



TRINITY BRIDGE AND CROYLAND ABBEY

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Engraved by J. Le Keux from a drawing by F. Mackenzie, after a sketch by W. Alexander F.S.A., for the Architectural Antiquities of Britain. 1813.

the Trent watered a fertile valley and Gainsborough was a good trading town. The east of the county he described as "the richest, most fruitful and best cultivated in England."

Lincolnshire Wool was acclaimed for its fineness and sent in great quantities to Norfolk and Suffolk and other manufacturing counties, the main sheep farming district being the Lincoln Heath.

Boston, a handsome, well-built sea port, enjoyed a good share of foreign trade and St Botolph's, with its fine tower was a landmark used by seamen to guide their ships into harbour.

In the area around Boston sheep and cattle were raised in "prodigious numbers" for the London markets and Defoe was more than a little surprised to find that the Lincolnshire "black" cattle were in fact red (Lincoln Reds). He found this colouring quite remarkable and described the cattle in some detail.

The Fen country had a particular beauty. Boston church could be seen for 30 miles, Peterborough and Ely minsters almost through the whole level, and the spires of Lynn, Whittlesea and Crowland (or Croyland) could be seen from a very great distance. This Holland, "like the other Holland", was flat and people transported themselves to the towns by boats along good navigable ditches.

At Crowland Defoe stopped to marvel at the triangular bridge, the only one of its kind, situated where the river Welland and a branch from the river Nene joined. According to local folklore, there was a whirlpool or bottomless pit under the bridge at the point where the two waters united.

The remains of the monastery at Crowland also drew Defoe's attention. "The monks of Crowland were eminent in history", he wrote, and then, because he loved the gossip of a place as much as its history, he continued, "and a great many stories are told of the devils of Crowland also!"

After visiting Sempringham and Grantham, Defoe came to Stamford, a pleasant, well-built and populous town with good trade, generally rich and with a good Free School, "and an abundance of very good inns, some of them fit to entertain persons of the greatest quality and their retinues, and a great advantage to the place."

It might seem that Defoe's *Tour* is just a collection of descriptions of places. It is more than that. Defoe was also a good storyteller. He wrote of his sea journey from Barton over the Humber to Hull which took four hours in an open boat. Also on board were 15 horses, 12 cows and 18 passengers "called Christians". But perhaps the most amusing piece, which covers several pages in his book and is worth reading in its entirety, is about the use of decoy ducks. The use of decoys is of course factual, but Defoe, with his delightful imagination, tells it this way.

"There are an infinite number of wildfowl in the Fens of Lincolnshire: duck, mallard, teal and widgeon, brand geese and so on, and a great number of decoy or duckoy pools.

"When the season is right, decoy ducks bred in these pools and tamed by the decoy man, fly abroad over the seas to Holland and Germany. Here they meet with others of their kind, and using duck language, observe how poorly their friends live, how all the rivers are frozen and the land covered with snow, and they let them know that in England the case is *quite* different! English ducks have open lakes, sea shores full of food, groves of trees, fields of corn, and not once in a wild duck's age have they had any frosts or deep snows, the sea is never frozen nor do the shores ever lack food. If only their friends would go with them to England they would be able to share in all these good things!

"And so the ducks return bring vast flights of fowl back with them and they all settle in the decoy pools. After several days, when the foreign guests are no longer on their guard, the ducks are lured by offerings of corn into the narrow waters where the decoy man snares them in nets. But the decoy ducks are saved and put in a little pool and made much of for their services!"

