64: Sunday school treats for children

Sunday Schools were a vital part of community life in Bourne during the 19th and early 20th centuries. They were the inspiration of Robert Raikes (1735-1811), publisher and philanthropist, who was instrumental in founding one of the first in Sooty Alley, Gloucester, opposite the city prison, in 1780 where the poorest children were taught the scriptures as well as reading and writing, and most of his pupils were the sons and daughters of chimney sweeps. The idea flourished and schools spread with astonishing rapidity and in 1785 a non-denominational national organisation, the Sunday School Society, was set up to co-ordinate and develop the work. By 1784, there were reputed to be 1,800 pupils in Manchester and Salford alone with a similar number in Leeds.

A century later, they had become well established in Bourne with the Baptists in West Street being the first non-conformists to provide a Sunday School, classes beginning in 1803, and by 1924, some 5,000 children had attended. The Methodist Sunday School had 150 scholars and 21 teachers enrolled in 1888 with both morning and afternoon sessions while 11 neighbouring villages also had Methodist Sunday Schools.

Congregational Church Sunday School treat in 1914

The appearance of Congregationalism in the town and the subsequent building of the Congregational Church [now the United Reformed Church] in Eastgate in 1846 brought an even greater impetus. A Sunday school was started in 1849 and for a long time its meetings were held in private houses yet by 1874 there were 235 children on the roll with 18 voluntary teachers and in 1900, a Sunday School building was opened adjoining the chapel and designed much on the plan of the new Baptist Sunday School which had opened in 1891, with a central hall flanked by numerous classrooms and over 150 names on the register.

The annual treat was always awaited with great anticipation, held as an enticement and a reward for children attending religious instruction on Sundays, then considered to be an integral part of their education. The day always began with an assembly followed by a parade through the streets, often accompanied by the town band and

parents, including mothers with babies in their prams, to either the Abbey Lawn or the Park Field in the Austerby, for the traditional sports, games, fancy dress, decorated floats and a picnic followed by dancing for the parents and organisers in the evening once the children had been sent home to bed.

On Tuesday 20th January 1885, children from all of the town's Sunday schools were invited to a treat financed by Robert Mason Mills and a local newspaper reported: "Through his liberality, the children attending the church Sunday schools, together with their parents, were given a splendid treat in the Corn Exchange. In the afternoon, a substantial tea was provided, at which nearly 500 were present. After tea, the contents of a Christmas tree (provided by the kindness of several lady members of the church congregation) were distributed among the children, a number of whom also received prizes for regular attendance and good conduct. During the evening, vocal and instrumental music was given by several friends."

In 1889, the Sunday Schools from the Abbey Church, held in the old National School in North Street [now the Conservative Party headquarters], and the Congregational Church, held a joint celebration on Friday 19th July which was reported by a local newspaper: "The annual treat was held when the scholars of the Eastgate and North Street Sunday schools assembled at the North Street schoolroom and marched in procession, headed by the Bourne Brass Band, to the Abbey Lawn where tea was provided. About 250 sat down, including the parents of some of the children, all of whom had been invited. After tea, the children went into the field for amusements, the teachers being indefatigable in organising races and superintending swings. The music infused additional liveliness into the proceedings and at about 8 o'clock, the younger children having been dismissed with a bun, dancing commenced and was carried on with spirit until 10.30 when the grounds were cleared. The weather was fine throughout and the treat was a thorough success."

The Congregational Church treats are among the best documented gatherings from our history because among the church members was a photographer, William Ashby Swift, son of John Thomas Swift (1855-1939), a local magistrate and councillor, and his wife Henrietta, who lived in North Road. Ashby Swift, as he preferred to be known professionally, went into business in 1904 when he took over premises in South Street and later in West Street, specialising in wedding and family groups, portraits and local scenes. As a boy, he was a competent pianist and in July 1898, he passed the junior examinations of the London International Music Society with top marks at the age of 15 and his musical talents were applied to the post of church organist, playing regularly at services as well as weddings and funerals.

Apart from a spell with the Royal Flying Corps during the Great War, Ashby Swift spent his life photographing local people and events in great detail, particularly the church treats which he captured with a series of pictures, many of which have survived. When the big day dawned, parents and children assembled at the church, all in their Sunday best, and then paraded with banners flying to the Park Field in the Austerby where the real business of the day got underway with games and a picnic, a fun fair and fancy dress competition and a parade of coloured floats and of course a sit down tea in a specially erected marquee. It was a happy family occasion which was talked about for days afterwards. Ashby Swift died on 14th February 1941 at the age of 59 and is buried in the South Road cemetery but the town remains indebted to him for the many images of Bourne from past times which give a remarkable insight into

the customs of the early 20th century, particularly the church treats when children turned out to enjoy themselves on a day out and wearing their Sunday best.

65: Demon drink threatened family and society

The recognition that the excessive consumption of alcohol was directly linked with social, moral and physical evils became manifest in England during the 19th century when the temperance movement flourished. It originated in 1826 with the object of prohibiting the use of alcohol and placing the liquor sales under official control with the profits being used for public purposes, the introduction of counter attractions, high licence fees and taxation.

