

Fishergate, Fulford and Heslington Local History Society

The New Walk Ordnance Railway

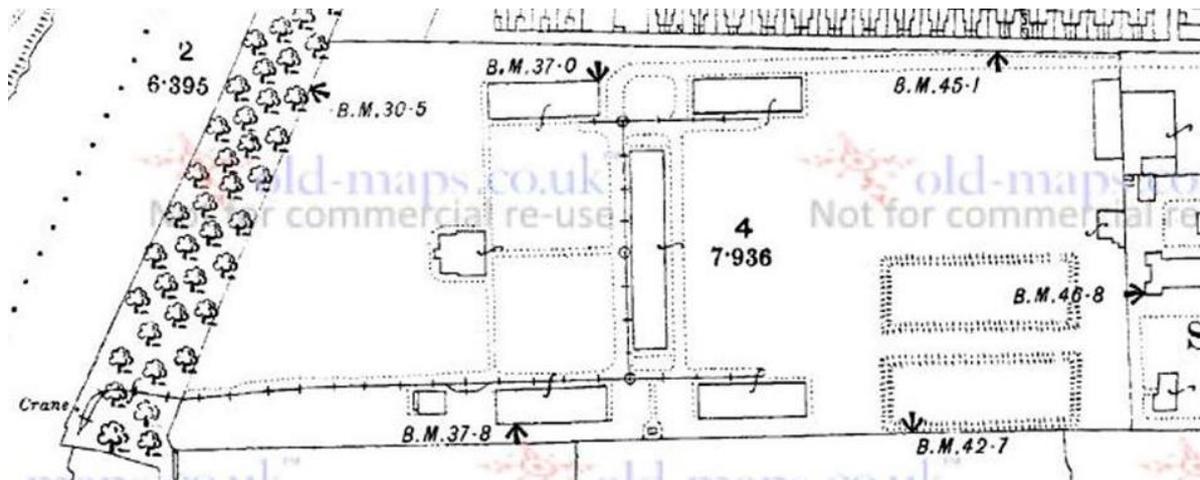


The Cavalry Barracks on Fulford Road was built in the late 1790s and in 1854 a military hospital was built over the road on what became known as 'Hospital Fields'.

In the 1870s, a site was obtained on the south side of the Cavalry Barracks and in 1880 the Infantry Barracks (now, Imphal Barracks) were completed and the West York Light Infantry (previously situated in Lowther Street) moved in.

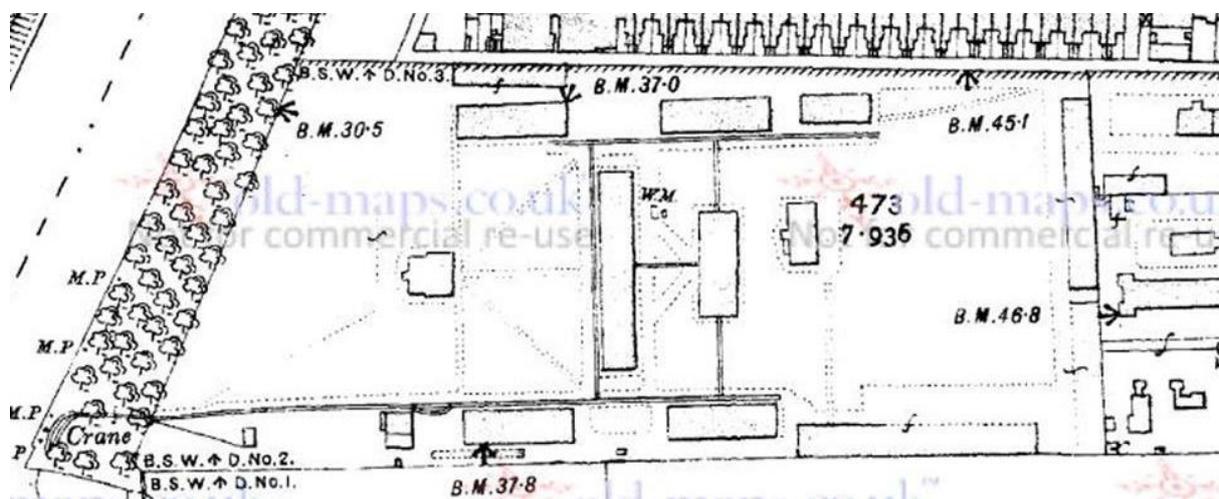
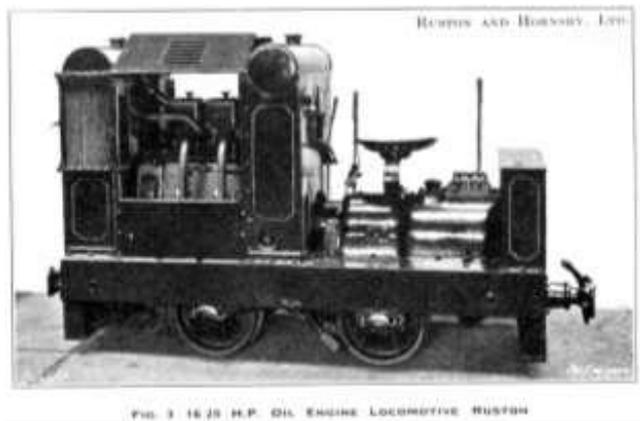
In 1890, a depot for the Royal Ordnance Corps was constructed between the military hospital and the river Ouse. Munitions for use by the various military units based in York were stored here and there were several workshops, storage buildings, and a small wharf with a crane.

