The History of Lincolnshire Committee

R. A. Carroll

It seems appropriate, now that the final volume of the History of Lincolnshire has been published, to record something of the early history of the group that has now completed its original task. The launch of Charles Rawding’s book *The Lincolnshire Wolds in the Nineteenth Century* on 26 October 2001 marks the start also of a new project to produce worthwhile monographs on the county in all its aspects.

The idea of a history of the county was the brainchild of Dr Alan Rogers. Lincolnshire was one of those unfortunate counties for which there was neither a complete Victoria County History nor a detailed account of the county, usually prepared by an eighteenth-century historian, comparable to Hasted’s Kent, Plot’s Oxfordshire or Hutchin’s Dorset. Rogers was aware that Cheshire had set up a committee to remedy a similar deficiency and felt the Rural Community Council in Lincoln might lead a similar Lincolnshire project.

Accordingly in 1964 a proposal was put to the Lincolnshire Local History Society (LLHS), administered by the Rural Community Council to prepare a series of books that covered the county both chronologically and thematically; a summary of the state of knowledge on the chosen period or theme was the basic intention rather than a requirement to undertake original research. It was hoped that original work would flow from publishing the history.

The editorial board of the LLHS first met in the County Archives Office at the Castle in Lincoln on 12 January 1966 with Canon Binnall in the chair; the History of Lincolnshire Committee (HLC) was set up for the purpose and by 15 December 1967 it was possible for the earliest contributors to meet in Nottingham University. An important breakthrough was that Dr Joan Thirsk, then at Leicester University, agreed to act as General Editor.

Besides Dr Thirsk others present were Professor D. Bullough (Nottingham University), Dr Jeffrey May (also Nottingham University), Ben Whitwell (then keeper of the Lincoln City and County Museum), Mrs Dorothy Owen (Cambridge University), G. A. J. Hodget (King’s College London), Mrs M. Simpson (Leicester University) and Dr Rogers. It was reported at that meeting that £1200 had been promised towards printing costs from various donors, including the Pilgrim Trust, Lincolnshire County Council, the John H. Wright Trust in Lincoln, the Willoughby Memorial Trust and Nottingham University Research Fund; the Seven Pillars of Wisdom Trust generously undertook to make up any deficit between the Committee’s funds and publication costs.

There were expected to be eleven volumes, of which seven were already in active preparation and the early schedule implied that two volumes would appear in each of the three following years. Much discussion centred on an agreed format for the first book and its successor volumes; Bembo type 10 point on 11 was to be used on a specified page layout; there would be 50-60,000 words per book, each with eight line-drawings and eight pages of photographs in editions of 2000-2500 copies. Mrs Simpson agreed to prepare all the necessary maps after a long discussion had accepted a general premise that there should be eight full page maps and two pull-out maps, which would not exceed eleven inches by sixteen inches. (In the event this template for maps was only applied to Ben Whitwell’s volume.) Footnotes were to be confined to references only without lengthy discussion. It was agreed ‘with some reluctance’ that there would be no bibliographies since the relevant works would have been referred to in the footnotes.

It is interesting now to note that the volume on Saxon Lincolnshire was to have been written by Professor Bullough; Professor Hallam was to prepare a volume on Medieval Lincolnshire, social and economic, 1100-1500; Arthur Orton was to be co-author with Professor Clive Holmes on seventeenth-century Lincolnshire; D. Grigg was to cover the Agricultural Revolution; a book on the Established Church and Nonconformity was to be a joint venture of Canon Binnall and Rev. C. G. Bolam and the series would be wound up with volume eleven on nineteenth-century Lincolnshire, urban development, industrialisation, transport, etc. prepared by E. E. Gillett (Hull University).

It was estimated that the first book would cost £1800 to produce, made up of £100 printing costs, £100 for blocks, £100 publicity, £200 distribution costs, £100 for the author, General Editor £50, clerical and other expenses £50 and £200 to cover any extra costs, especially through wage increases in the printing industry. By the time of the appearance of the first volume the committee had received £1100, by far the largest contribution coming from the Pilgrim Trust. After expected sales of 80% of 2000 copies at 25/- each it was expected that there would be £1231 to be carried forward for the second volume. The earliest printers were Broadwater Press and, through Professor Finberg’s good offices, Leicester University Press gave useful advice on printing and formats.

