

# The River Ouse Through Time

Judy Nicholson & Chris Rainger



*York as you go to Water foulford. 1703.*

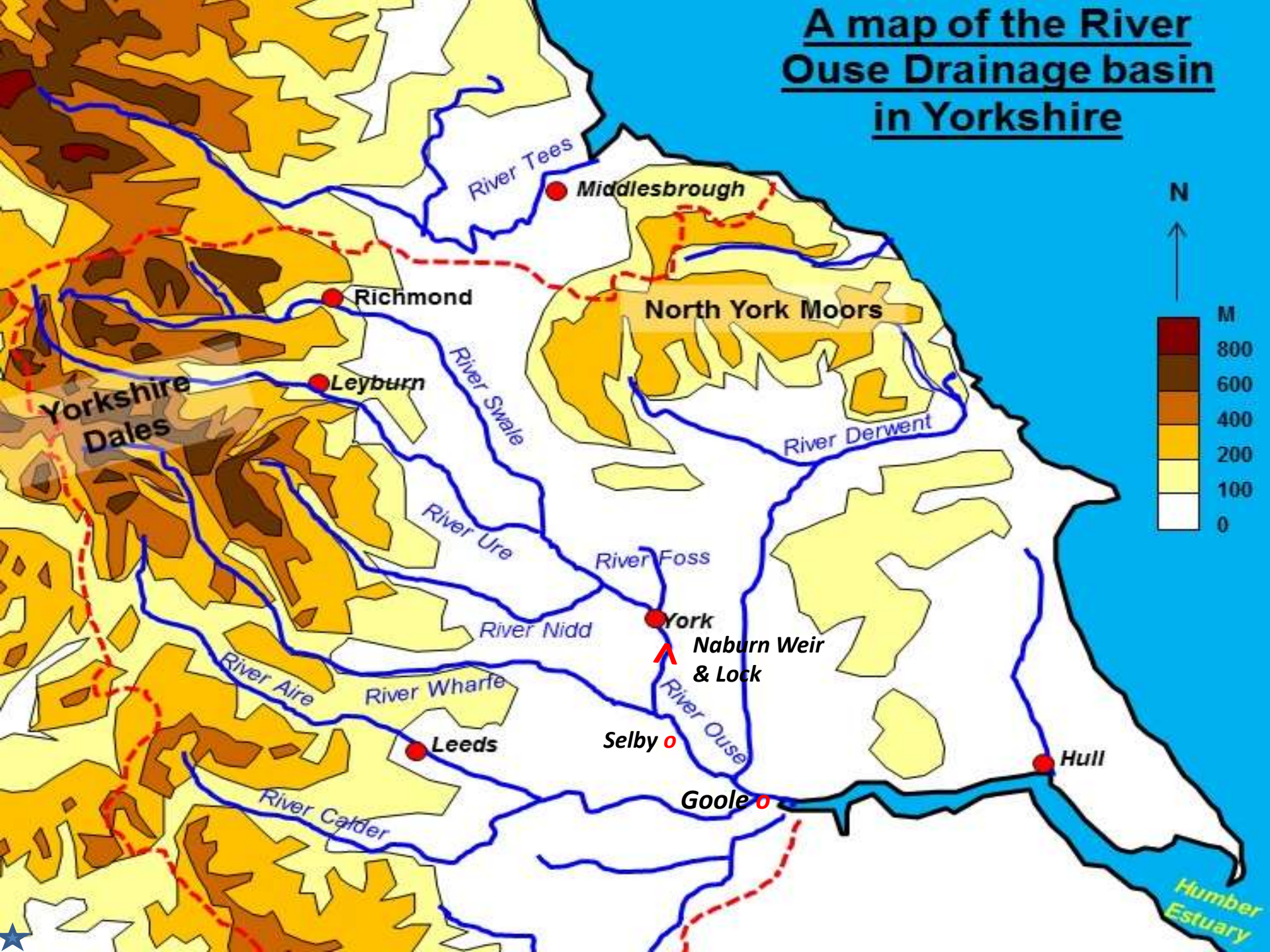


***Source-Stone for Ouse Beck Gill, in the gardens of the old workhouse at Great Ouseburn***





# A map of the River Ouse Drainage basin in Yorkshire





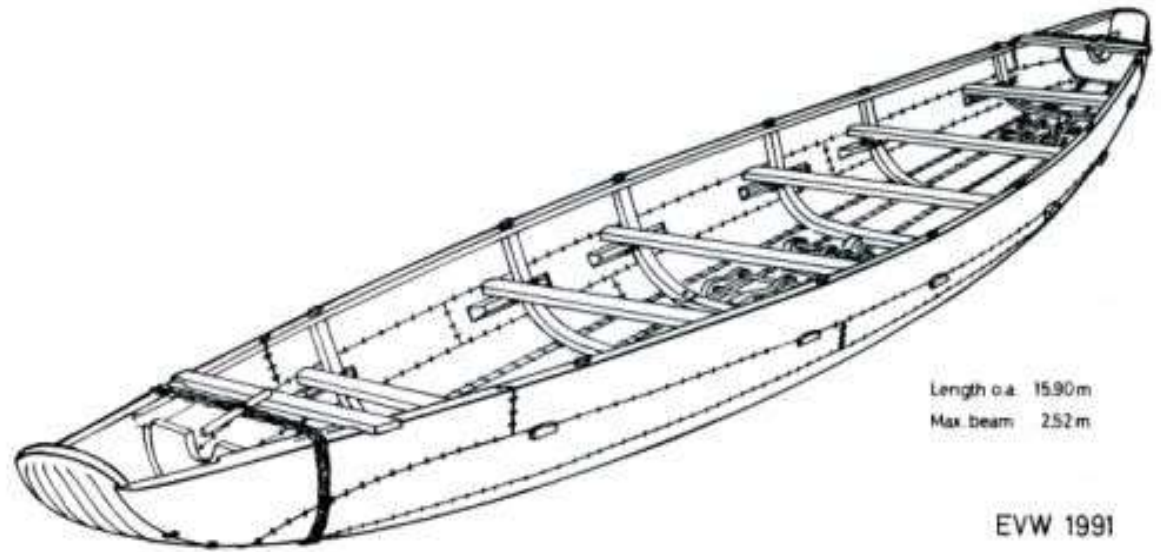
Naburn Swing Bridge 1947



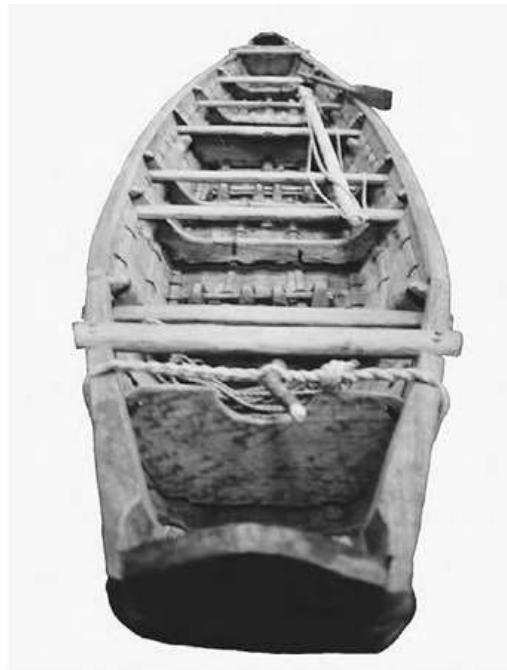


The river was tidal until 1757

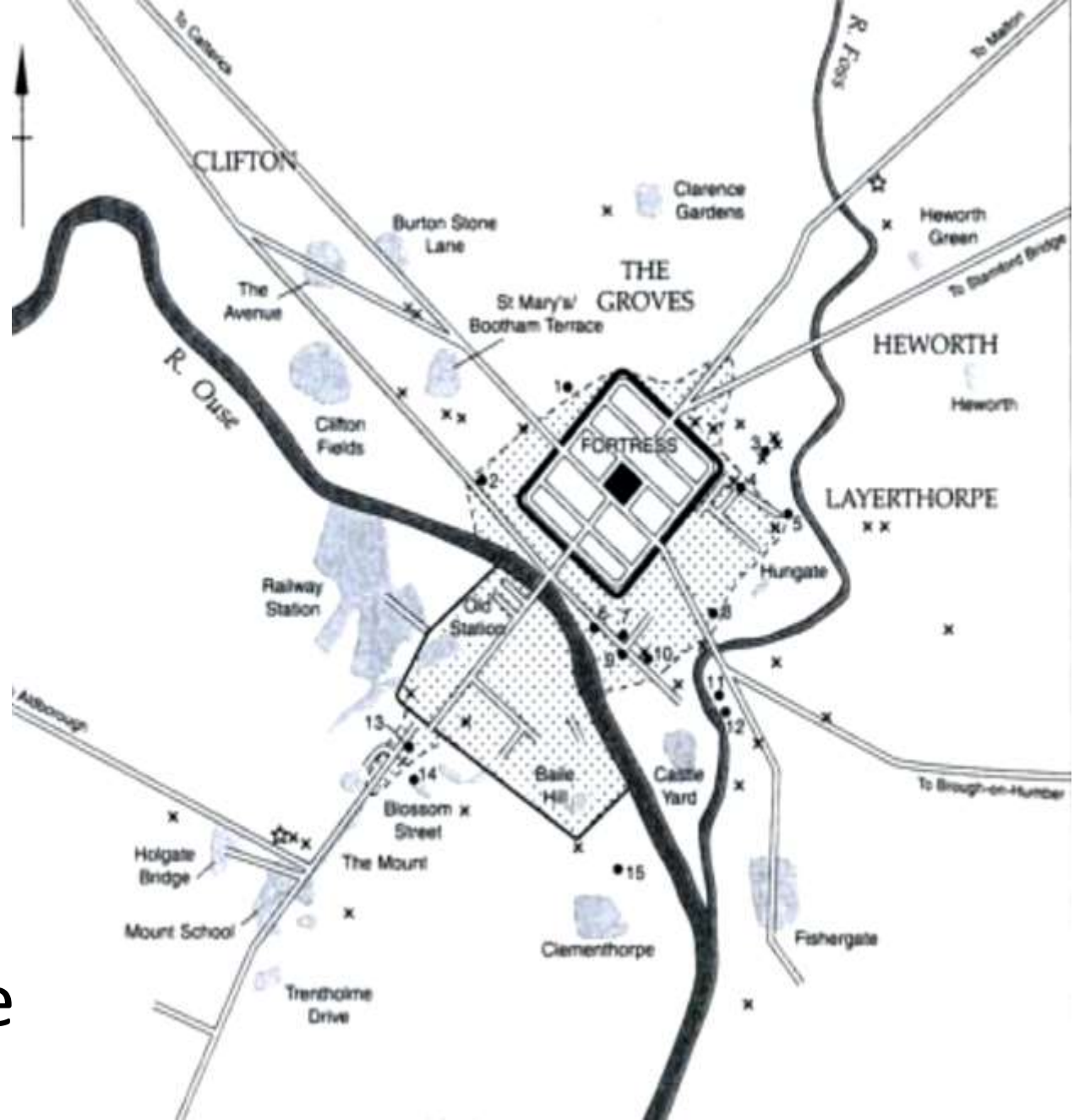
Mesolithic arrow heads have been found at Connaught Court, so it is likely that people have lived near the river since soon after the last Ice Age



Hypothetical reconstruction of a complete Ferriby boat

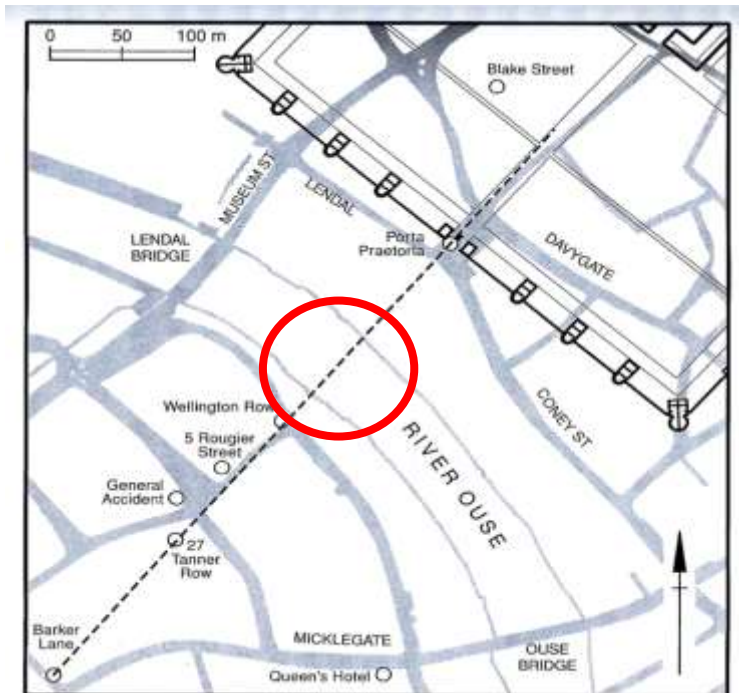


The Romans chose York as their northern military centre because of its accessibility. They built their fortress on the higher ground, protected by the two rivers





No-one has found the Roman Bridge, but its location is clear, leading from Micklegate to the Fortress gate

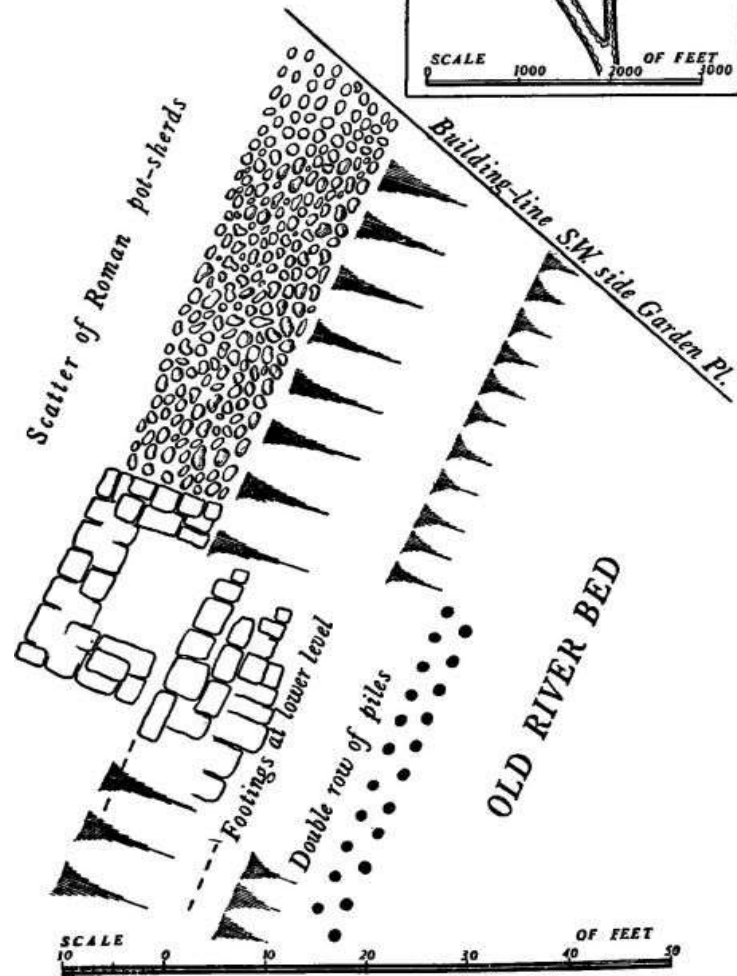




The Romans had wharves and warehouses along the banks of the Ouse and Foss. Remains of revetments and piling have been found at North Street and at the telephone exchange and at other sites.

