

A YORKSHIRE FOLK PARK AT FULFORD INGS: A DREAM WHICH NEARLY CAME TRUE

Dr Sally-Anne Shearn

Borthwick Institute for Archives, University of York

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Hello and thank you for coming along. I'm here this morning to talk about something that never happened, a lost project among, I'm sure, many lost projects that have been and gone in York over the centuries, and one which I did not expect to end up talking about when I was given the job of cataloguing the large archive of the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust in 2022.

For those who might not be familiar with it, the Reform Trust is one of three trusts set up by Joseph Rowntree in 1904, along with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. Unlike its sister trusts, the Reform Trust was founded as a company, with the power to give money to political and non charitable causes. Having spent months exploring the archive I can vouch for there being a lot of politics in it, but in one of the boxes I was intrigued to find a bulging file labelled 'York Folk Park'. I knew something about there being plans, once upon a time, for a folk park in the city, thanks to the Rowntree family and company archives we have at the Borthwick, but the Reform Trust file was far more detailed than anything I had read before and its contents form the basis for this talk. The story of the Folk Park is one without a very satisfying ending, I'm afraid. You will probably have noticed that York doesn't have, and has never had a Folk Park, but there was a time, two decades in fact, when we almost did and that's what I want to talk about today.



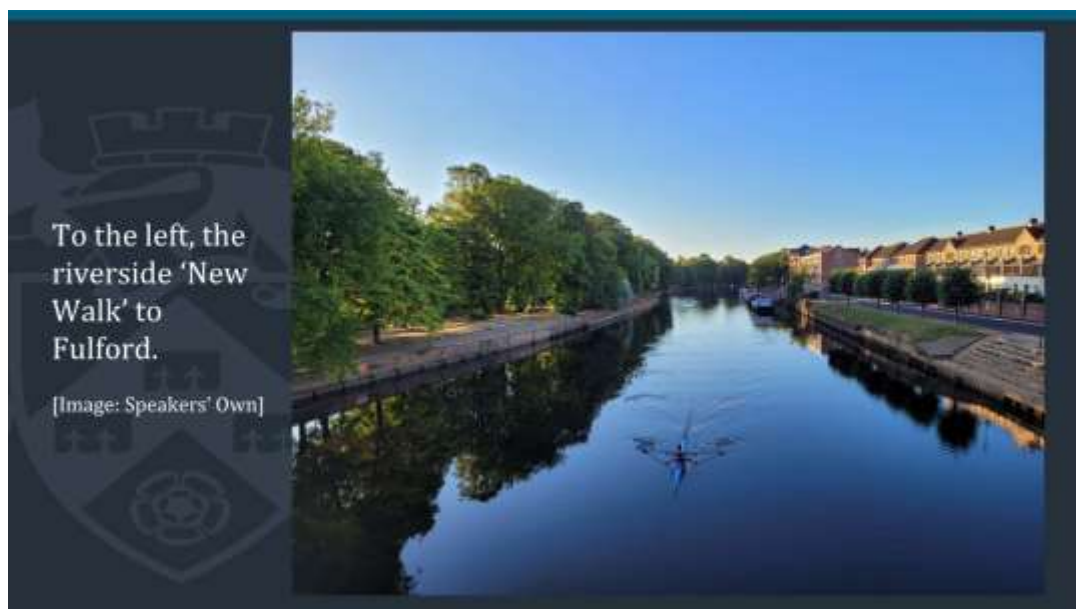
Kirkgate at the Castle Museum, York

[Images: speaker's own]

I would like to begin by bringing you all with me to York - but not quite the one you're familiar with.

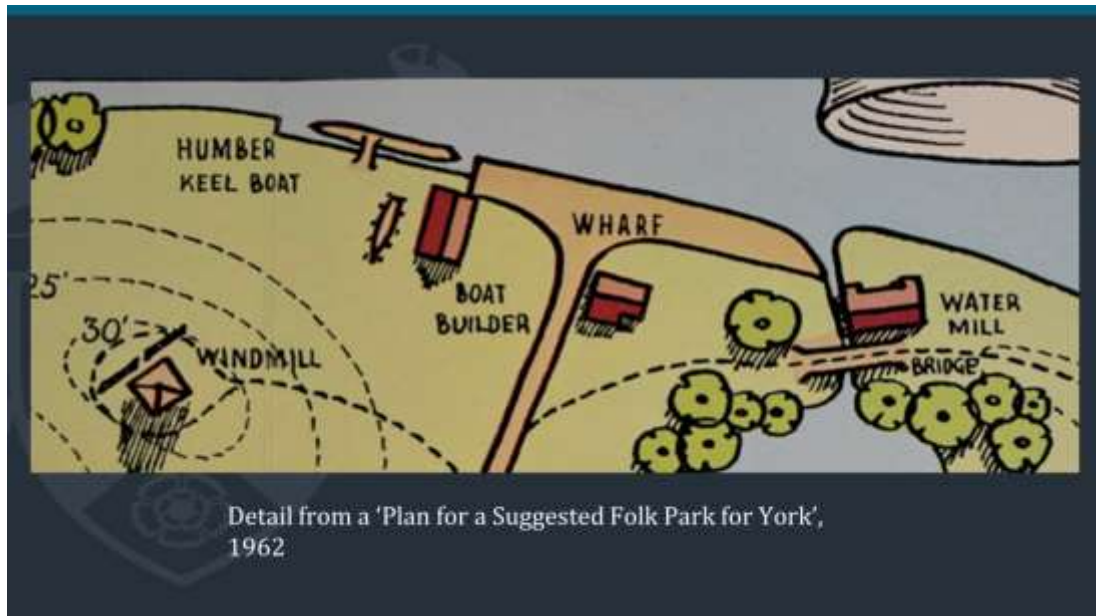
It's a sunny day in May and you've come by train for a day in the city. After tea at Bettys, a trip to the Minster and a walk along the city walls, you head to the Castle Museum near Clifford's Tower. By now the Museum has been open to the public for more than eighty years. You've read that it was the brainchild of Dr John Kirk who was a voracious collector of everyday historical items, from horse bridles and milking stools, to medical paraphernalia, weapons, clothing, advertisements and all kinds of household objects. He called them his 'bygones' and was even known for accepting interesting objects in lieu of payment for his medical services!

Since 1938 his vast collection has been on display at the Castle Museum, which was built out of the remains of York's female prison. The Museum's biggest draw is the detailed recreation of a Victorian street, which was created under the direction of Dr Kirk to provide a fitting backdrop for his collection and named, appropriately, Kirkgate. It was the first of its kind in Britain and it remains enormously popular, filled with the artefacts of a long lost York, from the names of the shops themselves to the posters and advertisements that line the walls of the little back alleys displaying well known brands like Rowntree's and Terrys. Here you can see the sights and hear the sounds of the city as it was more than 100 years ago.



But your visit to the Castle Museum is of course only half of the trip. Once you've walked through Kirkgate, taken a tour of what remains of the female prison, and looked at the museum's displays of historic toys and their detailed recreations of period rooms, it's time to go from this museum of town life to its sister museum of country life - the York Folk Park.

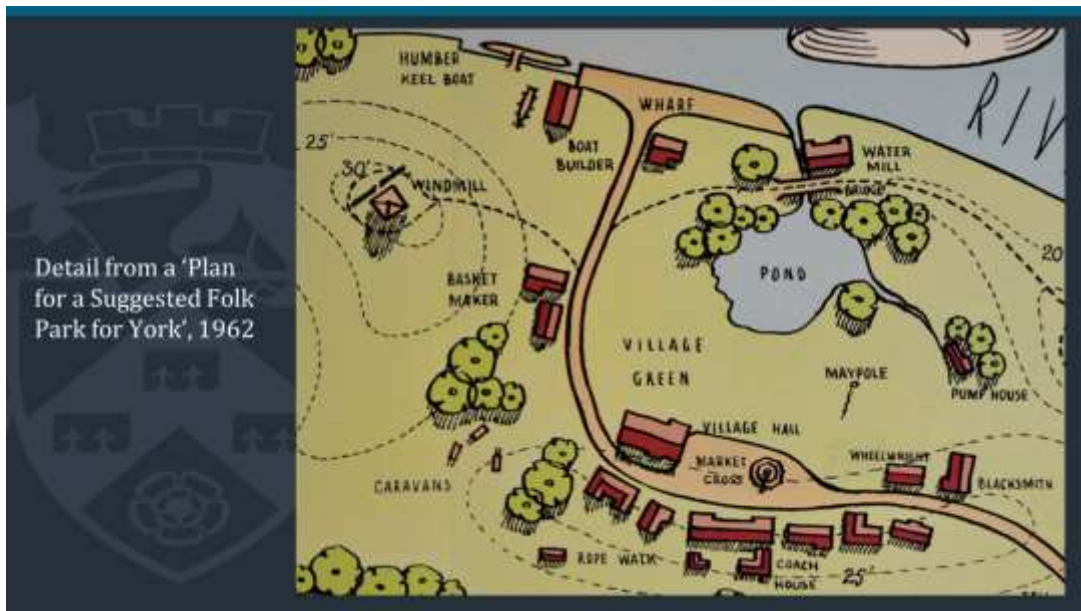
The first question is how to get there. The park is not even two miles away so you can make the journey on foot easily enough, via Blue Bridge and the New Walk which runs alongside the River Ouse and out to Fulford. But you've heard it's possible to go by river so you head to King's Staith instead to catch one of the regular boats that take you from the city centre to the park's own landing stage, allowing you to arrive in style.



The first thing you spot upon arrival is the windmill, standing at the highest point of the park. Your guidebook tells you it's actually called a Post Mill, an early type of windmill that came into use from the 12th century onwards, and that this one is in fact the oldest surviving Post Mill in Yorkshire, dating from the 18th century. It was taken from a site at Little Smeaton, near Pontefract, and transported to York to be rebuilt on the present spot.

You're so busy admiring it that it takes you a moment to notice the boats drawn up next to the wharf where your own boat is docking. The boatman points out the Humber Barge which traces the design of its hull to the famous Viking Longboats and which would have been a common sight transporting goods along the waterways of Yorkshire and the Humber right up until the 1970s. A little further along is a canal boat, something you're more familiar with, and beyond that a small round boat that's only really big enough for one person. The boatman tells you this is a coracle, a small fishing boat made of woven wood and material such as woollen cloth, calico or leather. They were traditionally used in Wales, but also adopted elsewhere for their size and manoeuvrability.

As you disembark you spot the Boat Builder's workshop standing beside the wharf, and to your left, next to a Packhorse Bridge, stands the 19th century Raindale Water Mill, which came to York from the North Yorkshire Moors. The blades of the Post Mill are turning, as is the Mill's water wheel, both have been brought back to working order so visitors can see exactly how they were used. You can even buy flour from the mill in the park's shop.



But you will come back to those later. For now you take the lane up from the Wharf, past the Basket Makers, where you pause to watch a demonstration of traditional basket weaving, and past the circle of brightly coloured Romany caravans clustered in a tree lined clearing, until you reach the village proper where buildings line a main street with a market cross. This is by far the busiest part of the Park. You see a village hall and an inn with its own Brew House, a blacksmith's shop, a wheelwright's, and a coach house, and everywhere you hear the sound of people working, as locals carry out traditional crafts such as weaving and fulling, and wood and metal work, surrounded by authentic tools and materials. All of them are happy to answer questions and you can buy samples of their work to take home with you as a souvenir of your visit. Your guide tells you there's even a Rope Walk standing a little way up the hill behind the village, where you can have a go at making rope by hand if you feel up to the challenge.

That sounds too much like hard work for such a warm day, so instead you cross to the Village Green with its pond and original maypole, donated from the collections of the Castle Museum. Later there will be a game of Knurr and Spel, a game played with a small wooden ball which was once popular in the textile areas of the West Riding, followed by a display of Folk Dancing, which you'd like to come back to watch.