By 1968 Dr Rogers had become Chairman and, since the group had no secretary, David Neal (WEA Organizer for South Lincolnshire) from Grantham had been recruited; meetings were now held at various sites in Lincoln. A more local involvement in the work had led to the inclusion of Tom Baker, Rex Russell, Michael Lloyd (then County Archivist), Ted Roberts (then County Librarian), G. R. Watson, who became treasurer, and Jim English (then Borough Librarian of Gainsborough). Dr Thirsk continued her involvement; the others who attended the first meetings in Nottingham had done so in the capacity of potential authors only. In 1969 a further £1300 had been received in grants and by then the author of volume eleven was to be Brian Loughborough after Mr Gillett had indicated that he could not undertake the whole of a volume and his offer to edit a book of essays by various hands had not proved acceptable. Canon Binnall had dropped out of volume nine but had offered his material for the use of Mr Watts; Professor Mingay had agreed to take over the task of writing volume eight (Agriculture). For the first time a twelfth volume to deal with the twentieth century was suggested.

The meeting held in August 1968 tried to deal with the vexed question of the ownership of copyright and the matter was referred to Messrs Andrews, solicitors, where Sir Francis Hill could be expected to provide an opinion. The outcome
was a decision that the Committee should hold the copyright on all its volumes. Much discussion from the earliest days also concerned the preparation of a county gazetteer to be compiled by Ben Whitwell; it seems that the costs of printing were the major stumbling block since it would have increased his volume by a further forty pages.

It was clear by 1970 that annual production of volumes had proved over-optimistic. For various reasons authors could not deliver acceptable copy to schedule and as the above shows quite a few of the original writers had dropped out and new authors had to make their own fresh starts. Professor Mingay had serious doubts about his being able to prepare the volume on Agriculture; it was agreed that Clive Holmes should work with Arthur Owen on a joint book on the seventeenth century while Mrs de Vaal and Professor Olney would combine in writing Politics and Society, 1700-1900. Professor Maurice Barley (Emeritus Professor, Nottingham University) joined with Dr Thirsk to become joint editors of the series.

Ben Whitwell’s survey of Roman Lincolnshire became in 1971 the first volume to see the light of day - two years after its hoped for publication. There had been considerable problems with the printer, who even asked to be allowed to increase his charges when the book was already at the page proof stage. A launch date was set for December 1970 but put back to 8 January 1971 at the Usher Gallery (Fig. 1). 2500 copies were printed, of which more than 700 had been ordered three months before publication.

Although it was originally expected that May’s book on Prehistoric Lincolnshire would be the second volume to be issued Mrs Dorothy Owen had proceeded so quickly with her study that it came out first. By mid 1972 the early hope that six volumes would already be in print had ceased to be valid and been superseded by an expectation that one book would appear each year. Doubts were expressed whether Professor Bullough would complete his book and, since Mr Loughborough had changed jobs, if he would be in a position to continue. Mr Molyneux had been approached to write the final volume on the twentieth century; his later doubts led to an approach to Mr P. R. Shorter. At the October 1972 meeting Mr David Roberts offered to write and illustrate a work on the architecture of the county and this was gratefully received. It was also decided to ask Mrs Catherine Wilson (Director of the Museum of Lincolnshire Life) and Mr Michael Honeybone to join the Committee. They both agreed.

Other volumes appeared at odd intervals; the second volume to appear (but following good academic precedent) was volume five, Dorothy Owen's study Church and Society in Medieval Lincolnshire. Nothing else appeared until Hodgett’s Tudor Lincolnshire in 1975, quickly followed in the next year by Jeffrey May’s Prehistoric Lincolnshire. Meanwhile (at the May 1974 meeting), Mr Ambler had agreed to write the volume, which eventually was entitled Churches, Chapels and the Parish Communities of Lincolnshire, 1660-1900; Professor Bullough indicated that he needed another three or four years to complete his contribution. At the end of 1974 Dr Thirsk withdrew since the death of Professor Finberg had greatly increased her workload at Oxford. A dinner was held in her honour at the White Hart in Lincoln.

