

WHAT'S THE HISTORY OF THE HISTORY OF BOSTON PROJECT?

EXTRACTS of original document announcing the start of the History of Boston Project following initial meeting of interested parties on 5th October, 1969 – in Isobel Bailey's records

Archives'Office, 27 Wide Bargate, Boston

“As you will probably know, it has recently been proposed that an up-to-date history of Boston should be compiled with a view to eventual publication in book form. In order to investigate the interest in, and the feasibility of, such a project a meeting of persons** thought likely to have a direct and informed interest was called on 5th October, 1969.

As a result of this meeting a group of persons was appointed to investigate all aspects of the matter and to report. This was done and a number of recommendations made. These recommendations formed the substance of a considerable report, the main points of which were:

- a. There is a need for a fully researched and authoritative history of the town which, however, when presented in book form, should be a readable and well-produced volume designed to appeal to the ordinary man-in-the-street and not only to the historian.
- b. That the project would entail several years' work by a considerable number of people.
- c. That the initial project should be to produce a series of authoritative pamphlets on a large variety of aspects of the history of the town and only when this has been achieved should a definitive history be written from the material thus accumulated. The eventual definitive history should probably be written by one individual who would probably, though not inevitably, be an author of proved ability.
- d. That professional local historical advice should be taken at all stages of the project. (This has already been assured from Dr. Alan Rogers of the University of Nottingham).
- e. That an 'executive-editorial' committee with powers to co-opt be appointed to organize and prosecute the project. (The names of this committee appear at the head of this letter).

This committee has already started work and a number of projects are already under way. This venture is, as may be realized, a considerable undertaking and will involve research into material in archives, libraries and museums in many places other than Boston. It is, however, a venture which is likely to be of interest to all thoughtful Bostonians, wherever they may be and not without value to the corporate life of the town.

Although it is hoped and expected that the actual publications which will result from this work will be financially self-supporting there are considerable initial difficulties to be overcome and there will be not inconsiderable expenses involved in accumulating the material.

The first and perhaps most important of these initial problems was to establish a central archives office for the collection of the relevant material and the organization of the project. Through the good offices of our present mayor, Councillor G.G.A. Whitehead, in his private capacity, and the generosity of Messrs. Roythorne and co., this has already been done. We are now appealing to the business, professional and commercial interests in the town, and to a few private individuals, to ask if they will assist in establishing the project on a firm basis.

If this is an undertaking of which you approve we shall be most grateful for your help. A donation of any size would be most helpful as also would office equipment such as filing cabinets, map drawers or facilities for copying maps and documents and many smaller items.

Quite incidental to any financial or material support that you feel able to give we should be very glad to know any 'historical' assistance that you might be able to render. This includes both historical material, or references to it, in the form of old business records and pictures, etc., and direct personal interest in involvement in the project by you or members of your staff. We shall be very glad to hear from you either by the return of the accompanying slip, or in any other way that seems appropriate.

Yours truly
(on behalf of the Committee)

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C.G. Keithley (sp?) (Chairman)
R.E.G. Parkinson (Hon. Secretary)
J. Mitchell (Hon. Treasurer)
R.K. Allday (Vice Chairman)
Miss Joan Carter
Miss R. Hilary Healey
Rev. Mark Spurrell
N.R. Wright

History of Boston project Publications notes (appears at the back of Isobel Bailey's *Pishey Thompson Man of Two Worlds 1785-1862* (1991))

The History of Boston Project was established in 1969 with the intention of encouraging and supporting by all means possible, research into the history of the town and district with the hope and intention of eventually seeing published a comprehensive and authoritative history of the town up to the present day. Pishey Thompson's *History and Antiquities of Boston* (published in 1856) had been published 113 years earlier and no major attempt had been made since then to cover the succeeding years nor to reassess Thompson's work in the light of modern knowledge.

Initially, many people responded to the concept and it was decided to publish a number of booklets as the material became available. This resulted in the History of Boston Series which eventually (1970-1977) consisted of 14 booklets and *The Atlas of Boston* by Neil Wright and Frank Molyneux [making 15 in all]. It was then decided to husband the Project's limited resources and for the time being to give all the support available to John Bailey who had undertaken the herculean task of transcribing the Corporation Assembly books (the minutes of the Corporation) which were virtually complete from the incorporation of the Borough in 1545 to the present. Between 1980 and 1985 the first four volumes were published (a total of 2,867 pages plus appendices). Unhappily John Bailey had died in 1984 but the work of transcription, though still a major task, is easier towards more modern times, and vol. V (1717-1736) is progressing towards completion [in 1991].

The History of Boston Project 1969-present – 1985...letter [unknown author – probably Jim Hopkins], with Isobel Bailey's papers and in the HofBP archive at Fydell House

“A brief outline of the origins and work of the History of Boston Project can hardly do justice to the number of people involved nor to the hard work that has been devoted to the project. Nor would it be possible to apportion credit between the work of the earlier years and that of the later. Although the number of people actively involved in the initial stages were somewhat greater than those of more recent years, the nature and value of the work done and the dedication and involvement of the smaller (although still considerable) number of people latterly, has been truly amazing. There have never been less than some 20 people actively involved at any time although the greater burden has been carried by a few.

It is fitting that the Exhibition is being held in Pilgrim College, as the origins of the Project sprang from just this place. In the summer of 1969 a doctoral thesis by Frank Molyneux, who had once taught geography at Boston Grammar School and had been a part-time tutor in Pilgrim College, was left lying on the table of Alan Champion, the then Warden, in his office. This Book, Boston in the Twentieth Century, was casually picked up and leafed through for a few moments. A few weeks later the book was again picked up by the same hands and noted a little more seriously. Indeed, the book was taken away and read over the next week or two, when it became evident that there was work recorded between the covers that would be of great interest to many present Bostonians, and of considerable value to historians of the town and district. (Some of the work in that thesis has appeared in the Atlas of Boston.

From this casual happening, after considerable discussion and with the support of Alan Champion and the University of Nottingham, a meeting was called later in the year that was to consider the possibility of researching and writing an up-to-date history of Boston and district. An initial meeting took place on a Sunday evening in the autumn of 1969 in the Green Room of Pilgrim College, with some thirty to forty people present and Alan Champion in the chair. From this meeting a committee was set up to investigate the possibilities for the future. Cyril Keightley took the chair of the steering committee, and served as Chairman of the Project from its inception until 1984, since when Jim Hopkins has chaired the Project. Richard Parkinson was its first Secretary. There was, in the next few weeks, considerable discussion with many people. A further meeting of the original gathering, with some other interested people, was called, and a firm decision was taken to go ahead with the broad plan to research and publish various aspects of the history of the town, with the hope that in time sufficient ground would be covered to justify handing over the material to a competent historian with the brief of producing an up-to-date history of Boston. At that time it was somewhat nebulously estimated that perhaps 7-10 years might be needed for this work. Now, some 15 1/2 years later one might almost say that the Project is no nearer to the ultimate completion of the task it set itself.

The initial thoughts and plans were that individuals should research aspects of the town and produce booklets. The booklets should be written to interest the general reader, and the research material investigated and recorded should be collected and collated and made available 'for the eventual historian'. In the first few months of the Project many local businesses and individuals were canvassed and some funds raised. An office was made available to the Project by the then Mayor, councillor George Whitehead, who was at that time a solicitor in the town. The office made available by this firm, Roythorne and Co., was gratefully used for several years and is still the postbox of the project. At the same time, amongst other businesses, the Trustee Savings Bank, in addition to making a donation to the

funds of the Project, kindly made available secretarial assistance – invaluable in the first few years.