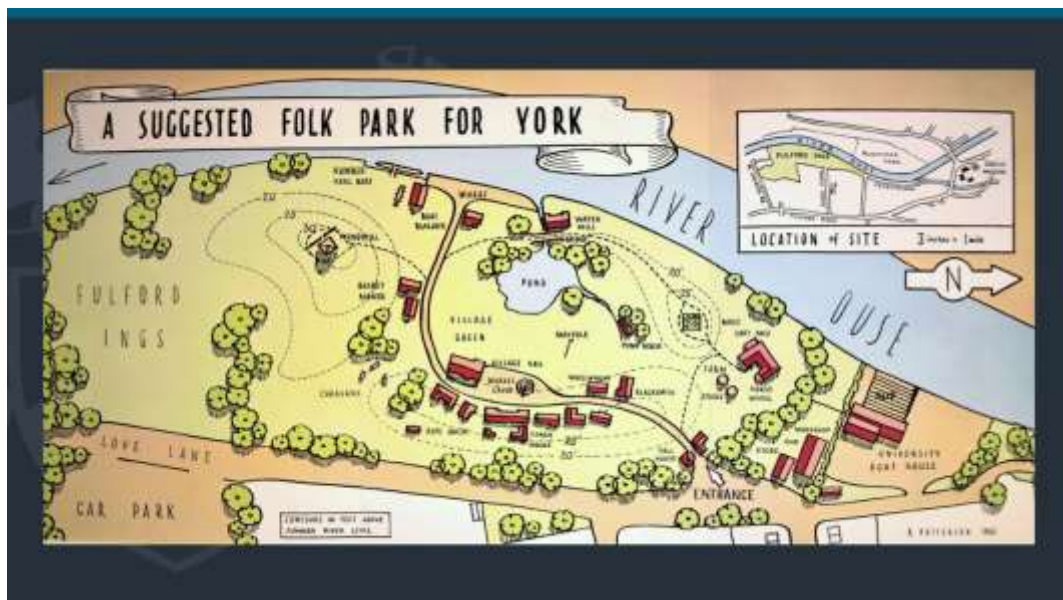
From the Green you head over to have a look at the small row of reconstructed Yeomen's Cottages, each one furnished to show how ordinary people lived in different periods through history with helpful guides to demonstrate how things worked. There's even room for a pair of large timber houses, one brought to York from the village of Helperby and the second taken from York itself, where it once stood at the bottom of what is now Parliament Street. The two of them put you in mind of the half timbered houses you saw on the Shambles earlier that day.



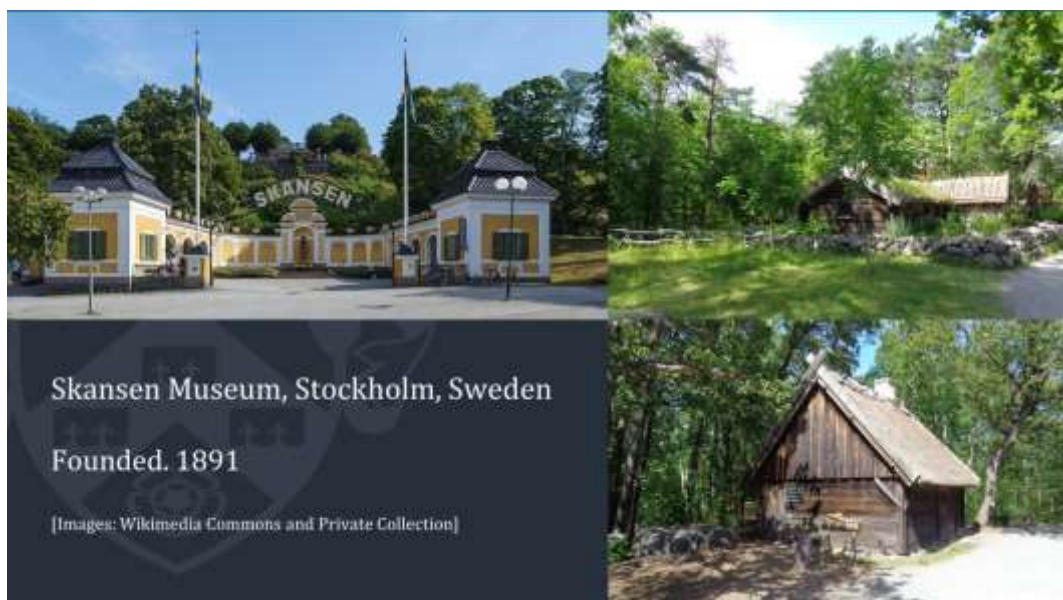
You complete your initial circuit with a visit to the small farm where you can see a horse mill in action, another kind donation to the park. The nearby shed houses a collection of surviving carts and there are demonstrations of crafts such as hedging, thatching, rick building and hurdle making to enjoy - or even join in with, if you're feeling brave.

Once you've watched the horse turning the mill wheel and visited the sheep, ducks and goats in their paddock, there's just time to have a look at the small maze, a replica of the 'Troy Town' maze cut from the roadside turf between Terrington and Brandsby. The original is said to be the smallest remaining turf maze in Europe, dating from the 19th century although your guidebook tells you that local legend claims it's far older. The name 'Troy Town' recalls the labyrinthine walls of the ancient city of Troy, and their purpose in England is debated. Some say they were used for entertainment on high days and holidays, while others claim they had religious or mystical significance of some kind.

Today though there are children playing along its paths so you head back to the village to sample some of the Brew House ale as you find a spot on the green to sit and await the folk dancing.



I hope you enjoyed your brief visit to the York Folk Park that never was, or one version of it, at least. There were three versions of the Park altogether, imagined over different sites, and over some twenty odd years. Today I want to talk about how the idea of the Folk Park came to be, why it was important and what it involved, before answering the crucial question - what on earth happened to it?



The origins of the York Folk Park do not lie not in Yorkshire at all, but in Sweden, where the first 'Folk Park' was created in 1891 at Skansen in Stockholm. In a century of extremely rapid change, Skansen was created to preserve evidence of a pre-industrial Swedish way of life before it was lost forever. The term 'folk' in this context refers to the customs and culture of ordinary working people, whose homes, material possessions, crafts and stories were less likely to be preserved than those of the wealthy, and therefore far more at risk of disappearing.

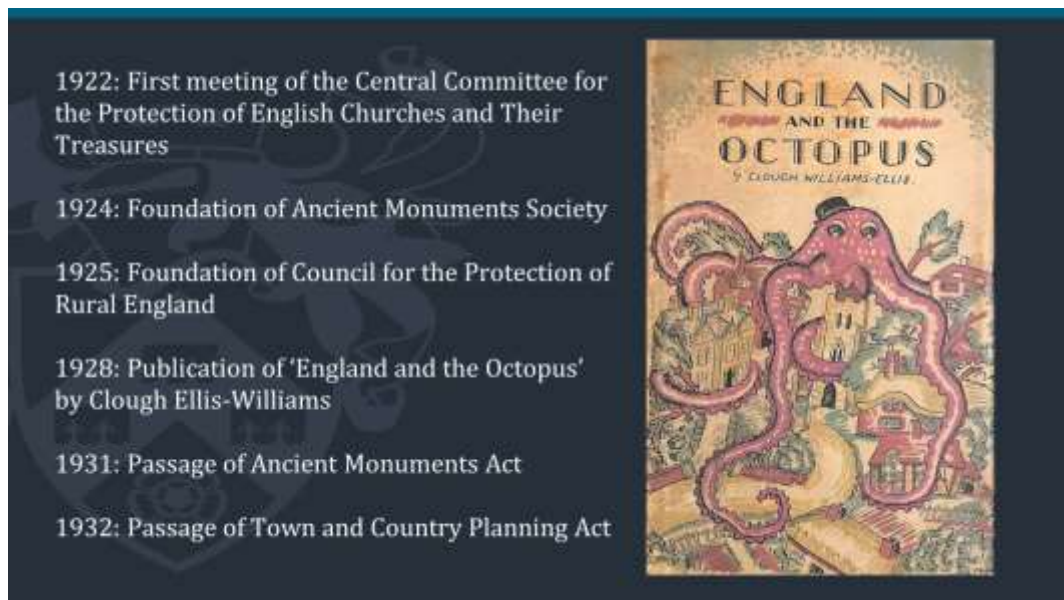
The methods used to assemble the park were novel for the time, its founder Artur Hazelius travelled around the country, buying some 150 houses which he then had carefully dismantled and shipped to Stockholm to be rebuilt in the large park as

authentic representations of historic Sweden. All of the buildings were opened to the public and the park showcased traditional crafts, clothing, and furnishings, along with the buildings themselves, in both country and small town settings.

The idea was soon taken up elsewhere. Another Swedish example was created at Lund in 1892, followed by a Norwegian open air museum in 1902, the Old Town museum in Denmark in 1914, and the The Netherlands Open Air Museum which opened at Arnhem in 1918.



The idea soon caught on here too. The York Folk Park might have been intended as the first such park in Yorkshire, but it was not the first one in England. The self proclaimed 'first open air folk park' in England opened in New Barnet, North London, in June 1934 and, much like Kirkgate a few years later, it was intended to display the personal and extremely varied collection of one man, Father John Ward. Like his fellow collectors on the continent, Ward's park was made up of historic buildings he had relocated from elsewhere, so his collection could be displayed, so far as possible, in authentic settings. His Abbey Folk Park included a working blacksmith's shop, a tithe barn, and a wheelwright's shop, and there were also recreations of prehistoric and neolithic huts and a Roman stove that could be demonstrated to visitors. Ward was not above adding some drama for interest however - a 16th century cottage in the park was decked out as an Elizabethan witch's cottage, complete with talismans, strange symbols, and information on casting spells.



Although the park closed for good as a result of the Blitz, it was very popular, feeding as it did into a growing public concern about the destruction of Britain's heritage and rural landscape as a result of the rapid expansion of towns, cities and roads in the first half of the twentieth century. Throughout the 1920s and 30s this concern had produced tangible results, from organisations set up to protect churches and historic buildings from demolition and decay, to campaigns to save the countryside from the polluting effects of the motorcar. In 1928 Clough Ellis Williams' book 'England and the Octopus' took aim at the dangers of what he saw as uncontrolled residential and industrial development, particularly around London, which risked swallowing up the essence of the English countryside and destroying what was left of the nation's rural character.

In 1932 the government passed the first Town and Country Planning Act, the first planning act to explicitly extend control over rural as well as urban development. In its scope of action, it included the preservation of existing buildings or other objects of architectural, historic, or artistic interest and places of natural interest or beauty in the countryside, as well as in towns and cities.

Further Planning Acts were passed in 1944 and 1947, followed by the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act in 1953. But as much as people were preoccupied with the physical preservation of buildings and landscape, they were also concerned about the preservation of what those things represented, an older, and what many saw as a more traditional way of life. Rural and pre-industrial jobs, crafts and customs, ways of speaking and dressing, what people ate and drank, what they believed and how they travelled and spent their leisure time, aspects of history and identity that were thought to be at risk of being lost.

Large and famous museums were good at preserving the big stories of history but who...cared about the little stories of ordinary people, their dogged will to survive on very little, their symbolic relationship with the land around them, their customs and superstitions?

