Light on Horncastle in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

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The soke and manor of Horncastle together with the advowson of the rectory belonged to the bishops of Carlisle from before 1229 until its surrender to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in the mid nineteenth century. During most of that time the manor was held by lessees, often on long leases, who were rarely local men. Administration was in the hands of Stewards, themselves non-resident, sometimes holding stewardships over a number of manors, and the resultant loss and decay are clearly demonstrated by some of the Carlisle and other records.

Repairs to buildings had not been taking place over long periods, and by the early seventeenth century many premises were in a state of ruin. Thus the Corn Mill was in ruin by 1648, when it was noted in the supplement to the Parliamentary Survey:

Wee present that there is a double cornere water Milne standing upon the River Baine with a close called Milne Holmes . . . . and wee further saye that the saide Milne is in grete ruine and will not be repaired under £100 or £150.3

The duty to grind corn at the lord's mill had, from the evidence of the town terrier of 1639, been allowed to lapse:

To the 8th article wee saye that for ought wee knowe the tenants may grind where they please, and are not tyed to the Boro's Milne.2

The parish church and many cottages had been allowed to fall into a state of disrepair:

From 35 poore cottages most of them miserably ruinous and ready to droppe downe in the possession of several menne . . .

To the 23rd Article wee saye and present that the chancel of the church of Horncastle is very much out of repair and hath been formerly repaired by the Bishop or his tenant.3

Damage to properties caused by fire and the elements was in many cases probably not properly repaired, as claimed by the Bishop of Carlisle. Exceptionally severe storms were mentioned in the parish registers:

Upon Monday the 27th January 1627 was a great Tempest of Winde the like not often hath beene in any age; likewise upon the Friday the 4th November 1636 in the nighttime there happened a more fearfull winde then before.4

There was a widespread fire in the town in 1660. It caused so much damage that the Horncastle justices issued a Fire Brief or Letter of Request which enabled people with damaged premises to go round the town collecting money for repairs without being prosecuted for begging. There is no record of the Lessee helping with repairs.5

After the beginning of the seventeenth century the lessees of the manor were from surrounding estates: the Dymokes of Scrivelsby, the Snowdens of Horncastle, and, later, the Banks family of Revesby Abbey. In 1602 the Bishop of Carlisle leased the manor of Horncastle to Sir Edward Dymoke for a term of twenty one years at a rent of £100 per annum. In 1623 the Bishop leased the manor to Abigail Snowden of Horncastle for the longest of three lives (Rutland, George and Scoope Snowden) 'on payment of the valuable consideration of £120 per annum'. Rutland Snowden was in trouble during the Commonwealth for supporting the Royalist cause, and in November 1643 his estate was valued by Cromwell's Commissioners as being worth £1880, and he was fined one tenth 'for having adhered to and assisted the forces against the Parliament'. He was also accused 'of having more wives than one'. The Commissioners sequestrated the lease of the manor, which was not recovered by the bishops of Carlisle until after the Restoration, when, in 1664, the old charters relating to the manor were confirmed by Charles II.6

It is very probable that the poor state of the church already referred to was in some measure due to the fact that the great tithes had been appropriated to the See of Carlisle, as the supplement to the Survey of 1648 discloses:

To the first question we answer that the rent of £92.10.0 reserved upon Mrs. Snowden's lease issued out of the Demeenes and Manor only of Horncastle and not anything out of the Impropration or Tithes as in the former Survey is evident and for that we also make known that during the 4th time William Bishop of Carlisle in respect of the great charges he was in succouroing to those that dayly fled to his Castle of Ross to avoid the Scottish invasions had by Henry then Bishop of Lincoln the Rectory of Horncastle appropriated unto the See of Carlisle . . . . 8

The town of Horncastle was occupied by both Royalist and Parliamentary forces in 1643, and there can be little doubt that material damage must have occurred to property during that time, particularly as troops were billeted there after the Battle of Winchelsea:

. . . After the fight and chase was over Horse and Foote though very weary marched on towards Horncastle where my Lord of Manchester lay this night with all the Foote, his Horse (cavalry) being sent to their old quarters in townes adjoining . . . . 9

Buildings would be requisitioned for food kitchens, dressing stations, and all the attendant operations of an army on the move.

