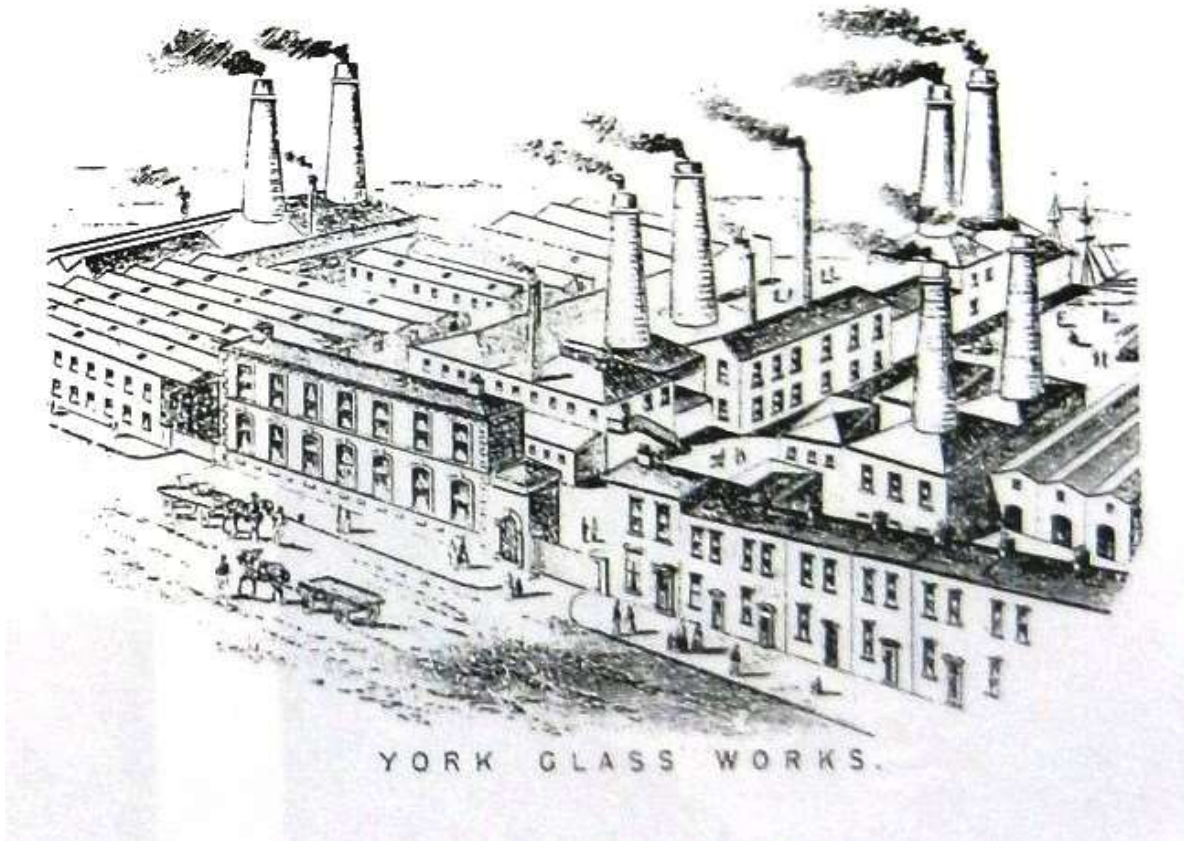


# THE YORK GLASSWORKS, FISHERGATE

A brief history by Van Wilson



*Image: York Explore*

In April 1986 the Redfearn National Glass factory in Fishergate was demolished and replaced within a year by the Novotel with its car park and a small estate of houses and flats. This ended the history of one of York's biggest employers and certainly the largest in the Fishergate area. The factory chimney had dominated York's skyline for a long time and although the Novotel has a number of framed photographs showing the history of the company, little else remains apart from the brick wall along Browney Dyke.

After demolition of the factory and before the hotel was built, York Archaeological Trust conducted a dig on the site and discovered a large number of finds, as well as unearthing some history of pre-Viking settlements and St Andrew's Priory which had once stood there. The team found remnants of wooden buildings and fragments of beaver skins and feet of pine martens, furs which were the currency of European trade. (see the Eoforwic page in History Topics on this website)

The first glassworks in Fishergate was established in 1794 by Hampston and Prince, to manufacture flint glass and medicinal phials, and was built on what had been St Andrew's Priory.

