

Swavesey Docks and Planned Town

Why were there docks in Swavesey?

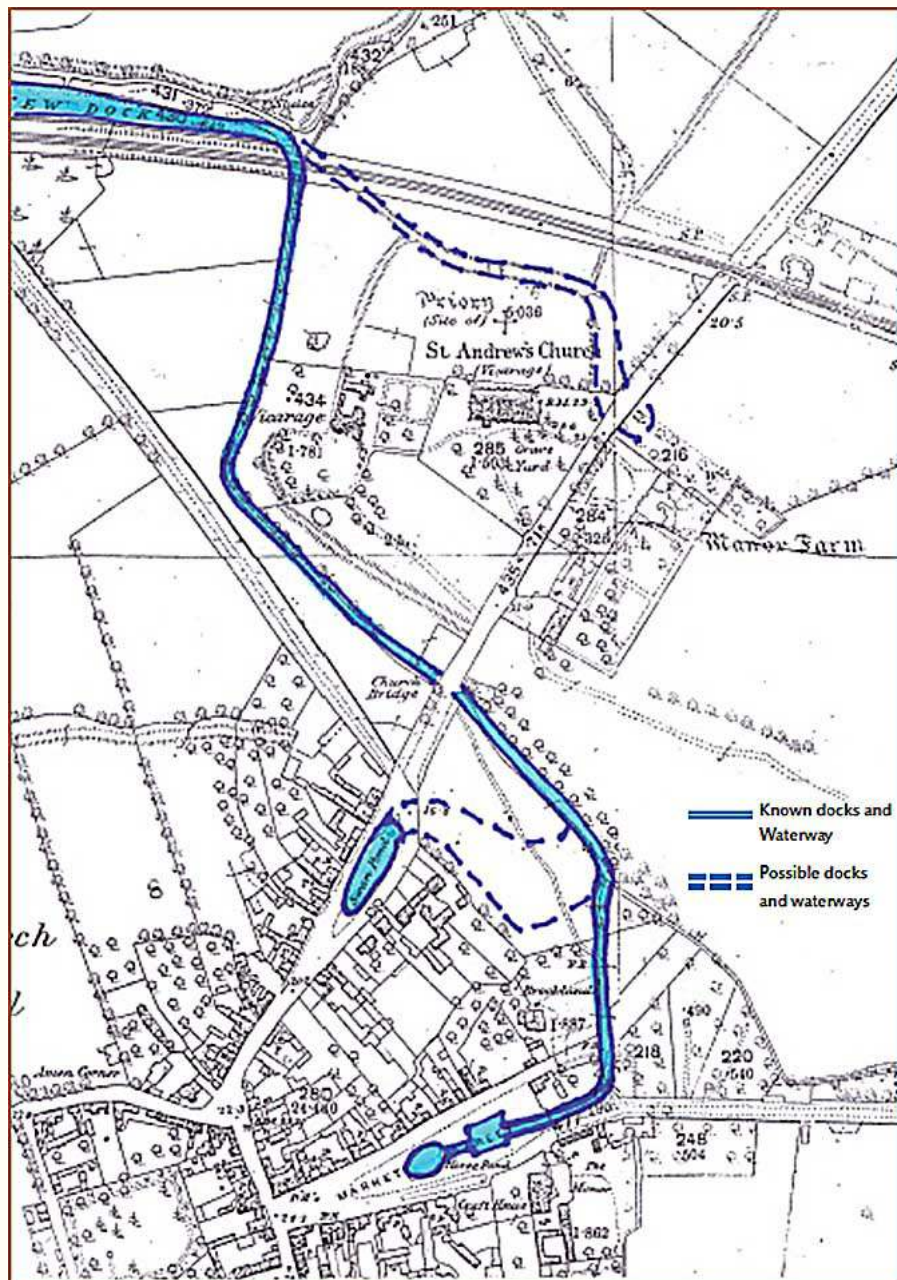
Along these fertile reaches of the River Ouse, seasonal flooding was common before the Fens were drained. Roads were often impassable and water transport was the cheapest means of moving bulk goods. Riverside places like Swavesey, St Ives and Waterbeach, with agricultural products to export and ground above flood levels, became important as inland ports. The name

Swavesey is taken to mean Swaef's Ey (or landing place), and the Eye survives as a name on maps as late as 1838. The Eye includes the parish church and Manor Farm, a substantial 15th century building, suggesting this was an administrative centre. There was a dock in Swavesey by 1177, and people exported grain and eels from here. Waterways, wider and deeper than now, connected docks at Swan Pond and Market Street to the River Ouse, as well

as giving protection from raiders and rebels. Traces of other waterways exist at the priory site and Manor Farm, maybe to deliver building stone for the priory and church, or to move grain from a tithe barn known to have existed.

What happened to the docks?

