

# *A Period Piece*

*Stamford seen from the  
perspective of the 1970s*

## **STAMFORD REVISITED**

*written and illustrated by*

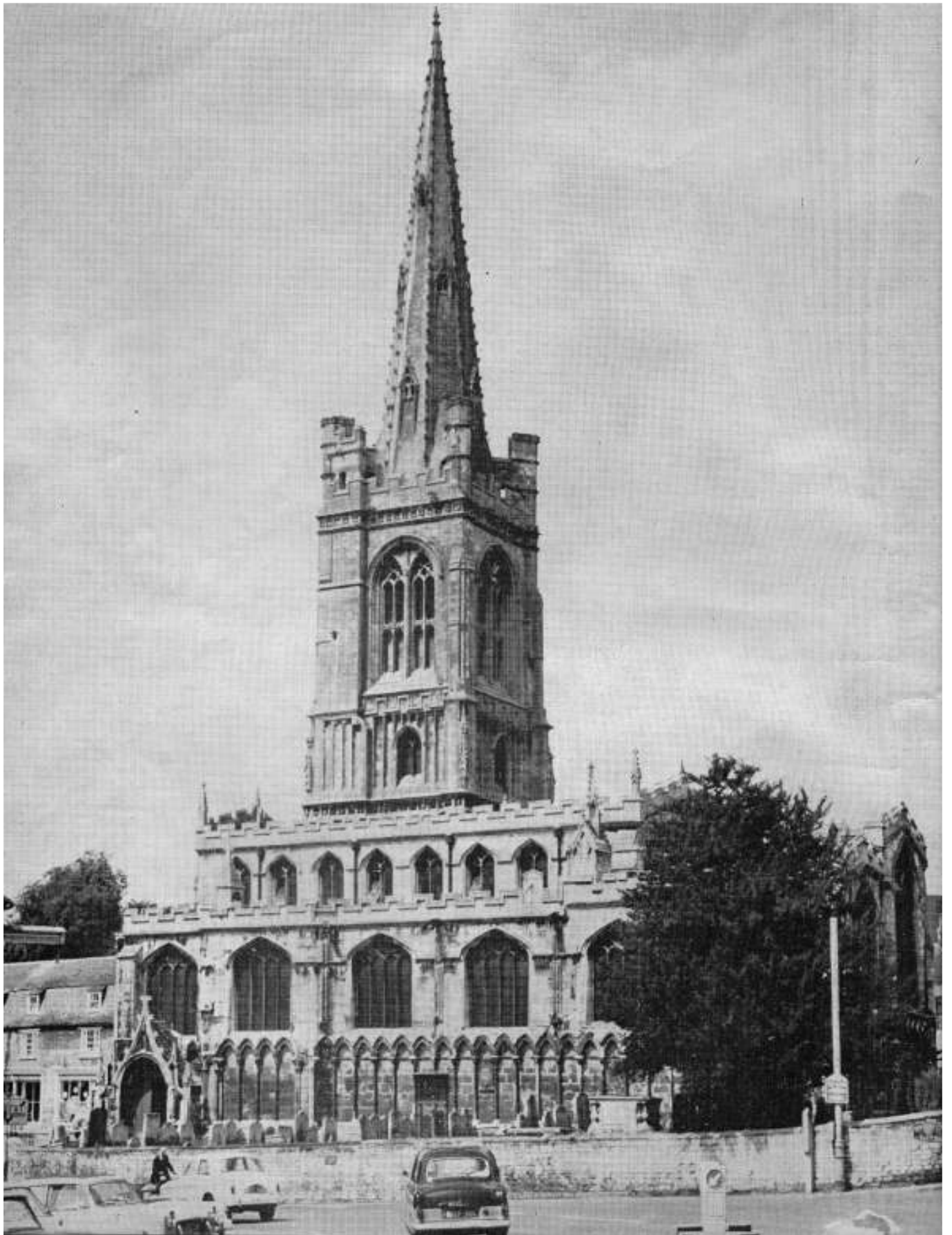
**HUGH D. MARTINEAU**



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the Editor in aid of Stamford Civic  
Society*

(this space will be needed for one or more additional pictures)

**Note:** the size will be reduced to A5



*All Saints' Church still boasts much 13th century arcading but the tower and spire were added in the 15th century by William and John Brown, the rich wool merchants.*

**I**T SEEMS clear that, if there are any who may not agree that Stamford is one of England's most beautifully built towns, they must surely never have had the good fortune to know it. Five years ago, I wrote about Stamford for Lincolnshire Life, and there is no reason now to alter the highly favourable impression I then had when I called it "A Symphony in Stone".

