



Boston - *Now and then*

History buffs and people with a passion for interesting architecture will find treasure in a county port town.

Words: Glynis Fox Photographs: Mick Fox and Eyerise Photography

Boston is simply awash with fascinating buildings, and boasts the stories to go with them, making it a destination well worth discovering whether you are a tourist or someone living on its doorstep.

Yet, aside from its fascinating roots, the town is also a place which has benefited from extensive investment in recent years, making it a surprisingly good place to shop and find essential services.

And while Boston is happy to show off its buildings of note, those steering its recently-launched Business

Improvement District are working hard to ensure it pulls in even more shoppers and tourists in the future.

With so much on offer, perhaps those with an interest in history should start by checking out The Stump, which is this year celebrating its 700th anniversary.

In Medieval times England was a major wool producer and Boston, one of the main commercial ports at that time, grew rich on this trend which saw trade flourish with Europe.

It was decided to transform the town's small Norman church into the

equivalent of a cathedral as a sign of the town's wealth and so work began on The Stump, which remains a beacon for visitors from miles around, and a special place for weddings and other ceremonies.

Boston Guildhall (formerly The Boston Guildhall of The Blessed St Mary (or Boston St Mary's Guildhall), is one of the oldest and most significant religious guildhalls in the country.

For a long time, it was thought to have been built in the fifteenth century. But during its restoration, it was discovered it was erected in the 1390s,

SOUTH STREET



almost immediately after religious guilds were given permission to own property for the first time.

This building has had many uses, from town hall to sessions court and a gaol – where the band of religious Separatists (some of whom later joined with the famous Pilgrim Fathers) were tried and held in 1607. It is also an award-winning venue.

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Boston BID

Boston has only had a Business Improvement Group since last December, but it is already starting to make its mark by working on a raft of projects designed to make the town more attractive to shoppers and more prosperous for traders.

Three town rangers started work, to help deter shoplifters and people intent on causing a disruption in the town, earlier this year, and BID manager Niall Armstrong said their hours have already been altered, allowing them to operate even more effectively.

“We have changed the hours of the rangers slightly so that, although they still work the same amount of time overall, they give cover between the hours of 7am and 7pm, seven days a week.”

Boston BID is also working with the Community Payback Scheme. Where people have been given Community Service Orders, we are asking them to do unpaid labour in the town, such as weeding and clean-up projects, said Mr Armstrong.

“We are also working towards an electronic offenders database, which will allow businesses to get information and log reports about shoplifters. We can use this to assist in criminal prosecutions and look at a scheme whereby retailers can

take civil action if necessary.”

Mr Armstrong said the BID will have to register this with the Information Commissioners and businesses will have to sign to be able to use it.

Boston already has a retail anti-theft group, but BID bosses – which keeps talking to the local police, council and other agencies about its ideas – would like to see this expanded and the town move to having a Retail Crime Reduction Partnership.

Boston Borough has made £50,000 available for the regeneration of empty shop units. The BID will eventually be responsible for rolling-out this work.

“We are also looking at getting funding from Lincolnshire County Council, in order to provide jobs for people between the ages of 18 and 25. The idea is to put forward a project whereby we and other businesses can take someone who is out-of-work and employ them for six months,” said Mr Armstrong.

“We are also involved in consultations over £2 million of funding from Boston Borough Council and the county council, to undertake a revamp of the Market Place. People are being asked what they want to see, for instance, more or less parking/display areas”

The consultation period finishes at the end of this year. Plans will be put together in 2010 and work started in 2011.

FISHING BOATS ON THE RIVER HAVEN



THE HUSSEY TOWER



Award for Funeral Home

The Boston Preservation Trust has named Lincolnshire Co-operative as recipients of the Boston Civic Pride Annual Award for their work on the funeral home at 5 South Square. The Grade II listed building has had various uses over the years but it was in danger of falling into disrepair.

The funeral home was opened in December 2007, having kept many of the original features, including wood paneling and wooden sash windows.

John Bird, vice chair of the Boston Preservation Trust's civic group, said the building had been "exceptionally well restored."

