The Industrial Heritage of Boston in 1965 and 1995

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In 1993 the Association for Industrial Archaeology (AIA) as part of its Sites and Monuments Initiative for England launched a programme to record industrial monuments in the country. This programme is known as the Index Record of Industrial Sites (IRIS). The Industrial Archaeology Committee of the Society for Lincolnshire History and Archaeology has been involved with this project since it began and indeed ran one of the pilot schemes that tried out some of the earliest versions of the IRIS forms.

The Society has continued to take a leading role in the IRIS project and is one of the more successful local societies in forwarding data to the project co-ordinator. One of the main sources of information for the project has been the record cards from a previous industrial archaeology survey conducted by the Council for British Archaeology (CBA) in the 1960s. A number of local historical and archaeological societies were involved in this survey, including the Lincolnshire Local History Society.

The record cards from the Lincolnshire parts of the CBA survey provide an extremely useful body of information on the state of industrial monuments during the mid 1960s when the majority of the cards were completed. It is the aim of this article to take one discrete area of Lincolnshire as a representative sample and, by comparing the information on the CBA cards with the present surviving buildings, to draw some conclusions on the present state of the industrial heritage of Lincolnshire.

Boston was chosen as the area of study since it is a market town and port with a large number of surviving buildings from several distinct industries all within a reasonably small locality. In addition the CBA survey for Boston had been completed by one person, Neil Wright, and was of a consistent standard; that standard being particularly good.

Boston developed during the medieval period as a port and at its peak in the thirteenth century was second only to London. Although the port and the town declined in the later middle ages it enjoyed a revival in the eighteenth century. As the surrounding fens were reclaimed for agriculture it was through Boston that the produce was shipped up the River Witham to the newly industrialising towns of the Midlands and the North, and down the coast to the rapidly growing population centres around London. The population of Boston and Skirbeck doubled to 12,800 between 1801 and 1831, and in the next twenty years rose by almost half as much again to nearly 18,000; indeed Boston was the largest town in Lincolnshire for most of the first half of the nineteenth century.

In 1848 the railway arrived in Boston and there followed an economic decline in the town as the goods that had previously passed through the port were now carried by rail directly to their markets. The population of Boston and Skirbeck remained virtually unchanged for the next forty years and in 1891 stood at just over 19,000. This decline was halted with the development of the docks in the early 1880s, although this was a modest revival compared with the boom times earlier in the century. Boston remains an important Lincolnshire market town and port.

Boston has not enjoyed a reputation for holding its historic buildings in high regard, and certainly many buildings of note have been demolished or unsympathetically altered in the years since the Second World War. Nevertheless Boston has been no better and no worse than many other similar towns across the country and it is not unreasonable to use the example of Boston to illustrate how the state of the nation's industrial heritage has changed in the last thirty years.

Forty-seven buildings were considered in this survey, and all of them had been recorded between 1964 and 1968 during the CBA survey. Over two separate days in 1995 those buildings within this group that were still standing were visited as were the sites of those buildings that had been demolished in the intervening years. This most recent survey consisted of an external visual inspection of each building from the roadway, in addition a brief note of the condition and occupancy of the building was made.

Of the forty-seven buildings surveyed in the mid 1960s twenty-four (51%) were no longer standing in 1995. Twenty-three buildings did survive and of these 9% were either vacant or under threat; the other twenty-one (91%) being in use. At the time of the CBA survey thirty-seven (79%) of the buildings were in use but twelve (26%) of them were either empty or, if in use, were under threat of demolition.

Almost exactly half of those buildings recorded in the mid 1960s have now been lost. Had it not been for the CBA survey most of these buildings would have been demolished without any record being made. If these figures are representative, then fifty percent of England's standing industrial archaeological heritage has disappeared in the last thirty years. More positively however, surviving buildings are now less likely to be vacant or under threat than they were in the 1960s. One reason for this may be because society now places more importance on the historic environment than it did in the 1960s.

It is also instructive to consider how many of the buildings in each survey were still used for their original purpose. In the mid
1960s seventeen of the buildings (36%) could be considered to be serving their originally intended function. By 1995 only four of the surviving twenty-three buildings (17%) were still in their original use.

A new owner may well wish to use a building in ways that are quite different to its original purpose. The alterations that are then necessary can sometimes lead to the loss of original fixtures and fittings from the building, and can in extreme cases change the entire character of the building. This is a particular problem with large industrial buildings. The survey shows how markedly the number of industrial buildings that continue in their original use has declined since 1965.

The following buildings and structures have been chosen to illustrate the variety of Boston's industrial heritage as it survives today. The photographs taken in 1995 can be compared with the photographs taken in the mid 1960s. It is hoped that in another three decades it will still be possible to take photographs of these monuments to the county's industry and commerce.

**Boston and Skirbeck Iron Works, Fishtoft Road.** (Figs 1 and 2)

The works were founded in 1826 by a local millwright William Wred Tuxford. The firm made traction engines and agricultural machinery until it closed in 1892; by 1903 the site was disused. It was at these works that the first steam-powered and movable, combined thrashing and dressing machine was made. There was an early nineteenth century windmill in the yard and when it was demolished its eight-sailed head was removed to Heckington where it can now be seen working on Heckington Windmill.