In the 19th century there were two basins in Market Street Green for shallow barges. Around the green were 'hovels', possibly workshops, and 37 Market Street, built around 1720, was known as the Coal Yard. At Market Street and Swan Pond there were inns for traders and carters. In 1847 the railway provided faster, more reliable transport, and the docks fell into disuse. The docks on Market Street Green and at Swan Pond then served to water cattle and carters' horses. Swan Pond was cut off from the Navigation Drain when the road to Over was built in 1838.



This Project was undertaken by Swavesey Festival Committee, Swavesey Village College History Club, Swavesey and District History Society and Oxford Archaeology East. Young people from SVC History Club asked the questions, investigated Swavesey's mediaeval past and helped formulate the information on this board. Swavesey Parish Council supported the project which was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Cambridge Antiquarian Society.



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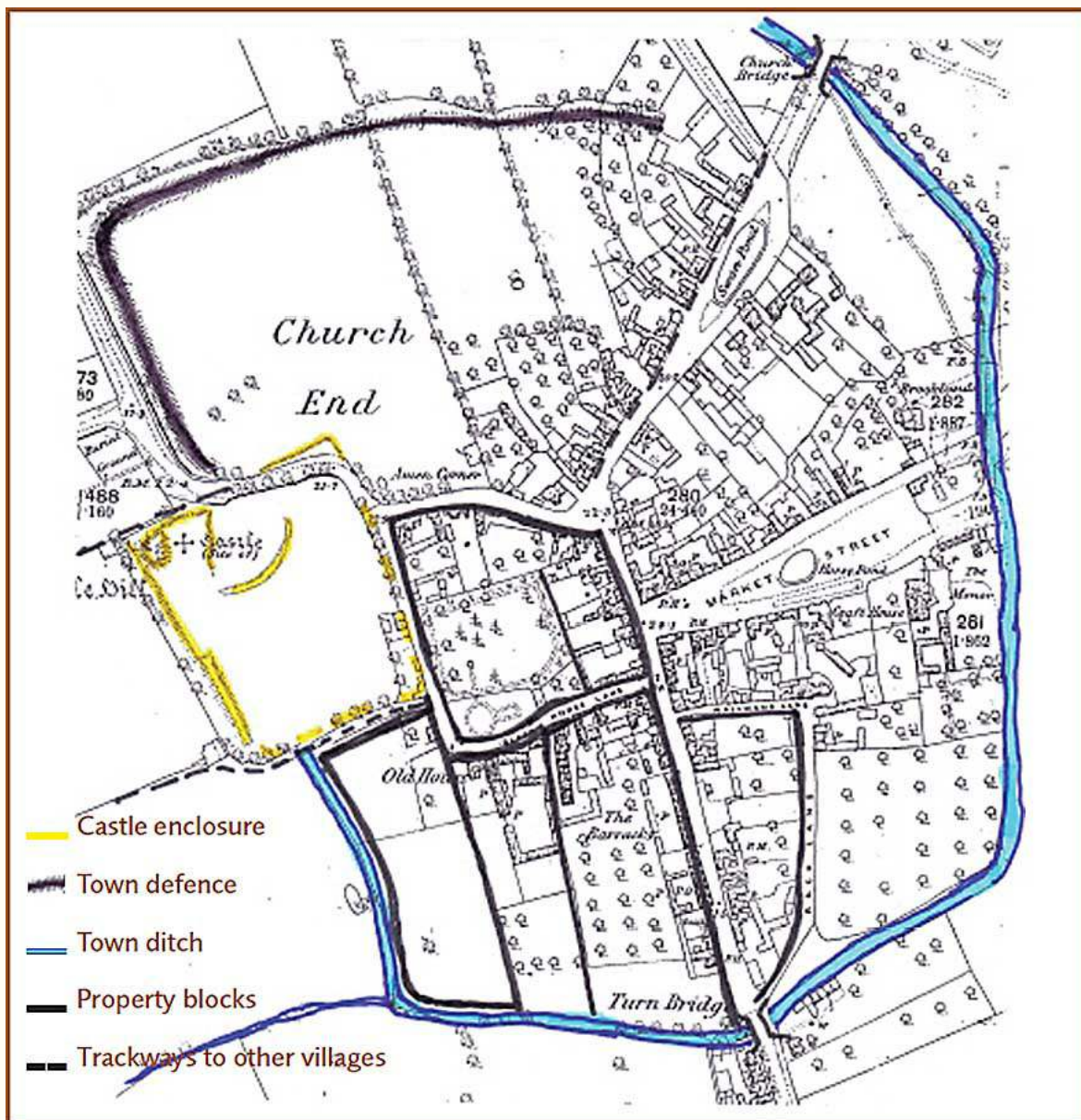
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The Planned Town

The Norman aristocracy was eager to develop towns, as urban rents were higher than rural land rents. In 1230 the la Zouch family took over Swavesey, and in 1232 Roger la Zouch was granted 15 oak trees to build lodgings here. In 1244 he received the right to hold a fair. The la Zouch family seem intent on expanding Swavesey into a trading town. The fair and the docks enabled merchants to trade and export, and Swavesey's eight day fair was a big event. Between 1086 and 1279 the population increased from 65 to 217 households, and at one time it was the second largest town in south Cambridgeshire. The streets within the defended part of Swavesey show a grid pattern typical of other planned towns with rectangular blocks separated by narrow streets, like Back Lane. With the continuing unrest

in the region during the 1200s, the la Zouch family would want to protect their investment in the town, and this could account for the extension of the town defences in the late 13th century, though the enclosed space was never fully developed. Outside the defended area, stood individual farms, including Ryders Farm dated to around 1290, and traces of a deserted village remain in the field at Boxworth End

The blocks of the mediaeval planned town are still visible on this 19th century map. The boundaries remain recognizable in the later landscape.





