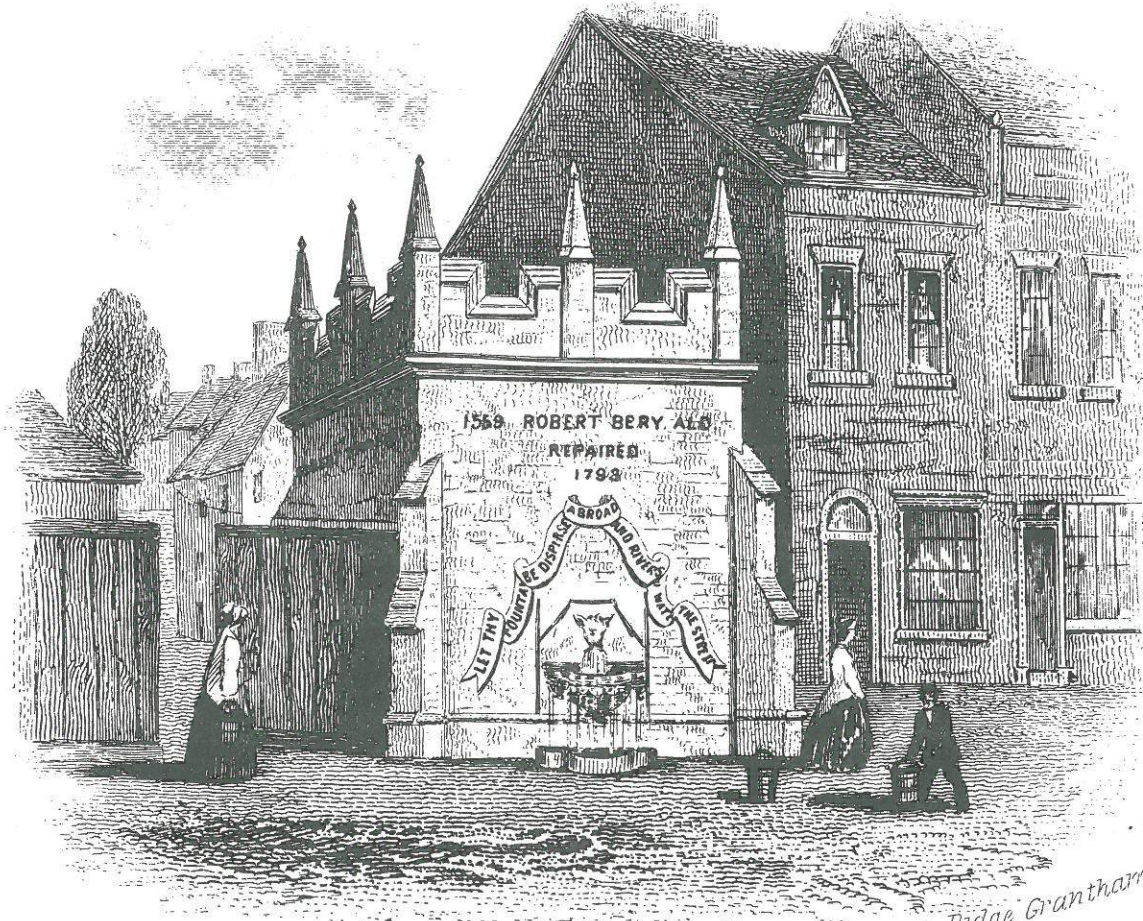


Information Sheet

Archaeology Series No. 9

GRANTHAM CONDUIT



The Conduit?

Steel engraving of the Conduit c. 1870 by Lawrence Ridge

INTRODUCTION

At the south-west corner of Grantham Market Place stands a small rectangular building like a stunted tower with a battlemented top and eight pinnacles, known as 'The Conduit'. Although it is a rather unusual building and obviously of some antiquity many people would be surprised to know that it represents the first public water-supply in Grantham.

