

Fairfax House, Castlegate, York

Faience Repair | Standing Buildings Watching Brief



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Revision: –

Maybank Building Conservation LLP

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0.0 Non-Technical Summary

In July 2019 concerns were raised about the condition of the C20th faience facade at the Grade I listed, Fairfax House, Castlegate York (UID 1259337). A programme of photographic recording was undertaken during repair works to fulfil Condition 4 of Listed Building Consent (City of York Council Ref: 19/02407/LBC). The repair scheme was undertaken by Pinnacle Conservation for the property owners, the York Conservation Trust. The Faience panels were carefully removed, the rusting steel joist behind was cleaned and treated, and the faience reinstated. Damaged faience tiles were replicated and replaced. Although some of the faience pieces are stamped or labelled, no manufacturer has been established; Lumley Brickworks in Chester-le-Street must be considered a possible contender.

1.0 Introduction

The site's owner, the York Conservation Trust (YCT), commissioned Maybank Buildings Conservation (MBC) to undertake a Standing Buildings Watching Brief during repairs to the faience facade of No.25 Castlegate, part of the Grade I listed Fairfax House, a significant C18th-century townhouse.

The faience facade dates from c.1921, when Fairfax House was altered and converted into St George's Hall Cinema. This work involved incorporating the adjacent early-C19th house (no.25) into the site, and converting its ground floor into the new entrance lobby for the site. Repairs were undertaken by Pinnacle Construction Ltd. during the summer of 2020, with work being interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Repairs were completed in August 2020.

2.0 Site Description

Fairfax House is Grade I listed structure (UID #1259337) located within the historic core of York. The site is located within the York Central Conservation Area and within an Area of Archaeological Importance. Fairfax House is situated near Clifford's Tower, a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM), and Castlegate contains numerous listed historic buildings (figure 1), largely of post medieval date but also including the redundant medieval parish church of St Mary. Designated Sites in the immediate vicinity of the site:

HNLE ID	Designation	Type	Name
1011799	SAM	Monument	York Castle: motte and bailey castle
1259325	I	Monument	Clifford's Tower
1259338	I	Building	Castlegate House
1259342	I	Building	The York Story (St Mary's Castlegate)
1259339	II*	Monument	Railings and Gate Piers to Castlegate House
1259340	II	Building	29 Castlegate
1259341	II	Building	31 Castlegate
1259336	II	Building	No. 20 and wall attached to the south west corner

Today Castlegate is a quiet side street, however, prior to the construction of Clifford Street in 1880-1, Castlegate was a much more significant thoroughfare. It's status as a polite Georgian street is demonstrated by the survival of numerous listed properties from the period, including Fairfax House and Castlegate House. Historic mapping shows that in the C18th, Fairfax House had a large garden that ran westward from Castlegate towards the Ouse. The River Foss runs to the east of the site, perhaps explaining why the gardens were located opposite rather than behind the house.



Figure 1 Historic England map showing designated sites (blue triangles), with Fairfax House outlined in red © Historic England

3.0 Aims and Objectives

The recording and watching brief were undertaken to provide a record of the exposed structure during works to repair the failing faience facade. The work was undertaken to fulfil Condition 4 of Listed Building Consent (City of York Council Ref: 19/02407/LBC). The condition required a programme of recording of the repair work to the faience at Fairfax House including a written description, analysis and photographic recording to Historic England Level of Recording 3.

4.0 Methodology

Record photography was undertaken of the wall prior to work commencing, with images captured on a Canon 5D Mark IV DSLR camera with a 24-70mm L-series lens. The standing building recording was undertaken in accordance with the Project Design, Risk Assessment and Method Statement. Recording was undertaken in accordance with Historic England's (2016) *Understanding Historic Buildings: a guide to good practice*. This report is produced in accordance with the *ClfA Standards and guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures*, published 2014 (updated 2020).

Limitations - this project was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, limiting safe access to the site, and preventing any recording being undertaken during reinstatement.

5.0 Documentary Research

Fairfax House has been the subject of considerable research, including by the Royal Commission (RCHME 1981). It is therefore not proposed to reproduce the history of the site here. A detailed historical overview of Fairfax House can be found in the 2019 Heritage Statement (YSW19-05) prepared by the York Conservation Trust, which itself draws on a Conservation Statement prepared by Purcell (2014).

