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LINCOLNSHIRE'S '1812 FEN CHURCHES ACT' AND ITS BUILDINGS

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The Ecclesiologists were rather fond of criticising Georgian churches. They disliked their architecture and the services they contained, but also prominent in their list of grumbles was the notion that secular authorities could be involved in church building, in the way that they were, for instance, in street cleaning or erecting a workhouse. One of the most curious episodes of Georgian church provision concerned the Fen Chapels in Lincolnshire in the 1812–40 period. This was the biggest initiative in terms of the number of buildings constructed between the so called 'Queen Anne churches' of the first half of the eighteenth century and the products of the 1818 Church Building Act.

The Lincolnshire fen churches had tiny budgets and seem devoid of religious or architectural ambition; indeed, they might well serve to confirm the Ecclesiologists' worst prejudices about late-Georgian parsimony where church building was concerned. Occasional mentions of them can be found,¹ but they have not been the focus of any sustained study and often references to them are confused or contradictory. Their neglect is, perhaps, understandable as the buildings are hardly impressive, but they are not without interest. The programme of church building in the fens came on the eve of the national 1818 Act and lessons might well have been learned from the fen experience; one of the Act's Commissioners, Lord Charles Bathurst, had earlier been heavily involved with these Lincolnshire churches. And an examination of

the discussions that surrounded this initiative, the choice of sites and their construction, how they were funded, and the nature of architectural expertise available in this remote area, is of considerable interest for historians of the late-Georgian period.

INTRODUCTION

The fens in Lincolnshire cover a large expanse of the south-east of the county and the so called 'Fen Churches Act' relates to those fens north of Boston which were the last, the most difficult and the most expensive to reclaim. They comprised a 'V' shaped area with Boston at its base, bounded to the west by the River Witham and on the east by the band of higher land that separated the fens from the North Sea. It was designated the area's Fourth District² and consisted of the Wildmore Fen on its western side, the West Fen in the middle and the East Fen to the east. The six chapels that form the main part of the discussion are at Thornton-le-Fen (sometimes called Wildmore) and Langrville, both in Wildmore Fen; at Carrington and Frithville, both in the West Fen; and at Midville and Eastville, both in the East Fen.

These fens consisted of a huge area of low-lying land which, prior to a succession of innovative and expensive projects from the mid-eighteenth centuries, were drained, most ineffectively, by the River Witham.³ The land was used in summer to provide 'valuable pasturage for the stock of

the farmers who had rights of common in them. In winter, being lower than all the surrounding ground, and no means of drainage being provided, they became covered with water over the greater part.⁴ W.H. Wheeler, an accomplished nineteenth-century drainage engineer, notes that prior to drainage and enclosure, the area's 43,407 acres had an annual rental value of £5,982,⁵ but by 1847 – and by then efficiently drained – this had risen to £42,375.⁶ Drainage, however, involved formidable technical challenges and costs were enormous. Wheeler gives a thorough account of the reclamation, and only a summary is needed here. The second half of the eighteenth century saw a number of ambitious proposals, but the stakeholders struggled to reach agreement and there was little activity. Then, in 1799, the naturalist Sir Joseph Banks, who lived at Revesby Abbey, just to the north, sought to drive the project forward by reconciling the interests of various competing parties and supporting the commissioning of a comprehensive scheme from the eminent engineer John Rennie. 'No man sees clearer [than Banks] the vast advantages which would result from the measure', noted one observer.⁷ Rennie estimated the costs at £188,552,⁸ but if drainage were accompanied by enclosure the scheme could be extremely profitable despite the huge bills.⁹

The first Enclosure Act came in 1802,¹⁰ and 'under Banks's influence, the proprietors of the three fens agreed, on the basis of apportionment, how manorial rights were to be compensated and how the expense of drainage and division was to be met.'¹¹ All this expenditure was to be supported by sales of land at public auction and nine sales took place between 1802 and 1820.¹² The artificial drainage was initially achieved by pumps powered by windmills, but from around 1820, increasingly by steam-power. Rennie's scheme was, at least in the short term, highly successful, and the resident engineer, William Bower, was able to report in 1814 that 'every wished-for object in the drainage of the whole of the fens and of the low lands adjoining is effectually obtained, and

the lowest land brought into a state of cultivation.'¹³ Following much discussion about future ownership of the reclaimed land, especially the allotment of land in lieu of manorial rights and tithes, the sold land was divided into new townships and the rest of the reclaimed land allocated to the adjoining parishes whose inhabitants had enjoyed common rights over these fens. All this was regulated by Acts of Parliament, and Wheeler, writing in 1896, noted that 'upwards of one hundred and sixty Acts have been passed relating to the drainage, reclamation and enclosure' of these fens.¹⁴ Three of these included the provision for the erection and maintenance of 'Chapels' and parsonages, and for the payment of ministers in the townships.

THE ACTS OF PARLIAMENT

That there was an '1812 Fen Churches Act' is much repeated in the published literature, but this is misleading. There was no 'Fen Churches Act' as such; the provision noted above was initially merely a small part of one of the Enclosure Acts, of 1810 (50 Geo III, Cap. 129) and the issue of church accommodation reappears in two later Acts, of 1812 and 1818 (52 Geo III, Cap. 144 and 58 Geo III, Cap. xlv). Although it is in the nature of Acts of Parliament that the prose is exceedingly clinical, one senses that chapel building in the fens had little to do with spiritual nourishment, and was, essentially, an inevitable concomitant to the creation of the new townships in the reclaimed land.