Though the Romans built their fortified town on higher ground at Great Casterton by the river Gwash, they also forded the river Welland at Stamford, where in 61 A.D. Queen Boadicea chased the 9th Legion back across the stream, and they built their Ermine Street from London to York by the direct route through Stamford, Lincoln and the Humber.

The Saxons had their stone ford where the present bridge spans the river, and it was they who in the 7th century made Stamford the town of importance that it has remained to this day, commanding numerous natural routes as well as the river. Here in 658 A.D. King Alkfrid was married and held his court, while his tutor Wilfrid of Ripon founded St. Leonard's Priory, Stamford's earliest Christian monastery. In 972 King Edgar made Stamford a borough administered by 12 'lawmen', and the Saxon custom of 'borough-English' was long preserved here, whereby if a father died intestate, his estate passed to the youngest son, rather than to the eldest.

## RENOWNED THROUGHOUT EUROPE

From their castles Saxon and Dane faced each other across the river, and Stamford, which already possessed a Mint, became one of the five towns of the Danelaw. The Normans rebuilt the Castle on the north bank, which became the King's Burgh, as distinct from Stamford Baron on the south, and the borough became increasingly important as a



*The River Welland is crossed by the stone bridge and divided the King's Burgh of Stamford from Stamford Baron in the South*

meeting place of Parliament and for the wealth of its 17 churches, 6 monasteries and 6 colleges. In the 14th century Stamford was renowned throughout Europe as an educational centre, when only king Edward IV's intervention prevented it from ousting Oxford University from its leading position. Stamford School, though endowed in 1532 through the generosity of the town's Alderman William Ratcliffe, had actually existed for some 200 years. In 1548 it took over St. Paul's church, which became the school chapel. In the 15th century William Browne, who had amassed a fortune in the wool trade, not only built and endowed the unique and most charming Browne's Hospital Almshouses on Broad Street where the market is held, but also restored All Saints' Church, whose spire still soars above Red Lion Square.

## STAMFORD ALES

The sacking of the town in 1460 by the Lancastrians under Sir Andrew Trollope in the Wars of the Roses, and later the dissolution of the monasteries in the 16th century brought much depression, but the opening of a route to the sea by the river Welland through Spalding had an important influence on Stamford's trade, whose malting business prospered. The All Saints' Brewery, where Stamford Ales are still brewed has flourished for several centuries.

Nothing, however, could deprive Stamford of its unique position on the main South to North road, and also astride its river and other natural routes between the Midland towns and East Anglia. Not less important were the rich quarries of the finest building stone all round Stamford, which were used not only for the town itself, but also for the great churches and houses built in Lincolnshire in Norman times. This stone was carried down the Welland, for roads in those times could not bear such weights. The beautiful roofing slates from nearby Collyweston complete the beauty of the buildings. Indeed, few parts of England can compare with the district surrounding Stamford for the loveliness of the stone villages set in the rolling countryside.

## THE ART OF STONEMASONRY

The art of stonemasonry became one of the many crafts carried on in the eastern part of the