Today Fairfax House comprises two buildings, being a large C18th townhouse with an attached early-C19th house to the north. The C18th townhouse was constructed c.1704, but was subsequently heavily remodelled by John Carr for Viscount Fairfax in 1760-2. The extent of the remodelling and surviving early C18th-fabric remain unclear. This building remained in domestic use until 1865, after which the site served as a gentlemen's club. In 1919 the site was converted into a cinema, at which point the attached no.25 Castlegate was incorporated into the site to serve as the cinema entrance. Little is known about this early C19th domestic property prior to its conversion, which included the remodelling of the ground floor facade with the addition of the decorative faience that forms the focus of this report. Following the closure of the cinema in 1960, Fairfax House was used as a dance school before a major restoration was undertaken in 1982, led by the York Civic Trust. This significant restoration campaign largely reinstated the mid C18th elite townhouse, and today the site serves as a museum, housing Noel Terry's collection of C18th furniture. The site is owned by the York Conservation Trust, and is occupied by the York Civic Trust, who operate the museum.

6.0 Analysis and Interpretation

- 6.1 The faience pieces are white glazed, which is today heavily crazed, and they are separated by a fine white mortar. See drawing YAW-19-05-100 REV 02 for details of the extent of removal and repair/replacement. When the faience pieces were removed, they were found to have been mortared directly onto the earlier brickwork behind. Below the brickwork, a course of long limestone masonry sits on a large steel I-beam that acts as a lintel for the large opening forming the entrance lobby below (figure 2).



Figure 2 Removal of the faience pieces revealed the earlier brickwork behind, which is supported on a course of masonry sitting on a steel I-beam lintel.

- 6.2 None of the faience pieces were found to have any maker's marks or logos, and the manufacturer is not known. Some of the faience pieces were however numbered on the sides, with the numbers prefixed "DA". Some of these labels were stamped (figure 3), while others were clearly incised by hand with a pointed tool or wire (figure 4). Faience was manufactured extensively throughout late Victorian Britain, and most manufacturers have ceased production or ceased to exist. The label DA, might be indicative of the manufacturer of these pieces, but it has not yet been linked to an individual firm.



Figure 3 Stamped label on the side of a faience tile, reading "DA 107", from a flat panel (tile 3.15).



Figure 4 Handwritten label on the side of a faience tile, reading "DA 100X", from a flat panel (tile 4.4).

- 6.2 The numbering scheme relates to the course and bay location rather than to the shape of the faience piece. That is, the numbering for identical pieces changes depending on its location within the Fairfax House scheme. For example the central rectangular panels in the centre of each bay are respectively labelled DA106 (left bay), DA107 (centre bay) and DA108 (right bay). Despite these rectangular panels being identical, they are numbered according to their location within this particular faience scheme. This indicates the faience was produced specifically for this scheme, rather than being standard mass produced pieces.
- 6.3 Not all faience pieces contain labels, indeed most are blank. The numbering of the labels doesn't seem to reflect any particular order, either from base to top or left to right (figure 5).