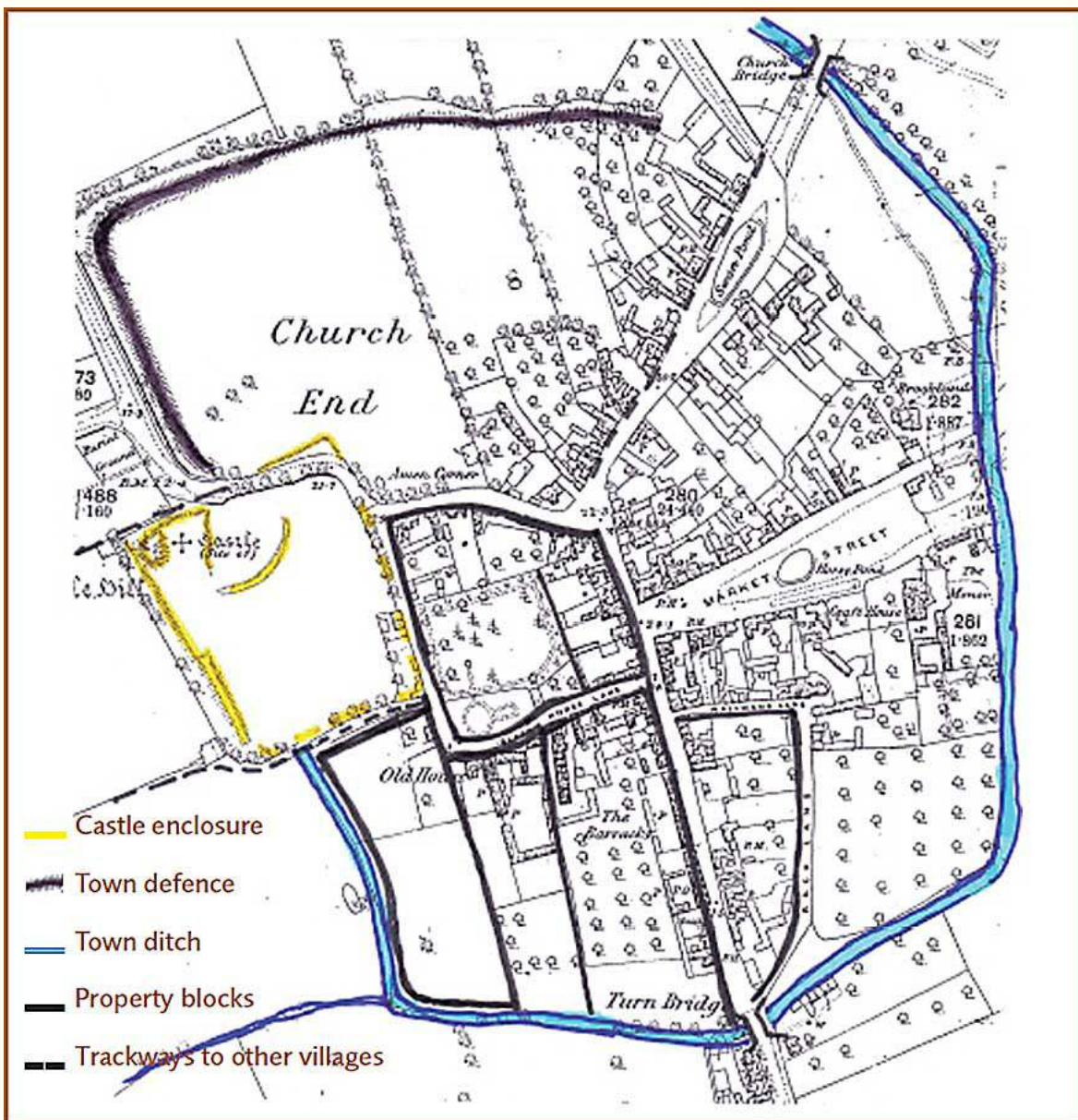
With their shallow draft and length, these Fen boats from about 1910 carried surprisingly large tonnages. Mediaeval boats using Swavesey docks were probably similar.



Swan Pond in about 1898. After the dock closed, carters watered their horses there while they went to the Swan with Two Nicks pub. Along the front of the cottages at doorstep level the wharf and track to Over are still visible.



Beyond the railing is Town Pond on Market Street in about 1924, the last remnant of the docks.



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