FOSS RIVERFRONT Structure on site of Telephone Exchange, Garden Place, Stonebow

Monument 52

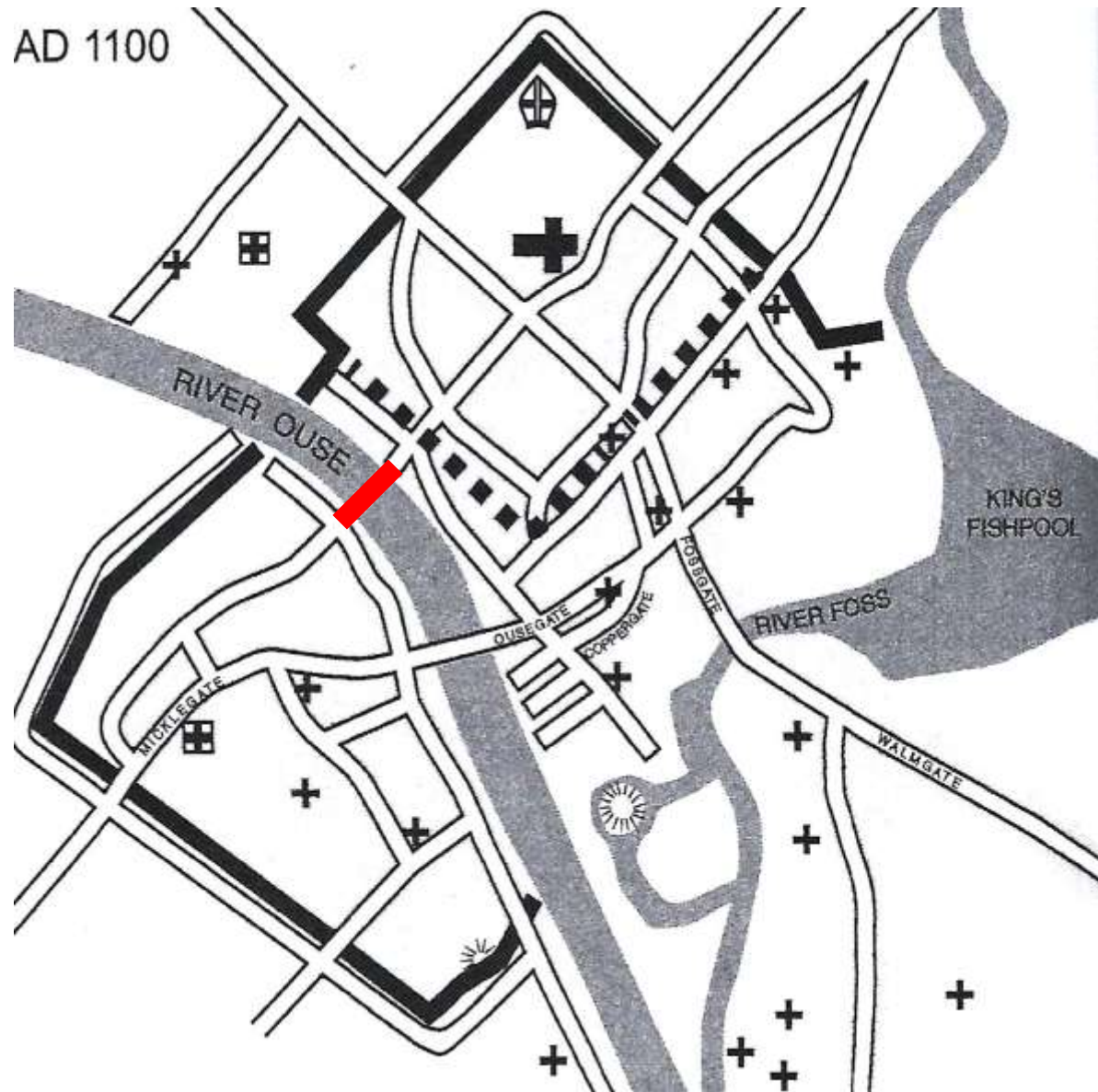




York recovered through the 7<sup>th</sup> century and became a centre of royal and ecclesiastical power, with staites in the Fishergate Wic forming the centre of trading, manufacturing and provisioning. Alcuin wrote of arriving in York along the river.

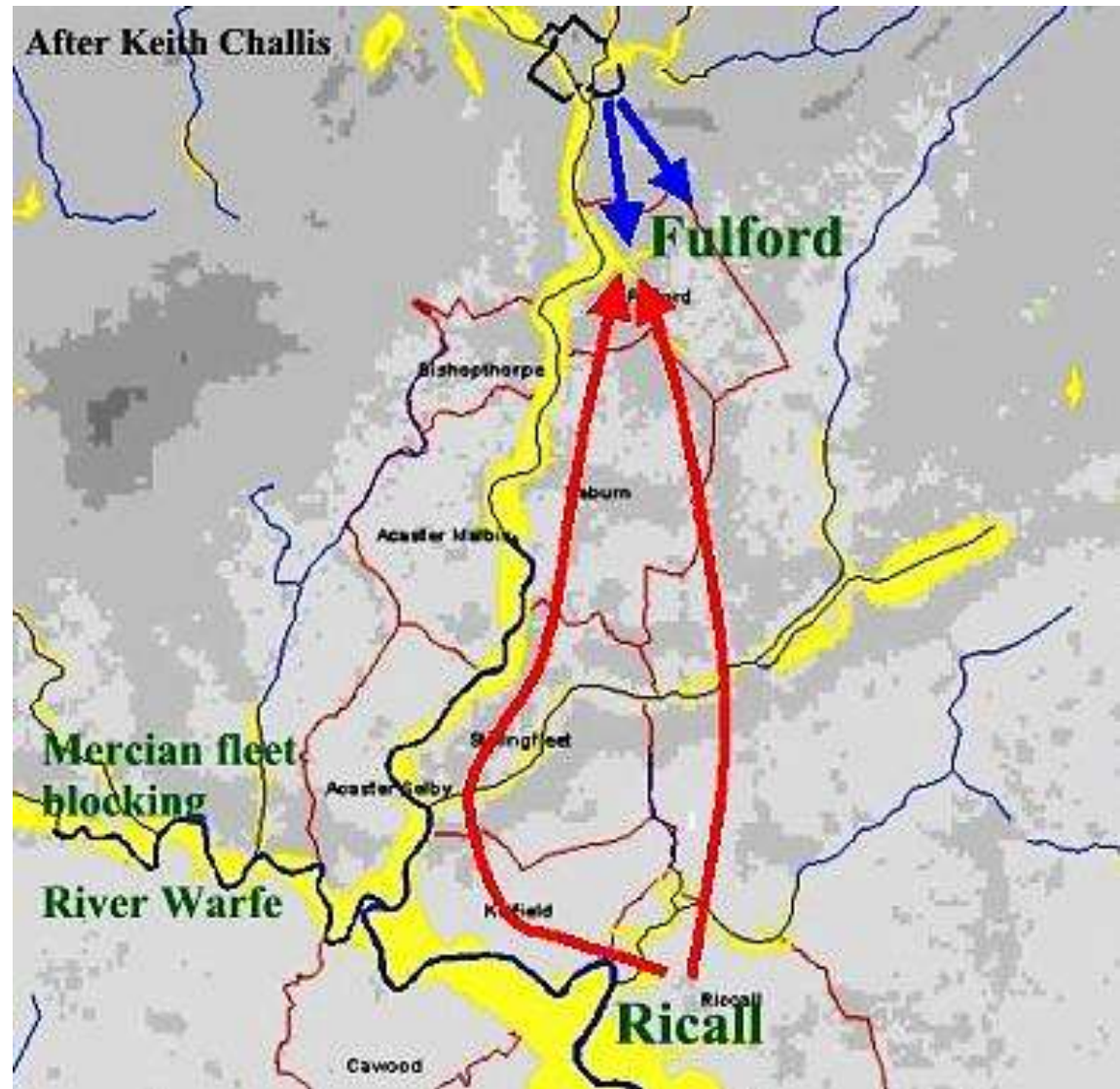


It is now thought the Roman bridge may have survived through to the 10/11<sup>th</sup> century, with a new Anglo-Scandinavian timber bridge on the site of Ouse Bridge serving the new city layout.



1066 –  
300 ships rode the  
tide up the Ouse to  
Riccall, but walked to  
battle at Fulford.

1068 --  
200 Danish ships  
came up the Ouse to  
support rebellions  
against the Normans,  
leading to the  
'Harrying of the  
North' by William's  
army





In 1068-9, the Normans dammed the Foss, flooding the castle moat & creating the King's Fishpond.



Castle Mills dam prevented boats travelling up the Foss beyond Browney Dyke until 1794





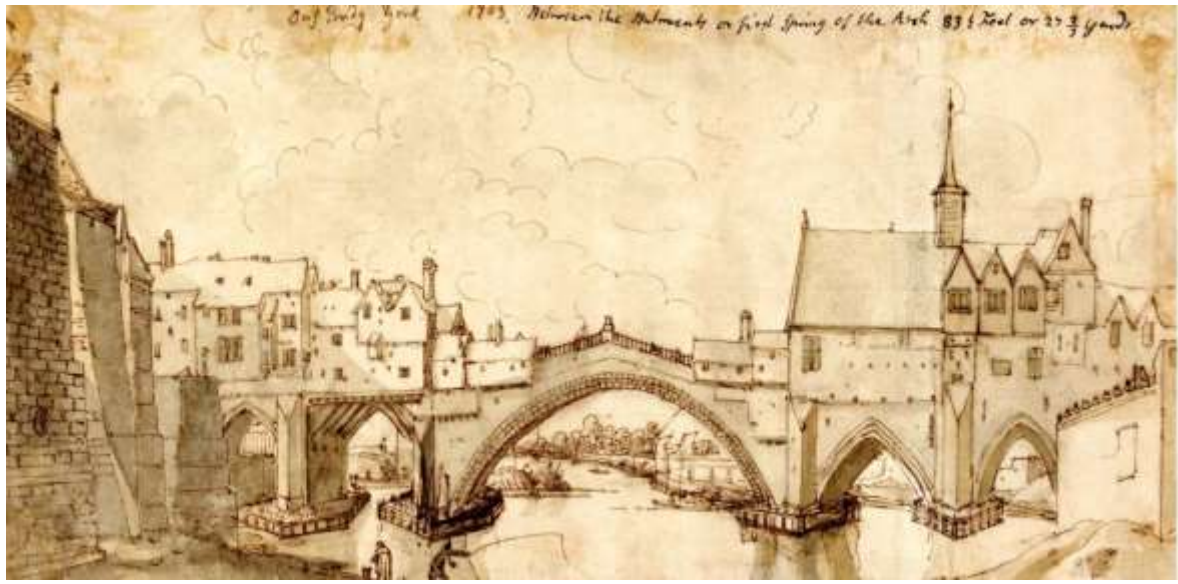
In 1154, Archbishop William was said to have been greeted by such a large crowd that the timber Ouse Bridge collapsed. Miraculously no one was drowned. A new multi-arched stone bridge was built in c.1155.



Apart from Edwin Risdale-Tate's imagined view, there are no images of the new 6 arched masonry bridge of c.1155.

But, we do have many pictures after it lost its central pier - during floods in 1564.

The outer arches were retained and the two lost central arches were replaced by one elegant arch.







William Marlow's painting of c.1763 shows Ouse Bridge 50 years before its replacement with the present structure in 1820.

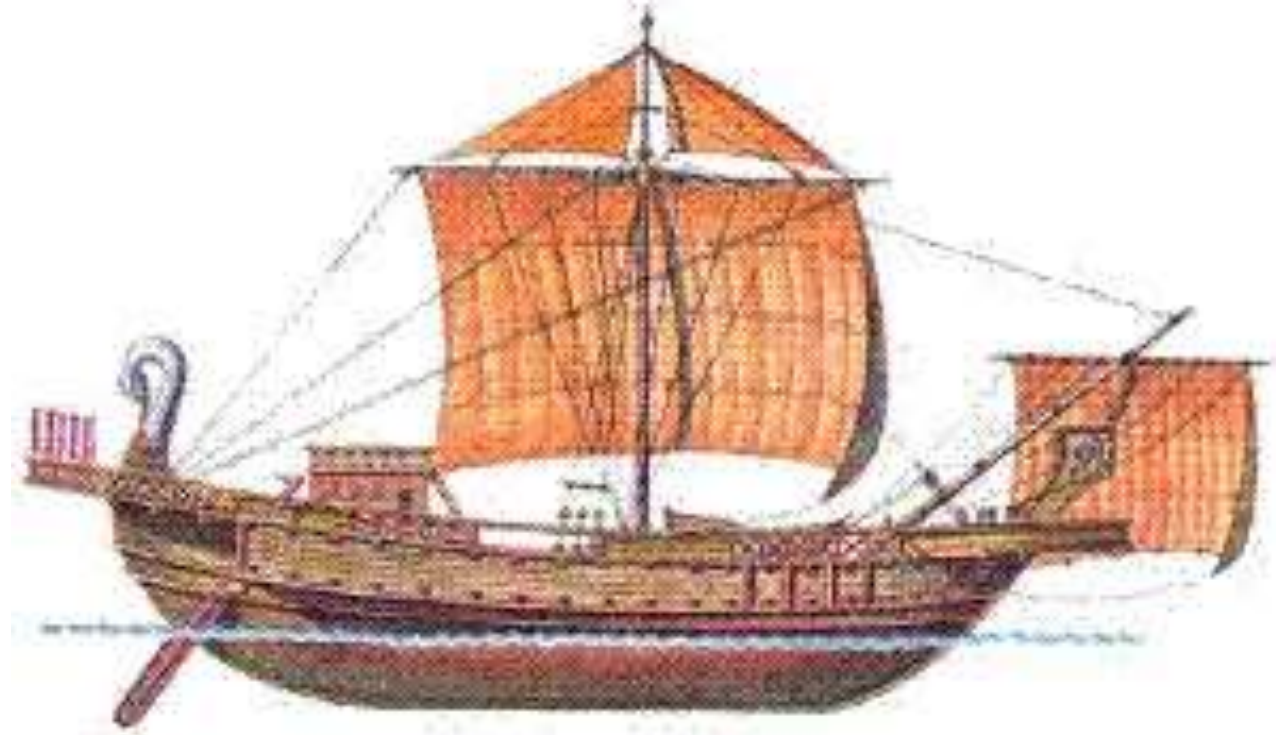




Ouse Bridge, by John Carter, late 18<sup>th</sup> century



What type  
of ships  
were  
coming to  
York?



Roman Trading Ship



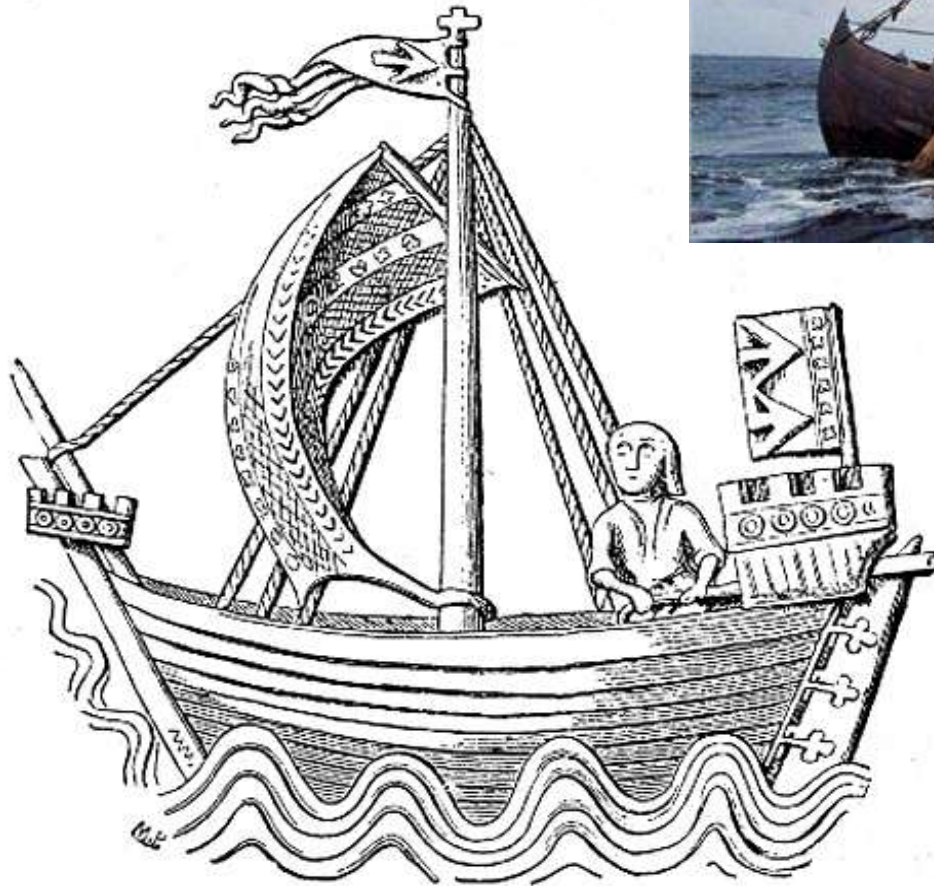
Norman Ships shown on  
the Bayeux Tapestry and  
are probably the same as  
Anglian and Viking Ships



Ships were evolving and getting bigger and better



Knarr – Viking/early medieval trading ship



Cog – 13/14<sup>th</sup> century trading ship, possibly with cabins fore and aft, and a rudder for steering.

Magnesium limestone for the new Minster, St Mary's Abbey, churches and the city walls was brought down the river Wharf from Tadcaster, and Millstone Grit Via the Ure.



Knarr – 10/13th century flat bottomed cargo ship which could easily rest on the river bed. Fore-runner of the Keel.



Medieval York's wealth was built on the river – exporting wool, cloth, lead, grain, and importing basics and luxuries, such as olive oil, figs and raisins from Spain.

York became England's second richest city.