Bert Frank, Founder of Ryedale Folk Museum, opened 1963



Ryedale Folk Museum

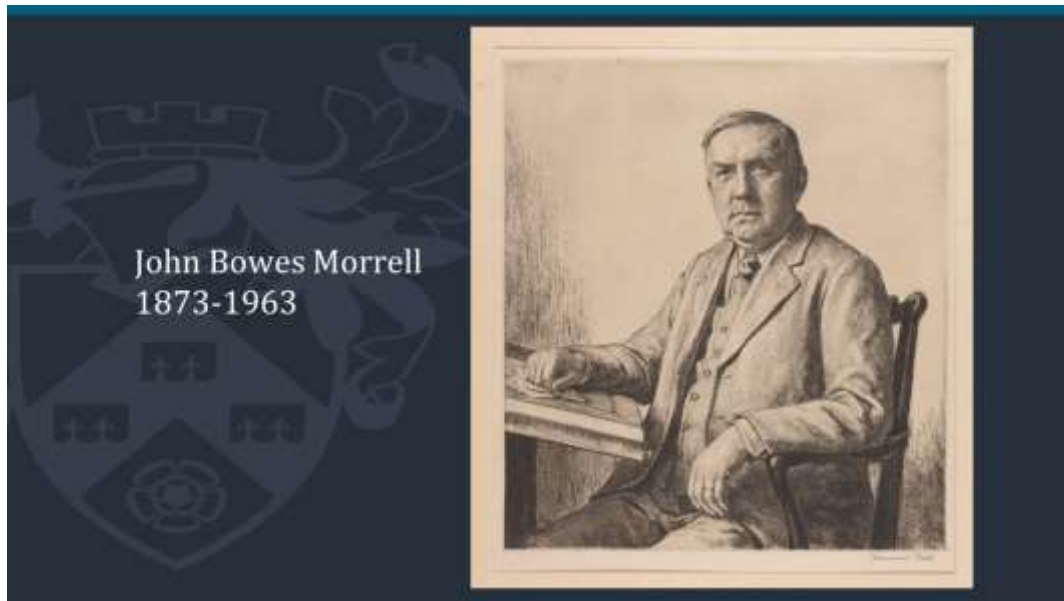
Image: Wikimedia Commons

The first half of the twentieth century saw a growing interest in capturing the evidence of this vanishing way of life. As early as 1903 Cecil Sharp travelled through Somerset, collecting more than 1500 folk songs from locals, and people like Father Ward and Dr Kirk amassed their own collections of so called 'bygones' from a wide variety of sources. But crucially this interest was not confined to wealthy collectors and academics. The history of the ordinary and the pre-industrial was given greater prominence in museums too, particularly the many provincial museums that sprang up in this period and which explicitly set out to showcase regional histories and identities. In 1928 there were 530 provincial museums and art galleries in Britain. Ten years later this number had increased to 800. Appearing in county towns as well as cities, these museums drew their main audience from the local population and became repositories of regional artefacts and knowledge, working to keep this shared heritage alive through educational work and imaginative displays.

Thus by the 1930s Hereford Museum had an 'old country life' section with dairy churns and smocks highlighting the region's farming history, Northampton Central Museum had a reconstructed cobbler's shop to showcase the region's history of shoemaking, and York had Kirkgate, with its mix of 19th century trades and crafts, all of which had been drawn from the local area. In the 1950s Frank Atkinson, Director of Halifax Museums and the man who'd later create Beamish Open Air Museum, spent years collecting and photographing materials and skills used by craftsmen in South and West Yorkshire, seeking to preserve what he called the evidence of the mundane, grubby and everyday.

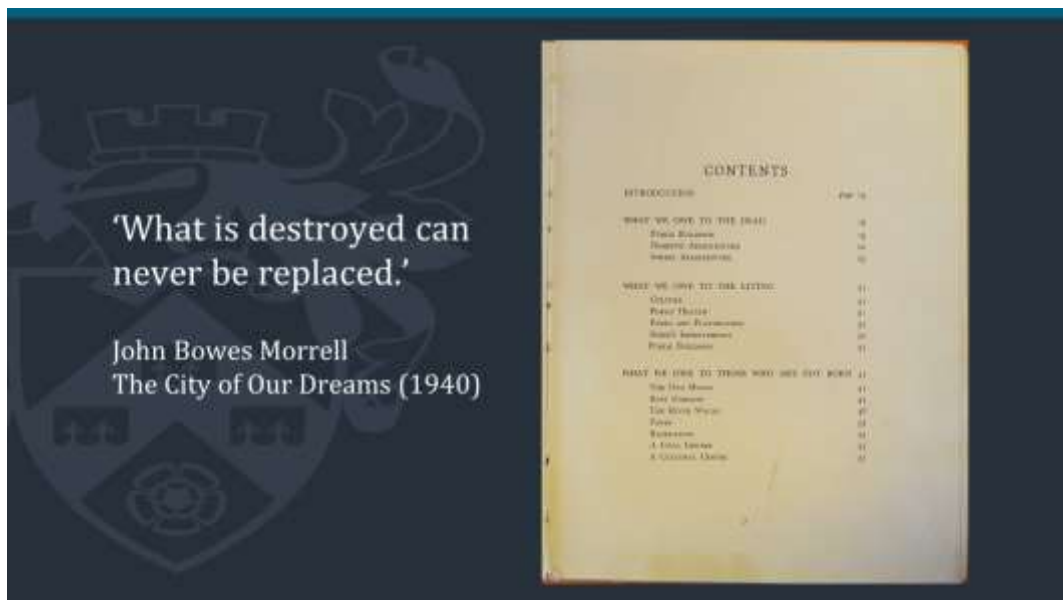
The Folk Park or open air museum offered an ideal way to combine these elements, creating a lost world in microcosm, made up of buildings and artefacts that had been preserved, relocated and rebuilt so that visitors could more authentically experience - in so much as that was possible - how people lived and worked in the past. As Iorwerth Peate said when he opened the Museum of Welsh Life in Cardiff in the 1940s, the task was not to create a museum which preserved the dead past under glass, but one which used the past to link up with the present, highlighting the continuity in a time of rapid and dramatic change.

Small wonder then that the open air museum became popular here as well as on the continent. As well as the short lived Abbey Folk Park, a Highland Folk Museum was founded in Scotland in 1935, the National Museum of Wales at St Fagan's in 1948, a Folk Museum for Ulster in 1958, Ryedale Folk Museum in 1963, and of course the famous Beamish Living History Museum in 1972.



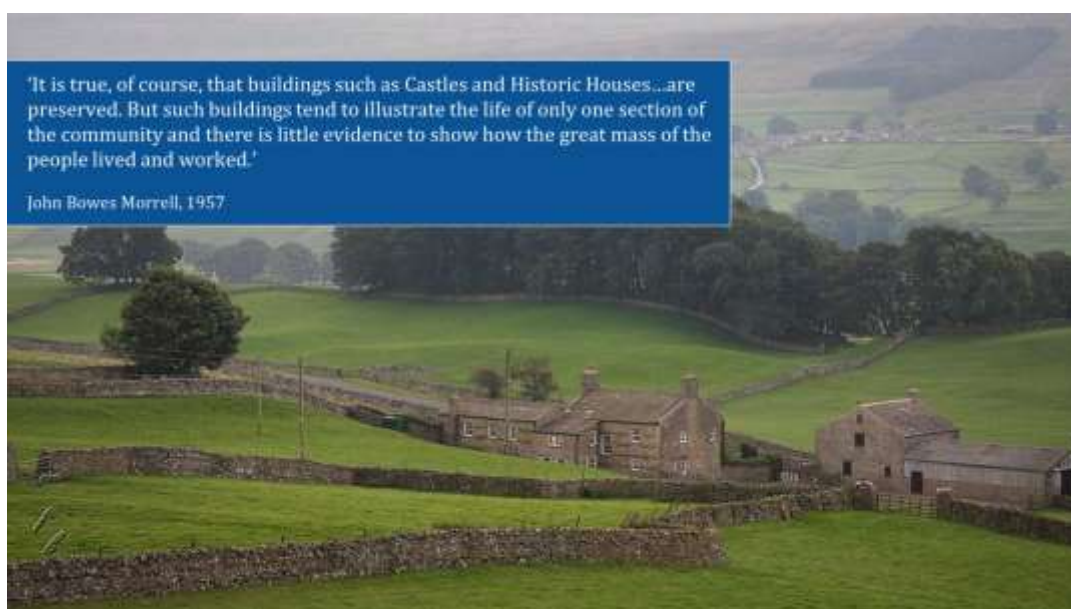
You might think then that the time was ripe for one in Yorkshire too, and certainly that was the belief of this man - John Bowes Morrell. If you've ever visited the Borthwick you will be familiar with his name as you reach us via the Morrell Library, named after him in 1966. There's also a Bowes Morrell House on Walmgate in the city and his name appears in many of our archives, across a range of business, philanthropic, educational and cultural endeavours. If anyone could have founded a Folk Park here, it probably would have been him.

Morrell came from a wealthy and well connected Yorkshire family. His father was General Manager of the York City and County Bank and Morrell the younger enjoyed a long and successful career with the Rowntree company, serving as the firm's Finance Director for many years. His influence in York was bolstered by his involvement in the newspaper industry. He was Chairman of the Westminster Press for twenty years until 1953 and of the Yorkshire Herald Newspaper Company, which produced the Yorkshire Herald and the Yorkshire Evening Press, two of the city's most prominent papers. In addition to all of this he was a trustee and later Chairman of the Joseph Rowntree Social Service Trust, now the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, as well as a Liberal Councillor for the City of York for forty years and Lord Mayor twice.



Morrell also played a vital role in the cultural life of 20th century York, particularly in the preservation of the city's heritage. In the 1930s he chaired the Shambles Area Committee which purchased and restored buildings on York's famous medieval street, and in the 1940s he began buying historic properties in York with the aim of preserving and restoring them for the future. This would later become the York Conservation Trust which counts among its properties medieval and early modern townhouses, as well as York's Theatre Royal and Assembly Rooms.

In 1940 Morrell wrote a book called *The City of Our Dreams*, which set out his vision for the post war development of York. In it he stresses that improvements and modernisation need not be at the expense of the buildings and character of the historic city. 'In York, he writes, we still have more of the past worth preserving than there is in any other provincial town in England, and we have no need to reconstruct, but only to preserve, and then to add what is worthy in modern architecture to stand by the examples of the past.'

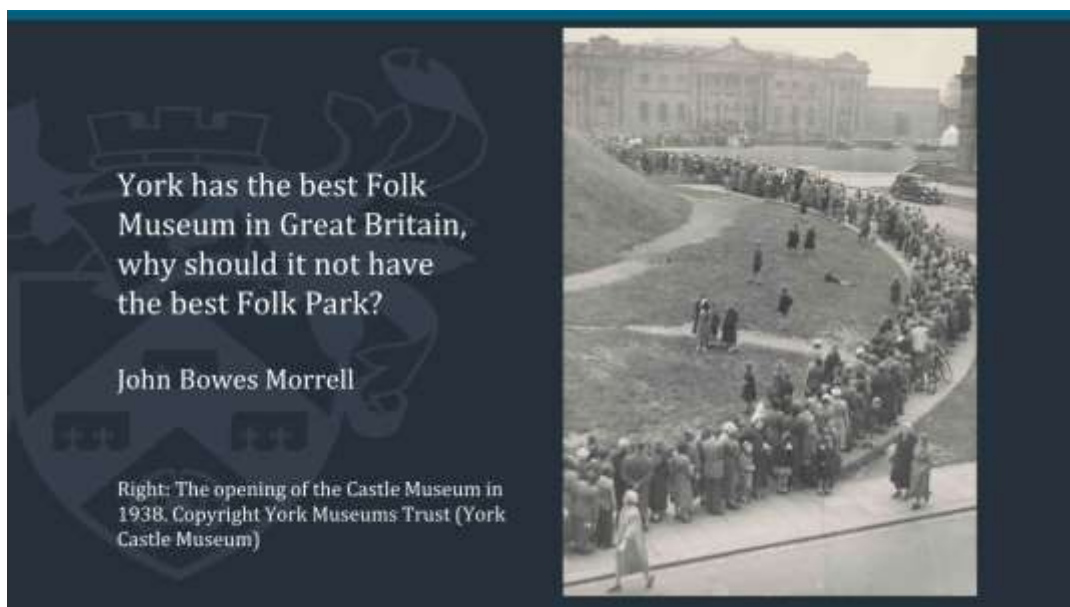


'It is true, of course, that buildings such as Castles and Historic Houses...are preserved. But such buildings tend to illustrate the life of only one section of the community and there is little evidence to show how the great mass of the people lived and worked.'

John Bowes Morrell, 1957

Although his City of Our Dreams makes no mention of a folk park, it reflects many of the same concerns that Morrell would later put forward in defence of the scheme. Most obviously that necessary modernisations should not sweep away all before it, but also that the domestic architecture of the past, the surviving small townhouses, shops and workshops, should be preserved, where possible, alongside the grand mansions and civic buildings, and that museums - of which he mentions several - were of great educational value to people of all classes.