The process of manufacturing involved a mixture of Lynn sand, pearl ashes and red lead, heated into a molten liquid. The furnaces were kept burning continuously and then the glass would be blown before cooling very slowly. The adjacent river Foss was used to bring coal and raw materials. Later, crude oil to heat the furnaces was pumped from barges, which could hold 10 to 12 ordinary lorry tanker loads.

The work had to be carried on without any breaks, so two sets of men were always employed on alternate shifts. The art of glass blowing by mouth is over 2000 years old, and originated with the Romans. Today the process is of course automated, though some individual glass blowers still exist. Bottle making was done by gangs of five men, the 'gatherer' who placed the molten liquid into the blow pipe, then the 'blower' who would actually blow the bottle into shape, the 'wetter off' who broke off superfluous glass from the neck and the 'bottle maker' who was in charge. He would run metal round the neck and fashion it into shape. Finally, the 'taker-in' was a young lad who would take the bottle to the kiln to cool for 48 hours.



**Men from the Cutting Shop. Jan 1895**      **Image: York Explore**

Many Fishergate men were employed at the works, whose professions were listed on census returns as glass stopper, glass cutter, glass stainer and glass blower. Eventually the factory also employed women.



The works had become the York Glass Company by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and in 1880 it was flourishing, eventually merging with Redfearn's Glass in 1977 to become Redfearn's National Glass in York and Barnsley, (which had been founded by the Redfearn family in 1862). They made not only glass bottles but also jam jars, vinegar bottles and jars for beauty creams amongst others. At one point, the company made 16 per cent of the UK's production of glass bottles.

**Glassworks employee with milk bottles. Image York Press**

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed, more and more of the work was mechanised as with so many industries, and workers were made redundant. Although there had been almost 3000 employees in 1972, there were only 300 left before the end. In 1982, steeplejacks climbed up to the top of the chimney to build an extension. But the company actually closed only a year later in 1983 and it was erased from York's industrial heritage by 1985.