The 1810 Act was an amendment to the 1801 Act (41 Geo III, Cap. 142), and concerned the division 'and inclosing the Parochial Allotments ... and for declaring to what Parishes such Allotments shall belong'. Only seven pages into this Act do we encounter a clause by which 'Lands [were] to be deducted from Manorial Allotments to be appropriated for erecting and endowing Chapels in the Fens'. But the more detailed wording implied

only the facility, rather than a specific proposal, for 'discharging the Expences of building any Chapel or Chapels, and House or Houses which may be authorised by Parliament to be erected ...' and for providing clerical stipends (para. XV). An Act of two years later – 'for forming into Townships, certain Extra-parochial Lands in *Wildmore Fen*, and in the *West* and *East Fens*, in the County of *Lincoln*' (52 Geo III, Cap. 144) – was more specific about places of worship and is, presumably, the Act erroneously referred to as The Fen Churches Act. Its preamble recites briefly the contents of six earlier Acts from 1801–10 dealing with drainage, division, enclosure and parochial allotments. This 1812 Act was principally concerned with the creation of seven new townships, very precisely defining the boundaries and extent of each. The seven are: Eastville, Midville, Frithville, Carrington, Westville, Thornton-le-Fen

and Langrville. But at only four of them – Midville, Frithville, Carrington and Thornton-le-Fen – was there to be provision for a chapel. Specifically, the Act notes that within the specified area of each of these four townships there would be 'all that Piece or Parcel of land allotted by the Commissioners for executing the [1810 Act] for the Erection and Endowment of Chapels ...' (para. II). This wording is repeated in each of the four townships identified for a chapel.

In 1818 came the third of the relevant Acts: 'An Act for amending Two Acts of His present Majesty, so far as the same relates to the Establishment of Chapels in the *East*, *West* and *Wildmore Fen*' (58 Geo III, Cap. xlvi). This is the first instance of the word 'Chapels' appearing in the title of an Act and it is indeed primarily concerned with places of worship. It recites that the 1810 Act gave the commissioners



Fig. 1. Thornton-le-Fen, St Peter, attributed to Jephth Pacey, c.1816, from the south-east. Unusually for the fen churches, the tracery is of stone. (*Author*)

powers to use 'the rent and profits' from specified lands towards 'the discharge the Expences of building any Chapel or Chapels' and houses for clergy. It also notes:

'And whereas two Chapels have been erected ... one at Wildmore [Thornton-le-Fen] and the other ... on land belonging to John Holland ... in the West Fen [Carrington] ... And whereas from the increased and increasing Population in the said Fens, it is expedient that the Trustees of the said land should be empowered to erect and build such additional Chapel or Chapels as circumstances shall require ... '

There would also be houses and stipends for ministers. Significantly, the Act notes that while 'empowerment' would be expedient, 'no Provisions are contained in the said Acts for such Purposes ... [and it is therefore] desirable that the said Acts be amended ... ' So, by the same Act, the Trustees were

empowered to build 'such and so many additional Chapels as to them shall appear necessary [in the fens and] as to them shall seem most convenient', along with sufficient burial ground, and to pay for any maintenance of the chapels or clergy houses (para. II). The Trustees were also empowered to use any voluntary subscriptions in their endeavours and were given the facility to borrow up to £2,000. Only several pages further on do we encounter paragraph XIV which specifies that 'the Chapels already erected and such additional Chapels' were to be 'dedicated to the service of Almighty God'. The Trustees were to appoint the ministers and set stipends (para. XV), and the latter were authorised to solemnise marriages (para. XVI). The rest of the Act is taken up with appointing chapel wardens, clerks and sextons; with the allotment of seats; and the means of collecting rents to support the chapels and those employed in their ministry. As we shall



Fig. 2. Carrington, St Paul, attributed to Jephtha Pacey, c.1816.
The chancel is a later addition. (*Author*)

see later, the Bishop of Lincoln was unwilling to consecrate the 'already erected' chapels until this Act was passed because he recognised that it would settle various issues about the appointment and payment of clergy unresolved by the earlier Acts. If any of the various Acts can be thought of as 'The Fen Churches Act' it was, surely, this one, not that of 1812.