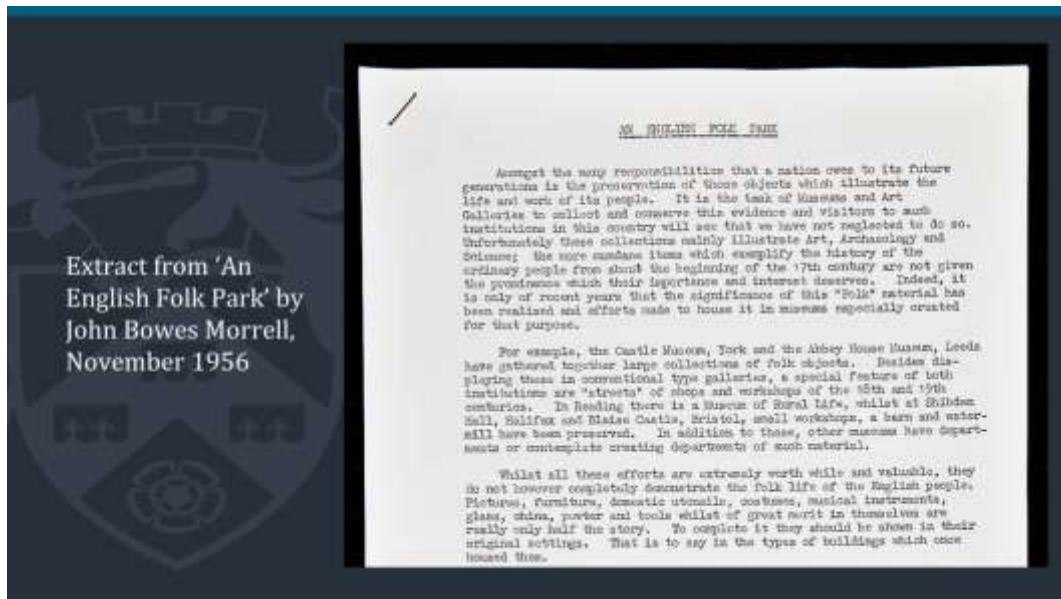
We know Morrell had a strong interest in the history of the ordinary and everyday because he had already been instrumental in the establishment of the Castle Museum, something he would later describe as perhaps the best work he ever did. In 1932, when Dr Kirk was looking for a new home for his collection of bygones, it was Morrell who saw an opportunity to house them in the historic prison that the city council was then in the process of acquiring. Morrell held an influential position as Chairman of the Council's Finance Committee, and both he and Kirk were familiar with the folk museums and parks of the continent. Kirk and his wife Norah had visited Skansen in Sweden in 1910, and Morrell and Kirk had both visited Munich Municipal Museum in Germany which had been set up to show the history of the city and which included a series of recreations of period rooms - something that would later be used to great effect at the Castle Museum. Kirk's sister had even visited Father Ward's Abbey Folk Park in London, although she'd been less than impressed with the curating practices there.



Despite facing a number of hurdles in terms of cost and attracting local support, Morrell and Kirk campaigned successfully for the creation of the Castle Museum and by the time it opened, Kirk's collection of largely rural bygones had been bolstered by Morrell's own purchases from the city. These included the York Sheriff's Coach which Morrell purchased for £15, and features from some of the city's lost historic buildings.

Morrell was very proud of the museum's success but he also felt it told only half of the story. It was, he wrote later, an illustration mainly of city life, but the life of the country people should be preserved too, before it was too late.

The Castle Museum was already in possession of, or had been offered, a number of buildings it could not re-erect and display in its central York location, including a water mill from Raindale, an 18th century post mill, and an old timbered building from the village of Helperby. What if they and others like it could be displayed nearby, as a sort of sister attraction to the Castle Museum, and as a way of preserving buildings that would otherwise be lost forever.



The earliest document we have that sets out his vision for a folk park is dated November 1956 and interestingly it shows that the title of 'Yorkshire' or 'York' folk park is a bit of a misnomer, because what Morrell was envisaging was actually an English Folk Park that just happened to be based in York. In the memorandum, he argues that folk materials, that is the mundane items which exemplify the history of ordinary people, had only recently begun to be given the prominence which their importance and interest deserve. It was not enough however to merely display them in cases in museums. The setting should be as authentic as the buildings and objects themselves. Even the best museums, he wrote, are of necessity limited in their scope and in the aspects of the past that they can illustrate. To see life in the round as our ancestors lived it needed something more - a reconstruction of their homes in surroundings as like as possible to those they knew.

The memorandum goes on to say that there were still, throughout England, fine examples of old watermills and windmills, small town dwellings, workshops, country cottages, farmsteads, barns and other such buildings which were just as historically important as the great mansions. But every year saw more and more of them falling into ruin or being demolished to make way for new housing estates and other schemes. Unless an attempt was made to preserve them, in a very short time they would nearly all have disappeared.

Whilst he felt it would be impractical to preserve them all in their original locations, relocating them to a folk park offered a number of advantages. There, the buildings could be shown, as far as possible, in their natural settings, appropriately furnished according to their respective historical origins, they would be under constant supervision and less likely to fall into disrepair, and, most of all, they would offer great educational value to students, school children and the general public.

At such a park, visitors could see how ordinary people in the past lived and worked, with the whole park acting as a microcosm of English country life over the last three hundred years.

He cites the folk parks at Skansen and Arnhem as examples of just how popular such a scheme can be, writing that 2 million people per year visit Skansen, and $\frac{3}{4}$ of a million go to Arnhem.

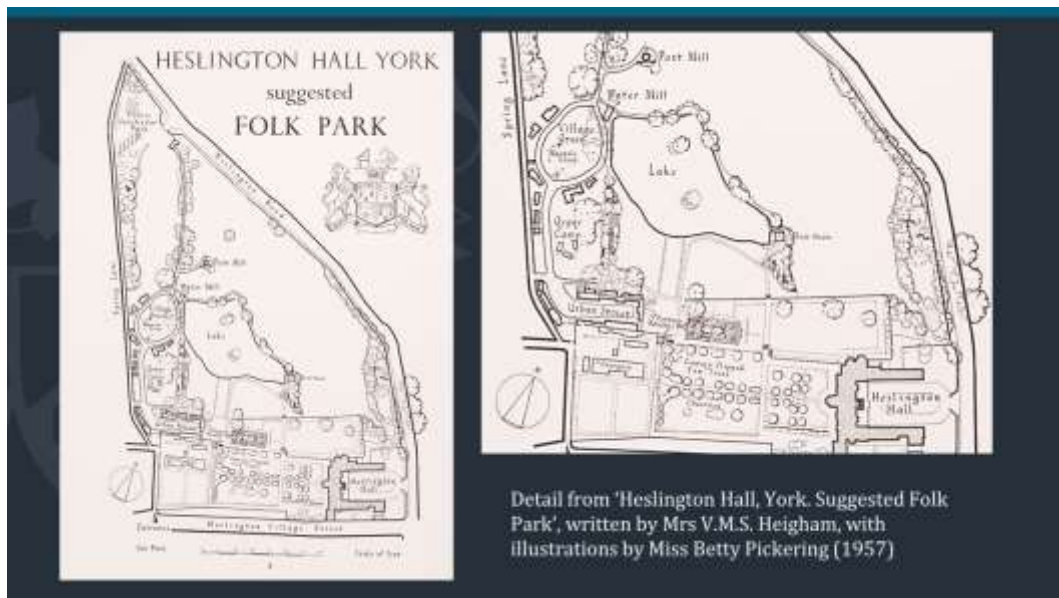


The site he has in mind for this first iteration of the Folk Park is not Fulford at all, but Heslington, specifically the Heslington Hall estate, just outside York. The Elizabethan Hall and its grounds had been put up for auction by its owners, the Deramore family, in 1955 and Morrell had stepped in swiftly to purchase it through the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, of which he was a Director, for the sum of £10,500. In his 1956 memorandum Morrell wrote that the estate would provide ample room for a park, which he felt would need at least fifteen or more acres, with room for further expansion.

Heslington Hall offered all of this and more. The main house would provide accommodation for a library, exhibition and lecture room, offices, workshops, stores, a flat for a caretaker and even a restaurant, whilst the existing 18th century gazebo and orangery in the grounds could also be incorporated into the park, along with its fine collection of 16th century Yew trees and kitchen and flower gardens. He imagines the gardens planted with appropriate English flowers and shrubs, together with a small herb garden, while the small stream running to the lake would make an ideal setting for the old Water Mill.

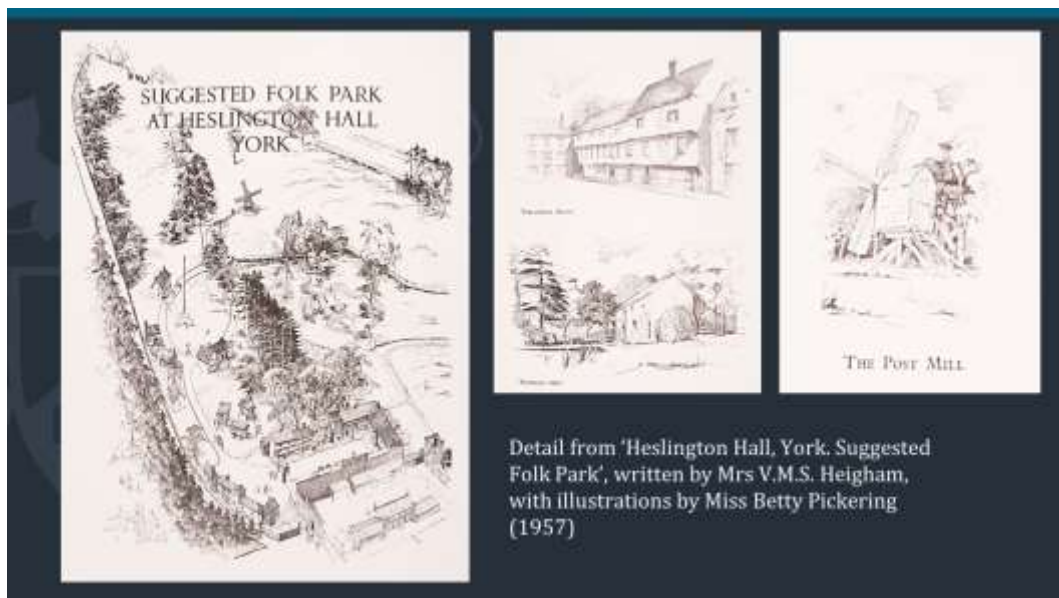
Beyond the Hall he imagined a village of small cottages, shops and workshops showing different periods and styles of architecture, each appropriately furnished. There would be a smithy, wheelwright and joiner, a weaver, rope maker, potter and other crafts that once flourished in small communities. Alongside these would be an inn and brew house, a church and school, and one or two shops. All of these would be grouped, along with houses and cottages, around a village green on which could be staged open air plays, archery displays, morris dancing and other games, sports and pastimes. The shops would sell their own commodities and old craftsmen could

ply their trade in the various workshops. At a distance from the central village, the estate offered space for farm buildings, a windmill and what he called other typical features of the countryside.



To better capture his vision for the park, he had a small booklet printed through the York Civic Trust the following year, setting out his argument and showing two detailed illustrations of the proposed layout. The first, shown here, shows the ground plan with the hall and its gardens intact, and then, behind it, the village, lake, postmill and watermill, which incorporates the existing lake and stream. There's a coach and car park at the top of the plan, and the pamphlet imagines how the visitor would arrive, writing 'Leaving his car in the park at the Heslington Road entrance, the visitor would approach the village by a path along the avenue of trees beside the plantation. Passing through the village he would find, at the further side of the green, byres and cart sheds set against the outer wall of the kitchen garden and used to house old farm implements.'

You will notice that the plan also has an 'urban street'. The pamphlet explains that the Castle Museum already has a number of old buildings awaiting a place to be rebuilt and that these include the great oak timbers from the Parliament House, which had been taken down in 1911 to allow for the extension of Piccadilly. It previously stood at the bottom of what is now Parliament Street. Rather than waste such materials, Morrell sees them forming the nucleus of a small group of townhouses which could be set up in the walled kitchen garden - and perhaps in time, if other buildings are offered, these could form an urban street or square, demonstrating the contrast between town and country.

