

Teachers' notes: 2. Life in Tudor Lincolnshire

Lincolnshire in Tudor times was quite an isolated county, being the most northerly county to be governed directly from London. Transport to and from Lincolnshire was inadequate for some people, especially those who were ambitious and wanted good transport connections with other parts of the country. The Great North Road was the only major road which ran through the County, and even today there are no motorways in what is now the county of Lincolnshire.

Outsiders were often ignorant about Lincolnshire and its people, and had some rather strange ideas about it. They thought that it was a very unhealthy place and that the climate gave rise to fevers. The inhabitants of the Fens were thought by some to be barely human.

Even Henry VIII said "the commons of one shire and that one of the most brute and beastly of the whole realm", although he did say when he was very exasperated with Lincolnshire people around the time of the Reformation.

However, Lincolnshire is a county of great variety in its landscapes, with its wetlands, Wolds, clay lands, coastal marshes and Fens, and has some of the richest agricultural lands in the whole country.

Agriculture

This great variety of landscape meant that there were different types of farming happening across the county. In the south of the county pasture farming made an important contribution to the national food supply: livestock was kept for meat and dairy products, and fish and fowl were provided from the wetlands. Parts of the marsh and southern wetlands were drained during Tudor times to provide more land for farming.

In the less fertile areas land was given over to sheep farming for wool production.

Tudor Lincolnshire was also a major grain producer. In the south the biggest crop was barley, followed by peas and beans and wheat. In the marsh areas the major crop was wheat. In the claylands rye was grown too. Overall barley was grown in the greatest quantities, and it was sent to London and Yorkshire for malting and brewing. Pulses were the second biggest crop, and were used mainly as animal feed.

HERITAGE LINCOLNSHIRE

Looking after Lincolnshire's heritage

The evidence for this comes from documentary evidence, and from the archaeological record. For example, archaeological excavation on the site of the Haven Cinema in Boston found the preserved remains of barley, wheat, walnuts, hazelnuts, grapes and plums. This also gives some idea of what was being eaten by people in Boston.

Timber was produced in the southern claylands between the heath and the fens, east of the Witham. There is placename evidence in this area that this had been going on for quite some time in the form of the village and parish of 'Timberland'. Timberland is first mentioned in the Domesday Book, and comes from Old English and Old Norse, meaning 'the grove where timber is obtained'.

Society and Population

In the early part of the Tudor period there was an unusually high number of gentry and yeoman (the middling rich) in Lincolnshire compared to other counties. There were relatively few great landowners, so in a way the county was leaderless compared to other counties. This changed in the later part of the Tudor period when Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, became the guardian of Katherine, Lady Willoughby, and then married her. Although he spent a lot of time out of the county he considered Lincolnshire his home. At that time many families were socially mobile, and many bought land at the Dissolution.

There exists a list of 129 families in Lincolnshire who subscribed to the defence of the country against the Armada. This is a small proportion of the population (about 1.4%). The total number of households recorded by the Diocesan Returns of 1563 was 22505, which makes a total population of about 110,000, which rose to an estimated 115,767 in 1603. However that could be a conservative estimate, as the population grew at a much faster rate in the second half of the sixteenth century across the country as a whole.

The population in many villages in Lincolnshire today is not much changed from Tudor times.

In some areas there was some depopulation due to enclosure and conversion to sheep farming, which grew in importance between 1517 and 1607. People were moved out of their homes and villages to make way for these new ways of farming. This was particularly bad on land owned by Henry, Earl of Lincoln, who has been described as an 'unpleasant tyrant'. Having said all that, however, the numbers of farms and buildings which were 'decayed' were not as great as those in other counties.

Notwithstanding these changes, in many places in Lincolnshire farming did not change for long periods of time. For instance, there is evidence from Kirkby Underwood from 1595 that tenants farmed their land as they had 100 years previously. They were still using the medieval open field system, where each tenant would have small plots of land scattered across the open fields, although there had also been a small amount of land enclosed.