*Messrs. Twilleys' knitting and crochet cotton mill.*



*The Band Stand in the Recreation Grounds.*



*Polythene tubes are manufactured at Bakelite Xylonite Ltd.'s factory*



*The Bluecoat Primary School is one of numerous modern educational buildings*

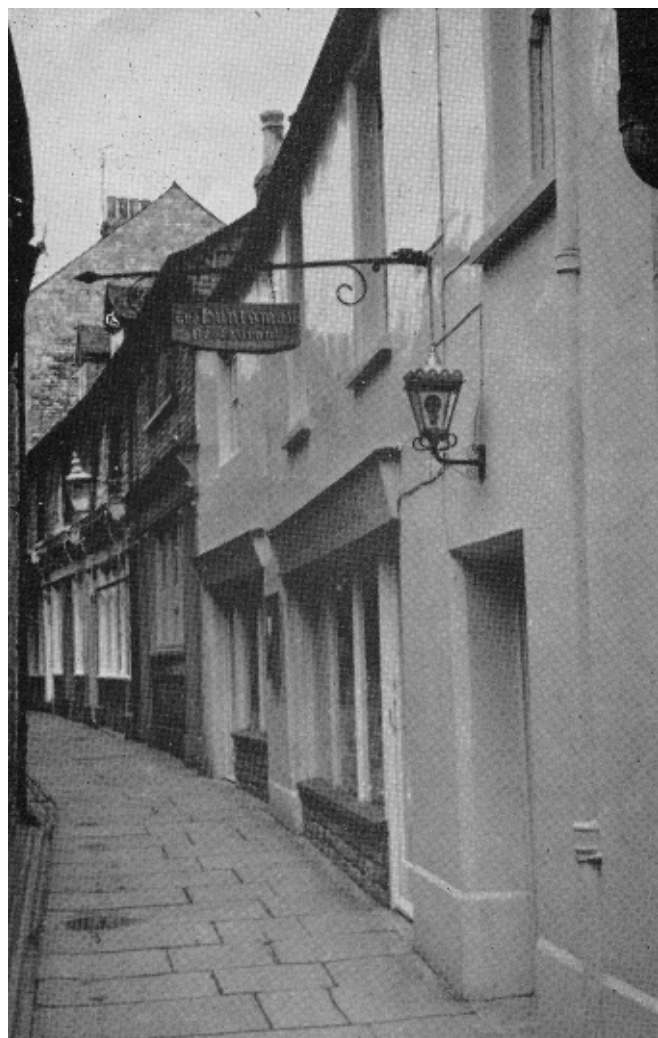
town, and it is pleasant to find Messrs. E. Bowman & Sons still producing skilled, artistically carved stone-work for fine buildings in all parts of the country, the great blocks of stone being brought from the quarries at Clipsham. Wonderful examples of the wood carving also executed by this firm are to be seen in Saint Martin's Church, though there is less demand for such work now than in the past.

The woollen cloth of Stamford was also famed throughout Europe and is said to have been used at Wolsey's Field of the Cloth of Gold. A Fair from the 13th century brought merchants from far and near, and Stamford's Friday market has always been a busy centre of trade, as well as for the exchange of ideas. The Cattle market is held on Mondays between the river and the railway station. For 500 years from the 9th century Stamford's glazed pottery was renowned, and what a delight it is now to see a lovely old house beside St. Mary's church converted from a long established tailor's shop into a charming pottery, where Miss Baker makes and decorates beautiful ware for sale on the premises.

Thus a population developed which was better educated, more skilful and knowledgeable than most others, constantly in contact with those who brought new ideas from outside, but who at the same time had an innate love for what was beautiful and best, whether made by Nature or by man.

## LORD BURGHLEY

In the 16th century William Cecil, the great Lord Burghley, born in 1520 at Bourne, became Lord Treasurer of England, and was Queen Elizabeth's right-hand man for 40 years. In this town's southern outskirts he built Burghley House, which his descendant the Marquess of Exeter throws open, so that all can enjoy, in its great park, this grandest Elizabethan house in our land. Queen Elizabeth was entertained here by Lord Burghley in 1566. He and his successors did a great deal through the centuries to improve the town. He rebuilt the bridge over the river, founded the Almshouses known as Burghley Hospital, overlooking the river, and endowed scholarships at Cambridge for boys of Stamford School, where he had himself been a brilliant pupil.