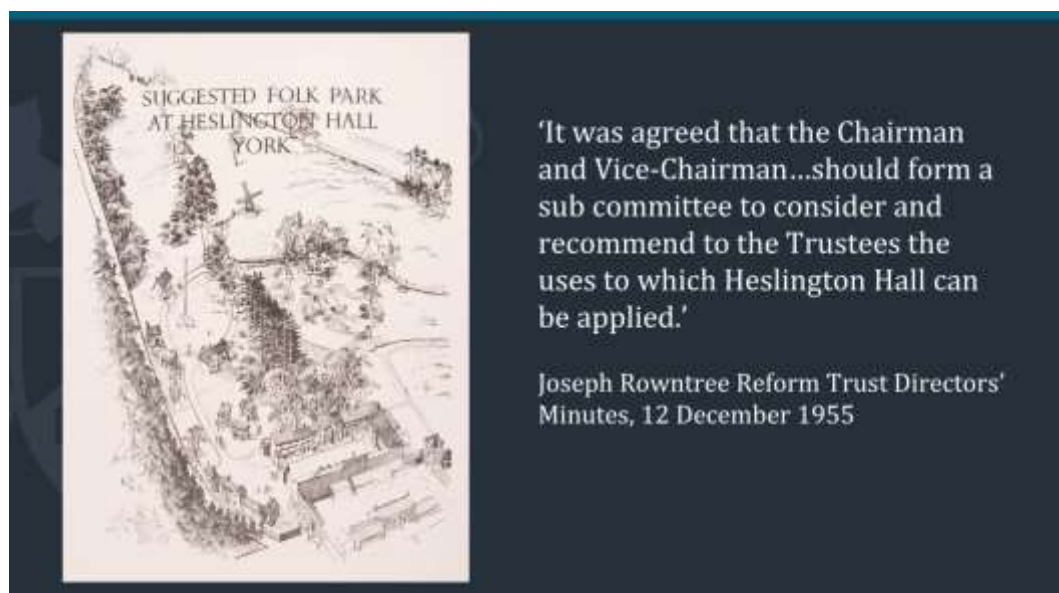


Detail from 'Heslington Hall, York. Suggested Folk Park', written by Mrs V.M.S. Heigham, with illustrations by Miss Betty Pickering (1957)

You can see the urban square more clearly in this second illustration which adds detail and visitors to the scene - as well as examples of some of the buildings Morrell already had in mind for the park in their imagined locations. The Parliament House from York, the Raindale Watermill and the last Yorkshire Post Mill, as well as the maypole on the green.

The urban square disappears from later iterations of the Folk Park, possibly because the potential sites that are available are smaller and offer a bit less scope for the imagination than the large Heslington estate. The pamphlet is keen to emphasise that this is only a blueprint in any case, signing off with an exhortation to 'Put up the old buildings that are in hand, and, with some ducks on the mill pond, doves in the dovecote and a cat on the doorstep, they will start to come to life again. All the rest can be added later.'

But while Morrell's memorandum and the pamphlet that followed, made an attractive case for a Folk Park in York, a great deal more work was needed behind the scenes to make it a reality.

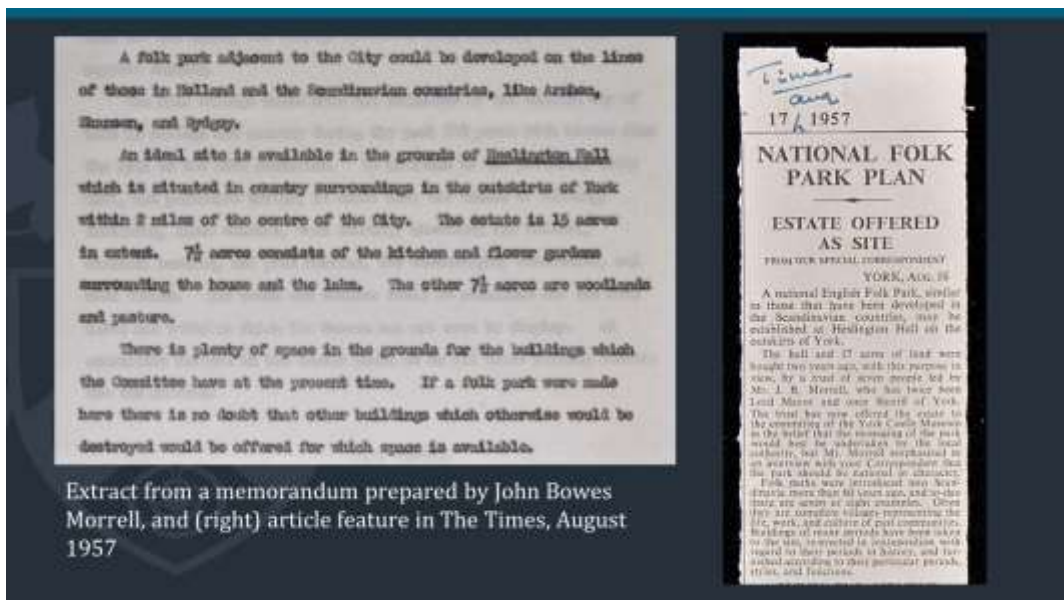


'It was agreed that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman...should form a sub committee to consider and recommend to the Trustees the uses to which Heslington Hall can be applied.'

Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust Directors' Minutes, 12 December 1955

Morrell's plans for the folk park are first mentioned in the Reform Trust's minutes in June 1956, where he is recorded as saying he had had preliminary discussions with York Corporation with the view of handing over the agricultural land and woodland of Heslington Hall for the creation of a folk park. However he goes on to say that he has since reconsidered this, since such a folk park was unlikely to be carried out in a reasonable time by a local authority and that therefore he was giving consideration to other means. A sub-committee had already been set up the previous December, to consider the uses to which the Hall and land could be applied, and this committee, which included Morrell and Peter Rowntree, was now tasked with looking into the Folk Park idea.

The sub-committee reported back in September to say that Dr Singleton of the York Institute of Architectural Study had offered to prepare a plan for how such a park might work on the estate. The committee had also discussed the financing of the scheme. It was feared that a folk park might end up being funded by the Reform Trust, which would prove a very heavy drain on their resources, but Morrell assured them that the development of the park could be carried out by a separate Trust headed by interested and notable people, with a national appeal made for funds to launch it. In December Morrell clarified that he envisaged making a gift of the land to a new charitable trust which, with the help of public donations, would create the Park and then hand it over to the City of York, who already, of course, owned the Castle Museum and the famous collection of Dr Kirk. This plan was reiterated the following year, although now the land was to be given to the York Civic Trust, of which Morrell was Chairman, who would sponsor a public appeal for funds.



Progress on the Folk Park plan was nonetheless slow. In June 1957 the sub-committee reported that the York Civic Trust and York Corporation's Castle Museum Committee were both in favour of the idea, and that the plan was still for the Civic Trust to launch the park and the city corporation to maintain it. The Corporation was still in the process of negotiating its take over of York's Museum Gardens however so Morrell felt the Folk Park plan should wait until this had been completed.

In August a piece appeared in The Times newspaper, reporting that the Heslington estate had been offered for the site of a National English Folk Park and

stating that the Castle Museum already owned a suitable water mill which had been dismantled near Whitby and that Mr Morrell had donated a post mill from a site near Doncaster. The Castle Museum had a maypole and an anonymous donor had offered a horse mill. It added that those sponsoring the project believed that more offers of buildings and objects would flood in once a public appeal was made.

In the meantime, the Reform Trust were footing the bill for the maintenance of Heslington Hall and estate and they were keen to find some use for it to help with the cost of its upkeep, even if it was only a temporary one. Various schemes were discussed, including the Youth Hostels Association taking over the Hall, or it being used as accommodation for students attending the summer courses in the city. In 1958 Leeds University approached the Trust about buying the Hall. Morrell and his fellow directors agreed to offer it to them for £10,000, with the condition that the sale would not include the stable block and the land necessary to build the Folk Park.

As it turned out, Leeds University did not have the money to both purchase and adapt the Hall for its needs, but another university was on the horizon, and this one would put pay to the Heslington Folk Park for good.

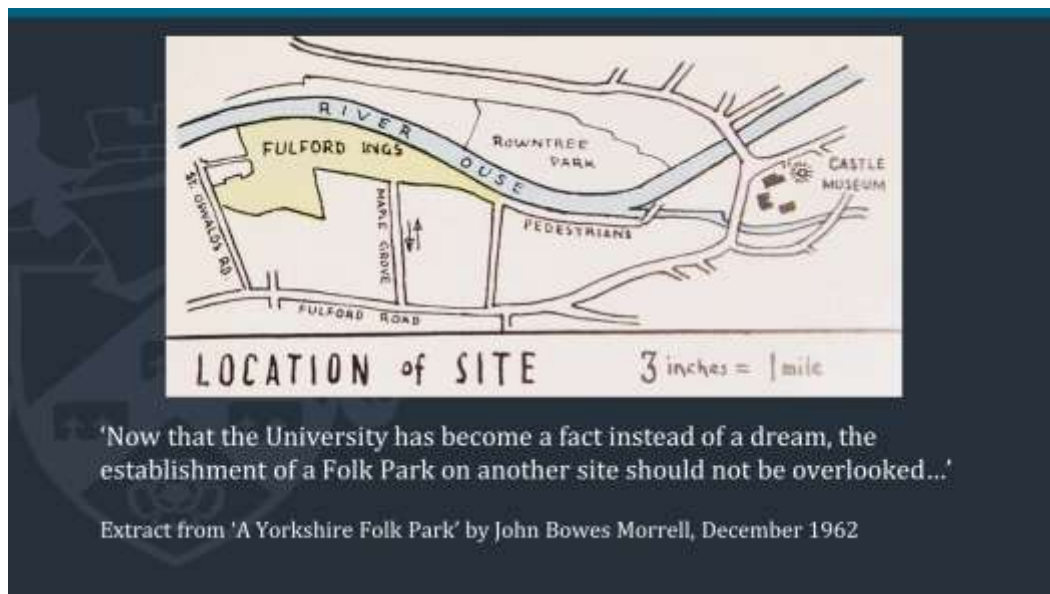


The campaign for a University of York began in the late 1940s and counted Morrell among its most active and enthusiastic supporters. By the 1950s there was a York Academic Development Committee with a serious programme of work, initially to create summer schools and then to create formal institutes of learning as proof that York could be a centre for further education. The Borthwick Institute, incidentally, was one of these, founded in 1953.

In 1959 the Reform Trust minutes record the first reference to Heslington Hall and its surrounding land being used as a possible site for a university. It was in many ways an obvious choice. There was no space within the city walls for a new university and the Heslington estate was a large, undeveloped parcel of land, within two miles of the city centre and already owned by a Rowntree trust with close links to the Academic Development Committee, York Corporation, and the Civic Trust, all of whom were key players in the university campaign. It was Morrell himself that proposed the motion in a meeting of the Trust in October 1959 that they should

undertake to transfer Heslington Hall and grounds to the new University, once its creation was certain, and moreover that they should make a contribution of £150,000 over the first ten years for its development. At the end of the discussion Morrell was presented with a book inscribed by his fellow directors, in recognition of his long and sustained efforts to secure for York the highest academic status - that of a University of its own.

In April 1960 the government approved the plan and in 1962 the Reform Trust formally transferred the Heslington estate to the new University of York.

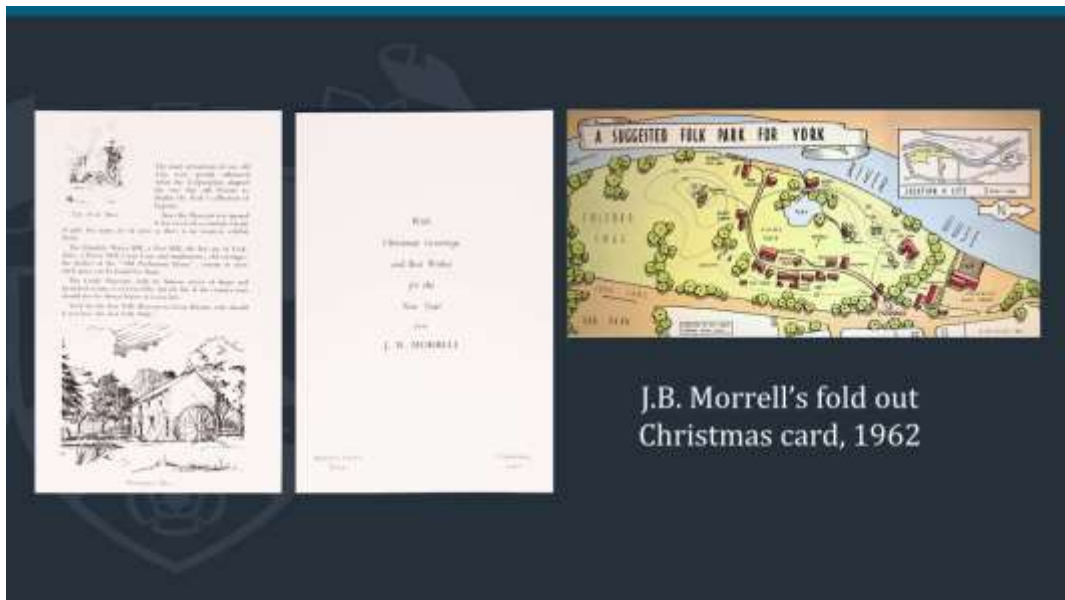


Where then did that leave Morrell's Folk Park?