Tuxford's Works occupied the block of land bounded by Fishtoft Road to the north and Maud Foster Drain to the west.
A number of buildings survive today. A range of offices and houses on the north-west corner of the site are now very much altered although still occupied as houses and a shop. The workshops on the east side of the site are still used by the present occupiers. The building range on the west side suffered a severe fire in 1964 and only the six northern bays survive today. They are illustrated in the photographs and are in use as workshops.  

**T. H. Lincoln’s Seed Warehouse, South Street.** (Figs 3 and 4)

Originally built as a granary next to the harbour in the late eighteenth century, it passed through several owners during the nineteenth century and in 1889 was occupied by a maltster and had a malting floor incorporated in the top of the building. For most of the twentieth century the building was owned by the Lincoln family and used as a seed warehouse. The building was listed as a Grade II Building of Special Architectural or Historic Interest on 28 November 1974, and remains so protected today. In 1976 it was purchased by Lincolnshire County Council and converted into the Sam Newsom Music Centre.

In 1965 the building was still in use as a seed warehouse and was in good condition. In 1995 the building remained in good condition and although the conversion in the 1970s led to the loss of some internal features and the addition of a completely new roof, nevertheless it did preserve a major part of one of the earliest granaries in Boston which may otherwise have been lost. Clearly visible in the 1995 photograph is the extra height added to the top floor above the segmental heads of the window arches for the additional beams to support the new roof.

**Shop on the corner of Straight Bargate and Market Place.** (Figs 5 and 6)

The building was built as a bookshop for Mr Morton in Italianate style in 1866. It originally had a curved door on the corner. The building was a snack bar in the mid 1960s, but was vacant when recorded in 1968. It was a shoe shop in 1994 and in 1995 was once more being refurbished and the lower floors were concealed with scaffolding.

The demands of modern retailing have led to the replacement of the original ground floor windows with large plate-glass display windows. The original ground floor windows were tall and round-headed, similar in appearance to the surviving upper floor windows. They can be seen in the 1964 photograph, the round heads concealed by the shop signs. The windows are smaller on successive storeys and these varying proportions are emphasized by the string courses and the decorative brickwork of the facade, thus giving an emphasis to the height of the building. The overall effect has been lessened by the loss of the ground floor windows.

**Packhouse Quay, South Street.** (Figs 7 and 8)

The quay is of red brick, some two hundred and thirty feet long (seventy metres) with a stone sill twenty feet (six metres) above the mean low water mark. It was the main landing stage for the port from the eighteenth century until the development of the Victorian dock complex in the early 1880s. The quay was improved as part of the harbour works carried out by the engineer John Rennie in 1814-15.

In 1965 the quay was used as a car park and had become slightly overgrown. In 1995 the structure was in a very similar condition and continues to be used as a car park. The front edge of the quay including the sill was very overgrown.

**GNR Offices at the Locomotive Depot, Broadfield Lane.** (Figs 9 and 10)

Built in 1848 these were some of the earliest of the Great Northern Railway Company buildings in Boston. Until the main
line running north to York was finished most of the GNR staff were based at Boston. These offices housed the company’s Locomotive Engineer and served as its Locomotive Department until 1853 when the locomotive headquarters were transferred to Doncaster. After that date the depot at Broadfield Lane continued to serve the southern Lincolnshire section of the GNR and the offices were used by the Locomotive Works Manager until 1964.

In 1966 the offices were still in good condition although not in use. Since then they have deteriorated considerably. In 1995 the site was found to be derelict, several trees had established themselves adjacent to the buildings and most of the window glass had gone as had some window frames. The roof was in a poor condition and the rain-water goods needed attention. There had been attempts to secure the building with boarding, but this has been unsuccessful and the site continues to suffer the effects of vandalism. This building is at risk.  

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NOTES
2. The work within the county is being co-ordinated through the Lincolnshire Archaeological Sites and Monuments Record of the County Council. The national co-ordinator is Jane Robson who is based at Lancaster University.
3. The Lincolnshire Local History Society amalgamated with the Lincolnshire Architectural and Archaeological Society in 1966 to form the Society for Lincolnshire History and Archaeology.
4. For the most recent short account of Boston’s history see the Introduction in Neil Wright, Boston a Pictorial History (Chichester, 1994).
5. W. Page, ed., The Victoria History of the County of Lincoln Volume II (1906), p.359, for the population figures.
6. Consider the statement of Nicholas Antram, ‘Boston since the mid 1960s has suffered in terms of loss of buildings more than many towns, due partly to low property values and a lack of civic pride . . .’ Nikolaus Pevsner and John Harris, revised by Nicholas Antram, The Buildings of England: Lincolnshire, 2nd edn (1989), pp.154-55.
7. This increased importance can be seen in various government projects such as the revisions of the statutory lists of buildings of special architectural or historic interest that began in the late 1970s; by the issuing of Planning Policy Guidance Notes on archaeology, and on historic buildings and conservation areas in the 1990s; by the ongoing English Heritage project that is assessing archaeological monuments (including industrial sites) throughout England; and most notably by the creation of a Department of National Heritage in 1992.
8. This does include five granaries that were being used as seed warehouses in 1965.