*The Huntsman Restaurant in Cheyne Lane is an example of Stamford's genius for adapting its ancient buildings to modern use*

## WORLD'S BIGGEST MAN

Lord Treasurer Burghley's magnificent tomb can be seen in St. Martin's Church, not far from Burghley Park, while in the same church's burial ground is the tomb of the world's biggest man, Daniel Lambert, who died at the Waggon and Horses Inn in 1809, weighing 52 stone, 11 lbs. His walking stick and a painting of him can be seen in the entrance to the George Hotel, which stands where there has been a hostelry for travellers for close on 1000 years. The famous bell foundry of Tobie Norris stood in the east part of the town near St. George's Church, where he was buried in 1676. Many of the finest



church bells emanated from here.

It is not really surprising that Stamford, being such a perfect centre for the exchange of news and knowledge, had one of England's earliest newspapers. The Stamford Mercury first appeared in about 1695 and still flourishes.

The 18th century was a time of developing communications, when the roads and water supplies began to be improved. Many fine buildings were erected, the Town Hall, the Assembly Rooms, and the Theatre on whose stage the famous actors of their day, Kean, Kemble and Carrick, all appeared. At the moment of writing, an Arts Festival is being held in Stamford, and an interesting project is the conversion of the Assembly Rooms and the Theatre into a fine new Arts Centre, in keeping with the architecture of the area.

## BULL RUNNING CONTINUED FOR 600 YEARS

One ancient custom, which continued for 600 years, was the legendary Bull-Running on November 13th. This is said to have originated in 1209, when William, Earl of Warrenne, from his castle, saw two bulls fighting in the river meadow between the Mill Stream and the Welland. Two butchers were trying to separate the beasts, one of which was chased through the town by dogs, scattering the people in panic. The Earl so much enjoyed the spectacle that he mounted his horse and managed to corner the bull. He gave the meadow to the Stamford butchers as common land, and following that, each 13th November, to celebrate the anniversary of the massacre of the Danes, a fierce bull was baited and run through the streets of the town, after which it was roasted and eaten amid great rejoicing. The main object was to 'bridge' the poor bull, by pitching him over the bridge into the river, for if this was achieved before noon, the butchers had to supply a second bull. ,

This cruel 'sport' of Bull Running, prodded with nail-pointed sticks, continued in Stamford's streets, accompanied by the Bullard's Song and with much riotous behaviour, until, after soldiers had been called in, it was finally abolished in 1839. There was bitter local opposition to the abolition of this custom, which had long been supported by rich citizens, and it was the damage to property and to life and limb, rather than sympathy for the bull, that brought about the eventual discontinuation of Bull-Running.

The first verse of the Bullard's Song reads:

*Come, all you bonny boys,  
Who love to bait the bonny bull,  
Who take delight in noise,  
And you shall have your belly-full.  
On Stamford Town's Bull-running day  
We'll show you such right gallant play,  
You never saw the like, you'll say,  
As you have seen at Stamford.*

In 1853, Lord Burghley's descendant, Lord Robert Cecil, was elected Member of Parliament for Stamford at the age of 23. As



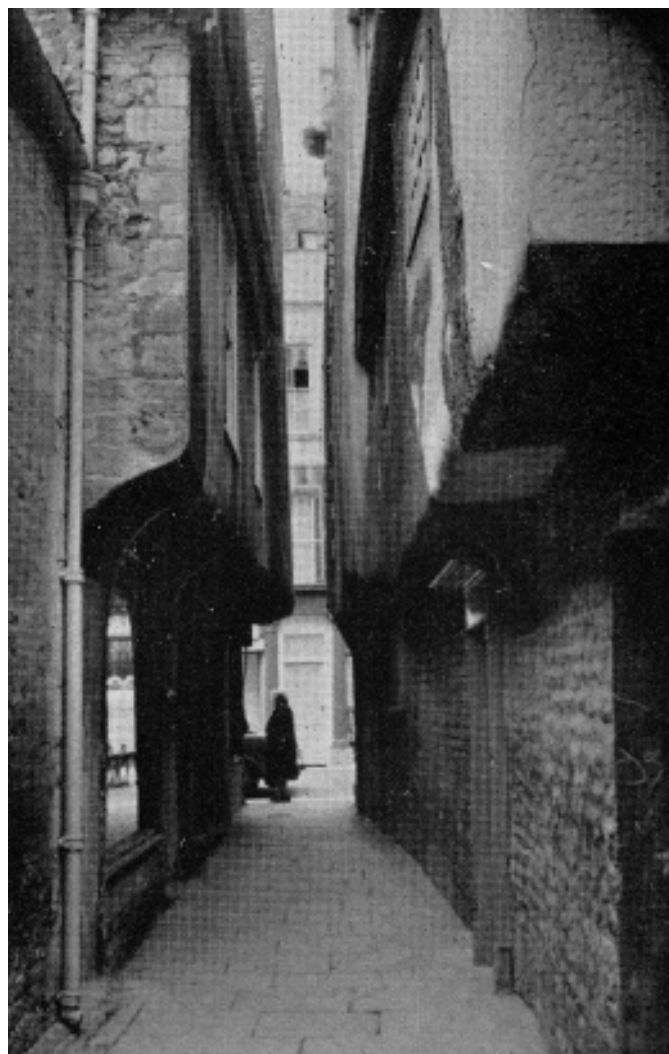
*Another ancient house adapted for modern use in the heart of Stamford town*