"Lincolnshire Co-operative has done a superb job. It sets a standard for the rest of the town. We were very worried about this building and we are very thankful that the Co-op took it on."

Chief Executive Officer Ursula Lidbetter said it was an honour to have received the award. "Because Lincolnshire Co-operative is owned by the people of Lincolnshire it is appropriate that we put the resources into preserving and enhancing the communities where they live," she said.

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Boston Guildhall was named Lincolnshire Museum of the Year 2008 and RICS (Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors) East Midlands Conservation and OVERALL Project of the Year 2009.

Next door is Fydell House, a Grade 1-listed building which has benefited from the restoration of its forecourt walls, gates and railings, thanks to financial help from English Heritage.

An impressive Georgian townhouse, dating back to 1726, it was built for prosperous merchant Samuel Jackson, but actually named after Robert Fydell, who bought it in 1733.

After remaining in the Fydell family for many years, the house was eventually bought by the Boston Preservation Trust. In 1938, the then American ambassador to Great

Britain, Joseph Kennedy (JFK's father) dedicated a room within the building for the use of American visitors.

Boston's Cultural Quarter also boasts another unmissable attraction. The Haven is a striking architecturally-resurrected building.

This glass-fronted, contemporary centre, is used for exhibiting arts and crafts and the museum collection – the latter was housed and stored within the building, created from a derelict 1960 retail showroom. The Haven is also home to Boston's Tourist Information Centre.

Boston Borough Council principal museum, arts and heritage officer Luke Skerritt is delighted at the result of various revamp projects in the town.

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“The culmination of the ambitious twin project to both restore and reinterpret the Guildhall, along with providing a modern centre for the arts and a home for the museum collection within The Haven, enables us to effectively engage the public with our cultural heritage offer,” he said.

“We have the ability to tell stories of The Guildhall, through subtle interactive, audio and virtual reality exhibitions and to complement these with interpretation panels and the contextual display of material from the museum collection.

“Contemporary art, local arts and crafts, touring exhibitions and museum collections all form part of the vibrant exhibitions programme we deliver and are provided for, in part, by the level of environmental control we can offer to vulnerable and sensitive items.”

Built on the remains of a thirteenth century Dominican friary, the Blackfriars Theatre & Arts Centre is a great place to enjoy everything from plays to films, music and stand-up comedy, plus dance and visual arts workshops. Check out The Foyer Gallery for work by local artists, sculptors and others.

The surviving building, believed to be the Friary dining room, was converted into a theatre in 1965. The building is said to be haunted by a friar who hides sharp objects left by theatergoers under the stage – adding to the “theatrical atmosphere” perhaps!

If you’ve time, don’t forget to check out Scotia Creek, Fishtoft, the site of a Pilgrim Fathers’ memorial, put up in 1957. It marks the site where, in 1607, a band of religious Separatists waited to board a Dutch ship to take them to Holland, to escape persecution for their religious beliefs.

Unfortunately, the Dutch captain of the ship they hired betrayed them, and some were arrested and later tried in Boston Guildhall. But they were successful on a second attempt in 1608, when they sailed for Holland from Immingham Creek.

Boston certainly has a colourful past, and those steering the town forward today want it to have an even more prosperous future.

In recent years the town’s £27 million Pescod Square redevelopment has really boosted the shopping experience on offer to people in desperate need of some retail therapy.

This paved area is home to names such as Next, Waterstones and Wilkinsons and many more, which complement the wide variety of family-owned businesses in the town, which includes the popular department store Oldrid’s.

The Boston Shopping park has also been created on the former Asda site, off Horncastle Road.

And, because this port town is surrounded by miles of fertile agricultural land, Boston is also a great place to buy fresh produce, and market days really spoil you for choice.

In a drive to make the town even more welcoming, the Boston Business Improvement District, is also aiming to generate at least £1.1 million over the next five years (with the help of matched funding) to spend on projects to make Boston safer and the town an even bigger magnet for shoppers and visitors.



BOSTON STUMP



THE GUILDHALL