



**Bawtry Heritage Group**

Preserving our Past for the Future

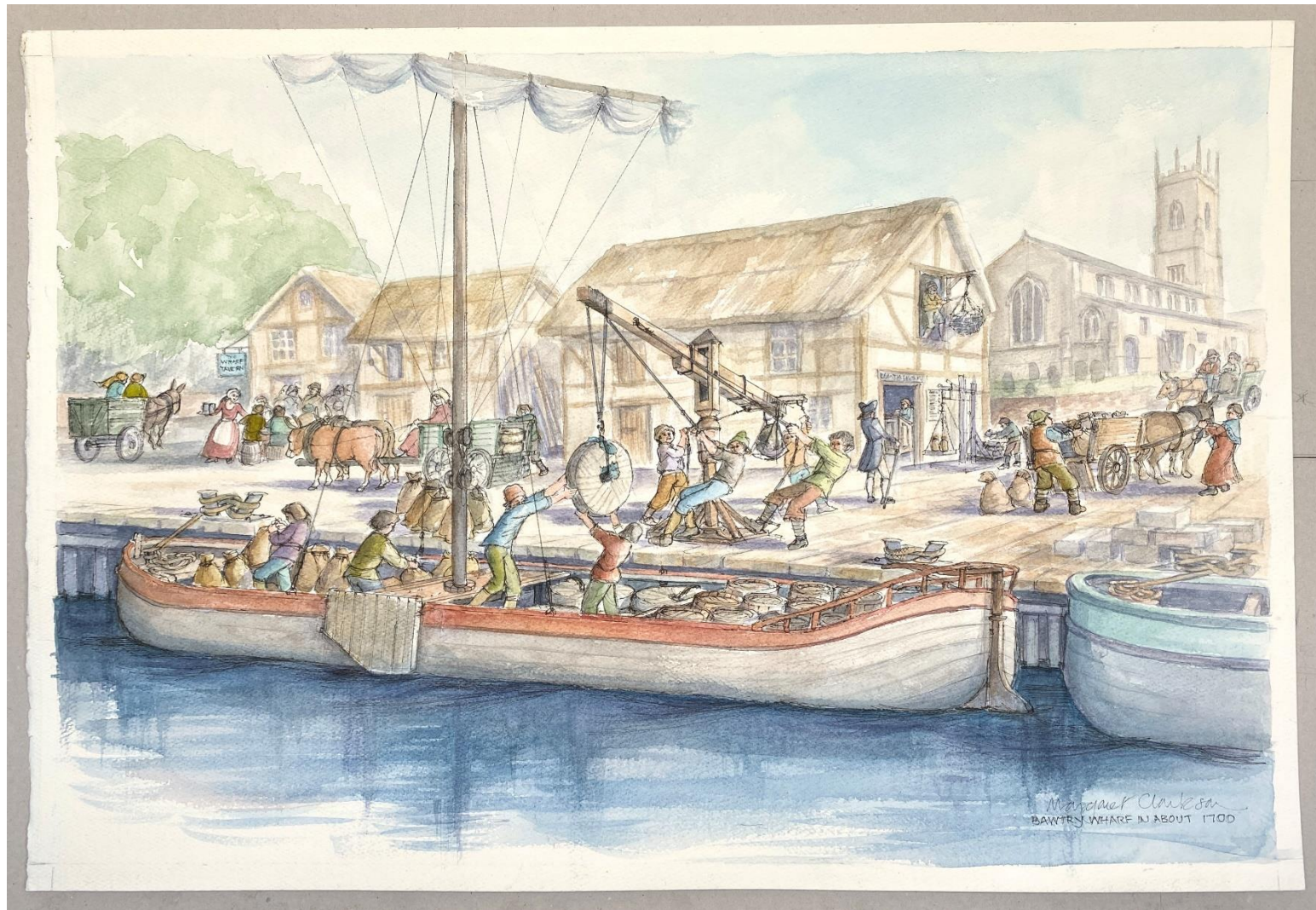
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**BAWTRY WHARF 2**  
**THE WHARF RE-IMAGINED**

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Bawtry Wharf in about 1700 – painting by Margaret Clarkson

Every major road into Bawtry used to have a sign saying “Welcome to Bawtry – 12<sup>th</sup> century port”. This confused people because there was no river in the town, let alone a port.