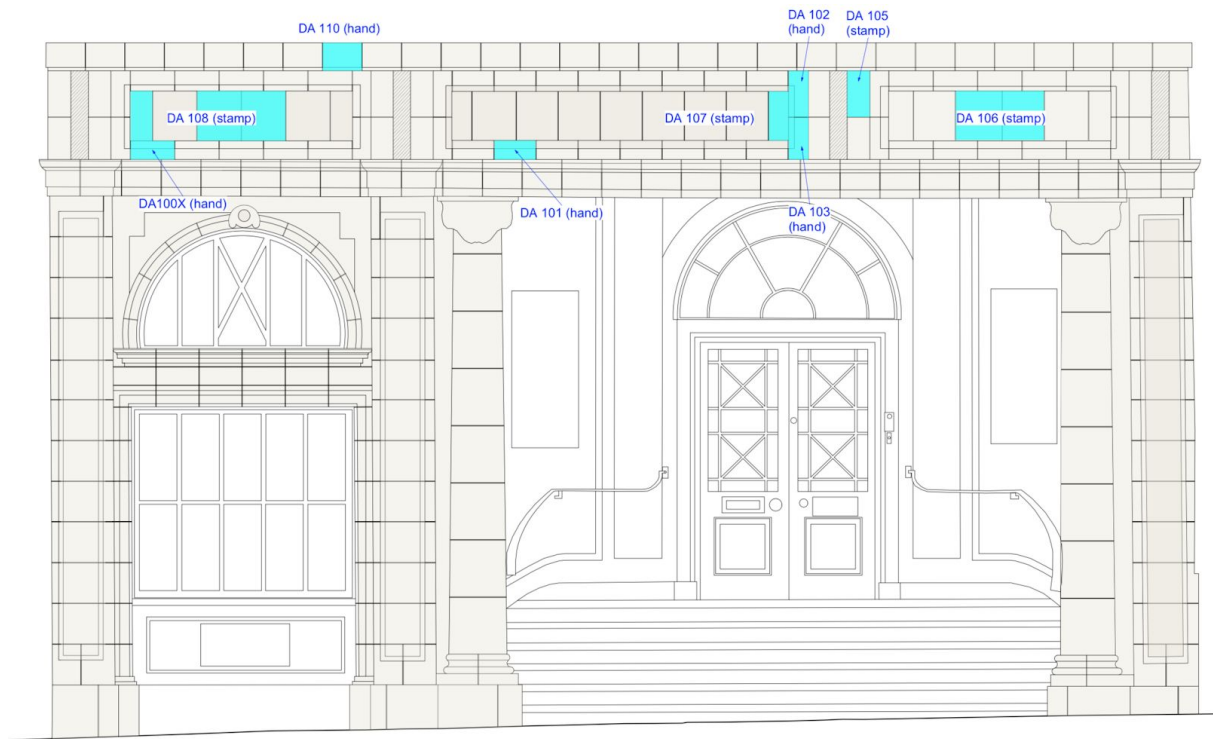


Figure 5 Location of identified lapels (stamped or handwritten) on the faience pieces (base drawing © YCT).

6.4 Four rectangles of cementitious mortar mark the mounting locations of a former canopy that accompanied the faience facade. Between pairs of acanthus scrolls these plain concrete panels were painted white. When this later material was removed, a piece of small-section steel I-beam was revealed in each, representing the mounting points for the canopy frame (figure 6). It is not known how these panels were originally decorated, but they were presumably not faience.



Figure 6 Canopy mounting location between two acanthus brackets, with the broken T-section joist visible at the top following the removal of the white-painted concrete.

- 6.5 The canopy is visible in historic photographs and was likely installed with the faience, especially given the intentional spacing within the faience design. The canopy originally contained patterned glass and text on its front face (figure 7).



Figure 7 (Left) A photograph of the site in the 1920s showing the original design and canopy for St George's Hall, and (Right) the same canopy in 1965 © York Press

- 6.5 There is evidence of regular holes drilled into the top course of the faience, presumably relating to the fixing of a canopy (figure 8). The holes have been drilled through the faience.



Figure 8 One of the small holes (highlighted in red) drilled into the top line of faience tiles as part of a canopy mount.

- 6.6 The left composite capital (6.5) flanking the entranceway has clearly been repaired at some point in the C20th (figure 9). The course above it (tile 5.12) has clearly also been repaired and has been pinned back in place with 2 stainless steel pins into the course above.



Figure 9 C20th repair to the left volute of the composite capital (6.5).

- 6.7 Written in the exposed face of the steel I-beam lintel is the text “14x6H LEEDS STEEL WORKS ENGLAND” although corrosion is starting to make the text illegible (figure 10). The figures represent the I beam’s dimensions in inches. Leeds Steel Works operated from 1888 until 1935, occupying a 10 acre site with four blast furnaces at Hunslet, Leeds.



Figure 10 Visible lettering on the face of the Steel I-beam following cleaning. Corrosion from water ingress has deteriorated the beam and reduced its legibility to the right.

- 6.8 The beam at Fairfax matches an 1888 advertisement from the company (figure 11), where a 14x6 joist is listed.