**The Glassworks during demolition c.1984. Image Paul Nolan**

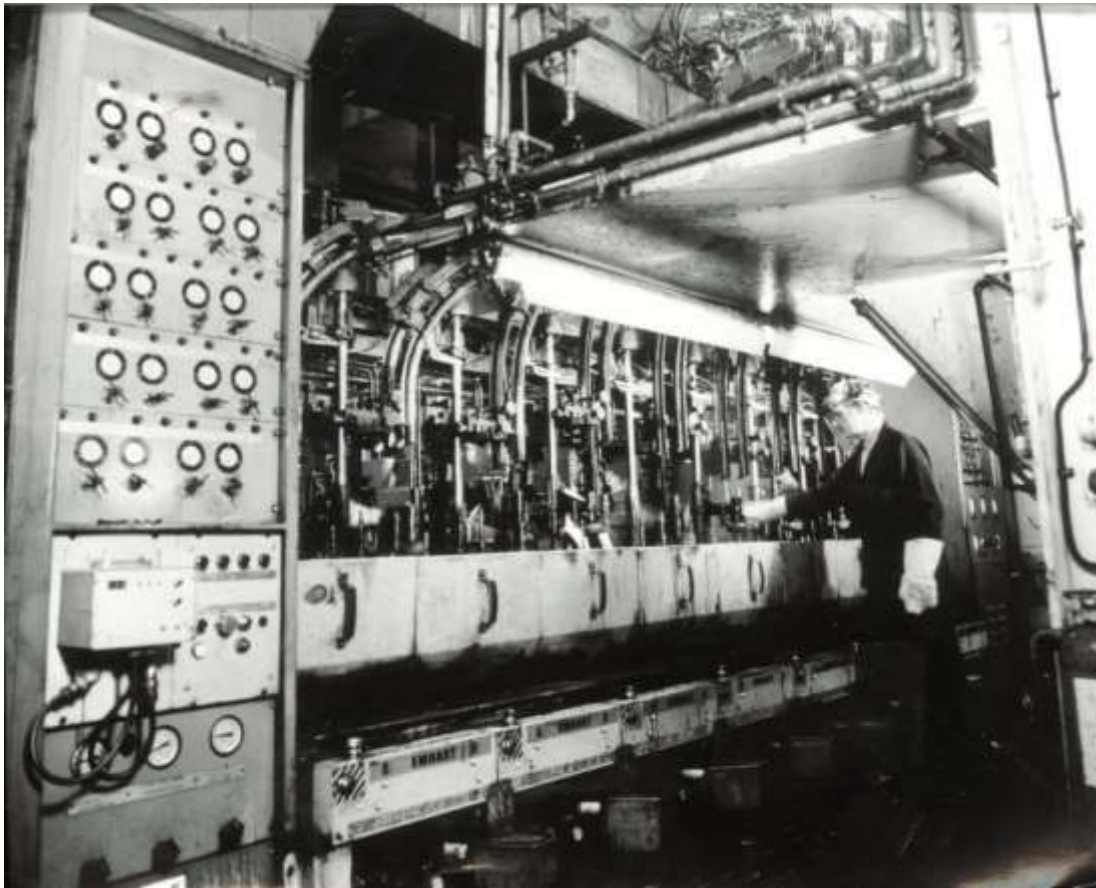




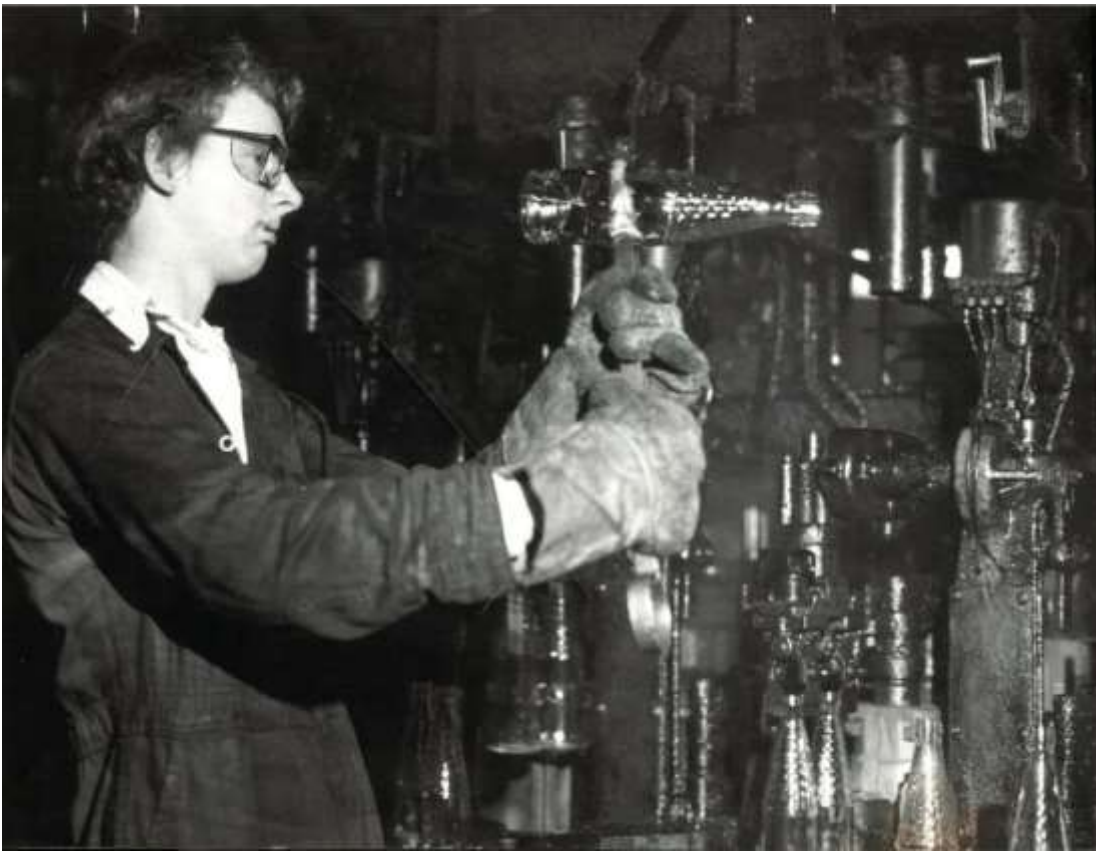
Part of the glassworks overlooking Browney Dyke. Cc1970s Image: private collection



John Whitaker tanker barge unloading crude oil while moored in Brownie Dyke. Image Richard Pearson



