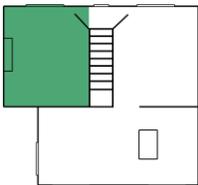


Navigation House
First floor plan



The room to the left of the stairs gives visitors information about the history of Sleaford, focusing on the architecture of the town.

Medieval Sleaford 800 – 1499

“From 1070 until 1550... Nobody could match the Bishop for political and economic power in the region.”

Under William the Conqueror, The Bishop of Lincoln was given extensive control over the counties of Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Rutland, Northamptonshire, Huntingdonshire, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire.

This Medieval lord built Sleaford Castle in the early 12th Century to the west of the existing town. As well as being a centre of feudal and manorial power, the Castle afforded him defense.

The Bishop was surrounded here by marshland and water could be diverted into the moat for further defense. The flat fenland afforded a good view of the approaching enemy.

The Bishop also had a Great Barn building, positioned in the outer courtyard of his castle, where produce from his land could be stored. (The Castle and Barn were both dismantled by Robert Carre in the late 1550s)

At the time of the Domesday Book, there were 12 watermills along the River Slea, with seven more on the way from Sleaford to Ruskington. It was said the Slea never dried up in summer and never froze over in winter!

The tower of St Denys' Church dates back to Medieval times, approximately 1180. The broach spire was built shortly afterwards. It is among the oldest stone-built ones in England and stands 44 metres (144 feet) tall.



The tower rebuilt after being struck by lightning in 1884



An aerial view of the church and market place. The Vicarage may be seen to the top left.

The Vicarage, which stands on the north side of the churchyard, is one of the oldest houses in Sleaford and the main wing with timber-framed gable is 15th Century.



The Vicarage today

Georgian Sleaford 1714 – 1836

“Canals were the motorways of the 18th Century.”

The opening of the Slea Navigation and The Enclosure Act (both in 1794), transformed Sleaford’s townscape and countryside dramatically.

At the beginning of this period, property in Sleaford had been neglected by its absent landlord, Lord Bristol. The town had suffered from fire damage due to the easily flammable thatch roof houses and an inadequate fire service.

In 1722, the town opened a workhouse for the old, poor and destitute. These people were unable to look after themselves and the men worked breaking stones. The women picked oakum (separated fibres of old rope) and the children had to spin.

A new town hall was built in 1755 on the Market Place in a classical style, typical of the architectural influence of this era.



The Georgian town hall



The town had two popular inns, ‘The George’ and ‘The Angel’, which served stage coaches daily; although travelling this way could be a hazardous business, due to lurking highwaymen.

Sleaford however, was on the threshold of change. The opening of the Navigation meant goods could be transported effectively and cheaply – canals were “the motorways of the 18th Century”.

The town thrived because of this new mode of transport. The existing watermills increased their trade, while some businessmen expanded into windmills. The most striking windmill was Henry Sutton’s big brick tower mill, situated at the head of the Navigation.



An elegant example of a late Georgian house in Northgate

Victorian Sleaford 1837 – 1901

“The Flower of Lincolnshire”

Victorian Sleaford witnessed much industrial change with the boom and decline of the Navigation and the opening of the railway in the town. Highway robberies were a social problem at this time, as were a lack of clean and adequate sewers.

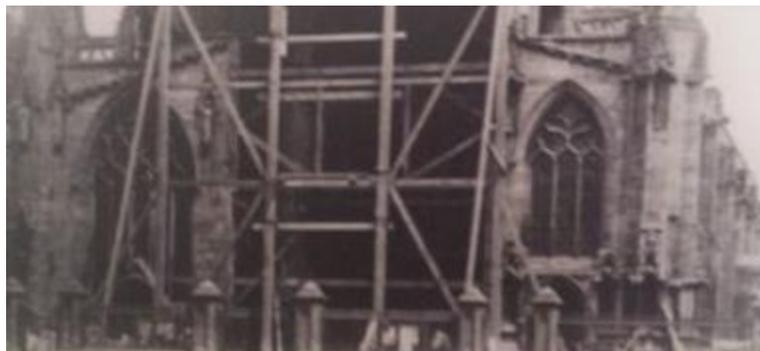
The Victorian’s version of progress was to erect large and ornate public buildings. This show of opulence was in harsh contrast to the poor living conditions prevalent in the many slums.