THE CHAPELS AND THEIR DATES OF ERECTION

Establishing the date of erection for each chapel is by no means straightforward, as no building accounts have been traced and surviving evidence is often contradictory; the following is a summary. Thornton-le-Fen (Wildmore Fen) would seem to be the earliest chapel (Fig. 1). It has a date stone over the door of 1816, although it was not consecrated until 20 July 1818,¹⁵ two months after the 1818



Fig. 3. Midville, St Peter, attributed to Jephtha Pacey, c.1819, from the west. The church is currently closed and undergoing repairs. (Author)

Act became law. On the same day the new burial ground was consecrated,¹⁶ yet the church's Burial Register dates from 1816. The Marriage and Baptism Registers both date from 1818.¹⁷ Pishey Thompson, the Boston historian, states it was 'opened in 1816'.¹⁸ Carrington (West Fen) is also dated 1816 (Fig. 2) and was consecrated the day before Thornton.¹⁹ Thompson reports that it was 'consecrated 1818, opened 14 September 1817',²⁰ presumably taking the earlier date as that of its licencing. The Diocesan Archives include a letter, dated 15 March 1817, from John Holland who lived at Carrington House which faces the chapel and who owned the land on which the chapel was built. He urged the bishop at least to licence the chapel if he was unable to consecrate it, adding that it had been 'lately erected' and 'nearly finished for some time'.²¹ Carrington was followed by Midville (East Fen), with a date stone of 1819 (Fig. 3). Thompson gives this as the date of 'opening', but the 1851 *Census of Religious Worship* gives the date of 'consecration' as 10 December 1820;²² its Baptism Register starts in 1821²³ and the Diocesan Consecration Book lists the ceremony as having taken place on 24 July 1822.²⁴ The fourth of the 'early' chapels is Frithville, (West Fen) with a date stone of 1821 (Fig. 4). The 1851 Census return gives '1822' as its date of consecration,²⁵ partially confirmed by the report of a wedding that took place in the chapel on 29 September 1822.²⁶

The fifth church at Langrville (Wildmore Fen), with a significantly different design (Fig. 5), was 'built in 1828'.²⁷ The *Stamford Mercury* of 16 January 1829 reported that 'The Bishop having granted a license for the performance of Divine Service in the newly erected chapel at Langrville, before the consecration of the building, and that it was 'opened on Sunday se'nnight by Rev. William Robinson, Minister and Perpetual Curate of Thornton Chapelry'. The 1851 Census notes the date of consecration as 22 August 1831,²⁸ and the registers also date from 1831. Robinson, however, was clearly living in the parsonage there as early as the summer of 1828 for in



Fig. 4. Frithville, St Peter, attributed to Jephth Pacey, 1821, from the south-east. Only the stump of the bell-cote remains. The tracery is of wood. (*Author*)



Fig. 5. Langrville, St Margaret, attributed to Jephth Pacey, c.1828, from the south-west. It was repaired and altered in 1885 and the wooden window tracery and chancel might be from this later date. (*Author*)

June he advertised for paying scholars 'to be received into his family [at] Langrville Parsonage'.²⁹ The final church was at Eastville (East Fen), 'consecrated 21 October 1840' (Figs. 6 and 7).³⁰

In addition to the information quoted above, there is a good deal of more contradictory evidence. Perhaps some of this can be dismissed as confusion on the part of those outside the immediate area about the precise location of particular chapels. The fen townships were, after all, of recent origin and without any sort of history as to their precise location and extent. There was, for instance, a reference to a wedding at the chapel in Westville township,³¹ but no such chapel ever existed; presumably the writer confused Westville and West Fen. Equally confusing is a letter to the Bishop, dated 1 October 1816, from Rev Charles Roberts, who was seeking a clerical appointment at the new chapel in East Fen 'now erecting', yet the first chapel in this fen, Midville, did not open until 1822. Roberts, it seems, had muddled

up the fens and was probably thinking of the chapels at either Thornton or Carrington in Wildmore and West Fen respectively. But the greatest confusion surrounded Eastville's chapel of 1840. The *Stamford Mercury* of 6 September 1822 recorded 'the first couple married in the chapel of Eastville', but the building was still eighteen years from completion. The newspaper recorded several subsequent marriages at the church in the early 1830s.³² And at a confirmation for 400 children in Boston in 1834, 'Rev. Mr Dawson, Minister of Eastville Chapel [preached the sermon]'.³³ A likely explanation is the transposition of Eastville for East Fen whereby the chapel at Midville (of c.1819/20) in the East Fen and only around a mile from the centre of Eastville, was thought of as belonging to Eastville, rather than to the almost non-existent settlement of Midville. Bell's *Gazetteer* of 1834 seems to confirm this: 'Eastville ... there is a chapel in the East Fen belonging to the townships of East-Ville and Mid-Ville'.³⁴



Fig. 6. Eastville, St Paul, J.C. Carter, 1839–40.
(From an early twentieth century postcard)

