Like most towns of the 19th century York faced many pressing contemporary problems that could not be met by referring to mediaeval precedents. Britain had been transformed by a revolution in industrial production and transport. Places like Leeds, Darlington and Middlesborough were completely transformed by these new forces of production and distribution. From negligible places in the Middle Ages, they grew to be vital parts of the new industrial Britain at unprecedented speed. In this world, York became something of a backwater, clinging onto its mediaeval appearance and status as an important law court and administrative centre, though simultaneously becoming a railway town and a site for those characteristic Victorian institutions the Mill (factory) and the Workhouse. Though York’s growth was not as spectacular as Leeds, it needed new housing and expanded beyond the restriction of the City walls, parts of which narrowly escaped being pulled down.
Not amused: Victoria ‘empress’ statue

Once designed to remind the citizens of York that they were part of an empire on which the sun never set and displayed in the Guildhall, this statue of Queen Victoria has been relegated to West Bank Park, Holgate Road, amidst receptive foliage.
Windmills were scarcely new in the Victorian age; they had been a necessary part of food processing since the Middle Ages. Holgate windmill, however, was improved during the 19th century with a curb ring and other mechanical features derived from 19th century railway technology.
Terrace houses: Falconer Street

The Victorians faced an urban housing crisis. By the end of the century more people were living in cities and towns than in the countryside for the first time in British history. The terrace house was the Victorian’s solution. Maximum use of minimum space. These are simple ‘two-up, two-downs’ (two rooms upstairs, two downstairs) but they are not immune to the Victorian desire to create distinctions of status wherever possible. White brick seems to have been more prestigious than red brick and these buildings have a facing of red brick that does not extend to the sides or rear of the terrace. Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and Wilde’s *Dorian Gray* extend the trope of smart façade and disreputable rear to cover the Victorian body as well as the Victorian city.
Railway sidings and sites of works
Though now mostly derelict, this photo from the Victorian iron bridge near St Paul’s Terrace shows approximately a quarter of the land that was eventually devoted to railway workshops, sidings and the support structures of the railway.
York’s New Railway Station
York’s first railway station pierced the walls of York and ended up at the top of Station road. It was rapidly found too small and impractical. The new station was set outside the city walls on a large curve to reduce the need for shunting. One of the clichés of Victorian Britain is that the stations are the cathedrals of its age. Like most clichés it has a vivid basis in fact. The sweep of roof and pillars recollects the nave of York Minster.

Heraldic Detail: York New Station
The technology that built the station was unprecedented. The ability to manufacture and assemble such vast areas of steel and glass did not exist before the 19th century. As if to reassure travellers that this structure was as safe as temples and castles, let alone houses, the station’s pillars were shaped like those of Greek temples and heraldic details were included. The white rose of Yorkshire and the arms of the city of York (five lions or on a cross gules on a field argent) assuage local pride. Railways gradually displace coaches in Dickens’ novels and are the major mode of national transport in Trollop and Conan-Doyle.
Notice the Classical Greek style pillar and foliage crown on the left and the clock on the right. Though taken for granted by modern travellers, the railways made accurate clocks and a national system of time-keeping possible and essential. A standard time could be carried round Britain by the railways replacing the old ‘system’ where each town decided what time to set their clocks at. The factories, schools and workhouses could be all run to the same time and same timetable.
Museum Gardens

Frequently disturbed by the effects of urbanisation and industrial power, particularly the sooty, acidic deposits of the dark smoke that Ruskin believed created ‘The great storm cloud of the nineteenth century’, the Victorians conceived of city parks as the lungs of the city. York’s Museum Gardens contained an archaeological museum to improve the minds as well as bodies of citizens and impressive trees, including some exotics that display the flora of the British Empire to the stay-at-homes of York.
York Art Gallery shares the national 19th century civic aim of offering opportunities to improve the hearts and minds of visitors and locals.

Constructed first in 1879 for a Yorkshire Fine Art and Industrial Exhibition, it was converted into the City Art Gallery in 1892. With more than a touch of local pride, a statue of William Etty, the most famous painter to come from York in the 19th century, fronts the art gallery. The Victorians were embarrassed that his main skill was in appreciative life-drawings and paintings of the nude, both male and female…
Mill House, North Street
Despite their supposed piety and respect for the Middle Ages, the Victorians didn’t worry about inserting what looks like a small factory or warehouse adjoining a mediaeval church. Before the 21st century feels too sanctimonious, it must be pointed out that this church is now the Priory Bar and Restaurant. It still retains its bells, which are rung occasionally by campanologists who have to stand behind the bar.
York Workhouse 1
The iron fist of Victorian social engineering. In 1768 York’s workhouse was an adapted, relatively small ex-cotton factory down Marygate. This vast structure was purpose built on Huntington Road in 1849. (A History of Yorkshire: The City of York, ed. P.M. Tillot (London, Oxford University Press, 1961, 171-2, 219-20, 279-80) It is designed to be a deterring structure and was once walled with barred windows.
York Workhouse 2

As this frontage shows, the building was deterring but grand. Such warehouses were designed to address the fears raised by Malthus that the poor were breeding too fast and creating a ‘surplus population’. On entering the workhouse, the breeding of the poor was stopped by being separated into male and female dormitories. Dickens makes Scrooge reveal the ideology behind the institution when he inquires ‘And the Union workhouses? ... Are they still in operation?’ amidst asking about the prisons and Treadmill (A Christmas Carol, 1843, 17). When told many of the poor would rather die than go there, Scrooge retorts: ‘If they would rather die, ... they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.) (A Christmas Carol,18). In Our Mutual Friend (1863) the Betty Higden dies by the roadside rather than go in a workhouse The concept of a ‘surplus population’ could take on a racial aspect, as in the mind of Conrad’s Kurtz: ‘Exterminate all the brutes’ (Heart of Darkness). Inheriting such ideas, Nazi extermination camps such as Treblinka existed to destroy a surplus population within twenty minutes instead of over generations.
Today the buildings are used to lodge students of St John’s. Some will be in the lower back rooms of the large building behind the chapel in the foreground. According to the original plans these were once ‘Idiot Wards’ with convenient access to the ‘Male Idiot’s Yard’ and the ‘Female Idiots’ Yard. … (http://www.workhouses.org.uk/York/)
The Victorians had an equivocal relationship with York’s mediaeval city walls, threatening to demolish inconvenient stretches. They removed Skeldergate Postern and the barbicans of all the gates except Walmgate Bar. When they eventually decided to preserve the walls as a tourist attraction they seem to have decided that parts were not antique enough, hence the addition of a couple of fake turrets to tower 28 in 1887-9. (City of York: Volume Two: The Defences, (England, Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, 124a)
Scarcroft School

By the end of the 19th century Victorian Britain had accepted that the state should provide elementary education for its children. Scarcroft school (1896) and its near contemporaries Haxby Road, Poppleton Road and Fishergate were built on a monumental scale and designed to accommodate all eligible children in York. Scarcroft was designed to hold about 1,000. (*A History of Yorkshire: The City of York*, ed. P.M. Tillot (London, Oxford University Press, 1961, 440-460) Diffusion to the suburbs has meant these schools have hardly ever been full.)
Concerned to reinforce not reduce gender stereotyping, Scarcroft School built a Girls’ Entrance and a Boys’ Entrance. A similar entrance survives at Park Grove Primary. Notice the lack of possessive apostrophe!