Carre's Hospital, Eastgate. Designed by HE Kendall and built between 1830 - 1846

The Kirk and Parry firm dominated the local architecture scene in Sleaford. Amongst other buildings, they constructed the Corn Exchange in 1857, providing a refined environment for farmers and millers to do business.

When St Denys’ Church spire was struck by lightning during a Sunday service in 1884, Kirk and Parry were naturally called upon to carry out the rebuilding.



Due to a strong Methodist temperance movement, the Town's Lee and Green bottled water factory did a roaring trade. In addition to disapproving of alcohol, the Methodists regarded the Playhouse on Westgate actors' theatre as a 'den of vice'. The Playhouse opened in Sleaford in the 1820s and the actors performed Shakespeare, songs and comic interludes.



Almshouses' entrance

A Roman Catholic Church was erected in 1888 because of Irish labourers, who came to the town to work on the cultivation of the fens. This was also a moot point for the Puritans!

Due to building developments and improvements that took place in Sleaford in the early 19th Century, White's Directory of Lincolnshire in 1856 described it as "...one of the handsomest towns in the country... The flower of Lincolnshire".



Early Victorian working class housing in Charles Street



The Corn Exchange is seen to the centre.



The Savings Bank, Northgate

Growth of Sleaford

Sleaford has always been a market town and its history dates back as far as the Iron Age. The town once had its own Medieval castle and the River Slea powered as many as 18 watermills.

The name Sleaford was coined by the Anglo-Saxons and means the crossing place over the river – quite literally the ford over the Slea. The surrounding fertile fenland would have attracted early settlers, as would the excellent location for flour mills the River provided.

From the time of the Domesday Book, records exist of Sleaford holding a weekly market. Markets were often held on the Sabbath in Medieval times because church-goers were good passing trade!



Sleaford cattle market

Cogglesford Mill was built in the 18th Century and is the only surviving mill in the area today. It is open to the public as a tourist attraction and grain can be seen being turned into flour by millstones.



Cogglesford Mill in the snow

Georgian Sleaford was a time of great change and saw the start of the Industrial Revolution. Two major events for Sleaford at this time were the opening of the Navigation and the enclosure of the open fields. The town's first banking house, Peacock, Handley and Kirton opened in 1792 to help fund the opening of the Navigation.

Pieces of the 12th Century Castle are rumoured to have been pillaged by Victorian architects, Kirk and Parry, and used in their own homes. These two men built many of the public buildings in the town of this period.

Kirk and Parry

“Reusing redundant pieces of Medieval masonry was one of Kirk and Parry’s hallmarks.”

Charles Kirk and Thomas Parry were Victorian architects of regional repute. Amongst other types of buildings they specialised in constructing railway stations and restoring churches.

These prolific architects made Sleaford their home and business headquarters. Consequently their fine work can be seen all over Sleaford in the schools, houses, offices and restoration work on St Denys Church.

Charles Kirk built the new Sessions House in the Market Place for the architect HE Kendall when he first moved to the town. Thomas Parry married into Kirk’s family and together they made a formidable team.



Sessions House, the Market Place

The men turned Jermyn Street into their works where stone and wood were prepared for building projects. Kirk and Parry’s contracts were not all local and their designs can be seen in country houses and railway stations as far as London, Leeds and Liverpool, as well as churches across Southern England.

In Sleaford their work includes two major restorations of St Denys’ Church and the Corn Exchange in the Market Place. They also built the Palladian style housing which is now the District Council offices.



Lafford Terrace, Eastgate 1856, now North Kesteven District Council's offices



The Corn Exchange 1857



Northgate, leading to Westholme House

Kirk and Parry built themselves spectacular homes in the centre of Sleaford.

Kirk's Jacobean-style Mansion House on Southgate (built in the 1840s) became Kesteven and Sleaford High School for Girls, while Parry's Westholme House, built in French-Gothic and English manor house style, is an educational centre.