Illness and epidemics added to the problems of the time. In 1631 176 people died between May and September.10 Poor sanitation was undoubtedly contributory to such mortality. Records show that there were large dunghills in the streets, tanners were washing hides in the two rivers which supplied the town with water, and butchers were disposing of their refuse such as beasts entrails by throwing them into the rivers and leaving them on the market place after the close of business. Open drains were also a menace. In an effort to bring about improvement the Great Court of the manor produced a new set of forty nine Byelaws in 1673 covering management of the open fields as well as sanitation.12

Flooding has always been a problem in Horncastle, situated as the town is in the centre of the catchment area of the Bain valley. The Bailiff's accounts show that flooding of lands in the manor had resulted in loss of rents.

To the rent of a parcel of land called Candall late in the tenure of John Piggott at 8 shillings of which received nothing this year because total wasted by water by the oath of the accountant.13
The effect of floodwaters on mud-and-stud cottages with earth floors is not difficult to imagine. The Byelaws of 1673 dealt with drainage works to be carried out to avoid flooding:

That the Constables of the said towne of Horncastle after notice given them by the Jury of the said towne doe cause gravel to be laid at the tops of Langton Layme to turne the water into the sewer thereunto adjoyning and also doe likewise cause gravel to be laid in the way coming from Thimbleby to turne the current of water into the River of Temsworth or any other place accustomed when and soe often as neede shall require and doe likewise cause the fields of the said towne to be drained when and soe often as neede shall require in paine of 20 shillings.

The area mentioned in the byelaw is still the most troublesome part of the town during flash floods. The River Temsworth no longer exists, and was undoubtedly a watercourse flowing into the River Bain near the weir.

In 1653 there were 164 households in Horncastle, rising to 250 by 1674, but by 1723 the number had reduced to 220, probably because dwellings which became damaged were abandoned and not repaired or rebuilt. The seventeenth century, apparently, had seen little substantial building in the manor.

There is some interesting evidence that the gradual decay of properties continued into the eighteenth century when the manor was leased to the Banks family of Revesby. In the sixteenth century the Revesby Estate was owned by the Howard family, and Craven Howard built a house there in 1663. When he died the estate was sold in 1714 to Joseph Banks of Sheffield, an attorney and moneylender. On the 19 July 1732 the manor of Horncastle was leased to Joseph Banks. Joseph's son William was granted the lease in 1750, but only after some very acrimonious letters had passed between Banks and the Bishop of Carlisle.

The letters from William Banks were written for him by his wife Sarah 'because he was ill with a nervous complaint', and Sarah also had to sign the letters on his behalf. The correspondence was lengthy, and of interest because of the light it throws on the condition of the property within the town of Horncastle, and references to the Court House. The first letter dated 6 June 1750 was written from Revesby Abbey and addressed to the Bishop at Rose Castle, Cumberland, asking what his terms were for a renewal of the lease.

Your Lordship will no doubt acquaint him (Wm. Banks) with the terms, not doubting but therein your Lordship will consider ye nature of ye estate which consists by much the greater part in old houses which are very expensive in repairing, and sadled with a very large reserve rent, and likewise with repairs of the chancel of the church, and maintaining 700 yards of the Haven Bank, which together last yeare cost upwards of £100 .

The Bishop replied on 29 June 1750:

Your insinuation that the greatest part of the estate consists of old houses had little weight with me. The houses I apprehend are many, and if any of them be ruinous it is the fault of the Lessee who had not kept them in repair according to the covenant. The Court House I am told is suffered to go to ruine, but why I cannot understand. The reserve rent is £92.10.0 per annum, a burthen surely not to be complained of, as by that payment I am informed the Lessee enjoys a yearly estate which exceeds five times that sum.

The next letter from William Banks is dated 7 July 1750, and reveals two interesting points, namely the short time letters took to travel between Lincolnshire and Cumberland, and the fact that Quarter Sessions had until the mid eighteenth century still been held at Horncastle.

As to the bad condition of the Court House, he (Wm. Banks) says it has always been repaired hitherto by the County as it was made use of by them for the Sessions, the shops underneath he repairs. The County of late have come to some new regulations in regard to their Sessions and have refused to repair the Court House.

The argument persisted through the summer, for on 5 September 1750 William Banks again wrote to the Bishop at Rose Castle:

...As for saying the lease chiefly consists of old houses, it not only does, but of such as are of the worst kind of old houses, the walls of wood and clay, the covering of thatch ....

