1: Victorian philanthropy saved the Abbey Church

Interior of the Abbey Church prior to the 1890 restoration

Maintenance of the fabric hangs like a millstone around the neck of those who run our parish churches. There is always work to be done to keep the buildings in good order but never sufficient funds to foot the bills yet they survive for although God may be the inspiration, it is the public that provides. The Abbey Church is the town's only Grade I listed building but is in constant need of attention and records since it was built by Baldwin Fitzgilbert in 1138 reveal an ongoing body of work over the centuries with sporadic periods of major restoration when the masonry was beginning to show its age but by the 19th century, serious work was needed to ensure its survival.

The Victorian era therefore became a period of tremendous activity in the upkeep of the building and one of the main benefactors was Robert Mason Mills (1819-1904), founder of the town's aerated water business that brought world fame and royal approval to this market town. In 1870 for instance, he was the principal supporter of an appeal for £1,200 which was raised by public subscription to finance extensions to the north aisle that was widened to provide a vestry and organ chamber. The vicar, the Rev Joseph Dodsworth, laid a stone in the north wall and a bottle from the factory run by Mr Mills and containing a document referring to the current state of the town was deposited behind it as a reminder to future generations of the way things were.

Further alterations were envisaged after one of the churchwardens, Henry Bott, landlord of the Angel Hotel, expressed concern about the box pews which were in use at that time. "I and many others strongly disapprove of the system which allows one person to fix himself at the entrance of a pew and prevent the entrance of others who might want to get in", he said. "I would like to see an alteration in that respect and when this restoration is completed, it is hoped that those persons who are interested will kindly assist in making such arrangements as will tend to the promotion of the object we have in view." But it was to be another 20 years before these changes were implemented although in the meantime, further refurbishment to the west end was carried out in 1882, again financed mainly by Mills. This was by far the biggest single

restoration of the 19th century and a brass plate in the church records his generosity because without his help there could have been serious financial difficulties at a time when the tower was in a forlorn condition and the ringing chamber in a wretched state. This time, the work was far more extensive and an architectural report on the project gives an idea of its complexity, involving thickening the Early English wall of the west front throughout its entire height and width, and reinserting the original triplet of lights.

The report continues: “The shattered pier was rebuilt, a perilous undertaking because of the great thickness of the walls and their want of bond, but with very careful centering to the arches, strong shorting, and the inserting of balks of timber and iron, the pier and staircase were first taken entirely away and then rebuilt in their original form with solid masonry, cement and brick backing, and an inner ring or tube of bricks in cement, this giving greater thickness and solidity to the shell of the staircase. The old ringing floor was entirely cleared away, and the ropes brought down to the ground floor, whence the interior of the tower is now entirely thrown open. A pier corresponding with the restored one on the south side has been partially disclosed by the removal of the casing of the Perpendicular work. The triplet windows have been filled with very elegant painted glass corresponding in style with their date, and adding much to the beauty of this part of the church."

The work was not completed without incident because on Tuesday 14th February that year, John Darnes, one of the workmen helping with the alterations on the west front, was badly hurt. Sections of stonework were being removed to install three new windows when some of the pieces slipped and fell, smashing part of the scaffolding where Darnes was standing and he lost his balance although his fall was broken by planking lower down. A second man saved himself from falling by hanging on to a protruding pole and escaped unhurt but Darnes suffered extensive injuries and was away from work for several months.

In 1890, the old wooden Jacobean pulpit was replaced by the present one made of stone and in 1892, a new high pitched roof was installed and the chancel wainscoted in oak and choir stalls fitted, again with financial assistance from Robert Mason Mills. At the same time, the twin aisles disappeared, the old style box pews were removed and the present ones installed. The floor was lowered during the work and so the church began to take on the appearance that we know today.

The removal of the box pews also ended the old system of private sittings, a practice whereby important and wealthy people from the parish could, for a small contribution to church funds, reserve their own place for services. But the majority of worshippers favoured the principle of all seating being free and available to everyone without distinction and this system was duly adopted. The work was carried out between Easter and Christmas during which time services were held in the Corn Exchange.

Since then, there has been a continuing programme of restoration, particularly in 1934 when the tower was strengthened and in 1979 when the present ringers‘ gallery was built within the south west tower, and each time work needed to be done, the money has been found, from wealthy patrons and others ready to give smaller amounts, but all gratefully received. Parishes depend on voluntary effort and a small band of workers who give their time freely for the betterment of the Abbey Church are now busy with the details of the latest £100,000 appeal and although their efforts will go

largely unsung, those who appreciate this fine building will give thanks for their labours that will help preserve it for the future.

2: The mystery of the Abbey House

One of the grandest properties in Bourne in past times was the Abbey House, described as "a fine mansion" when it was built in the mid-18th century but its life was a comparatively short one because it was demolished in 1878 and no one appears to know the reason why. Had it become too large and unmanageable or perhaps fallen into disrepair? I have searched the archives in vain to find out why this imposing Georgian property should disappear from such a coveted location near to the church but can find no mention of it other than reports of it being dismantled.

The house was built in 1764 by George Pochin, three years after he inherited the estate of his uncle, Sir Thomas Trollope, and became Lord of the Manor of Bourne Abbots. Pochin lived there for a short time but it was eventually bought by the church for use by their ministers and during this period, it was always known as Bourne Abbey, perhaps because it was built on the site of the old abbey buildings of mediaeval times. The *Peterborough Advertiser*, for instance, reported in 1871: "The vicarage stands on the old site of the Augustinian Abbey and it is a modern mansion, surrounded by extensive grounds."

The Abbey House in 1850

The vicarage was originally at Brook Lodge in South Street which was used from 1763 until 1848 but a larger property was needed and the Abbey House was deemed to be a suitable place. Pochin died in 1798 but his sister Mary stayed on until she too died in 1804 when the house passed to her sister-in-law, George Pochin's widow, Eleanor Frances Pochin, together with other manorial estates in the town. She died in 1823 and the trustees of her estate leased the property to Robert Steevens Harrisson (sic), a farmer and grazier. Harrisson originally lived at Thurlby Grange where he tenanted 427 acres of land belonging to Eton College, one of the principal landowners in the locality. Despite living at the Abbey House, he retained his connection with the parish church at Thurlby where his children were baptised and he was later buried and

there is a memorial tablet in the chancel to record his passing. Harrisson (born 1795) married Anna Maria Nicholls, daughter of Robert and Mary Nicholls, of Witham-on-the-Hill, near Bourne, who died in 1863. He died in 1831, aged 36, following a hunting accident and his will, dated 29th March that year, survives and was written when he was still resident at the Abbey House.

The house stood empty for a while and in 1848 it was acquired by the church as the new vicarage for the then incumbent, the Rev Joseph Dodsworth, who had been appointed to the living in 1842. He remained there until his death in May 1877 after serving the parish as curate and vicar for more than half a century. Two years after his death, a new vicarage was opened in 1879 but that too became redundant when it was replaced by the present building in 1986 and is now the Cedars retirement and rest home.

Demolition of the Abbey House began late in 1877 and construction of the new vicarage was well advanced by the summer of the following year. A local newspaper reported on Friday 23rd August 1878: “The new Abbey is nearly completed and though not so large as the old edifice, it is thought by most people to be more appropriate.”

The work however was not without its dangers and the newspaper reported the following week, on Friday 30th August: “A serious accident occurred on Monday in connection with the building of the new Abbey. It appears that two men named Hare and Brown were engaged taking down some scaffolding and by some means a pole slipped before they were aware of it. Hare fell to the ground, breaking an arm in two places, but it is hoped that under the skilful treatment of Dr Frederick Glencross, he is progressing favourably.”

No reason was given as to why the Abbey House was pulled down and no mention is made in subsequent newspaper reports. Its disappearance from the landscape is therefore a matter of speculation. Did Mr Dodsworth, like many of today's clergymen when faced with the prospect of living in large and draughty vicarages, eventually find the place too big to manage and too expensive to heat? This may have been the case because by then, Dodsworth was a widower, his second wife Ellen having passed away on 31st March 1876, and so he may have drawn up the plans for the new house, only to die before they came to fruition. Or perhaps his successor disliked the property.

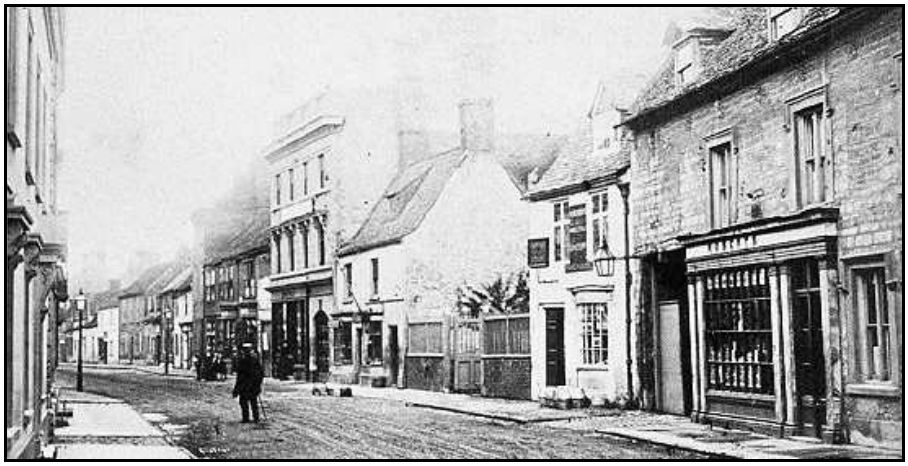
The Rev George Massey, of Uley, Dursley, Gloucestershire, having accepted the incumbency in July 1877, arrived at Bourne on Tuesday 23rd October 1877 when a special peal was rung on the church bells to welcome him but there is the possibility that his wife did not like their future home and insisted on a more suitable one for herself and the family. There is evidence from the literature of the period that clergymen's wives were a force to be reckoned with and their husband's appointment often depended on their decision.

Whatever the reason, the Abbey House had disappeared by 1879 when the new vicarage opened and Mr and Mrs Massey were the first tenants. But the question as to why such a substantial property should be pulled down after only 114 years persists although the answer may well lie in some dusty archive waiting to be discovered quite by chance by a future historian and only then will the mystery be explained.

3: Protecting our ancient buildings for posterity

Financial restraints in recent years have put many of our old buildings under threat and although the more historic are protected by the government and cannot be demolished without special permission, there is often a shortage of cash to restore them, especially if they are in public ownership. This protection comes through a procedure known as listing maintained by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) on the advice of English Heritage which provides various resources for architectural conservation. There are around 370,000 listed buildings in England divided into categories I and II. Grade I buildings are defined as being of "exceptional interest" but constitute fewer than 2% of entries and the majority are Grade II. The listing system incorporates all pre-1700 buildings that have not been substantially altered and almost all those built between 1700 and 1840. Grade I and II buildings may be eligible for English Heritage grants for urgent major repairs while many other conservation organisations offer help and financial advice.

Listed buildings in the parish of Bourne were originally identified during a survey conducted by South Kesteven District Council on 21st July 1977, the majority of them in the Conservation Area that was designated at the same time. This area includes most of the town's main features, including South Street and the Wellhead Gardens, Abbey Road and the Abbey Lawn, much of the town centre and North Road as far as Burghley Street and West Street as far as St Peter's Road. It also includes an ancient monument, namely the supposed site of the castle marked by the grassy mounds in the Wellhead Gardens.