**Bottle forming machine. Image York Press**



**Glassworks staff inspecting bottles. Image York Press**

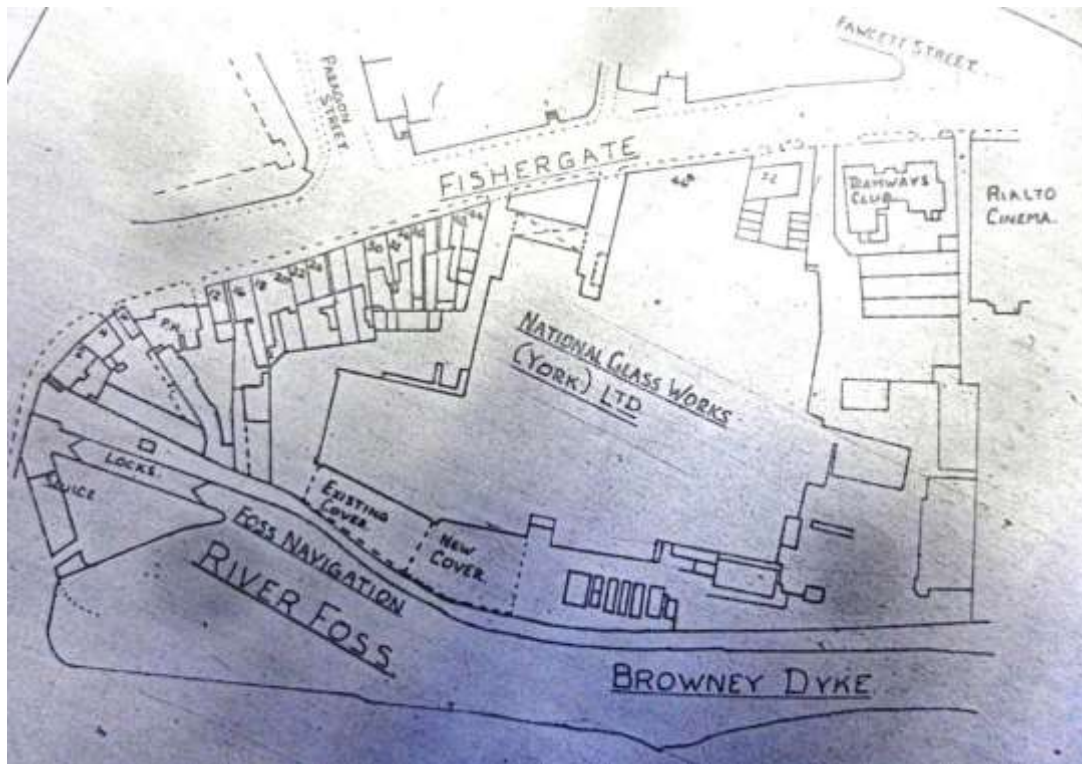




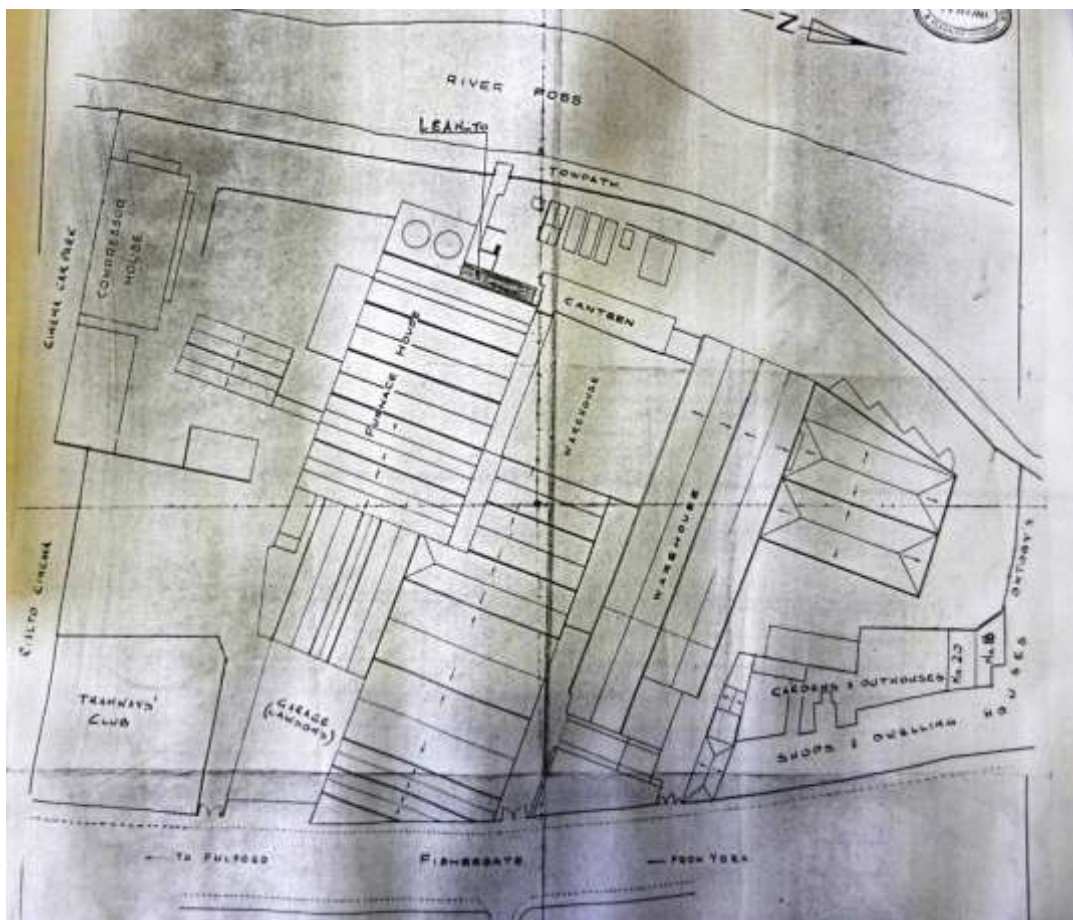
**The Glassworks looming over the Tramways Club in Fishergate. Image York Press**