the famous Marquess of Salisbury, he was four times Prime Minister, including the whole duration of the Boer War in South Africa. From the reign of Edward I until 1867, Stamford returned two members to Parliament.

Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote a ballad entitled "The Lord of Burleigh" which tells the story of Henry Cecil, the 10th Earl of Exeter, who concealed his sorrows at having to divorce his first wife, by lodging incognito as a farm servant to a Shropshire miller. There he fell in love with the miller's beautiful daughter Sarah, and they were married in 1721, after which they lived happily at a small farm. One day, the news came that 'Gentleman Harry', as the local people called him, had succeeded to the title, and so the great Burghley House became their new home. The magnificence and luxury did not suit the simple 'Cottage Countess', who soon pined away... "With the burthen of an honour, Unto which she was not born... Then before her time she died". A painting by Sir Thomas Lawrence in the Billiard room at Burghley House shows her and her husband, who had become the 1st Marquess of Exeter, with their daughter Lady Sophia Cecil.

## OLYMPIC GOLD MEDAL

Though Burghley House is just across the border in Northamptonshire, it has many close connections both with Stamford town and with Lincolnshire, and all who love beautiful things and historic homes should visit it. The present Marquess of Exeter won an Olympic Gold Medal in the hurdles in his youth, and a Stamford inn named "The Hurdler" has an inn sign depicting him in action. Another inn of modern design, named "The Danish



*Cheyne Lane preserves the ancient houses of mediaeval Stamford*

Invader", displays the figure of a Viking in armour, and, instead of the usual 'canned' music, entertains its patrons with an organ played by a skilled organist. The late Sir Malcolm Sargent would doubtless have approved, for he was born at Stamford and began to enjoy good music at the Bluecoat School, later becoming organist at All Saints' Church. At his own request, this famous Freeman of Stamford was buried in Stamford cemetery. On his grave is written "We thank Thee who hast revealed Thyself in great music, and for giving us understanding of it".

In the last half century, the coming of motor transport and the use of electric power have enabled manufacturers to make greater use of Stamford's excellent position and to be less dependent on the railways and on coal. Fortunately, the planning authorities and Stamford's Civic Society have insisted on the preservation, wherever possible, of the most desirable aspects of the town's buildings and streets, realising that this is an entirely exceptional area that should not be left to the mercy of those who lack appreciation, to develop and alter in whatever way their immediate financial interests dictate. Indeed, the streets and buildings have been improved in many cases, while retaining their aesthetic grouping and character. This is not