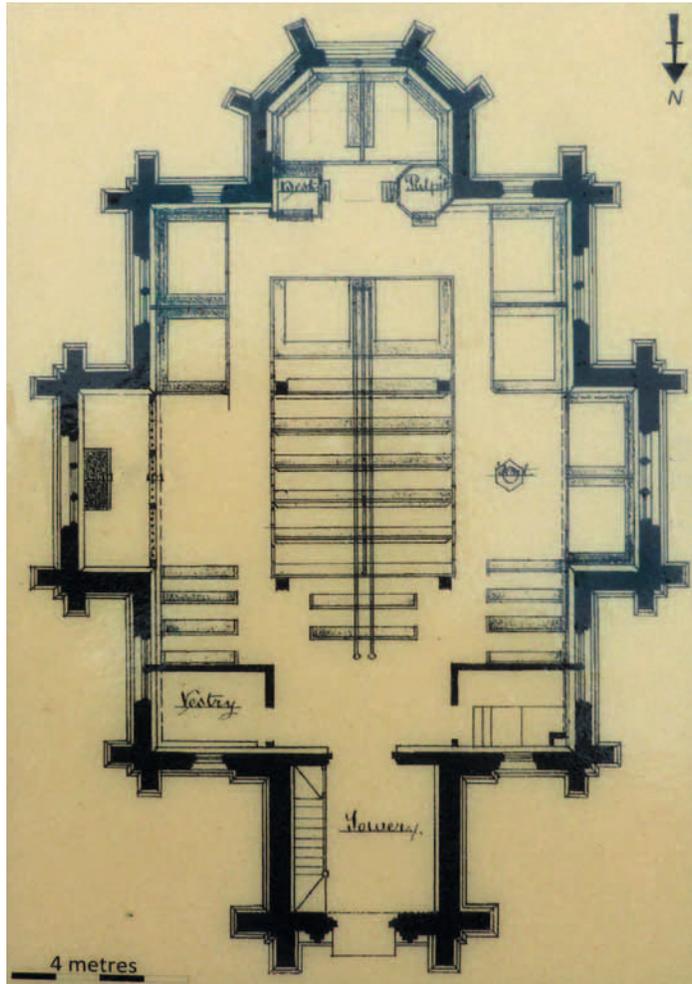


Fig. 7. Eastville, St Paul, J.C. Carter, 1839-40. Based on a late-nineteenth century plan (*Archives of the Church Commissioners*)

LOCATIONS

As we have seen, the location of the chapels was left to the Commissioners, who were, by the passing of the 1818 Act, empowered to build wherever 'to them shall appear most convenient'. Some of their decisions, however, seem questionable, especially since the reclaimed land is so consistently flat and fertile that it cannot have varied much in value so that the purchase of sites was unlikely to have been much

influenced by costs. For instance, the chapels at both Midville and Eastville are in remote locations, well away from any settlement, yet in between the two is the significantly bigger community of New Leake with no chapel. Carrington is similarly isolated, but stands opposite Carrington House, appearing almost as an estate chapel. The 1821 Census records the populations thus: Eastville, 118; Frithville 272; Midville, 139. However, the rapidly expanding

community of New Bolingbroke, in the north part of the West Fen, with a population of 752 in 1821, was never provided with a chapel.³⁵

From the beginning, concerns were expressed in a series of letters to the Bishop of Lincoln. Sir Joseph Banks wrote on 22 September 1816 that he was 'informed the Building of the Fen Chapels is begun [but the sites are some distance away from those allotted by the Commissioners]'. There are also several letters from Lord Charles Bathurst who, as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, which owned large swathes of the land, must have keenly observed the reclamation project.³⁶ In his letter of 24 July 1817 he commented that the places where the chapels have been built – at this date he could have been referring only to Carrington and Thornton – 'are stated to be very inconvenient'. Most remarkable of all is a letter from John Holland of Carrington House, dated 15 March 1817: 'It is strongly reported that the Chapel lately erected in the West Fen [Carrington] is to be taken down and rebuilt nearer to New Bolingbroke to accommodate Mr John Parkinson's Estate there ... [it is claimed that Carrington Chapel] is not central in the West Fen'. Parkinson was, it seems, keen to establish a market town and, as we have seen, New Bolingbroke had a population considerably larger than any other settlement in the Fens. Holland hoped that Carrington Chapel 'would not be taken down ... I think it is a most proper situation.' He added that, if the Trustees did not have 'sufficient power ... in the late Act to purchase land and build' an additional chapel at New Bolingbroke, he would sooner give the Trustees the land on which Carrington Chapel was situated, which he owned and for which he received rent, if this were the only means of ensuring the survival of his local chapel. Holland's plea was successful and New Bolingbroke's worshippers walked the one and a half miles to Carrington on Sundays until their own, privately financed, church was finally built in 1854, to a design by S.S. Teulon. Another writer in 1817 claimed the chapels would

have been more useful 'if they had been built nearer to Boston', i.e. further south in the Fens.³⁷

Visiting this still desolate area in the twenty-first century it is hard to understand the rationale for the Commissioners' decisions concerning the sites. None, apart, perhaps, from Langrville, is in anything that can be seen as even a village, and arguably the only positive thing that can be said is that several of the chapels are placed by a crossroads where worshippers could, at least, approach from four directions: a useful facility when so much of the land was divided by impassably deep drainage ditches.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE CHAPELS

Pevsner and his revisers recorded around sixty Georgian churches in Lincolnshire, of which 'nearly half date from between 1790 and 1825';³⁸ certainly there was a late-Georgian enthusiasm for building, but most of these churches are neat rather than remarkable. Many are simple, brick-built, rectangular structures without chancels and with a bell-cote rather than a tower. They tend to be small in size, well-proportioned and constructed to modest budgets with limited decoration.