There were several public roles in rural society, some of which still exist today. There were churchwardens, overseers of the poor, constables and surveyors of highways. In the south there were dike reeves who looked after the maintenance of drains and ditches.

The social structures of the county seems to have varied with farming regions, with the south east of the county (Holland) being more egalitarian than the two other areas (Lindsey and Kesteven).

Industry, Transport and Trade

The economy of Lincolnshire was overwhelmingly agricultural. Those trades that weren't were almost entirely based in towns, and tied up with agriculture. The major centres and trade and industry were Boston, Grantham, Stamford, Grimsby, Spalding, Bourne, Horncastle, Louth and Lincoln.

Examples of the types of trade that were going on were brewing and leather-working. Metal goods were made in towns for agricultural use, for example ploughshares, forks, spades, rakes, harrows, horseshoes, scythes, cartwheel rims and nails. There were also those which were made for the household, like pots, pans, kettles, spits and fire irons. Smiths forged iron and braziers made brass objects like pots and pans. The finer vessels were made of pewter (which is lead and tin, and sometimes silver).

Baskets were made from reeds and osiers, and 'skeppers' made skeps (wicker baskets and beehives) and hampers. Hemp and flax were grown and used to make sacks and sackcloth, rope and linen. Those who took part in these activities were often also farmers.

In the ports of Boston and Grimsby there was a boat repairing industry, but no large scale ship building.

Lincolnshire exports included butter, cheese, cattle, poultry, fish, wool, grain, malt, beer, calfskins, beans, linseed, a little cloth, beef, bacon, oats and barley.

Imports into Lincolnshire included timber, turf, thatch, coal, wine, vinegar, prunes, starch, resin, and white salt.

The routes which were used for transport and trade were roads and rivers. Long journeys by road were often made on horseback, as coaches were very rare in Tudor times. Pack animals like horses and mules were mainly used to carry goods, rather than carts.

Water transport was by means of shallow boat. It was cheaper than transport by road, but it was slower, and was often impeded by fishing nets. Commissioners were employed who were supposed to make sure that the waterways were free of obstructions.

As well as the inland modes of transport, coastal trade was also very important. As well as the ports of Boston and Grimsby, there were many small harbours or 'havens' along the Lincolnshire coast, like those at Wainfleet, Kirton, Frampton, Fleet, Leake, Fishtoft, and Fosdyke. However, the coastline was changing then, as it is today, and many of the harbours silted up and fell out of use.

Boston was in decline in Tudor times. It had been the second most important port in England in the thirteenth and fourteenth century, and its prosperity was mainly due to the wool trade. However, by the sixteenth century, the wool trade had declined while the cloth trade flourished, and Boston was not in the best geographical position to exploit this. What also contributed to this decline was partial silting up of the port.

Boston was run by the Admiralty, the Borough Council and Customs Officers, with its own court. Trade through ports like Boston was highly regulated and taxed in Tudor times, and disputes often arose, particularly over money.

From time to time counties were stopped exporting grain because of shortages and high prices, to try to prevent famine. In 1589 twelve counties were prevented from exporting grain because of rising prices, and because some 'not regarding the publicque benefytt, doe transport the same by stealth to make their private lucre'.

Fairs and markets were a large source of income for Lincolnshire towns.

Crafts

There were 35 different crafts recorded in Lincoln in the first half of the sixteenth century. In an effort to encourage the growth of crafts in Lincoln the guilds were reorganised, and the rules for taking on apprentices were relaxed somewhat. Some of the guilds were joined together to make them larger and more effective; for example the smiths, ironmongers, armourers, spurriers (spur makers), culters (knife makers) and wire drawers; also the glovers, girdlers, skinners, pinner (cap makers), pointmakers, scribes (a professional writer who prepares contracts, for example, or a broker) and parchment makers.

Boys would be taken on as apprentices to craftsmen. Apprenticeships lasted on average between seven and nine years. It could be that the craftsmen would see having apprentices as cheap labour.

