

CHAPTER I

THE EARLY VICTORIAN SCENE

A casual visitor to Lincoln at the time of Queen Victoria's accession might have thought it little changed since the brothers Buck depicted it in their engraving of 1743. There was the cathedral dominating the scene, supported by the castle and the cluster of houses round them. This was the upper city, virtually consisting of the original Roman *Colonia*. On the steep hillside, virtually the second Roman enclosure, was the high street, the Roman Ermine Street, flanked by houses; and the street punctuated by church towers strode across the river Witham and the valley to the southern edge of the gap in the limestone ridge running north and south through the county. To the west of the high street was the inland port of Brayford Pool, the commercial centre of the city, with access by water both to the sea down the Witham, and to the river Trent and the Humber by the Roman Fossdyke canal. The most obvious changes of the century were that the western towers of the minster had lost their spires, and a little turret had been added to the eastern mound of the castle.

Yet on a closer view the city had changed much. There was new building, mostly of brick, contrasting with the older stone houses. There were new churches and chapels. Above all, there were the houses needed to accommodate a population that had doubled in the course of the century. Most of the new houses, however, were small and poor, and tucked away in yards and alleys, or spread along the banks of the waterways, and were not likely to be much noticed by tourists.

This growth of population was to continue at an increasing rate: between 1831 and 1871 there was an increase of 150 per cent. Most of the new inhabitants came from neighbouring rural areas, and most of them from the poorest classes. Richard Sibthorp commented on the changing scene:

10 February 1858. This old city is becoming increasingly populous, and one or two considerable branches of business have, within the last ten years, been introduced here and with great success. There is an iron foundry employing six or seven hundred workmen weekly, and doing an immense business; besides large corn mills. But on the whole, the poor are increasing, and its richer inhabitants diminishing; for, like most old cathedral towns, it used to be the residence of many independent persons, widow ladies, etc., and this class of inhabitants is quitting it. We are in hopes that a Loan Society would be of much use here.¹

¹ J. Fowler, *Life and Letters of R. W. Sibthorp* (1880), p. 126.

When Richard Mason retired from the town clerkship in 1855, he having been appointed in 1826, he too referred to the change. When he first came to Lincoln, he said, it was a mere straggling place of 7,000 or 8,000 inhabitants, and a trade which supplied the mere wants of the inhabitants. Now, the population comprised a race of intelligent merchants and tradesmen, and the tall shafts of the steam mills were emblems of advance in material wealth, with moral and social advantage. It was a triumph that the Stamp End Works could prosper, because coal and iron had to be brought to an agricultural district, and yet the foundry could beat those with coal and iron at their command.¹ He might have added that it was the railways that had made this possible; it was not a long haul from the coalfields of south Yorkshire, and in Lincoln were men of enterprise, a pool of labour, and wage rates related to agricultural rates.

Railways and factories were not then the commonplaces that they have since become. About 1857 Edward Peacock, a countryman and a small squire, described Lincoln as having become 'a semi-manufacturing town in the centre of an agricultural district'. But in spite of the daily train of operatives he saw extending three or four abreast for a distance of nearly half a mile, Lincoln was still an agricultural market: 'It is almost incredible what a vast quantity of horses and vehicles, to say nothing of numerous droves of other cattle, pass daily through the streets, leaving behind them unmistakable traces of their presence.'²

This predominantly agricultural atmosphere persisted until the later years of the century. In 1883 one of Charles Dickens' successors found a busy, thriving, brewing, malting town, with the reek of brewers' grain in the air, with horsy men, always ready for a deal or a bet, thronging its principal inns; and over the railway crossing its main street there was always going on a vigorous shunting of cattle trucks and pig waggons. But a different stage of existence marked each stage of ascent to the hilltop.³

The industrial revolution, if it can be so described, reached Lincoln a century after it reached the great industrial areas of the country. Its advent, accompanied by rapid increase of population due in part to increased opportunities for work and in part to the townward drift of surplus rural labour, changed the economic and social scene and completed that transfer of the centre of gravity from the upper to the lower city which had begun with the growth of agricultural markets at the

¹ *L.C.*, 26 October 1855.

² Peacock ms in my possession.

³ *All the Year Round*, 27 October 1883.

beginning of the century. Local leadership was taken by prosperous commercial men, mostly liberal and even radical, and many of them dissenters, quick to show resentment of the old social superiority of gentry and cathedral clergy, expressed in the single pejorative term 'uphill'. This geographical expression of social division continued until the geographical division of society was itself erased by the building of great housing estates both above and below hill in the years following the First World War. The term however can still be used by anyone wishing to air a prejudice against anyone or anything he dislikes.