The temperance organisations that existed in Bourne were fully supported by the church and public meetings usually had a religious flavour with rousing hymns and fire and brimstone speeches from local clergymen. Visiting speakers were so effective that members of the audience would leave their seats in a mesmerised state and queue up on the stage amid cheers to sign the pledge, a document vowing total abstinence in the future, although whether all kept their promise is a matter of conjecture. Public witness was a favourite method of avowing the giving up of alcohol because the stigma of over indulgence was, in many cases, deeply felt. For instance, in the autumn of 1854, Thomas Fracey, a fruit and fish hawker trading at Bourne market, was brought before the local magistrates accused of drunkenness and abusive behaviour while running his stall on market day and was fined 5s. The sentence was not unusual but Fracey was mortified by his conduct and the following week, asked the local newspaper to publish an apology on his behalf which they did on November 10th adding: "It is hoped that he will forthwith enrol himself a member of a teetotal society".

A Temperance Society was formed in Bourne in 1863 and organised frequent gatherings in various public halls such as that on Friday 31st January 1868 which took the form of a social gathering of members and friends at the mission school in Eastgate [demolished in 1960] when 300 people sat down to tea followed by a public meeting at which several readings, recitations and speeches were delivered, interspersed with music and singing. A local newspaper reporting the event said: “The school was very much crowded and great interest was manifested throughout the meeting, at the close of which, a vote of thanks was passed by acclamation to the Rev Joseph Dodsworth, the Vicar of Bourne, for his kindness in granting the use of the room. We hear that several persons signed the pledge”.

Similar meetings consolidated the activities of the society which was soon inviting guest speakers, often from abroad, to address them. On Saturday 15th January 1870, they were host to Josephus Cheaney, widely publicised as "the American boy orator" who was then touring the country with his message against the evils of drink. The meeting was held at the Victoria Hall in Eastgate [demolished in 1967] where he delivered two lectures on the themes of abstinence, both of which were listened to with undivided attention by a crowded audience. Tea was provided afterwards for the 100 people who attended and ten of them signed the pledge.

But not all temperance gatherings were of a peaceful nature, as one visiting speaker discovered in 1863 because the newspaper reported on Friday 10th June: “On Monday evening, the vicinity of the Ostler fountain in the Market Place was for two hours the

scene of a very riotous tumult, in consequence of Mr Grayson attempting to lecture on teetotalism from the steps of the fountain, and the non-abstainers being as determined to prevent him. During that time, a quantity of ale was brought out and partaken of with great apparent gusto. It is to be lamented that there was a considerable amount of intemperance exhibited by both parties and it appears to be the opinion of the more quiet part of the audience that the exertions of each would be better confined to their respective spheres of action, and that however good the intentions of the total abstainers may be, they may be too obtrusively brought before the public."

A second organisation opposed to alcohol formed in 1874 was known as the Bourne Total Abstinence Association which held its meetings at the Corn Exchange, usually public teas and lectures with a strong emphasis on family involvement. Open air meetings were also popular, specially in the surrounding villages such as Thurlby, Edenham and Rippingale while a temperance weekend camp was held at Castle Bytham where 30 people signed the pledge. In 1880, Mr Harry Goodyer opened a Temperance Café and Working Men's Institute in South Street and a limited company was formed to run it and although it enjoyed some success over the next five years, the venture soon encountered financial difficulties and eventually went into voluntary liquidation with debts of almost £200 although the café was revived for a time afterwards, continuing on a voluntary basis as a public institute and library. Many visitors to the town did not wish to stay in hotels which served alcohol and so in 1896, the premises were converted for use as the Willoughby Temperance Hotel but this too had a short life, closing in 1901 when Mr Goodyer left to begin a new career as Bourne's school attendance officer.

The temperance movement continually claimed that its activities were having an effect on the drinking habits of the population and an apparent reduction in cases of drunkenness in Bourne during the late 19th century is indicated by a report in 1890 to the Brewster Sessions, the annual meeting of magistrates sitting as licensing justices to consider the conduct of public houses and to renew or refuse licences for incoming landlords. Superintendent Willerton Brown, who was in charge of the town's police force, detailed the convictions for drunkenness during the previous twelve years, dropping from 221 in 1878 to only 53 in 1889 and added: "These figures will give the temperance party in Bourne unqualified delight." The population of Bourne at that time was 4,191 (1891 census).

But public attitudes changed and by the mid-20th century, social conditions had improved and wages increased and the taboos associated with alcohol began to disappear and drinking became an accepted practice in all walks of life. Today, liquor in all of its forms, spirits, wine and beer, can be bought at a variety of outlets including public houses and off-licences, which until recently were the only available source, to supermarkets, grocery stores and even garages.

66: Bourne boys demand a playing field

Direct action for social change is usually regarded as an adult activity but in the late 19th century, youngsters in Bourne anxious to find somewhere to play took matters into their own hands and called on their M P for assistance. This is not only a heartening tale of help from on high but also an illustration of how speedily things could be done in those days before our local affairs became bogged down in a burgeoning bureaucracy. In the spring of 1890, the lads from both the Grammar and

the Board schools who were seeking somewhere to play called a meeting and decided to lodge a formal protest with their newly elected M P, Mr Henry Cust, the member for the Stamford division which also included Bourne. They then drew up a petition which was handed to his agent, Mr J Pask, on April 23rd and he forwarded it to the House of Commons. The petition said: "Will you be so good as to try if you can to get us boys a recreation ground? We have no field where we can play cricket or football or anything. No one cares for us, like they do for the boys of Sleaford and Stamford who have just had a jolly playground given to them. We know a fine level piece near Bourne station, just like a park. We should be glad if you would help us to get that and we do hope we shall not be disappointed. We have signed this petition which Mr Pask says he will show to you. You will be sure to do something for us because you know what boys want."