Very close to the fens under discussion here, but at the other side of the River Witham, is the subscription-financed All Saints, Holland Fen, of 1812 (Fig. 8). It must have influenced the Commissioners administering the chapel building in the East, West and Wildmore Fens, and may have been seen as an appropriate model in terms of architectural embellishment, size and cost. It was an arrangement that can be traced back in the county at least as far as St Margaret's, Well, of 1733 (Fig. 9) with a portico at one end with a bellcote above, loosely based on Inigo Jones' St Paul's, Covent Garden (1631–3). St Helen's, Saxby (1775) was broadly similar, and at Holland Fen the portico is reduced to a gabled west wall. The four early churches of this study – the near identical Thornton-le-Fen (Fig. 1), Carrington (Fig. 2),



Fig. 8. Holland Fen, All Saints, architect unknown, 1812, from the south-west. The Chancel is a later addition. It was erected by private subscription as a chapel of ease in the parish of Algarkirk. (*Author*)

Midville (Fig. 3) and Frithville (Fig. 4) – are closely based on Holland Fen; the most obvious difference is that the three windows in the north and south walls of the later churches are identical, whereas at Holland Fen the central one of the three on each side is slightly more elaborate. What is significant is that all of these churches from Holland Fen (1812) onwards have vestigial Gothic as the style for the windows. In short, the nod towards the Covent Garden model lived on, but whereas that London church had emphatic Classical associations – along with the eighteenth century Lincolnshire derivatives – in these five early nineteenth-century fen chapels, the windows have become pointed. It was a clear, if hardly scholarly, shift towards Gothic.

The fifth fen chapel is at Langrville (Fig. 5), probably constructed in 1828, and here the adoption

of Gothic is much more emphatic. Although appearing to be a radically different design from the first four, it is really only its details that are innovative; it retains the three-bay format, with entrance and bellcote at the west end, and its overall dimensions are within inches of the earlier four. The church was ‘repaired and altered in 1885’,³⁹ and it is likely that the tiny chancel and wooden window tracery are from this campaign. Its unusual Gothic features are composed of a series of ‘special’ bricks. Perhaps only a limited range of moulds was available and dictated the idiosyncratic composition, but at least the Commissioners were spared the expense of carved stone. The composition is certainly provincial, but its designer cannot be accused of lacking confidence.

For the sixth and final fen chapel, at Eastville



Fig. 9. Well, St Margaret, architect unknown, 1733, a miniature version of Jones' Covent Garden church and representative of Lincolnshire's eighteenth century tradition. (*Author*)

(Figs. 6 and 7), we do at least have a reliable date for construction, 1839–40, and the name of its architect: Charles John Carter of Louth.⁴⁰ Like the others it was small and built of brick, but it was cruciform in plan, with what appeared to be a small polygonal chancel, and there was a tower. Internally, the cruciform arrangement was emphasised by four slim wooden pillars supporting the roof structure which were arranged in a square.

What might these chapels have cost? No accounts survive, but we do have useful evidence from Jephtha Pacey's church at nearby Chapel Hill (1826–7), similar in size and design to the first four fen chapels. It 'was contracted for £425 ... plus £40 for the land'.⁴¹

THE ARCHITECTS

Who designed the fen chapels? For the first five, there is no documentary evidence. However, Jephtha Pacey's name has been attached to them. He lived in Boston and was probably part of a family of builders and drainage engineers there.⁴² In an area where Pacey is not a common name, he might also have been related to the Rev Dr Henry Butler Pacey, one of the town's most influential citizens whose forebears had been among the borough's mayors and MPs, and would surely have been a useful ally for a kinsman seeking employment with the new churches in the fens. It seems Jephtha Pacey had a successful career as a developer, estate agent, surveyor and architect,⁴³ and, bearing in mind the Ecclesiological obsessions of the next generation that only a 'good architect can design a good church',⁴⁴ it is worth



Fig. 10. Boston, the chapel of ease, Jephtha Pacey, c.1820–22, erected by private subscription. (Photograph, c.1900, courtesy of Pat Pomeroy.)

considering his career. He was a prolific advertiser in the *Stamford Mercury*, the principal newspaper serving Boston and the Fens, where he is most frequently acting as an estate agent, often letting public houses,⁴⁵ although he also dealt in land, both for development and farming.⁴⁶ In different contexts he variously described himself in advertisements as ‘Mr Jephtha Pacey’, ‘Mr Jephtha Pacey, Builder’, ‘Mr Jephtha Pacey, Surveyor’, ‘Mr Jephtha Pacey, Corporation Surveyor’, ‘Mr Jephtha Pacey, Builder and Building Surveyor’.⁴⁷ In the trade directory of 1826 he is listed under ‘Land Surveyors’ as ‘Jephtha Pacey (architect)’ and by 1830 he was using the style ‘architect’.⁴⁸ Although he rarely appeared in

advertisements as ‘Architect’, certainly he worked in that capacity. In 1816–17, as both architect and contractor, he remodelled the old Fish Market in Boston to create municipal offices,⁴⁹ and in 1819–22 he built the town’s commanding Assembly Rooms, with an open Butter Market below, perhaps using or adapting a design by William Atkinson made for the town council in 1813.⁵⁰ He also designed the substantial chapel of ease in Boston (c.1820–22) (Fig. 10) and he is recorded as the architect of two other new churches in the area, at Whaplode Drove (1821) (Fig. 11) and at Chapel Hill (1826–7), both partly funded by the Incorporated Church Building Society.⁵¹ An 1891 article in the local paper ‘by An Old Inhabitant’ states that although there were ‘several good architects in Boston at that time ... Mr Pacey held the first position and was considered the leading gentleman in the town and was always employed on the large works’.⁵² Useful praise, certainly, although it is hard to identify *any* other architects in Boston at this time. Around 1837,⁵³ he left the town to live in Manchester and served as a Director of several new railway companies.⁵⁴ He returned to Boston in the late-1840s and died there in 1852.⁵⁵