A supply of fresh water available at the turn of a tap is one of those everyday things that we

tend to take for granted today: only when the supply is cut off, through drought or a mains-burst, do we really begin to understand its importance to our way of life. In the Middle Ages most people obtained their water from private or public wells, or from streams and rivers. Every drop that was needed often had to be carried a considerable distance, and the source might frequently be contaminated and carry a risk of infection, particularly when drains and cesspits leaked or overflowed.

The idea of bringing water in pipes from a



East view of the Conduit c. 1912, prior to the last restoration

suitable spring outside the built-up area of a town and delivering it at a central point was well understood by the 13th century: London had its first piped water in 1237 and the Great Conduit in Cheap was set up in 1285. Other towns and cities were not very quick to follow, for a variety of reasons. Civic amenities in the Middle Ages were very often left to private benefactors to provide, the authorities not feeling it to be part of their responsibilities. Private benefactors tended to support hospitals, almshouses for the poor and elderly, and monastic establishments, rather than an effective water supply. Nonetheless a fair number of provincial centres such as Exeter and Wells were provided with public conduits. The real innovators were the Monks, and more particularly the Friars (See Lincolnshire Museums Information Sheet; Archaeology Series No. 7).

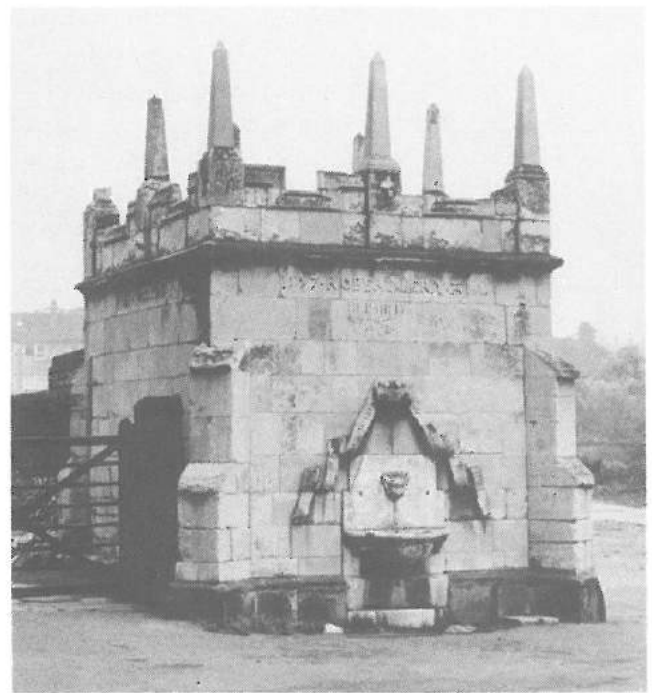
The Friars seem to have had a good eye for a potential supply of water. In Lincoln two of the Friaries, the Dominicans and the Franciscans, drew their supply from the same source; in Boston the Dominicans constructed an aqueduct from as far away as Old Bolingbroke, while in Stamford several conduits existed, according to John Leland who passed through in about 1540.

'There be diverse springes conveyid yn leade to the Freres houses of Staunforde.

And one faire springe is conveyid a quarter of a mile ynto the hart of the toun; and that hath 2 or 3 castelles in the toun'.

By 'castelles' Leland meant structures such as that in Grantham Market Place.

Whether the Friars were interested in having fresh water themselves or whether it was seen as a service to the poor is open to question. At all events when the Dissolution of the Monasteries came about there were many greedy eyes cast in the direction of the conduits, and the conduit heads (or 'castelles') were frequently moved to more convenient positions. Thus it was that Grantham obtained the conuit which had for two hundred and twenty-five years supplied the house of the Greyfriars.