North Street circa 1875

There are now 71 listed buildings within the parish of Bourne. There were originally 75, fifty-one of them in the Conservation Area although two of these in North Street, both dating back to the 17th century and built of red brick with Welsh slate roofs, were demolished in 1988 to make way for the Burghley Arcade development. They included a fine example of a Victorian chemists' shop and a second containing a classic bow display window. The other 24 were outside, in Eastgate, Cawthorpe and Dyke, but four of these have also been pulled down. Two more, the chapel and the Ostler Memorial, both in the town cemetery in South Road, which were probably missed during the original survey because they were so far out of town, were listed in 2007 by the DCMS after an investigation by English Heritage decided that both were at risk. Only the Abbey Church, built in 1138, is Grade I listed while all of the others

are Grade II which means that they are of special interest, warranting every effort to preserve them.

There are others at risk, notably the Old Grammar School which stands in the graveyard at the Abbey Church. This is particularly important because of its associations with education, built in 1678 with money from a bequest by local landowner William Trollope, although the present building is thought to have been erected on the site of another where the monk Robert Manning (1264-1340) may have taught. The pupils came from wealthy families in the town and its closure as a school in 1904 eventually led to the establishment of the present Bourne Grammar School in 1921 and is therefore a reminder of the establishment of secondary education in this town. The building is currently administered by the Bourne Educational Foundation and is closed to the public because of structural problems and awaiting a buyer but with restricted access limiting its use, the future looks bleak.

Other Grade II listed buildings that have been at risk are being put to good use such as the early 17th century Red Hall, threatened with demolition until acquired by Bourne United Charities in 1962 and now used as offices and function rooms, Baldock's Mill in South Street, built in 1800, leased to the Civic Society since 1981 and now used as the town's Heritage Centre while Wake House in North Street, an early 19th century residence and birthplace of the international fashion designer Charles Worth (1825-95), is now a centre for many activities run by the Bourne Arts and Community Trust.

The Town Hall, built in 1821, is regularly maintained by the local authorities as our centre of public affairs while the churches have also fared much better because all depend upon the charity of their congregations and so have survived and the structures improved. These include the Baptist Church in West Street, built in 1835, the Methodist Church in Abbey Road (1841) and the United Reformed Church in Eastgate (1846). Those buildings in private ownership have also been well protected because homes are invariably improved, such as Bourne Eau House in South Street, while commercial properties need to be maintained to remain viable. These include the 18th century Angel Hotel and the Burghley Arms, both licensed premises in the town centre, the Golden Lion in West Street, the Anchor Inn in Eastgate and the old New Inn in Spalding Road, now a private house.

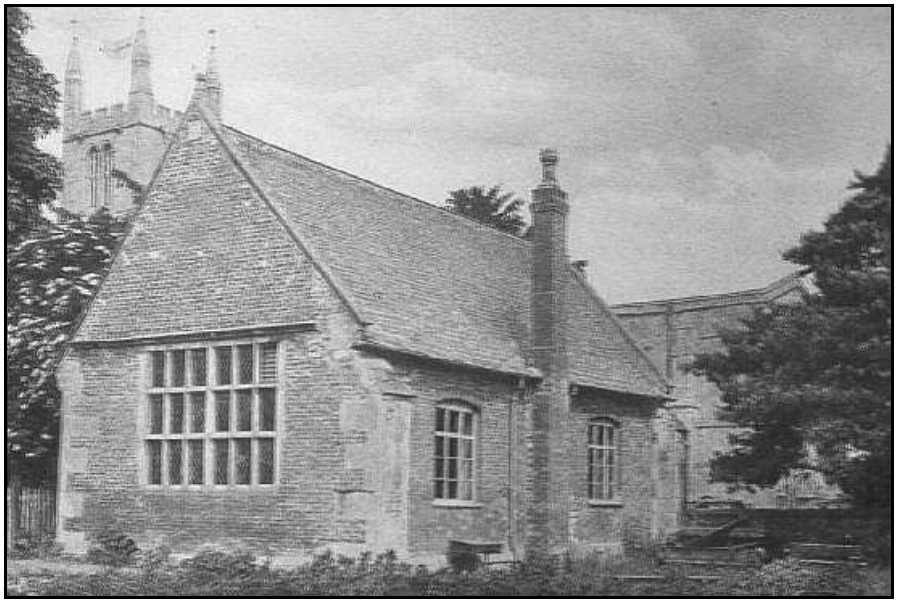
We may find listed buildings in Bourne in the most unlikely places, a newspaper shop in North Street, a fish and chip shop in West Street, an iron bridge in Church Walk and even a stretch of wall in South Street, part of the Red Hall gatehouse, all of which are similarly protected as Grade II.

4: The beginnings of secondary education

A grammar school has existed in Bourne since the Middle Ages and there are a number of references to the names of headmasters after 1580, either in the bishop's or the parish registers. One of these who was given permission to teach scholars within the parish of Bourne in 1625 was Edmund Lolley M A of Magdalene College, Oxford, who had already been Vicar of Bourne for 12 years. He died in 1632 and his will directed that his books and clothes should be sold for the benefit of his only son, also called Edmund, "to bring him up at the school". There was a rapid turnover in staff about this time and the names of seven different schoolmasters appear in the records during the first 30 years of the 17th century. Among them is

Thomas Gibson who was appointed on 8th May 1629 and died a fortnight later on May 23rd but nevertheless received a tribute in the parish register saying that he was "as worthy a schoolmaster as ever taught in Bourne" and so he may have been engaged in some form of teaching in the town before being officially licensed by the bishop.

A new and important phase in the arrangements for education in Bourne began in the early 17th century when William Trollope, a local landowner, left a bequest which provided for an endowment of £30 a year to maintain "an honest, learned, and godly schoolmaster" in a free grammar school incorporated by royal charter and built by himself. The school was sited next to the Abbey Church where it still stands although the premises have been rebuilt since his day. His will, dated 16th November 1636, stipulated that it should be called "The Free Grammar School of King Charles in the town of Bourne and County of Lincoln, of the foundation of William Trollope, gentleman".



The Old Grammar School in 1920

The present building, erected in 1678, has a brick superstructure over a solid stone foundation but it is not certain whether this stonework is from Trollope's original school or whether it dates even further back to the days when the monastery existed. Repairs and alterations were carried out from time to time, in 1858 and particularly in 1876, mainly through the generosity of Lord Kesteven, a noted landowner in the locality at that time and five years later, a new stove chimney was erected and repairs carried out to the floor, dado boarding was fitted and when the ceiling was removed, the oak roof became visible.

The school appeared to have a more stable staff than in earlier years and in 1638, Exuperius Spencer RA was appointed schoolmaster and between then and the end of the century, there were only four successors. By the 19th century, the duties of schoolmaster were carried out by the vicars of Bourne until the Rev Joseph Dodsworth was appointed in 1842 when he delegated the actual work of teaching and administration to his curates until 1858 when William Webber was appointed under-master with a salary of £30 a year, as provided in the original endowment. Webber was an energetic and conscientious teacher and it was his influence that provided the

boys with a playground on a small area of land adjoining the school on the east side. Until then, scholars had been playing in the churchyard among the tombstones and several had been damaged and there had also been complaints about them roaming the streets between lessons. He was also probably responsible for the alterations of 1876 that included new seating to accommodate 32 boys. Many of his pupils were successful in their studies, going on to Oxford and Cambridge Universities, but he became frustrated with the slow response to his repeated requests for improvements and he resigned in 1881 after 23 years of teaching and moved to a school at Tunbridge Wells.

His successor was to be the last schoolmaster, the Rev Henry R F Canham, a curate from Barrowby, near Grantham, but by this time, the popularity of the school had begun to decline and Canham tried valiantly to revive its ebbing fortunes by increasing the number of pupils who attended and spending a lot of his own money in the process. But despite his efforts, the future of the school was now in doubt and the 21 pupils in attendance in 1889 had dwindled to just nine by 1897 and soon it was removed from the list of those officially recognised by Kesteven District Council. Canham refused to accept the inevitable and in the autumn of 1903, he departed for Scarborough with the key of the school in his pocket but after much correspondence and discussion, he finally agreed to resign at the end of 1904, thus officially confirming its closure.

There were several attempts at a revival but there was insufficient interest and from 1918 the church decided to use it as a Sunday School. The building was never re-opened for its original purpose and it was eventually replaced by a secondary school that became the present grammar school in 1921. Two years later, in January 1923, the building was sold by the trustees for a nominal sum of £100 to the secondary school and the board of governors has administered the building ever since. It has largely been unused during that time although in the Second World War, the premises became an ambulance station and a meeting place for the Girl Guides and in later years it was used for a time as headquarters for the local troops of cubs and boy scouts.

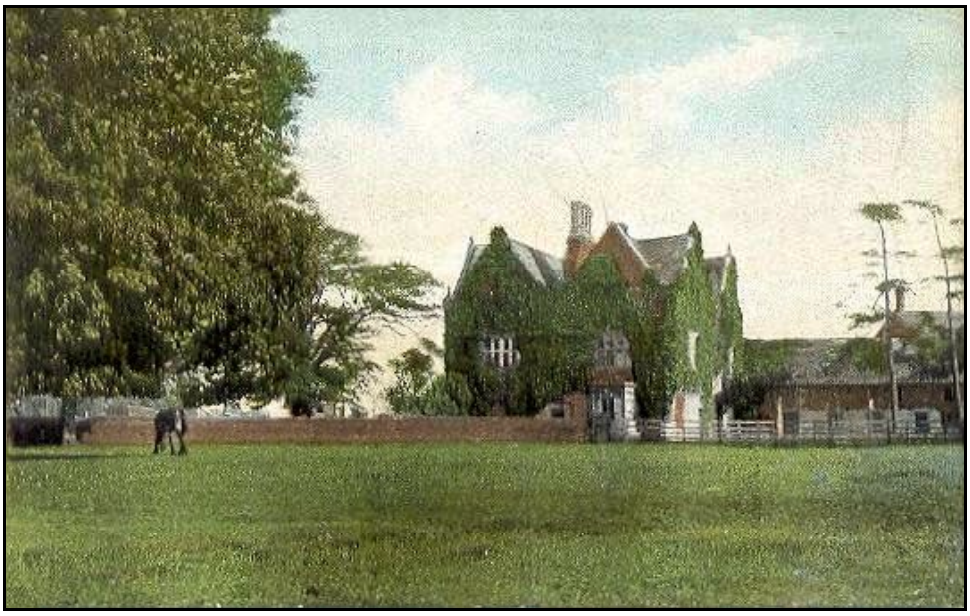
Today, it is Grade II listed within the Bourne conservation area and is currently administered by the Bourne Educational Foundation but has again been badly neglected in recent years and in April 2003, it was condemned as unsafe and all entry forbidden. The roof was leaking and repairs were costed at £20,000. In February 2005, it was put up for sale at an undisclosed price, although potential buyers were warned that there is no vehicular access and the only approach is by way of a footpath through the churchyard. Nevertheless, sale to a private developer is seen as the only chance it has to survive.

5: The myth of Bourne and the Gunpowder Plot

Magazines and guide books continue to print the erroneous assertion that the infamous Guy Fawkes plot to blow up King James I and the Houses of Parliament during the early 17th century was hatched at the Red Hall in Bourne. One of the earliest references appears in John Moore's account of the town published in 1809 but as he was stating beliefs that were prevalent at that time it is safe to assume that there was a widespread oral tradition that subsequently filtered down

through the printed word, notably by later written historical accounts, particularly those that appeared regularly in trade directories such as Kelly's and White's between 1842 and 1937 and are still available and often quoted today.

Historian Joseph J Davies, the distinguished headmaster of the former Council or Board School in Abbey Road, now the Bourne Abbey Church of England School, was quite specific in his 1909 edition of Historic Bourne that one of the leading conspirators, Sir Everard Digby, was born at the Red Hall and was executed for his part in the Gunpowder Plot which he had joined with the sole purpose of restoring the Roman Catholic religion in England.