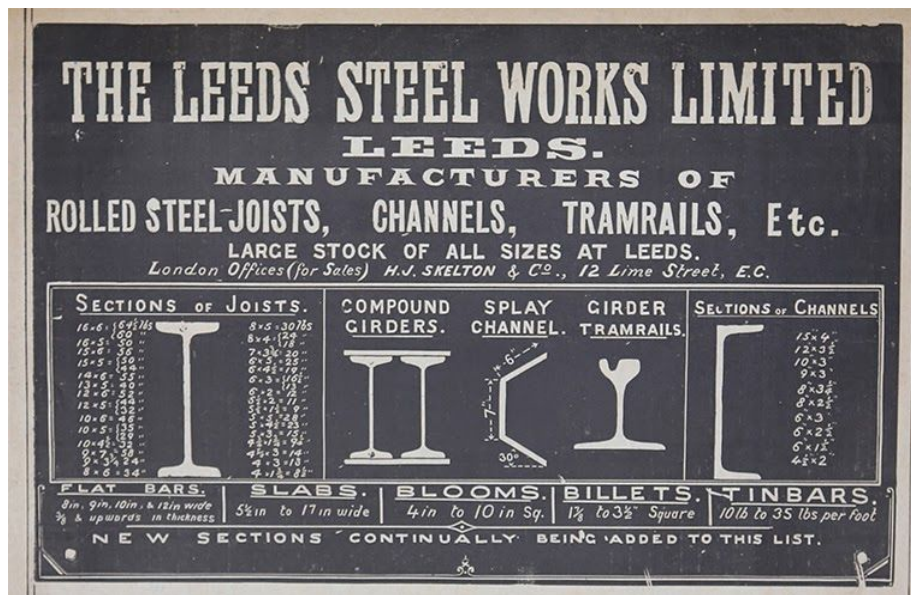


Figure 11 Advertisement for the Leeds Steel Works from 1896, with joists shown on the left. © [Grace Guides](#)

- 6.9 Below the steel lintel, a course of bricks forms the soffit of the entranceway opening. The bricks are laid on their sides, and on one the stamp is partially visible, revealing it was made by the Lumley Brickworks (figure 12).



Figure 12 Lumley Brick forming the soffit of the opening, immediately behind the composite capital at the right side of the entranceway. © [Solway Past](#)

- 6.10 The Lumley Brickworks was founded in the 1870s in Chester-le-Street, next to the No.6 pit. The firm appears to have used quite a few different stamps, including an outline of Lumley Castle on early examples. A full brick with a similar stamp (figure 13) suggests the full text reads "Lumley Brk Ltd Fence. Houses".



Figure 13 Lumley Brick with similar stamp © [Old Bricks](#)

- 6.11 Little information appears to be available about the Lumley Brickworks. However it is noted that they manufactured enameled bricks glazed a number of colours, including cream. Lumley Brickworks must therefore be considered a possible manufacturer for the Faience facade at Fairfax. If so, it is curious however that none of the faience features any of the company's many different stamps.