Cog – 13/14<sup>th</sup> century merchant ship



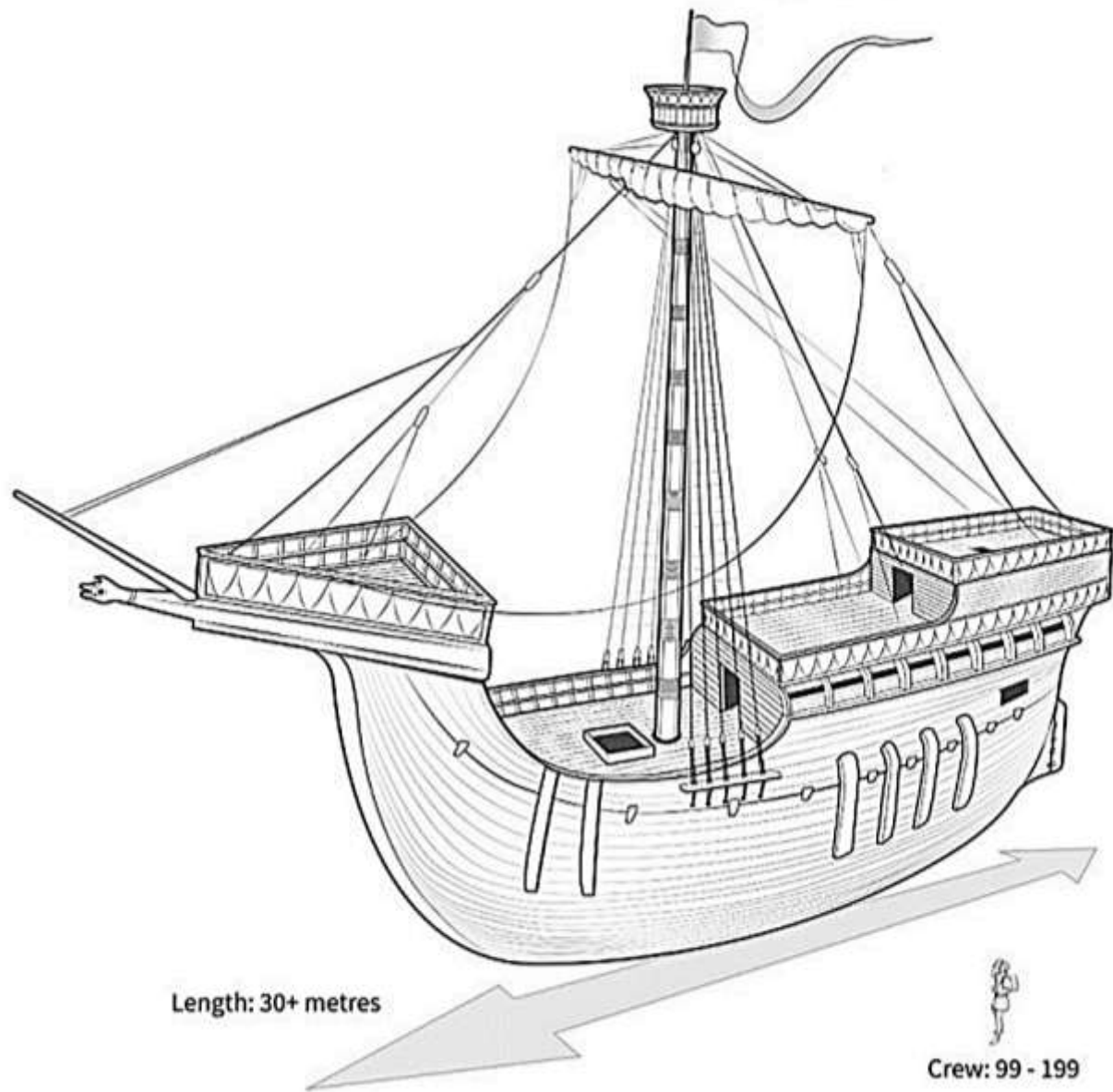
In Jan van Eyck's 1434 painting 'the Arnolfini Marriage' the lady is holding up her very fashionable full-skirted dress, woven in Flanders from English wool.  
- perhaps exported from York?





In 1415, York sent 5 ships to join Henry V's invasion fleet to France and subsequently, Agincourt.

This image is of the 'Holigost' a clinker-built Carrack of the period.



Hull began to rival York from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, but York maintained its position for another 100 years, thanks in particular to the rise of the Merchant Adventurers and trading power of the Abbeyes.



Hull – 1537

*Note that the ships are all in the River Hull, not the along the Humber*





There were complaints in Hull that York merchants controlled most of their port, as they increasingly based their shipping activities there.

As sea-going vessels grew larger the Ouse became harder to navigate.

Selby grew in importance too, as it was easier to reach than York and closer to the growing West Riding wool industry.

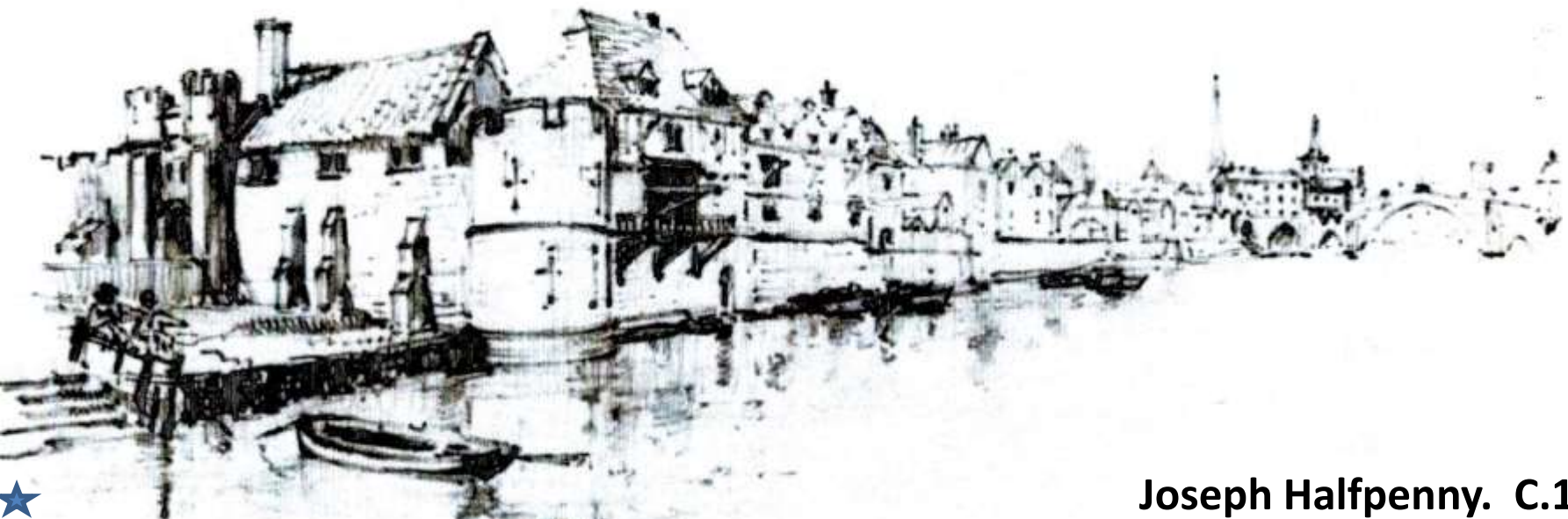


**Abbot's Warehouse, Selby**

Rebuilt in 1417,  
the City ordered  
that *'the wares of  
foreigners such as  
spices, wines,  
alum.....were to be  
stored in the  
Cranegarth'*.



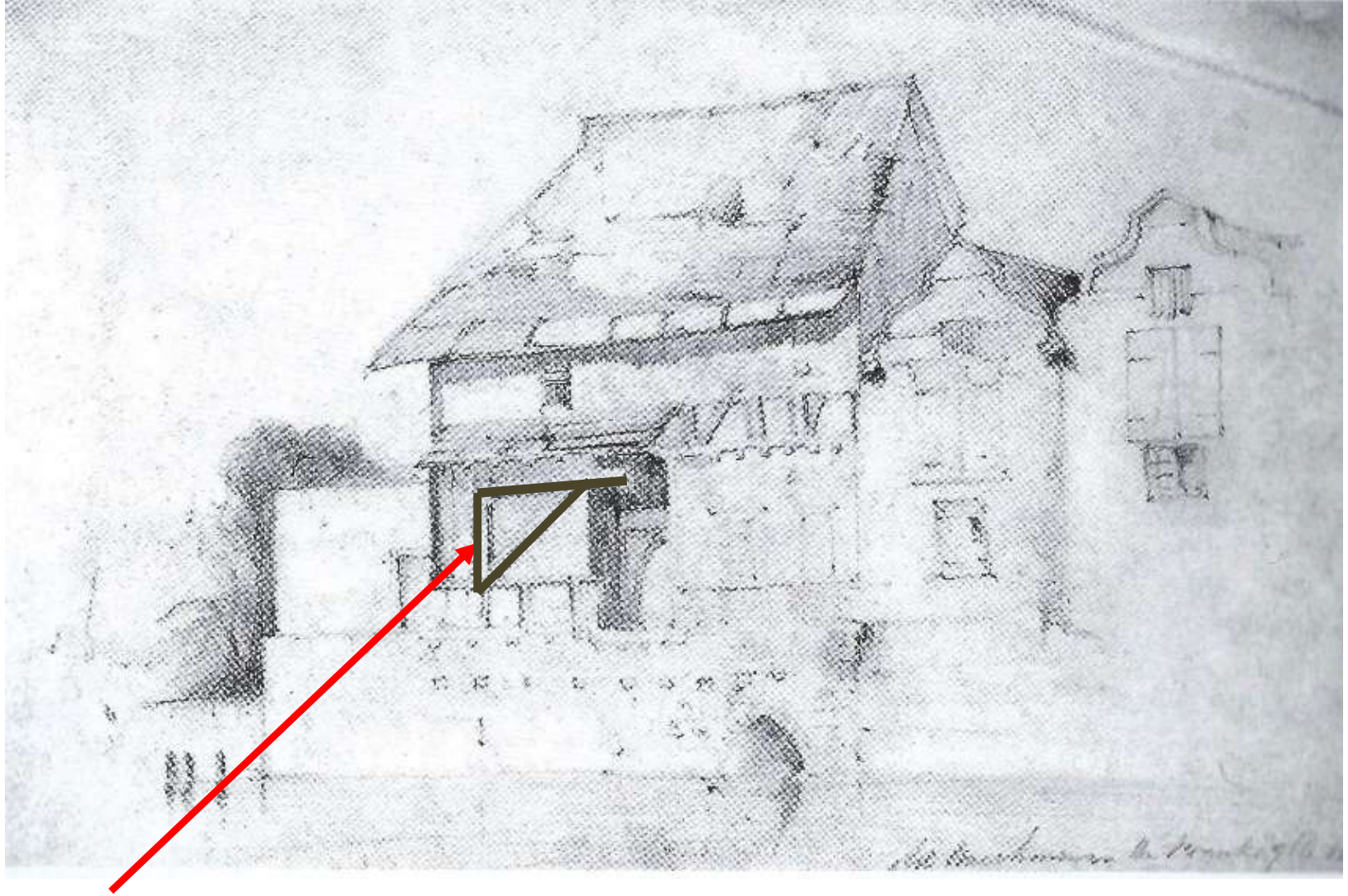
**William Boddy. 1909**



**Joseph Halfpenny. C.1800**





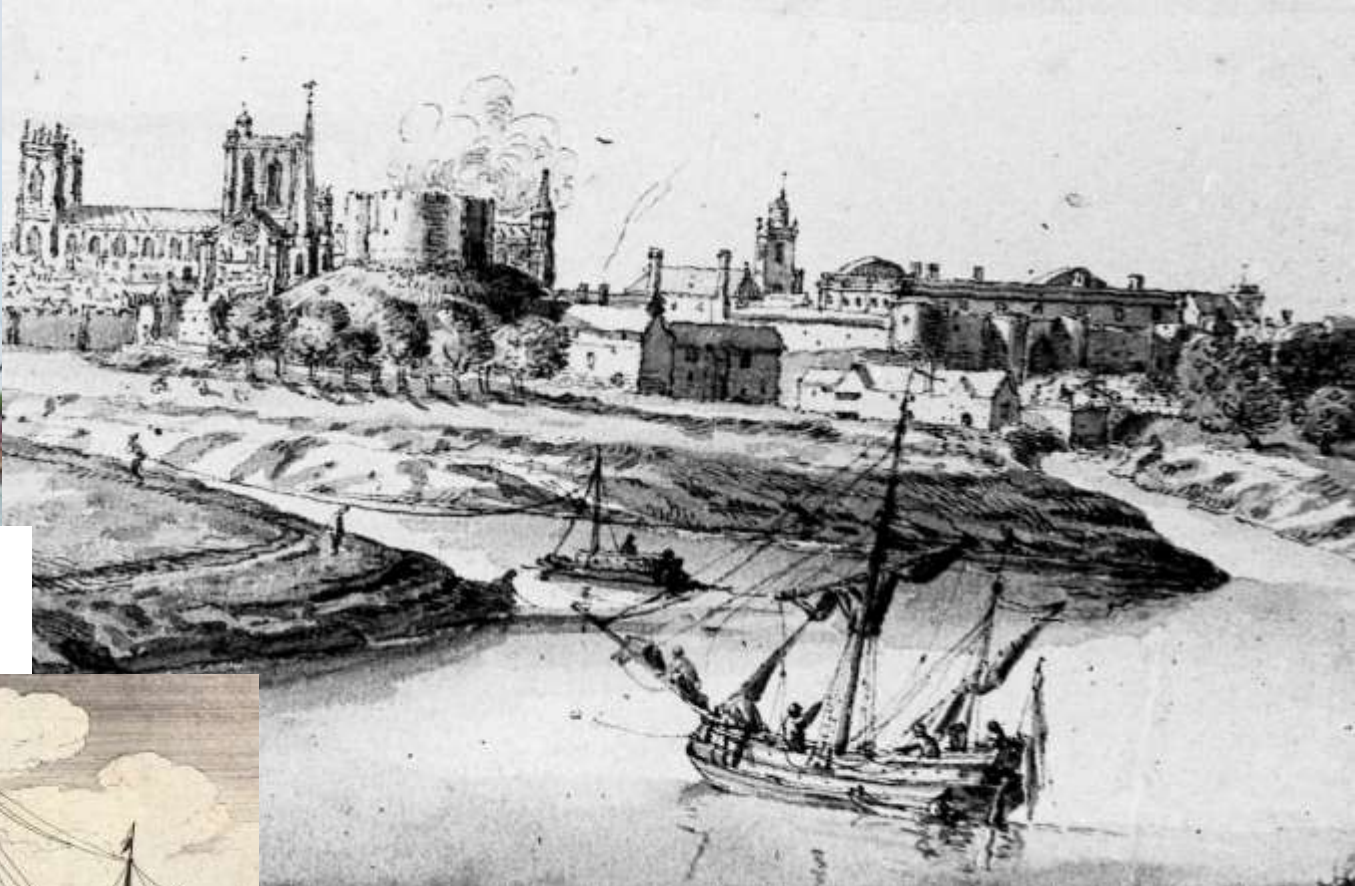


The City Crane, by John Harper. C.1830, showing the swinging boom of the crane and also the Watergate to Skeldergate, partly submerged since Naburn weir.