The Red Hall pictured in 1909

But by 1925, John T Swift dismissed all connections between the conspiracy and the Red Hall in his history Bourne and People Associated with Bourne yet it was to be another forty years before the myth was finally laid to rest. In between times, Bourne was stuck with the legend which was often referred to in the local newspapers and there is evidence that many still believed it in later years and still do so today. In fact, it was not until 1964 that the story was totally discredited by Mrs Joan Varley, archivist to Lincolnshire Archives Committee, after studying parish registers and deeds of the hall that had recently been deposited with them by a descendant of the Bourne Digby family, Sir Everard Philip Digby Pauncefort Duncombe, of Great Brickhill Manor in Buckinghamshire, and so the popular theory was well and truly laid to rest.

The story had evolved around the mistaken belief that Sir Everard Digby was born and lived at the Red Hall and it has been frequently stated that as he was one of the main perpetrators, he and his fellow conspirators met at his home where the plot was hatched. The date the hall was built is not known exactly but 1605 is the most favoured. This was the year that the plot was actually discovered and as the building was some time in the planning, it would have been impossible for it to have been the meeting place for those involved in the conspiracy. In fact, Sir Everard Digby, who was involved in the plot, lived at Stoke Dry, Uppingham, Rutland, and was one of the great landowners in the Midlands although he had no connection with Bourne. But over a century later, the building did pass into the hands of a Digby family and James

Digby, gentleman, appears as a deputy steward to the Manor of Bourne Abbotts at a session of the manorial court in October 1730, and from then onwards there are numerous references to him and his descendants in the manorial records. It is at this date also that the name Digby begins to appear in the parish registers. The family owned and inhabited the Red Hall from then until about a century later and this fact appears to have been the cause of some wishful deduction that Sir Everard was a direct ancestor of the Digbys of Bourne which was certainly not the case.

After an exhaustive search through the documents, Mrs Varley published her findings in April 1964, with some reluctance it would seem, because she said at the time: “I am sorry in a way that I have robbed Bourne of its best known legend but I was merely trying to get at the truth. It is very easy for incorrect statements to get into local town guides. Stories grow up about places, following generations believe they are true and eventually they are accepted as fact. They are written into books and other authors do not take the time to check and revise them.” This is still the case. Once a statement is made in print, it is filed away in various archives and then when a subject or place is to be written about again, the writer consults the cuttings and repeats the error. So it is that the Gunpowder Plot will surface occasionally as having happened at the Red Hall because, as Mrs Varley pointed out, some writers are careless about checking their facts.

Nevertheless, this is one of the reasons why Bonfire Night has been celebrated with great enthusiasm in Bourne during past times and on some occasions, particularly during the 19th century, extra police were drafted in because of possible trouble. Riotous behaviour and vandalism became an annual event on every Fifth of November and special sittings of the magistrates were held the next morning to deal with offenders.

The worst riot of this kind was in 1877 when 40 men and youths were arraigned on charges relating to disturbances in Bourne and the surrounding villages, their main enjoyment being the rolling of lighted tar barrels down the street, a popular although illegal method of celebration at that time, and of starting bonfires on the highway. Other offences included assaulting the police, firing guns, discharging fireworks in a public place and causing a general commotion to the annoyance of the public.

Disturbances of this magnitude are now unknown although there is a continuing public debate over the sale of fireworks and their indiscriminate use, especially in the run up to November 5th when the night sky is regularly illuminated by rockets while the use of bangers and other explosives in residential areas frightens old people and their pets. The current situation is that most of us deplore their universal sale and use because of the dangers involved but would accept some form of regulation that would prohibit all firework events except those which are organised and supervised and this would seem to be the perfect solution.

6: The importance of our Town Hall

The Town Hall has been the focal point of administration and justice in Bourne for almost two centuries but its role is currently under review and major changes in its use are likely in the future. It is one of our finest secular buildings, erected in 1821 to a design by the architect Bryan Browning and now listed as Grade II. There was an earlier building, referred to by the historian William Camden in 1586 when making

his survey of the British Isles, and probably built by William Cecil (1520-98), trusted chief adviser to Queen Elizabeth I, who was born at the house next door, later the Bull Inn and now the Burghley Arms, because his coat of arms was reputed to have been carved into the frontage.

But by the early 19th century this hall had become dilapidated and a site occupied by a house adjoining the Bull Inn on the east side of the market place was chosen for a new building. Browning, who later designed Folkingham goal in 1825, was asked to draw up the plans and he decided on an exterior staircase and recessed twin flights of steps within the front of the building that was to be constructed with Doric columns after the fashion of the Roman baths.

The project was financed with money raised through the county rate, from the sale of salvaged materials from the previous building on the site and from public subscription with contributions not only from Bourne but also from neighbouring parishes such as Market Deeping, Morton and Haconby, which between them eventually raised just under £1,400. A large painted board containing the names of the original subscribers and the amount they contributed is still on display in the main courtroom.

The Town Hall in 1910

In the event, the total cost was £1,640 plus £811 15s. 1d. for extras that had been decided after the original plans had been approved. These included raising the height of the building by 2 ft., extending the hall by 6 ft., constructing the front staircase in Portland instead of York stone and increasing the size of the prisoners' room underneath the building from 9 ft. to 14 ft. The tower and the clock, however, were financed separately as a gift to the town by Mrs Eleanor Frances Pochin, widow of George Pochin, who was Lord of the Manor of Bourne Abbots for 37 years from 1761-98, shortly before she died on 16th July 1823 at the age of 76.

The building was duly opened in 1821 and was soon in frequent use, not only as a courthouse but for many other varied events and it appears that permission to hold these was frequently given by individual magistrates but damage was caused on some occasions and on 3rd January 1842, the justices met under the chairmanship of William Augustus Johnson to regularise the position, resolving that all future

applications for functions required the approval of the entire bench rather than individual members and so began the present licensing system for events that we know today. The Town Hall was also the centre of the weekly market with a shambles or set of stalls underneath and from the mid-19th century the fire station was located beneath one of the arches with a bell on the wall to sound the alarm while in later years, ornamental iron railings enclosed the entire frontage.

The hall was often the scene of grand occasions such as the ball in January 1842, held to raise funds for the new National School in North Street, the biggest social event of the year attended by 170 guests who enjoyed themselves so much that they danced until their carriages arrived to take them home in the early hours. The building has remained in use ever since and is relatively unchanged except that the shambles has disappeared although the market is still in the vicinity, occupying a purpose built precinct at the rear, so retaining this link with the past, although the wooden clock tower was destroyed by fire and never replaced.

By the time he designed the Town Hall, Bryan Browning had became an architect of some repute. He worked originally in London but returned to Lincolnshire and married a local girl, Miss Ruth Snart, in 1826 and practised from offices in Stamford in the early part of the 19th century. But his reputation was such that he won several prestige commissions including the House of Correction at Folkingham in 1825, the Baptist Chapel and the workhouse, but is not remembered by any plaque or street name in Bourne although the naming of the new retirement homes in Manning Road in 2007 rectified this omission because the complex is known as Browning Court.

The Town Hall is now owned by Lincolnshire County Council but leased to South Kesteven District Council which in turn allowed the courtroom to be used by the magistrates. The interior was altered in 1974-75 but magistrates continued to meet regularly with a public gallery for anyone who wished to watch the proceedings. The courtroom was also used for regular meetings of the town council and there was an adjoining library or committee room where the magistrates adjourned to consider their decisions when necessary. A reception room area with a counter and access from the street is also used by South Kesteven District Council for the payment of the council tax and other public inquiries. The authority also has adjoining offices while those of the town council are upstairs at the back, overlooking the new market place. The courtroom was refurbished in the spring of 2004 at a cost of £90,000 and during the autumn, the exterior doors, woodwork and ironwork were also given a fresh coat of paint. Court sittings, however, were phased out in April 2008 and cases are now heard elsewhere in South Lincolnshire but the Town Hall remains the central point of Bourne's administration.

7: The market cross was the centre of activity

A feature of most towns and villages in times past was the market cross, a place to meet and gossip and around which traders gathered on market days to hawk their wares, eggs, butter, cheese and milk, fruit and vegetables, poultry, meat and fish, cloth and basket work, food and goods that were produced in and around the home or farm and brought in for sale to supplement the family income. Hence the name butter cross and many survive as a marker for the old market squares that have virtually been taken over by modern traffic, usually in the form of spires, obelisks or crosses, although sometimes as fountains, but usually with steps. Bourne too had its own

market cross, situated in the market place where two main roads intersect and now known as the town centre. It was first referred to in 1586 by the historian William Camden (1551-1623) who visited the town while writing Britannia, his survey of the British Isles, in which he described it as being ten feet high on an octagonal base with three steps, and although it seems certain that it was simply a market cross, he suggested that it had been erected to commemorate a battle and added: "It was a place of sanctuary, and around it worship was wont to be held."

A more detailed description survives from John Moore, one of our earliest historians, who published an account of the town in February 1809 at the instigation of his patron, Mrs Eleanor Pochin, tenant of the Abbey House (now demolished) and widow of George Pochin who had been Lord of the Manor of Bourne Abbots for 37 years until his death in 1798. Moore did not think much of the town because he wrote: “Bourne in its present state is low and meanly built and though the town is large and well situated, the market is but indifferently attended.” He then went on to describe the market cross: “On the west side of the market place formerly stood the cross, the shaft of which was octangular and elegantly formed, and stood upon a deep basement, ascended by three steps. The shaft was ten feet in height, out of which grew an ash tree, but both the shaft and tree are now removed.”

The Ostler memorial also became the market cross in 1890

Moore also quotes Camden in greater detail, telling us that the cross appears to be “the same cross as was commonly worshiped by ye parishioners at other towns in Kesteven” and added: “These crosses, many of which still remain in various parts of the kingdom, were erected, some of them for boundaries of property, parishes and sanctuary, and others commemorated battles, murders and other fatal occurrences. But they were principally intended for devotional purposes and are commonly seen near churches, or in the crossways leading thereto, where they were undoubtedly regarded with idolatrous adoration. The cross lately destroyed in Bourne was built with the ruins of the basement of a nearby building and placed on the market place but of this there now only remains a heap of loose stones and earth.” The market cross provided a central point for the community, a place where villagers gathered to meet and to talk and to discuss the momentous events at both local and national level that affected

their lives because they realised, as we do today, that there is a security in being with your neighbours in times of crisis and an unspoken fellowship when there is cause for celebration. The annual May statute fairs for the hiring of servants were also held there and proclamations of important local and national events were made from this spot.

Visiting monks and priests preached the word of God, and John Wesley, the evangelist and founder of the Methodist movement, is supposed to have visited Bourne in 1782 when he addressed townspeople from the steps of the market cross after the parish clergy had closed their pulpits to him. This incident is recounted in great detail by prominent local farmer Henry Andrews Sneath (1860-1931), political and religious stalwart and author of the book Methodist Memories, although it has since been claimed that the story is apocryphal.

The market cross in Bourne is known to have survived until 1803 although its fate after that is unknown. A much later feature of the market place was the Ostler memorial fountain, erected in 1860 in memory of a local benefactor John Lely Ostler (1811-59) and which acted as a market cross for the next hundred years because this was the centrepiece of many local celebrations such as Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, the Relief of Mafeking in 1900 and the ending of the Boer War two years later, peace proclamations for the Great War in 1918 and the Second World War in 1945. But that too was overtaken by progress and in 1960, Bourne Urban District Council which then controlled local affairs decided that because of increasing vehicle flows it was causing a traffic hazard and so it was dismantled and moved stone by stone to the town cemetery in South Road where it was re-erected and now awaits restoration after being protected with a Grade II listing in 2007. But we have to look a little further afield to find examples of market crosses that have survived such as that which originally existed in Bourne and the nearest example can be found at Swinstead, five miles west of the town, standing on high steps in the main street. An earlier edifice can be found at Corby Glen, erected during the reign of Edward III (1312-77), a more elaborate design but then the village once had the status of a small market town.