The petition had the full support of the local newspaper whose correspondent had got to hear of the protest and reported on Friday 2nd May: "The rising generation at Bourne are not minded to be behind the times. They have that not uncommon thing - a 'want' - and they have adopted the time-honoured plan of their elders in bringing their 'want' under the notice of the member. On Saturday, the petition, signed by some scores of them, was duly presented to Mr Cust. The enterprise of the youngsters deserves to be rewarded with success. A convenient recreation ground for them would prove an inestimable boon."

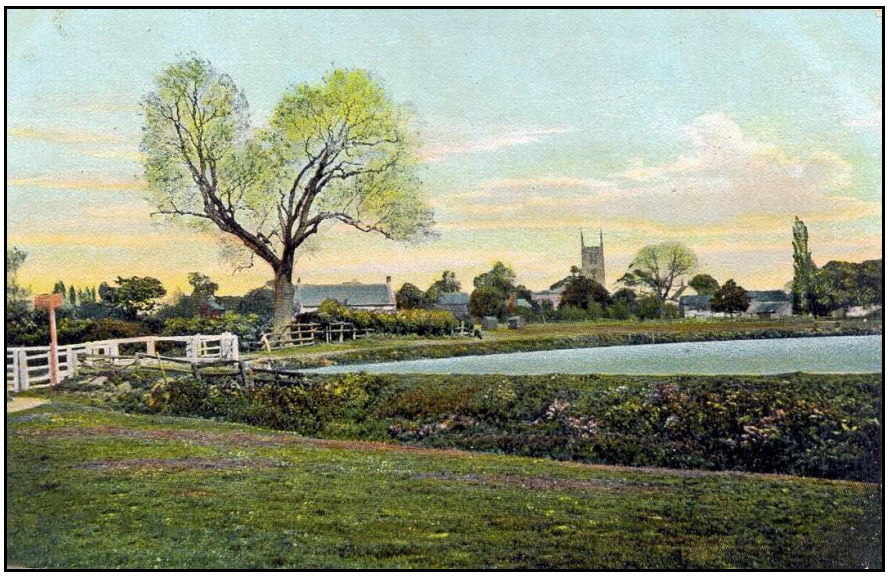
Mr Cust replied from the House of Commons on Monday 5th May saying: "I entirely agree that you ought if possible to have a good grass field near the town where you can play your cricket and football and other games together, and I will do all I can to help you get one. Parliament makes plenty of laws to see that you work hard and get lots of schooling but I think myself that it is quite important, if you are to grow up into sturdy Englishmen, that you should play hard and get plenty of exercise for your arms and legs. I hope, as long as you are boys, you will pay just as much attention to the rules of cricket as you do to the game of life. I will set about doing what you wish at once and perhaps something may be able to be arranged by Whit Monday, when I hope to come to Bourne." The letter was read out to a meeting of the boys that had been called in the grounds of the grammar school next day by one of the senior pupils and was greeted with loud cheers all round.

Mr Cust was as good as his word. On Thursday 20th May, he visited Bourne to make inquiries about a suitable piece of land that could be used as a recreation ground and by the time he returned to London, a committee comprising interested and influential townspeople had been formed and several venues were under discussion. The newspaper reported: "It is expected that arrangements will be made by Monday for the grounds being thrown open free for the use of the boys of Bourne."

The following Monday was Whit Monday and a public holiday but the committee had been speedy in its deliberations and by then they had arranged with Mr Henry Goodyear, a local farmer, for the boys to use Hereward's Field, an area of grassland covering ten acres next to St Peter’s Pool to the west of Bourne. Mr Cust arrived from London at noon and was met at the railway station by a large crowd of boys all cheering and shouting. They then paraded through the town to their new recreation ground, headed by the Bourne Town Brass Band with Mr Cust, Mr Goodyear and members of the committee following in a wagonette. On arrival, there were speeches of congratulation that the objective had been achieved in such a short time. "It is a

great pleasure that the needs of the lads have been met", said Mr Goodyear. "I hope the boys will grow up healthy and strong and become good cricketers into the bargain." Mr Cust thanked Mr Goodyear for making the recreation ground possible.

"It is through his kindness and of others, that the boys of this town will now have a good field in which to play their games", he said. "I entirely concur with what Mr Goodyear has said with regard to cricket being a manly game and I hope I will be present when the boys play their first match and win. In fact I hope to participate in this victorious cricket as I have just done in a victorious election. I therefore declare this recreation ground open and hope that the boys of Bourne will for many years enjoy the benefits to be derived from it." The boys responded with hearty cheers and then settled down to a game of cricket in which Mr Cust joined them for a short spell.



Hereward's Field and St Peter's Pool in 1906

The land continued in use until 1911 when the present ground in Recreation Road was opened to celebrate the coronation of King George V. Hereward's Field was subsequently purchased by Bourne United Charities in 1945 for preservation as an open space and is now part of the Wellhead Gardens and known as the Wellhead Field which continues as a popular venue for community events.