After the initial gathering of interested parties and the setting up of the committee, the hard work began, but already some material had been collected and partially worked upon by various people so that the nucleus of the first booklet or two was to hand. It so happened that in the autumn of 1970 Boston was having a Trades Fair, an event which at that time took place every 3 years, and a stand was made available for the Project. In September of that year the initial work was displayed and a subscription list for the booklets was brought before the public. This subscription list had, in fact, been opened somewhat earlier, through the good offices of almost all local newsagents, who had agreed to distribute leaflets on one or two days in the summer with their daily newspaper deliveries, so that these leaflets were posted through very many of the letter boxes in Boston. At the time of the Trades Fair, although no booklets had been published, covers of the first and second were actually available, and by the end of the Trades Fair, or at least by the end of the year, the subscription list had achieved the not inconsiderable figure of some 400 subscribers to the series. During the year 1970-1971, four titles were published for a subscription figure of 25s. (or £1.25). In the following year a further 4 titles were published, and by the end of the following 5 years, up to October 1977, a total of 14 booklets and the bound Atlas of Boston had appeared. The last publication, appearing in October 1977, was really only able to do so because of a guaranteed sale to the Catholic community of the town, whose history it was, and on the 150th anniversary of their church building, it was published.

The Atlas of Boston had been published in June 1974, and a little before that time a newcomer, John Bailey, had come to Boston and had shown an interest in the work of the Project. He brought with him an expertise previously lacking in the town, namely an ability to read medieval manuscripts. Between 1974 and 1977 the financial stability of the Project had become increasingly dubious, and with the advent of John Bailey it was decided to husband the slender resources of the Project and devote them to a task which was thought to be of major importance both to Boston and local history.

Boston, if not unique, is at least unusual in having an almost complete set of Minutes from its incorporation as a borough in 1545 right up to the present day. Not only did it possess these minutes, but they had been carefully preserved, and insofar as any material of that age is legible, they could be read and – by those who knew what they were reading – interpreted.

Again, with the good offices of Pilgrim college, a Local History Workshop was set up under the direction of John Bailey, and an enthusiastic group of transcribers and transliterators set to work to make the minutes of the Corporation of Boston available in a form that could be read by anyone capable of reading typescript English.

The magnitude of this undertaking can hardly be over-emphasized, but over the time from about 1975, when the work actually started, up to the present time, the first 3 volumes of the minutes, from 1545-1871, were completed in their entirety under the direction and control of John Bailey. In addition to that work, John did an enormous amount of research into the archives of the borough, although the task of sorting and recording the material there has only just begun. Unhappily, John Bailey died in August 1984, but he had by then achieved the greater part of the problem task of deciphering and transcribing the minutes of the Corporation. From the point at which his work stopped, the remaining minutes are something which can be read, albeit with some difficulty, by any scholar.

This transcription of the minutes has resulted in a mass of typed work which, if published in the ordinary manner as a book, would be far beyond the resources of the Project to support. Nevertheless, it was felt that the material was of sufficient importance to justify dealing with it in a laborious and somewhat unusual manner. Each of the first three volumes, covering something of the order of half a century, consists of almost 800 pages of typescript, and these (nearly 21/2 thousand pages in total) were photostated on equipment loaned by Beam Office Equipment Ltd. In all, something like 125,000 sheets of paper have so far been dealt with, all being collected and collated by hand into separate columns. These volumes have been made available as bound books, each being bound by hand by John Ashman in Lincoln. The books were, and insofar as copies remain unsold are, available at a cost of £110 each, or £100 per volume if all volumes in the series are taken.

The work of the Project continues, and Volume IV of the transcriptions of the Minutes of the Corporation of Boston is in process of being completed. The original work on this volume was done by John Bailey but the checking has inevitably been in other hands: it will be duplicated and produced in the same fashion as volumes I, II and III.

Throughout the Project's history, support has been forthcoming from the University of Nottingham, and Dr. Alan Rogers, Lecturer in Local History at the University in the early years of the Project, gave much valuable help. The University made facilities available for much of the work of the Workshop class in Local History, which transcribed the minutes under John Bailey's direction, and has supported the Project throughout. In addition to this, the Borough of Boston has watched with interest and given very real help. Recently it has made a room available so that the work of the Project may continue. In the next few years, it is hoped that further booklets along the lines of the initial History of Boston Series booklets will emerge, and several are in process of preparation now.

Although at the outset a time span of 10 years for completion of the Project was in mind, as more and more of value and interest has been discovered, the task of doing justice to the history of this town seems greater. Whether or not a definitive history, to supersede Pishey Thompson's History of Boston published in 1856 does emerge within the measurable future, it is nevertheless an undoubted fact that much of the value has already been achieved. The work that has so far been published, both in the booklets and the transcriptions of the minutes, has travelled to many places, particularly institutions of learning throughout the world. Some or all of the published work has been requested from so far west as Salt Lake city, and in the east from Tokyo: to the north copies have gone to Scandinavia and to the south, Cape Town.

There are still places ignorant of the history of this town – but they get fewer year by year. The work of the Project continues.

Written notes that appear with each of the History of Boston publications (14 in all):

This series is designed to consist of individual papers and material relevant to the history of the town of Boston in the County of Lincolnshire in England. These papers – which may be short and published several to a booklet or long enough to justify booklets to themselves – will range widely over many aspects of the life of the town. Some indeed may deal mainly

with people and events far removed from Boston, but only in so far as they have a relevance to the history of the town itself.

All the papers in this series will be contributed by individuals through the 'History of Boston Project', usually from the material that they will have accumulated towards the proposed eventual *The History of Boston*. However, although all papers are the work of the individual authors, who retain full responsibility for their own contributions, every paper (other than reprints from the documents of history themselves) is submitted to a professional authority before acceptance. Whether or not the professional advice is accepted is the responsibility of the individual author but nothing will be published in this series which is thought to be historically inaccurate or in any other way unacceptable as a work of history.

Consultant in Local History to the History of Boston Project:

Alan Rogers, MA PhD FRHist S Lecturer in medieval and Local History, Department of Adult Education, University of Nottingham, Editor of Bulletin of Local History East Midlands Region. Edited *The Making of Stamford* (1965); *Stability and Change: some aspects of N. and S. Rauceby in the Nineteenth Century* (1969). Author of *The Medieval Buildings of Stamford* (1970). *A History of Lincolnshire* (1970) and of several papers on aspects of Lincolnshire history. Chairman of the History of Lincolnshire committee

List of titles and authors (plus biographical notes where they appear in the pamphlets, reproduced below).

Number 1: *The First Stone* and other papers, Mark Spurrell (1970)

The Revd. Mark Spurrell read modern history at Oxford and has been Lecturer of Boston at St. Botolph's since 1965. Co-editor of the *Journal of a Slave Trader, John Newton, 1750-1754*, 1962, he is president of the Boston branch of the Historical Association

Others:

Schools in Boston (up to 1910) by Neil R. Wright

Neil Wright has previously contributed papers to *Lincolnshire Industrial Archaeology* and the *National Journal Industrial Archaeology*. He is Treasurer and Publications Officer of the *Industrial Archaeology Group of the Lincolnshire Local History Society* and joint Hon. Secretary of the Boston branch of the Historical Association.

The Coming of the School Board. Elementary Education in Boston 1815-1895 by Stephen de Winton.

Stephen de Winton B.A. is at present on the staff of Loughborough Grammar School

The Violent Death of Gentle Sutton. The last gibbeting in the Boston district by R. Hilary Healey

Miss Hilary Healey, N.D.D. is Head of Art Department, Spalding Girls High School. She is on the Executive Committee of the Lincolnshire Local History Society and represents that

committee on the Council for British Archaeology. She is immediate past secretary of the Boston and south Lincolnshire Archaeology Group and is currently writing a thesis on medieval pottery of Lincolnshire.

Number 2: *The Early Medieval History of Boston A.D. 1086-1400* by P.H.J. Dover

P. Dover – ‘Pop’; - retired from the Civil Service in 1950 and came to live in Algarkirk, moving into Boston itself in 1969. Whilst in Algarkirk he had access to many previously unexamined parish records and devoted much time in the early years of his retirement to the task of examining those papers. He is well known in local history circles throughout the county and has contributed papers to various local history journals and periodicals.