The 18" gauge tramway enabled easy transport of heavy munitions into and around the site.



1892 OS map showing the tracks running from the wharf and then around the depot, including one track across the front of the headquarters building, now Cycle Heaven. Note the turntables at each junction and a passing point.

In the early years, it is likely the small trucks were pulled by a horse and soldiers, rather than steam locomotives, as this would have avoided the risk of sparks igniting the explosives. However, it is possible that small petrol or diesel engine locos could have been used in the 20th century, such as this Ruston and Hornsby engine of 1933, which was used at other Ordnance Depots. (Image: Graces Guide)



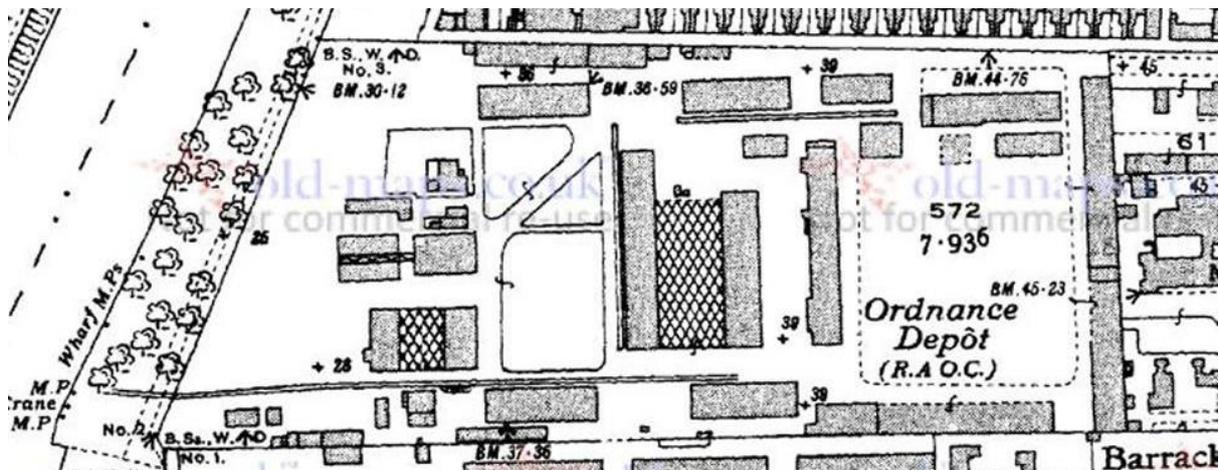
1909 map showing more tracks within the depot, including through a building

Unfortunately, we have not found a photograph of the crane, or a ship at the wharf, but FFH member, Judy Nicholson discovered that a ketch named 'Princess' delivered ordnance from Woolwich Arsenal on a regular basis. (restored example pictured right)



It is likely that the sailing ships were replaced by motor powered ships, and within recent memory, these craft were known locally as the 'Powder Boat'.

Local historian, Van Wilson, reports that York Council charged £1-10s when a poplar tree was felled on New Walk in 1888 so that the War Department could construct a wharf.



1937 map still showing the crane, but far fewer tracks than in 1909.

It is thought the railway was removed from the Depot in the late 1950s and the access gateway through the boundary wall was bricked up. The tracks were uncovered during the New Walk Millennium Project, but require cleaning to remove silt from flooding.





Aerial View showing the route of the tracks through the remaining original and modern buildings. Numbers 6 & 5 are the wharf and crane, other numbers relate to junctions and passing places.

With thanks to Tim Robinson of the York Past and Present Facebook Page.

Christopher Rainger

Chair of Fishergate, Fulford and Heslington Local History Society

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