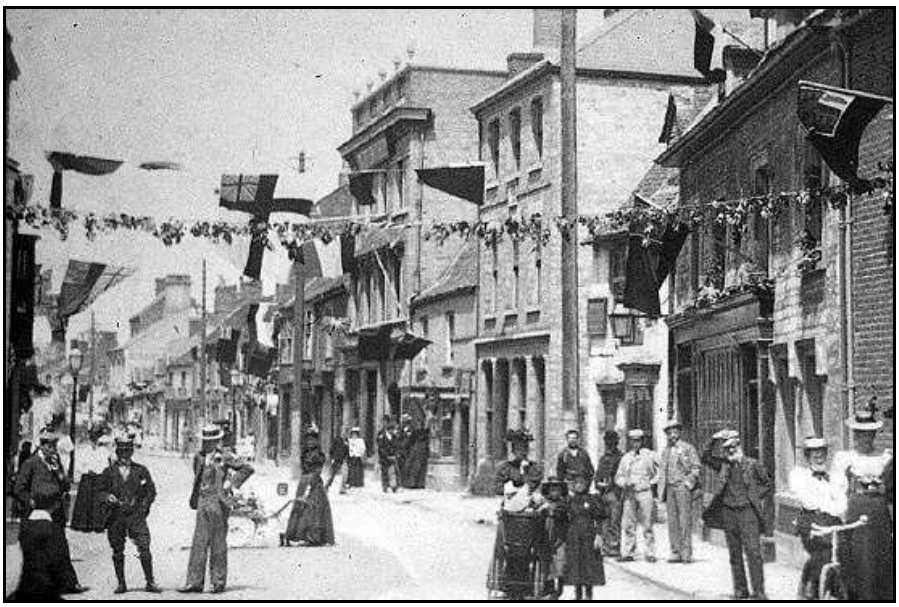
67: Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee

One of the great occasions in Bourne during past times was on Tuesday 22nd June 1897, the day this town celebrated the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria. It was a joyous and auspicious event which attracted large crowds which we know from surviving photographs showing the market place thronged with people.

The weather was perfect, hot enough for many to carry umbrellas to protect them from the sun, and a day of unalloyed enjoyment for both young and old. The town was ablaze with colour, national flags adorned every property, the streets were festooned with red, white and blue bunting while the front of the Town Hall was a mass of patriotic decorations. A public holiday had been declared and so the shops and businesses were closed and families turned out in their Sunday best to stroll around, greet old friends, stop and gossip, mostly about the grand old lady who had been on the throne for sixty years and would be celebrating her 80th birthday two

years later. The women and girls all wore long dresses and large hats while the men were dressed in suits, starched collars and ties, often carrying a stick and usually wearing a bowler hat, or more likely a straw boater which became fashionable in the closing years of the 19th century. It was unheard of for anyone to be seen scruffily dressed on a public occasion and many actually bought new clothes for such events.

There were special services at all of the town's churches where ministers preached sermons on patriotism and loyalty to one's country, followed by a day of celebration and enjoyment for both young and old for this special day that had been long anticipated. "Children were jubilant from daybreak till long after the legitimate bedtime", reported the newspaper, "and *v*eterans of 70 and 80 were early astir. There was no home undecorated and many were remarkable beautiful with red roses, evergreens, flags and patriotic emblems. There appeared to have been a happy rivalry in transforming the old Saxon town into a place of beauty."



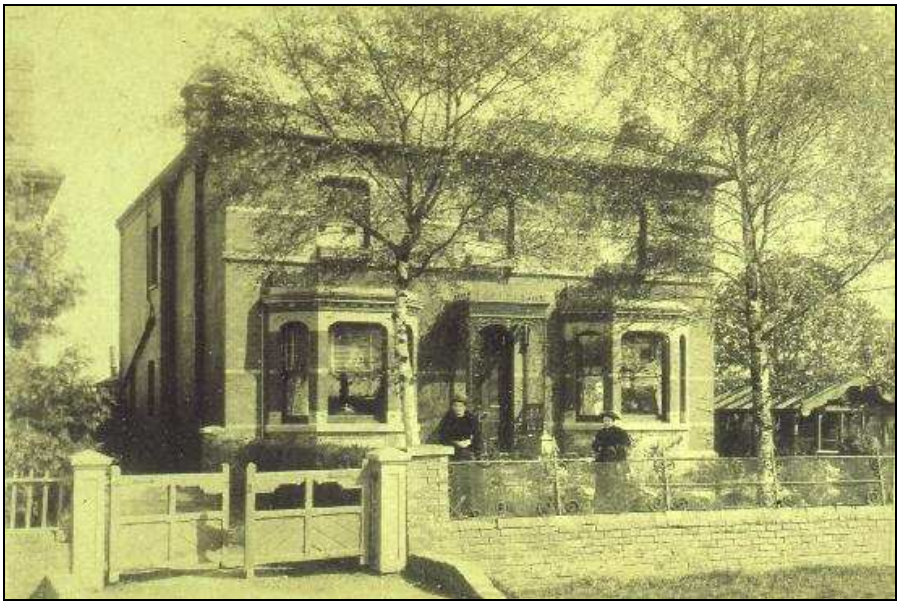
North Street decorated for the occasion

The town was full of people for the rest of the day and at three o'clock, 1,000 schoolchildren gathered in the Market Place to sing God Save the Queen. The town band then struck up the National Anthem to mark the start of a grand parade with the Volunteers resplendent in their uniforms and medals close behind and followed by the friendly societies, always evident on public occasions carrying their colourful banners. They all marched through the streets to the Abbey Lawn followed by a huge crowd of people ready to begin the celebrations consisting of a children's treat of tea and buns, a programme of sports, a cycle parade, a supper for the adults in the evening followed by dancing, fireworks at dusk in the Wellhead Field and to end the day, a torchlight procession to Stamford Hill on the outskirts of the town where, at the highest point, a huge bonfire that had been days in the making, some 20 feet in height, was lit to coincide with others across Lincolnshire and indeed, the entire country.