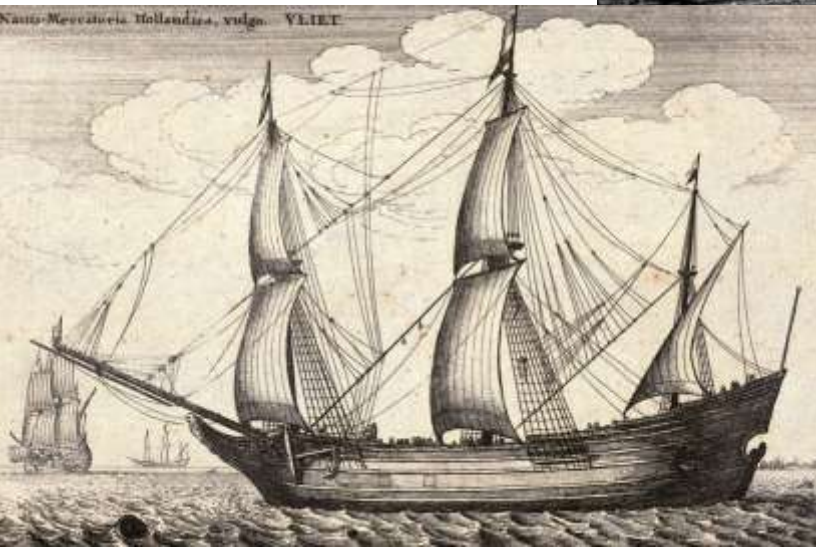




**Pinta, Columbus ship of 1492**



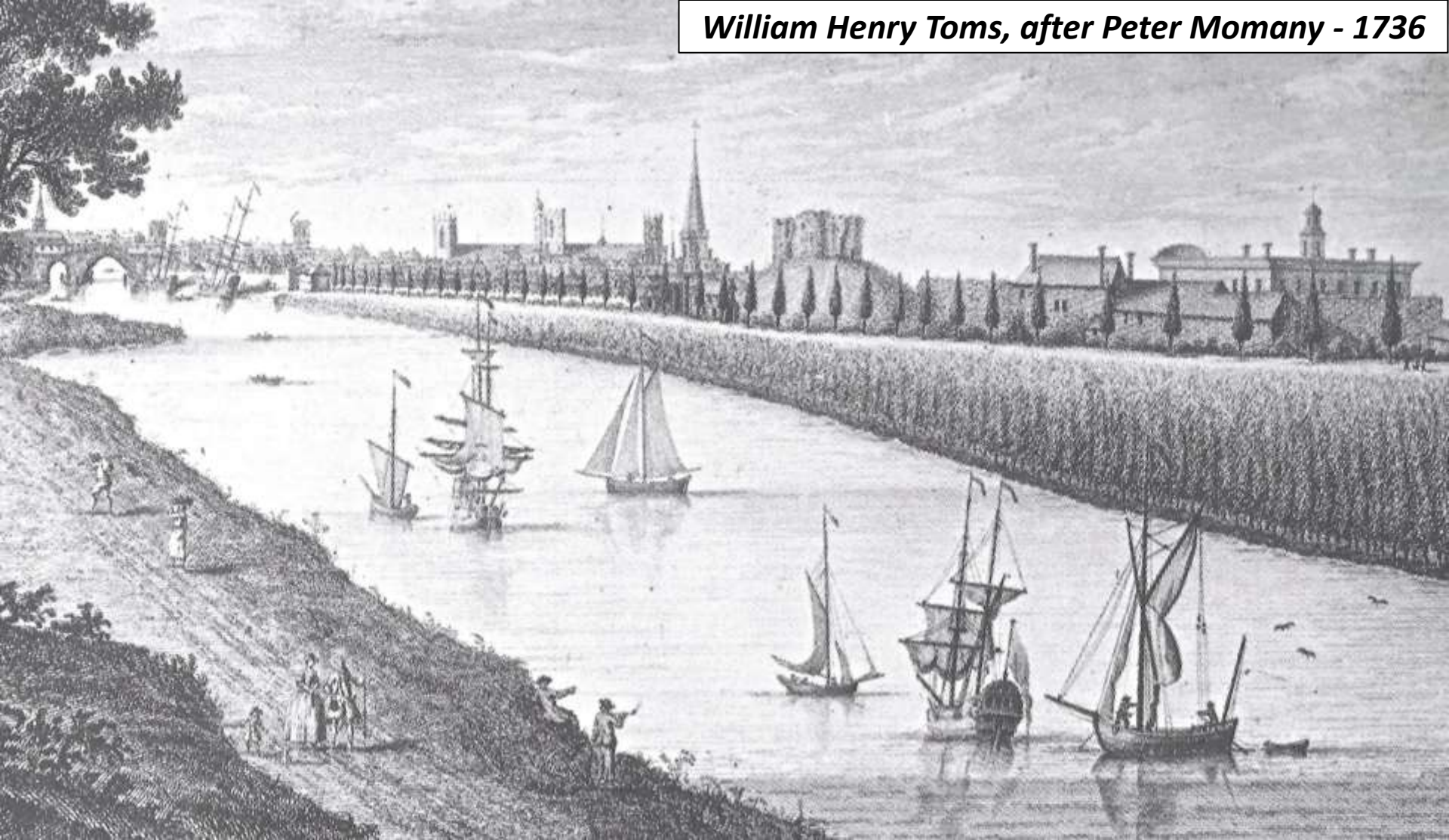
**Francis Place - Confluence of the Foss with the Ouse in 1703**



**A Dutch Fluyt Trading Vessel 1677**

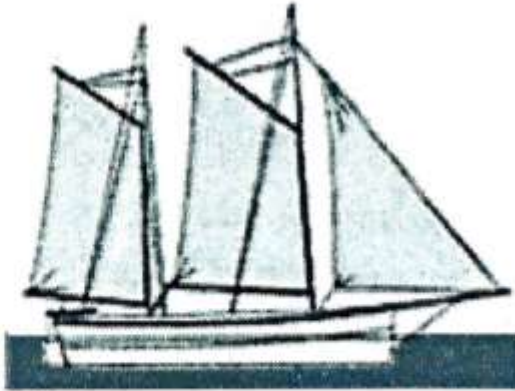
**So, what type of vessels were used on the river when it was tidal? ie. before 1757**





18<sup>th</sup> century engravings show a variety of vessels, but were they romanticising the image or showing us what was really there?

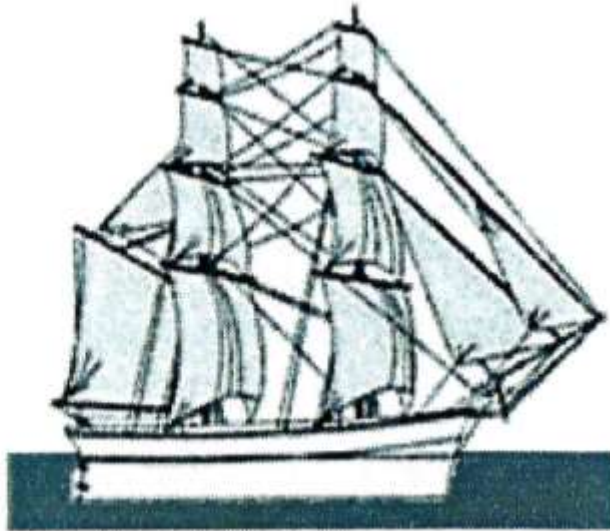
## Ketch



Two masts with a fore- and aft-rigged main mast and a smaller mizzen mast.

---

## Brig



Two masts with both fully square-rigged. A spinnaker or trysail is set on the lower main mast.

Larger ships could only reach York when there was sufficient depth of water, ie. twice/month at spring tides

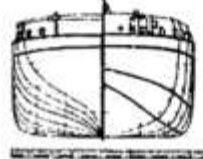
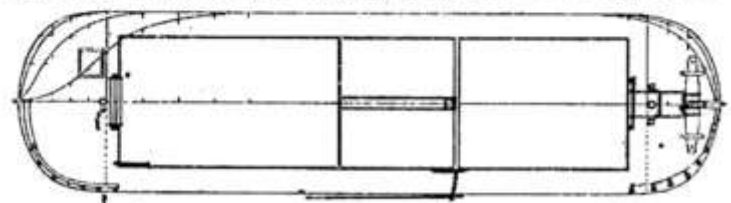
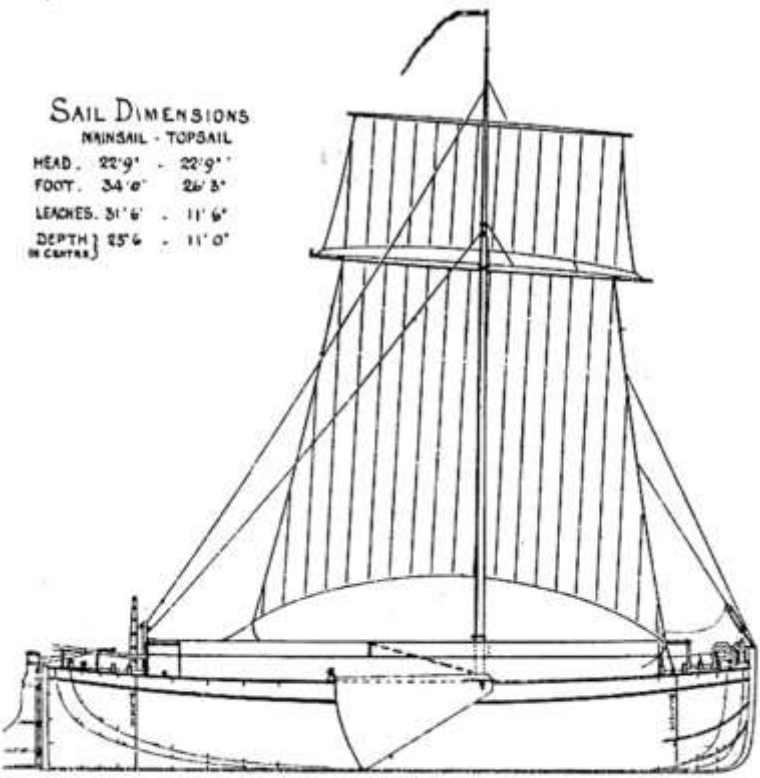




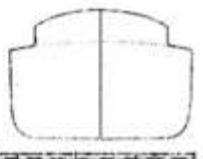
*Most craft were probably  
Keels or Sloops*

In 1698, Trinity House reported York had 8-10 ships of 60-80 tons and 20-30 boats of 20-40 tons. They exported woollen goods, lead, butter, corn, and imported sea coals and other commodities.

SAIL DIMENSIONS  
 MAINSAIL - TOPSAIL  
 HEAD. 22' 9" - 22' 9"  
 FOOT. 34' 0" - 26' 3"  
 LEACHES. 31' 6" - 11' 6"  
 DEPTH } 25' 6" - 11' 0"  
 IN CENTRE }

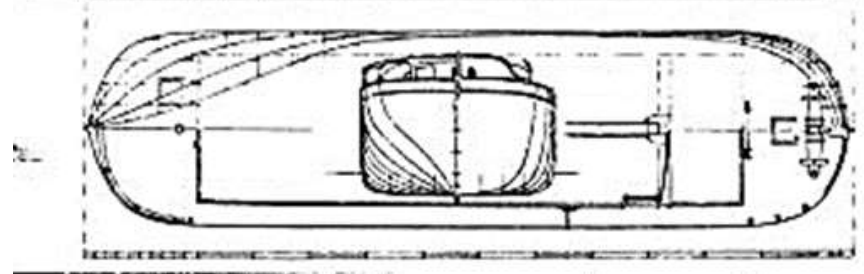


LINES OF A  
**HUMBER KEEL.**  
 SHEFFIELD SIZE.  
 60" 3" x 15" 3"



THE  
**HUMBER SLOOP.**

LENGTH 68 FEET  
 BEAM 17 FT 3 1/4"  
 DEPTH 8 FT 3 1/4"  
 SAILS MAIN FORE  
 LEACH 56 32  
 LEPP 29.6 36  
 FOOT 38. 16  
 HEAD 27 -



Humber Keels and Sloops were used on the Humber rivers, and occasionally sailed to east coast ports





*Keel passing New Walk*

*Keel near Marygate Tower*

Humber Keels and Sloops continued to be used into the 20<sup>th</sup> century - becoming the diesel barges we see today

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the War Office used 2 Topsail Schooners, one called the *Princess*, bringing explosives from Woolwich Arsenal to Fulford Munitions Depot on New Walk.

This was known locally as the 'Powder Boat'

Topsail Schooners were probably the largest sailing vessels to reach York after the Naburn lock improvements.

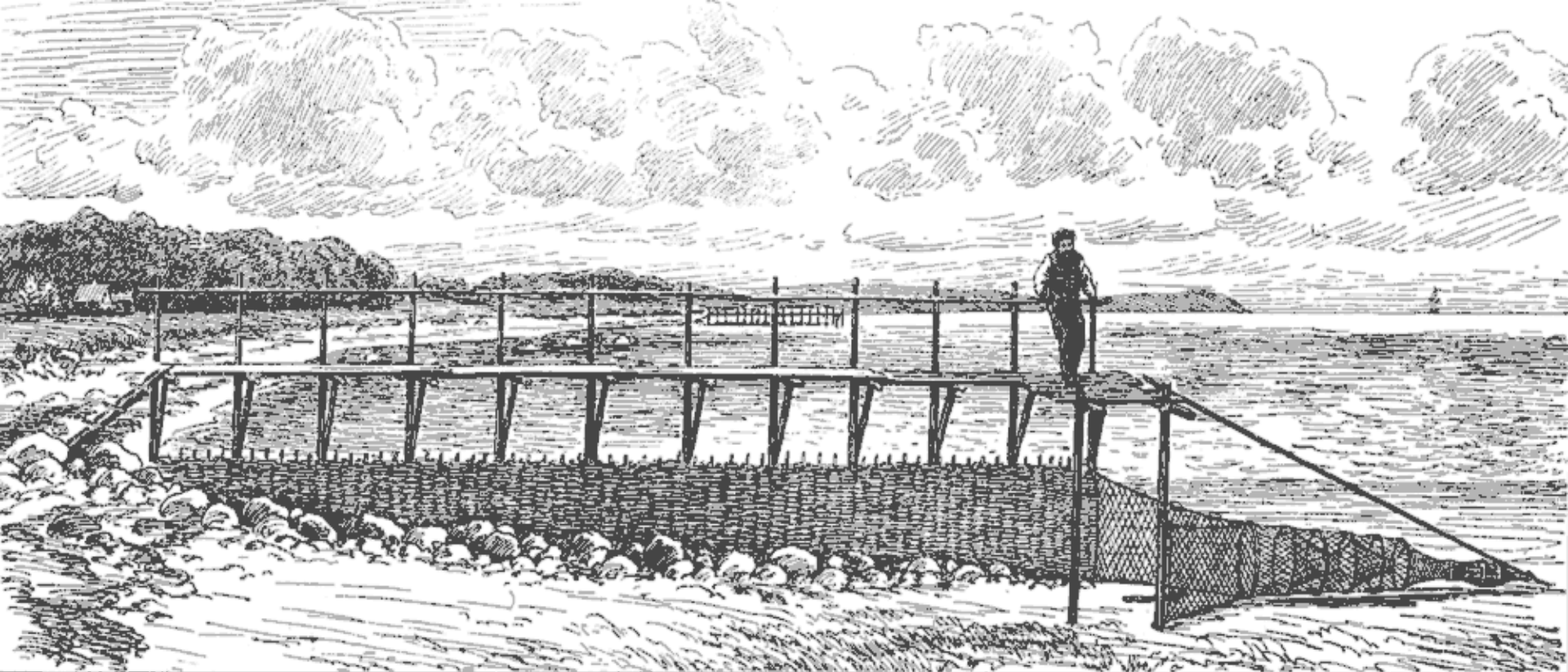






It is reported that ships firing a salute when passing Bishopthorpe Palace would be sent a flagon of ale!





The first charter giving York Corporation maintenance responsibilities and powers to remove obstructions such as fishgarths, was granted by Edward IV in 1462, but it didn't give powers to make navigation improvements

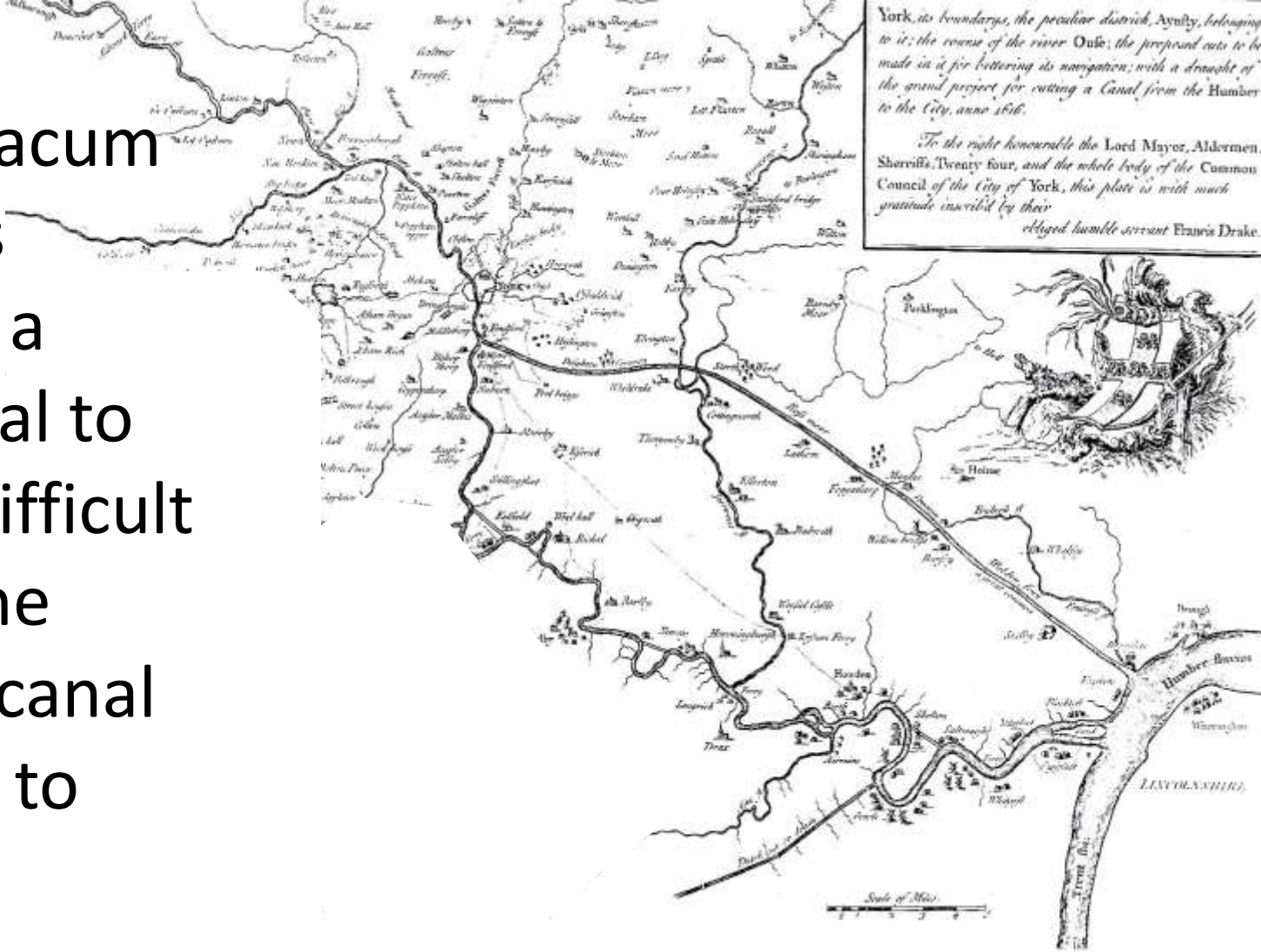




A City letter to the Duke of Suffolk in 1544 said that two 35 ton 'Crayers' could be put at his disposal, but...  
*"truthe is that the watter of the Owse is often tymes so lowe that crayers cannott passe from York to Hull"*  
Improvements tended to concentrate on dredging the river.