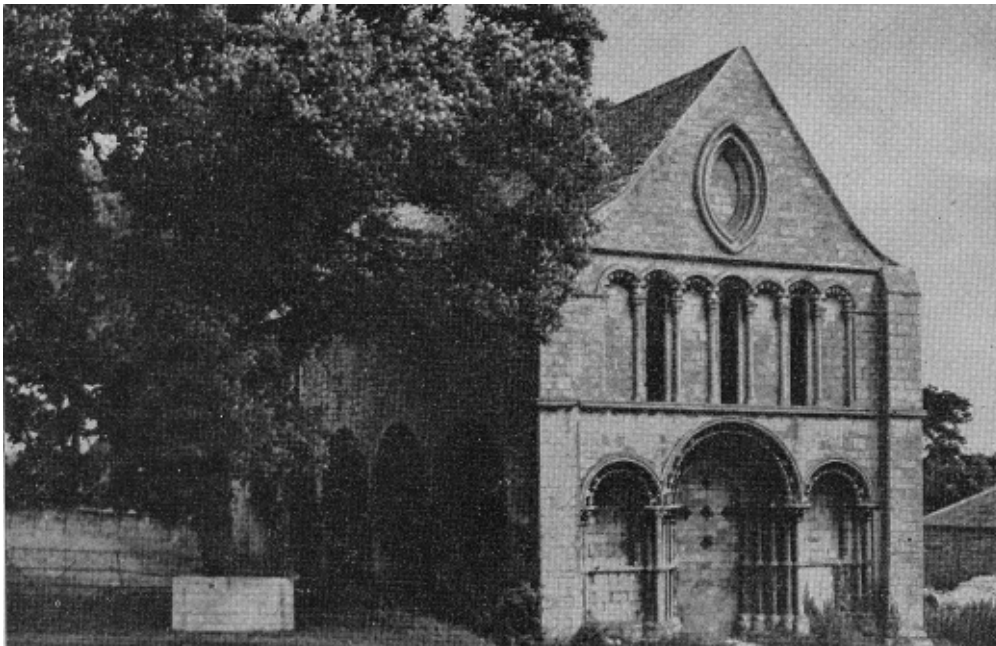


an easy matter, when one takes into account the vast increase in motor transport, and a central shopping precinct is envisaged now, from which cars will be excluded, thus enabling pedestrians to enjoy without worry the delights of this incomparable town.

The diversion of the traffic passing through the town centre from the old A.1 to the new by-pass gave the town some respite, while providing five roads by which the shopping area could be approached from the by-pass, in addition to the two roads leading in from the east. The town is well provided with free car-parking places in every area.

## PRIORY INTO NEW MUSEUM?

The pleasant building which houses Stamford's excellent library and its museum offers insufficient space for a town of such wide interests and, while the possibility has been considered of turning the Priory into a new museum, the remoteness of the Priory from the town centre makes such an idea seem very unpractical. An alternative suggestion, which



*Stamford's  
Oldest  
Building . . .*

*St. Leonard's Priory,  
founded in 658 A.D.,  
is Stamford's oldest  
building. It was  
rebuilt in the 11th  
century.*

*Stamford's  
Newest  
Building . . .*



*A new Regal Industrial  
Estate is rising rapidly  
on the Ryhall road*

has much appeal, is that the old St. Michael's Church should be turned into a new Library, where an upper floor could easily be inserted to provide extra reading-rooms. This would allow the whole of the present library building to be devoted entirely to the Museum, and

both buildings, being on the High Street, would come within the projected central shopping precinct.

There has been a great amount of building, especially on the north, with many new homes and a well laid out road system. Since the death rate is less than half the birth rate, Stamford's population of some 15,000 is still mostly youthful, and new schools of all grades, supplemented by the College of Further Education, have been built amongst these houses,



*Brownes Hospital, founded in the 15th century is a delightful set of Almshouses overlooking the Market in Broad Street.*

with recreation grounds and playing fields within easy reach. The older schools have also been modernised and extended. The Exeter Secondary Modern School is situated further out on the Empingham Road to the west, where there are also many charming houses in their tree-shaded gardens.

The factories, which have increased in number in recent years, are not centrally situated. Therefore, traffic to and from them is kept out of the town centre. On the Ryhall road from the north-east a new Regal Industrial Estate is growing up rapidly, and near it are the older established big firms of Martin, Markham Ltd. and the Hawker Siddeley's great ultra-modern foundries and engineering works of Mirrlees, Blackstone, Ltd., who train educated young men for employment on their highly sophisticated products. They have their own sports ground nearby.