From the numbers of apprentices the craftsmen in Lincoln took on in the early sixteenth century in Lincoln, it is possible to see which crafts may have been flourishing or in decline.

Leather workers took on the most apprentices, followed by cordwainers (shoe makers), glovers and tanners (someone who tans hides). There was one saddler apprentice. Metalworking was also flourishing, with the smiths,

braziers and pewterers. The mercers, tailors, bakers and butchers were also doing well.

In contrast the cloth industry was struggling, with the weavers, fullers (someone who makes cloth denser and firmer by soaking beating and pressing it) and dyers taking on very few apprentices. Builders did not seem to be in demand either: it seems that maintenance only was required at that time, with few new buildings being constructed.

The Tudor Poor

There were people who were unemployed, or who were unable to work in Tudor times, as there are today. There were stern measures used against those considered to be 'undeserving poor', that is those who are able to work, but chose not to, and the 'deserving poor', those that were unable to work through disability or old age. There were steps to deal with this problem, and the responsibility was given to the officials in each parish who, it was felt, were in the best position to understand the local community. However, this was done with close control from Central Government. It was felt that there needed to be balance struck between how the poor were dealt with: too harsh, and there might be rebellion, too soft in some areas would attract 'rogues' and 'vagabonds' to live there. Rogues and vagabonds were vagrants or unreliable people. It was felt that it was in the interests of everyone in society to make sure that everyone was as prosperous as possible.

Justices of the Peace had a duty to make sure that the Poor Rate was collected from all those in the parish who could pay. The amount each person paid was means tested, and so varied from person to person. The Churchwardens and four overseers of the poor had to set poor children to work, purchase materials for their work and maintain the impotent poor. The Poor Rate was also used for the maintenance of the poor, hospitals and almshouses.

People were also paid to look after the sick, or to bring up children, and were paid either with money or goods like food or coal.

Collectors for hospitals and poor houses could obtain a licence to beg, known as a 'testimonial', and could travel to any part of the country to collect money. Some may have been professional collectors, like fund-raisers for charities and good causes today.

Government in Lincolnshire

The Crown maintained control in Lincolnshire, as it did in other counties, through Justices of the Peace and the Lord Lieutenant of the county, who was the most important man in the county. The Lord Lieutenant was a local noble or knight chosen by Central Government and who was known to be loyal and trustworthy to the Crown.

The main responsibilities of the Lord Lieutenant were to muster men to fight for the Crown in times of war, and to suppress rebellion. He was also expected to act as an adviser and pass on information to the Government on his county.

At the same time the Sheriff's powers declined: he was now responsible for seeing that justice was done in executing the Crown's writs, and the secure keeping of prisoners, but he no longer had the financial duties he once had. However, it was still a prestigious job, and it was a desirable position for many of the leading families in Lincolnshire.

Coroners were appointed to enquire into sudden deaths. The High Constable oversaw the Petty Constable, who took on duties in the townships.

Justices of the Peace (JPs) took on many of the responsibilities that had been those of the communal courts. JPs enforced criminal justice, except for the most serious crimes, and administered the county in the monarch's name. JPs were expected to order rioters to disperse, and act against gypsies, 'rogues' and 'vagabonds'. They could also punish rioters and make orders for arrangements for illegitimate children.

They could appoint overseers of the poor and license ale houses, and over time began to have more and more officials working for them. Again they were closely controlled by Central Government, and had to be loyal to the Crown.

Parliament

Although there was a House of Commons in Tudor times with elected MPs, it did not have the influence it does today. Its influence grew under the Tudors, but it could still not initiate anything, it could just reject or amend the Sovereign's proposals.

Elections were also controlled by Central Government. MPs were often from the same families as JPs, Sheriffs and Mayors, and it was no different in Lincolnshire. MPs were paid by the people they represented, and often the people who were chosen to be MPs were those that didn't charge, which meant that they would have to be well-off. Those with humble origins could become MPs if they had the right money, experience and preferment. There was a lot of interference from local gentry and the Crown as to who was put forward to become MPs. Often MPs would not represent constituents' interests or views, and many were not active.