Drake's Eboracum included this engraving of a 1616 proposal to bypass the difficult reaches of the Ouse with a canal from Fulford to Broomfleet.



York, its boundaries, the peculiar district, Aynity, belonging to it; the course of the river Ouse; the proposed cuts to be made in it for bettering its navigation; with a draught of the grand project for cutting a Canal from the Humber to the City, anno 1616.

To the right honourable the Lord Mayor, Aldermen, Sheriffs, Twenty four, and the whole body of the Common Council of the City of York, this plate is with much gratitude inscribed by their  
obed humble servant Francis Drake.

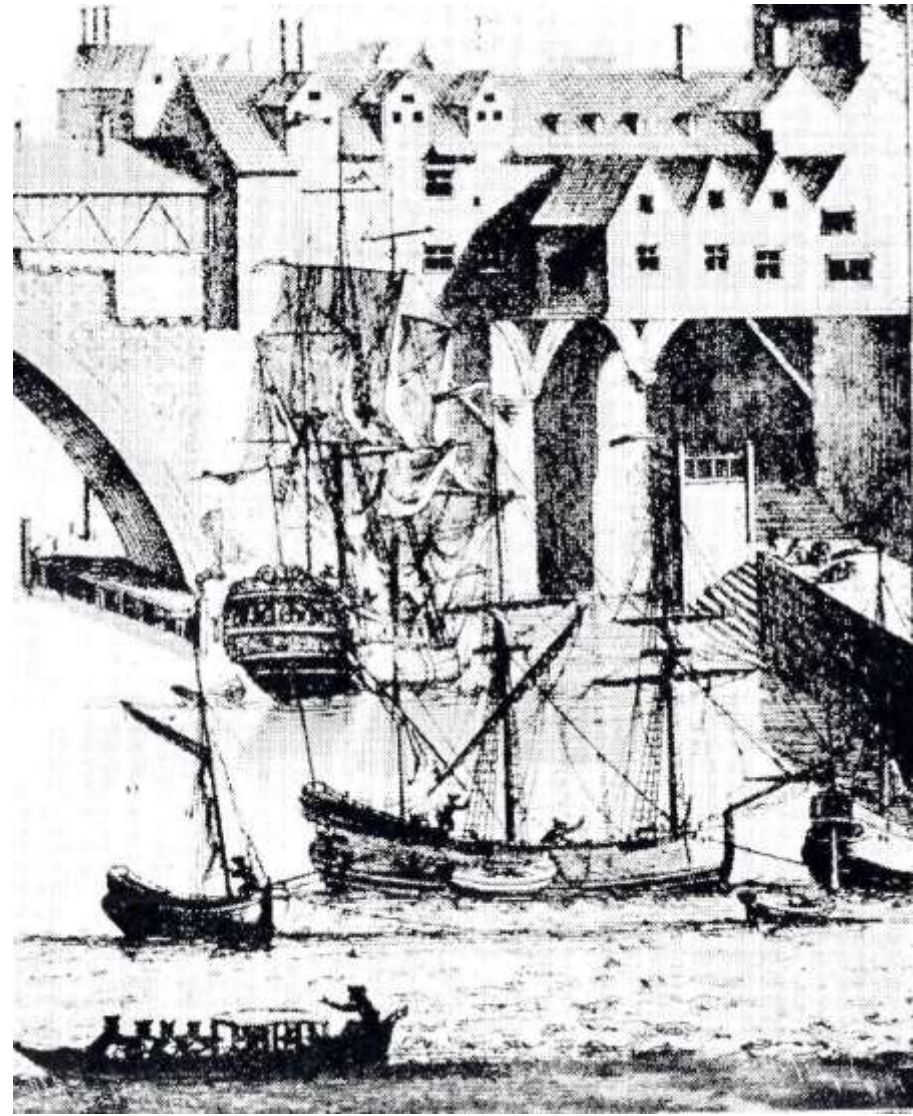
This idea is not as fanciful as it may appear... In 1635, Vermuyden diverted 10 miles of the river Don to create the Dutch River at Goole.





By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the combination of siltation and larger ships, meant that sea-going vessels could only reach York twice a month, utilising Spring tides.

In response to this problem, and improvements on the Aire and Calder, a very comprehensive survey of the Ouse was made in 1699 by Thomas Surbey.



Below Cawood, Surbey found the tidal river to be deep enough, but badly restricted in places by shoals. However, at Water Fulford, he found only 8" of water at low tide and a little further downstream, a shoal  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile long had just 18" covering it at low tide, with the tide adding approx. 3ft (more on spring tides).

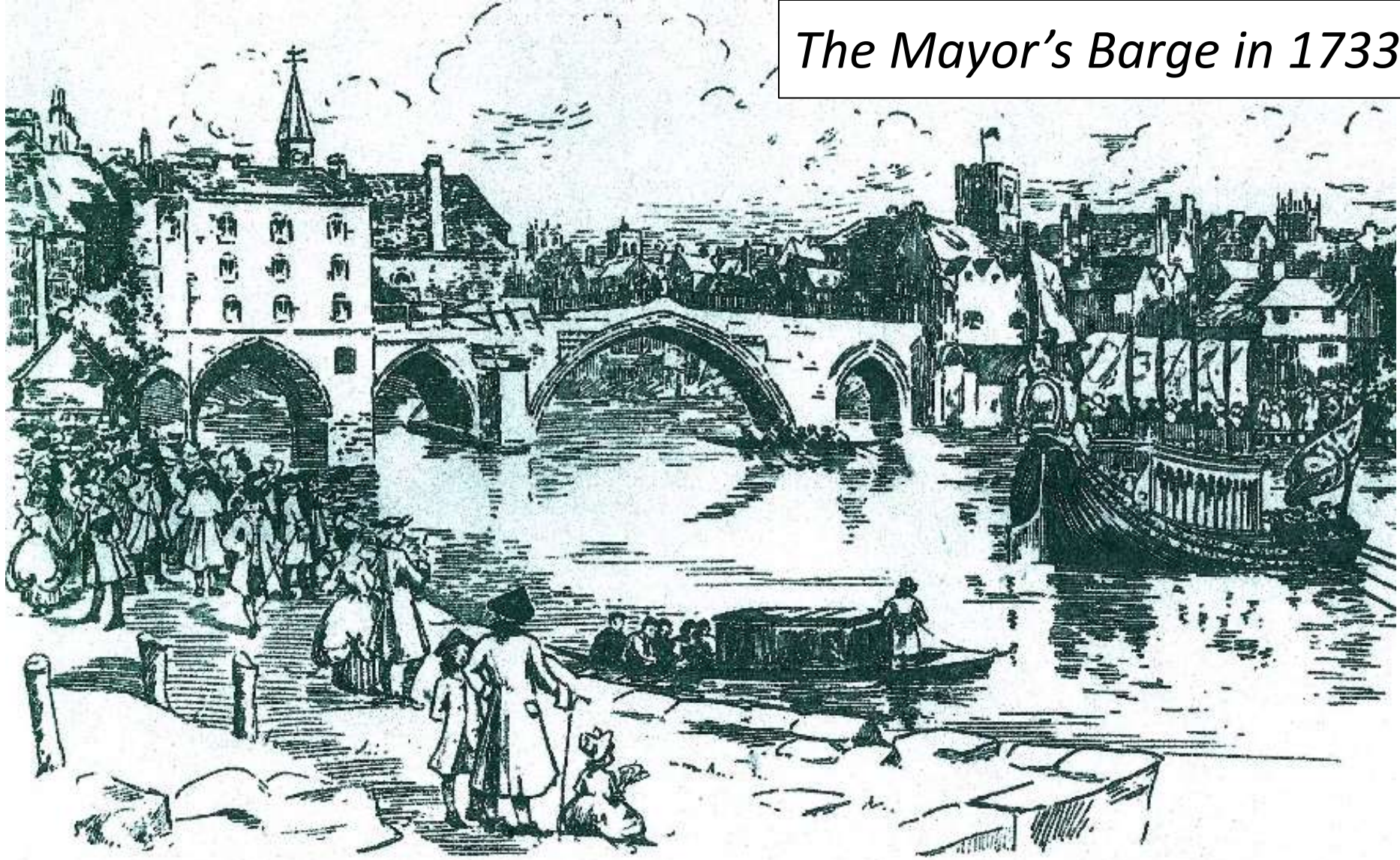


His report said that new cuts were not cost-effective, but he is the first to recommend building a weir and lock near Naburn to secure a draft of 7ft to York.





*The Mayor's Barge in 1733*



York Corporation held 'septennial' trips down the Ouse on the Barge '*Royal Carolina*'





# Navigating the tidal Ouse



*Hull Maritime Museum*



*Hull Maritime Museum*



# Navigating the tidal Ouse



Leaving Naburn Lock just before high tide

# Navigating the tidal Ouse



At first, the river looks quite placid



# Navigating the tidal Ouse



Approaching Selby  
the current is quite  
fast and turbulent

# Navigating the tidal Ouse



Entering Selby Lock is somewhat hair-raising! The lock-keeper casually signals you to turn around and drive back against the flow – and exactly when turn into the lock.



Before Naburn weir was built in 1757, spring tides in York used to reach approx. 3.4m AOD, raising water levels by approx. 1.5m (5ft).



The Weir was initially constructed at 4.44m AOD then in 1835 it was raised to 4.9m, and raised again in 1876 to 5.0m AOD.

# How do the tides work on the river Ouse?

<i>High tide at Spurn 12.00</i>	<i>High tide at Hull 1.00</i>	<i>High tide at Selby 3.20</i>	<i>High tide at Naburn 5.00</i>	<i>High tide at York 5.45 ?</i>
	<i>Duration of the Tide at Hull 6 hrs.</i>	<i>Duration of the Tide at Selby 2 1/2 hrs.</i>	<i>Duration of the Tide at Naburn 2 hrs.</i>	<i>Duration of the Tide at York 1 3/4 hrs.?</i>
	<i>Tidal Range at Hull 6.9m (22ft)</i>	<i>Tidal Range at Selby 4.5m(15ft)</i>	<i>Tidal Range at Naburn 2.0m(6ft)</i>	<i>Tidal Range at York 1.5m(5ft) ?</i>

*From York as a Tidal Port, by Colin Briden*

The current can be very fast,  
eg. around 8 knots at Selby

Floods will add to the  
height of the tidal range



Water Gates are now much closer to water level than they were originally



Sluices at Naburn were opened in c.1895 to facilitate installation of sewer pipes.

‘Normal’ water level is now approx. 1.5m (5ft) higher than when Spring Tides used to reach York and up to 3m (10ft) higher than low tide level.

Former Banqueting House



Steamship Lock

Original Lock



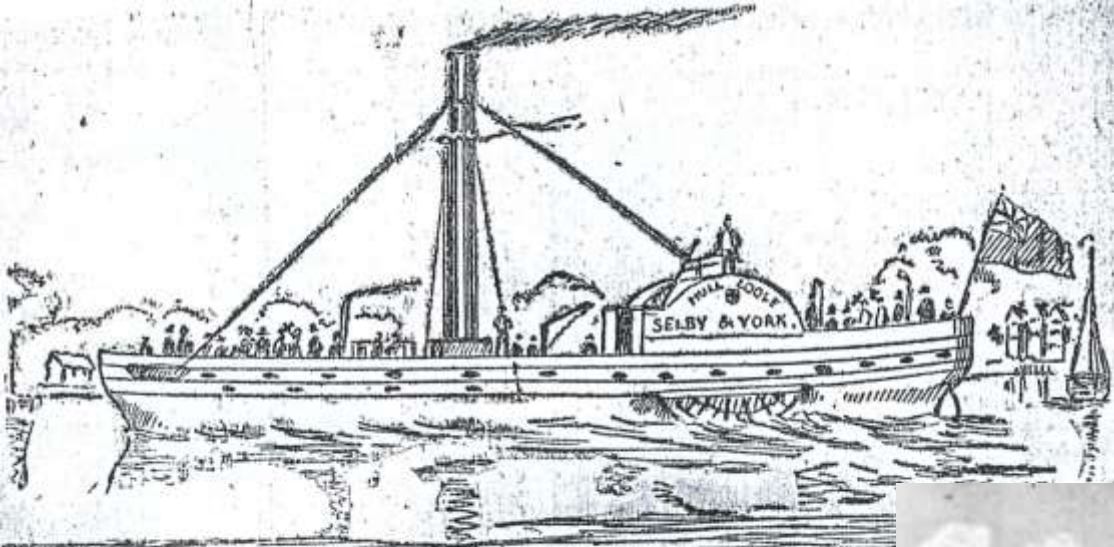
Site of Former Water Mill

The 1757 lock at Naburn is 27.5m long x 6.6m wide  
(90ft x 21ft 6in)  
The 1888 Steamship Lock is 46m x 8m (150ft x 26ft)





# Aerial Packet Boat



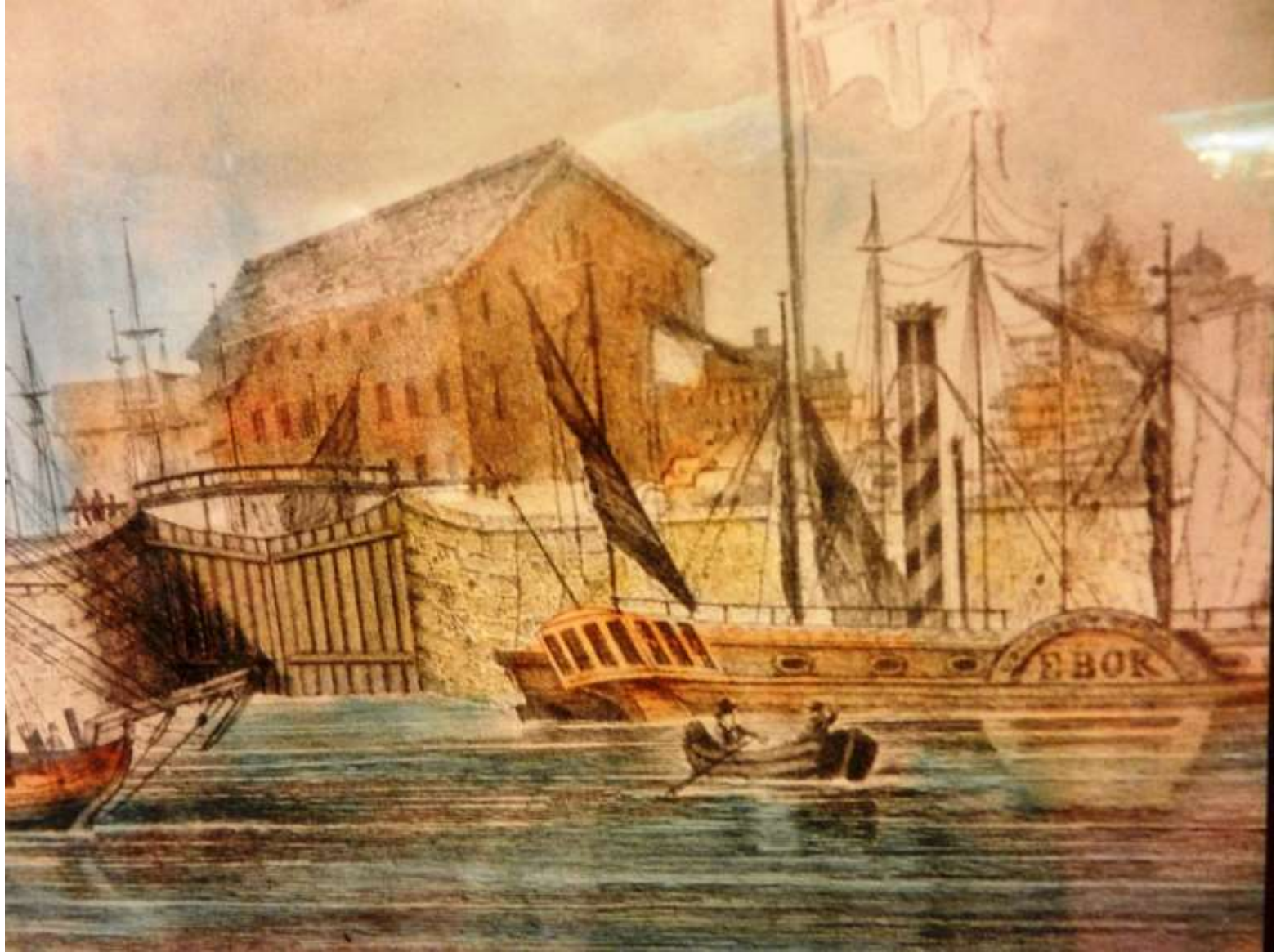
Name.	Hour of setting out.	From what Place.	Where to.
Yorkshireman . . .	Wednes. 6 A. M.	Dock Basin . . .	London, (return on Sat.)
Prince Frederick	Saturday, 6 A. M.	Ditto . . . . .	London, (return on Friday)
Enterprise . . . . .	Thursday, 6 A. M.	Ditto . . . . .	London, (return on Sunday)
Pelham . . . . .	High Water . . .	Ditto . . . . .	Grimsby
Kingston . . . . .	Ditto . . . . .	Ditto . . . . .	Grimsby
Royal Charter . . .	7, 10, 1, and 4 . .	Vittoria Tavern	Barton
Adelaide . . . . .	Half Tide.	Dock Basin . . .	Selby
Sovereign . . . . .	" "	Ditto . . . . .	Selby
John Bull . . . . .	" "	Ditto . . . . .	Thorne
Rockingham . . . .	" "	Ditto . . . . .	Thorne
Eagle . . . . .	" "	Ditto . . . . .	Goole
Calder . . . . .	" "	Ditto . . . . .	Goole
Dart . . . . .	" "	Ditto . . . . .	Gainsborough
Echo . . . . .	" "	Ditto . . . . .	Goole
Mercury . . . . .	" "	Ditto . . . . .	Gainsborough
Elizabeth . . . . .		General Elliot .	Brigg and Ferriby Sluice
Trafalger . . . . .		Bull and Sun . .	York
Magna Charta	Four times daily		New Holland Ferry
Transit & Monarch	Satur. alternately		Hamburgh.