In addition to this circumstantial evidence of Pacey’s involvement in the fen chapels, there is Pacey’s documented co-authorship of the design of Whaplode Drove church, some fifteen miles south of the fens.⁵⁶ This is almost exactly the same size as the first four fen chapels and is similarly detailed, though Whaplode Drove has semicircular-headed rather than pointed windows, easily explained in the context of subjective Building Committee preferences. Furthermore, in the archives of the Bishop of Lincoln are accounts from 1815, between John Burcham, a land agent,⁵⁷ and the Trustees of the Chapel Land at East, West and Wildmore Fens for building work connected with the agricultural leases under the 1810 Act of Parliament (paras XXX and XLIV).⁵⁸ Under the heading ‘West Fen Buildings’ there is a payment to Jephtha Pacey ‘for surveying the buildings:

£10.16.7d,' and another under 'East Fen Buildings ... for surveying: £5.0.1d'. A further payment to 'Pacey and Watmough for bricks and stone: £13.18.4d', presumably refers to James Pacey and William Watmough, both listed as 'bricklayers' in the 1826 *Directory*.⁵⁹ And in his letter of 15 March 1817 to the Bishop, already quoted, John Holland asks when the chapel at Carrington is to be opened:

'I hope you will appoint some person to do duty before long as the Chapel has been nearly finished some time except for the Doors to the Pews ... It is a well finished building much to the credit of Mr Burcham and Messrs Pacey and Watmough, the contractors.'⁶⁰

It is clear therefore that the Pacey family undertook work for the Commissioners and that Jephtha was the

probable beneficiary of their architectural patronage with the first four chapels. Their successful completion would seem a plausible prelude to his subsequent documented employment on a further three local churches: Boston's chapel of ease (1820–22), Whaplode Drove – designed jointly with William Swansborough – (1821) and Chapel Hill (1826–7). The obvious similarities between the first four fen chapels and Whaplode Drove serve to confirm the attributions.

Could Pacey also have been the architect of Langrville's church in c.1828 (Fig. 5)? This is puzzling because its quirky Gothic details are so different from those of the churches so far discussed. Pacey was almost certainly an early purchaser of W.F. Pocock's *Designs for Churches and Chapels* first



Fig. 11. Whaplode Drove, St John, Jephtha Pacey and William Swansborough, 1821, from the south. This was a rebuilding of an older chapel on a new site. The chancel and west porch were added in 1909. (Courtesy of Steve J. Asquith, Spalding)

published in 1819,⁶¹ as evidenced by the detailing of the west front of the Boston chapel of ease, begun in the following year: notably the slim buttresses surmounted by open pinnacles, the side buttresses with panelled upper sections, the window tracery and the crocketed hoods. And we know that in 1826, William Swansborough, Pacey's collaborator at Whaplode Drove, copied wholesale one of Pocock's designs for his church in Wisbech, perhaps having borrowed Pacey's copy.⁶² The Boston chapel, with its 1200 seats, substantial budget and middle class subscribers, was one of the largest new churches in the southern part of the county. Its successful completion must have cemented Pacey's architectural status in the area, and made him even more likely to have been offered the commission for Langrville. But here he was back once again working on a small chapel with a tiny budget for parsimonious Commissioners. His solution may therefore have been to take the basic design he had used for the first four fen chapels and trick it out with some effective, but very inexpensive, Gothic details: Pocock on the tightest of budgets. The rectangular panel with 'Tudor' hoodmold in Langrville's west front, below the bellcote and above the porch, was a simplified version of one of Pocock's favourite, if idiosyncratic, motifs, appearing in all three of his Gothic towers in plates 24, 29 and 31 of *Designs*.

We can at least be certain about the authorship of the final fen chapel at Eastville (Figs. 6 and 7), but its architect, J.C. Carter, was a man of little accomplishment. His earlier Holy Trinity, Louth (1834) was a church that almost defies stylistic labelling, although 'Classical' was probably the most appropriate. His skills with Gothic, as demonstrated at Eastville, were little better. Like Langrville, it had Gothic details of the least scholarly type, but this tiny church was not without a certain charm and its demolition in 2015, due to subsidence, is to be regretted.⁶³ Moreover, its plan was truly remarkable: yet another example of the varied arrangements to be found on the eve of Ecclesiology. A glance at the

plan suggests an absolutely orthodox arrangement, although one might wonder why its 'chancel', with a pulpit at one side and the desk at the other, faced south. A more careful examination, however, reveals that its orientation was conventional; the 'chancel' was in fact a pair of triangular rented pews, while the altar was placed in what looked like a shallow transept on the east side. Had the Ecclesiologists ever stumbled upon Eastville, would they have laughed or cried? Carter was one of those architects whose understanding of Gothic really did demonstrate 'a want of mature knowledge',⁶⁴ a term of abuse much used by the Ecclesiologists.