Number 3: *The Boston Farmers’ Union* and other papers by J.E. Spurr (1971)

John Eric Spurr, a farmer’s son, was for 35 years the secretary of what is now the Boston Branch of the Holland (Lincs.) County Branch of the National Farmer’s Union. he has for many years had an interest in matters of local history and has an unrivalled personal knowledge of the subject of his paper. Since his retirement he has continued to make his home in Boston.

Other sections:

The Institute - Agricultural Education by D.E. Horton

Donovan E. Horton was trained in the Netherlands and at the royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and was on the staff of ‘The Institute’ from 1930 until his retirement two years ago. He is co-author of several Ministry of Agriculture bulletins and of the *International Dictionary of Scientific Horticulture*.

The Boston-to-Spalding Road prior to the General highway Act 1835 by P. Dover

A Letter of 1815 by Samuel Leigh

Samuel Leigh came to Boston in 1815. He was quite unaware that his writing was destined eventually for publication in this series.

An Escape from Boston Gaol in 1838 by Neil R. Wright

Tunnard Park by Neil R. Wright (Also known as Hopkins’ Park and Oldrid’s Park)

Number 4: *The Railways of Boston Their Origins and Development* by Neil R. Wright

Number 5: *The Puritan Town of Boston* and other papers (1972) by Mark Spurrell

Other sections:

Signature Emblems, Marks and Brands in the XVIth and XVIIth centuries by P. Dover

Notes on Two Mayors by P. Dover

Number 6: *Methodism in the Town of Boston* (1971) by William Leary

William Leary is the Honorary Secretary of the Lincolnshire Methodist History Society and Methodist Archivist for the Lincoln District of the Methodist Church. He serves on the committees of the Methodist Archives at City Road, London and the International Methodist Historical Society. Following five years of war service in the Royal Navy, he entered Hartley Victoria College, was ordained to the Methodist Ministry in 1949 and for the last eight years has taught Religious Education and History in a boys Secondary School in Lincoln. He holds four awards in the George Eayrs Methodist History Essays and has published a number of books on village Methodism, including *Methodism in the City of Lincoln*.

Number 7: *Boston and The Great Civil War* by A.A. Garner (1972)

Arthur Garner, although having no close personal ties with Boston itself, was born in Lincolnshire at Cleethorpes in 1926 and now works in the drug and fine chemical industry in Grimsby. He is Chairman of the Grimsby Archaeological Society and a member of the Cromwell Association. During the past 15 years he has developed a particular interest in the Civil War period and has made an especial study of the events of that time occurring in, and the impact of the larger conflict on, the county of Lincolnshire. He has previously published *Colonel Edward King* (Grimsby Library and Museum Committee 1970) and has already accumulated material for studies on several other aspects of the mid seventeenth century in Lincolnshire. It is hoped that one of these at least, relating to Boston in its seafaring interests in the period immediately following the Civil War, will eventually appear in this series.

Number 8: *Aspects of Nineteenth Century Boston and district* (1972) contains:

Rural Boston a Century Ago. The Foundations of Contemporary Arable Farming by Frank Molyneux

Frank Molyneux is on the staff of the School of Education, Nottingham University. His thesis for the Master's Degree was a geographical study of Boston's development in this century and was based on research carried out during his residence in Boston between 1959-1964. This thesis, *Boston in the 20th Century* which is as yet unpublished but of which there are typescript copies in the Borough and Pilgrim College libraries, was the principal stimulus leading to the formation of the HofBP and this series of publications. He acts as geographical and cartographic consultant to the Project and plans a single volume contribution to the HofBP series on aspects of Boston's development since 1900. His current major writing concerns educational planning in the United States where he was a Research Fellow of the American Council of Learned Societies in 1969-70. He has been invited to produce the final volume in the 12 volume History of Lincolnshire series.

The Clay Pipe Makers of Boston by Peter Wells

Peter Wells, A.T.D. is Head of art Department, Giles Secondary School, Old Leake. He is a member of the committee of the Boston and South Lincolnshire archaeological Society and directed the excavation of a clay pipe kiln in Boston publishing a report on the excavation in *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology*. He read a paper on pipemaking in Lincolnshire at the national Spring conference of the Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology in 1969.

The Building of Boston's Sessions House by Neil R. Wright

The Boston election of 1860 by boys in the Department of History, Boston Grammar School.

Number 9: *The Monumental Brasses in Saint Botolph's Church, Boston* (1973) by Jeremy Wheeldon

J.P.D. Wheeldon, although not a Bostonian, has many connections with the town. He was born at Heighington in 1946 and educated at the North Kesteven Grammar School. After leaving school he joined the family business of Art Dealers in Lincoln. He became interested in Church Brasses after seeing an exhibition of brass rubbings in Cambridge and joined the Monumental Brass Society in 1965. He has since written several articles and lectured on brasses.

Number 10: *An Atlas of Boston* by Frank Molyneux and Neil Wright (1974)

A note on the atlas:

“So far as is known to those concerned in the production of this atlas, it is unique in its method of portraying the development of a town. The stimulus for it arose when one of the authors (Neil Wright) submitted an important paper to The History of Boston Project on ‘The Bounds of Boston’. That paper (which appear as Section III in this volume), interesting and important in itself, came at a time when the Project was considering the Possibility of making available reproductions of some of the rare maps of the town that were known to exist but copies of which were not easy to obtain. When these two concepts were placed before Dr. Molyneux he immediately, as a geographer, saw the possibilities of using the spatial viewpoint to produce a developmental study of the town. Subsequently parts of his own research into the socio-economic development of Boston in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were incorporated and the whole synthesized into a portrayal of the development of the town by means of the geographical idiom. As a tool for those researching into any aspect of the history of Boston, this atlas will be invaluable. As a prototype for the portrayal of other towns or districts it is likely to be of interest both to historians and geographers. To those who know and love Boston it is likely to prove a source of continuing fascination and enjoyment.”

Number 11: *Boston's Newspapers* (1974) by Lionel Robinson

Lionel G. Robinson came to Boston with his family from Lincoln in 1912 and has been associated with the newspaper industry for half a century. After five years at Boston Grammar School, he became what was known in those days as a newspaper pupil at the Lincolnshire Standard, under his father's direction, and for three years worked and studies in the different production departments. He was successively a proof reader, compositor, junior reporter, senior reporter, sub-editor and news editor. From 1930 to 1953 he was the Editor of the Lincolnshire Standard and in the latter year succeeded his father as Managing Director and Editor of the Group. He retired in 1970 and has since been engaged in feature writing. For three years he was a member of the council of The Guild of British Newspaper editors and is an ex-chairman of the East Midlands branch. he has also been chairman of the North Midlands Branch of the newspaper Society. Locally, he is a Trustee of the East Midlands Trustee Savings Bank, a member of the Management Committee of the Boston preservation Trust and a member of the Council of the Boston and District Chamber of Commerce.

Number 12: *Boston At War. Being an Account of Boston's Involvement in the Boer War and the Two World Wars* by Martin Middlebrook (1974)

Martin Middlebrook was born in Boston in 1932 and, except for the latter part of his education and 2 years of National Service, he has lived in the town ever since. His early education, firstly at St. Mary's Catholic School and later at the Grammar School, was in Boston and included the first five years of the Second World War. Thus many of the events described in the third part of this booklet were experienced at first hand, albeit as a schoolboy. Since 1958 he has been deeply involved in local government and in 1966 was elected Boston's first citizen as the youngest ever mayor of the Borough. His interest in military history dates from an early age and, following a visit to the First World War battlefields of France and Belgium in 1967, he began work on his 'Men at War' trilogy. The first of these books, *The First Day on the Somme*, was published in 1971 and the second *The Nuremberg Raid* in 1973 (Allen Lane). The third, *Convoy* is currently in preparation.