**Ebor at Goole 1831**

Naburn weir and lock allowed larger ships to reliably reach York and run scheduled passenger services to Hull and London





Paddle Steamer Ebor,  
pictured in the Humber at Goole in 1831





Packet boat  
and Cargo  
Ship  
operators  
advertised in  
trade  
directories  
and  
newspapers

Telephone :  
No. 2979.

Telegrams :  
"WOOD, YORK."

**T. F. WOOD & CO.,**  
LTD.,

*Steamship and Lighter Owners,  
Wharfingers, Forwarding Agents,*

**ALBION WHARF, YORK.**

**Carriers by Water**

between

LONDON, GOOLE, SELBY &  
YORK, HULL, SELBY & YORK,

and in connection with steamers plying  
to and from the principal English, Scotch,  
Continental and American ports.

We shall have pleasure in quoting  
Through Rates on application.

London Traffic should be ordered  
"via STANTON'S WHARF."

LONDON Address:—  
Wm. France, Fenwick & Co., Ltd., Stanton's  
Wharf, Tooley Street, S.E. Tel.: Royal 3160.

HULL Address:—  
T. F. Wood & Co., Ltd., Hessegate Buildings,  
Humber Dock Side. Tel.: 1310.

GOOLE Address:—  
Wm. France, Fenwick & Co., Ltd., 9 East Parade.  
Tel.: 12.

**Head Office: Albion Wharf, York.**

to which all communications should be addressed.

*Marine Insurances Effected as Instructed.*

**STEAMERS**

DO AND FROM

**HULL, SELBY, & YORK,**

And in connection with Steamers plying to and from  
the principal English, Irish, Scotch, Continental, and American Ports.

THROUGH RATES QUOTED.

Freights Low



Freights Low

From Woodhouse and Co.'s Wharf, High Street, Hull,  
every Wednesday and Saturday (loading days  
Tuesdays and Fridays).

From Albion Wharf, York, every Monday and  
Thursday.

*Weather and circumstances permitting.*

For Freight and full Particulars apply to T. F. WOOD and CO.,  
Albion Wharf, York.

Goods collected Free of Charge on receipt of instructions and Warehouse  
in Hall, pending shipment.

**BE PARTICULAR TO ORDER PER STEAMER.**

**LONDON, GOOLE, & YORK STEAMERS**

DO AND FROM

**STANTON'S WHARF,**

STONEY LANE, TOOLEY STREET, LONDON, S.E.

From York every Monday and Thursday (subject to Trade require-  
ments). From London almost Daily.

Through Rates Quoted, including collecting and delivering all Goods in London  
and York.

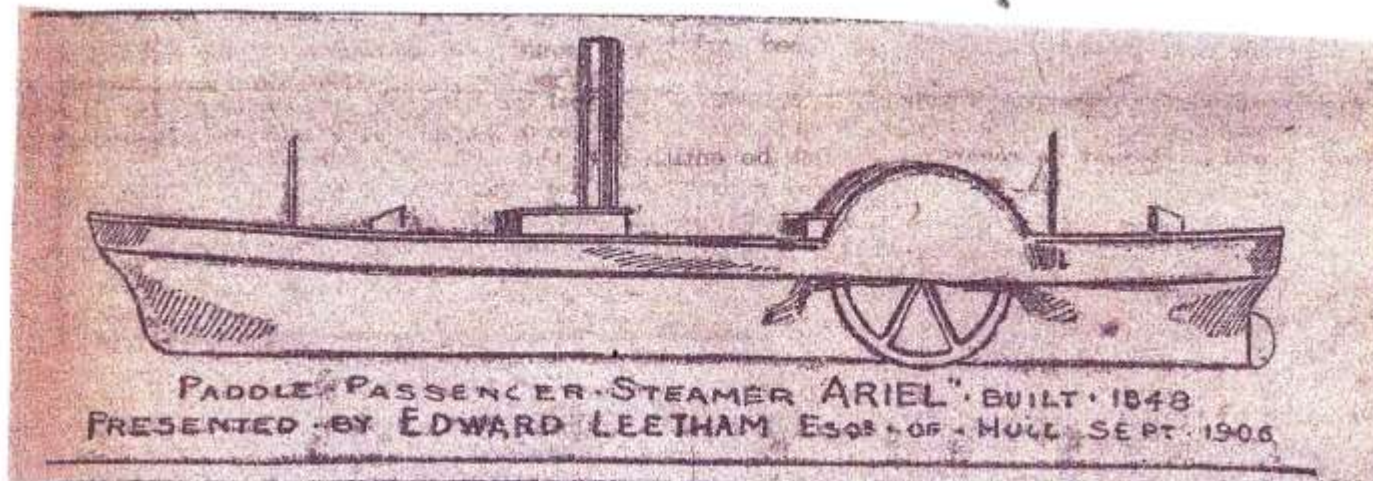
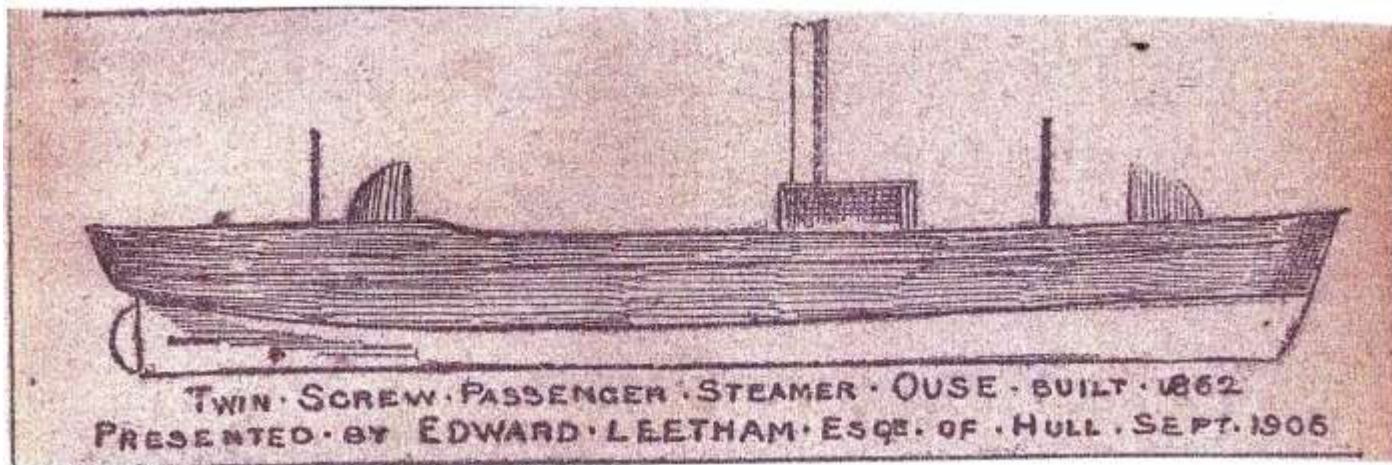
W. FRANCE, Stanton's Wharf, London.

T. F. WOOD and CO., ALBION WHARF, YORK.

**BE PARTICULAR to Order to STEAM from STANTON'S WHARF.**  
Sailing Cards when required. Marine Insurances effected.

Competition between Packet Boat operators was fierce.

Ebor & Arrow collided near Naburn, when the faster Arrow tried to pass the slower Ebor

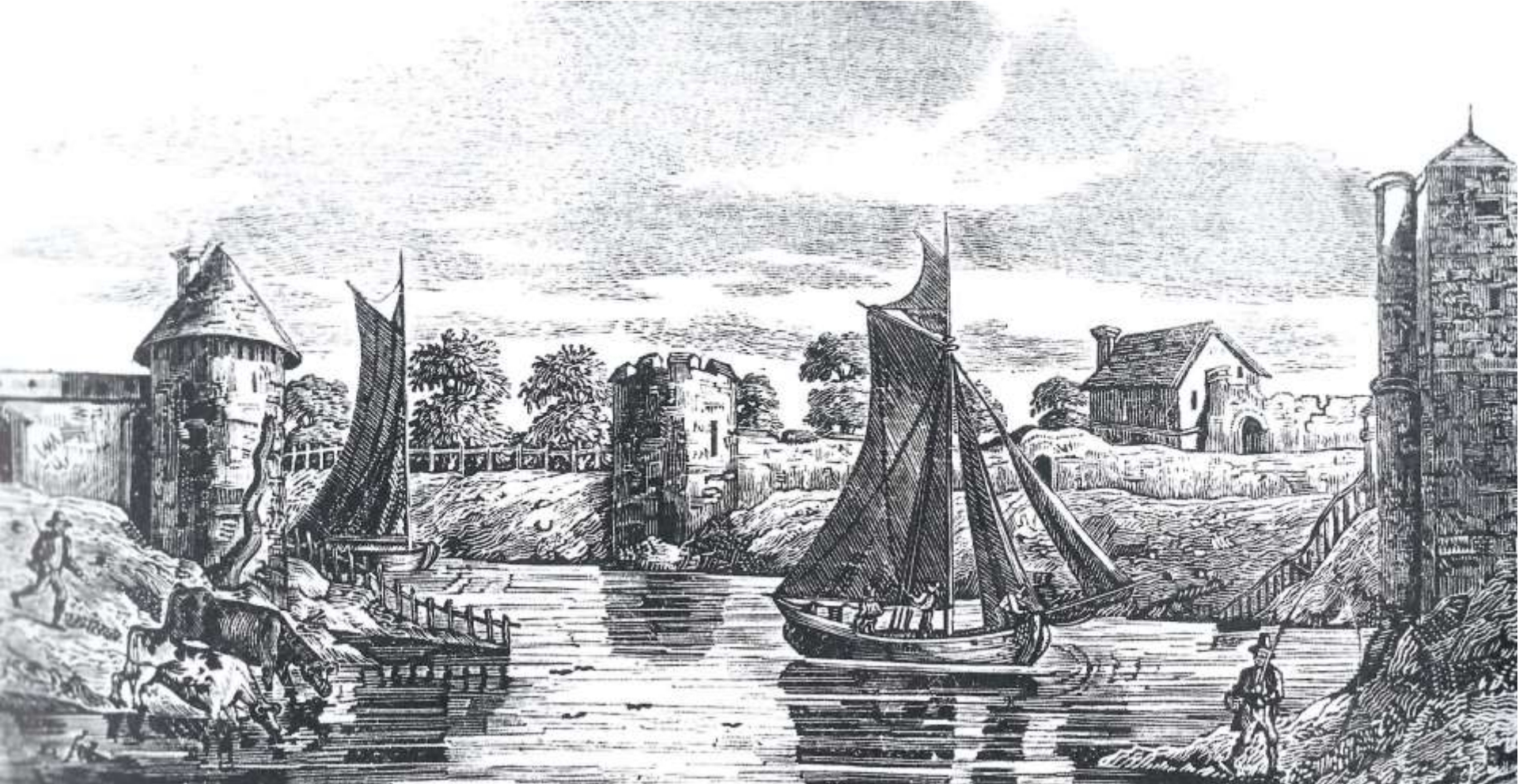


Arrow was screw powered, probably similar to the 'Ouse', pictured top.

These drawings are of models presented to the Ouse Commissioners by Edward Leetham in 1905 – *where are they now?*



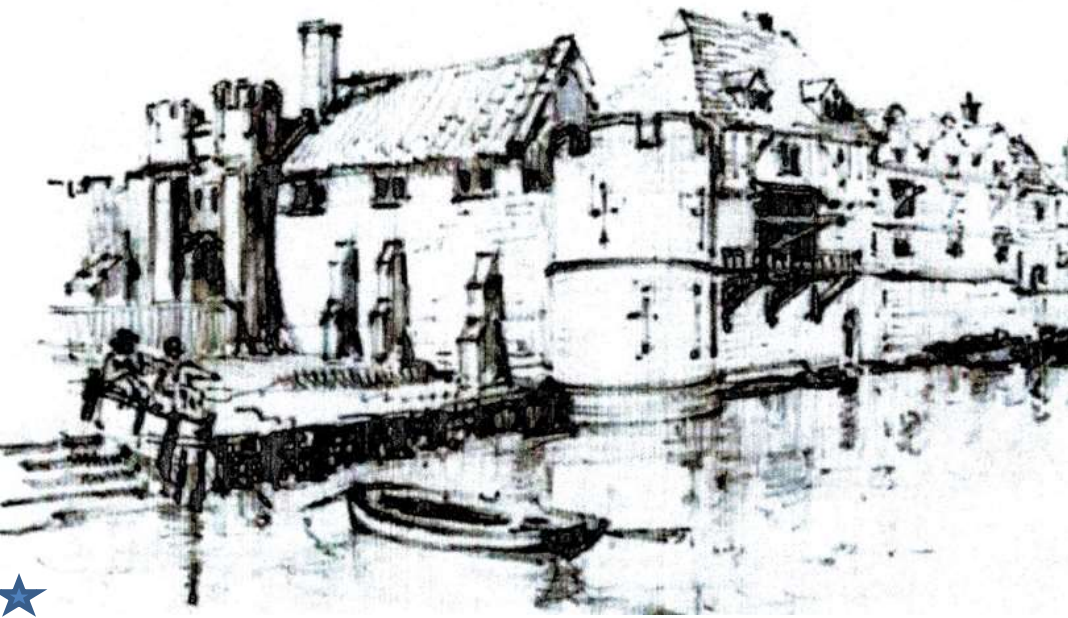




There has been a ferry at Lendal since at least the Anglo-Scandinavian period, and the Victorian steps still remain next to the elegant iron bridge built by Thomas Page in 1863.