When it became apparent that the new university would need the Heslington site, Morrell quickly began looking around for another and soon lit upon an area of land at Fulford to the south of the city.

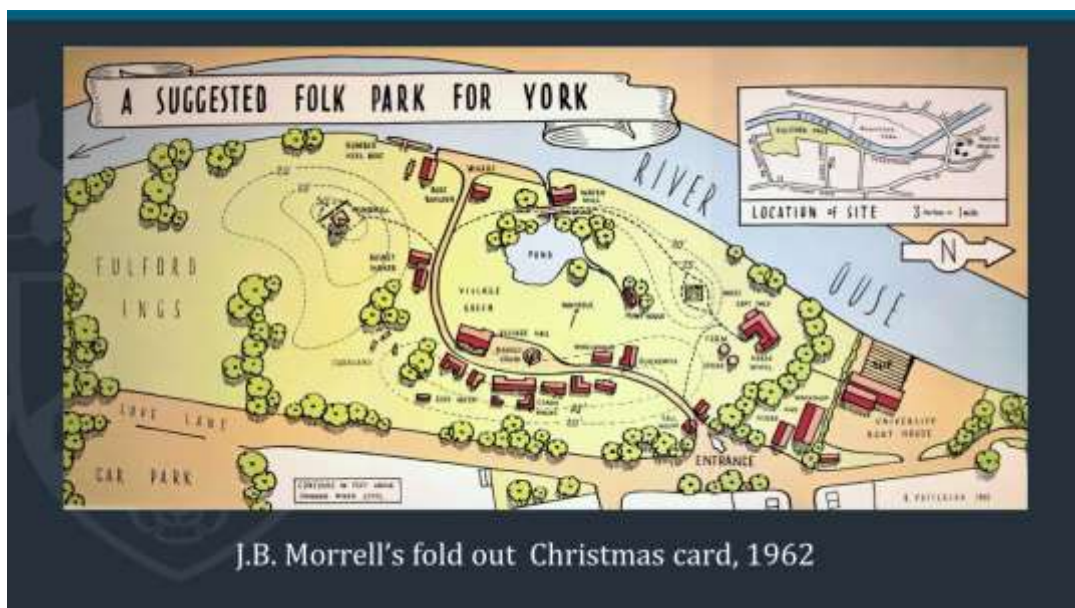
In 1961 Morrell proposed that the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust carry out a survey of the river approaches to York, with a view to funding, or campaigning for, necessary improvement works to be carried out. The Memorial Trust agreed and appointed a landscape architect, Mr Clark, to do the work, and Morrell promptly met with Clark and not only secured his support for a Folk Park beside the river but also got him to suggest a good site for it. Clark proposed he use a piece of land next to Fulford Ings which was already owned by York Corporation and which had, conveniently, already been raised above flood level.

Morrell agreed. Whilst not as large as the Heslington estate, he felt the Fulford site still had potential for expansion and would act as a convenient outdoor extension of the Castle Museum, with an almost direct route between the two via the popular riverside path known as the New Walk.



J.B. Morrell's fold out Christmas card, 1962

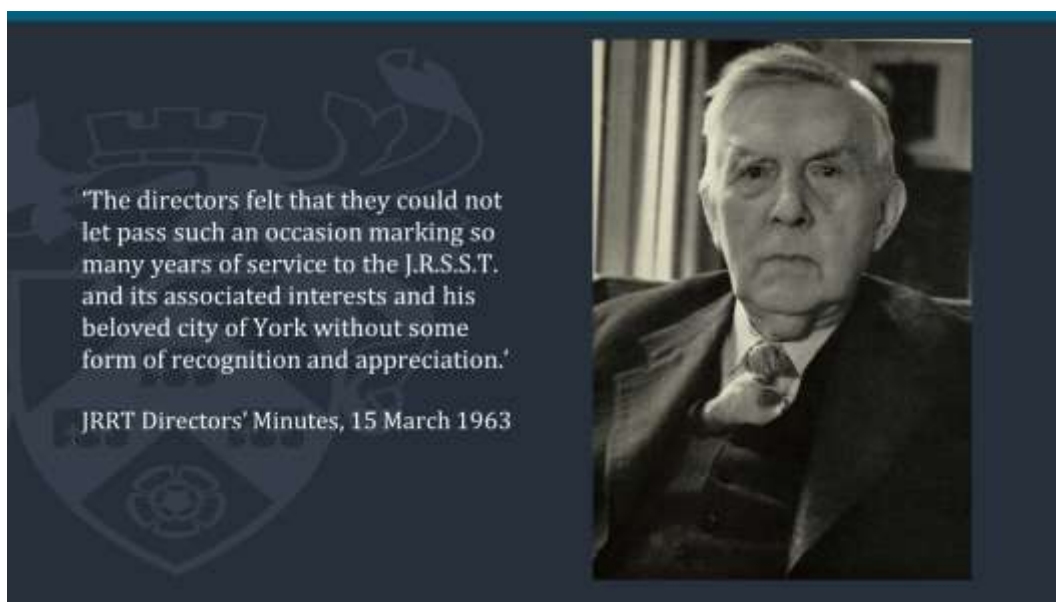
So keen was Morrell on this new site, that he had Mr Patterson, the Curator of the Castle Museum, create a coloured plan for it and he turned this plan into his Christmas card for 1962. This is the plan that you saw at the beginning of this talk, giving an idea of how the Folk Park might look and what it might include. Gone was the town street or square. Instead, Morrell described this park as showing the evolution of the English way of life in village and country during the past 500 years. In a new memorandum setting out his revised plan, he wrote that the village green would be available for open air plays, folk singing and dancing and traditional country games. It would be the site of the village cross, the pound, a well and a maypole, as well as a replica of the Troy Town maze near Terrington. As at Heslington, the park would include the post mill, water mill, and horse mill that had already been donated or purchased. There would also be a village inn, a blacksmiths, wheelwrights, boat builder and romany encampment, with workshops showing traditional crafts and industries in action.



J.B. Morrell's fold out Christmas card, 1962

The new site also allowed for some exciting changes however. The riverside location would allow visitors to be brought by boat direct to the park's own landing stage, and the wharf could be used to display historic vessels like the Humber Barge, the canal boat, and the coracle. Fulford also had a disused parish church, St Oswalds, that Morrell thought could easily be incorporated into the folk village, showcasing its religious and ritual life.

In summing up the revised plan, he wrote that he felt the new site would in time prove to be as attractive to visitors and residents of York as the Castle Museum had already proven itself to be.



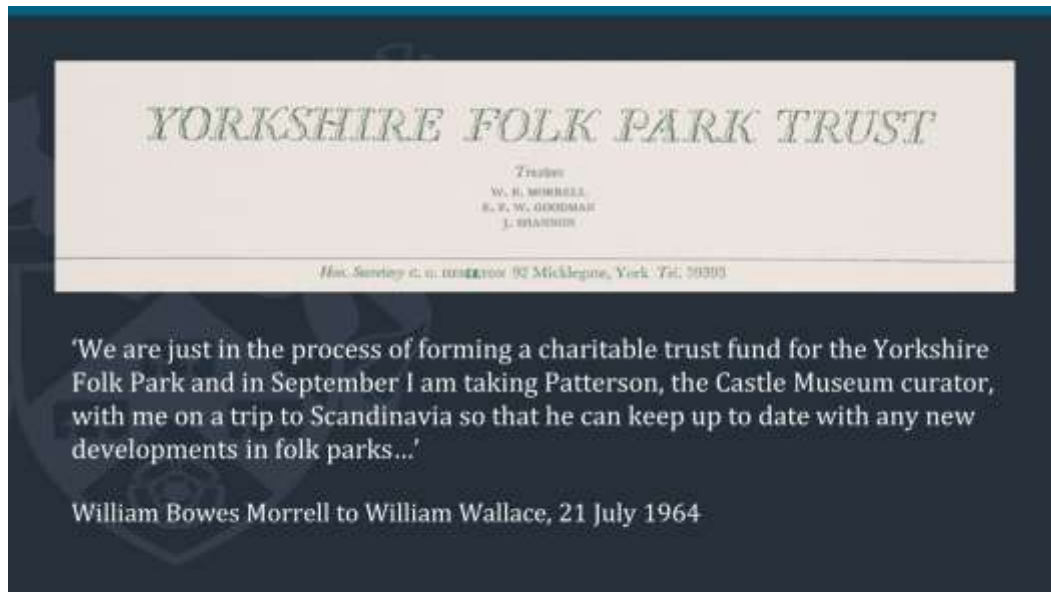
Once again, Morrell looked to the Reform Trust for help in making this new park a reality. Whilst he believed that the park would eventually pay for itself, a large injection of funds would be needed to develop and launch it.

In December 1962 he proposed that the Trust make a grant of £10,000 to start work on the park, with a further grant the following year, and that in the meantime he would also approach the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust and his own family trust for additional funds. A further document in the archive sets out the task in hand, which would involve first levelling and laying out the site, and then removing and re-erecting the various buildings, all most likely over the course of several years.

At their next meeting in March 1963 it was reported that the proposal to use the land at Fulford had been put before York Corporation, now York City Council. In the meantime the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust had offered £2,500 towards the scheme, and the Rowntree company had given another £1000. In the same meeting the Reform Trust made a grant of £12,000 to Morrell to be used for any charitable purpose he wished, to mark his 90th birthday and his many years of service to York and to the Trust. Unsurprisingly, he chose to put the money towards his Folk Park.

Morrell celebrated his 90th birthday in April 1963 but died less than two weeks later. He was remembered by the Reform Trust for his inspired and devoted leadership as Chairman, and his abiding love for York. It was his constructive imagination and unquenchable persistence, his fellow directors wrote, that was probably decisive in establishing York as a university city.

Although he had not succeeded in achieving his dream of a folk park in his lifetime, Morrell had left the plan on a secure footing, having found a site, secured initial funding, and made an approach to the city council, and his family were keen to see his campaign succeed. Following his death, his son William took up the baton, taking his father's place on the York Castle Museums Committee and continuing to campaign for the park for the next 17 years.

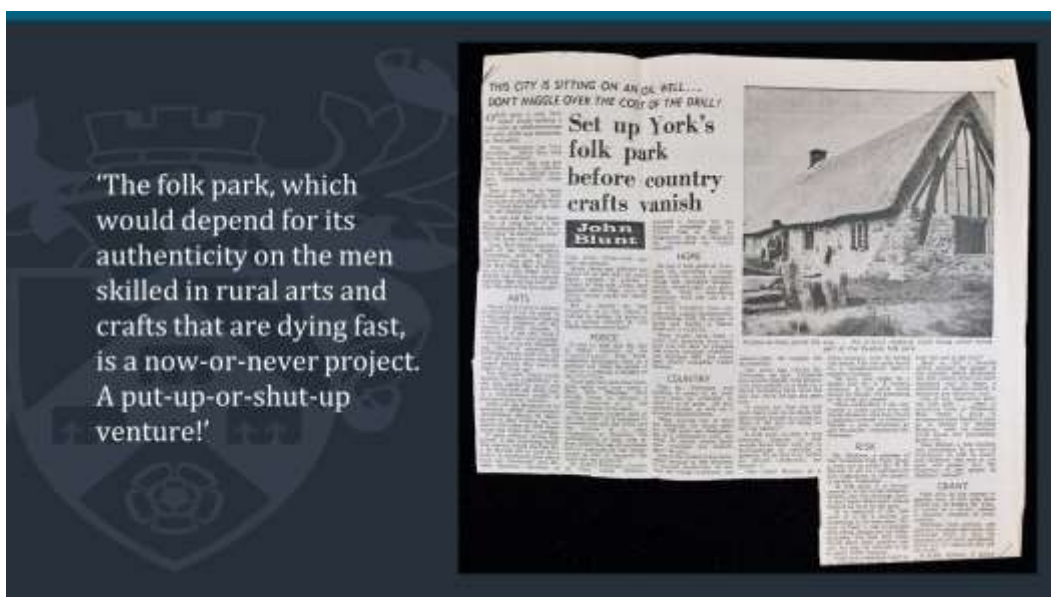


The first step William took was to secure the £12,000 promised by the Reform Trust - of which he was also a director. The Trust were happy to confirm that this money should still be earmarked for the park, as Morrell wished, and William set about creating a Charitable Trust Fund to oversee the campaign's finances. In doing so, he settled on the name of the Yorkshire Folk Park, rather than the York Folk Park, in the hope that it would better attract support from across the county.