All these changes came gradually and almost imperceptibly, and a visitor could continue to describe the city in terms which would have been appropriate in earlier times. The attempt to depict the city as it appeared just before the industrial development had made much mark is helped by a record left by a transatlantic visitor in 1857.

In that year, when Nathaniel Hawthorne was United States Consul in Liverpool, he made a pilgrimage to Boston in Lincolnshire.¹ He left Manchester at 1.45 p.m., travelling by the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway, and reached Lincoln shortly after 6 o'clock. The last stage of the railway line had only been opened in 1848;² before that, travelling by coach, it would have taken him all day. Arriving at the Midland station (now St Marks), with its Ionic portico, he found no cab – cabs had not arrived in Lincoln³ – and so he took the Saracen's Head omnibus for the few hundred yards' journey to the hotel. There he and his party were hospitably received, and he thought it looked comfortable enough, 'though, like the hotels of most old English towns, it had a musty fragrance of antiquity, such as I have smelt in a seldom-opened London church where the broad-aisle is paved with tombstones'. The entrance into the courtyard was through an arch, in the side of which was the door to the hotel. Inside, there were long corridors and an intricate arrangement of staircases 'amid which it would be no marvel to encounter some forgotten guest who had gone astray a hundred years ago, and was still seeking for his bedroom while the rest of his generation were in their graves'. He thought there was no exaggerating the confusion of mind that seized upon a stranger in the bewildering geography of a great old-fashioned English inn.

The hotel stood in the high street immediately without the Stonebow,

¹ See his *Our Old Home* (1890), I, 231–58. For the date see Julian Hawthorne, *Nathaniel Hawthorne and his Wife* (1885), II, 138.

² Below, pp. 113–15.

³ A cab first appeared on the streets in 1863, and though cabdriver and horse vanished in the following year, a cab-stand built in 1865 implies their reappearance. Uphill got a cab-stand on Castle Hill in 1877.

which had been the southern gateway of the medieval walled city. The city walls had gone, and many of the gates, but the mostly Tudor Stonebow stood across the street with a similar arch for foot-passengers on each side: 'a gray time-gnawn, ponderous shadowy structure, through the dark vista of which you look into the Middle Ages'. Although the street was narrow and contained many antique peculiarities, English domestic architecture had lost its most impressive feature: and he thought there were finer old towns than Lincoln – Chester, for instance, and Shrewsbury – with houses once the homes of the gentry. These he was later to see in the uphill city. His sentimental regrets were not shared by the local newspaper, which had hailed the most striking improvements in street architecture: many of the old shops in High Street, formerly of a most miserable and squalid appearance, had given place to others that would not disgrace any city in England.¹ Hawthorne was right in noting that the modern brick or stucco fronts hid the older houses behind them.

That evening, between 7 and 8 o'clock, his party set out to pay a first visit to the cathedral, ascending a street which grew steeper and narrower till at last it got to be the steepest street he had ever climbed – it reached a gradient of 1 in 4 – passing the Jew's House with a stone portal and carved ornaments, which had become a dwelling-place for poverty-stricken people.

Certainly, the Bishop and clergy of Lincoln ought not to be fat men, but of rare spiritual, saint-like, almost angelic habit, if it be a frequent part of their ecclesiastical duty to climb this hill; for it is a real penance, and was probably performed as such, and groaned over accordingly, in monkish times.

Entering the precincts of the cathedral through the Exchequer gate, one of the gateways of the once embattled Close, they saw the houses of Minster Yard, built as habitations of its dignitaries and officers: 'some of them are still occupied as such, though others are in too neglected and dilapidated a state to seem worthy of so splendid an establishment'. Except for Salisbury he remembered no more comfortable picturesque precinct round any cathedral.

The following morning they took a fly up the hill by the oblique ascent – the Lindum Road. They visited the cathedral, saw the castle – part of it still used as a prison – and the Roman Newport Arch: they saw, 'on the broad back of the hill' some stately and queer old houses and many mean little hovels; and little houses clustering in the castle moat looking like toadstools from the mould of a decaying tree.² He concluded, with

¹ *L.C.*, 23 June 1848.

² The ditches had been granted away in the time of Charles I. *M.L.*, p. 99.

exaggeration but with a hint of truth, that all or most of the life of the day had subsided into the lower town, and that only priests, poor people and prisoners dwelt in the upper regions.