7.0 Conclusions

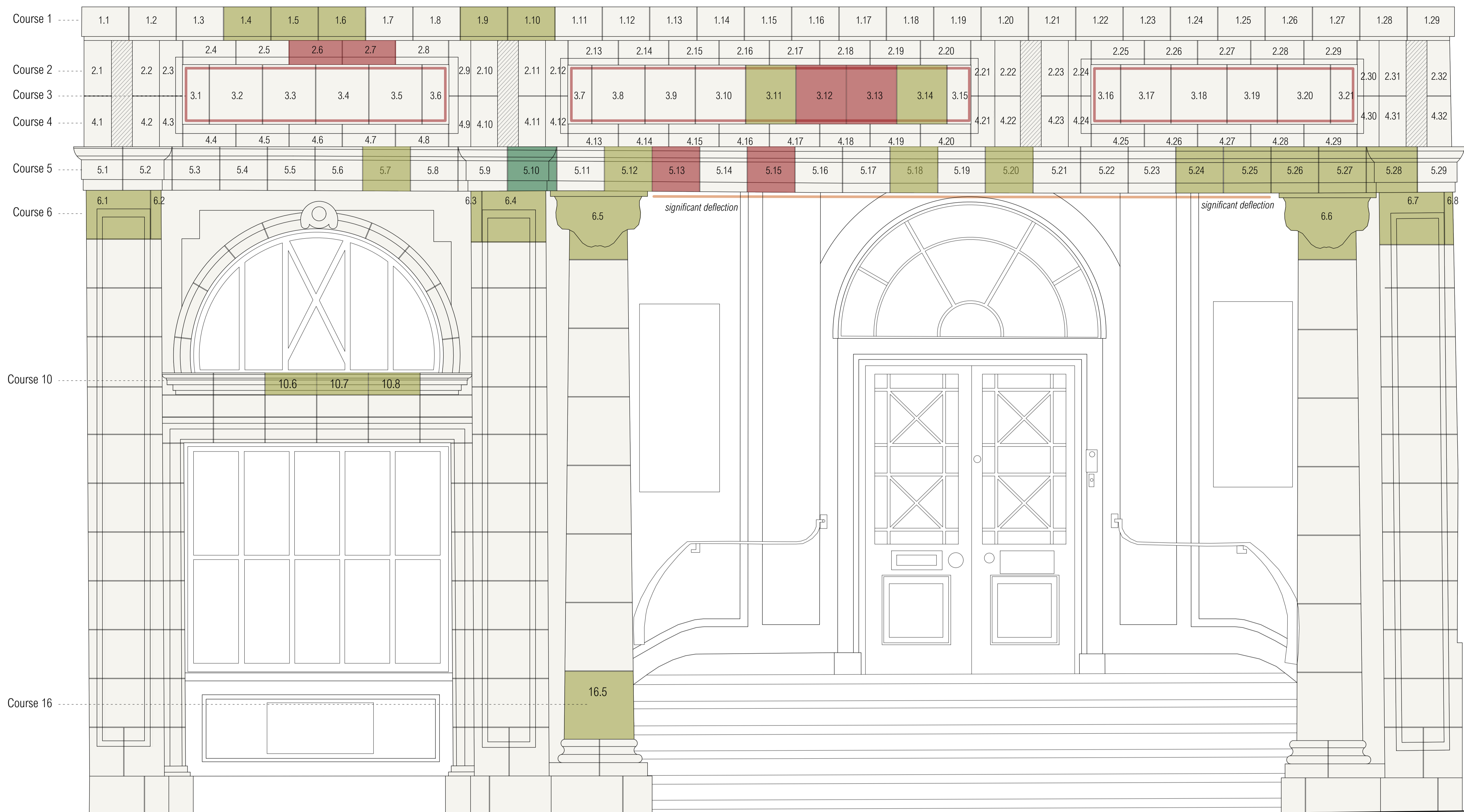
- 7.1 Faience was at peak popularity in the UK from c.1890 to 1914, with its use declining following the First World War (Fidler 1983, 27). The labels found on the c.1921 faience facade at Fairfax House suggests the pieces were created specifically for this design, and possibly specifically for this building - the mix of stamped and handwritten labels implies it was not a common or pattern book design. The manufacturer has not been identified. The present opening was created into the early C19th brick facade with the insertion of a large steel I-beam from the Leeds Steelworks. The design includes 4 blank sections between acanthus scrolls, indicating that the canopy was an integral part of the design despite requiring the drilling of fixing holes into the upper course of faience.

8.0 Bibliography

ClfA (2020) *Standards and guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures*.

Fidler, (1983) 'The Manufacture of Architectural Terracotta and Faience in the United Kingdom' in *Bulletin of the Association for Preservation Technology Vol.15, No.2*, pp.27-32.

Historic England (2016) *Understanding Historic Buildings: a guide to good practice*. Swindon: Historic England.



Location

Key

- Loose tile | Potential to fall free.
- General area of loose tiling with potential to fall.
- Fractured tile | Small fragments loose and in danger of falling.
- Tile out of position but not loose | May become loose without intervention.
- Signs of structural movement | Areas to tiles above need to be removed to permit further investigation.

02	PLANNING (LBC) STATUS.	GB	11.11.19
01	COURSES 10 - 16 ADDED.	GB	03.09.19
REV	AMENDMENT	DWN	DATE

RIBA STAGE 4

CONTRACTOR MUST VERIFY ALL DIMENSIONS ON SITE BEFORE COMMENCING ANY WORK OR MAKING ANY SHOP DRAWINGS



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Job Title
Fairfax House
Faience Repairs to Main Entrance

Drawing Title Elevation Record of Defects	
Scale 1:15 @ A1	Drawn GB
Date August 2019	Checked