The Trust was active by 1966 but work on the park could not proceed without the support and approval of the City Council, and this had not yet been formally given. In fact nothing much seems to have happened at all with the campaign for four years, until the occasion of the city's 1900th birthday in 1971 brought it back into the public eye.



In the summer of 1970 the scheme was mentioned in the local press in relation to a meeting of York City Council. In both cases the coverage was very positive, unsurprising perhaps given the Yorkshire Evening Press' links to the Morrell family. The articles expressed disappointment that the scheme had languished for such a long time and that it was still no closer to success. Making a start on the park would be a fine way to mark the city's anniversary, it was argued, and in the meantime its supporters were anxious to make sure the council didn't use the proposed site for something else. Councillor Thompson, evidently one of those supporters, is quoted as saying that York has one of the finest museums in Europe and should therefore have a folk park too.



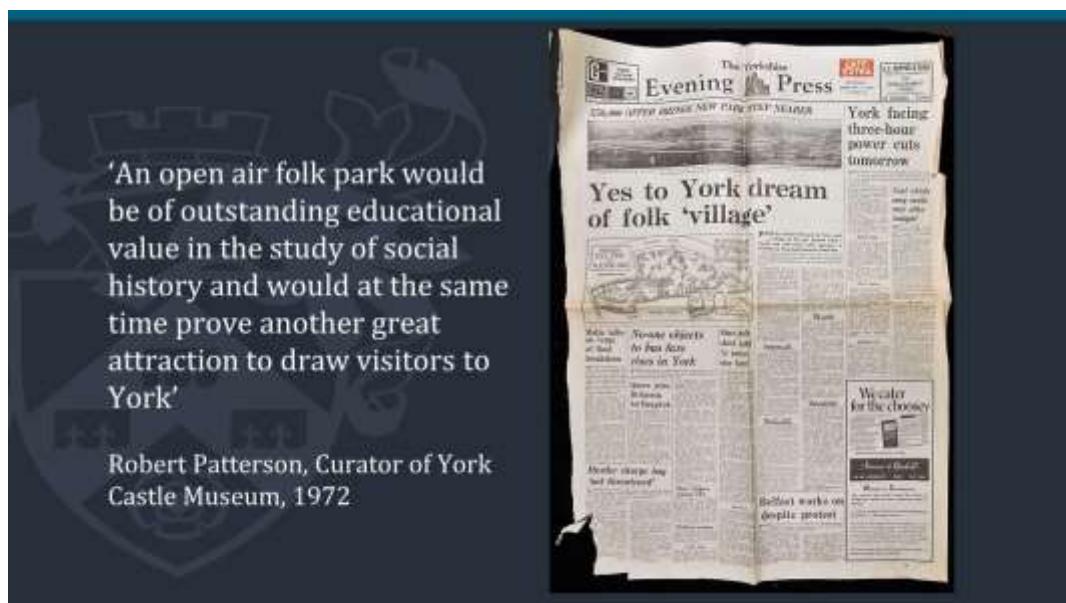
These initial articles were followed by a much longer one in the John Blunt column of the same paper, calling on the Council to make a decision over a site for the park and to pledge its support for the scheme. Blunt writes that it's been twelve years and thousands of pounds since York Civic Trust first threw the idea into the melting pot and although the council had pledged their support in principle, they had not given it formal approval and their delay was robbing it of the very thing it needed most - the

country's rural heritage. Country crafts were fast disappearing, along with the kinds of buildings Morrell had hoped to save. Robert Patterson, Curator of the Castle Museum, is quoted extensively throughout, expressing his disappointment at the delay and his fears that soon they would lose the opportunity entirely. Ten years ago, he is quoted as saying, he saw Yorkshire corn stacks, topped with decorative corn dollies, in a field on a North Yorkshire farm. Over the last six years he had not seen any. He believed the last corn stack ever to be made has been made, except in a museum.

By this point the Folk Park scheme has undergone some revision. The Raindale Mill was no longer available, and it was unclear whether the Fulford site was available either, as it was then being used for a council sponsored travellers camp. A third possible site was now being suggested, this time a piece of land off Bishopthorpe Road, but it was all still dependent on the support of the Council.

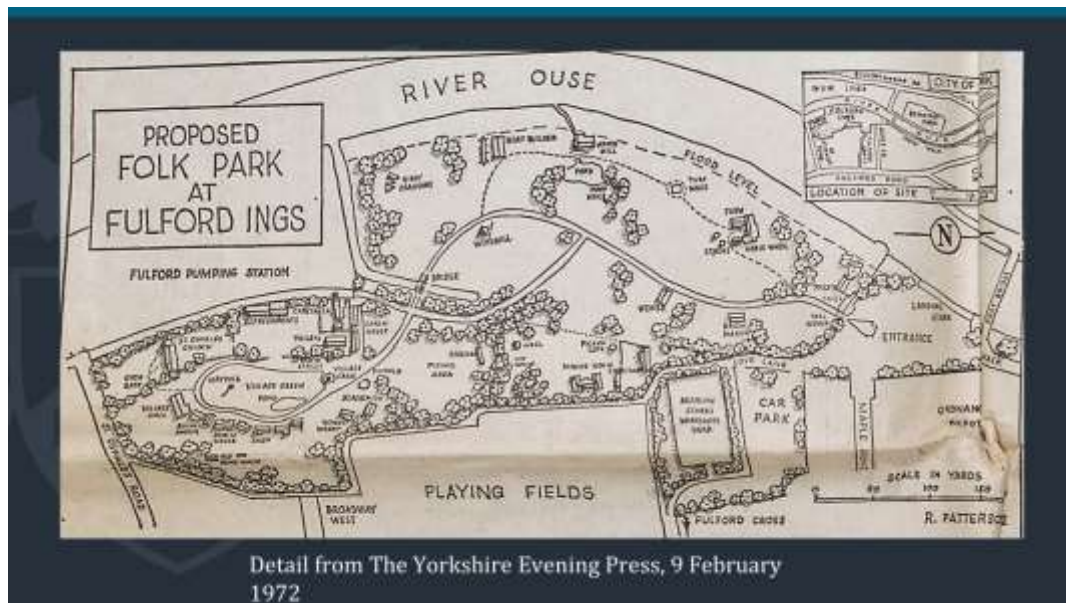
The sticking point of course was money. Although John Bowes Morrell has managed to secure around £15,000 of initial funding, it was thought that the costs of building and launching the park could be as much as £50,000 and that was back in 1963. By 1970 it was feared it could be double that.

However the Folk Park Trust was not yet ready to admit defeat. If the Council were dragging their heels at the size of the investment they'd have to make, then the Trust would try and raise more money. In September 1970 the Reform Trust agreed to increase the £12,000 gift they had made to Morrell in 1963 to £20,000, albeit on the condition that it was a loan that would have to be repaid if the scheme did not go ahead. With the £1000 from the Rowntree company, £250 from Westminster Press and £25,000 raised from personal gifts and money from the family trust, by 1972 the Folk Park Trust had raised £50,000 which it offered to the Council for the creation of the Park.



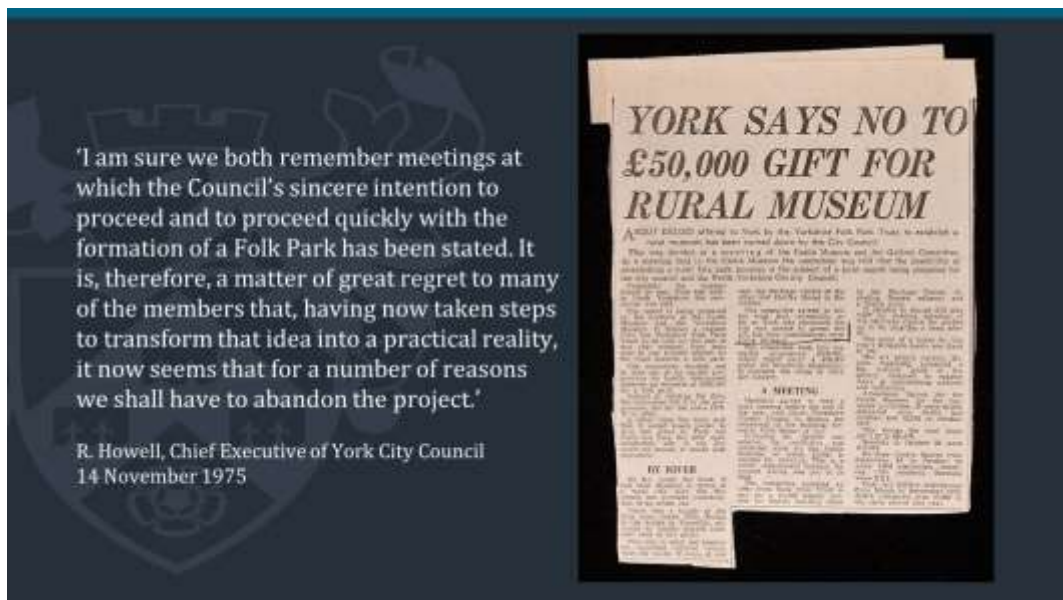
And it worked! In February 1972 the plan for a 30 acre folk park was finally approved in principle by the council's York Castle Museum Committee, to be sent on to be considered by the Finance and Planning Committee. William Bowes Morrell made sure it made the front page of the Press, claiming that the park might be ready

to open to the public as soon as eight to ten buildings had been erected which would take perhaps six years in all, including a full year to prepare the site. Once again Robert Patterson was quoted giving his enthusiastic support and the article included a plan of the proposed park which was the most detailed one yet, placing it once again at the Fulford site and expanding it significantly.



And here it is. The last known illustration of the Yorkshire Folk Park, created by Patterson and clearly drawing on Morrell's 1962 plan. It shows the full extent of the park, stretching from the end of the New Walk right across to St Oswald's Road and including St Oswald's Church. All the features of the 1962 plan are there - the village, the caravans, the windmill and farm, but there are additions too. There's a small manor house now, a pinfold, well, and pigeon cote, as well as practical additions like toilets, refreshment huts, picnic areas, offices, a caretakers house, and storage shed.

Sadly, this proved to be the closest the scheme ever came to reality. Based on the documents in the file the plan stalled and then ultimately was abandoned for a number of reasons. The cost continued to be the main issue. The scheme was approved in 1972 and in 1973 the British economy went into a recession which lasted for two years. As costs rose, the value of the £50,000 gift went down and there was a feeling among city councillors, expressed in newspaper articles and correspondence, that a folk park risked becoming a financial burden on the city in very difficult economic times. This was compounded by the problems they faced in actually securing a site for it. When the plan was provisionally approved by the Council it was based on the Fulford site, but it turned out some of the site was privately owned and by 1975 it was clear these parcels of land would be costly and difficult to obtain. There was also the more prosaic matter of car parking. The council's initial plans to create a car park on the opposite side of the River Ouse apparently faced such strong local opposition that the suggestion had to be dropped, making the site a difficult sell as a major tourist attraction.



In November 1975 the Chief Executive of York City Council wrote to William Bowes Morrell to say that the Council had, reluctantly, had to abandon the folk park project. The idea limped on for a few more years, with various ideas put forward to try and keep the essence of the folk park scheme alive. There were some discussions with the North Yorkshire Moors National Park about perhaps building the folk park there, or making it a part of the existing Ryedale Folk Museum, but this was rejected on planning grounds as it was felt it would create too much traffic. Similarly a plan to invest the funds in a Museum of Farming History at Murton, outside York, was not felt to be viable. Morrell even suggested some kind of 'urban folk park' instead in the Castlegate area, but this was also rejected by the council.

