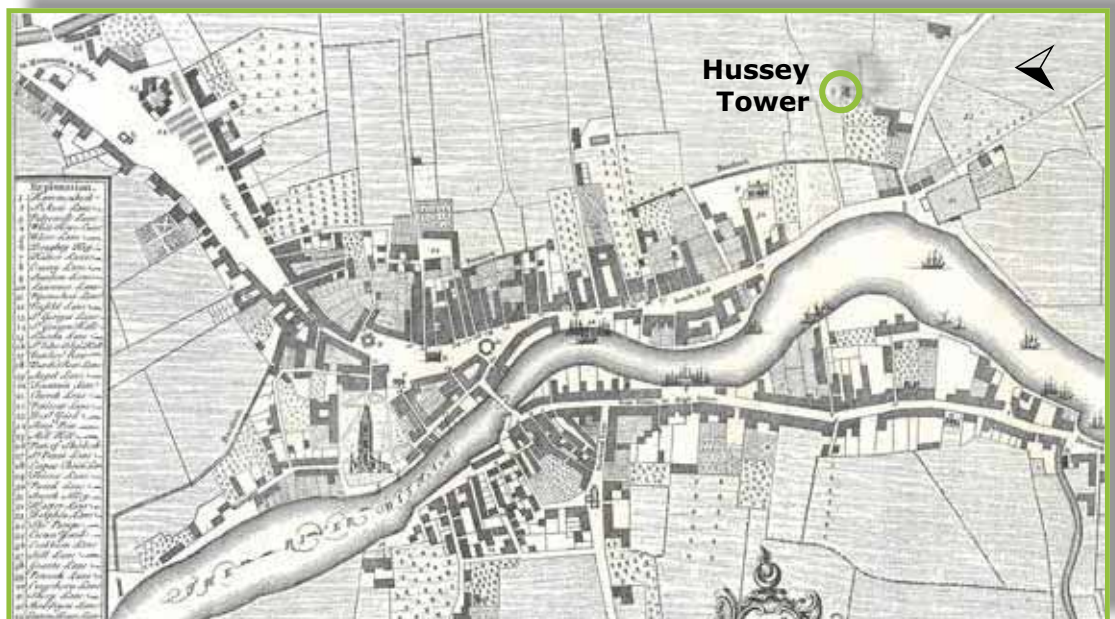




## Medieval Boston

### Boston as a port and market centre

During the medieval period Boston was an important sea port with goods being imported from and exported to Europe. At that time the coast was nearer to the town than it is today and the wide estuary of the River Witham meant that large ships were able to load and unload their cargoes on the quayside in the town, or transfer them to smaller boats for transporting further inland along the river. The wool produced by Lincolnshire's many monasteries was central to this trade. Wool, iron and lead from England were exchanged for furs and falcons from Norway, wine from France and Italy, cloth from the Low Countries and spices and other exotic items from the eastern Mediterranean. Because of this trade Boston became a very wealthy town. Its bustling markets and fairs attracted people from all over the country, including the king's own servants who came to buy luxury goods for his royal residences. By the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century (the late 1200s) there were many merchants from northern Europe (Hanseatic merchants) living and operating in the town. Although there was some decline in the later medieval period, the town remained a focus for overseas trade and its economy was still



Hall's Map of Boston 1741



relatively buoyant. The investment in some of its buildings built at that time, including the tower of St Botolph's church (The Stump) and the Guildhall are evidence of this.

Boston's market place and streets were lined with shops and workshops. Particular trades tended to group together and medieval street names such as Butcher Row and Fysshe Row often reflected this. Because everyone wanted to front on to a street or the market place the individual plots were long and narrow and were arranged with their shortest sides facing the street with regular alleys giving access to their rears. The buildings were built directly on to the street and had long gardens behind them that were used for growing vegetables and keeping animals. These 'burgage plots' can still be seen in the way that many of the town centre properties are arranged today. They are especially clear on the eastern side of the marketplace where numerous little alleyways run between the blocks of buildings.

In the earlier part of the medieval period the town was enclosed by a moat called the Barditch, but as the population of the town grew houses began to be built outside it. The Barditch, which had an earth bank along its inside bank, ran down the east side of the main part of the town. It joined with the river to the north and the south. It served as the town's sewer and must have been very smelly, especially in the summer. It can be seen on Hall's map of 1741. Hussey Tower was built outside the Barditch in about 1450 – 60.



**Jettying at Shodfriars Hall**

### **Boston's buildings**

Nearly all the buildings in the town were made of timber and earth. Their upper storeys were often 'jettied' out so that they overhung the street and provided more space in the upstairs rooms.

Stone was used for important buildings such as the churches but because it had to be brought from a long way away it was too expensive for



ordinary use. Brick began to be used in the 14<sup>th</sup> century but that too was an expensive material which was only used by wealthy people. A few medieval timber buildings still survive in the town, some of them hidden behind later extensions and changes. Pescod Hall in Mitre Lane and Shodfriars Hall in South Street both date from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, although Pescod Hall was taken down and rebuilt in the 1970s and Shodfriars Hall was much altered by the Victorians in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Both of these buildings belonged to quite wealthy people. The houses of poor people were more flimsily built and have not survived.



**Blackfriars Arts Centre**

### Religious life

Religion was a central part of medieval life, and everyone strongly believed in heaven and hell. They also believed that before they would be allowed to enter heaven after they died they would have to spend time in purgatory being cleansed of any sins that they had committed during their lives. People also believed that if prayers were said for their souls when they

died they would need to spend less time in purgatory and get to heaven sooner. They therefore gave money and possessions to churches and monasteries to pay for prayers to be said for their souls and for those of their family members after they died.

Because of this the churches and monasteries in Boston were very important to the people of the town. St Botolph's church (Boston Stump) was the parish church of Boston as it still is today but the town was also served by monasteries. Monasteries in towns were called friaries because they were homes to communities of friars. The friars carried out preaching duties in the town. The Blackfriars Arts Centre was once the dining hall of the Dominican friars, and Boston Grammar School now stands on the site of the Franciscan friary.



A cemetery was discovered to the east of the Franciscan friary where many foreign merchants and wealthy families were buried. The Austin friars built their friary to the south of the Franciscans', although the exact location is not certain, and the Carmelites had their friary to the west of High Street, on the opposite side of the river. The Knights Hospitaller also had a church and a hospital on the outskirts of the town, where poor people as well as the sick were cared for.

### Medieval guilds

Guilds were an important part of medieval life. They were groups of merchants or craftspeople, often working in the same trade, who joined together into clubs or societies to support each other and to protect each other's interests. The guilds controlled the way that trade was carried out in the town, and you could only operate your business if you were a guild member. Many wealthy wool merchants belonged to the powerful guild of St Mary. The guilds built their own meeting places in the town. St Mary's owned the Guildhall in South Street which is now the museum and Tourist Information Centre.



**Boston Guildhall**

It was built out of brick in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century. Shodfriars Hall is also believed to have been built as a guildhall.

The guilds were involved in the administration of the town, organised feasts and took part in religious festivals and other events. They also provided a lot of support to the church and the friaries, which meant that prayers would be said for the souls of their members after they died. By paying to be a guild member, therefore, you were looking after yourself and your family both while you were alive and when you died.

