The purpose of this piece is to illustrate the way in which the air-wars of the two world wars placed civilians in even relatively unmilitary towns like York in the front line. York was bombed several times by Zeppelins in WWI, probably accidentally; the docks of Hull were their main target. During WWII York suffered several ‘hit and run’ raids by single aircraft but only one major air-raid. This was in the early hours of April 29th, 1942. 74 were killed, 92 seriously injured, 113 wounded. (Yorkshire fights Back, Charles Whiting, Easingwold, G. H. Smith, 2005). It was one of the so-called ‘Baedeker’ raids, where German aircraft attacked historic British towns in revenge for the destruction of Luebeck on March 28/29th, 1942. According to the RAF official history Luebeck was chosen ‘because it was known to be lightly defended … and would burn easily’. It intensified a cycle of retribution. ‘Bomber’ Harris quoted the Bible ‘They have sown the wind, they shall reap the whirlwind.’ It would lead to the complete destruction of the German air force and the fire-storms of Hamburg, Dresden and Darmstadt. Modern estimates think 25,000 people died in Dresden.

According to modern folklore the scars on the walls below King’s Staith are the result of a low-level daylight Heinkel attack on Dec 17th, 1941.
York was relatively lucky. Where Coventry lost its entire mediaeval core and cathedral during their Baedeker, in York the Guildhall and St Martin’s church were the only ancient building burned out. The Guildhall was restored; St Martins was left in partial ruins as a peace memorial.
The Guildhall

York Railway Station
An important centre for military transport. The station was burnt out. There is a plaque to Station Foreman William Milner, killed trying to get medical supplies out of a burning building.

*Poppleton Road School (skyline)*

The German bomber stream covered most of the sky over York from here to the horizon. Poppleton Road School received a direct hit. As the war developed attack planners recognised the phenomenon of ‘creep back’, planes bombing at the fringe of a burning area, instead of pressing their attack home. To combat this the RAF set up Pathfinders, light bombers who would identify aiming points and mark them with flares.
The Bar Convent: New Brick
The new brick marks the repair of bomb damage. 5 nuns died on the night of the air raid. (Leo Kessler The Great York Air Raid, Clapham, Dalesman, 1979)
I3 Upper Price Street
Destroyed by a bomb dropped by a Zeppelin in 1916. George Alison, aged 70, and his wife Sarah Ann killed (The Evening Press, February 24, 1997, 7).

By 1943 raids on Germany would be carried out by about 1,000 aircraft flying from airfields in Yorkshire (Halifax bombers) and Lincolnshire (Lancaster bombers). This is the period in which Yorkshire exerted most influence over world history.
No 28th Nunthorpe Grove The most ill-fated street of WWII York.

During the April 29th raid houses 23/25 and 19/21 were destroyed. On March 5 1945 many Halifax bombers iced up as they tried to take off and crashed. Four Halifaxes from the Canadian 426 Squadron at Linton-on-Ouse crashed that night. Flt Lt Emerson’s Halifax broke up under the weight of ice, and fell on number 28 Nunthorpe Grove. 6 crew and 5 civilians were killed. (The Press, Monday February 28, 2005)
York Racecourse
Used as a RFC airfield in WWI.

York Grandstand
A WWII Prisoner-of-War transit camp was located near the grandstand and an anti-aircraft battery set up (after the Baedeker Raid).
WWII ROC Building
The Royal Observer Corps was set up in WWI to identify and warn of enemy aircraft. As radar developed in WWII their function became more passive.
The End
This is the ROC Nuclear bunker in Acomb, York. After WWII the ROC’s role became even more passive. They were expected to plot nuclear strikes and emerge from shelter to take radiation readings in the aftermath of a nuclear war. Though the station was opened in 1961, when a limited war was expected, it was not stood down until 1991, by which time experts predicted a nuclear war would be so intense as to create a nuclear winter through ash clogging the atmosphere.

The War in the Air: Yorkshire Memorials

Fulford Golf Course Memorial.
Elvington Airfield was crewed by the Free French airmen of 77 Squadron, who volunteered to continue the struggle against Nazism after France surrendered. A Halifax from Elvington tried to make an emergency landing on Fulford golf course on June 19 1943. After the crash a bomb exploded killing the crew. The dark marble reflects the sky from which they fell.
Dunnington Lodge, on the B1228 Elvington road.
On March 4 100 Ju 88 night-fighters flew over Yorkshire to try to shoot down returning British bombers. Hauptmann Johann Dreher attacked Elvington airfield. Turning in the dark about seven metres above the ground he hit a tree, ripped through the left-hand gable of Dunnington Lodge, crashed and burned. The four man crew were killed; one man and two women in the cottage died of injuries. (Broken Eagles: Luftwaffe Losses Over Yorkshire, Bill Norman, Barnsley, Pen & Sword, 2001, 196)
Dunnington Lodge: Memorial
Lissett
The closest airfield to Germany in Yorkshire, situated close to the coast south of Bridlington. The life-size, rust-coloured sculpture shows a crew walking towards a bomber. Their bodies are covered with the names of the 850 men who died in the squadron. Their faces are hollow, filled by empty air.

* * *
Starfish site (Heslington Tilmire: Beyond Fulford golf course, adjoining West Campus.

In the event of another heavy air raid on York, large fires were to be ignited in this field, miles out of town, in the hope of diverting bombers. It was never used.