"It was lighted precisely at ten o'clock", reported the newspaper, "and the flaming tongues that flaked the night must have formed a beacon far across the fenland towards the sea. From near the bonfire could be seen the fires at Spalding and Crowland, and lights in the direction of Gosberton, Pinchbeck, Littleworth, Boston

and Peterborough, were discernible. From beginning to end, the proceedings passed off with perfect success."

A significant development from the celebrations was the establishment of the Town Diamond Jubilee Nursing Association which eventually led to the opening of the Butterfield Hospital. The inspiration and much of the work came from Alderman William Wherry. It was his vision that medical treatment should be available to all in their own homes and once he mentioned the idea to the Countess of Ancaster, she gave her support and became patroness while he was elected the first president with an organising committee to administer day to day affairs. It was envisaged that the scheme could be introduced for the town at an annual expenditure of £110 with 20 surrounding villages joining later for a further sum of £130.



Brooklands in 1900, the house that became the Butterfield Hospital

Then in 1909, the committee was offered a large detached house called Brooklands, built of red brick and blue slate and situated at the corner of North Road and Meadowgate, from the estate of the late Joseph Butterfield, to be devoted to the relief of suffering and, at Alderman Wherry's suggestion, it was converted for use as a cottage hospital which opened in 1910 with a ceremony performed by Lady Ancaster. In the ensuing years, the nursing service became a valued medical amenity in Bourne with more than 2,000 home visits a year and continued until the introduction of the National Health Service in 1948 while the Butterfield Hospital, as it became known, was in use until as recently as 1983 when it closed, although the building became a day care centre for the elderly two years later and is still a much loved amenity today.

68: Three centuries of bell ringing at the Abbey Church

Those who live near to a church, and most of us do, can fail to be moved by the sound of the bells summoning the faithful to prayers on a Sunday morning or perhaps to celebrate the union of a young couple as they leave after their wedding. Even the repetitive pealing we hear some evenings as the resident ringers polish up their skills is worthy of our attention and serves as a reminder of the popularity of campanology and the affectionate place it holds in our history. There is a peal of six bells in the tower of the Abbey Church, cast in 1729 by Rudhalls of Gloucester. They

were commissioned and installed during the incumbency of the Rev William Dodd, who was vicar from 1727-56, and whose name is inscribed on the treble or first bell. His three churchwardens at that time were John Hardwick, Lyon Faulkner and James Lay, and their names can be found on the tenor or great bell in the key of G which is reckoned to weigh 15 cwt. The six bells are inscribed as follows:

No 1 weighing 14½ cwt: William Dodd, Vicar, 1729 *Surge age* (Rise and act);
No 2 weighing 10½ cwt: 1729 *Laudo Deum Verum* (Praise the true God);
No 3 weighing 8 cwt: *Et Clamor ad coalos, Henricus Penn, fusor* 1729 (And I call to heaven, Henry Penn, founder);
No 4 weighing 7 cwt: *Ut Mundus sit nos nuno laetitiam nunc delerem* 1729 (Whether the world be joyful or doleful);
No 5 weighing 6 cwt: *Plebem voco congrego clerum, Henricus Penn, fusor* (I call the people and gather the clergy, Henry Penn, founder);
No 6 weighing 15 cwt: *Defunctos plange, vivos moneo* (I bewail the dead, I warn the living). John Hardwick, Lyon Faulkner and James Lay (churchwardens).

Inside the bell chamber – photo courtesy Jim Jones

The total weight is 61 cwt, 1 cwt being 112 lb and there are 20 to the ton (avoirdupois). Henry Penn was the most famous of the country's makers, working from his foundry in Peterborough, and he achieved particular fame by casting one of the bells, weighing just over 12 cwt, for Lincoln Cathedral which was delivered by a raft on the Car Dyke, passing through Dyke village in 1717, which indicates that the waterway was still navigable more than 1,500 years after it was built by the Romans.

There was tremendous excitement in the parish when the bells were installed at the Abbey Church and ringers were easily recruited to use them, becoming extremely efficient in a short space of time and soon winning a reputation for their skill. John Hurn Dove of Cawthorpe recorded in his journal: "The ringers of the church almost immediately became celebrated and on 21st February 1745, they rang the bells to the peals of Crown Bob, College Pleasure and College Treble Bob, a feat rarely accomplished, and have since taken part in many peals at other churches in the neighbourhood." The bells were completely re-hung in 1805 by Mr Cabors of Strugg's

Hill, Sutterton, Lincolnshire. His work was so well known that he was reputed to have restored the greater part of the peals in this country and whose work at Bourne lasted intermittently for half a century. They were partly re-hung in 1852 but the work was carried out on the wrong principle and the vibration of the bells had a damaging effect on the tower. A church vestry meeting was held on 27th October 1864 when a proposal from the churchwardens, Thomas Mawby and Henry Bott, to have them re-hung in a correct manner, was agreed. This time, the work was entrusted to the bell founders Mears and Stainbank of London at a cost of £495, money raised by public subscription, and was completed early in the New Year although there were difficulties in collecting all of the money promised.

The bells at the Abbey Church were last removed in 1926 when the tower fell silent for six months after they were taken by lorry to Croydon for re-tuning and maintenance at Messrs Gillett and Johnson's foundry and a fund was opened to pay for the restoration. The clappers were re-modelled and the bells re-hung on ball bearings in a dust proof housing to make the task of ringers less arduous in the future. It was reported at the time of their removal: "Over the years, the bells have been put to various uses, some of their number having done duty as the passing bell, the pancake bell, the labour bell and the curfew bell. From time immemorial, the labour bell was rung at 6 a m in the morning, except during December, and the curfew bell was rung every evening at 8 p m" - both practices which have long fallen into disuse.