The market cross that once stood in the middle of Edenham, three miles to the north west, also survives but not in its original position in the centre of the village, having been removed to the churchyard after the stonework was endangered by passing lorries and now rests underneath one of the cedar trees near the main entrance to the church of St Michael's and All Angels.

8: St Peter's Pool is the site of an ancient spring

Water is the centre of this historic community and its source is St Peter's Pool or the Wellhead, a natural feature just a few steps from the town centre. The circular, clay-lined and embanked pool is reputedly fed by seven springs and would have provided an abundant supply of water for the early settlers. This is a direct contrast to today when water is a valuable commercial commodity and supplies from Bourne are piped to other districts by Anglian Water and in times of drought, St Peter's Pool dries up for weeks at a time and this picturesque part of the town becomes a morass of mud and weeds. The pool now forms part of the Wellhead Gardens administered by Bourne United Charities since 1945 and it is the spring, or the stream

that flows from it, that gives Bourne its name, from the Old English word *burna* which was common in the early Anglo-Saxon period and is found in its modern form, particularly in Scotland, as *burn* meaning stream or spring. Many other English place names have a similar derivation with *burn*, *borne* or *bourne* as an ending to denote a river or stream in the vicinity. It is possibly one of the most ancient sites of artesian water supplies in the country, figuring prominently in the development of the town and it is inevitable that remarkable traditions have gathered around it. One of these was still current in the mid-19th century and asserted that the Bourne Eau flowed underground from Stoke Rochford, sixteen miles away, and that a white duck which was immersed at Stoke, was later seen to rise at the Wellhead. Another slice of local folklore suggests that the pool is bottomless and that swimming there or even trying to clean it out might end in tragedy because those who venture into the water are likely to be swallowed up and never seen again but both tales owe more to the imagination than actuality.

St Peter's Pool in 1900

The footpath that follows the stream past the site of the former workhouse, later St Peter's Hospital which was demolished in 2001, formerly skirted another large pond known as the horse pool, so called because it sloped gently at one end to allow horse and cart to enter together to be washed in the clear spring water and this indentation in the land can still be seen today. Black swans, indigenous to Australia and Tasmania, have made their home at St Peter's Pool since the summer of 1999. The species are handsome birds with dark, curly plumage, a bright red bill and white wing feathers that show only in flight. It appears on the armorial standard of Western Australia where the Dutch discovered it in 1697. They took it to Batavia and thence to Europe where the existence of a black swan was regarded with amazement. Like the mute swan, it has been successfully domesticated and raised in captivity and the first pair were a gift to the town from the Wildfowl Trust when a shelter was made on the side of the pool where they later produced a number of cygnets each spring. The original pair are now dead, one killed by vandals early in 2007 and another by a fox, but several of their cygnets remain in residence and are obviously here to stay.

The pool has been the central feature of this community since time immemorial yet has not always been given the care for which its ancient origins are due. Rubbish was

often tipped there and in 1870, the police were called in after reports that parts of a child's body had been found in the water by boys out playing. The arm of a newly-born infant contained in a box with a stone attached to it by a string was recovered but an investigation revealed that there had been no foul play although a police statement to a local newspaper on January 21st revealed a most curious tale: “A short time ago, a medical student came to Bourne to visit a friend and brought with him the arm in question for the purpose of some experiments. On returning to the medical college, he inadvertently left it behind and wrote to his friend to bury it, by which it was proposed to do in the garden. To this there was some demur and the young friend unwisely determined to throw it into the Wellhead. From the information thus volunteered, and from inquiries made by the police, there can be no doubt that there has been no child destroyed, as was supposed when the discovery was made."

The pool also became a popular place for pet owners to wash their dogs, a practice that many people found unacceptable and there were protests to the authorities that the water would become contaminated which was a danger to the nearby workhouse because this was their direct source of supply. The Wellhead at that time came under the jurisdiction of the Rural Sanitary Authority which in 1891 banned the practice and posted notices on the banks that in future offenders would be prosecuted.

In the same year, when the town was planning to build an outdoor swimming pool, St Peter's Pool was considered as a possible site but the idea was rejected because it would involve too much boarding up that would deface this picturesque spot which, it was pointed out, was home to kingfishers and other rare birds and would therefore be regarded with considerable disfavour.

During Edwardian times, and well into the 20th century, St Peter’s Pool was maintained as a local beauty spot, lovingly cared for as a favourite place for weekend walks by people dressed in their Sunday best, the place to be and be seen. Photographs from the period show a beautifully kept pleasant and attractive amenity with a wooden walkway that has long since disappeared and mute swans gliding gracefully across the clear blue water while as late as the 1960s, enthusiasts had many happy hours sailing radio-controlled boats, a pastime impossible to pursue today.

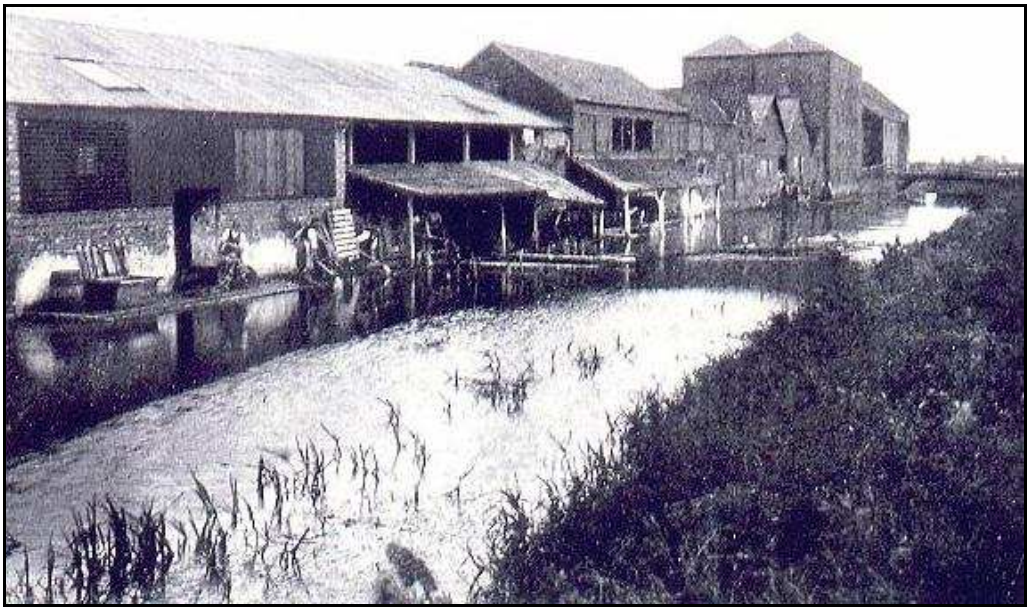
The pool is now showing signs of neglect, the surface frequently covered with algae and the crumbling banks choked with weeds. The black swans, moorhens and other waterfowl that live here are confined to a small area of clear water because the rest of the pool has been made impenetrable by the mess of green slime, bringing disapproving looks from both townspeople and visitors who find it difficult to believe that a place with such ancient origins should be allowed to deteriorate in this way.

9: The changing fortunes of the Bourne Eau

Our local river, the Bourne Eau, has had a chequered history as a means of transport and trade link, the power for several water mills, as a fishing venue and as a beauty spot. But in those past times, the waterway was wide and flowing and although it may seem unbelievable today it was also used for boating trips on Sundays. The river begins at St Peter's Pool where the water can be seen gushing out at its very source, feeding it in two directions, one almost directly east towards Baldock's Mill and the second flowing north and then east, skirting the boundary of the Wellhead Gardens before flowing south towards Baldock's Mill where the waters

combine before crossing under South Street and surfacing in Church Walk. From here, the river is piped underneath the vicarage gardens until it reaches Coggles Causeway where it runs behind the houses on the north side and on reaching the edge of the Abbey Lawn complex, it again goes underground and surfaces in Victoria Place. After crossing the road at the Queen's Bridge, the Eau runs parallel with Eastgate for its entire length and is joined by the Car Dyke near the Anchor public house. The river then crosses underneath Cherryholt Road at Mays' Sluice and out into the South Fen, joining the River Glen at Tongue End, its entire length being just under 3½ miles.

The Domesday Book of 1086 records that Bourne had six water mills powered by the Bourne Eau of which three survived into the 20th century, the West Street (or Cliffe's) Mill which was demolished in 1910, Notley's Mill in Eastgate, demolished in 1970, and Baldock's Mill in South Street which survives as the town's Heritage Centre after an extensive programme of renovation by the Civic Society.



The Bourne Eau in Eastgate in 1908

The river underwent a continuous programme of improvement during the 18th century to increase its role in the fen drainage system and make it navigable for boats engaged in the corn trade, Bourne having a direct link with the North Sea via Boston with the building of the South Forty Foot Drain. Warehouses sprang up along the river banks in Eastgate and in 1816, the Bourne Eau was capable of handling vessels with up to ten tons of cargo, grain, wool and tanning leather being among the favourite commodities for outward cargoes with incoming supplies of coal and other products for commercial and domestic consumption. But the river trade was not to last and had virtually disappeared by the end of the century, replaced by rail and then road transport.

As the use of the waterway declined, it soon became neglected and in 1892 there were complaints that it had become a health hazard in many places, particularly between the quay in Eastgate and Tongue End, but there was a great deal of squabbling between the various authorities over who was responsible and it was many months before work of cleaning it up finally got underway. But once the task was completed, for the first time in many years the Bourne Eau became an attractive amenity, so

pleasant in fact, that when the town celebrated Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in the summer of 1897, decorated gondolas took guests on pleasure trips along the river.

The waterway was also popular with anglers, the fishing rights originally being under the jurisdiction of the Manor of Bourne Abbots but during the 19th century, they were acquired by the Bourne Fishing Club and then Spalding Fishing Association. In August 1894, the rights were bought for £80 by Mr Thomas Moore Baxter, a local businessman, and the following year the Bourne Angling Association was formed at a meeting in 1895 when he gave members permission to fish his waters which extended along the Bourne Eau from St Peter's Pool to Tongue End and along the River Glen to Guthram Gowt.

Fishing in these rivers was extremely popular when the angling association flourished and the waters were well stocked with pike, perch, roach and dace that provided excellent sport for club members. The most popular period was in the middle years of the 20th century when coaches brought in hundreds of visiting anglers from the Midlands at weekends during the season. On some Saturdays and Sundays, they were spaced out along the banks as far as the eye could see and catches were invariably good. Workers from the processing plant owned by T W Mays and Sons Ltd, the Eastgate fellmongers, had a profitable sideline in raising maggots from rotting carcasses and many made their week's wages over again by selling them as bait to visiting anglers during the summer months.

In 1965, an open charity match on the Bourne Eau attracted 200 entries and the river's match record was broken by P Charlton who weighed in with a catch of over 36 lb. during four hours of fishing. But several cases of severe pollution decimated fish stocks and although they are returning, especially along the upper reaches, anglers no longer find the waterway an exciting prospect.

In recent years, there have also been continual complaints about the state of the river, particularly in times of drought which lowers the water level and reveals the muddy bottom, often strewn with litter and creating an eyesore during the summer months. One of the worst such spells occurred during August and September 1991 after three dry summers in which the area lost the equivalent of one year's rainfall and ground water levels were at their lowest ever. The river bed dried up completely and the entire stretch of the Eau along South Street was turned into a sea of mud that soon attracted litter and venture scouts were called in to clear up the mess, filling fifteen bags in two hours.