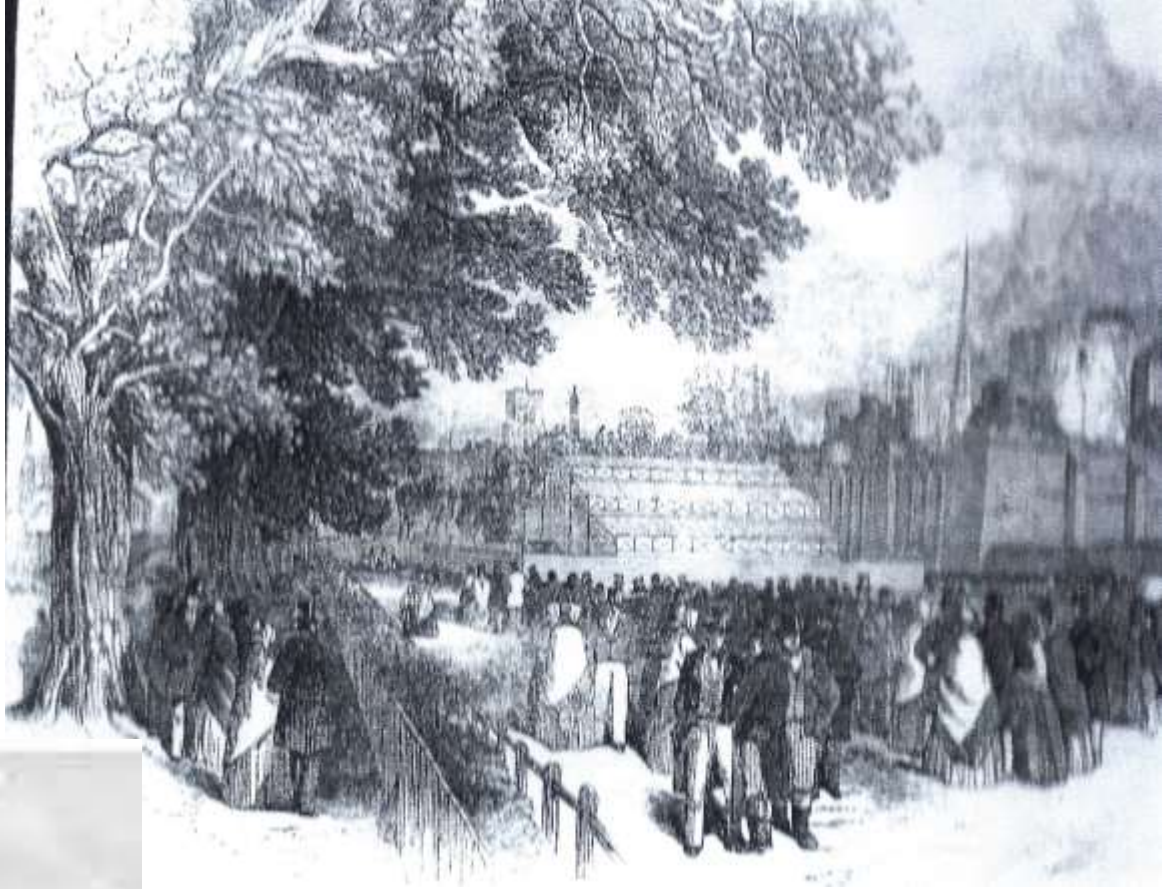


There has been a  
ferry at Skeldergate  
since at least the  
Norman period  
The steps still  
remain next to the  
Bonding Warehouse





New Walk was begun in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and is still York's most beautiful riverside path. Pavilions were erected in St George's Field during the York Exhibition of 1879(?)



View from Blue Bridge towards St George's Field in c.1910, with the chimney of the public baths on the right





Skeldergate Bridge was opened in 1881, with a steam-powered opening span on the east side





There was also a ferry from Ambrose Street steps on New Walk for Terry's workers and race-goers.



*The timber posts which supported the landing stage are still visible*

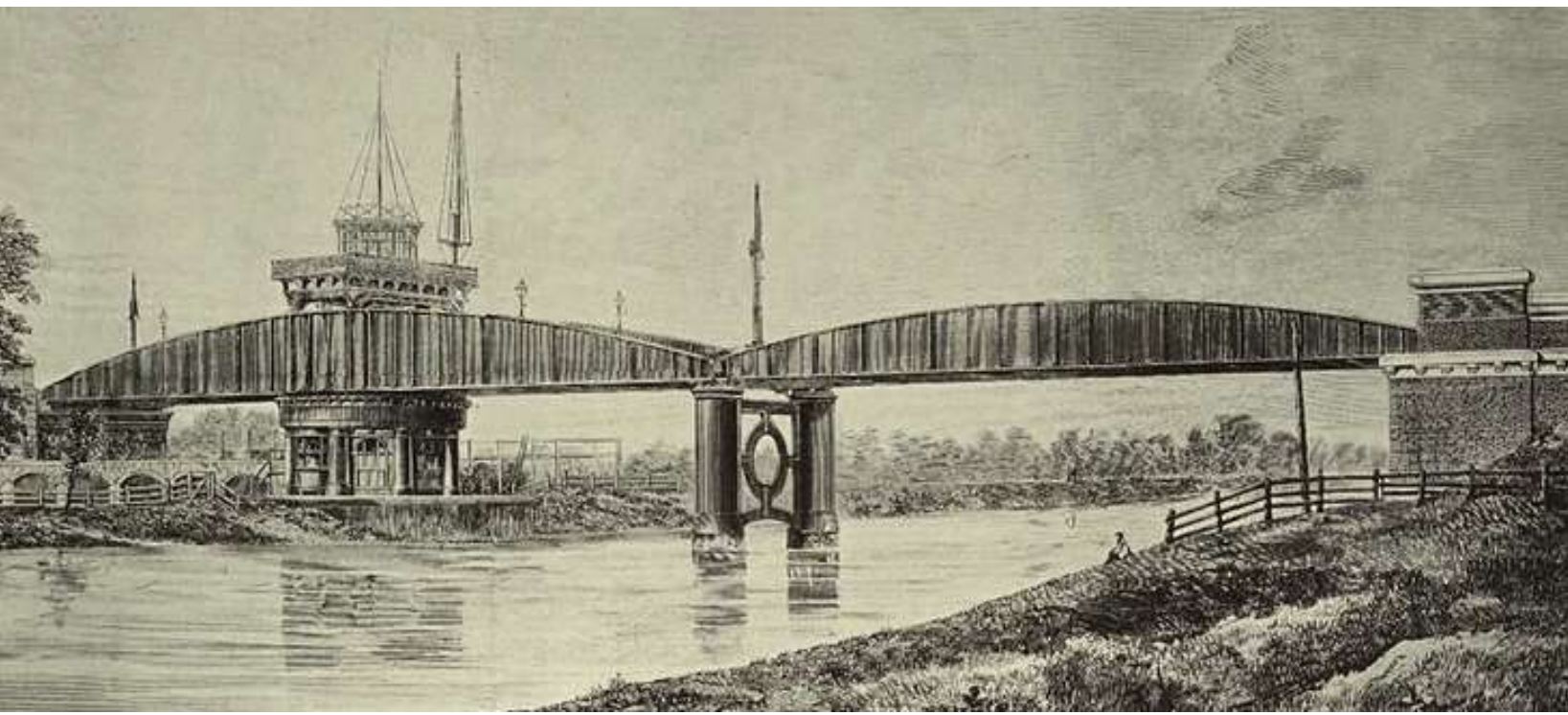


Naburn Ferry c.1900



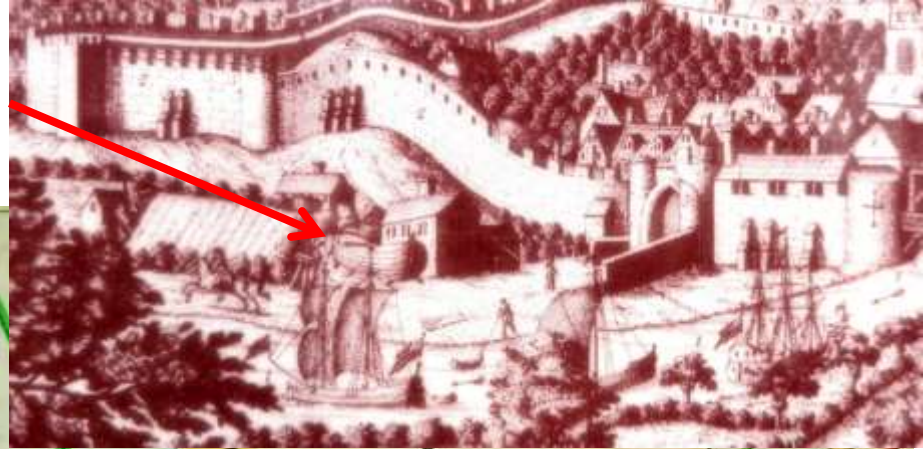
Howden Dyke Ferry  
c.1890

Naburn's Steam-Powered Swing bridge was built in 1871. The line closed in 1964





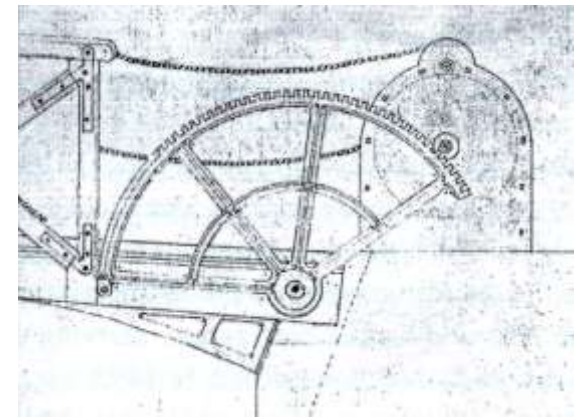
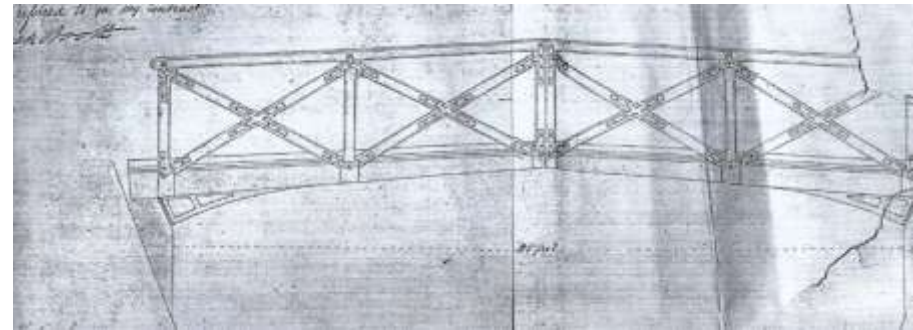
Ship pulled up on the river bank  
at Skeldergate - Edmond Barker  
1718



Clementhorpe shipyard in 1852







# Shipbuilding and repairing at Clementhorpe







Water Lane. 1810  
by Samuel Prout

## Wharves & Warehouses

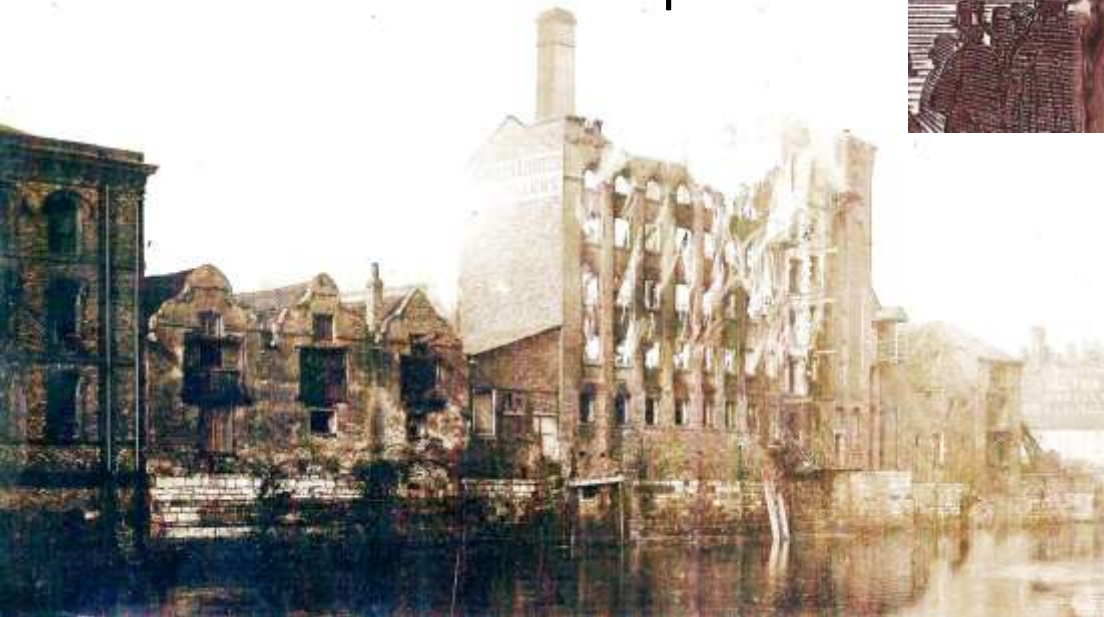




Rowntree's warehouse April 1942



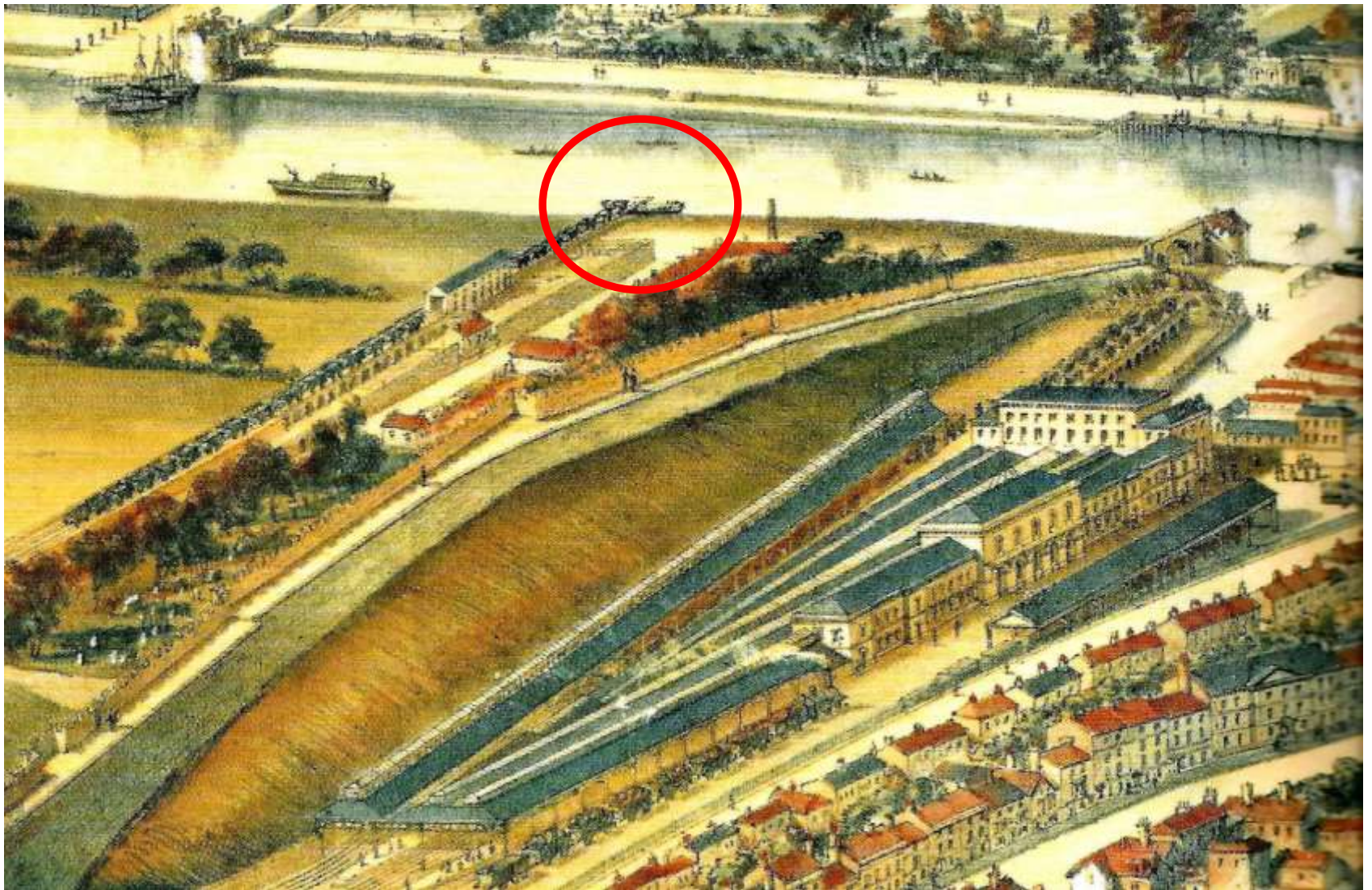
Fire at Hatfield's Steam Mill, Skeldergate 1848