Westholme House, Thomas Parry's home

Local Building Style

The townscape in the centre of Sleaford is a mix of different periods and styles. The street pattern of the Medieval period still survives, but the feel is predominantly of the Georgian and Victorian period. The local red brick favoured by the Georgians and the limestone favoured by local architects Kendall, Kirk and Parry may still be seen in abundance.

The local (vernacular) style of building

The ordinary buildings that survive in Sleaford generally date at the earliest from the late 17th Century. The local style thrived through to the mid 19th Century when the coming of the railways allowed building materials from outside the area to be used.



Houses on Watergate. Bright pantile roofs sit above the strong warm colour of the local brick.



House on Jermyn Street, Flemish bond brickwork sits above the coursed Oolitic limestone.



Roof of a house on Church Lane. Weathered pantiles with stone ridge tiles.

Walling materials

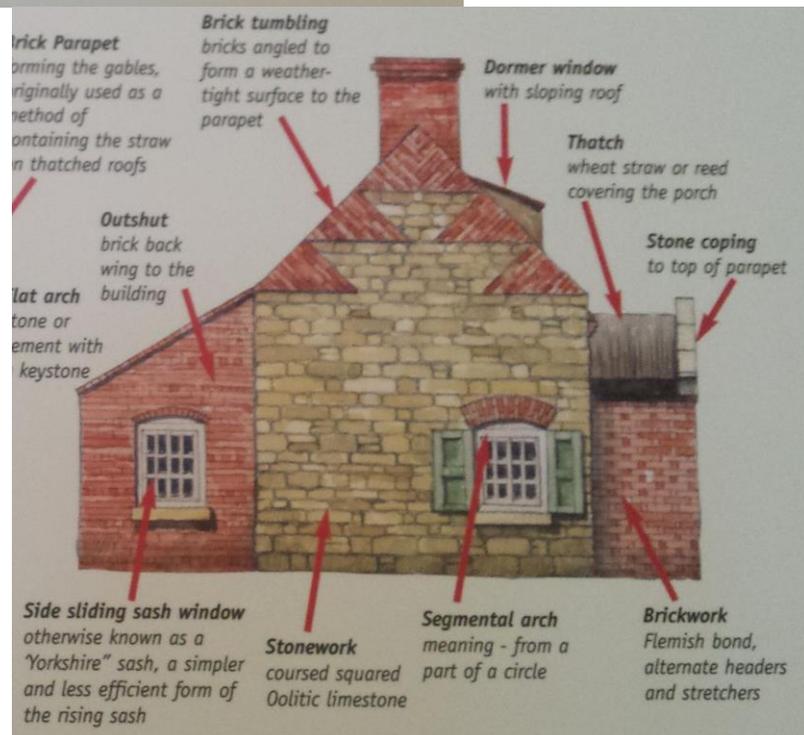
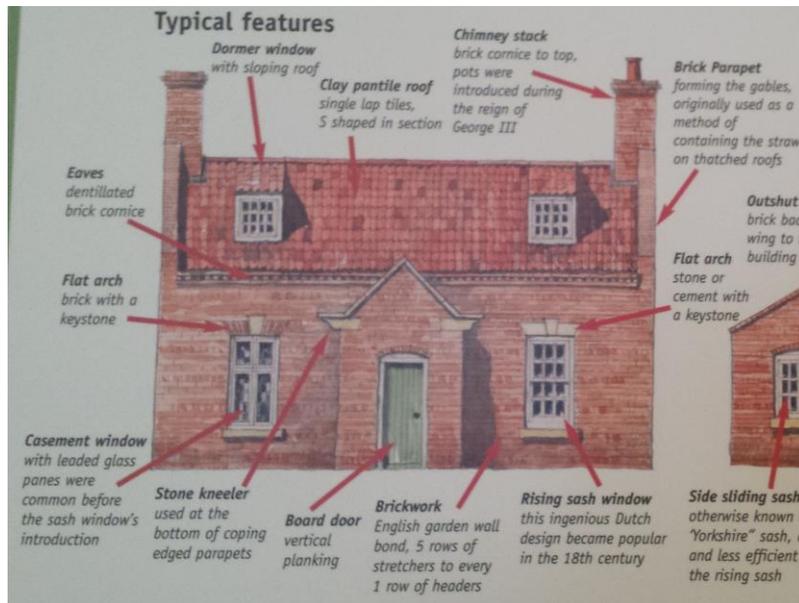
Sleaford is fortunate to be situated near some fine stone quarries which include Ancaster, Ketton, Barnack and Clipsham. The stone is Oolitic limestone and is sought for its colour, texture, durability and workability.