The bells have been sounded throughout the centuries on a variety of occasions for celebration and mourning, for weddings and royal birthdays, the end of wars and even the arrival of a new vicar such as that on Tuesday 23rd Oct 1877 when a special peal was rung to welcome the Rev George Massey, from Uley near Dursley in Gloucestershire, who officiated until 1881.

One of the oldest known persons to ring the bells at the Abbey Church was Mr Thomas Taylor, the senior ringer, who died on Saturday 16th February 1889 at the age of 83. He had been at the church for more than 60 years and could describe graphically events that had taken place there and in the town for the previous 75 years. As a young man, he was one of the pall bearers at the funeral of Lady Catherine Digby, tenant of the Red Hall, who died in 1836. When Mr Taylor died, a dumb peal was rung on the bells on the evening of his funeral.

Many celebratory and record peals of the bells of the Abbey Church were organised by the well-known ringer John Lake (1875-1965) who was team captain for many years during the early 20th century. He also rang the bells at many churches in the neighbourhood, believing that campanology was not only an enjoyable pastime but also a fellowship of those who participated. He was born into a farming family in 1875 at a cottage in Bourne Fen and became a joiner and wheelwright, working at Witham-on-the-Hill and Little Bytham. He later moved to live in South Street then West Street, retiring when he was 69, but continued bell ringing until he died at the Butterfield Hospital, aged 89.

There is little doubt that bell ringing is a companionable pastime, bringing together expertise, dedication and fellowship. But it has also been known to be dangerous. While ringing one of the bells at the Abbey Church on the evening of Monday 18th February 1895, John Howe, a hairdresser, of Church Street [now Abbey Road], met with a serious accident. A local newspaper reported: “He was taken up by the bell

rope and fell down from a great height. His right leg was broken just above the ankle. Dr John Gilpin was speedily in attendance and skilfully attended the injury which is of a severe nature."

69: The navvies who built Bourne's railways

The navvy was a phenomenon of the 19th century when public works such as the construction of new railways needed human muscle to shift massive quantities of earth, often at the rate of twenty tons a day for each man on site.

The word navvy is a shorter version of navigator, the name given to the canal builders of the 18th century and was inherited by the railwaymen. It was used more particularly to mean a man with a pick and shovel, an excavator as opposed to a bricklayer or a mason, and invariably referred to someone employed on the building of railways. It was a rough and ready life that attracted itinerant workers from other countries, particularly Scotland and Ireland where the only alternative was ill-paid employment on the land. They were also prepared to live together, often in encampments by the line, and they invariably had an ability to eat heartily, drink heavily and fight fiercely.

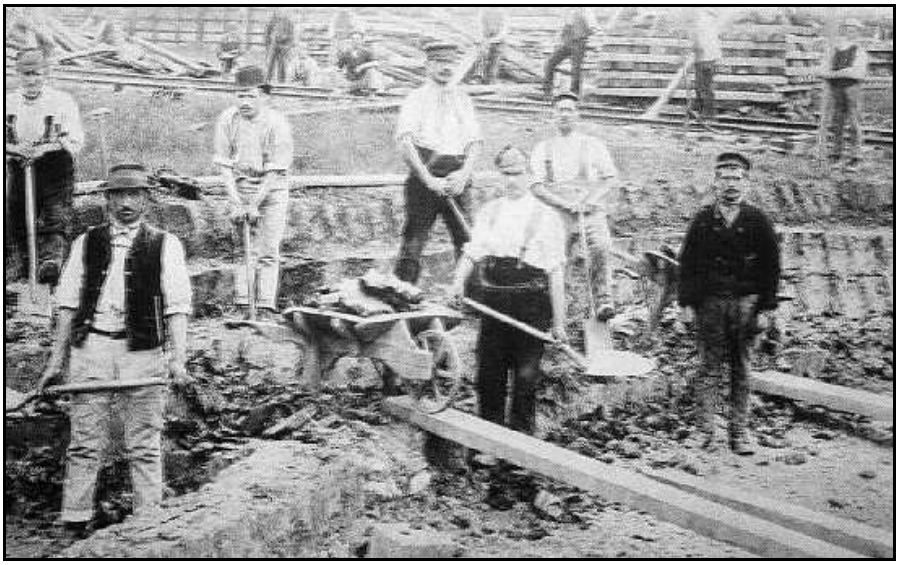
The navvies came to the Bourne area to help build the railways and their first job was on the Bourne to Essendine link on which work began in the autumn of 1857. Such a large concentration of tough workers renowned for their strong language, love of beer and immoral behaviour was regarded with some concern by the people who lived locally and there were many attempts to keep the men on the straight and narrow path of Victorian righteousness. A director of the Bourne and Essendine Railway Company responsible for the project was Mr John Lely Ostler of Cawthorpe House, a local landowner and a dedicated Christian who sought to pass on his ideals to others by bringing preachers to speak to the men in their off duty hours, a practice that continued even after he died in June 1859.