Number 13: *Boston Politics and the Sea 1652-1674* by A.A. Garner (1975)

From his researches into the involvement of Boston in the civil wars of the 17th century (see above) Alan Garner uncovered material which has led to this present volume. His researches into the Port Books, a source of information which seems largely to have been ignored heretofore, gives a valuable insight into the fortunes of the Port of Boston at this time. Although still living in Grimsby, the vicissitudes of local government re-organisation have removed him from the county of Lincolnshire to that of South Humberside. His interest in Boston's History however, remains unchanged and further researches are already being made into the lives and families of a number of well-known Bostonians of the past. It is hoped that in due course this also will appear in the Series.

Number 14: *Banking in Boston* by S.N. Davis (1976)

Steven Norman Davis was born in Birmingham in 1949 and educated there at King Edward VI School for Boys. His interest in local history developed whilst at the University of Wales, Cardiff, where he obtained his B.A. Hons Hist. and Cert.Ed. After joining the staff of Boston High School for Girls he began a course there in local history and during this time researched and wrote *Banking in Boston*. He is now teaching at the Amy Johnson High School, Hull, and is continuing his interests in local history, now being involved in the production of audio-visual material for schools. He is married to Miss Lesley Cox of Boston.

Number 15: *The Catholic Church in Boston* by Martin Middlebrook (1977)

In 1986 **George Bagley**, with the encouragement and financial support of the Hof BP, but wholly as a result of his own labours, published *Boston: Its Story and People*, a comprehensive up to date history of the town towards which the aim of the Project had been directed since its inception.

In 1987, the HofBP published *The Fydells of Boston* by A.A. Garner as an 'Occasional Paper'

Transcriptions of the Minutes of the Corporation of Boston Volume 1 1545-1607, initiated by John Bailey, published 1980

These transcriptions were commenced in 1976 and the first volume completed in 1980. It was presented to the Mayor of Boston, Councillor John C. Wright for the Archives of the Borough of Boston.

Born in Bristol, John Bailey was offered the appointment of Town Clerk (in ???). He already had an interest in local history having studied and obtained an M.A. degree as a mature student after retirement. **In Boston, he discovered that there was a most unusually complete archive of the Minutes of the Corporation since its incorporation as a borough by a charter of Henry VIII in 1545.** It was whilst researching in the archive material of the borough that he discovered a single diary of Pishey Thompson's which, as Isabel tells in her introduction to her edited publication of *Pishey Thompson's 'Boston' Diary 18th October 1842-6th April, 1844* (1991) led first to her husband's interest and later to her own, in Pishey Thompson the man rather than simply an interest in his monumental history of the town.

History of Boston project Committee members, 1980: Cyril G. Keightley; Richard K. Allday; John F. Bailey; James W. Hopkins; Christine E. ort; June M. Ostler; Hilary R. Healey; Ann E. Carlton; David B. Ganderton; Ivan C. Stimson.

Local History Project Workshop members: Enid E. Lee; Pauline M. Lee; Grace H. Smith; Betty E. Coy; Roinald K. Blakey; Penny W. Vine; John H. Guy; Olive Guy; Jane A. Garner; Geoffrey Paling; Pamela M. Paling; Kay Paling; Keith N. Wolverson; Olive M. Wolverson; Normal E. Whitaker; Kim Parlabeau; Reginald C. Atterby.

A worthwhile project for the Boston History Group would be to digitise the Minutes of the Corporation of Boston.

Volume I's introduction is copied below from the typewritten document to give an example of the extensive and careful foreword that appears in this first Volume....and what is at stake. These are documents of international scholarly significance – as is the archive of the Borough (permission would be needed to reproduce any of this online – Richard Kay publications has the copyright?)

Volume 1 1545-1607, 1980 History of Boston Project pp. xiii-xxiii

John Bailey

“The original intention of the History of Boston Project to use the Corporation Assembly Books as source material for a comprehensive history of the Borough may have been too ambitious for the resources at their disposal. The ‘raison d’etre’ of the Project’s activities has been to illumine facets of the town’s history through the work of enthusiasts labouring in fields limited by their own interests. Examination of the Assembly Books has revealed a wealth of detail that illumines far more than the history of a small port and market town seven miles inland from the Wash. Lack of resources has not deterred the project from undertaking a transcription of the material available, from which it is hoped that two things will emerge – the facility for students and historians to investigate the fascinating detail of the Borough’s history since incorporation, and a comprehensive history of Boston based on the ‘Acts of the Corporation’ as recorded in the Book of Assemblies. These ambitious concepts have induced many people to take up a more detailed study of the town in which they live and this transcript of Volume I is a testimony to their interest and enthusiasm.

It is impossible to contemplate the fifteen volumes of the Boston Assembly Books without marvelling that a detailed study of them has not been attempted before now. Francis Thirkill’s beautifully written index ought long ago to have invited someone to undertake the task; future students should, however, beware of an inexplicable lapse on the part of such a consummate craftsman. Although clearly headed as an index to Volume III, the details which follows is that of Volume IV No reference to the entries in Volume III appears in the index.

Pishey Thompson’s magnificent volume has weathered well and after more than a century stands as one of the outstanding antiquarian works of the nineteenth century. Despite his herculean labours, however, Thompson gave scant attention to the historical implications behind the wealth of information he uncovered and it is at once that any future student of history should make a closer study of Boston’s Assembly Books in order to obtain insights not readily available elsewhere. This work is offered in the hope that what is here presented will be of some assistance when such an opportunity presents itself.

Considering the antiquity of the volumes, the method of storing them over the larger part of their life, and the uses to which they have been put, it is astonishing that they have survived in such remarkably good condition. In this connection it is a pleasure to acknowledge the sterling efforts of Mr. Hoffrock Griffiths in having the volumes rebound and to the Borough Council of the time which supported him in his inspired campaign.

volume I covers the years from the incorporation of the Borough in 1545 (the thirty-seventh year of the reign of Henry VIII) to 1607 (the fourth year of the reign of James I). The scripts vary enormously and while it is pleasant to think that they may reflect the characters of succeeding Town Clerks it may be nearer the truth to say that scribes employed by them were responsible. It has not so far been possible to identify the change in the scripts with the changes in the appointment of the Town Clerk. By the nature of his task and the methods applied to it, the Town Clerk, or whoever wrote the ‘Acts of the Assembly’ was excluded from all possibility of showing how the collective mind of the Assembly moved. The infrequency of the Guildhall meetings in the early days of the Corporation’s existence, and especially a system calling for the Acts to be written twelve months in arrears, rendered it impossible to rectify any occasional lapse on the part of the scrivener and generated a

prevalent disregard for accuracy in the making of so important a record. It has to be admitted that we are fortunate to be in possession of the records as they stand, but it is tantalizing to read that many documents of surpassing interest to the twentieth century scholar were carried to London or Lincoln in support of the extensive litigation undertaken for and against the Corporation, and while in most cases their return has been recorded, they cannot now be found. The capacity of the 'Great Presse' (still standing as a room divider on the upper floor of the Guild Hall) called for frequent re-organisation by Mr Mayor and a select few of the aldermen, and it takes little imagination to see the busy re-organisers feeding out-dated documents to the flames in the kitchen below.

Before the history of this town can be pieced together the net will have to be cast somewhat wider to draw into the mass of information already in hand, documents lodged with other authorities. There may yet survive carried up to the Court of Chancery and Star Chamber or to Lincoln assizes by mayors and aldermen in support of cases put forward by the Borough, or in answer to complaints made against it.

To the discovery of such a surviving document we owe a clear account of why incorporation was deemed necessary; of who suggested that it should be petitioned for; and how the finance was arranged to achieve it. Further than this, the document makes clear that there was well organised resistance to the project, led by Thomas Brown, a J.P. and chief Customs Office of the port of Boston. Nicholas Robinson's reply to the complaint that the facilities provided by the guilds to obtain the Charter of Incorporation had been corruptly used, is typically long-winded and impossible to quote in full. It can be said, however, that following the neglect of the sea banks by Henry VIII's agents administering almost the whole of the property in the town (which had at various times fallen to the Royal Court of Augmentation of the King's Revenue), in 1543 the banks were breached, and the land for seven miles around Boston was invaded by a disastrous flood of salt and fresh water. Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, called a number of the most substantial townsmen to Tattershall where he suggested to them that the tragic inundation would recur so long as only three feet of the bank was neglected – making the obvious point that control of the whole sea defence must be under the sole authority of an incorporated borough. The townsfolk should petition to buy the royal holdings in the town, so removing the fear of neglected sea banks collapsing and allowing 'the rage of the sea' to have them in perpetual jeopardy. When it was protested that the townspeople had not funds for such an enterprise, the Duke showed them that the vast wealth of the corporate guilds of the town could not be more profitably employed than in such a godly enterprise, and how he, with his ready access to the royal presence, would 'be their good lord' and put his considerable weight behind the petition for incorporation.