**View of the Glassworks from Castle Museum in the 1950s. Image York Explore**



Plan of the glassworks site in 1947. Image York Explore

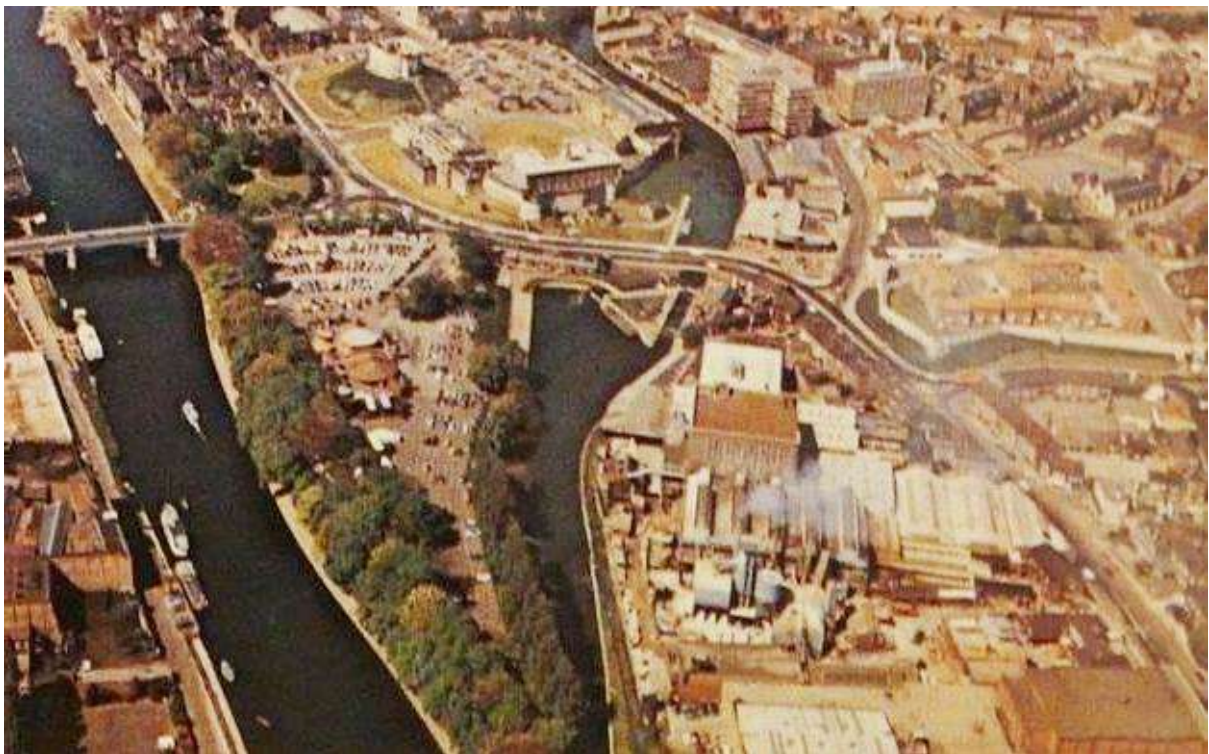


Plan of the Glassworks at its highpoint completely filling the site in 1960. Image York Explore 1960