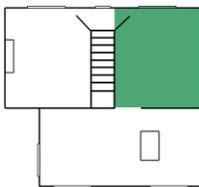
The local clay fires to a strong rich orange-red colour and the locally-made brick was used widely from the 17th Century through to the 19th Century.

Roofing materials

During the Medieval period, thatch was probably the most popular material on ordinary buildings. The principle materials were wheat straw and reed.

During the 17th Century pantiles began to be imported from Holland, originally coming over as ballast in boats. They soon became widespread and were manufactured locally from the beginning of the 18th Century.





The room to the right of the stairs holds interactives and offers visitors a glimpse of life on the water.

10 Random Canal Facts

- 1 . Before canal locks were invented, boats could only be moved past obstacles such as hills or weirs by being 'portaged' – physically carried.
- 2 . Modern 'mitre' lock gates were invented in Milan in the late 15th Century by the man who painted the Mona Lisa – Leonardo da Vinci.
- 3 . The longest ship canal is the Suez Canal in Egypt, measuring 161.9km (100.6 miles).
- 4 . There are more miles of canals in Birmingham than there are in Venice.
- 5 . Before the railways, canals carried passenger traffic. Passengers could choose between first and second class cabins and refreshments were provided.
- 6 . The first canals in the UK were built by the Romans. One of them, the Fossdyke in Lincolnshire, is still navigable today.
- 7 . The first British pound lock – the type still in common use today – was built at Exeter in the reign of Elizabeth I.
- 8 . Canal cruises are nothing new. Canals were popular for Parish and Sunday School outings as early as 1900.
- 9 . The earliest known recorded description of 'Roses and Castles' decoration appears in 1858 in a magazine called Household Words, edited by Charles Dickens.
- 10 . Robert Louis Stevenson, author of Treasure Island, canoed through the rivers and canals of France and Belgium in 1876. His grandfather, another Robert, was a canal engineer.

Narrow boats & 'Roses and Castles'

Narrow boats were used on the canals in the Midlands and much less so on wider canals like the Slea and those in West Yorkshire.

The canal painting technique known as 'Roses and Castles' was almost exclusive to the narrow boats.



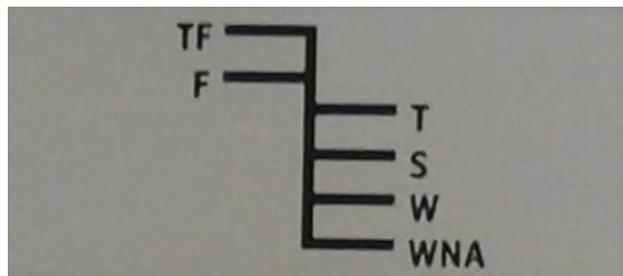
The Plimsoll Line

The Plimsoll line is the mark on the hull of a ship that shows where the waterline is when the ship is at full capacity.

The official name is the international load line, since the Plimsoll line is an international load limit standard.

It was named after Samuel Plimsoll, who instigated the passage of the Merchant Shipping Act of 1875, which established the marking of a load line on every cargo ship.

This was to prevent the practice of launching deliberately overloaded 'coffin ships', which were intended to sink so that the owner could collect the insurance money.



The marks to the left show how much cargo can be loaded when the ship is in fresh water.

