

Rowntree Society, 16 May 2011 at York University:

- 1 Thank you Lord Mayor, for your continuing support as Patron of the Rowntree Society, for joining with us this evening, and for your kind words of support for this new initiative.
- 2 I am Stephen Pittam and I am the Trust Secretary of The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, one of the four trusts that have grown out of Joseph Rowntree's generous gift of 54% of the share capital of the Rowntree Company in 1904. The four trusts are the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, The Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, The Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. We are all now separate entities, with our own Boards and staff, but we share the same heritage and a common Memorandum written by Joseph in 1904 setting out his thoughts on how we should use his money. We also have in common our support for the work of the Rowntree Society.
- 3 I am also a Trustee of The Rowntree Society. Most of my fellow Trustees are here tonight and I think they would want to join me in paying tribute to Steven Burkeman (our founding Chair) for taking the initiative and having the persistence to establish a Society to celebrate the 'work and ideas of the Rowntree family', and to promote these ideas in the contemporary context. I would also like to thank Bridget Morris, our indefatigable Executive Secretary who comes up with the most amazing ideas for promoting our message like the one tonight; and Liz Grierson our Vice-Chair who has worked so hard on this event today.
- 4 And whilst I am on the thank-yous, can I also thank the year 10 students of the Joseph Rowntree School for researching the recipes and then making the 1911 cakes for tonight's event. We are delighted that they, together with their Head, Penny Robinson and Deputy Head, Andrew Janes are here tonight. We are also very grateful to Richard Pollitt, the Manager of the Mansion House and Guildhall for bringing the original scroll marking Joseph Rowntree appointment as a Freeman of the City. He has it placed in a lockable cabinet just inside the entrance door – please have a look at it before you leave this evening.
- 4 We have come here tonight to launch and to view an installation in the demonstration space of this remarkable new building at York University. We are very grateful to the University for enabling us to do this, and thus to build on the connections between the Rowntree name and the University of York.
- 5 The installation is based on the quaintly named 'Mr Rowntree's Retrospective' which was the title the press gave to Joseph's speech

when he was made a Freeman of the City of York on 17 May 1911 - exactly 100 years ago today.

- 6 I have read the speech, and I am looking forward to seeing how it is transformed into a 21st Century installation! The speech really was a retrospective as Joseph looked back from his age of 75 to the City he knew as a child in the 1840s. He looked at the massive progress that had been made over the 70 years - in the fields of health, education, housing and electoral reform. He paid great attention to statistical detail in the way that he and his son Seebohm were to become famous for. And he ends his speech with a moving description of how poverty was still impacting negatively on the lives of so many citizens in York and encouraged the City Councillors to do more.
- 7 Anne Vernon in her biography of Joseph Rowntree suggests that this last part was challenging to the company of prosperous citizens assembled in the Guildhall, and made some feel uneasy. I am not sure that JR's speech will come over to us in this way tonight, although it would be good if it did - because part of the Rowntree legacy that we are celebrating tonight is about challenging the comfortable and speaking truth to power, and also one of leading by example.
- 8 You may have seen Stephen Lewis' piece on the Rowntree speech in The Press yesterday under the title Speaking Across Years. Stephen Lewis wrote that the speech has lost none of its passion or humanity a century on, and that it resonates in today's post-recession age almost as much as it must have done back then. This is the reason why the Rowntree Society wants to keep alive the values that underlie what we might describe as the Rowntree message. The message remains relevant today.
- 9 It would be a really interesting project to update the statistics on the City of York for 2011 in the same way that Joseph did in 1911 on the previous 70 years. Of course we would be able to show huge progress in many areas, partly as a result of the creation of the Welfare State that Joseph and Seebohm were keen to achieve. But just as Joseph added a sting to the tale of his speech, one would need to be added now. I would like to pick out three of the themes that Joseph raised that are key to our current situation;
 - First, Poverty & Inequality- Rowntree's deep concern about these issues comes through in the speech. He was troubled by the fact that the gap between the rich and the poor had declined little over his working life. He knew what poverty meant, not only intellectually (through his & his son's Seebohm's research), but experientially because of his visit as a young man to Ireland during the famine, his direct contact with members of his workforce facing difficulties, and also because of his experience of teaching in the Adult Schools of

York. Right into his 60s he spent every Sunday morning in the working class districts of York, teaching in the Adult Schools that were so strong at that time.

He would be disappointed that more progress had not been made in this field. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, in particular, is carrying forward his passion for undertaking research in this area (some undertaken by staff at this University); and bringing the experience of those living in poverty to the attention of politicians and policy makers. And I imagine that Joseph would be supportive, but saddened to know that JRCT, after funding organisations like the Child Poverty Action Group and the Low Pay Unit for the best part of 50 years, is currently funding a High Pay Commission to consider what can be done to address the other end of this spectrum - the huge salaries of many in the senior echelons of the UK's companies and financial institutions. You may have seen coverage of the Commission's interim report earlier this week. How depressed Joseph Rowntree would be to hear that in 2011 the average FTSE 100 Chief Executive is taking home a salary that is 145 times that of the average, and that by 2020 it is estimated that the differential will have risen to 214 times if nothing is done to stop this.

- Second, Purity of Elections. Rowntree used this speech to re-enforce the message that he had earlier given to future Trustees of his Trusts in his 1904 Memorandum. This was about the need to work for purity in local and national elections. Four years earlier in 1907 he had written a pamphlet on the need to reform the House of Lords. Does anything change! Of course we are in a very different situation today, and yet these same themes remain relevant and are very much on the agenda of the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust today. He would have been dismayed by the standards in public life shown by many MPs in the recent expenses scandal, but I imagine content that it was resources from the Charitable Trust that had been used to draft and promote the Freedom of Information Act that played such a key role in uncovering the scandal.
- Third, the limits of Philanthropy. In this speech JR spoke convincingly of the roles that Philanthropy can play but he also talked about the roles that it should not. He says that private philanthropy may do much, but the work to be done is beyond its power. This was true in 1911. It is also true in 2011. As Timothy Stanley recently wrote in *The Guardian* 'Owen and Rowntree started out as private philanthropists, but they dreamed that one day free schools and hospitals funded by taxation would become national policy'. We are now living in economically challenging times with some subtle and some less subtle suggestions that we can roll back the state and let philanthropy solve our social problems. This speech

in 1911 suggests that Rowntree would be sceptical of this suggestion, just as we at JRCT are today.

- 9 Joseph Rowntree was a genius at combining timeless values (for him stemming from his Quaker faith) with a forward looking outlook on the world. He was keen on science and on the development and use of new technology. One of his passions was education. He would have been delighted that his Trusts had played a significant part in the development of the University here in York. Under the inspirational leadership of JB Morrell it was the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust that bought Heslington Hall and the land that was to form the original university site. Three of the Rowntree Trusts have been associated with the development of the University and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation continues to have a close relationship.
- 10 Joseph would be delighted to see this vast new part to the expanding university campus and the thriving student population. He would be interested in the new hopes for a greener and regenerated city that Ron Cooke, whose name is associated with this building, is leading.
- 11 As an innovator and a visionary Joseph Rowntree would have been fascinated by the modern technology that can produce this installation (32 speakers hidden in the walls and the possibility of projecting images on all four walls simultaneously). 100 years on we are in a very different venue from the genteel world of the Guildhall where he was made a Freeman of the city. Change and continuity are captured in this installation. The Rowntree Society is all about promoting the ethos and the values of the Rowntree family in the contemporary world. What better way to do this than through this very modern installation. I hope you enjoy Mr Rowntree's Retrospective!