The six Fen chapels, plus the others nearby, are, with the exception of Whaplode, all Gothic. Nowhere is there even an ounce of Gothic scholarship, but in the context of Lincolnshire's impressive eighteenth-century commitment to Classicism for its churches, the Fen region demonstrates that even in one of the country's remotest areas, the post-Waterloo Gothic Revival could find a foot-hold.

In the wider context of late-Georgian church building, the fen chapels are about the plainest and most economically constructed to be found anywhere in the country. Among the period's outstanding ecclesiastical buildings are the privately funded examples where either an individual paid the bill – for instance St Peter ad Vincula, Hampton Lucy, Warwickshire (Thomas Rickman, 1822–6) – or a group of subscribers did – for instance St Marylebone Parish Church, London (Thomas Hardwick, 1813–17). However, those funded by secular authorities like a town council might also be impressive. In 1802, 'the old Common Council' in Liverpool decided to build a new Corporation church, eventually completed in 1831 as St Luke's. It was, according to J.A. Picton, 'the crowning point of Liverpool's ecclesiastical architecture ... built regardless ... of expense and dedicated to [the corporation's] patron saint.'⁶⁵ It had cost £53,418, a sum that could have built more than one hundred fen chapels.⁶⁶

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ENDNOTES

- 1 H.M. Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects*, Yale U.P., 2008, p. 765; N. Pevsner, *Buildings of England: Lincolnshire*, Penguin, 1995, p. 65; Henry Thorold, *Lincolnshire Churches*, The Lincolnshire Old Churches Trust, 1976, p. 21; Henry Thorold and Jack Yates, *Lincolnshire a Shell Guide*, London, Faber and Faber, 1965.
- 2 For the purposes of drainage and its administration, the area was divided into six 'Districts'; this study concerns the Fourth District. These Districts came into being by an Act of Parliament in 1762, but initially the East Fen was excluded. The East Fen was added to the Fourth District by an Act of 1801 (41 Geo III, C. 134).
- 3 Accounts of the drainage and enclosure can be found in: Pishey Thompson, *History and Antiquities of Boston*, Boston, John Noble, 1856; W.H. Wheeler, *History of the Fens of South Lincolnshire*, (1896), Stamford, Paul Watkins, 1990; R.C. Wheeler (ed.), *Maps of the Witham Fens*, The Lincoln Records Society, 2008, p. 15. Although making no reference to the chapels, there is also the 1868 edition of W.H. Wheeler's *History of the Fens*, Boston, Newcombe, 1856; and H.C. Darby, *The Draining of the Fens*, Cambridge U.P., 1968.
- 4 W.H. Wheeler, 1896 [note 3], p. 199.
- 5 But W.H. Wheeler, 1896 [note 3] provides acreages for the drained lands that vary slightly. Thus he also discusses an area of 57,200 acres by 1861 (p. 198) and one of 59,196 acres in the 1801–10 period. (p. 227.)
- 6 W.H. Wheeler, 1896 [note 3], p. 182.
- 7 Quoted in W.H. Wheeler, 1896 [note 3], p. 216.
- 8 W.H. Wheeler, 1896 [note 3], p. 219.
- 9 Potential profits were huge; Wheeler also tells of a bigger scheme from Rennie in 1839 for draining 150,000 acres at a cost of around £2,000,000 which would have provided a profit of around £4,000,000. W.H. Wheeler, 1856 [note 3], pp. 176–7.
- 10 42 Geo III, Cap. cviii.
- 11 R.C. Wheeler [note 3], p. 15.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- 13 Quoted in Darby [note 3], p. 234.
- 14 W.H. Wheeler, 1896 [note 3], Preface (unpaginated).
- 15 *Cambridge Chronicle*, 24 June 1818.
- 16 Lincolnshire Archives, Diocesan Consecration Book 1.
- 17 Lincolnshire Archives, Wildmore Par 1.
- 18 Thompson [note 3], p. 641.
- 19 19 July 1818. Lincolnshire Archives, Consecration Register, Book 2.
- 20 Thompson [note 3], 640. Nicholas Bennett, *Lincolnshire Parish Clergy c.1214–1968 a Biographical Register. Part II: the Deaneries of Beltisloe and Bolingbroke*, Publications of the Lincoln Records Society, 2016, p. 219, records the consecration as 19 July 1818.
- 21 Lincolnshire Archives, Ben 13/16. Another letter in this file, addressed to the Bishop and dated 3 August 1816, refers to 'chapels about to be erected in the West and Wildmore Fens' which can only refer to Thornton and Carrington. However, a third letter, dated 29 August 1816 refers to [Thornton] chapel as 'now erecting'. A fourth letter, of 1 October 1816, mentions a chapel in the East Fen as 'now erecting', but it seems unlikely that Midville had been started then.
- 22 The entry in the 1851 census return for this church is unusually detailed and should not be dismissed lightly. The 1820 date might refer to its licensing. R.W. Ambler (ed.), *Lincolnshire Returns of the Census of Religious Worship 1851*, The Lincoln Records Society, 1979, p. 148.
- 23 Lincolnshire Archives, Midville Par 1.
- 24 Lincolnshire Archives, Consecration Register, Book 1.
- 25 Like the entry for Midville, the Census entry is detailed. Amber [note 22], p. 45.
- 26 *Stamford Mercury*, 4 October 1822.
- 27 Lincolnshire Archives, heading to the Langrick Deposit, Acc 87/80.
- 28 Amber [note 22], p. 143.
- 29 *Stamford Mercury*, 6 and 27 June 1828.