Today, the Bourne Eau is largely neglected, an eyesore through lack of maintenance, the banks choked with weeds, the water covered in algae and a target for litter. Imagine the transformation were a far-sighted developer with sufficient money and vision to take an interest because this area could then become the most sought after in the locality.

10: A new lease of life for the old mill by the stream

The Domesday Book of 1086, the great land survey ordered by William the Conqueror, records that six water mills existed in Bourne at that time out of an estimated 5,000 mills in the whole country. They were owned by Oger the Breton and produced an income of thirty shillings a year. He also had two parts of the profits

from another mill that brought in a further five shillings a year. Other landowners in Bourne are also recorded as having "parts of mills", a system we would refer to today as shares, but it is not known how many there were. These values seem insignificant by today's monetary standards but in Norman times they provided a most important income for the Lords of the Manor.

Another source of manorial revenue in the late 11th century were fisheries and there were 24 in Bourne. Ivo Taillebois had three that brought in eight pence a year while Alfred of Lincoln had six producing sixteen pence and the revenue from Oger's six fisheries is counted in terms of produce rather than currency and amounted to 2,500 eels. A further fifteen fisheries are mentioned in the Domesday Book entry for Bourne and so they would appear to be a quite important business venture. Imagine a pound consisting of 240 pence, as it was before the introduction of decimal currency, and you will have some idea of the amounts involved. The fisheries continued to play an important role in providing food, the monks of Bourne Abbey having their own Monk's Pool, now the site of the outdoor swimming pool, where carp were bred for the monastery table.

Baldock's Mill in 1940

Baldock's Mill was one of the three water mills mentioned in the Domesday Book that survived into the 20th century and still stands today at No 21 South Street. It was built on the banks of the Bourne Eau in 1800 and operated until the mid-1920s, taking its name from the last family to work it, i e Baldock. The mill wheel was 15 ft in diameter by 3 ft wide and there was a smaller fly wheel measuring 5 ft by 1 ft. Corn was brought in to be ground into animal feed by farmers and smallholders who paid for the grinding. Maize was also split for chicken feed and horse beans and a flour dresser provided sufficient for the family's own use. Two sets of stones operated on the first floor fed from hoppers on the floor above, the corn being lifted up from the ground floor where it had been previously delivered by a chain hoist driven, like the stones, by the wooden undershot water wheel. Access to the two upper floors by the miller was by ladders.

The mill operated twice a day for three hours and this time was increased by the digging of the leg between the paddock that is now the War Memorial Gardens and

the Wellhead cottage. After powering Baldock's Mill, the water then ran downstream and could be used by Notley's Mill in Eastgate. A gas engine was run at other times to provide power and as the owner, Mr Frederick Baldock, ran a carpentry and timber business from the premises, it also kept his saw bench in operation. Ground meal was packed on the downstairs floor, using the same bags brought in by the farmers, then hoisted up to the store on the first floor ready for collection via a wooden chute that was attached to the iron bar that can still be seen today below the stable door entrance. The mill stopped working about 1924 when the water wheel collapsed. The owner, the Marquess of Exeter, called in experts to inspect the damage but decided not to repair it because of the high costs involved. The wheel and machinery were removed but the mill race that turned the wheel can still be seen within the building, now scheduled Grade II as being of architectural and historic interest.

The mill was listed in 1973 and in 1981, Bourne Civic Society sought permission to turn it into a Heritage Centre and Bourne United Charities agreed to lease them the building for a peppercorn rent in order that it would be preserved for community use. This lease was renewed in 2002 for a further 21 years and the full potential of the building in this new role is slowly being realised.

The Heritage Centre now houses various collections, notably the Raymond Mays Memorial Room devoted to the international racing driver and designer whose life's work was centred on Bourne, the Charles Worth Gallery which contains displays and copies of the actual dresses created by the father of haute couture, and many displays and artefacts devoted to the town's history including the railways and the aerated water industry. The water wheel which stopped working over eighty years ago was restored during 2007-08 by Jim Jones, a retired engineer and custodian of the mill, after devoting some 500 hours of voluntary work in its design and construction and it now provides green electricity to reduce the heating bills for the building.

11: Bourne Castle - fact or fiction?

The existence of a castle in Bourne in early times is part of our local folklore although concrete evidence of any such building is rather sparse. Today, the hills and hollows in the Wellhead Gardens around St Peter's Pool are regarded as the remains of this fortification and many guide books support that tradition but documentary references down the centuries are often inaccurate and repetitive and archaeological excavations generally inadequate.

The architect of Bourne Castle is generally believed to have been Baldwin Fitzgilbert who turned the parish church into a monastery and probably laid out a new market place in trying to make Bourne a caput or headquarters worthy of the king's relative. During the reign of Henry I (1100-1135), the Lord of Bourne was William de Rullos but Fitzgilbert married his niece Adelina and thus came into the possession of Bourne by the right of his wife. There is little evidence of his castle and he is more celebrated for founding the abbey in 1138. Proof of such a building then is scarce but what emerges from the available evidence is not so much a castle as a settlement, which would most certainly be the case because people tended to live near the source of their fresh water, St Peter's Pool providing an abundant supply for early settlers and has figured prominently in the development of the town. The possibility of a Norman castle being built in Bourne emerges with accounts of the Norman Conquest which had repercussions in all parts of the country. Most of Lincolnshire's 32 castles were

built at strategic points by William during the years that followed to subdue any possible revolts and to administer the substantial estates he had created. He took possession of Lincoln two years after the Battle of Hastings in 1066 when there seems to have been little resistance and the king allowed twelve lawmen to retain their powers in the town and he took the precaution of building a castle to overawe the citizens. Whether or not the series of hills and hollows in the Wellhead Gardens mark the spot for Bourne is a matter of conjecture.

Even if there was not a castle on this site, the tradition is now firmly entrenched and is invariably accepted as fact by most guide books. The theory is also reinforced by the fact that those castles built by William were all of the motte and bailey type, comprising a conical mound (the motte) crowned by a keep and a lower outer courtyard (the bailey), a layout that fits neatly into what is known of Bourne Castle. Yet some Victorian writers have been insistent that a castle stood here as early as Saxon times and was the home of the rebel hero Hereward the Wake while at the other end of the time scale there is the inevitable tradition that during the English Civil War of 1642-1651, Oliver Cromwell placed the artillery of his Parliamentary army on the site of the castle or fired at it from the rising ground to the west.

The truth then, as J D Birkbeck suggested in his excellent book A History of Bourne (1970), seems to lie somewhere between the opinions of the over-credulous and the completely sceptical. There may have been a castle in Bourne at sometime in the mediaeval period but if so, it was certainly in a decayed state by the 17th century. The 16th century antiquarian John Leland called here while making a tour of the country between 1534 and 1543 and he found the castle greatly ruined with little but earthworks remaining. "There appere grete ditches, and the dungeon hil of an ancient castel agayne the west end of the priori, sumwhat distant from it as on the other side of the streate backwarde; it longidd to the Lord Wake, and much service of the Wake fe (family) is done to this castelle; and every feodarie knowith his station and place of service."

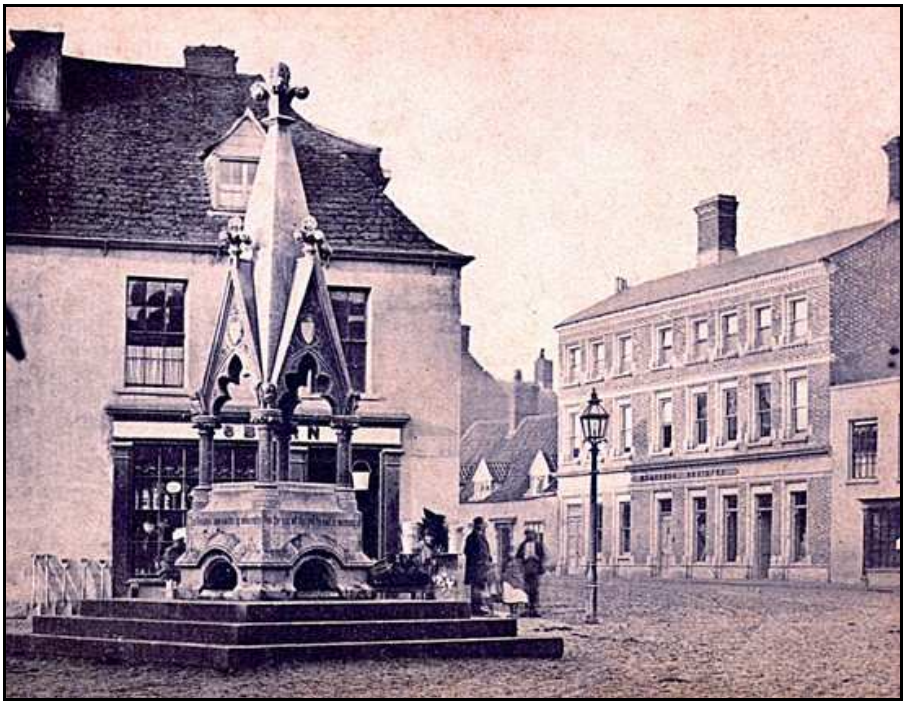
During the Civil War period, a century later than Leland, there is also a brief reference to a castle in the parish registers saying: "Oct 11th, 1645, the garrison of Bourne castle began". This suggests that the castle was still in existence and consisting of much more than Leland's "grete ditches and dungeon hil" which leads us to wonder whether considerable repairs had been carried out to the building in the intervening century or that in 1645, a garrison of soldiers simply set up camp on the site where the castle was reputed to have once stood. There have been many attempts in recent times to discover something more definite about Bourne Castle, most importantly in 1861 when archaeologists made a survey of the area and published a layout of the entire building although contemporary newspaper reports indicate of the actual excavations were not particularly detailed or conclusive.

Nikolaus Pevsner, one of the most learned and stimulating writers on art in England during recent times, visited Bourne while compiling his survey of Lincolnshire in The Buildings of England, first published in 1964, and he not only accepted Bourne Castle as a fact but also dated it. His entry says: "To the south of the town lie the very extensive earthworks of an 11th century castle. It consisted of a motte and bailey, with at least two large outer enclosures. It had masonry defences, and there is a copious water supply for its ditches. Of all this little remains; the ditches are largely dry, the masonry has been removed, and the motte has almost entirely vanished - probably dug

for gravel." Unfortunately, the public perception is of a castle of Disney-like proportions with turrets, towers and battlements, but such a structure is extremely doubtful and a fortified manor house seems a far more likely construction. It is therefore up to each of us to read the available evidence and then make up our own mind.

12: The Ostler memorial fountain

One of the biggest public occasions ever observed in Bourne took place during the autumn of 1860 when an ornamental drinking fountain was unveiled in the market place. It was dedicated to the memory of John Lely Ostler and is the only known example of a freestanding memorial erected in this town outside the churchyard. There was much public opposition to it being built on the grounds that it was too large and that its location in the market place, now the town centre, might frighten the horses. The magistrates who dispensed justice from the Town Hall were also afraid that the fountain might overshadow the building but in the event, all objections were overruled and the project went ahead at a cost of £120 (almost £6,000 at today's values), a sum that was quickly raised by public subscription, an indication of the high esteem in which he was held.