In the boroughs freemen could vote, but this was a very small electorate. Therefore MPs were often not representative of the people who they were in Parliament to represent.

Local Government

There are some functions of Tudor local government that still exist today. Records survive which tell us much about local government in Lincoln. The documents are the minutes of the Common Council, known as the White Book. In it there are by-laws, such as the one which forbade the deposit of 'muck, earth, rammell (rubbish) or other filth' on the streets.

Local government was also there to collect taxes, and to maintain law and order as it does today. Constables were appointed to help with this. One issue for Tudor Lincoln was excessive drinking; it was believed that it was a major cause of disorder. Therefore in 1553, it is recorded that the number of tippling houses was limited to 30.

It was also a function of local government, as it is today, to maintain economic prosperity. This was difficult, as the decline of the cloth industry led to growing poverty in the city. One method that was used to help local people was to stop 'foreigners' or people from outside the city trading in Lincoln. An instance of this was recorded in 1524 when only local bakers were allowed to sell bread. Also to alleviate conditions for the poor, and to prevent riots, there were price controls over bread, ale, candles, thatch, turf and wood.

There are many records of disputes in the documents. For example in 1554 David Brian was committed to ward for 14 days for calling the Mayor 'a false man and a butchering harlot and the aldermen (City officials) all false harlots'. He submitted and paid a fine of 40 shillings.

Prosperity in Lincolnshire towns

Lincoln enjoyed a reversal in its decline from the 1560s, and so could spend more money on education, charity, entertainment and the ceremonial.

However, most of the major towns in Lincolnshire were in decline in the sixteenth century. In Boston, for example poverty was a big problem. In Stamford also in 1574 it is recorded that there was high unemployment and poverty.

The population in the towns was not increasing by much, in stark contrast to the villages where in some cases the population was increasing by 50-100%.

Education

Opportunities for education for children and young people in the Tudor period were better in Lincolnshire than elsewhere in the country. The number of schools increased during the sixteenth century: many schools were either founded or resuscitated during this time.

Many of the schools taught classical Latin and Greek. There were two types of Latin: 'Old' Latin was the Medieval Latin used by the legal system, which

was unaltered from the thirteenth century. The other was Latin from antiquity which was introduced to Britain shortly before 1485.

The education system was better for boys than it was for girls: often Latin was thought to be a subject not suitable to be learnt by girls. Reading and writing in English, arithmetic and accounts, and occasionally manners and reverent behaviour were also taught in schools.

Many schools in Lincolnshire were set up in Medieval times, and by the early fourteenth century there were twelve grammar schools across the county.

By 1585 there were schools in Horncastle, Boston, Grantham, Bourne, Louth, Barton on Humber, Grimsby, Kirton in Lindsey, Strubby, Alford, Gainsborough, Market Rasen, Stamford, Spilsby, Wainfleet, Moulton, Wrangle, Bolingbroke, Laughton and Sleaford. By 1594 there were 33 schools, and a decade later there were 85 townships and parishes which had schoolmasters. They were not evenly spread: there were more in the richer areas in the southern and eastern parts of the county.

In the early part of the Tudor period people did not often own their own books, apart from the clergy and a few laymen. In Lincolnshire the books owned were religious or legal in nature. Some did have linguistic or literary interests, but they were rare. But this started to change as the sixteenth century progressed. It seems that Tudor people became more interested in education as time went by, and saw it as being increasingly important. As well as founding more schools, we have evidence in the wills people left, by which they left money to schools and education.

Sources and further reading

Cameron, K., *A Dictionary of Lincolnshire Placenames*, English Placename Society, 1998.

Hodgett, Gerald A.J., *Tudor Lincolnshire*, History of Lincolnshire VI, 1975.

John Samuels Archaeological Consultants, *Archaeological Field Evaluation Report, The Haven Cinema Site, South Square, Boston*, March 2000.