### **History of the wharf**

In fact, as explained in the “Bawtry Wharf” paper dated 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2023, the River Idle used to loop into the edge of town, and the wharf was just behind St Nicholas church. Bawtry was one of England’s busiest inland ports, certainly since medieval times and possibly earlier. It was probably at its peak in 1700, but was still going at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It closed in 1857 when the existing railway viaduct was built and caused the river to be diverted away from the town.

### **Trade through Bawtry**

Bawtry wharf served agriculture and industry in the region, notably the West Riding, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. A wide array of goods were carried to Bawtry by carts and pack horses or mules – lead, cast and wrought iron, edged tools, millstones, coal, timber, cereals, wool, cloth and animal hides. They would be loaded into sailing barges at the wharf, and shipped to Hull via the Trent and Humber. From Hull, they were transhipped to London, the Low Countries, the Baltic, and Scandinavia. “Imports” included iron ore, copper, tin, flax, hemp and timber.

### **The painting**

Bawtry Heritage Group decided to try to bring this crucial part of Bawtry’s history alive by commissioning a painting from Margaret Clarkson to show what the wharf would have looked like in around 1700. What is shown in the painting is historically accurate.

At top right in the painting, the eastern end of St Nicholas church appears – allowing the viewer to see that the wharf was just to the east of the graveyard wall – where a small modern housing estate is now located.

### **Sailing barges**

At the front of the painting, there are two sailing barges. The design of these changed very little between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. They were wide and almost flat bottomed, with a draught of less than 30 inches. The keel projected only a few inches below the bottom, providing very little lateral stability, therefore leeboards were fitted on each side of the hull. Hinged in one corner, these would be lowered into the water when necessary. A “parked” leeboard can be seen abreast of the mast in the painting. The barges had a single mast, which could be easily lowered to enable the barge to pass under low bridges. Being square rigged and

steered by a large tiller at the stern, the barges could sail very close to the wind, which was essential on the narrow waterways on which they plied – like the River Idle. In calm inland waters they were very manoeuvrable and could be handled by a single person, but a crew of two or three would have been the norm. Barges using Bawtry wharf would have been up to 48 feet long, up to 14 feet wide, and could carry up to 24 tons of freight.

### **Loading and unloading**

The barge at the centre of the painting is being loaded with a millstone. These originated from Derbyshire. The crane being used to hoist a millstone is typical of the simpler technology available in 1700. It can be pivoted on its mount, and a large counterweight is slung beneath the the far end. The size of this could be easily changed, and would be depending on the weight of the load being lifted. One or two men would pull on ropes either side of the counterweight to increase the force. At the front of the crane, another one or two men would use ropes to swing the crane on its pivot to the required direction.

The barge is already loaded with goods. As well as other millstones, there are numerous barrels and sacks. Edged tools from Hallamshire – scythes, shears, knives etc. – were usually transported in barrels. The sacks contain cereal grain, from Nottinghamshire.

### **The staithe – warehouses, carters and hauliers**

Behind the barge is the wharf itself, with a timber landing stage – which was called a staithe. On the staithe are several carts, coming and going. These were usually pulled by oxen or mules, which were cheaper than horses, with better endurance for load carrying. A load of cut stone is piled on the edge of the wharf; these may have been quarried at the quarry adjacent to Roche Abbey, near Maltby.

Between the two warehouses depicted is a lot of lumber, probably imported from Scandinavia. Enormous amounts of timber were brought into Bawtry, on some occasions covering the staithe in quantities that impeded the normal working of the wharf.

### **The excise man**

The well dressed man stood on the staithe, with a cane and tricorne hat, is a customs official – or “excise man”. He is watching some “pigs” (ingots) of lead from Derbyshire being weighed adjacent to the large warehouse, having been lowered from the “taking-in” door above. Excise or customs duties were a major source of Government revenue, being levied upon a wide range of goods being shipped abroad or imported. A port the size of Bawtry probably had an excise man permanently assigned to it.

## **The Wharf Tavern**

The “Wharf Tavern”, on the left of the painting, is the only element in the painting which is not attested to by documentary records relating to Bawtry and similar ports elsewhere. We believe an inn would have been located on the wharf. There would have been a captive customer base of numerous, mostly young and fit men – barge crews, dock stevedores, and carters. Then there were merchants, the excise man, and probably other craftsmen – possibly a blacksmith, a shipwright, a wheelwright. It would have been too good a business opportunity to miss!