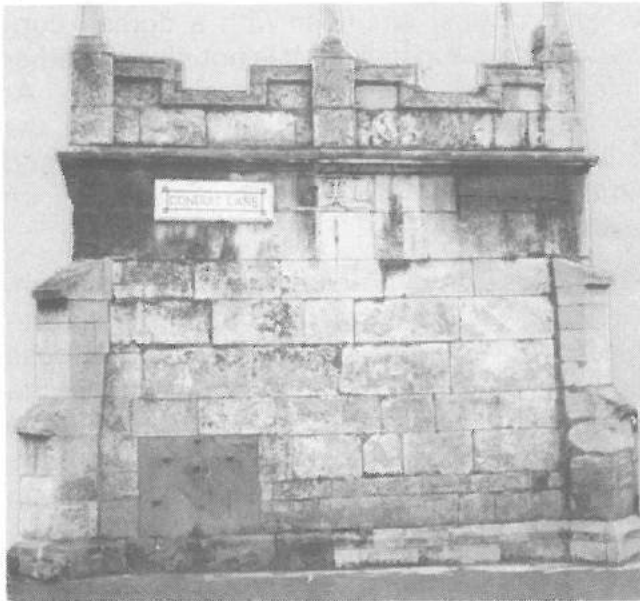
General view from south-east

HISTORY

Long before 1086 the Bishop of Durham owned land in Gonerby. In 1314, shortly after their arrival in Grantham, the Greyfriars obtained permission from the Bishop to enclose a spring of water in the south field of Gonerby and convey the water through leaden pipes to their house in Grantham. They were to replace any soil which they dug out in effecting repairs to the pipeline, so as not to damage the pasture. The Greyfriars' house lay west of the Market Place more or less where the Grange Flats now stand. After the Dissolution in 1539 their property was granted to Robert Bocher and David Vincent of Henry VIII's court.

We do not know what the nature of the conduit-head was at the Greyfriars end. Exca-

vations in 1972-3 on the site showed that there had been much disturbance of the mediæval remains. However, it is likely that the house built on the site sometime after 1542, known as 'The Grange' or 'Cistercius Place' (and pulled down before 1816) continued to use the Friars' water-supply.

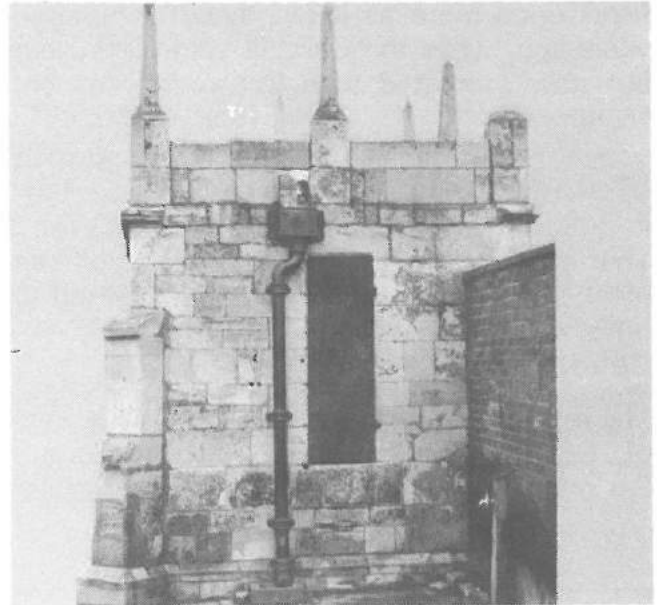


General view from north

In 1597 the Corporation built the present Conduit in the Market Place. It was supplied by a branch pipeline which left the main line at the boundry of The Grange property. In 1684 an agreement was reached with Robert Fysher, then owner of The Grange, that the Corporation should keep in repair the pipes from 'Conduit Leyes' (where the spring was) to the 'Fryers' Walls', while Fysher would maintain the pipes from there to the Market Place. This agreement probably reflects the earlier arrangements. The Alderman, Robert Bery, whose name appears on the Conduit alongside the date of 1597, was himself owner of The Grange at the time.

It is clear from the Corporation's Minute Books that the Conduit frequently required attention. In 1636 John Phiper, a plumber and glazier, who was also Constable for the Swinegate area, was made Keeper of the Conduit for 30 shillings per annum. No doubt his plumbing abilities were called for in maintaining the cistern and lead pipes. A Mr. Shootewell was employed to carry out the same task in 1687, at the same salary — despite the rise in prices over the intervening fifty years. At various times — in 1646, 1664 and again in 1683 — assessments of £20 were made for repairs to the Conduit, implying that it was badly out of repair. At the latter date a new cistern was

required. The money was raised by a door-to-door cash levy carried out by the Constables, who were not very enthusiastic since they would become most unpopular! In 1655 a fine of fourpence was decreed against anyone who should 'annoy the Conduitt by rinseing or washing of clothes or doeing other business



General view from west, showing access door

there to the prejudice of the Conduitt', which shows the sort of uses to which it was currently being put.