The Ostler memorial fountain in 1870

Ostler was born in 1811 of a distinguished family from Grantham who claimed as an ancestor Sir Peter Lely (1618-1680), the Dutch artist who came to England as a young man and became a painter of royalty, and on leaving school joined his father's law firm. Much of his public life was devoted to his home town but he moved to Cawthorpe House with his wife Laura (1785-1864) only a short time before his death and by 1859 he had became one of the biggest land and property owners in Bourne. He was also a dedicated Christian and while serving as a director and a principal shareholder of the Bourne and Essendine Railway Company he made himself responsible for looking after the moral welfare of the labourers employed on building the line by arranging for preachers to speak to them at meetings in the town and at the

camps where they lived. He died in on Monday 27th June 1859 by which time he was a very rich man and his many holdings included those premises along the banks of the Bourne Eau in Eastgate, the old coal yard, granary and sheds which he converted into a fellmonger's yard, dealing in skins and hides, and in subsequent years to be taken over by Thomas Mays. His business interests in Bourne also included the Maltings in West Street, now occupied by Warners Midlands plc, the printing company, as well as land holdings at Dyke and Cawthorpe.

The direct connection of John Ostler with Bourne was therefore a very short one and yet sufficient money was raised within a year to finance this very elaborate edifice to perpetuate his memory to a much greater degree than many others who had a far more important claim to local renown. He did achieve a reputation for his charitable acts and philanthropy, the building of a school at Dyke in 1854, the donation of land for the Eastgate school in 1856 when his daughter, Miss L Ostler, laid the foundation stone, and the provision of a site for the Bourne Waterworks Company.

A committee was set up after he died and within seven months of his death the money had been raised and the project put out to tender, the lowest from Messrs John and James Sneath of Baston, who were in business as builders and bricklayers, which was finally accepted. The memorial was designed by Edward Browning, son of Bryan Browning who had been responsible for the Town Hall in 1821, and the stone was carved by Mr William Hilliam of Stamford who had earned himself a reputation for his fine work in the district. The unveiling ceremony took place in October 1860 when the local newspaper recorded: "It perpetuates the memory of the late John Lely Ostler Esq., a gentleman deservedly esteemed for his extensive benevolence whilst resident in this locality."

The fountain was 18ft 6in high and stood on three steps of Yorkshire stone while the main monument was built from Portland stone and similar in architectural style to that which prevailed in England during the 14th century, popularly known as Decorated or middle pointed while the foliated capitals of the shafts were examples of the previous early English style. A continuous stream of water was provided free by the Bourne Waterworks Company, the surplus draining away through an interior pipe, and the supply had been so arranged that it could not be stolen for domestic purposes as few homes of the period had running water and usually relied on communal outside taps. This was indeed an elaborate memorial to a man who had been so highly revered in Bourne and for the philanthropy he had bestowed on the town.

It stood in the market place for 100 years and, when it was working, provided refreshment for townspeople, especially on market days when shoppers, farmers and stallholders would gather here to gossip and strike their bargains, although it soon became apparent that its days were numbered. By the mid-20th century, the horse had given way to the motor car and the memorial was in danger of impeding traffic flows. It was struck several times by passing vehicles and the stone steps on which it originally rested had been removed. Bourne Urban District Council decided that it had to go in the interests of road safety and in 1960 workmen dismantled the fountain stone by stone and moved it to its present location in the South Road cemetery.

Ostler's grave is nearby although the iron railings that once surrounded his handsome tombstone have gone, probably removed during the Second World War when ornamental metal such as this was collected in a government drive to provide the raw

materials for planes or munitions. The memorial fountain has been largely neglected since it was moved and is now suffering the effects of wind and weather and badly in need of restoration. In July 2007, it was listed Grade II by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) on the advice of English Heritage after an inspection revealed that it was at risk and the town council which is responsible is now considering a refurbishment project costing £25,000 once finance has been arranged.

13: The appeal of Bourne Wood

There has probably been continuous tree cover on this site for the last 8,000 years and the present varieties are a mixture of broadleaf and conifer of all ages while their diversity has created ideal conditions for a wide range of wildlife. Bourne Wood covers some 400 acres and is now managed for conservation as well as recreation and timber production.

The Forestry Commission bought the larger part of the wood from the Earl of Exeter, the Lord of the Manor, in 1926 and the timber brought in an income of 20 shillings per acre per annum, most of it being used for fencing enclosures. In the preceding years, the woods had been heavily felled, most probably to provide props for the trenches during the First World War, and when the commission took over there was an urgent need for extensive re-planting as part of their programme of producing softwoods because the return on them was much quicker. This policy has since been reviewed and the loss of broad-leaved trees is being remedied under a new programme of re-establishing the old forest.

Visitors to Bourne Wood in 1905

Many plants have survived and so make the woodland valuable in terms of wildlife conservation. The wild flowers that can be seen here in season include bluebells, primroses, wood anemone and nettle leaved bell flower while fallow deer are abundant and you may catch a glimpse of their smaller, shy cousin, the muntjac or barking deer. Other animals that can be seen in these glades are foxes, grey squirrels, owls, snakes, badgers and dormice and a wide variety of birds. Nightingales can be heard on summer nights and dragonflies fly over the ponds at twilight. Seven species of bat have also been identified including the rare Leisler's bat which was first

discovered in nesting boxes in 1991 and is now being closely monitored by the Forestry Commission in conjunction with English Nature.

One of the delights of walking in the woods is to explore the many tracks that lead off the main paths for there is always something new to discover. The ancient forest that can be found here consists of mixed plantings of both deciduous and coniferous trees and each have their own beauty. The Corsican pines that can be seen here were once native to that Mediterranean island of high granite peaks and fertile plains but have been grown in Britain since 1814 and are now reared at nurseries in this country before being planted out and these will be thinned once every five years before a final crop of around 100 trees are felled perhaps 20 years from now. In the meantime, these magnificent trees that can attain heights of 150 feet, are here for us to enjoy throughout the year for as every schoolboy knows, they will remain evergreen because conifers do not shed their leaves in winter.

Deep in the woods are two lakes which were made by damming a small dip in the landscape in 1972 and these have become watering holes for woodland inhabitants and home to ducks, herons, many aquatic animals and several species of fish. The pool is a mass of rushes and sedge, white water lilies float on the surface and yellow flag grows in the margins of the lakes while fallow deer come to drink here in the evenings and early mornings and their hoof prints can often be seen in the soft mud at the water's edge. This is a marvellous sight if you are prepared to sit here until dusk or to get up at 4 am on a summer's morning for a rendezvous with these graceful creatures.

Twenty small oak trees were planted in a quiet spot off the main path in January 1999 by the Friends of Bourne Wood, an organisation of volunteers devoted to the preservation and enhancement of the forest, as a tribute to Diana, Princess of Wales, who died tragically in 1997, and the spot was named Diana's Glade. Another endearing feature is the placing of memorial seats at suitable locations alongside the footpaths to enable older walkers sit and take a rest. These rustic seats were made by staff on site from timber grown in the woods and financed by relatives of loved ones now dead who enjoyed walking here while small metal plaques record their dedication. They were however prone to vandalism, despite the poignancy of their dedications, and in 2002, the Forestry Commission replaced them with sturdier constructions.

New woodland trails were introduced in the autumn of 2003 with the intention of directing visitors to the most attractive areas of the forest. Their names are self-explanatory but the most appealing being the Nightingale Trail, dedicated to one of Britain's rarest and most beautiful songbirds that can be found here. The trail runs for a distance of 2½ miles and can be followed by the orange-lettered markers and planned to take visitors right into those parts of the woodland where the birds are most likely to be heard singing. During the summer the following year, new signposts were erected at various vantage points throughout the wood to help the growing number of visitors find their way along the main paths and, more particularly, the way back to the car park.

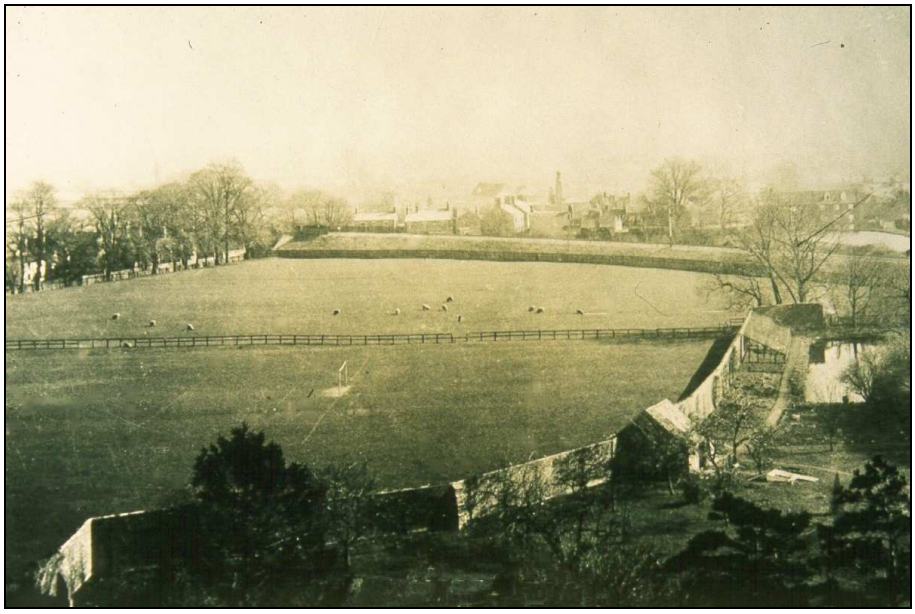
Problems of finance now mean that many of these features are under threat and may be discontinued in the future along with other woodland amenities such as the public toilets which were closed in October 2008 although there is widespread opposition to

the cut backs. There was a similar public outcry in April 2008 when it was revealed that the Forestry Commission was negotiating to sell a strip of the woodland to build a northern relief road for Bourne, thus opening the way for housing development, but the scheme was scrapped following a public meeting called by town councillor Helen Powell when vociferous objections were raised over the possible loss of even one tree of Bourne Wood.

14: Centuries of enjoyment at the Abbey Lawn

Bourne is blessed with several green spaces for relaxation and sport but the Abbey Lawn has been in public use for longer than any other. In times past, the land formed part of the grounds of Bourne Abbey although the public were allowed to use it at the discretion of the vicar. There is no record of access ever being restricted or the public being banned from using the Abbey Lawn for this purpose and so it became the town's unofficial recreation ground and has been in use for such purposes for at least 200 years.

Our two main national sports have dominated and a century ago, the football pitch was located on the north side of the field while cricket was played where the soccer pitch is now situated and usually grazed by sheep off season. The land was eventually acquired by a syndicate of local businessmen who rented out the rights for cricket and football but when it came under threat from housing development, Bourne United Charities decided to buy it for the benefit of the town.



The Abbey Lawn in 1890

The purchase was sanctioned by the Charity Commissioners in January 1931 subject to a satisfactory valuation and by May that year, the transaction was agreed in the sum of £700, to which the cricket club made a token donation of £20. The trustees, advised by their very capable clerk, Horace Stanton (1897-1977), completed the purchase with the intention of preserving it as an open space and sports ground for the town in perpetuity and since then there has been a continuous programme of improvement. A plaque on the left hand column at the main gates in Abbey Road says: "These grounds were purchased in the years 1931-34 by the Trustees of Bourne

United Charities in order to preserve the same as an open space for ever and the work of levelling and laying out the grounds was carried out by trainees from the Ministry of Labour Instructional Centre, Bourne." There is a second notice on the opposite column that says: "The trees and shrubs in these grounds were planted to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of HM King George the Fifth, 6th May 1935".

The handsome hand-forged, wrought iron entrance gates to the Abbey Lawn were made during the 18th century and formerly graced an estate entrance to a stately home in Derbyshire. They were acquired through the efforts of Horace Stanton and installed in 1933 and the side gates were made to match by Mr William Friend, an agricultural engineer and specialist in metal work who was in business in Bourne at that time.