The Answer gives the names of a few of Thomas Browne's collaborators and offers suppositious reasons for their joining him in originating so serious a complaint in the highest court in the land. One was said to be heavily in debt to several guild members and, being but a poor merchant, was fearful that the unification of guild influence into a corporation would be the occasion for calling in the debts at a time when he was unable to meet them. Two are named as having taken offence at being omitted from the twelve named as aldermen in the Charter, while Thomas Browne himself is said to have been apprehensive lest he should be driven from his position as Customer of the Port of Boston.

Nicholas Robinson's involved sentences, while they achieve the semblance of the legal jargon of the day, cannot obscure the fact that he is making heavy weather of a weak case and may have been the cause of Edward VI's regal rejoinder in ordering the disputed guild

property to be handed over to the Marquis of Northampton who, in this instance, used his privileged status as brother to Katharine Parr, the King's step-mother, to his own advantage, and utter consternation of the aldermen and common councillors meeting St. Mary's Guildhall – which they would most certainly lose if they concurred in the threatened transfer of property. Despite their two frantic meetings on 21st June 1552 they reluctantly allowed that they had no alternative but to obey the royal command with as good a grace as they could muster.

After the graphic opening on page 2 of Volume I, depicting the inauguration of the Corporation, the installation of the Mayor, the Recorder, the Town Clerk and the twelve aldermen, the entries follow the events of the next few years rather hesitatingly before assuming a form which established the 'modus operandi' for the remainder of the volume. After the inaugural meeting on 1st June 1545 there was but one meeting in each of the following years until 1548, when two are recorded. There was one in 1549, four in 1550-1551. When, however, the crisis developed over the transfer of the Guild property to the Marquis of Northampton in 1552, there were fourteen meetings recorded. Subsequently there is no detectable pattern to the arrangement of Assemblies save that there was an insistence on meetings being held on or about 25th March for the election of the new major, and on Ember days in order to read the ordinances and Charters to the company.

Despite the gaps in the early records it is certain that considerable activity was taking place: the trade of the port continued, the marts and fairs were held, officers were appointed, the Court of Record was in session each week, and the Corporation's newly acquired property was being faithfully administered by the Bailiffs.

It is disappointing, however, to discover that George Forster, the First town Clerk, did not adhere as closely as he might have done to the brief with which the Charter provided him. His appointed task was 'to write, ingross and register all Records, Matters, Causes, Directions, Processes, Statutes, Laws and Mandates of the said Mayor and Aldermen'. For it was the Mayor himself who recorded details of what transpired at meetings of the Assembly, and his notes were given to the Town Clerk at the year's end to be written up as 'the acts of the Assembly' in 'the great Book of Assemblies'. The frequency with which the folios were left blank suggests that the Mayor's notes were not always forthcoming – a supposition borne out by the opening entry on folio 4:

“John Wendon Maior who always
carryd home with him the Notes
for the Assembles in the tyme
of his Mairaltie saving one pamphlet”.

In 1550 it is recorded that Henry Fox's pamphlets were lost, but despite the apparent frailty of the system and the probability that the Mayor failed to record many of the activities of the Assembly, we have in later entries a fascinating account of many of the decisions made by Boston's self-perpetuating oligarchy.

In a litigious age, in an attempt to be explicit, resort was made to legal phraseology wherein more than necessary was entered on the written page. Spelling is arbitrary and inconsistent, often relying on the phonetic – which frequently produces an impression of the Lincolnshire dialect of the times. The influence of Latin as taught in the grammar schools, and fresh in the memory of many who looked nostalgically backwards to the liturgy of the Roman church, is

frequently apparent and sometimes a residue of Norman French can be detected in such things as the elision of the definite article with the noun to which it relates. Punctuation is erratic and unpredictable, personal preferences determining the form to be used. Where it is absent (as frequently happens) there is little difficulty in following the meaning, in consequence of which no attempt has been made to insert punctuation marks consistently in the transcripts. The use of capital letters for proper names is disconcertingly inconsistent. Under our self-imposed rule this idiosyncrasy has been carried forward into the transcript. 'And' is frequently used to originate a new sentence – which practice, in the syntax of the day, appears not to break any grammatical rules; where, however, 'and' is used within a sentence it is noticeable that the ampersand is frequently employed.

It became necessary almost at the outset to remove from the shoulders of the volunteer members of the Workshop Group the responsibility for extending the palaeographic abbreviations and modernising the spelling and punctuation of the manuscript. They were in consequence, asked to transcribe *verbatim et literatim* what they saw on the page in front of them. It is hoped that no one who has cause to consult these pages will criticise them for so doing: the sense of the original is rarely obscure and can easily be arrived at.

No study of the Acts of the Assembly of Boston Corporation can be seriously attempted without reference to the Charter of Incorporation and the 'charter for the Exemption of the Admiralty'. A transcript of both these charters is included in this volume. This has been made possible by the discovery of the Charter Book in an almost derelict condition but sufficiently intact to allow of almost complete restoration, and it now exists as something of a showpiece in the Borough Archives.

Henry VIII's Charter of 1545 reflects the anxiety in the minds of the townsfolk following the disastrous flood of 1543, which had released the pent up emotions of those who had suffered in the repeated inundations. But this was not all that troubled the minds of Boston's merchants, craftsmen and traders, who took the view that an important staple town was capable of administering its own affairs without the intrusion of Officers from the County. Not only did they petition for their own officials to be appointed but called for their counterparts to be excluded from the town's affairs. Further than this, it was laid down that no freeman of Boston should be compelled against his will to serve in a County appointment.

Other towns, though probably for other reasons, were also seeking the supposed benefits of incorporate status, and with them, Boston's learned advisors rifled the parchment treasures of older towns, so that we find that the men of St. Botolph's town were in certain particulars to do as the men of Winchester, King's Lynn and London did. Broadly they were to be managed by similar teams: a Mayor elected for one year only, to be the controlling hand in an assembly of twelve aldermen and eighteen common councillors elected from the most suitable freemen of the Borough. The aldermen were appointed for life but the common councillors were mere probationers and could be replaced at the will of the Council. The validity of Corporation documents was to be attested by a seal, and the documents and records of the Assembly were to be prepared and managed by a Town Clerk whose annual fee was to be five marks, while the 'man learned in the law of the land' on being chosen Recorder was granted twice that sum.

For maintaining the Assembly's authority over the towns-people two sergeants at the mace were to be appointed, each having a mace engraved with the royal arms as the insignia of his

office. Their duties were not, alas, as clearly defined as they might have been, while it was nevertheless assumed that their responsibility was so great that they had to enter bonds for eighty marks later increased to £100. They were called on to serve alternately at the Mayor's table; to warn members of impending meetings; to collect the fines of the Court Leet and – particularly difficult at that time – to account weekly.

Boston's famous market was confirmed, but lifted from manorial control by the appointment of a Clerk of the Market, an office which dropped into Mr. Mayor's lap, and a Court of Piepowders, which was also the mayor's responsibility. Despite this reduction of Manorial power, the Charter perpetuates the Court Leet, the Court Baron and the View of Frankpledge, and while lessees of property found themselves committed to jury service at the Leet, little is heard of the Courts Baron and nothing at all of the View of Frankpledge. It is interesting to observe that the Earls of Lincoln were Stewards of the Manor of Boston; fathers wrote to the corporation to make sure that their sons were appointed, and the Chamberlains took pains to pay the Steward's fee of £10 without delay.