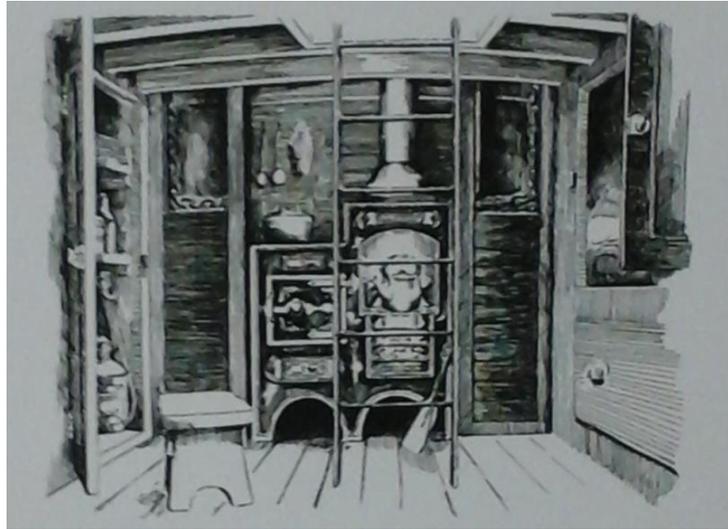
TF Tropical Fresh water
F Fresh water

The marks to the right show how much cargo can be loaded when the ship is in salt water.

T Tropical sea water
S Summer sea water
W Winter sea water
WNA Winter North Atlantic

Life Aboard

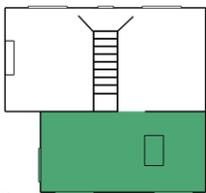
Humber keels and sloops had two cabins – one at the stern and one forward. The cabins appeared to be paneled in varnished oak or pine with some mahogany decoration. These panels were almost all cupboard doors. The keels were heated by an open coal stove, which was stored in its own area. The space was lit by oil lamps hung from a three-foot rod allowing them to be slid fore and aft.



A wooden keel's fo'c'sle: the stove is against the hold bulkhead and is flanked by the anchor chain lockers. To the left is the boatswain's store, full of lines, paint, a dog leg anchor and navigation lamps.



A stern cabin was found under the after deck. This was entered by way of a 'companion' - just big enough for a large person to pass through - then down a near vertical ladder.



The long back room (above the reception) details the history of the industry of Sleaford and the people behind the founding of the Navigation.

Seed Industry

Not many people know that Sleaford is the 'seed capital of the world'!

This incredible legacy was left by Charles Sharpe & Co, one of two major seed houses which started trading in Sleaford in the late 19th Century, the other being Hubbard and Phillips.

These two leading seed merchants produced many varieties of seeds, from sugar beet, grass, peas and beans, to cereal crops including corn, wheat, barley and oats.

At this time most market towns had seedsmen who sold cart-loads of seeds at market. However, the advent of the railway in Sleaford meant that trade could now take place on a much larger scale and by the end of the 19th Century, Charles Sharpe was exporting seeds all over the world!

Because of the railway, the Sleaford Navigation was now mainly disused apart from farmers who still sent sugar beet by river to the refinery at Bardney.

Messrs Hubbard and Phillips bought the entire wharf area from the Sleaford Navigation Company and Navigation House itself was used as a private dwelling. Elizabeth Mettam was born here at Navigation House in 1878 where she lived for the rest of her life as a tenant of Hubbard and Phillips.

As for the seed merchants' heritage, Charles Sharpe's company became a large international business and today is part of Advanta Seeds. It is still trading under the family name 'Sharpes International' – a testimony to the high reputation the family had earned. Hubbard and Phillips grew to have importance countrywide but closed in the early 1970s.

The Maltings

The Maltings are unique Grade II* listed buildings built between 1901 and 1906 by Bass, Ratcliff and Gretton. The largest of their kind in Europe, they cover the area of six whole football pitches!

When The Maltings were being conceived in the 1890s it was a time of severe agricultural depression. A delay in the firm's arrival caused some annoyance locally, but investment and capital were attracted into Sleaford and I opened in 1906.

The Maltings were elaborately built with an artesian well at the centre and an internal railway with its own locomotive and shunting engine.



Malting is the actual process of turning starch in the form of grain, into sugar in the form of malt. It was used mainly to make beer but whisky is another product of malt.

The actual malting process was complicated and was all done on site in specialised areas. It involved the barley arriving by rail, being heated in a kiln, steeped in water, then sent to a warehouse to germinate. After this lengthy procedure, it was sent by rail to Burton-on-Trent to serve the breweries.