The Bishop then replied stating further letters were unlikely to prove fruitful, and suggested William Banks send his agent to negotiate when the Bishop visited Hutton Bushell in Yorkshire. The meeting took place, but no definite agreement was reached, and William Banks suggested an arbitrator be appointed. The Bishop would not agree to this, but some progress was eventually made, for on 12 October 1750 the Bishop wrote from Hutton Bushell offering to accept six hundred pounds from William Banks for a new lease on three lives.

...And greatly to my loss I will accept £600 your offer for adding a new life and changing one of the two present in your lease ....

The lives in the new lease were Mrs. Grace Hutchinson of Doncaster, Master Banks and Master Richard Shepherd. The offer was concluded and a new lease drawn up and signed on the 25th October 1750.

When William Banks died in 1761 he left the Revesby estates and leases to his son Joseph then a student at Oxford University. The latter became Sir Joseph Banks Bart., President of the Royal Society, Knight of the Bath, and a member of the Privy Council. In spite of his wide national interests Sir Joseph always maintained a close interest in the town of Horncastle, and leased the manor throughout his lifetime. He negotiated a fresh lease in 1811 which he held until his death in 1820.

The situation in Horncastle altered dramatically under Sir Joseph's influence. He sat as a magistrate on the Horncastle Bench when in residence at Revesby, and built a house in the High Street so that he could attend to his town interests.

In 1767 the rights to hold Market Stainton Beast Fair on the 29 October each year were put up for sale by a Mr. Dickinson who was Lord of the Manor there, the price being two hundred guineas. A subscription list was opened in the town by the tradesmen who raised £110.18.3, and Joseph Banks not only gave permission for the market to be held in his manor, but also subscribed the outstanding £100 so that the Fair rights could be purchased. The Fair is still held each year.

The following year Joseph Banks sailed with Captain Cook on a voyage to the South Seas, but on his return he quickly resumed interest in his Revesby Estate and Horncastle manor. In 1792 he was active in sponsoring the building of the Horncastle Canal from Horncastle to Tattershall, and when work ceased because of lack of money he, together with Lord Fortescue, leased the Navigation Company £20,000 on security of the tolls. At the same time Joseph Banks set in hand drainage works in
Horncastle and the town’s manorial allotments in Wildmore Fen. He also sponsored a Bill in Parliament for enclosure of the open fields in Horncastle and Wildmore Fen which was passed in 1801, and by 1805 the Award was virtually completed. This made land readily available on the market for building purposes, and the old mud-and-stud cottages with thatch quickly gave way to brick and tiled houses. The canal was completed and opened in 1820, and trade quickly increased. Coal was imported at low rates, and many small industries were started and flourished.

When the National School was started in Horncastle in 1814 Sir Joseph gave the Committee a plot of land near the Manor House on which to build (subject to a nominal yearly rent of ten shillings). He also donated twenty-four ash trees, five elms, one maple and one beech from his estate at Revesby to provide timber for the building, plus a donation of £94.15.0.

In 1789 Sir Joseph became concerned about the annual outbreaks of smallpox in Horncastle and district, and called a public meeting at the Bull Hotel on 28 October 1789 when it was resolved to establish a Dispensary in the town by public subscription. It was opened on rented premises adjacent to the Church in December of the same year. Each year until his death Sir Joseph sponsored an annual Ball at the Bull Hotel Assembly Room, which was attended by many of the county gentry, and provided a useful contribution to funds for the Dispensary. In 1792 he moved the Beast Market which had previously been held in the Bull Ring, down to the Wopk adjacent to the Sheep Market. The Vestry then had the Bull Ring paved with stones and cobbles for the sum of twenty pounds. In 1802 Sir Joseph levied tolls of one penny per head for all cattle and twopennep for all horses exposed for sale, and set out at length his justification for raising such tolls.

Sir Joseph was interested in cures for animal diseases, and encouraged a local doctor in his experiments:

Doctor Harrison to have a small piece of land next to Mr. Harrison’s yard near the watermill rent free to try his experiments in the diseases of sheep.

In 1794 Sir Joseph outlined plans for the defence of Lincolnshire against the threatened invasion from France, advocating widespread use of cavalry in the Lincolnshire countryside, and he supported the setting up of the Horncastle Volunteer Corps in 1803.

By the time Sir Joseph died in 1820 the town of Horncastle had been transformed.

