

Trading places: Canal Head

Canal Head would have looked very different in its heyday, with two warehouses, a sawmill, crane and several landing places stacked with coal and lime alongside the canal basin.

Thomas Johnson's warehouse and wharf, 1818

The first warehouse was built in 1818 by shareholder and committee member Thomas Johnson. This can still be seen today (now a private house) beside the canal basin. An 1818 notice stated that 'additional WAREHOUSES, GRANARIES, &c. will be immediately built at the Head thereof, for sufficiently carrying on Trade', but rather rashly, the company had promised Johnson that no other warehouses would be built for 14 years, leaving the canal with a shortage of storage at its most important destination.

Coal, lime and timber landing stages 1818

The north side of the canal basin was staked out in 1818 to provide several landing places for modest annual rents. These were used by a succession of local coal and lime merchants with their own carrying businesses, changing from year to year as their fortunes fluctuated, providing the Canal Company with a small but regular additional income. Thomas Tate of East Cottingham, Robert Witty, Richard Firth, Robert Hodgson of Pocklington and others were established at Canal Head early on. William Ellis, a Bielby farmer who also rented for a time the mill and inn there, also established a lime and coal dealership at Canal Head. In 1834, Ellis, Hodgson, miller and merchant James Peart & Sons were renting plots. Michael Gray & Co, however, declared bankruptcy in April 1836. By 1840, Hodgson and the Pearts had been joined by Godfrey Coward, who also dealt in corn, and Charles Weddall.

The Union Company and the Union Packet, 1821

The Union Packet vessel was purchased late in 1821 to operate a regular return service between Canal Head and a wharf at 60 High Street, Hull operated by shipping agents William Tummon & John Smithson. The vessel could carry 50 tons whilst a cart could only carry 2 tons. However, the vessel took 5 days to travel to Hull compared with a night and day by road. Other factors such as tidal water and competition with other traders meant that the venture was probably not as successful as hoped.

The 'Hull packet' was still advertised as leaving Pocklington every ten days in 1834, but the toll registers show it was in fact travelling elsewhere to pick up bulk cargoes such as timber, coal and gravel to earn a living.

Between August 1833 and August 1834, for example, the service carried 373½ tons of timber, 41 tons of groceries, 24 tons of iron and 158 tons of other goods, a total of 596½ tons. Separate trading figures for the service were produced until the year ending August 1845 when 553¾ tons were still being carried, consisting of 227½ tons of timber, 33¾ tons of iron and 293 tons of other goods, but it may have wound down shortly afterwards when the canal was sold and the tolls were raised by the new railway owners to an unfavourable level.