Since the underlying purpose of incorporation was to acquire land and property, some space is given in the Charter to provide means for the new Corporation to do this in face of the stringent laws which governed the acquisition and holding of land and property in circumstances where it was assumed that the Kingdom was the King's. This concession was restricted to the acquisition of property of a yearly value of not more than £100.

Merely to become an incorporated borough was sufficient entitlement for electing two burgesses to the Parliament House at Westminster, and while the Sheriff and his officers may have been excluded from the town, it was he who issued the writ for an election, and to him that it was perforce returned. No thought of a democratic election intruded into the assembly's consideration and they hugged the duty of electing MPs to their bosoms, happy in the knowledge that each representative would service not only without a fee but also without claiming one penny in expenses. It was accepted that all candidates were to be freemen of the borough, and not infrequently a gentleman – or even an aristocrat – having offered himself for election was called on to pay the customary fine of £5 for his freedom, whereupon the £5 was returned as a gratuity 'in expectation of the favours the elected one might bestow'!

For privileges as dearly bought as were those of Boston, sacrifices were called for and a number of the townsmen paid for their freedoms before the Charter was granted, in patriotic zeal to help in defraying the cost of the enterprise. Thereafter no man (women are never mentioned in this connection) was to enjoy the liberties of the town unless he had been enrolled in the book of freemen. To this end he could buy his way in, generally for the same fine as that demanded of Parliamentary candidates. This heavy charge was more often than not ameliorated by the acceptance of a 5 shilling deposit and bonds for the balance to be paid over an extended period. The sons of freemen were more favoured, for they were accepted for the same fine as that required of apprentices on completion of their 7 years' service with a master. Instances can be observed of the first born son of a freeman being admitted to the select company without payment of any kind. Every effort was made to maintain the advantages of achieving the status of a freeman, and 'straungers' were watched with a malignant eye and rigorously held at a distance, so that the trade of the town, use of the markets, fairs and courts was to all intents and purposes retained to the advantage of those traders living in the town and dutifully paying whatever dues were demanded by the Corporation Assembly.

Henry VIII had continued his father's practice of making members of the local gentry his unpaid retainers as justices of the peace. Once appointed, their functions were legion and the call on their time and money considerable. For the first time in its history the Charter gave to Boston a court of its own and the valuable privilege of having the Mayor and the town's four senior aldermen as justices in the twice weekly sessions of their newly established Court of Record. Litigation was almost a hobby with the Tudor citizenry, and lawsuits were time-consuming and costly, particularly when plaintiffs elected to have their case heard in a distant [place?] thus imposing a heavy penalty on a defendant before the case came to court. In further protection of their freemen the justices were empowered by the Charter to bring any case against a Boston townsman into court at Boston. suits between Bostonians were to be engaged in only on permission granted by the Mayor.

Ranking high among the considerations which agitated the minds of the petitioners was the all important question of finance, to resolve which they cast their net very wide indeed, and, it appears, met with a generous response. The court of Record was expected to be self supporting, with an outside possibility that it would make a profit. The Mayor and Burgesses are 'to have all fines, redemptions, forfeitures, amerciements and other profits'. An office of weight, but in a small town like Boston of little significance (other than its assumption of what was a Royal perquisite) was the appointment of the Mayor to the Escheatorship. In this, he was given the entitlement to, at the very least, the management of estates the owner of which had died without an heir. Trade in the new Borough was to be called on to make a contribution to corporate revenue; shops and stalls in the market provided a modest income, and the payments to the treasury of the receipts of aldermen and councillors charged with collecting 'pitching money' are perhaps the only figures of which the Assembly took consistent notice. collection of other revenue was farmed to individuals who, reputable as they usually were, were required to enter bond for the proper execution of their duties; the only figures recorded therefore relate to the rent paid for the 'farms' and the extraordinary sums for which the 'farmers' and their 'sewer-ties' were bound. Despite the many charges made on 'strangers' entering the town to buy and sell, the freemen of Boston were, according to the Charter, to be free throughout England of all manner of tolls. This cannot have been an easy privilege to administer and we find King's Lynn and Cambridge prepared to go to law about it. Only once is any attempt made to provide a Boston freeman with evidence of his privileged status.

A singular omission from the early Corporation records is the total neglect of the Assembly to use their Charter-based authority to levy rates and taxes. Simple as were the conditions demanded of a freeman, his major undertakings were to live in the Borough and to pay 'scott and lott'. Sir John Langton in a later reign was excused the former on condition he continued the latter. Others were dismissed the Assembly when they moved outside the boundary, and it can be assumed that the privileges of a freeman were at once removed from the unrecorded many who moved on to greater pastures. any levying of rates or taxes is not recorded.

Property, as intended, was the Corporation's main source of income. Members of the Assembly were early about in the town to see what waste land could be added to that conveyed from His Majesty. Leases are an unceasing preoccupation at every assembly in the guildhall, where some care appears to have been taken over the fines and rents to be paid by new and old tenants. of Corporation property.

A fortuitous acquisition came to the Corporation attached to the property bought from the King, giving to the secular power the unusual privilege of appointing the incumbent to the vicarage of St. Botolph's. Records of the activities of the parish do not appear to have survived in sufficient numbers to make certain how the parish was administered before the responsibility fell into the hands of the Corporation. It is nowhere stated that the Corporation Assembly took over the functions of the Parish Vestry but occasional acts of the Assembly show that the appointment of parish officers and the administration of parish funds was taken over immediately it was realised that the Corporation was in fact lay rector of the parish. The charter itself gives to the new corporation authority to appoint six constables, officers normally appointed – almost on a rota basis – in most parishes. Only passing references are made to the Churchwardens, and then no more than to report action to make them speed up the presentation of their accounts. The assumption, supported by the fact that many of them were members of the Assembly, must be that the Assembly appointed them. When legislation in Parliament began to express an awakened conscience relative to the scourge of poverty, frequent mention in 'The Acts of the Assembly' of the Overseers of the Poor allows of no other construction than that the Corporation had appointed them, as indeed it later appointed the Master of the 'Jarsey School' and bought considerable quantities of wool to 'keep the poor on work' and corn at cheap rates to keep them fed.

Church income from tithes was diverted into the Corporation treasury and the Town Clerk frequently found himself burdened with the duty of suing those who had not paid. Church expenditure from the somewhat unreliable box concealed in the recesses of the great press, mentioned on every page as The Treasury. An arrangement was put into force in the early days whereby the Mayor took the income from the Parsonage lands. Later the lands were let out to farm and the farmer of the Parsonage paid the vicar's stipend with, on occasion disastrous results for the vicar. It is certain, nevertheless, that once approved by the Assembly the Vicar and Preacher were generously treated out of the desire of the majority in the Assembly to replace the religion of their fathers with the new interpretations of Christianity being propagated by continental reformers. Seating in the church was re-arranged so that the assembled elders, who might not be excused their attendance, could hear the preacher. The teaching and preaching ministry was further to replace the ceremonial and sacerdotal by preaching sermons whenever an alderman or common councillor died, a proceeding far removed from the celebration of obituaries and obits which had been specifically perpetuated in the Charter.

Mediaeval concepts of trade, of prices and profits, were perpetuated in the Charter and the Mayor was burdened with the responsibility of ensuring that borough freemen were not imposed on by 'straungers' in a monopolistic situation demanding excessive prices for goods not readily available in the subsistence economy to which Boston inexorably committed. Throughout the half-century of the Tudor epoch remaining after the incorporation of the borough, it is possible to observe the gradual change which took place as the theology on usury was revised under Calvinistic teaching. The Corporation became in due course the accepted repository and source of funds for the merchants and traders of the town. Considerable sums were lent at 8 or 10%, always on good security and guaranteed bond for double the amount of principal. In the absence of an easily available banking service the facilities offered by the corporation assumed a priority in the functions of the assembly to the exclusion of the local government function for which it existed. From the historian's point of view this can be regretted since it leaves the records incapable of showing the range of events which came before the 12 aldermen and 18 common councillors in the Guild Hall.