Football has been played here for almost 140 years, one of the first games being recorded in 1871. The present Bourne Town Football Club dates from 1897 (not 1883 as is generally believed) while Bourne Town Cricket Club's activities date from 1803 but current records only go back to 1920 and the facilities have become greatly enhanced under the present ownership, making it one of the most attractive grounds in Lincolnshire.

Bourne Tennis Club formerly played on courts in Burghley Street for almost 100 years until the site was sold in 1958 when the club was saved by Bourne United Charities which was planning a new set of courts on land that had once been used to provide vegetables and herbs for the monks of Bourne Abbey. The ground was subsequently levelled and drained and turf from the old courts in Burghley Street lifted and used for the new ones on the Abbey Lawn which were opened for play in May 1959.

There was once a putting green here (circa 1965) but is now closed. It was a great attraction during the summer months when visitors could spend an enjoyable hour or so for a small fee and it was a very popular pastime, especially for courting couples on hot and sunny Sunday afternoons when the ice cream man was waiting nearby with his Stop-me-and-buy-one pedal cart. Quoits was also popular and competition was keen whenever visiting clubs arrived from surrounding towns and hockey was played here from 1921 until recent years.

Bourne Town Bowls Club which occupies land on the far corner of the site, dates back to 1953 when it was known as the Abbey Road Bowling Club. A brick built pavilion was completed in 1977 and two years later the club changed to its present name. Next door is the Outdoor Swimming Pool, formerly the carp pond for the monk's of Bourne Abbey but taken over by BUC in 1922 and now greatly enhanced and one of the few remaining lidos in England. In the far corner of the Abbey Lawn, near to the eastern entrance, is an enclosed court for petanque, a type of boules played especially in France and a game that has gained popularity since the town became twinned with Doudeville in Normandy in October 1989.

The Abbey Lawn has had many other uses over the years such as maypole dancing by schoolchildren on May Day during Victorian and Edwardian times, the annual Whit Monday sports, a notable feature during the 19th century which continued for over 30 years when top athletes from around the country competed, and even ladies' cricket matches. When flax was grown in the area to help the national effort during and after the Great War, itinerant workers who were brought in for the harvest each year

camped under canvas on the Abbey Lawn and in the summer of 1918, there was a tented town catering for 500 people assisted by troops from various regiments.

Church feasts and treats were celebrated here and gatherings for other national and royal occasions such as Queen Victoria's golden jubilee in 1887 and patriotic meetings and military parades during two world wars. Over the years therefore, the Abbey Lawn has been a focal point for the people and synonymous with the community spirit here in Bourne.

15: A legacy of the Romans 2,000 years ago

The origins of the Car Dyke which runs through Bourne continue to engage the attention of historians and speculation as to whether this unique waterway was built for transport or as a flood defence. Although there have been many learned treatises on the subject no absolute conclusions have been reached. The waterways of fenland have been used by its inhabitants for centuries, even as far back as the Bronze Age which is usually dated in Europe from 2000 to 500 BC. The early settlers travelled these parts by boat on their expeditions in search of fish and fowl to feed their families and for reeds to thatch their houses and turf to fuel their fires. Their boats were hewn from the trunks of oak trees and many have been found in South Lincolnshire. One of them which was recovered from Deeping Fen was 46 feet long with a maximum beam of 5 ft 8 in and had a ribbed floor and an external keel cut out of the solid wood which demonstrated that these people were no mean sailors.

The Car Dyke behind Eastgate in 1920

There is however no evidence that the early inhabitants of the fens used these waterways for anything more than domestic purposes but with the coming of the Romans 2,000 years ago, all this changed and the invaders made a determined effort to improve their lines of communication.

Their most ambitious project was the Car Dyke, a watercourse of 75 miles in length, starting at Waterbeach in Cambridgeshire then crossing the River Welland and entering Lincolnshire at Deeping St James. From here, it skirted the western limits of

the fens and joined the River Witham at Torksey below Lincoln, and so extended for a distance of 56 miles through Lincolnshire. Since the 18th century, it has been recognised as an important feature of the ancient landscape, possibly the second longest Roman monument after Hadrian's Wall, yet very little is known about it and it has even been suggested that it might have been a Roman Imperial estate boundary. It was first described as a canal for the trade and transport of goods by one of our earliest historians, Dr William Stukeley (1687-1765), Lincolnshire born antiquary and one of the founders of field archaeology, who wrote that the word *càr* was Old English with a transport connotation and applied to raft, sledge and vehicles of carriage, which may therefore have given rise to its present meaning in the modern motor car.

It is known that the dyke was traversable, not by sailing ships as may be imagined, but by low barges and rafts drawn by horses or manpower, and was probably used by the Romans to move supplies between East Anglia and the armies in the north, the main cargoes being corn, wool for uniforms, leather for tents and shields and provisions such as salted meat, returning laden with coal and building materials and locally made pottery. In later years, it was probably used for the transport of stone from various quarrying operations in the county, a valuable commodity in the construction of houses and important buildings such as churches, and in 1717, a bell weighing 12 cwt was transported on a raft from Henry Penn's foundry at Peterborough for installation at Lincoln Cathedral, passing through Dyke village, thus indicating that the waterway was still navigable more than 1,500 years after it was built.

Other historians have suggested that the name means nothing more than a fen dyke and the fens in the Ancholme area in the far north of the county were once known as *carrs*. In fact, Dr Stukeley admitted that car and fen were practically synonymous, a term used in Lincolnshire to signify low unenclosed watery and boggy places and it has since been established that the name is most likely derived from an old Norse personal name, hence *Kárr's dik* and subsequently Car Dyke.

However, there is no doubt that the Car Dyke also functioned as a catch-water drain, carrying off the water from the numerous high land brooks and streams from the west and although this strategic planning soon fell into disrepair in the fifth century once the Roman administration ceased, it did begin the long process of draining the fens. This project continued in various stages, through the Middle Ages with the establishment of the Commission of Sewers to oversee the upkeep of embankments and the cleaning of watercourses, the piecemeal improvements of the 16th and 17th centuries, major work during the 19th century, particularly in 1846 when a section of the dyke north of Haconby was scoured out and deepened to improve drainage, and thence into modern times.

This important waterway ran through the Bourne area and a branch canal between Bourne and Morton still exists today but can only be seen from the air when the field crops are at a stage which make its outline visible although it has shown evidence of soak ditches parallel to the canal to take water from the field ditches and discharge it into the canal. The conclusion is therefore that the waterway was built for the primary purpose of transport while the route chosen also meant that it would be useful when flooding was threatened. Today in most areas, the Car Dyke is difficult to identify except for those who are looking for it because as the fen has been intensively drained since the 17th century, it is indistinguishable from any of the other watercourses

which are a feature of this part of England. It can best be seen locally in Manning Road where it crosses underneath the carriageway on its way north and in the villages along the route, notably Dyke, which takes its name from the waterway, and Dunsby Fen where it has a particular prominence, and to the south of the town where it runs alongside the main A15 trunk road and past the village church at Thurlby.

In 1807, it was described as being 60 feet wide in places with a broad, flat bank on either side, but today it is much narrower and even choked with weed in some places but although no longer navigable, still serving a useful function as an integral part of the rural drainage system.

16: How the town got its Corn Exchange

Of all the venues for public events in Bourne, the Corn Exchange is the most popular and has been since it was built during the 19th century. Grain was one of the main products from the surrounding farmland and the need for a central corn market coupled with a requirement for additional leisure facilities for a rising population persuaded local businessmen to finance the venture and the project was given the go ahead at a public meeting held at the Town Hall on 10th February 1870.

Until then, the main venues for large events were the Town Hall and the Assembly Rooms at the Angel Hotel but it was decided that purpose built accommodation was needed for an expanding town with a population of 3,850 [census 1871]. One of the prime movers was local magistrate William Parker, of Hanthorpe Hall, who was elected chairman of the meeting. "This is of considerable importance to the town and neighbourhood", he said. "There are three main advantages in the erection of such a building. Firstly the establishment of a much needed corn exchange on a proper site, secondly the opening of a reading room and library and thirdly the provision of a suitable room for lectures and concerts which will afford instruction and rational amusement to larger numbers than can at present be accommodated in Bourne."

A limited liability company, Bourne Public Hall and Corn Exchange Company Limited, was proposed with a capital of £1,500 divided into 300 shares of £5 each and nine prominent people were elected as directors. A site in Church Street [now Abbey Road] then occupied by the town's post office, owned by the Marquess of Exeter, Lord of the Manor of Bourne, who offered it for sale on favourable terms to help speed the development, was also agreed. By the time the meeting closed, 250 shares had been taken up.

The contract for the construction work went to Robert Young of Lincoln in May 1870 after his tender of £1,150 was accepted and work began on clearing the site. The building was ready for use by the autumn and the corn market opened for business in October. The total cost, however, had risen to £2,000, a sum that included the purchase of the land and the fittings. The result was an unpretentious Victorian building of red brick and stone dressings and a blue slate roof but lacking the sober grace of the Georgian Town Hall just round the corner.

Nevertheless, the new Corn Exchange was soon in use and a local newspaper reported on Friday 18th November 1870: "We are requested to state that the building is a boon to the inhabitants as the large room is ample for all requirements and, being well adapted for a ball, a hope is entertained that arrangements will be made during the

winter with this object in view. The opening of the room is said to be likely to increase the corn market, as 1,500 quarters of wheat were sold on the 10th inst. It is suggested that a meeting of merchants and farmers should be called to decide upon and establish a system of buying and selling corn without ‘chap money’ [a promise to pay rather than a payment] which has caused so much unpleasantness at Stamford. In referring to this matter, a merchant recommends 14 days net cash.”

The new venue also became busy as a centre for social and community events, being the largest hall available in the town, able to seat 500 people and suitable for lectures, concerts and shows from visiting theatrical companies, with other rooms devoted to billiards and reading. Ice skating as a public pastime was introduced in 1876 at a time when many rinks were being opened around the country and the facility became known as the Bourne Skating Rink in an attempt to cash in on a fashionable pastime of the period.

The Corn Exchange in 1909

In the summer of 1889, the Corn Exchange was struck by lightning although no serious damage was done. The weather vane, to which the point of the lightning conductor was attached, was bent, falling about five inches, and the wire was twisted throughout its length. A passer-by noticed a flash of light run from this point to the earth but no one was injured.

Corn dealing was phased out during the early years of the 20th century but the building continued in use as a social venue. The controlling company was wound up in June 1938 when it was sold to Bourne Urban District Council and under the local government re-organisation of 1976 ownership subsequently passed to South Kesteven District Council, the current administrators. The original pyramid-style blue slate roof marks the last remains of the old building from 1870 and in 1990, the Corn Exchange and its facilities were completely rebuilt, refurbished and enlarged on a much bigger site as part of a £900,000 project for the area although a stone tablet bearing the date 1870 and the town's coat of arms were incorporated in the wall of the new building which borders Abbey Road. The extensions at the rear of the property also created a façade overlooking the new market square and car park. Apart from the

main hall, the Corn Exchange also has a small reception area and a bar and has therefore become the major venue for social and business occasions in the town ranging from meetings of the Bourne Organ Club, regular productions by the local dramatic societies and the annual civic dinner and ball, to blood donor sessions, displays and exhibitions and is also hired out for family celebrations such as wedding receptions, birthdays and christenings.

The Corn Exchange has therefore served the town well, even surviving an attempt to pull it down. In February 1969, Councillor Lorenzo Warner proposed at a meeting of BUDC that the building be sold off for a supermarket development to fund a new town drainage scheme and that future meetings and events be held in school halls but his suggestion was overwhelmingly rejected by his colleagues on the grounds that it had become a valuable even indispensable amenity having been let out 112 times in the previous five months. It continues in frequent use today and has many more valuable years of life ahead, all due to the foresight of those who ran this town 140 years ago.