The Maltings continued to operate until 1960 and the buildings have stood the test of time since. They've survived three fires and a turned-down application for demolition.

Their future is bright now, having attracted The Prince of Wales's Phoenix Trust charity. The charity is working with partners to restore life to the Maltings, and to repair and maintain these interesting buildings.



Charles Sharpe

Charles Sharpe was a man of so much vision that his name still sells seeds today – one hundred years after his death.

It was his father, John Sharpe, who initially bought land in Sleaford and built 'The Pines', their family home in Boston Road. He set up a nursery and seedsman but when Charles took over in 1851, he decided seeds were the future.



Charles Sharpe



Sharpe's warehouse, Station Road

By the end of the 19th Century, Charles Sharpe & Co was exporting peas, sugar beet and vegetable seeds to America, Germany and France.

Charles campaigned for seed quality control and his efforts were rewarded in national legislation that stopped companies from selling old or bad seed.

Discoloured pea seeds are now removed electronically, but originally they were picked over by hand – a painstaking operation involving mainly women workers.

Charles' son-in-law, Augustus Jessop and John Coy (who joined the company in 1889 as an office boy) both became directors and then chairmen. The seed business meant extensive travel and John Coy showed much foresight in sending his sons, Raymond and Robert to Swiss and French agricultural colleges to learn French and German. Raymond was chairman from 1961 to 1978, then Robert took over until his retirement in 1984.

Sharpes continued to grow and became the largest handler of peas and beans in Europe, trading some 15,000 tonnes annually with Canada, South Africa and Europe.

Sharpes International continues to market seeds today under leading global company, Advanta Seeds.

From Pod to Pea

The vining pea crop season starts with drilling in early March, to harvesting at the end of June. The pea crops are closely monitored and measured for tenderness and size by technical specialists. The journey from field to freezer takes just 150 minutes!

Peas grow well in the UK's climate, but seeds do better kept in dryer conditions which helps avoid mould; North Africa, Eastern Europe and Canada have better climates for keeping seed.

A new variety of pea can take as much as 10-12 years to cultivate! When a variety is developed it can then be patented, so other people growing your peas have to pay you royalties.

Part of the production process is called roughing and if any plant has sprouted different leaves or looks dissimilar, it is spotted instantly and removed from the crop. People who do this are specialists and can spot the most subtle leaf point or colour differences.

Hubbard and Phillips

Hubbard and Phillips were the ‘biggest sellers of mushy peas nationwide’! These dried marrowfat peas were the precursors of the frozen peas we know and love today.

An advert in the Sleaford Gazette dated the 13th April 1872 reads, “James Hubbard, Ewerby and Sleaford Seedsman, continues to send out Pure and Unadulterated SEEDS, some home grown and fine quality.”

Mr James Hubbard was a farmer in Ewerby Thorpe, but as farming became uneconomical, he began to diversify into selling seeds. His eldest daughter married Mr Phillips and their seed business, Hubbard and Phillips, opened in Sleaford in 1880. It was later carried on by his son, Charles William Hubbard.

These seed merchants specialised in grass seeds and dried peas. They purchased the Navigation Company’s old warehouse buildings to use for their seed and pea business.

Their trade extended countrywide and in 1939 they constructed a four-storey warehouse and seed sorter (magic eye) on the old wharf.

Hubbard and Phillips went into liquidation in the early 1970s but their huge warehouse has been renovated and opened to the public in October 2003. It is a centre of contemporary craft, design and making, once called the ‘Hub’.



A dapper young man poses in front of a Hubbard and Phillips lorry.

Five Pea Facts

The UK is the largest producer of frozen peas in Europe.

There are 40,000 hectares of peas grown in the UK each year - around 80,000 football pitches.

Thick London fogs in the 19th and 20th Centuries were called 'pea-soupers' because of their density and green shade.

For thousands of years, peas eaten in soups and porridge were made from the dried pea, known as the field pea today.

Fresh peas became popular in the 19th Century when improved varieties were developed by English plant breeders.