The line was completed in 1860 but Ostler had laid firm foundations among the railway navvies in the Bourne area and the practice of employing visiting preachers for their spiritual welfare continued on other railway projects in the ensuing years, particularly the line between Bourne and Little Bytham junction that opened in 1894. As the railway progressed towards the town, particularly during the two years from 1891-93 that it took to build the last section through Little Bytham, Toft and Lound, earnings were as high as £1 a week or even 30s. if on piecework, far higher than could be obtained elsewhere and this attracted a motley collection of hardened labourers from all parts of the British Isles. By this time, organised evangelism had taken root with the establishment of the Navvy Mission Society, a Christian action group founded by a Yorkshire vicar, the Rev Lewis Moule Evans who actually worked as a navvy himself. He recruited ladies of means and Christian conviction who were able to devote their leisure time to taking the word of God to most of the railway construction sites during the years of its existence between 1877 and 1918. The society has now become the Industrial Christian Fellowship but the records of those missionary days have been preserved in the library at Lambeth Palace and at the University of Leicester.

The society set up mission rooms at the Victoria Hall in Bourne (now demolished), at Little Bytham and Castle Bytham, and regular meetings and entertainments were

arranged for the workers as an alternative to their usual pursuits. At Bourne for instance, Mr A Mousley, son of the contractor Mr William Mousley, organised a concert of music including violin solos, songs and recitations at which, it was reported, "the humorous element met with hearty appreciation". The society sent missionaries to speak to the men and Miss Spofford, who had been crusading among the workers engaged on building the Manchester Ship Canal, delivered what was described as "a very powerful and earnest address" on behalf of the Christian Excavators Union, an organisation associated with the Navvy Mission Society, and the men apparently listened to her with rapt attention.

The majority of the navvies were well behaved and many were sending money home to needy families. But there were those who spent all they earned on drink and often worked through the day while still drunk. Petty crime therefore was inevitable and navvies were convicted and fined and sometimes jailed by the courts for poaching and stealing, often poultry from local farms but also from each other and on one occasion a navvy absconded with the money from their sick club. The Midland Railway tried to keep law breaking, particularly drunkenness, under control by appointing special constables at 30s a week but the experiment was short-lived.



Navvies at work on the line in 1892

Fighting was also a way of life and regular bouts were held on Sundays to determine who should be Cock of the Camp for the following week. It was also the accepted method of settling quarrels and many were badly injured. There was at least one death during the construction of the railway when two of them, James Hook and Thomas Smith, met in a bare-knuckle contest in a field near the line in which Hook was felled and collapsed in the shadow of a wall where he was later found to be dead. Smith gave himself up to the police and was sent to jail for manslaughter.

Hygiene was unknown and this may have been the cause of a smallpox epidemic which broke out in 1893. It began among navvies working at Castle Bytham and Thurlby, some of them living at a common lodging house in South Street, Bourne, although many carried on working without revealing their illness for fear of losing their weekly wages with the result that infection soon spread. Unfortunately, the public health authorities were unprepared and inexperienced and it was several months before the outbreak was brought under control and only then after a trained

nurse from Hull in Yorkshire was drafted in to help. Details of any fatalities and those taken ill are not known because the medical records for this period have mysteriously disappeared and may have been destroyed in an attempt to cover up inefficiencies in handling the outbreak.

With the completion of the modest railway system serving this town, the navvies moved on and the projects they had toiled over became redundant when Bourne was finally phased out of the railway system in 1964 with only a few isolated examples such as the Toft tunnel remaining as a memorial to their Trojan efforts.

70: How Bourne got lit up for Christmas

Christmas past in Bourne had a distinctly Dickensian flavour, the shops full of festive fare, particularly for the table, and most butchers hung their meat and poultry on the front of their premises to attract customers while other traders gaily decorated their windows with groceries, sweetmeats, drapery, millinery and other goods to entice the housewives shopping for the festive season. But the anticipation did not start quite so early as it does now and lasted no more than a few days and today many believe that Christmas has become more commercial and certainly modern innovations have given shops and other retail outlets a higher profile, not least through the introduction of street illuminations.

Shops in the early 19th century had no safe means of lighting their windows at night and street lamps did not arrive in the town until 1878 when they were installed by the Bourne Gas Light and Coke Company. By 1885, Bourne had the reputation of a well lit town with 56 public incandescent gas lamps at various points along the four main streets and in 1898, the parish council, which controlled local affairs from 1894-99 and had footed the bill for street lighting, asked the gas company to ensure that the lamps were turned on every dark evening and that they were burning all night on Saturdays and Sundays and over the Christmas period.

From 1900, the increasing availability and popularity of electricity enabled a far more extensive public use but the Christmas lights we know today are comparatively new, dating back to the middle of the last century. They arrived in the years following the Second World War of 1939-45 when efforts were being made throughout the country to revive its drab appearance brought on by enforced rationing and austerity.

Probably the most famous are the Regent Street illuminations which began in 1954, prompted by a letter in the *Daily Telegraph* complaining how drab London looked at Christmas, and soon they became one of the capital's major tourist attractions, renowned worldwide and attracting huge numbers of visitors each year. Oxford Street followed suit in 1959 and today the displays are so bright and attractive that they can be seen from outer space. Towns and villages soon latched on to the idea and within a few years the street lights became part of the Christmas season for every community.

The first Christmas illuminations were switched on in Bourne as a trial in 1967 with a ceremony outside the Town Hall and they remained on between dusk and midnight each evening until New Year's Day. Although only the market place [now the town centre] and part of North Street were lit up with little more than strings of fairy lights, the experiment by Bourne Urban District Council and the Chamber of Trade proved to

be so successful that it was repeated the following December when the council chairman, Councillor Ted Kelby, told the assembled crowd: "It is gratifying to see so many people here for the second year of this venture. It is also pleasing to know that towns from all over Lincolnshire have asked for particulars of our arrangements. This lighting system has started something Bourne can be proud of. In five years, we hope to have lights all along the shopping centre."