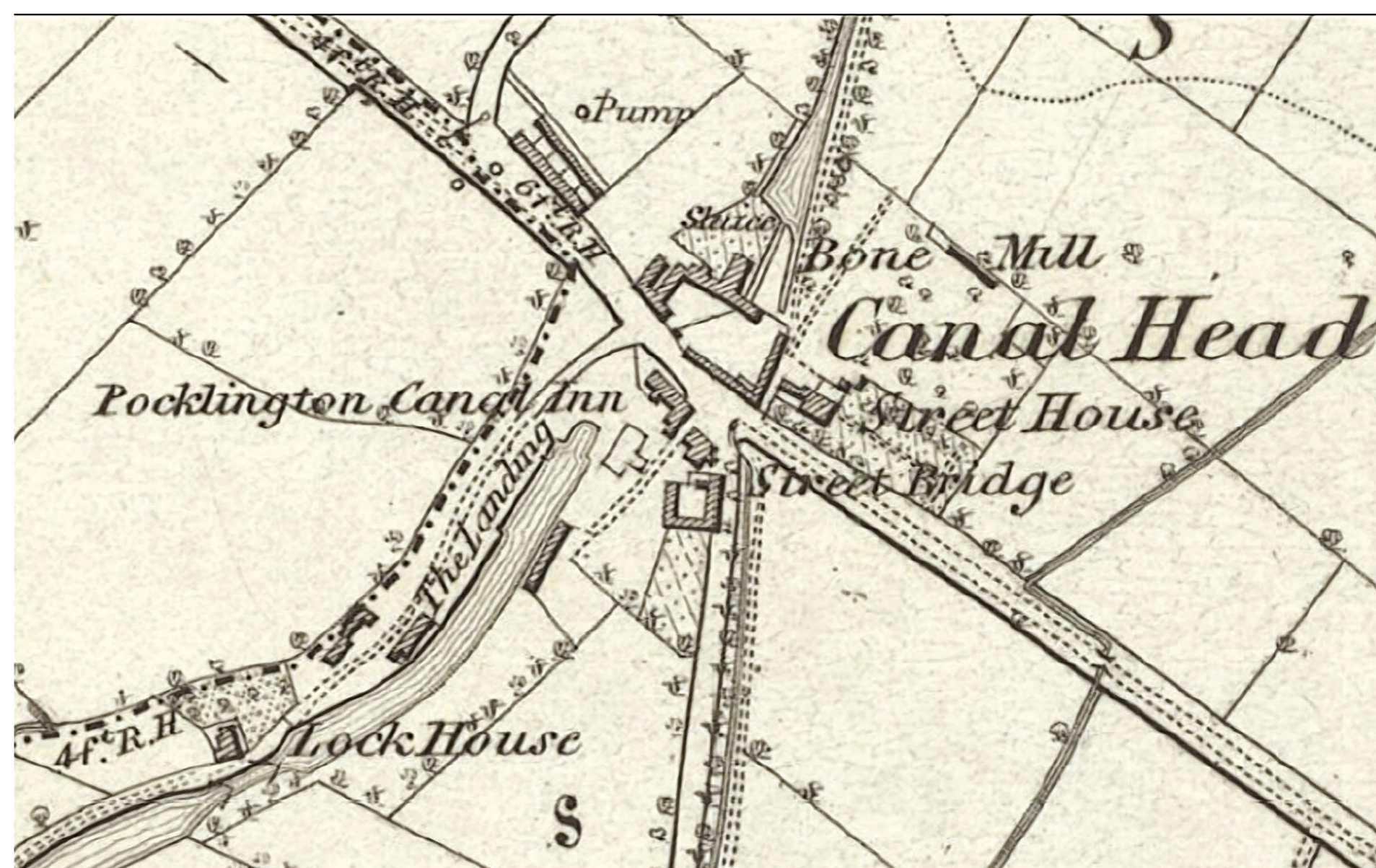
The Bone Mill, 1825

In 1825, York chemist and druggist Cook Cooper Taylor established a water-powered bone crushing mill using the beck north of the main road next to the Wellington Inn. Taylor already had an extensive chemist's business in Spurriergate, York: the future chocolate manufacturer Joseph Terry was an apprentice of his from 1808–15. Cook Cooper Taylor died in 1835, although his son continued the York businesses as Cook Taylor and Son and still ran a few cargoes to Canal Head in 1836.

Robert Denison's warehouse, 1834–5

After Johnson's 14 years grace had ended, in February 1834 the Canal Company allowed major shareholder Robert Denison jnr to construct a second warehouse (the 2017 archaeological dig found evidence that this was built on top of a former coal landing stage). An advert from 1836 mentioned the new coal wharf, warehouses, granaries, lime sheds, a cottage, and the Wellington Inn which Denison also owned; in that year Denison also rented the fishing rights for the entire canal, paying the Company 5s a year.

Denison, however, met with financial difficulties in 1840 and sold many of his assets, including Kilnwick Hall, where the family had lived since 1784. Despite this, Denison held onto the Canal Head warehouse until 1862, when the North Eastern Railway company agreed to take it off his hands.



Ordnance Survey map detail of Canal Head, surveyed 1851. National Library of Scotland



In 2017, archaeology volunteers discovered the Denison warehouse foundations had been cut through an early coal plot.