Much Committee discussion centred on distribution and storage, problems that have been a constant source of worry over the years. In 1968 Ian Beckwith, Neville Birch and Philip Fanner had been asked if they could offer help; by the end of the year Mrs W. Craven had volunteered to help. The early volumes were stored in the Lincolnshire County Council premises in Newland, Lincoln and, by the late 1970s when the County Library had moved to its new headquarters in Lucy Tower Street the books were kept there. At the end of 1972 it was felt that the Committee needed a Publicity Manager. After several changes in the book distribution team Mrs Catherine Everson was recruited in 1975 and in February 1977 Paul Everson was welcomed as the first Publicity Officer.

No book appeared during the four years after Dr May’s volume. Difficulties were being experienced over several books; by the end of 1975 Neil Wright had begun work on

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Fig. 1. (From left to right) G. R. Watson (Treasurer, History of Lincolnshire Committee), David Neal (Secretary), Dr Alan Rogers (Chairman), Miss Flora Murray (committee member), Ben Whitwell (author), C. R. Ireland (Chair, Lincoln City Libraries Committee), Tom Baker (committee member).

Usher Gallery, Lincoln, 8 January 1971 at the launch of the first book published by the History of Lincolnshire Committee (photograph by kind permission of The Lincolnshire Echo).
the volume *Lincolnshire Towns and Industry, 1700-1914*, with Mr Loughborough to provide assistance if willing; David Roberts wrote to report that he had moved to Scotland but his work would be ready by December 1975. The study of twentieth-century Lincolnshire was likely to fall by the wayside; Mr Shorter felt unable to write the whole book by himself and, in early 1977, suggested people who might be approached to write individual chapters. It was then agreed to consider a manuscript if it were forthcoming. In 1977 Tom Baker told the Committee of his impending retirement and it was unanimously agreed that he be asked to continue on a personal basis.

Although the HLC was part of the SLHA there were rumbles of discontent that relations were not always as smooth as they might be. There were particular difficulties stemming from the HLC’s success at obtaining grants from bodies who were then unwilling to be responsive to requests from SLHA for help with their own separate publishing programme and also that there were two treasurers with two separate accounting procedures. It was agreed that the Chairman and Treasurer of SLHA be *ex officio* members of the HLC. Mr Wickstead and Mr Ambler were duly welcomed as SLHA Chairman and Treasurer respectively at the February, 1978 meeting and this arrangement has continued successfully ever since.

Four years then of fallow were succeeded by an intense burst of activity with T. W. Beattie’s *Agricultural Revolution in Lincolnshire* and Dr Richard Olney’s *Rural Society and County Government in Nineteenth Century Lincolnshire* (both 1979), Professor Holmes’ *Seventeenth Century Lincolnshire* (1980) and Neil Wright’s *Study of Lincolnshire Towns and Industry, 1700-1914* (1982). The volumes published in 1979 and 1980 were priced at £8.50 and £9.50; those of 1982 (Wright) and 1985 (Platts) at £12.50 and £13 each broke the single figure barrier and reflected the greatly increased costs of production and distribution by that time. Interestingly members of the SLHA were offered 45% discount for pre-publication offers, which was by far the most generous offer made up to that time. Additionally the Committee was pleased to learn in December 1979 that Dorothy Owen’s book had become the first of the series to sell out completely; in order to fulfil a continuing demand for the title it was agreed to produce a paperback version and this also appeared in 1981. This was a novelty since all the previous volumes had been published in hardback versions only.

Meanwhile it had been decided that Professor Bullough would not deliver his expected volume and Professor Hallam produced a manuscript that was deemed unacceptable by the General Editor. The twelfth volume was now to be prepared by Dr A. Clark. By the 1980s a successful and much appreciated agreement with Lincolnshire County Council kept the committee’s work on a sound financial basis; the county loaned sufficient sums to see through the issue of each volume; it says much for the status of the series and the speed with which copies were sold that each loan was paid back within a matter of months.

