

# Mark Swann: The first lock keeper

Mark Swann became lock keeper in 1818 following the canal's opening and continued through the early stages of the canal's decline, serving until 1850. He collected tolls and ensured that the locks and sluices controlling the water level were in working order.

## Family background

Mark Swann (1789/90–1850) was appointed by the Pocklington Canal Company as the first 'Lock Keeper and Collector of the Tolls of this Navigation at a Yearly salary of fifty Pounds and the use of a House to live in not exceeding five Pounds Per Annum.' The salary was soon increased to £55. A bond (guarantee) of £500 was required for Swann's appointment. This was paid by James Garbutt of Norton, who was probably his wife's brother. Along with his wife Mary and their two children Mary and Henry, Swann moved into the new Lock House at Canal Head in 1819, which was also the year their third daughter, Elizabeth, was born.

Swann served for over 30 years and perhaps made some enemies along the way. In 1826 he was investigated for 'neglect of Duty and incorrectness in his accounts' but these allegations were found to be without foundation. Perhaps in compensation, the Canal Company rebuilt his kitchen! In 1845, Swann was also found to have been using about half an acre of land near Top Lock 'more than nine years without paying rent.' He was asked to pay £10 in arrears and 30s a year thereafter. Swann seems, however, to have been fairly wealthy, owning a row of houses in Regent Street, Pocklington. The 1834 electoral roll for nearby Bielby also revealed that Swann owned a tenement there.

Swann survived in post for the first years of railway ownership before allegedly being sacked in May 1850 shortly before his death in June at the age of 60, although there is no official correspondence to confirm this. With his long service and family connections with the local boating and trading communities, he was undoubtedly a significant part of the local community. He has a substantial monument in Pocklington churchyard.

Swann's widow and family continued to live in the Lock House for some years after his death, with the next lock keeper, Robert Turner, living in Melbourne, but by 1861 the Swanns had moved to Regent Street in Pocklington. Swann's descendants preserved a large early 19th-century blue-and-white transfer printed jug used by him to serve beer to boat captains, with faint traces of gold lettering spelling out 'POCKLINGTON CANAL COMPANY'.

## The Lock House

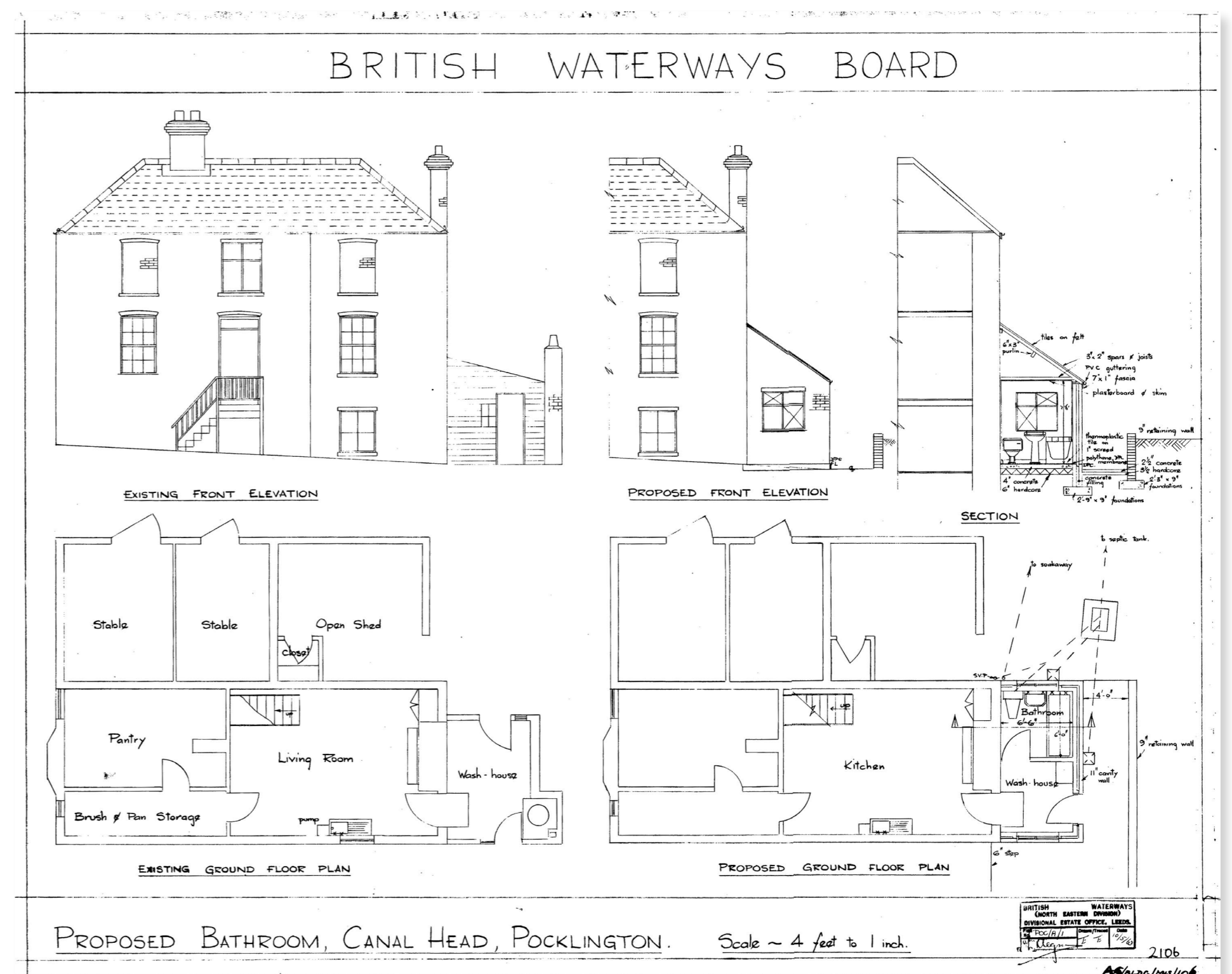
Built in 1819 by local builder Richard Hall, this is one of the few original buildings to survive on the canal. There is no information about its original layout, although the kitchen was extended for Swann in 1826. Otherwise it is thought to have remained largely unchanged into the second half of the 20th century.

In later years at least, the lock keeper was provided with a horse and trap to inspect the canal and there were two stables for Canal Company horses attached to the rear. It is likely that the ground floor originally included an office for the lock keeper and his records: the bay window next to the canal is typical of canal and turnpike toll houses, allowing the collector to see approaching traffic.

The Lock House was still occupied until around 1978, when lengthsmen Henry Richardson and his family moved out. After several years of semi-dereliction and fears of demolition, it was restored as a private house in the 1980s. The exterior had been altered, with two windows in the upper floor being blocked and the bay window removed, but these have been sympathetically restored.



The Lock House from the north-east before restoration, 1977. Richard Walton



British Waterways Board plans for altering the Lock House, 1963. CRT Archives



View of the early 19th-century Swann family jug. Phil Gilbank



Mark Swann's grave, All Saints church. Phil Gilbank