There was, so it would seem, an element of shortsighted-ness on the part of counsel employed to guide the townsmen in their petition to the Crown as Henry VIII neared the end of his life, as only minor details of Boston's maritime life came to be included in the Charter. These defects were remedied in the 15th year of Elizabeth's reign (1573) when a charter of Admiralty was granted. This, while repeating a number of the 1545 Charter provisions, extended the Corporation's authority over the seagoing activities of vessels along a considerable stretch of the Lincolnshire and Norfolk coasts by giving the Mayor the privilege of appointing a 'Learned Judge of Admiralty' to hold court every Wednesday to hear cases arising from the exclusion of Admiralty officials from the areas newly brought under local control. The responsibilities imposed by Elizabeth's Charter became a fruitful source of litigation as time went by, and the apparent glow of authority became somewhat dimmed as the revenue producing functions of the Admiral's jurisdiction were rented out to those prepared to undertake the task of planting beacons in the approaches to the haven; of providing ballast for unladen ships; and collecting the dues and demands from users of the port – however decayed it might become.

Over the 28 years since incorporation, puritan influence had grown, and since the Court of Admiralty was the central court for dealing with moral delinquency, opportunity was taken to include in the new charter provision for the Mayor of Boston to deal with that kind of offence. He was to be able to punish and convict 'all and singler whoremongers, whores, Bawdes, pronumbarum and other whatsoever lyving lasaviouslie and incontinentlie'. It was an interesting development, marking Boston even more clearly as the Puritan Town it had become known.

The whole of the Admiralty charter according to the translation made at the time in the Charter Book, is included in this volume as part of the Appendix.

Isobel Bailey

Isobel Bailey: *Pishey Thompson Man of Two Worlds 1785-1862* (1991)

Isobel Bailey: *Pishey Thompson's 'Boston' Diary 18th October 1842-6th April 1844* (1994)

Isobel Bailey was born in Sheffield and after leaving school set out on a secretarial career. Following her marriage, she lived in various Yorkshire towns where, after bringing up her family of two sons and a daughter, she gained her teacher's certificate as a mature student. After a number of posts she came to Boston to head the Secretarial section of the Management and Business Studies Department in Boston College of Further Education where she remained until retirement some years. It was her late husband's interest and involvement in Local History that led, during his investigations into the Borough of Boston's archives to the (re) discovery of a single volume of Pishey Thompson's diary. This in turn led to an unexpected archive of material in Stratford-upon-Avon, which, considerable in quantity and fascinating in content, further led to sources in the U.S.A. and, more recently, in Australia.

A list of the contents of Isobel Bailey's box
[handwritten – type up – handed box back to Alison Bailey]

Attention Chairman, Dr. Martin Fairman and all other existing committee members (listed below), the Boston History Project

A PROPOSAL FOR THE EXISTING COMMITTEE TO CONSIDER

Pamela Cawthorne and Gavin Kitching
BHP Committee members since 2011
October, 2014

The extracts below all relate the origins of the Boston History Project (BHP) when it was begun in 1969. The letter written by Jim Hopkins (most likely, although his authorship is not certain) also summarises what happened as a number of works began to be published under the BHP umbrella. We still have one founder member of the original committee, Neil Wright, and his views would therefore provide a particularly important perspective for this proposal.

In the end 14 booklets were published by the BHP

Original document announcing the start of the History of Boston Project following initial meeting of interested parties on 5th October, 1969

Archives' Office, 27 Wide Bargate, Boston

“As you will probably know, it has recently been proposed that an up-to-date history of Boston should be compiled with a view to eventual publication in book form. In order to investigate the interest in, and the feasibility of, such a project a meeting of persons** thought likely to have a direct and informed interest was called on 5th October, 1969.

As a result of this meeting a group of person was appointed to investigate all aspects of the matter and to report. This was done and a number of recommendations made. These recommendations formed the substance of a considerable report, the main points of which were:

- a. There is a need for a full researched and authoritative history of the town which, however, when presented in book form, should be a readable and well-produced volume designed to appeal to the ordinary man-in-the-street and not only to the historian.
- b. That the project would entail several years' work by a considerable number of people.
- c. That the initial project should be to produce a series of authoritative pamphlets on a large variety of aspects of the history of the town and only when this has been achieved should a definitive history be written from the material thus accumulated. The eventual definitive history should probably be written by one individual who would probably, though not inevitably, be an author of proved ability.
- d. That professional local historical advice should be taken at all stages of the project. (This has already been assured from Dr. Alan Rogers of the University of Nottingham).
- e. That an 'executive-editorial' committee with powers to co-opt be appointed to organize and prosecute the project. (The names of this committee appear at the head of this letter).

This committee has already started work and a number of projects are already under way. This venture is, as may be realized, a considerable undertaking and will involve research into material in archives, libraries and museums in many places other than Boston. It is, however, a venture which is likely to be of interest to all thoughtful Bostonians, wherever they may be and not without value to the corporate life of the town.

Although it is hoped and expected that the actual publications which will result from this work will be financially self-supporting there are considerable initial difficulties to be overcome and there will be not inconsiderable expenses involved in accumulating the material.

The first and perhaps most important of these initial problems was to establish a central archives office for the collection of the relevant material and the organization of the project. Through the good offices of our present mayor, Councillor G.G.A. Whitehead, in his private capacity, and the generosity of Messrs. Roythorne and co., this has already been done. We are now appealing to the business, professional and commercial interests in the town, and to a few private individuals, to ask if they will assist in establishing the project on a firm basis.

If this is an undertaking of which you approve we shall be most grateful for your help. A donation of any size would be most helpful as also would office equipment such as filing cabinets, map drawers or facilities for copying maps and documents and many smaller items.

Quite incidental to any financial or material support that you feel able to give we should be very glad to know any 'historical' assistance that you might be able to render. This includes both historical material, or references to it, in the form of old business records and pictures, etc., and direct personal interest in involvement in the project by you or members of your staff. We shall be very glad to hear from you either by the return of the accompanying slip, or in any other way that seems appropriate.

Yours truly
(on behalf of the Committee)

**

C.G. Keightley (Chairman)
R.E.G. Parkinson (Hon. Secretary)
J. Mitchell (Hon. Treasurer)
R.K. Allday (Vice Chairman)
Miss Joan Carter
Miss R. Hilary Healey
Rev. Mark Spurrell
N.R. Wright

History of Boston project Publications notes (appears at the back of Isobel Bailey's *Pishey Thompson Man of Two Worlds 1785-1862* (1991))

The History of Boston Project was established in 1969 with the intention of encouraging and supporting by all means possible, research into the history of the town and district with the hope and intention of eventually seeing published a comprehensive and authoritative history of the town up to the present day. Pishey Thompson's *History and Antiquities of Boston* (published in 1856) had been published 113 years earlier and no major attempt had been made since then to cover the succeeding years nor to reassess Thompson's work in the light of modern knowledge.

Initially, many people responded to the concept and it was decided to publish a number of booklets as the material became available. This resulted in the History of Boston Series which eventually (1970-1977) consisted of 14 booklets and *The Atlas of Boston* by Neil Wright and Frank Molyneux [making 15 in all]. It was then decided to husband the Project's limited resources and for the time being to give all the support available to John Bailey who had undertaken the herculean task of transcribing the Corporation Assembly books (the minutes of the Corporation) which were virtually complete from the incorporation of the Borough in 1545 to the present. Between 1980 and 1985 the first four volumes were published (a total of 2,867 pages plus appendices). Unhappily John Bailey had died in 1984 but

the work of transcription, though still a major task, is easier towards more modern times, and vol. V (1717-1736) is progressing towards completion [in 1991].