**Glassworks seen from a hot air balloon. Image Van Wilson**



**Aerial View of the glassworks c.1976. Image private collection**



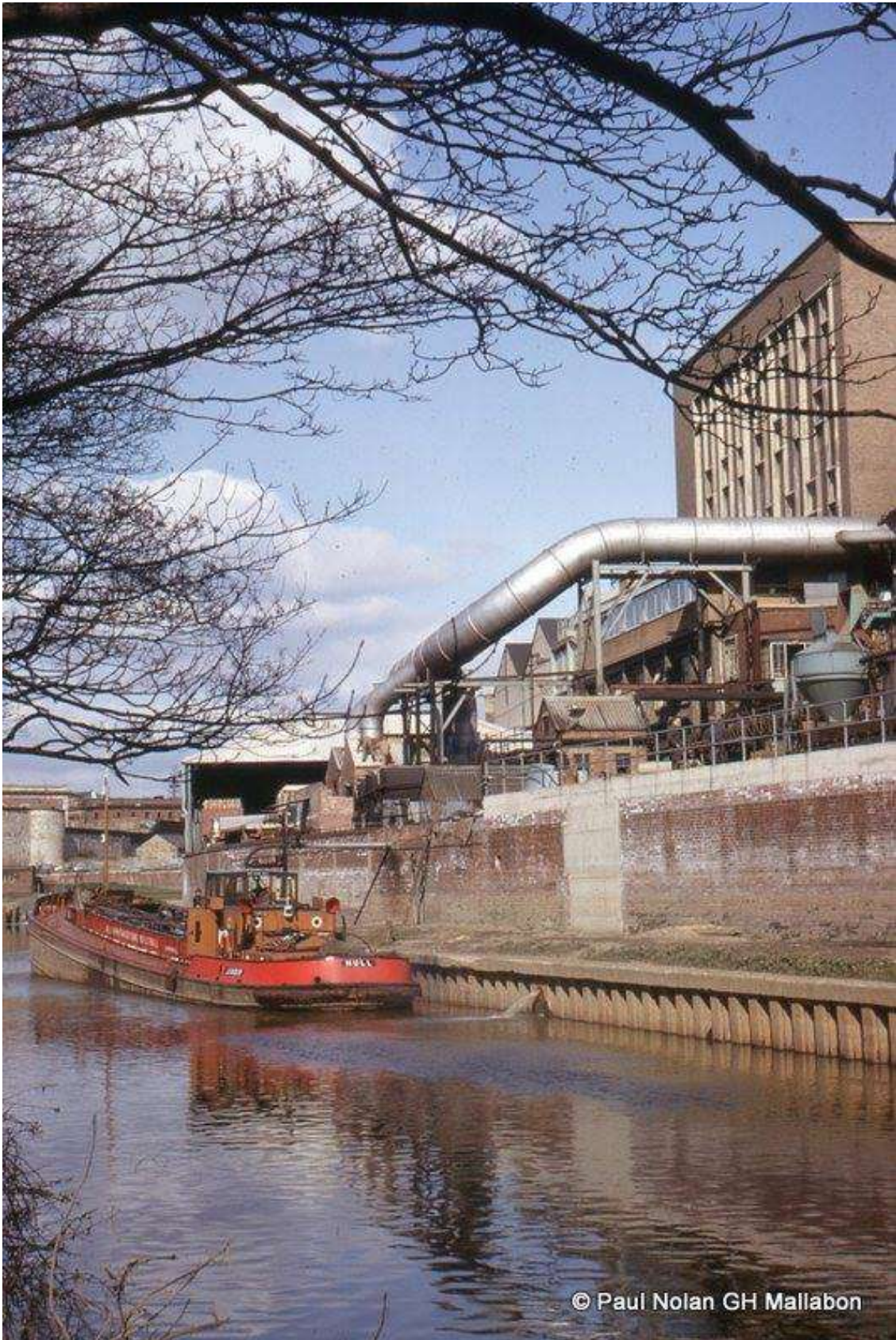


The Glassworks from Browney Dyke. The brick boundary wall is mostly still there. Image York Press