On the Little Casterton road is the modern Roman Mill of H. G. Twilley Ltd., in which various types of cotton are manufactured for knitting and crochet. Near this are the workshops of Stirton Partners, carpenters, and Metalcraft Ltd., who do welding, beyond which are the extensive works of Williamson Cliff Ltd., manufacturing facing-bricks and refractories, and the special Stamford stone

used in building Churchill College at Cambridge. Two other highly modern businesses are Bakelite Xylonite Ltd. on West Street, who make moulded polythene tubes, and the elegant buildings of Newage Lyon Ltd. on the Barnack road, where diesel marine and industrial engines are made, and centrifugal pumps for civil engineering.

## **RELIABILITY AND GOOD SERVICE**

To supplement the manufacturing industry are the countless firms supplying the skilled mechanical, electrical and building work, which help to make life smoother for everyone. Stamford's shops also, though not oversized, are generally stocked with better quality goods than most towns, and there is still that pride in reliability and good service, which are too fast becoming old-fashioned elsewhere.

The healthy interest in archaeology and history has recently led to several surprising discoveries, which have cast a most interesting light on life in mediaeval Stamford.

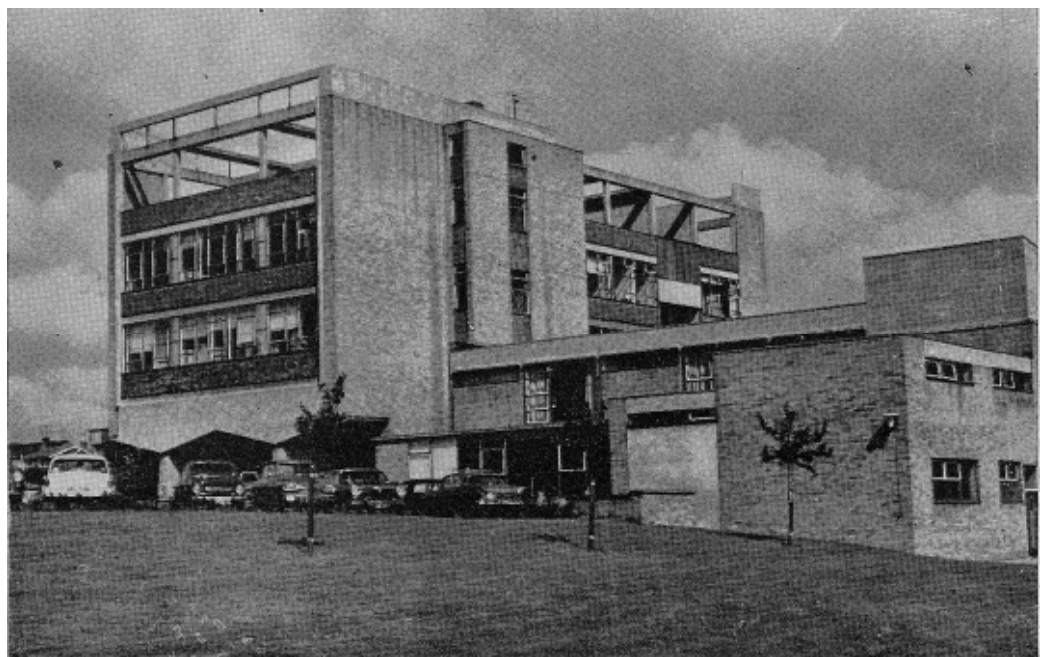
Excavations at the Norman Castle site are expected to start soon, while those at St. Leonard's Priory may be renewed later.

All this seems to stem from sound education and the truly progressive outlook of most people in Stamford. Stamfordians are quite prepared to make changes, but only if the change is really for the better. They are not prepared to destroy what is old and beautiful, unless it is to be replaced by something entirely in harmony with the environment. This appears to be the secret of Stamford's success.

*Hugh D. Martineau*

### *College of Further Education*

*The College of  
Further Education  
is one of Stamford's  
newer buildings.*



## *Missing captions*

*For these three  
photos*

*Also missing  
pictures, e.g.  
Sargent's  
grave*