The History of Boston Project 1969-present – 1985...letter [unknown author – probably Jim Hopkins], with Isobel Bailey's papers and in the HofBP archive at Fydell House

“A brief outline of the origins and work of the History of Boston Project can hardly do justice to the number of people involved nor to the hard work that has been devoted to the project. Nor would it be possible to apportion credit between the work of the earlier years and that of the later. Although the number of people actively involved in the initial stages were somewhat greater than those of more recent years, the nature and value of the work done and the dedication and involvement of the smaller (although still considerable) number of people latterly, has been truly amazing. There have never been less than some 20 people actively involved at any time although the greater burden has been carried by a few.

It is fitting that the Exhibition is being held in Pilgrim College, as the origins of the Project sprang from just this place. In the summer of 1969 a doctoral thesis by Frank Molyneux, who had once taught geography at Boston Grammar School and had been a part-time tutor in Pilgrim College, was left lying on the table of Alan Champion, the then Warden, in his office. This Book, *Boston in the Twentieth Century*, was casually picked up and leafed through for a few moments. A few weeks later the book was again picked up by the same hands and noted a little more seriously. Indeed, the book was taken away and read over the next week or two, when it became evident that there was work recorded between the covers that would be of great interest to many present Bostonians, and of considerable value to historians of the town and district. (Some of the work in that thesis has appeared in the *Atlas of Boston*.)

From this casual happening, after considerable discussion and with the support of Alan Champion and the University of Nottingham, a meeting was called later in the year that was to consider the possibility of researching and writing an up-to-date history of Boston and district. An initial meeting took place on a Sunday evening in the autumn of 1969 in the Green Room of Pilgrim College, with some thirty to forty people present and Alan Champion in the chair. From this meeting a committee was set up to investigate the possibilities for the future. Cyril Keightley took the chair of the steering committee, and served as Chairman of the Project from its inception until 1984, since when Jim Hopkins has chaired the Project. Richard Parkinson was its first Secretary. There was, in the next few weeks, considerable discussion with many people. A further meeting of the original gathering, with some other interested people, was called, and a firm decision was taken to go ahead with the broad plan to research and publish various aspects of the history of the town, with the hope that in time sufficient ground would be covered to justify handing over the material to a competent historian with the brief of producing an up-to-date history of Boston. At that time it was somewhat nebulously estimated that perhaps 7-10 years might be needed for this work. Now, some 15½ years later one might almost say that the Project is no nearer to the ultimate completion of the task it set itself.

The initial thoughts and plans were that individuals should research aspects of the town and produce booklets. The booklets should be written to interest the general reader, and the research material investigated and recorded should be collected and collated and made available ‘for the eventual historian’. In the first few months of the Project many local businesses and individuals were canvassed and some funds raised. An office was made available to the Project by the then Mayor, councillor George Whitehead, who was at that time a solicitor in the town. The office made available by this firm, Roythorne and Co., was gratefully used for several years and is still the postbox of the project. At the same time, amongst other businesses, the Trustee Savings Bank, in addition to making a donation to the funds of the Project, kindly made available secretarial assistance – invaluable in the first few years.

After the initial gathering of interested parties and the setting up of the committee, the hard work began, but already some material had been collected and partially worked upon by various people so

that the nucleus of the first booklet or two was to hand. It so happened that in the autumn of 1970 Boston was having a Trades Fair, an event which at that time took place every 3 years, and a stand was made available for the Project. In September of that year the initial work was displayed and a subscription list for the booklets was brought before the public. This subscription list had, in fact, been opened somewhat earlier, through the good offices of almost all local newsagents, who had agreed to distribute leaflets on one or two days in the summer with their daily newspaper deliveries, so that these leaflets were posted through very many of the letter boxes in Boston. At the time of the Trades Fair, although no booklets had been published, covers of the first and second were actually available, and by the end of the Trades Fair, or at least by the end of the year, the subscription list had achieved the not inconsiderable figure of some 400 subscribers to the series. During the year 1970-1971, four titles were published for a subscription figure of 25s. (or £1.25). In the following year a further 4 titles were published, and by the end of the following 5 years, up to October 1977, a total of 14 booklets and the bound Atlas of Boston had appeared. The last publication, appearing in October 1977, was really only able to do so because of a guaranteed sale to the Catholic community of the town, whose history it was, and on the 150th anniversary of their church building, it was published.

The Atlas of Boston had been published in June 1974, and a little before that time a newcomer, John Bailey, had come to Boston and had shown an interest in the work of the Project. He brought with him an expertise previously lacking in the town, namely an ability to read medieval manuscripts. Between 1974 and 1977 the financial stability of the Project had become increasingly dubious, and with the advent of John Bailey it was decided to husband the slender resources of the Project and devote them to a task which was thought to be of major importance both to Boston and local history.

Boston, if not unique, is at least unusual in having an almost complete set of Minutes from its incorporation as a borough in 1545 right up to the present day. Not only did it possess these minutes, but they had been carefully preserved, and insofar as any material of that age is legible, they could be read and – by those who knew what they were reading – interpreted.

Again, with the good offices of Pilgrim college, a Local History Workshop was set up under the direction of John Bailey, and an enthusiastic group of transcribers and transliterators set to work to make the minutes of the Corporation of Boston available in a form that could be read by anyone capable of reading typescript English.

The magnitude of this undertaking can hardly be over-emphasized, but over the time from about 1975, when the work actually started, up to the present time, the first 3 volumes of the minutes, from 1545-1871, were completed in their entirety under the direction and control of John Bailey. In addition to that work, John did an enormous amount of research into the archives of the borough, although the task of sorting and recording the material there has only just begun. Unhappily, John Bailey died in August 1984, but he had by then achieved the greater part of the problem task of deciphering and transcribing the minutes of the Corporation. From the point at which his work stopped, the remaining minutes are something which can be read, albeit with some difficulty, by any scholar.

This transcription of the minutes has resulted in a mass of typed work which, if published in the ordinary manner as a book, would be far beyond the resources of the Project to support. Nevertheless, it was felt that the material was of sufficient importance to justify dealing with it in a laborious and somewhat unusual manner. Each of the first three volumes, covering something of the order of half a century, consists of almost 800 pages of typescript, and these (nearly 21/2 thousand pages in total) were photostated on equipment loaned by Beam Office Equipment Ltd. In all, something like 125,000 sheets of paper have so far been dealt with, all being collected and collated by hand into separate columns. These volumes have been made available as bound books, each being bound by hand by John Ashman in Lincoln. The books were, and insofar as copies remain unsold are, available at a cost of £110 each, or £100 per volume if all volumes in the series are taken.

The work of the Project continues, and Volume IV of the transcriptions of the Minutes of the Corporation of Boston is in process of being completed. The original work on this volume was done

by John Bailey but the checking has inevitably been in other hands: it will be duplicated and produced in the same fashion as volumes I, II and III.

Throughout the Project's history, support has been forthcoming from the University of Nottingham, and Dr. Alan Rogers, Lecturer in Local History at the University in the early years of the Project, gave much valuable help. The University made facilities available for much of the work of the Workshop class in Local History, which transcribed the minutes under John Bailey's direction, and has supported the Project throughout. In addition to this, the Borough of Boston has watched with interest and given very real help. Recently it has made a room available so that the work of the Project may continue. In the next few years, it is hoped that further booklets along the lines of the initial History of Boston Series booklets will emerge, and several are in process of preparation now.

Although at the outset a time span of 10 years for completion of the Project was in mind, as more and more of value and interest has been discovered, the task of doing justice to the history of this town seems greater. Whether or not a definitive history, to supersede Pishey Thompson's History of Boston published in 1856 does emerge within the measurable future, it is nevertheless an undoubted fact that much of the value has already been achieved. The work that has so far been published, both in the booklets and the transcriptions of the minutes, has travelled to many places, particularly institutions of learning throughout the world. Some or all of the published work has been requested from so far west as Salt Lake city, and in the east from Tokyo: to the north copies have gone to Scandinavia and to the south, Cape Town.

There are still places ignorant of the history of this town – but they get fewer year by year. The work of the Project continues.