In the 1680s we hear of water-carts being rented from the Corporation by private individuals at £3 per annum, 'provided that no other persons do goe with any water-carts'. Presumably this monopoly was a paying concern, Grantham having by now reached a size where it had become worthwhile to pay for water being fetched from the Conduit instead of carrying it oneself. One of the water-cart proprietors was fined under the 'Auncient Order against water-carts with shod wheels' in 1684. One wonders whether it was the noise of the iron-studded wheels on the road or the damage they did that was being objected to. Other repairs were carried out on the Conduit in 1793, and 1860 a drinking fountain was added to the east side. By now it had probably almost ceased to function as a main supply of water. In 1849 a public meeting was held to discuss a new supply and by 1851 the new system was in operation, drawing water from springs at Stroxtan and feeding it to a reservoir on Spittlegate Hill. A few years later, when the springs were found to be inadequate, a new pumping station was set up at Saltersford, just to the south of the town, drawing water from the Cringle Brook and lakes in Stoke Park. The

days of the old Conduit were numbered, but repairs were carried out between 1927 and 1931 on both ends of the line, which had for some time been provided with iron pipes instead of the former lead ones.

Today the Intake House at the spring-head lies in ruins, the spring discharging into the open fields once more as it did over six hundred years ago, while the Conduit stands disused, but now protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

DESCRIPTION

The system consisted of three parts; an **Intake House** set over the spring, a **pipeline** running for about ¾ mile (1 km), and the **Conduit** itself.

The **Intake House** lies in the fields to the west of Grantham between Dysart Road and Barrowby Road and is a small rectangular

structure 10ft (3 m) north-south by 11ft 6ins (3.5 m) east-west. The stone base may date from the 14th or 16th century — there is insufficient detail left to decide. In the eastern side are the remains of a small doorway giving access to the base and inside is the spring, welling up into a sump. Repairs were carried out in the 17th century and again in 1931, when an upper chamber with a domed concrete roof was installed. It is not clear whether this was based on an earlier design or not. At all events at the time of writing (1979) the building is in ruins as a result of vandalism, and little idea of its original appearance can be gained.

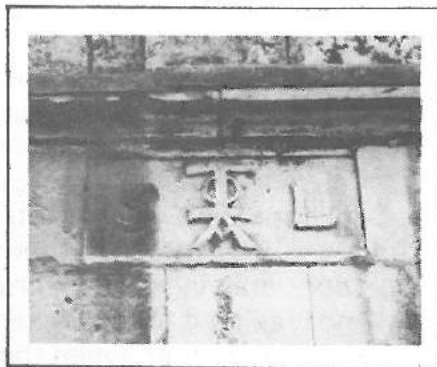
Of the **pipeline** nothing can now be seen. Constructed originally in lead and later replaced in iron it ran from the Intake House across the fields to the Friary and from there to the Market Place. The Intake house lies on a slope above the Barrowby Stream, and the logical route for the pipeline would be along



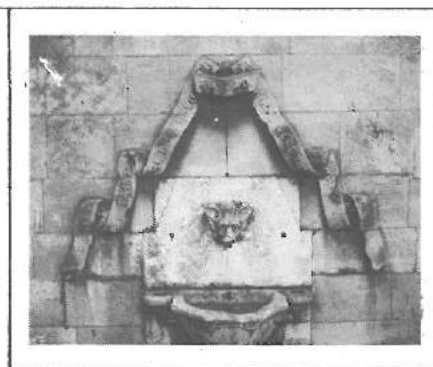
Detail, north face



Detail, east face



Detail, north face, showing private mark



Detail, east face, showing draped 'ribbon' and 1860 drinking fountain



Detail, south face



The Intake House as restored in 1930 (photo. by courtesy of M. Knapp)

the top of the scarp, using gravity feed. In the Middle Ages, however, the fields were already under cultivation and so the pipeline may have been arranged to follow the unploughed headlands, rather than pursue a direct course through the middle of the furlongs.

