

Welcome to St. Botolphs Church, Boston: 700 years of history

Peter Coleman introduces the first of a series of articles in the run up to the 700th anniversary of this iconic Lincolnshire landmark

Words: Peter Coleman



Many people ask why Boston has such a magnificent church. The reasons are that in the twelfth century Boston had become a flourishing seaport and its position between the wool growing Midlands and the great ports of Flanders ensured that for a long period it was the second most important port in the country.

Based on this wealth the church of St. Botolph, Boston, known the world over, as 'the Stump,' is the largest building in England that has always been a parish church, was built. The building of the present church began in 1309 on the site of a Norman Church when the digging of the foundations began. At a depth of thirty feet, five feet below the level of the River Welland, the foundations to this great church were laid. Later the same year the foundation stone was laid by Dame Margery Tilney with the construction of the church probably completed about 1390. The tower was probably started about 1450 and took some seventy years to build.

Why the name 'the Stump'? The exact reason is not known although it is probably referring to the towers appearance for it resembles a tree with its boughs lopped ready for felling.

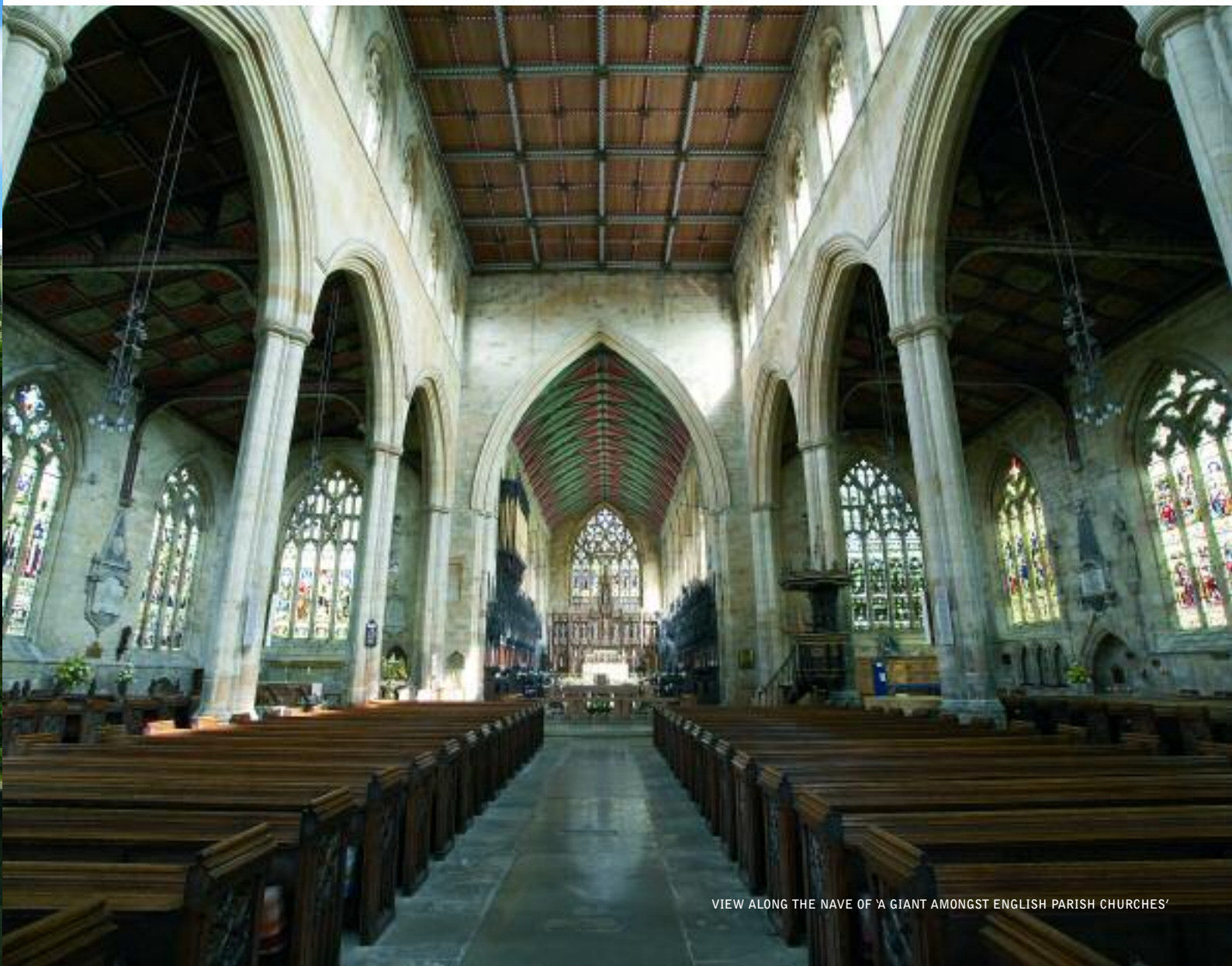
Across the Washes... stands Boston Tis remarkable for its Beautiful Church and Steeple which is reckoned the highest tower in Europe: Saluting travellers at a great distance round and an excellent Seamark seen about 40

miles distant. All the Country thro' there are many fine Churches... but this o'er looks them all like a proud Dame sensible of her beauty and scorning the meaner Croud about her [Dr. William Stukeley visiting Boston in 1707].

Many books have been written about the church and how it has contributed to the country's history. Built when Boston was the second most important port in England it has endured through the decline of the town and the turbulent times of the reformation. Its association with the Puritan movement is well recorded with its vicar John Cotton who departed to Massachusetts in 1633 with some of the violently puritan lay leaders leading to the founding of Boston, Massachusetts and that city's long association with the church and the town.

The library was founded in 1635 by Archbishop Laud and is still today one of the most prestigious parish libraries in the country with over 1,500 old manuscripts and books, some of them unique and of great interest.

There have been many restorations over the years, the first being recorded in 1634. However, by the late eighteenth century the church was in a very poor state of repair and this led to the almost continuous restorations of the middle 1850s carried out by the well-known church architect George Pace. Further work continued in the 1930s and the early 1980s leading up to the present restoration and development programme. Because of its





AERIAL VIEW OF ST. BOTOLPHS CHURCH

size, it is larger than many small cathedrals, the church requires continuous work to its fabric. So much so that thirty years ago it decided to employ its own masons, as far as is known, the only parish church in the country to do so. After twenty eight years they are still working at the church.

In 2009 the church celebrates its 700th anniversary, remembering the people who have given their time and talents to construct what was described by Sir Nikolaus Pevsner in 'The buildings of England' as 'a giant among English Parish Churches'. It will also remember how the church has contributed to history, not only in this country but also in other parts of the world. The long and deep ties between Boston, England and Boston Massachusetts will be reflected in the events planned for 2009 and it is expected that people will come from all over the world to visit the church and take part in the celebrations.

During the year many events will be held inside the church, including exhibitions, concerts, community

gatherings and special services. There will also be events outside in the town in the community celebrating this special year. The church is working with Lincolnshire Tourism and Boston Borough Council to promote the year to as many people as possible.

For over five centuries Boston's lantern tower has been a guide to travellers by land and sea, and in former times a beacon light shone at night from the Octagon. From its top there are amazing views embracing

Tattershall Castle, the towers of Lincoln Cathedral and Hunstanton across the Wash. The church is truly one of the icons of the country.

So if you have visited in the past come again. If you have not visited before why not come and see one of the most impressive buildings in the area and learn about how one of Lincolnshire's finest buildings helped shape history.

We look forward to welcoming you in 2009 to help celebrate our 700th anniversary.



THE LIBRARY WAS FOUNDED IN 1635