By this time a number of changes in personnel and other arrangements had taken place; the LLHS had recreated itself as the Society for Lincolnshire History and Archaeology (SLHA) in 1974; Tom Baker had retired but continued to serve; Ted Roberts retired in 1980 as County Librarian and the writer, his successor, took his place; Paul Everson served until his removal to Oxford; Arthur Owen joined Dorothy on the committee; Dr Dennis Mills joined in winter 1979 and found himself chairing the second meeting he attended, a post he maintained for a decade. Dr Mary Finch, then acting as County Archivist, and Terence Leach both joined the Committee in May 1980. Elizabeth Nurser, wife of the then
Chancellor of Lincoln Cathedral, had also joined and acted as editorial adviser; later this role developed and she has seen through the press all the final volumes, using her own typesetting facility and vast editorial experience. Ron Watson died in 1984 very suddenly and the committee had a succession of Treasurers; Maureen Birch took on the task of distribution arrangements and later combined it with being treasurer. Her husband Neville also joined the committee and, later as Chairman of the SLHA, helped to confirm the close association the HLC had with the parent body, the SLHA. After Neville’s retirement as SLHA Chairman his successor, Pearl Wheatley, has attended committee meetings and maintained this essential link.

In 1985 Dr Platt’s work *Land and People in Medieval Lincolnshire* appeared. By then the future of the twelfth volume was again under discussion. The Chairman, Dennis Mills, finally undertook to edit a volume made up of essays provided by a wide range of authorities on all aspects of Lincolnshire life in the twentieth century. This volume entitled *Twentieth Century Lincolnshire* proved to be the next to appear, in 1989. By far the largest (and dearest) work to appear in the series at over 400 pages it was the first occasion when a hardback and paperback version appeared more or less simultaneously. From Beastall’s volume (1978) all volumes had some form of bibliography; Platts’ had had fourteen such pages and now the new volume contained thirteen pages; a sensible reversal of the early decision.

After the production of nine volumes at an average of a book every two years the final three works took a further fifteen years. By the late 1980s Ben Whitwell’s account of the Romans in the county was out of print; it was decided to re-issue this volume in paperback format with a new introductory essay to take account of the archaeological research that had occurred since 1970. This version finally appeared in 1991.

By the 1990s and after the death of Maurice Barley the Committee was chaired by Professor John Beckett of Nottingham University. Of ‘the old guard’ only Jim English and Dorothy Owen (the vice-chairman to John) remained; of the second wave there remained Dennis Mills, Neville Birch and myself; we had been joined by Dr John Ketteringham, the late Christopher Starman, Dr Alan Vince, Chris Medley (who looked after distribution then) with Mr J. Battersby acting as Treasurer and Mr Derek Wellman, who remains the committee’s Secretary, aided by Susan Payne (née Noble) from the Lincoln Archives as Minute Secretary.

In 1998 Professor Peter Sawyer rewarded the Committee’s forbearance when his *Anglo-Saxon Lincolnshire* appeared twenty years after the initial invitation to write the volume; to some extent this study went against the original intention of a ‘snapshot’ of the state of research in the author’s particular sphere; much research had been undertaken during the gestation period and material yet to be published was also used in its preparation.

And so the series has now come to a conclusion with the much awaited study by Dr Rod Amblor of Hull University - *Churches, Chapels and the Parish Communities of Lincolnshire, 1600-1900*. It bears the date on the title-page of 2000 (although the official launch was delayed until 24 February 2001 (Fig.2) and it seems somehow appropriate that the end of the millennium should see the end of the first stage of the work of the Committee. It had been decided some time before the last two volumes appeared to create a monograph series that might cover a variety of aspects of the county’s history, topography and social life that perhaps crossed the boundaries of the periods used largely to determine the coverage of the volumes in the regular series. The first of these - Charles Rawding’s *The Lincolnshire Wolds in the Nineteenth Century* - appeared in October 2001.

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