By 1979, despite William's best efforts, the scheme was officially dead and the main grant of £20,000, received from the Reform Trust, was returned.

The entire scheme, from Morrell's initial memorandum to the final failure of the project, lasted just over twenty years and leaves us with many 'what ifs'. What if Morrell hadn't died when he did? What if the project had been started earlier or been approved sooner? What if the university hadn't needed the Heslington site?

Ultimately it seems to have been a case of the wrong place and the wrong time, but the fact that the scheme was put forward at all speaks to a very real concern about what was being lost, as well as gained, in the rapid progress of the twentieth century, and the importance of the ordinary and the everyday in our understanding not just of the past, but also of the present and how we came to be where we are.

Today the York folk park is something that only really exists in the archive, but after researching this talk I couldn't help wanting to find out what had happened to some of the buildings Morrell mentioned and which he wanted so much to preserve.



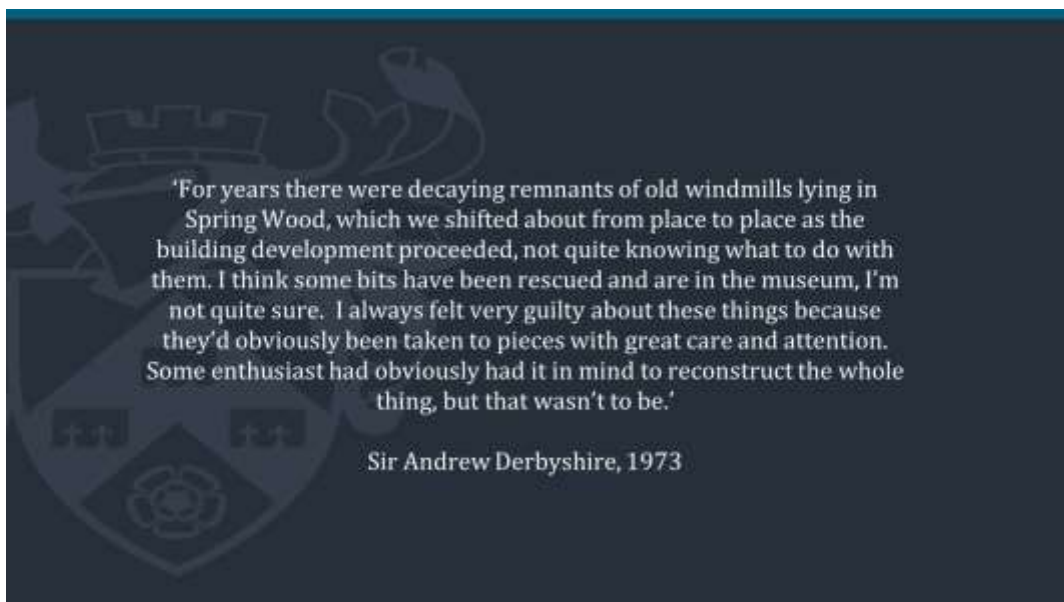
Raindale Mill, originally situated on the North Yorkshire Moors, serving Newton upon Rawcliffe and the surrounding villages

One of them was very easy to find of course. Raindale Mill, initially intended for the Folk Park, is now open to the public as part of Castle Museum. On the screen you can see a photograph of the mill in its original location near Newton upon Rawcliffe in 1915. Then you have Morrell's sketch of it, as he imagined it looking in the Folk Park, and then finally as it is now, carefully rebuilt and preserved. It was actually rebuilt at the museum in 1966, so it was lost to the Folk Park quite early on but not, thankfully, to the city.



The last working postmill in Yorkshire has proven to be more of a challenge and it's possible, maybe even likely, this one doesn't have such a happy ending. The postmill originally stood at Little Smeaton, near Selby. It had been in use until 1918 and subsequently fell into some disrepair. Morrell appears to have purchased it in 1961, in which year it was taken down and transported to York. The villagers were told it was being dismantled to be rebuilt in a museum. It was then stored at Heslington Hall in pieces, possibly in the greenhouses to start with.

Of course when the university took over the land and started building work, this became a problem! A newspaper article in December 1963 mentions that the mill was still there, 'with its huge wooden cogwheels', while all around work is in progress on the next building stage for the university. It was said to be in quite poor condition, the exterior wood had fallen away when it was dismantled so it would need to be reclad before it could be used again.



Correspondence shows William Bowes Morrell trying to find somewhere new to store the windmill in the mid 1960s and then the trail runs cold - except for an interview with university architect Andrew Derbyshire in 1973, in which he says,

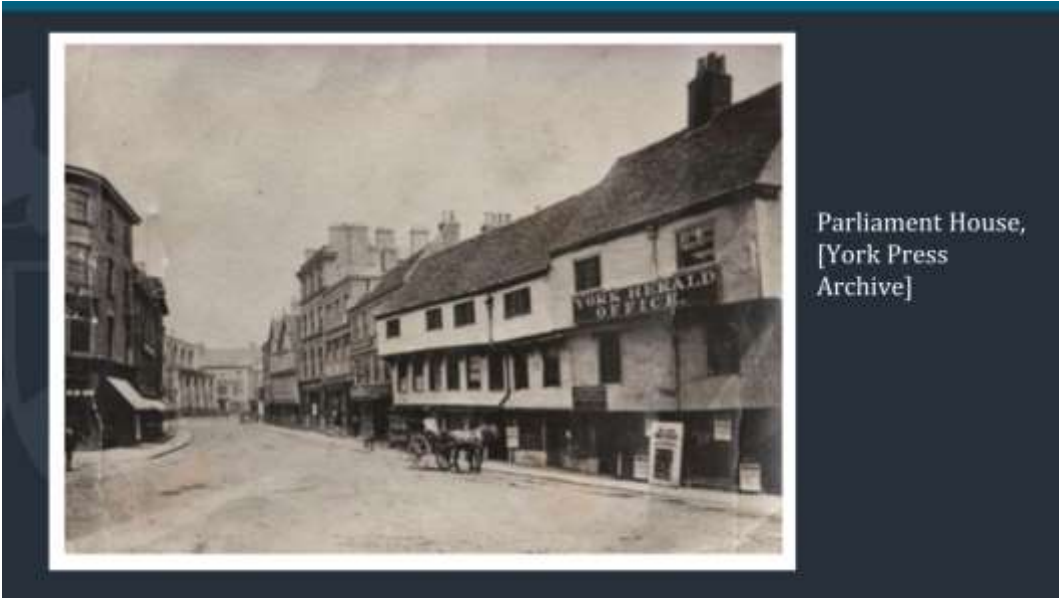
'For years there were decaying remnants of old windmills lying in Spring Wood, which we shifted about from place to place as the building development proceeded, not quite knowing what to do with them. I think some bits have been rescued and are in the museum, I'm not quite sure. I always felt very guilty about these things because they'd obviously been taken to pieces with great care and attention. Some enthusiast had obviously had it in mind to reconstruct the whole thing, but that wasn't to be.'

I haven't been able to find out anything more about the postmill, but the mention that some bits might have been rescued and put in a museum have given me some hope that it's still out there somewhere, in some form or other. If you happen to have seen a historic postmill lying around, please do let me know.



Parliament House,
c 1905 [Explore
York Libraries
and Archives]

I was discussing the postmill quite recently with the history research team at Treasurer's House, York, because they've been helping me trace another remnant of Morrell's Folk Park - the timbers of Parliament House, earmarked for the park's town or village square. They also showed me what it looked like for the first time, which was quite exciting as before I'd only had Morrell's sketch to go on. Here it is at the beginning of the 20th century, covered in a lot of advertisements. It's believed to be medieval in origin, possibly built for a Lord Mayor of York, although research is very much ongoing.



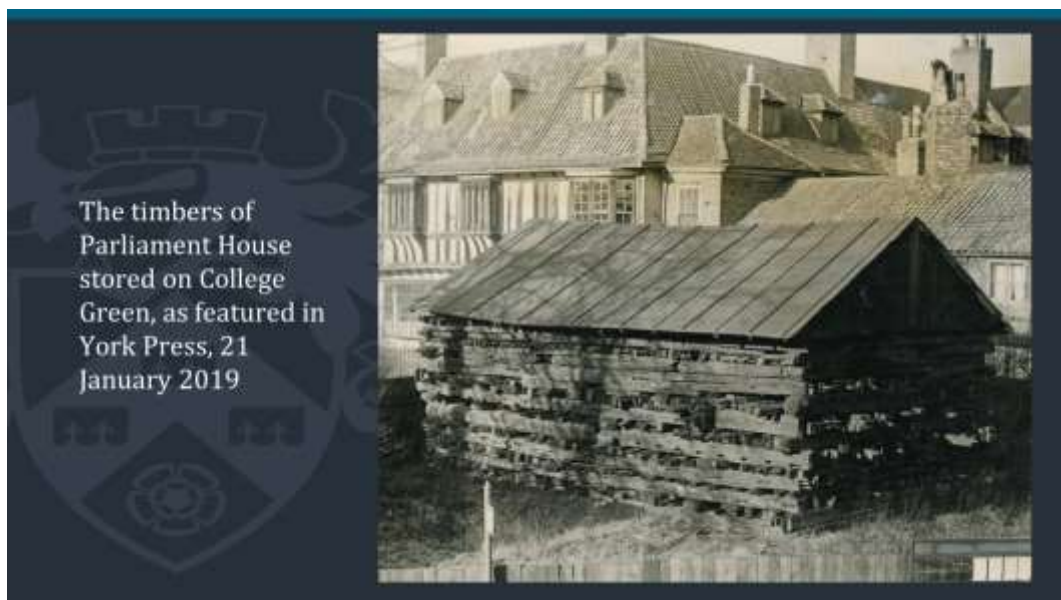
Parliament House,
[York Press
Archive]

If you're wondering where exactly it was, here's another view of it on the right. The picture is looking down towards Stonebow. You can see St Crux church on the left at the bottom and what is now the York Gin Shop, previously Jones shoe shop across the road from the church. So Parliament House would have been facing up Parliament Street.



And here is the old and new view together, as near as I could get them, so you can see roughly where it would have stood.

The house was taken down in 1911 to make way for the extension of Piccadilly. A plan was made and all the pieces were carefully numbered and labelled so the house could be rebuilt. As they were known to be of architectural value, the timbers were bought by Frank Green of Treasurer's House who stored them in a fenced off area near the Minster.



It was hoped they might be reconstructed near the old Minster gateway but it seems that did not happen and they remained in storage on College Green for decades. Eventually the labels seem to have fallen off and some of the timbers were burned. In 1955 it was reported that Morrell had bought the remaining timbers to give to the city. They were stored at Castle Museum and then at Heslington Hall until at least October 1963 when Mr Patterson from the Castle Museum came to look them over with a view to transferring them back to the museum for safer storage.



This is what appears to have happened. They were found again in museum storage in recent years and are now on display once more at Treasurer's House, with a very interesting information board and a whole folder of research, all carried out by the team there. The eight surviving timbers are really beautiful, with very vivid carvings of faces. The team told me that these timbers would have run along the front of the building where they could be best viewed from the street. If you haven't seen them and you get a chance to, I'd recommend it.

Finally, I did discover one further tangible result of Morrell's dream of a Folk Park.



In 1980 the Reform Trust agreed to make a grant of £10,000 out of the money originally earmarked for the Folk Park for the purposes of creating a Victorian solicitor's office at Beamish Open Air Museum in County Durham. The office used the name of J. and R.S. Watson, R.S. Watson being Robert Spence Watson, the Quaker reformer and solicitor whose daughter, Bertha, married John Bowes Morrell in 1902. The grant was duly paid and the solicitor's office can still be seen there

today, as part of the Ravensworth Terrace buildings in the replica Edwardian Town.

Whilst this may seem a far cry from the microcosm of English rural life Morrell imagined in 1956, the origins of Beamish too lie in the Scandinavian folk park movement. It describes itself as a living, working museum that aims to illustrate the lives of ordinary people in North East England, showcasing the rural as well as the urban, and as such I like to think Morrell would have approved of his small contribution to its work, and of its mission to introduce its visitors to life as their ancestors lived it.

Thank you.