Fire at Fairweather's Mill, Skeldergate 1911

# Riverside Warehouse Fires

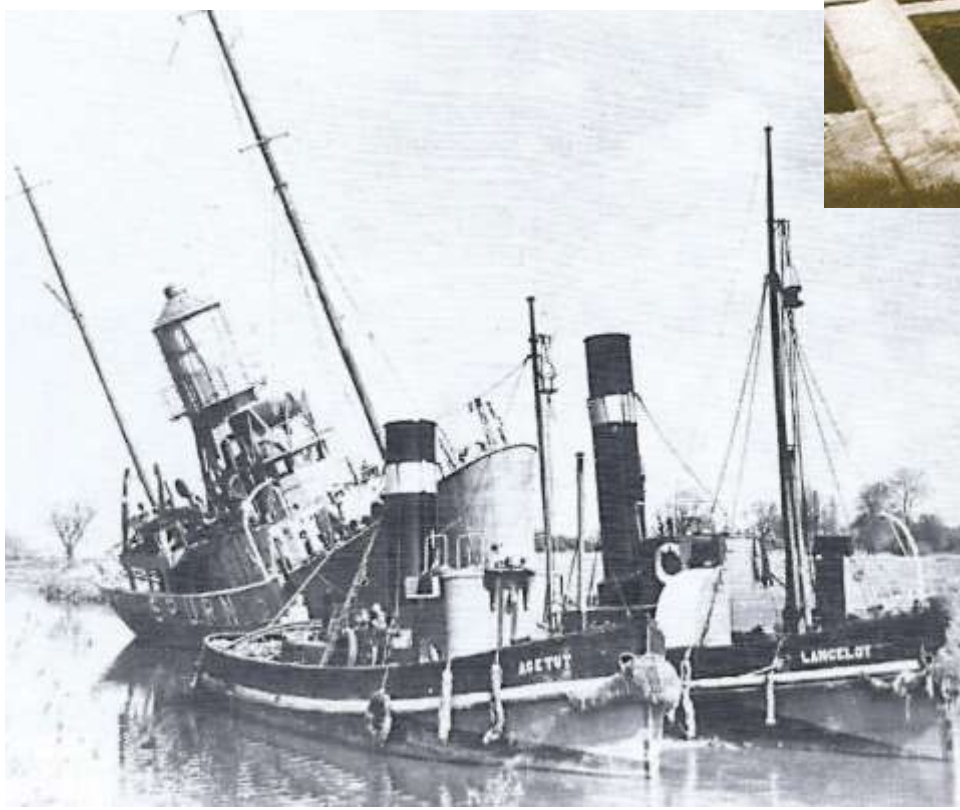




Railway competition & collaboration –  
Lendal Coal Wharf



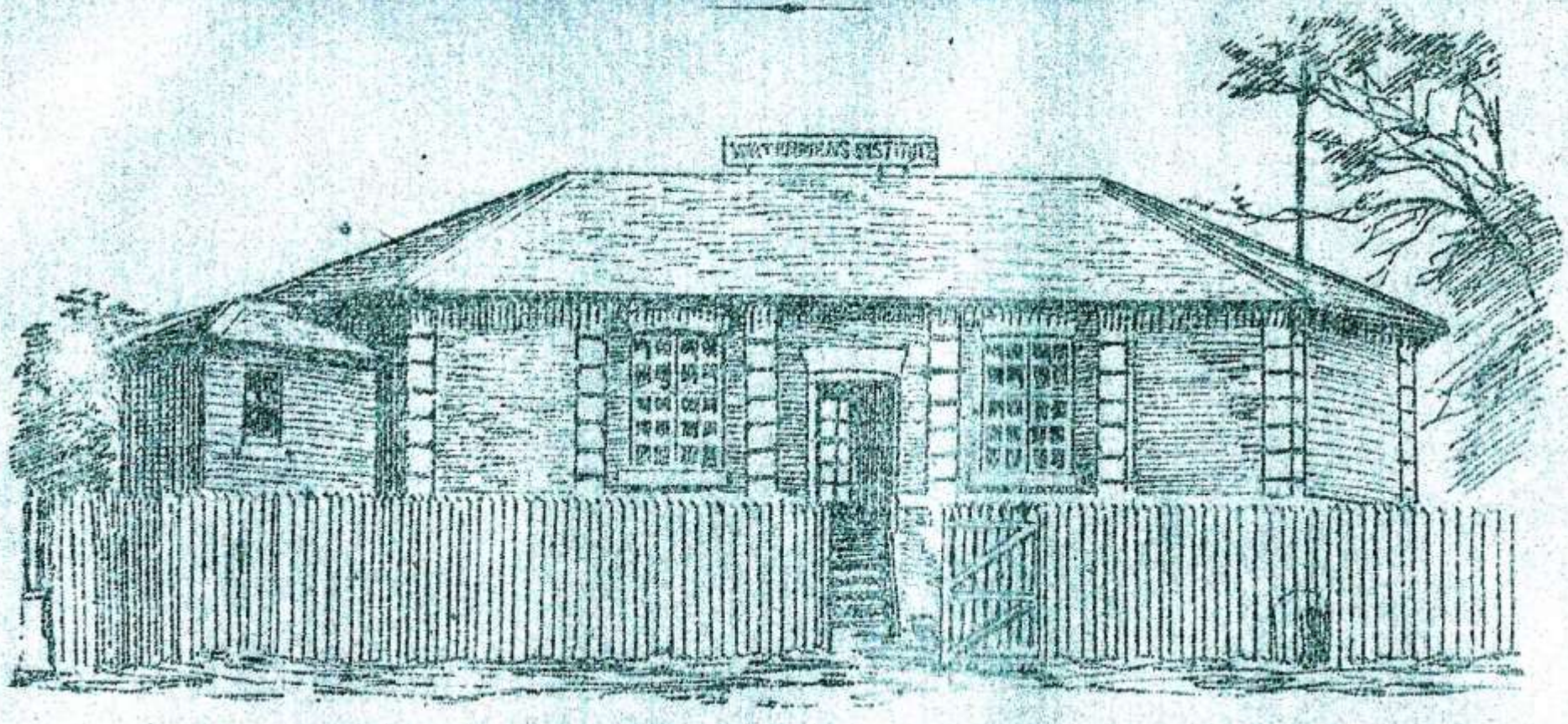
York Corporation built  
6 steam-powered tugs  
to tow Keels up to  
York until 1947.  
Eventually, barges  
were diesel powered



*Lancelot* and *Acetut* are  
shown here in 1959,  
towing the new Spurn  
Lightship from Beverley,  
where it was built.



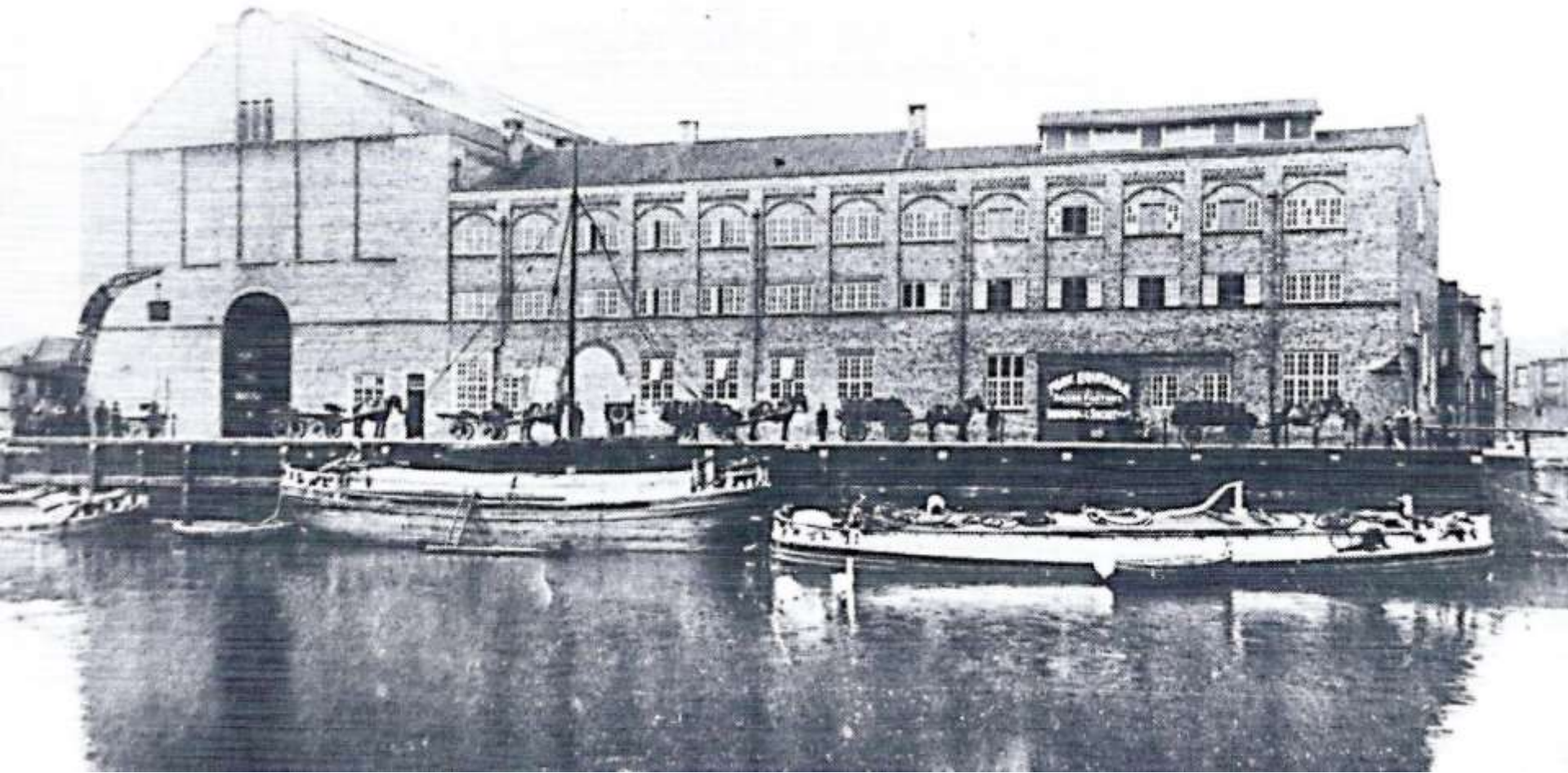
# YORK WATERMEN'S INSTITUTE.



Watermen's Institute, opened in 1909 adjacent to the public baths on St George's Field and overlooking Browney Dyke



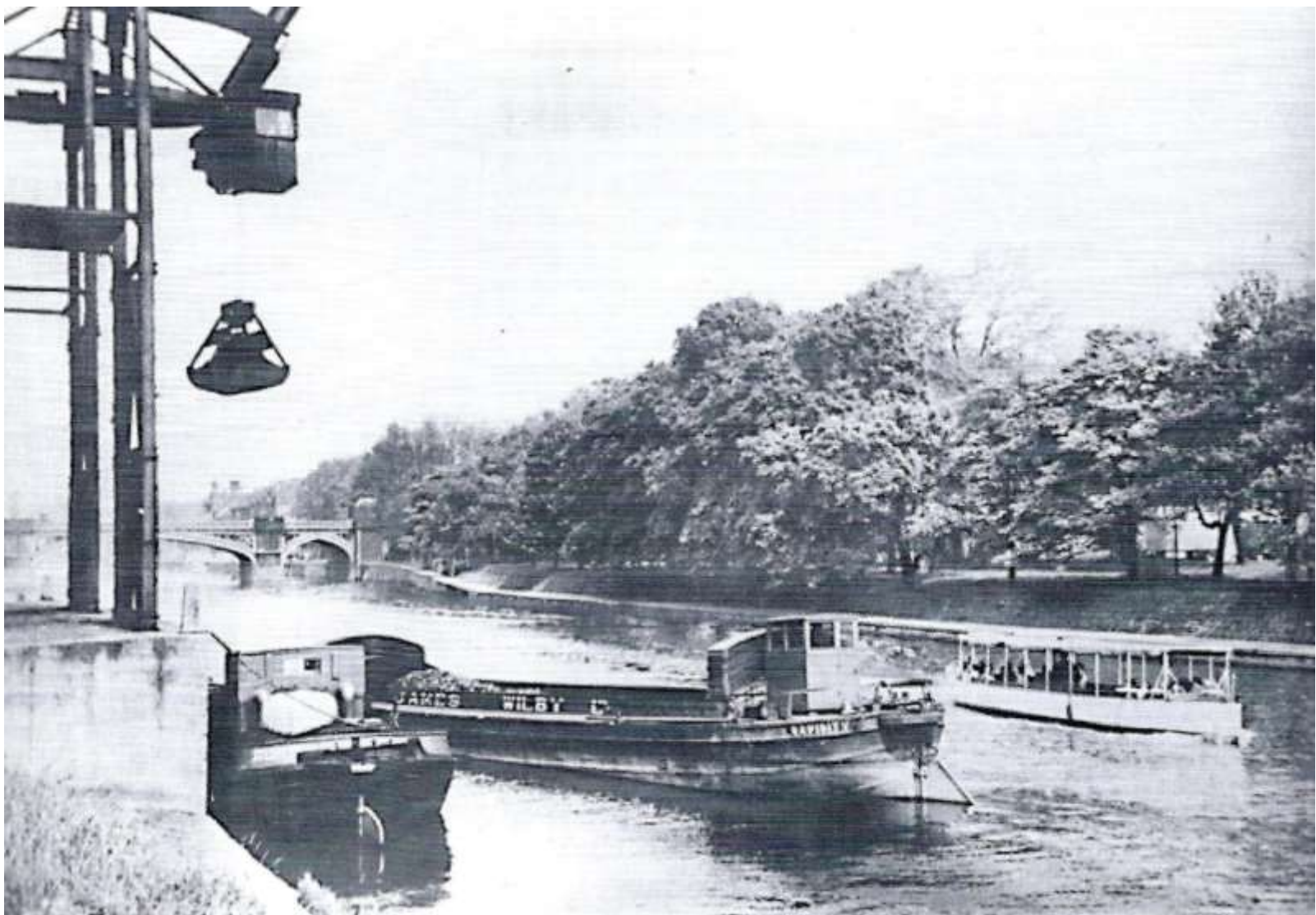




In 1909, the York Equitable Industrial Society built a bacon factory, bakery and coal depot next to the Clementhorpe Shipyard







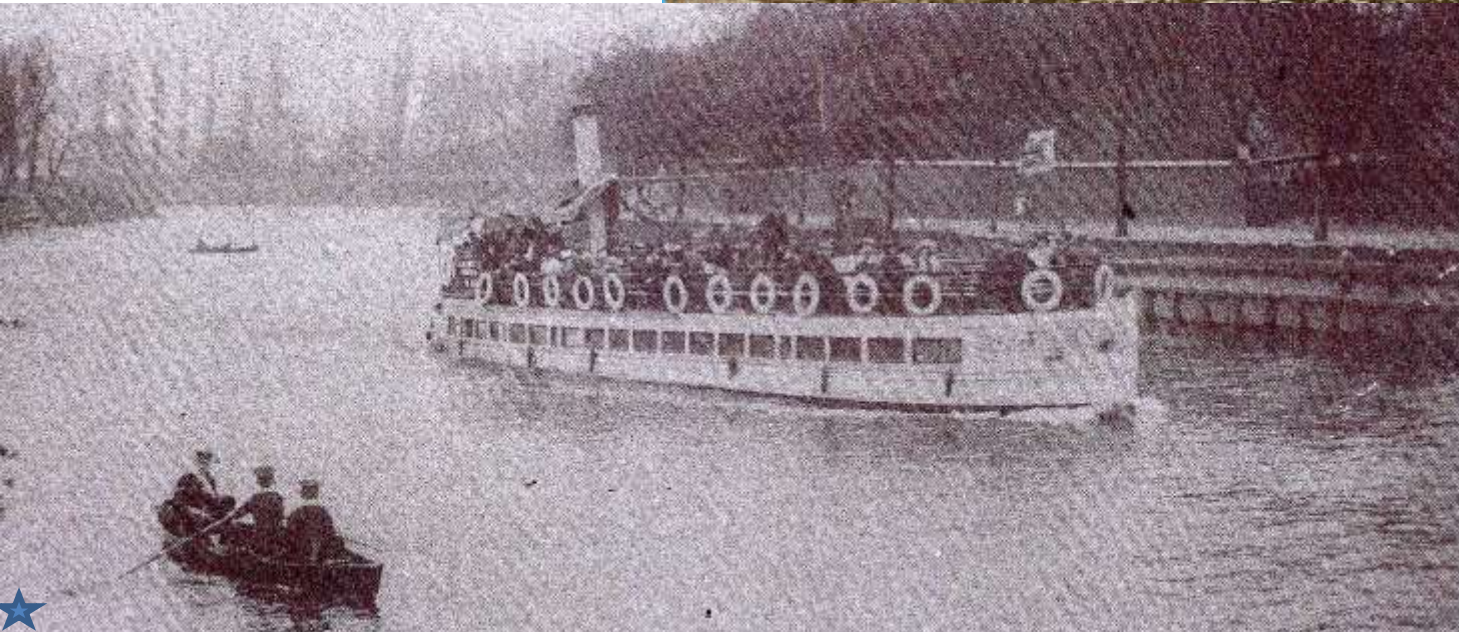
The Co-op built a wharf on the site of the Clementhorpe Shipyard to unload coal from barges



Diesel-powered barges were a common site in York through much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century



In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the *River King* was York's premier river-trip boat



It sank  
in 1932







Skating on the River Ouse, February, 1895. (By courtesy of The Yorkshire Evening Press).

Skating near  
Lendal Bridge 1895

# Floods & Ice

Snow and ice near  
Ouse Bridge in 1807



OLD OUSE BRIDGE  
YORK, 1807  
G. PROSSER / A.P.





Flooding at  
King's Staithe 1931

*York Floods. Sept. 1931.*

# Floods & Ice

Fishergate in 1978  
(and again in  
2016!)





Modern Times:  
Trip Boats, Recklaw Sand-Dredger & Newsprint





River Carnivals 1970/80's - are you in these pictures?





Blue Bridge Lane, flooded again