- 30 Ambler [note 22], p. 44. The building is documented in Lincolnshire Archives, 2CC 59/14752.
- 31 *Stamford Mercury*, 6 June 1823,
- 32 E.g. 22 April 1831, 29 September 1832, 5 October 1832.
- 33 *Stamford Mercury*, 29 August 1834.
- 34 J. Bell (ed.), *A New and Comprehensive Gazetteer of England and Wales*, Glasgow, Fullerton and Co., 1834, vol. ii, p.182.
- 35 Population statistics appeared in *Stamford Mercury*, 29 June 1821. New Leake and New Bolingbroke were, as the names suggest, on land allocated to existing parishes adjoining these fens and perhaps the Commissioners felt it was the responsibility of the 'old' parishes to provide chapels of ease.
- 36 Interestingly, Bathurst later became one of the Commissioners for the (national) 1818 Church Building Act.
- 37 All of the letters to the bishop quoted here are in Lincolnshire Archives, Ben 13/16.
- 38 Pevsner [note 1], p. 64.
- 39 Heading in the parish file, Lincolnshire Archives, Par 1.
- 40 Lincolnshire Archives, 2CC 59/14752.
- 41 Incorporated Church Building Society, file 00666. The ICBS archive is at Lambeth Palace Library.
- 42 Pacey is not a common name in the area and it is likely that the 'Mr Pacey of Boston' who 'in 1784 ... deepened and enlarged Mill Drain [in the fens]' was his father or uncle. W.H. Wheeler, 1896 [note 3], pp. 228–9. James Pacey, the Boston bricklayer, was, perhaps, his brother. (Wm White, *History and Directory of the County of Lincoln*, Leeds, Wm White, 1826, p. 86.)
- 43 Although in a private conversation, John Minnis told me Pacey had a reputation as slum landlord.
- 44 E.g. *Ecclesiologist*, iv, New Series i, 1845, pp. 277–9.
- 45 For instance, *Stamford Mercury*, 23 February 1816; 11 December 1818.
- 46 For instance, *Stamford Mercury*, 14 August 1818; 28 May 1819.
- 47 *Stamford Mercury*, 9 August 1816; 15 November 1811 (it seems he acquired the business of John Watson, builder of Boston and Grantham); 7 September 1827; 6 April 1821; 8 May 1812.
- 48 White [note 43], p. 86; Pigot, *National, Commercial Directory of Bedfordshire ... Lincolnshire ...* London, Pigot and Co., 1830, p. 75.
- 49 Richard Hewlings, 'The Public Buildings of Boston', unpublished paper, c.1988, p. 24.
- 50 Colvin [note 1], p. 83; Hewlings [note 49], p. 24.
- 51 ICBS [note 42], files 00666 and 00229.
- 52 *Boston Independent and Lincolnshire Advertiser*, 31 October 1891. It is hard to imagine who the 'several good architects' were as, apart from Pacey's known work, the town's early-nineteenth buildings appear to be largely by men from outside the town.
- 53 He was noted in the *Stamford Mercury* of 10 February 1836 donating to a charity, and appeared as a Manchester resident in the *London Gazette* of 17 February 1838.
- 54 For example, (London) *Morning Post*, 19 July 1845; *Leeds Mercury*, 11 October 1845.
- 55 The *Manchester Times*, 18 December 1850, referred to him as 'late of this town'. He died on 30 June 1852, aged 67, in Boston. *Ex inf.* Neil Wright.
- 56 ICBS [note 41], file 00229.
- 57 Burcham was a well-known land agent and prolific enclosure commissioner, based at Coningsby, just to the north of the Fens. He 'served [as a commissioner] on at least 70 enclosures.' Michael Turner 'Enclosure Commissioners in Buckinghamshire Parliamentary Enclosures, *The Agricultural History Society Review*, 1998, p. 128.
- 58 Lincolnshire Archives, Ben 13/16.
- 59 Pigot and Co. [note 48], p. 86.
- 60 Lincolnshire Archives, Ben 13/16.
- 61 For Pocock and his influence see C. Webster, 'Introduction' to W.F. Pocock, *Designs for Churches and Chapels* (facsimile reprint), Reading, Spire Books, 2010.
- 62 Webster [note 61], p. 27.
- 63 The newly drained peat provided an unreliable foundation and settlement gradually pulled the building apart.
- 64 The phrase was one much used by the Ecclesiologists when faced with architectural solecisms by men like Carter, e.g. ICBS [note 41], file 04359.
- 65 J.A. Picton, *Memorials of Liverpool*, London, Longman & Green, 1875, vol. ii, p. 242.
- 66 This article is an expanded version of material gathered for the writer's study of the late-Georgian parish church in England.