Here were the fine old houses that he had missed below hill. Some of them had been the town houses of the gentry, who had come in for the Color Ball¹ or the high sheriff's ball, or on county business, until the improved turnpike roads made it less difficult to get to Lincoln and back home again in a day. The upper city was still the capital of the county and the diocese. The residentiary canons usually resided only during their statutory periods of residence, some three months in the year, then moving on to other preferments; and the other houses were, many of them, occupied by the widows and unmarried daughters of clergy and gentry, some professional men, and a few other residents of private means. Merchants of substance were finding their way into the circle. Hawthorne, it seems, did not meet any of the higher clergy on his visits to the minster. As a representative of a republican government (and lately rebels at that) he would hardly have been welcome; and certainly he would never have been received at the table of Chancellor Pretyman – if he were in residence – with a footman behind every chair.

If he had known, he could have stayed at the White Hart near the cathedral: it had (in 1844) been repaired, and a new front with a balcony put up. Dr Dibdin, the bibliophile, had complained before then that there was no inn in the neighbourhood of the cathedral at which a civilised traveller could stay.²

The next day, on his return to the Saracen's Head, Hawthorne found the high street enlivened with a great bustle and turmoil of people all the evening, because it was Saturday night, and having accomplished their week's toil and received their wages, they were making their small purchases against Sunday, and enjoying themselves as well as they knew how.

This was the social heart of the city, and the business centre too. The shops of the principal tradesmen, interspersed with private houses, homes of doctors and lawyers and retired people, and a few private boarding schools were within a stone's throw. The shops which had not yet been refronted had old-fashioned bow windows with small panes of glass in them, and doorways divided in the middle. Except on market days and on Saturday nights it was all sleepy enough, and one could walk up and down the high street and not meet more than three or four people.

¹ Below, p. 79.

² *Bibliographical Antiquarian and Picturesque Tour in the Northern Counties of England and in Scotland* (1838), I, 89.

Hawthorne was no doubt told during his stay that his inn was the Lincoln headquarters of Colonel Sibthorp, the eccentric tory M.P. for the city, the whig stronghold, the Reindeer, being opposite. The whig-radical interest had been much strengthened by the Reform Bill of 1832, which had enfranchised the middle-class citizens, the £10 householders, who now shared the franchise with the resident freemen, upon whose well-paid support Sibthorp especially relied. The gradual removal of the disabilities of the dissenters had, with the vote, given them self-confidence, and they were emerging from the back streets and building chapels and schools; and they found plenty of abuses in the Church of England to denounce. The bishop for the first time for centuries had a home near the city, and Bishop Kaye was to be seen from time to time as he went about his slow but steady campaign against absentee and pluralist clergy. After municipal reform in 1835 the whigs and radicals had captured every seat in the city council, and were busy removing ancient landmarks and upsetting time-honoured institutions. Habits of deference were being undermined, especially for the clergy: a cathedral dignitary could walk the length of High Street without a single man touching his hat to him. What would happen next?¹ But the next thing did not happen. Reaction set in.

Hawthorne went on to Boston. His journey could most quickly have been completed by the Great Northern Railway, whose line along the river bank had not long been open. Instead, observing in the guide book that a steamer ran on the river between Lincoln and Boston, he thought the river trip would be a pleasant variation on their usual mode of travel.

The steamer proved to be small, dirty and altogether inconvenient, the sky lowering, and, presently, an ugly wind from the German Ocean blowing in their teeth. He thought they never accomplished more than six miles an hour; and the authorities would have been horrified if they had, fearing that the wash of the boat would damage the banks. They were constantly stopping to take up passengers and freight anywhere along the green banks. This gave them plenty of time to see the objects on the shore, but unfortunately there was next to nothing to see, the country being an unvaried level, over the whole thirty miles, save only the cathedral, which at last rather faded out than was hidden by any intervening object. The river retained its canal-like aspect all along; and only in the latter part of its course did it become more than wide enough for the little steamer to turn itself round; at broadest, not more than twice that width. And so to Boston.

The steam packets were soon to be driven off the river, as the coaches

¹ Thomas Cooper, *Wise Saws and Modern Instances* (1845), II, 121.

were driven off the roads, by the railways. But before a steam packet first appeared on the Witham, about 1814, there was only the horse-drawn packet; and on the road the mail coach was the best transport to be had. Long afterwards, when railway travel had become commonplace for the upper classes, Charles Anderson of Lea near Lincoln recalled the conditions of travel in his youth. Men were content to jog along in jackboots on palfreys of sober and constitutional pace, or to crawl through miry lanes in leathern conveniences called coaches or flies, truly like flies in a gluepot:

Even in later times, within our own remembrance, leaving Lincoln by the mail at 2 p.m. supping at Peterborough at 9, the traveller, after composing himself for an uneasy slumber about Yaxley Barracks (from whence the waters of Whittlesea Mere might be seen shimmering in the moonlight) grumbling through a weary night at the obstinate legs of his opposite neighbour, and sorely pinched in the small of the back, was duly delivered, cold and cross, at the Spread Eagle, Gracechurch Street, about 5 the next morning. He had then the choice of going to bed, with feet like ice, in a fireless room, opening out on an open-air gallery (where a box was fixed for the barber to shave travellers), or of sulking in a fusty coffee-room till the waiters were astir and the world was aired. But the days of Yaxley Barracks, where the French prisoners used to make toothpicks and models of machines of the bones which remained of their dinners, are long gone by – Whittlesea Mere has been pumped dry by machinery, and the Iron ways have superseded the old North Road.¹

Gentry and business men were relieved of this discomfort by the railways. Within a few years they could reach London in little over three hours instead of thirteen, spend a few hours there, and return within the day. Most people, however, had no occasion to go, and could not afford the cost. It was a sensation when cheap trains were put on for the Great Exhibition in 1851; a third-class return fare to London was only 4s.; the Midland, trying to compete, would take a party of twelve at 2s. 6d. each. The pawnshops were crowded by people determined to seize the chance. Thereafter cheap holiday trains were provided; in 1856, a ticket to Grimsby and Cleethorpes cost only a shilling return.

Meanwhile, instead of the shriek of the steam engine and the whistle of the guard there was the clatter of the hooves of the coachhorses on the cobble stones and the blasts of the guards' horns as the four or five mail coaches passed up and down the street. Gentlemen and farmers rode in on horseback or in gigs to sessions or the market; the waggons crawled in with heavy goods; and the carriers' carts came rumbling in on market day, about a hundred of them from villages all around, putting up at 15 or 20 different inns, unloading the farmers' wives and daughters with

¹ *Lincoln Pocket Guide* (1st edition 1874), p. 1, 'To the Curious Reader'.

their butter, eggs and poultry for market, loading up again in the afternoon and rumbling home. And there were the country butchers and the fish and game dealers making for the butchery or the fish market. Teams of horses and waggons always tried to get to Lincoln by 6 a.m. and to do so might have to start by 2 a.m. Flocks of sheep would start for the fair on Monday and try to arrive by Tuesday night, resting on Wednesday. By Thursday they would be ready for the fair.¹

Life in Lincoln was not only slow: it was isolated. For ordinary people the despatch or receipt of a letter was a rare event. Until the advent of the penny post in 1840 the total volume of letters was small.² The Lincoln post office consisted of a small room at the corner of Swanpool Court in High Street. There was only one delivery per day, but this was a great advance on the three posts a week to which they had been accustomed until 1790. There was only one messenger, Mrs Mimmack, an active old lady who went out in all weathers with skirts so short as scarcely to reach her ankles, and a large basket with two lids wherein she carried the letters. The post boy had to ride to Grantham for the mail, and in wintertime there was no knowing what time he would return. John Wold Drury was postmaster at a salary of £124, with perquisites from private boxes which made the job worth about £200. He resigned after many years, in 1846, and a room near the Stonebow was taken for the post office. When the penny post came in the number of letters passing through the Lincoln office multiplied nearly fourfold. It was only after much agitation that full advantage of railway transport was taken by the post office in getting mails to and from Lincoln. By 1887 the Lincoln office had about 50 officers and messengers besides those at five branch offices.³

Until the reform movement roused new interest in public affairs there was only one local newspaper, and that not very local, the *Lincoln Rutland and Stamford Mercury*, one of the oldest of provincial newspapers, published on Fridays at Stamford by Richard Newcomb.⁴ He was a liberal and an opponent of the Exeter interest at Stamford, but he was regarded as undependable in his views. His local correspondents, 'often men of substance and influence in their respective neighbourhoods, were allowed a fairly free hand in their weekly report'.⁵ The *Chronicle* commented that at Stamford it was for Church and State; at Lincoln for

¹ *Lincolnshire Magazine*, III (1938), no. 12.

² The postal charge depended on the distance the letter travelled. It was about 10d. from London to Lincoln.

³ *L.C.*, 2 July 1887.

⁴ *G.L.*, pp. 291–4.

⁵ Dr R. J. Olney's unpublished thesis, 'Lincolnshire Politics, 1832–1885'.

the radical Seely; in the county for the whig Cholmeley and protection; at Boston, anti-church and free trade.¹ The Lincoln column was generally radical, especially from 1836 to 1838, when it was written by Thomas Cooper. The price of the paper was 4½d., and in 1852 its circulation, spread over several counties, averaged 12,060.