APPENDIX OF ADDITIONAL MATERIAL FROM THE CARLISLE RECORDS

The Snowden family was not above encroaching upon the lord’s waste and annexing some of his land:

And one faire house built upon the Bishop’s waste by Mr. Scrope Snowden in which divers tenants dwell having Mr. Kent’s Mill close west, Bishop’s lands north, the Horse Fair south and east.

The Horse Fair referred to is now called the Bull Ring. There are a number of similar entries relating to encroachment on the lord’s waste:

One little house or cottage built on the lord’s waste beside the Towne’s Butt.

The archery butts referred to were situated to the north east of the town adjacent to Low Toynton Road.

The market authorised by charter in 1230 to be held on Wednesdays, had at some time before 1648 changed to Saturdays, probably because Boston and Louth markets were held on Wednesdays.

To the 18th article we say the Towne of Horncastle is a market towne having a weekly market kept therein every Saturday. And we further say there are yearly fayres kept (viz) on the 11th June and 8th August, and the small fayre on the 12th July. And market held together with the waifs strays felons gods and the profits of the Courts belonging to the said manor now worth per annum £40.00.00.

There is a description of the Manor House in the Survey of 1648. That house was badly damaged by fire about 1760 when the present house was built. Some of the original green sandstones can be seen in one of the walls.

We present and say that there is a capital message or mansion house with a large Barne Stables and other necessary buildings abt it all and the said capital message is now inhabited by Mrs. Abigail Snowden Widow lessee of the premises. The said capital message or house is built of Tymbor Stones and Lime and there are orchards gardens and yards abt the same containing 2 acres which together with one close called the Oaks and five other closes adjoining said in all 36 acres or thereabouts worth yearly £52.0.0. There are also 75 gadds of land and meadow.

For a very short period of time the see of Carlisle gave up ownership of the manor and sold it to Lord Clinton, then Lord High Admiral. He compounded with copyholders and made them freeholders, thus improving the rents from the manor. When Queen Mary came to the throne Lord Clinton was forced to return the manor to the see of Carlisle.

Memorandum. That the whole manor signorie and soke of Horncastle was rented formerly viz; tempore Edward Sixth Regis at 28 pounds per annum. And was then by Lyncence obtained from the Crowne, sold by the Bishop of Carlisle to the Lord Clinton then Lord Admiral who improved the rents of the demesne lands and raised them at the rates at which they now stand. And having compounded with the Copyhold Tenants and made their tenures to be Freehold, advanced the quit rents or other rents to £42.10. The said Lord Clinton in the reign of Queen Mary was forced to reconvey the said manor and lands to the Bishop of Carlisle who hath ever since continued the saidy improved rents for which cause there is not to be expected an improvement would be returned proportionable to the present rent reserved as in other Manors is to be found.

NOTES
The following abbreviations are used throughout:

L.A.O. Lincolnshire Archives Office.
7. Royalty Composition Papers - First Series, The News newspaper dated 23 May 1664 (Issue No. 42) quoted by Weir in his History of Horncastle (Horncastle, 1820), p. 114. See also Appendix to this article.
9. Lincoln City Reference Library, Boxes A74 & A77-A906 containing pamphlet ‘Contemporary Account of Battle of Winiceby’.

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10. L.A.O. Horncastle St. Mary, Par. 1/1; Par. 10/1 (Horncastle Vestry Minutes, 1672-1786).
11. L.A.O. Misc. Dep. 36, Horncastle Court Leet Byelaws and Paines, 10 April 1673. The Byelaws are in very poor condition, damaged by fire and damp before deposit, and very fragile, but the writer has a transcription in his possession taken some years ago when they were in better condition.
12. ibid.
16. Revesby Estate Records, I am indebted to the late Commander C.W.P. Lee for permission to examine documents in Revesby Estate Office, and to make transcriptions therefrom.
18. ibid.
19. Documents relating to purchase of the Fair are in the Banks-Stanhope Papers deposited with the Spalding Gentlemen’s Society in their museum at Spalding. I am grateful to the Curator for being given facilities to examine them.
20. L.A.O. TLE.1/1/1-10; History of Horncastle & Tattershall Navigations J. N. Clarke manuscript.
22. See various editions of White’s Lincolnshire Directory from 1826.
25. L.A.O. Horncastle St. Mary Par. 10/1, Vestry Minutes 13 Feb., 1783.
27. ibid.
30. ibid.
32. ibid; Patent Roll Mary I. 28/11/1553.