People Involved

People connected to the Navigation

After twenty years of trying to get the Sleaford Navigation off the ground, the winning combination of local gentry and business men finally came together. These men succeeded in turning the dream of a Sleaford Navigation into a reality.

It was the enterprising inhabitants of the town like banker Benjamin Handley, who could see the advantages of making the River Slea navigable up to the town – thus linking Sleaford into the growing canal network.

The **Navvies** were the men (and children too), who physically dug the Navigation with sheer hard graft.

Sleaford bankers, Peacock, Handley and Kirton gave their financial backing but were also actively involved in the work; so much so that Peacock later lost his life because of the canal.

The famous and influential **Sir Joseph Banks** was a huge asset to the project. Being from Lincolnshire he took a personal interest and pride in the area, as well as a vested interest as local landowner.

The other significant figure who was instrumental in the fate of the Sleaford Navigation was engineer **William Jessop**. His skills and experience were second to none and his were the plans that finally convinced Parliament to pass the Navigation Bill.

Before the Navigation opened, rising costs meant that another £2000 had to be raised from amongst the 41 shareholders. Plans for it to run through the centre of Sleaford had to be abandoned for lack of money and the terminus was built where engineers John Varley and Edward Hare had identified some years earlier – at the back of the George and Angel Inns. Here an elaborate stone portal proclaimed the wharf.



Navvies

The Navvies were a huge army of labourers from all over the country who were employed to dig the canals at the time of Canal Mania. 'Navvy' comes from navigator, or navigations and the term originated at this time, when canals were at the cutting edge of the transport revolution.

Working mostly with pick and shovel, navvying required great strength and physical stamina. It was said to take a year for an agricultural labourer to become a Navvy, whose day's work involved shifting a staggering 20 tons of earth. For this work, Navvies would get paid every month and were given days off. A lot of the men spent their money in one go at the local pub and some were even persuaded to be paid their wages in beer.



Navvies barrow racing, Bosworth, Leicestershire 1870s

Still, the working hours for the Navvies were long and accidents were common. They had a fearsome reputation as hard drinking and hard fighting men which meant some terrified locals sent their unmarried daughters away until work on the canal was finished!

The dress of the Navvy was distinctive. They usually wore moleskin trousers, canvas shirts, velveteen square tailed coats, hobnail boots, handkerchiefs, felt hats and coloured waistcoats.



Navvies working on the construction of St Pancras Station 1867

Peacock, Handley and Kirton

The bankers behind the Sleaf Navigation

Anthony Peacock, Benjamin Handley and William Kirton were businessmen and partners in a newly opened Sleaford bank in their namesake – Peacock, Handley and Kirton. The Bank building still exists in Sleaford today as part of the Lloyds branch which is in Northgate. These three gentlemen were a driving force behind the Sleaford Navigation being realized and gave it their financial backing. Handley attended the public meeting held at the George Inn, Sleaford in October 1771, after which Jessop's plan to adapt the Slea was passed in Parliament in 1792.

Once the Navigation Act had gone through, getting shareholders and raising the sum of £13,000 was not a problem, but inflation and rising costs were...



Bank notes from Peacock, Handley and Kirton's Bank

Benjamin Handley proved an invaluable asset. He was appointed Treasurer of the newly founded Company of the Proprietors of the Sleaford Navigation and made the Company a loan that gave the business a flying start.

William Kirton was a partner in the Bank and a Navigation shareholder. He shared a 48 ton sloop 'Union' with local merchant, John Brittain, which traded regularly along the Sleaford Navigation to Leeds.

Anthony Peacock was the Company chairman and a partner of the Bank. Sadly the Navigation hastened him to an early death in 1809; he was crippled with rheumatism from wearing wet clothes during his time superintending drainage-works on the Navigation.



Navigation Yard in the early 19th Century

The view on the glass gives an impression of how the yard may have looked in its heyday. The 1792 warehouse (although much rebuilt) is still here today. It was the largest building on the site and the focal point of all the activity.

To the right of the warehouse is the crane that was built by the Navigation Company; beyond, a Humber Keel is being unloaded. The other side of the River Sleas is still very rural.