Growing concern with public affairs stimulated the appearance and growth of other newspapers. A *Lincoln Herald* was started in 1828 by James Amphlett, which veered to the tories when the radical James Hitchens issued the *Lincoln Times* in 1839; the latter only lasted a year. The *Herald* moved to Boston in 1832. Another liberal paper, the *Lincoln Gazette*, was begun about 1835 by W. S. Northhouse with the support of Lord Yarborough; Sir William Ingilby called it 'the Brocklesby Gazette'. In 1836 it was taken over by Edward Drury, and ceased in 1841. A tory *Lincolnshire Chronicle* began at Stamford in 1833. T. J. N. Brogden became its Lincoln correspondent in 1834 and its lessee in 1850, moving it to Lincoln. He resigned in 1856. A *Lincolnshire Times* was founded in 1847 by the liberal William Gresham; E. R. Cousans bought it about 1856, and merged it in the *Chronicle* when he became the latter's lessee in 1861; he surrendered his lease in 1870. A tory *Lincoln Standard* began in 1836, published by Brogden, but it was short lived. Brogden became a liberal in 1859, and started a new *Lincoln Gazette*, publishing it with his son J. E. Brogden until 1870 when Cousans bought it.²

The circulation of these papers, other than the *Mercury*, was small, and within a narrow radius. Edward Drury said in 1834 that only one in 20 people saw a newspaper, and that only once a week. He raised the circulation of the *Gazette* from 400 to 800; and he said that the circulation of the *Standard* in 1838 was 150.³ What these papers lacked in circulation they sometimes made up in virulence, for which at a time of public controversy there was ample scope. Eatanswill was a caricature, but it contained some truth, and certainly some of the Lincoln journalists showed in their writings that they had read their *Pickwick Papers*, which began to appear in parts in 1836.

Most people took it for granted that if they wanted to go anywhere in the town they would have to walk. Hence men lived as near as they could to their work. Hence also the importance for health and recreation of the preservation of footpaths across the fields or by the river. They had not far to go to reach them. Lincoln was deeply embedded in the countryside, and the built-up area did not extend far from the heart of the city.

¹ *L.C.*, 7 May 1852.

² Dr Olney's thesis; *L.C.*, 29 December 1876, 7 May 1880.

³ *G.L.*, p. 294.

High Street virtually ended with a few straggling houses below the future Midland station and the stables of Mr Chaplin and Mr King (both commemorated in street names). On the west of the city there was only one house beyond the Park, and the way from Newland to Carholme lay through the fields. In Newport there were a few stone farmhouses and cottages; on Wragby Road building ceased at the Peacock Inn, and on Monks Road at the Sessions House. Anyone wishing to go to Canwick or Washingborough could walk south from Broadgate, over the river by a swing bridge, and through the fields; or by St Mary Street over St Mary's Bridge on the Sincil Dyke into the same fields; or by a gate opening from the south end of High Street across a path on the South Common. The common, not as yet broken up by roads railway and cemetery, stretched to the future Great Northern Terrace, including the present Cowpaddle. Dwellers on the long ribbon of High Street to Bargate were imprisoned by water, the Witham on the west and Sincil Dyke on the east, with few bridges in either direction.

The *Mercury* said in 1835 that there was no place with less convenience of public walks than Lincoln.¹ But there were several walks. In 1833 Charles Mainwaring, the owner of the Monks estate towards Greetwell, built a granite head for the spring called 'the Spa' in the Monks fields.² A little to the north of it was the Monks lane, a sylvan way giving a superb view of the minster much favoured by De Wint and other artists. After many complaints about it being impassable, St Swithin's parish undertook its repair, with a footpath on the north side.³ Thomas Cooper wrote of walks with Charles Seely by the Witham, or along the Canwick fields, or by the venerable minster.⁴ George Boole, living in exile at Cork, wrote 'Oh! that the Greetwell fields and those with whom I have so often walked through them could be transported here!' And again, 'I adjure you by the "fen" and the "hayth", by Skellingthorpe wood and the memory of Swanpool, yea finally by the little hostelry at Fiskerton in which you once read to me Smith's *Polite Conversations*, that you come and see me here at Cork.'⁵ Another choice of walk was added when a footpath was made by public subscription along the crest of the South Common in 1844.

New developments brought new threats to the footpaths. The walk

¹ *S.M.*, 25 December 1835.

² A. C. Benson, *The Trefoil* (1923), p. 150, remembered visits to fetch medicine bottles of chalybeate water from the spring, which was supposed to have an instantaneously strengthening effect.

³ *S.M.*, 29 April 1836.

⁴ *Life* (1872), p. 120.

⁵ Letters (24 October 1854, 18 June 1855) to W. Brooke, per Mr A. P. Rollett.