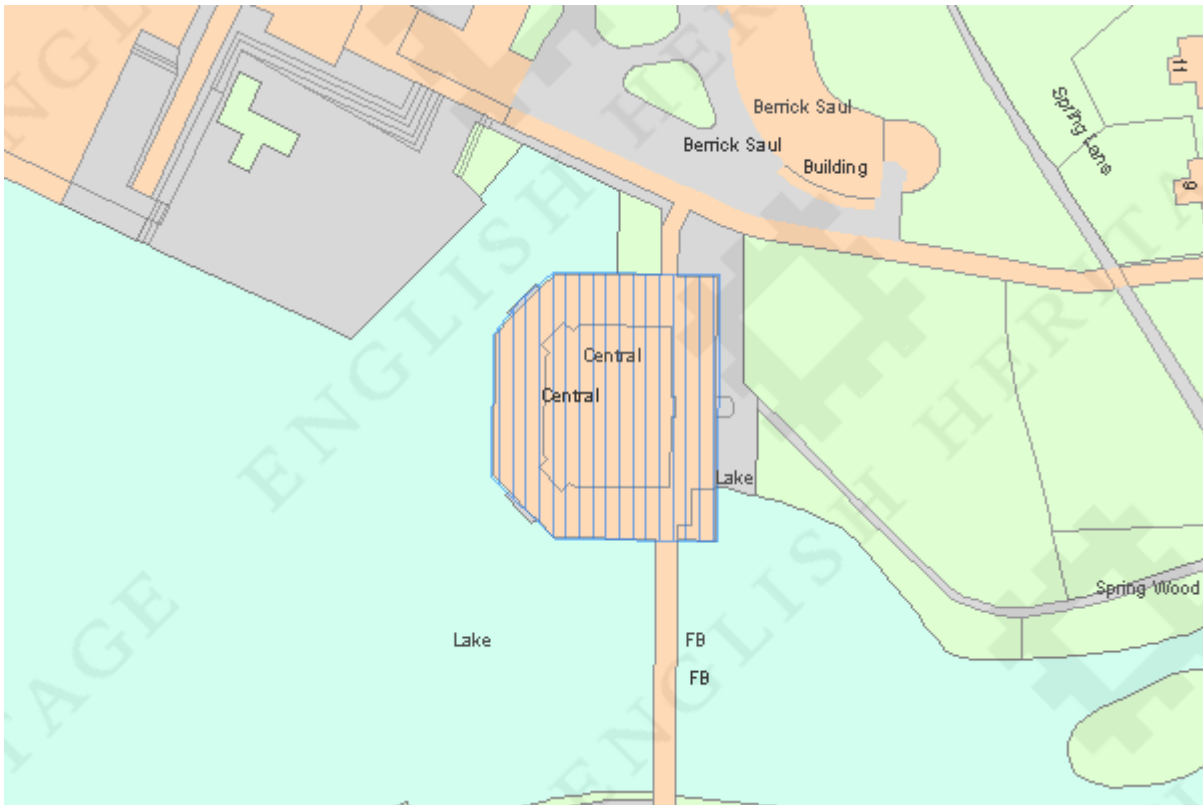
'Proposed Central Hall, and Concert Hall and Music Department' in *PERSPECTIVE East Yorkshire*, (1967), 449-450

Other

University of York Development Plan 1962-1972

Map

National Grid Reference: SE6225650518



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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 - 1456551_1.pdf