17: A pub crawl in past times

Bourne has never been short of public houses and in 1857 there were eleven taverns or hostelries in the town which had risen to 14 by the end of the century. Today there are thirteen although my researches have traced a total of 30 that were in business in the parish at some time in the past two centuries with an equal number of beer houses. Drink, it seems, was a necessary accompaniment to everyday life.

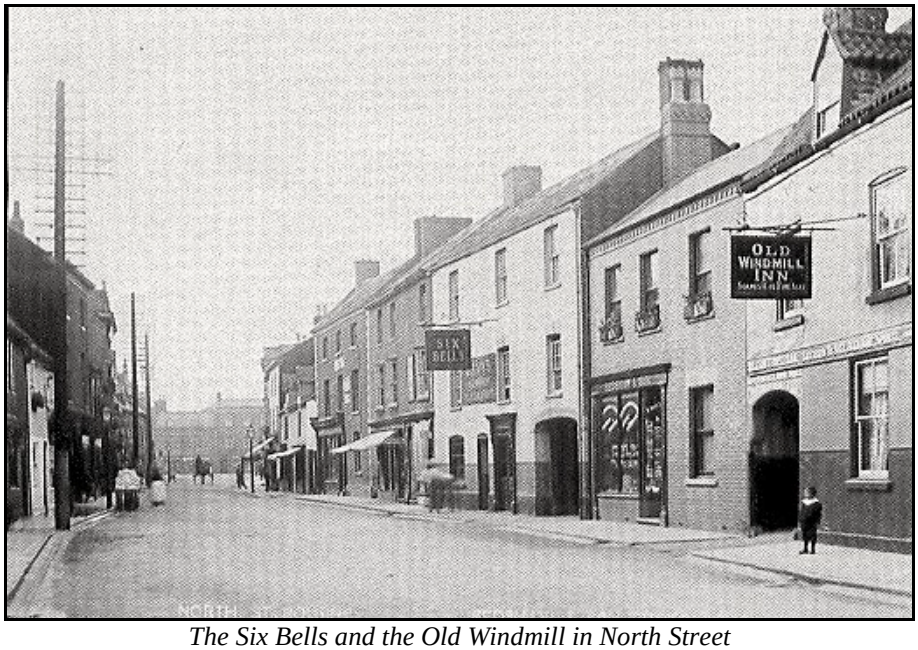
Among those still in business are the Angel Hotel (formerly the Nag's Head) and the Burghley Arms (formerly the Bull) which are probably the oldest of our hostelries to have survived, the first a coaching inn dating from the 18th century and the second a former private house best known as the birthplace of William Cecil (1520-98), later Lord Burghley, who became famous as the first minister and trusted adviser to Queen Elizabeth I.

Another important pub from the past is the Marquis of Granby in Abbey Road, formerly Star Lane, rebuilt in Victorian times with an imposing red brick corner frontage similar in design to many other buildings of the period in the town. The inn is named after a distinguished soldier, John Manners, Marquis of Granby (1721-1770), who during the Seven Years' War, as Colonel of the Blues, headed a cavalry charge against the French at the Battle of Warburg but his wig blew off during the whirlwind gallop and his bald pate, glistening in the sun, became a guiding light for his men, an episode which has given the language the saying: "Going for it bald-headed". After his military campaigns, he set up his senior non-commissioned officers who had been disabled in action as innkeepers which largely accounts for the large number of inns throughout the country that bear his name.

Others that have survived include the Golden Lion in West Street, the Royal Oak in North Street, the Anchor in Eastgate and the Red Lion in South Street, while across the road is the stone built Mason's Arms. There is also the Nag's Head in the town centre and the exterior of this building is largely unchanged since it was erected during the early 19th century in the yellow brick and blue slate much favoured by Victorian builders. This hostelry appears to have assumed the name the Nag's Head

Hotel that had been discarded by the Angel around 1800 although this has been shortened in recent years to just the Nag's Head, a name that reflects the Englishman's affection for the horse in this agricultural community although it has been interpreted in some districts as referring to a shrewish wife.

The Wishing Well at Dyke is also within the parish but was formerly the Crown Inn which opened in 1879. The present name dates from 1973 after the premises had been greatly enlarged and the public house and restaurant is now one of the most popular in the locality. You will, however, look in vain for many other pubs that have now disappeared such as the Butcher's Arms, the Old Wharf Inn and the Woolpack Inn in Eastgate, the White Horse, the Horse and Groom and the Crown in West Street, the Railway Tavern in the Austerby, the King's Head in Bedehouse Bank, the Six Bells, the Wagon and Horses and the Old Windmill in North Street which in 1835 was being run by a woman, Mary Banks, who prided herself on selling "foreign spirits" which no doubt referred to the strong rum of the period.



The Six Bells and the Old Windmill in North Street

The New Inn survives in Spalding Road as a private house and the distinctive red brick building of the Light Dragoon, also in Abbey Road, which closed in 1969 is used today as a bookmaker's shop although close inspection will reveal the monogram of the last brewery which provided their beer, Mitchell & Butlers, in the coloured glass lights over the side door. There were also several public houses just outside the town such as the Three Horseshoes and the Greyhound in North Fen and the Boat Inn and the New Inn in South Fen.

Beer houses existed in many places and there were at least thirty operating in Bourne between 1842 and 1913, two of them in Eastgate also being run by women, Sarah Knott (1856) and Fanny Thistleton (1872). The sale of beer is now controlled by the licensing justices but in early 19th century England, licenses could be obtained without application to the magistrates. The passing of the Wine and Beerhouse Act in 1869 regulated the sale of beer and owners were taxed on the amount sold. There has been continuous taxation on beer since and as the running of a beer house became a less attractive business proposition, so their numbers declined and by the turn of the

century they had almost disappeared completely. With so many places to buy alcohol, drinking was rife and drunkenness commonplace although by the end of the 19th century an active temperance movement and strict policing had brought about a drastic reduction in the figures.

One of the most recent of our public houses was opened in May 2002 in a converted shop on the west side of North Street. A grocery business founded by John Smith in 1857 operated from this three-storey listed building until it closed in December 1998 but the new owners have incorporated several of the original features in the refurbished premises, including the Victorian window and the old enamelled trade plates on the front, and they have also retained the original business name, Smiths of Bourne, by which the new public house is now known.

Smiths the Grocers in 1908, now a public house

Other newcomers to the scene are The Jubilee, opened at No 30 North Street in 2006 in a building with a chequered history as an ironmonger's shop, garage and blacksmith's forge but retaining features from all three, and Firkin Ales, also established in former retail premises in North Street, and both already popular haunts.

Public houses in Bourne are therefore alive and well although the heavy drinking ethos of past times has largely disappeared and customers now expect wine, food and entertainment which must be provided if they are to survive.

18: A new lease of life for the Vestry Hall

The Vestry Hall in North Street which has played a valuable role in the community since Victorian times has recently been turned into residential accommodation, thus preserving this interesting building for the future. The hall was built of red brick and blue slate as a chapel for the Calvinist Baptist movement that became established in Bourne during the mid-19th century, based on the beliefs of the religious reformer John Calvin (1509-64) and distinguished by its dogma of predestination which decreed that God had chosen certain souls for salvation and others for damnation. The congregation had been using temporary accommodation in West Street but a site for

the new chapel was bequeathed by Mr Charles Eldred, a brick and tile manufacturer who lived in North Road, and work began in 1867, the foundation stone being laid on November 27th by the Rev John Spurgeon from the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London who placed a cheque for £20 on it towards the building costs while twelve of the more wealthy members of the congregation laid a brick each and left a sum of money upon each for the same purpose. The ceremony was followed by a public meeting at the Independent Chapel in Eastgate [now demolished] that had been lent for the occasion.

The official opening was held the following summer, in August 1868, when church officials from London travelled up to Bourne for the ceremony. There were prayers, hymns and bible readings and eight people were baptised, followed by a public tea for 300 people in a barn and a marquee erected in a nearby field that had been made available by William Palmer, a local farmer. The chapel was described as being a very neat and convenient place of worship with room to accommodate 300 people, the seats being all plain and uniform and arranged in two rows with an aisle down the middle. The cost of building the chapel was £300, money that needed to be raised by public subscription but despite the grand opening and many donations, a debt of £160 remained and the outstanding sum soon became a millstone for the movement. During the next twenty years, attendance at the chapel declined and by 1890 it was forced to close.

The hall stood empty and disused for a time until April 1894 when it was restored for public use and in 1899 it was bought by H Company, the 2nd Battalion, the Lincolnshire Regiment, and turned into a drill hall, gymnasium and clubroom. The unit remained in occupation until early in 1914 when they vacated the premises and in July that year, the building was sold at public auction for £340 to the trustees of the late Thomas Carlton, a former draper of North Street, and made available to the Abbey Church for vestry meetings and other social activities. From that date, the building was administered by Bourne United Charities and became known as the Vestry Hall, a name that survives to this day.

The Great War broke out in August 1914 and in November, the hall was commandeered by the War Office and turned into Bourne Military Hospital for casualties from the front, administered by the Red Cross. The first soldiers arrived in December 1914 and the building remained in use until the end of the war during which time almost 950 wounded servicemen were cared for. When it closed on 1st January 1919, the remaining patients were sent to Lincoln General Hospital and the hall returned to its original purpose, reopening the following month.

The Vestry Hall also had a medical use during the Second World War when it became a first aid post and members of the Red Cross maintained day and night duty here from 1939 to 1945. Part of it was also used by the Home Guard as their headquarters. Since then, the building has had a chequered history and used as a frequent venue for concerts and drama productions staged by local groups and sporting activities such as badminton.

It has also been used for scholastic purposes, as a school clinic, for physical training lessons and to house overspill classes from other schools in the town. In 1959, the building was almost lost to the town when fire broke out in an adjoining storeroom in the early hours of October 23rd but a householder living in nearby Meadowgate who

was awoken by the smell of smoke raised the alarm and so avoided a major disaster. He got up and looked out of the bedroom window to see flames coming through the roof of the lean-to at the back of the hall and about to spread to the main building and called the fire brigade which arrived with a pump and water tender under the command of Station Officer Jack Moody. His men managed to isolate the outbreak and the hall and ancillary rooms were saved. The store building was gutted and the contents, including a quantity of coke for the stove, shelving and some tables, were destroyed. The cause was not known but may have been connected with a social that had been held by the Abbey Church the previous evening although the building had been locked up when it finished around 10 pm. Fortunately, the outbreak did not affect the use of the hall for subsequent functions.

The Vestry Hall in 1917

In 1977, the hall was leased by Bourne United Charities to the Hereward Youth Club as a meeting place but was in such poor condition that sufficient money was raised to add a kitchen, an outside area to sit and toilets to end the practice of members using those in the bus station across the road.

The club moved to Queen's Road in 1986 and soon afterwards the hall was declared unsuitable for public functions. In January 2003, the property was offered for sale as a large workshop and store together with the nearby retail shop at No 58 North Street and was sold the following year to Caroline Glithero and her husband Paul Nicholson. Accountancy Consultants East run by Caroline, occupy the shop premises as offices while the couple lived in the flat above but were anxious to preserve the traditional appearance of the Vestry Hall while converting it for use as a family home, a refurbishment which became a major four-year project.

One particular feature that has survived the tramp of feet of countless generations is the parquet floor, finished in a criss-cross pattern of wood blocks popular for institutional buildings during Victorian times and still in serviceable condition. "This has been preserved", said Caroline, "together with the frontage which is all part of the town's history. We love old buildings and have made as few changes as possible to ensure that the hall will remain a feature of the town in the future."