Part of the Glassworks adjacent to Browney Dyke. Image: private collection

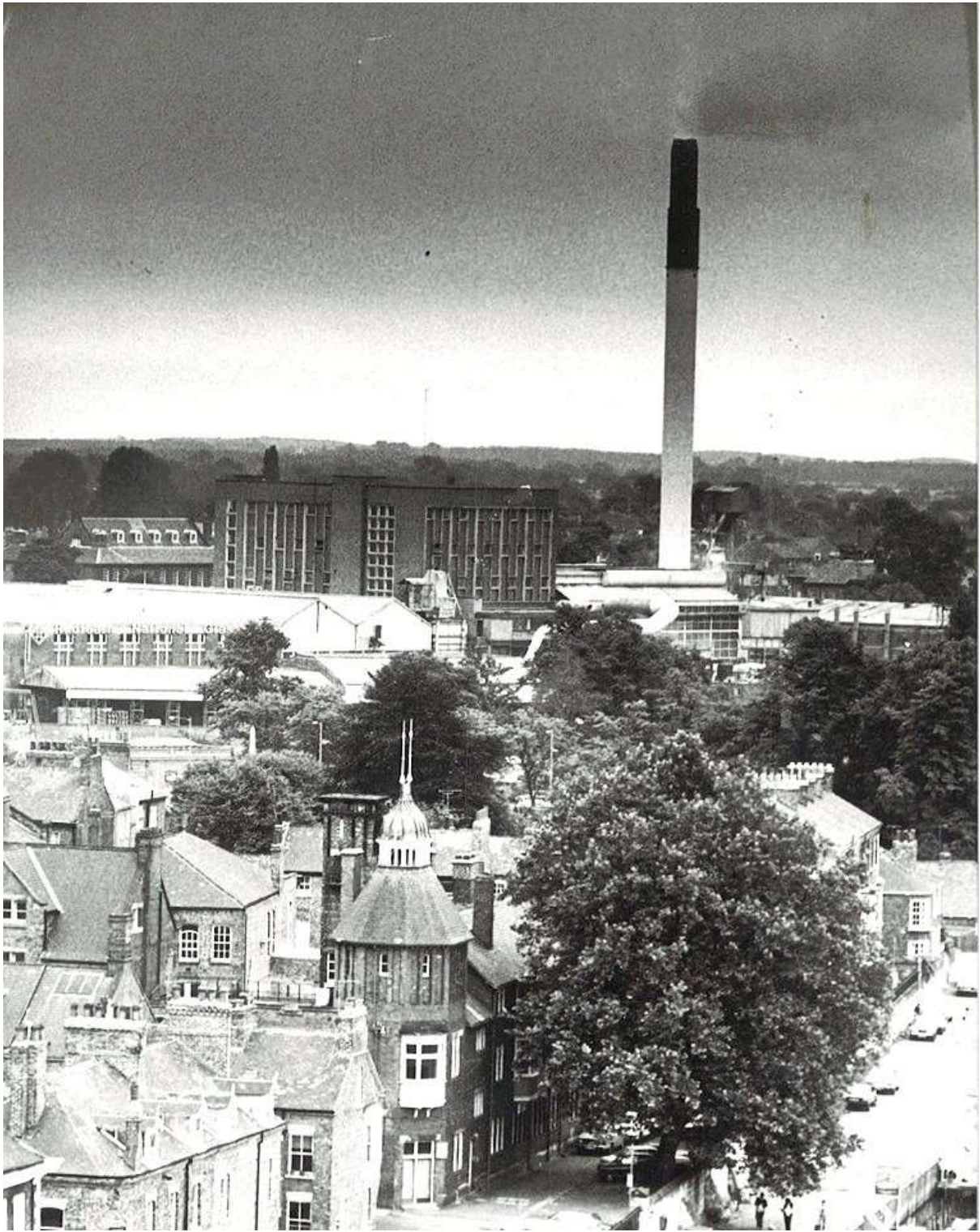




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Oil or sand barge moored at Browney Dyke. Image Paul Nolan





View of the Glassworks probably from the Viking Hotel. C1980. Image York Press



Demolition in progress. Image: York Press



The End. c.1984. Image: York Press