The **Conduit**, like the Intake House, is a rectangular building but of a much more ornate design. It stands on a red sandstone plinth 13ft (4 m) by 10ft 10ins (3.3 m) reducing to 12ft 4ins (3.8 m) by 10ft 4ins (3.1 m) for the main structure, which is of Ancaster stone. At each corner is a two-stage buttress, projecting diagonally 1ft 6ins (0.46 m). A leaded drip-course, marking the line of the roof, is 9ft 7ins (2.9 m) above ground level and above this are battlements surmounted by eight pinnacles, one of which has been removed for safety because of its condition. The roof and three of the pinnacles were renewed in 1927. The main purpose of this building was to contain and protect the cistern which acted as a storage and settling tank for the water from the pipeline. The water would probably be drawn from a faucet on the east side, now removed. An access door set high up on the west side would allow maintenance work to be carried out on the cistern.

The earliest inscriptions on the Conduit read '1597. ROBERT BERY·AL(DERMAN)' and 'ROBERT PARKINS' on the east and south sides respectively. Robert Bery (or Bury) lived at the Grange and was Alderman (the Grantham equivalent of Mayor) in 1597. Parkins was termed 'Gentleman' on his death in 1612, and was a man of considerable wealth, who had himself been Alderman no less than five times. His name on the conduit may record that he gave money towards its building. On the north side of the building is a curious combination of letters often claimed to be the symbol of the Grantham woolstaplers, but it is perhaps more likely to be the private mark of one of the two gentlemen mentioned above.

Two inscriptions added to the Conduit record repairs in 1793 and in 1927, the latter in the Mayoralty of R. Brittain. In 1860 a drinking-fountain was added to the east side, almost certainly to replace the original faucet. Above this, on a ribbon carved in high relief on the stonework, is the inscription 'Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad and rivers of water in the streets' a biblical quotation from **Proverbs 5.16**. This is probably an original feature of the building, dating from 1597.



The Intake House as it was in April 1979 showing the degree of vandalism which has occurred. Since then it has been almost totally destroyed.

SOURCES

L. Toulmin Smith *Leland's Itinerary in England and Wales* (1910)

Rev. B. Street *Historical Notes on Grantham* (1857)

W. Marrat *A Historical Description of Grantham* (1816)

E. Turnor *Collections for the History of the Town and Soke of Grantham* (1806)

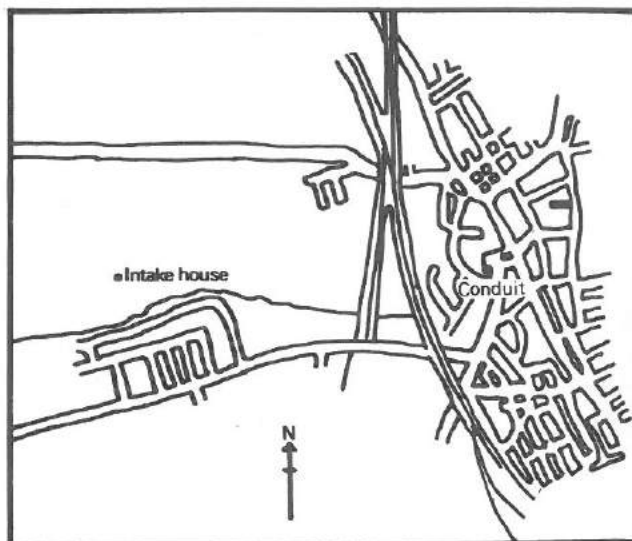
M. Pointer and M. Knapp *Bygone Grantham* (1977)

Grantham Corporation Minute Book No. 1

Lincolnshire Archives Office. Probate Inventories

Lincolnshire Library Service: Grantham Library Local Collections

Lincolnshire Museums : Sites and Monuments Record



Plan of the Conduit system

March 1979

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