Drawing Number
YSW-19-05-100 | REV 02

Detailed Elevation 1:15

Course	Tile ref	Type	Condition / Defect	
Course 1	1.1	Shaped head	Cosmetic damage - drill hole	
	1.2	Shaped head	Cosmetic damage - drill hole	
	1.3	Shaped head	Cosmetic damage - drill hole	
	1.4	Shaped head	Broken tile - Loose fragments	
	1.5	Shaped head	Broken tile - Loose fragments	
	1.6	Shaped head	Broken tile - Loose fragments	
	1.7	Shaped head	Cosmetic damage - drill hole	
	1.8	Shaped head	Cosmetic damage - drill hole	
	1.9	Shaped head	Broken tile - Loose fragments	
	1.10	Shaped head	Broken tile - Loose fragments	
	1.11	Shaped head	Cosmetic damage - drill hole	
	1.12	Shaped head	Cosmetic damage - drill hole	
	1.13	Shaped head	Cosmetic damage - drill hole	
	1.14	Shaped head	Cosmetic damage - drill hole	
Course 2	2.1	Highly ornate	N/A	
	2.2	Highly ornate	N/A	
	2.3	Shaped border	N/A	
	2.4	Shaped border	N/A	
	2.5	Shaped border	N/A	
	2.6	Shaped border	Poor connection - Loose Tile	
	2.7	Shaped border	Poor connection - Loose Tile	
	2.8	Shaped border	N/A	
	2.9	Shaped corner	N/A	
	2.10	Highly ornate	N/A	
	2.11	Highly ornate	N/A	
	2.12	Shaped corner	N/A	
	2.13	Shaped border	N/A	
	2.14	Shaped border	N/A	
Course 3	3.1	Plain	Potential to become loose	
	3.2	Plain	Potential to become loose	
	3.3	Plain	Potential to become loose	
	3.4	Plain	Potential to become loose	
	3.5	Plain	Potential to become loose	
	3.6	Plain	Potential to become loose	
	3.7	Plain	Potential to become loose	
	3.8	Plain	Potential to become loose	
	3.9	Plain	Potential to become loose	
	3.10	Plain	Potential to become loose	
	3.11	Plain	Large fracture - Loose Tile	
	3.12	Plain	Poor connection - Loose Tile	
	3.13	Plain	Poor connection - Loose Tile	
	3.14	Plain	Large fracture - Loose Tile	
Course 4	4.1	Highly ornate	N/A	
	4.2	Highly ornate	N/A	
	4.3	Shaped corner	N/A	
	4.4	Shaped border	N/A	
	4.5	Shaped border	N/A	
	4.6	Shaped border	N/A	
	4.7	Shaped border	N/A	
	4.8	Shaped border	N/A	
	4.9	Shaped corner	N/A	
	4.10	Highly ornate	N/A	
	4.11	Highly ornate	N/A	
	4.12	Shaped corner	N/A	
	4.13	Shaped border	N/A	
	4.14	Shaped border	N/A	
Course 5	5.1	Capital	N/A	
	5.2	Capital	N/A	
	5.3	Cornice	N/A	
	5.4	Cornice	N/A	
	5.5	Cornice	N/A	
	5.6	Cornice	N/A	
	5.7	Cornice	Damage to base - Potential to come loose	
	5.8	Cornice	N/A	
	5.9	Capital	N/A	
	5.10	Capital	Out of position but not loose	
	5.11	Cornice	N/A	
	5.12	Cornice	Fractured tile - Potential to come loose	
	5.13	Cornice	Loose tile	
	5.14	Cornice	N/A	
Course 6	6.1	Capping	Fractured tile - Potential to come loose	
	6.2	Capping Cnr	Fractured tile - Potential to come loose	
	6.3	Capping Cnr	Fractured tile - Potential to come loose	
	6.4	Capping	Fractured tile - Potential to come loose	
	6.5	Ornate Capital	Fractured tile - Potential to come loose	
	6.6	Ornate Capital	Fractured tile - Potential to come loose	
	6.7	Capping	Fractured tile - Potential to come loose	
	6.8	Capping Cnr	Fractured tile - Potential to come loose	
	6.5	Fluted column	Broken tile - beyond repair	
	Course 10	10.6	Cornice	Fractured tile - potential to come loose
		10.7	Cornice	Fractured tile - potential to come loose
		10.8	Cornice	Fractured tile - potential to come loose
		10.6	Cornice	Fractured tile - potential to come loose
		10.7	Cornice	Fractured tile - potential to come loose
10.8		Cornice	Fractured tile - potential to come loose	
10.6		Cornice	Fractured tile - potential to come loose	
10.7		Cornice	Fractured tile - potential to come loose	
10.8		Cornice	Fractured tile - potential to come loose	
10.6		Cornice	Fractured tile - potential to come loose	
10.7		Cornice	Fractured tile - potential to come loose	
10.8		Cornice	Fractured tile - potential to come loose	
10.6		Cornice	Fractured tile - potential to come loose	
10.7		Cornice	Fractured tile - potential to come loose	
Course 16	16.5	Fluted column	Broken tile - beyond repair	

Schedule of Defects