The extent and quality of the illuminations increased over the years but the old system was soon in need of replacement and by this time, Bourne Town Council was responsible. By 1998, there had been some criticism of the quality of the illuminations and so new ones were purchased with the task of erecting them each year being carried out by volunteers from the Bourne Lions organisation, a system that worked well but there were concerns over health and safety and the authority therefore decided that professional help was needed.

The Christmas illuminations in 1968

In June 2001, the town council announced that they would be solving the problem by spending £40,000 on new Christmas lights although the money was being borrowed from South Kesteven District Council over a five-year period at an agreed interest rate of 5.5%. Councillor John Kirkman, chairman of the town council's finance and general purposes committee, explained: "This is something which hasn't been done before." The decision meant that the council would now own its Christmas lights that would be erected and dismantled each year by a commercial company and the new scheme was introduced the following December.

The new lights were launched on Saturday 1st December 2001 amid general approval although there were some complaints that the bulbs were all the same colour, namely natural, with a distinct absence of reds, yellows, blues and greens, and one housewife suggested that it was like switching on the kitchen lights, "all brightness of no colour and therefore lacking in warmth". Nevertheless, the consensus was that the ultimate effect was a great improvement on the previous year although further enhancements have been made since, making Bourne‘s Christmas lights favourably comparable with any market town of the same size. The switching on ceremony has now become a tradition, always on a Saturday evening from the front steps of the Town Hall with children and their parents thronging the streets for the occasion. Police are on hand to

control the traffic to enable youngsters get a closer look and Father Christmas arrives to hand out gifts. The event is held to coincide with shopping, late night on a Friday with stalls and fairy lights and fun fair rides for the children to mark the start of the festive season, although there has been a recent departure from custom with the introduction of a Sunday daytime market which did not please everyone and so arrangements for future years may well be changed by the Bourne Chamber of Trade and Commerce.

The Christmas lights in 2001

71: A glimpse of Christmas past from 1887

The celebration of Christmas as we know it today has its roots in the 19th century but it is evident from contemporary reports that the anticipation did not start so early and lasted no more than a few days and charity was very much in evidence for the poor and the deprived. The traditional evocation of the festive season will forever be associated with Charles Dickens whose novels have inspired millions of greetings cards, featuring the fireside, the Yule log, stage coaches, snow covered rooftops, a decorated tree and presents, and it is this depiction that we most associate with scenes of Christmas past.

In 1887 for instance, the shop windows in Bourne had that Victorian appearance and were decorated much as they are today, the grocery, butchery and bakery shops crammed with appetising wares and the millinery and drapery stores displaying the latest fashions. The annual Christmas Fatstock Show was a regular feature of farming life during this period and beasts were bought for slaughter in readiness for the festive trade, the meat proudly displayed in their windows and sides of beef hung outside on hooks awaiting buyers. That year, one butcher alone, George Mays, of Eastgate, killed 300 sheep, one weighing 211 lb, and nine cattle, to meet the demand, and at that time he was only one of nine butchers in Bourne when the population was under 4,000.

The Abbey Church, the 12th century stone building that was the centrepiece of the Christmas story, was beautifully decorated by a small army of helpers, as described in a newspaper report: “Over the communion table in white letters on a scarlet ground was the text Emmanuel, God with us, the centre filled with a white cross. The

miniature arches were adorned with an arrangement of evergreens interspersed with flowers and the reading desk decorated with ivy and holly, the panels in front being ornamented with chrysanthemum crosses. The pedestal of the lectern was adorned with a choice selection of flowers and evergreens, a fine bunch of pampas grass being especially noticeable. Holly berries and ivy embellished the handsome pulpit. The sills of the windows in the north and south aisles were beautified with texts worked in white on a scarlet ground, and encircled with wreaths and evergreens. The font was decorated with exquisite taste; the cover was surmounted with a fine cross and chrysanthemums; the pedestal was encircled with ivy and a variety of evergreens prettily frosted. Great praise is due to the ladies who so admirably executed the decorations."

Butcher Richard Stevenson outside his West Street shop in 1885

Christmas Day was ushered in with peals of bells and carols from Bourne Brass Band and there were three main services at the church, all choral, communion at 8.30 am followed by morning and evening service when the Hallelujah Chorus from Handel's Messiah brought the day of worship to an end. The inns and public houses were busy throughout the day and full most evenings despite lively temperance meetings warning against the perils of drink.

On the two days after Boxing Day, a grand fancy fair, similar to our modern pantomimes, was staged at the Corn Exchange to raise funds for the Congregational Church in Eastgate and various entertainments were given in the evenings. Vocal and instrumental musical items and presentations were performed at intervals which were very popular. "The promoters of the enterprise are to be congratulated on the success which has deservedly crowned their efforts", said the newspaper.

But those who could not afford to buy what was displayed in the shop windows queued up at the National School in North Street where the Vicar, the Rev Hugh Mansfield, assisted by his churchwardens and officials from various charities, made their annual distribution among the deserving poor, the gifts including 700 yards of flannel, 50 blankets, 700 yards of calico and 170 tons of coal. Much of this was paid for by Harrington's Charity and there were also gifts of food and clothing brought in by townspeople.