



Guildhall and the restored Shodfriars Hall are exceptions. The Medieval pattern of burgage plots separated by narrow lanes running back from the Market Place also survives in part, albeit with much redevelopment. Boston began three centuries of relative decline from the early 14th century, due mainly to the contraction of the wool trade, bubonic plague and silting of the Witham and Fossdyke. By the early 1700s its international trade was stagnating and the town had even been eclipsed by King's Lynn as the main port on the Wash. Historians have generally attributed Boston's subsequent recovery and Georgian prosperity to a series of engineering improvements to the Witham and fen drainage schemes undertaken in the 18th century.

We have already seen in previous chapters how the Witham was partially canalised in the 1760s and the Fossdyke redredged, along with the schemes to drain the Witham Fens from Tudor times onwards. The Maud Foster Drain, now within Boston, was cut in 1568 along the former Skirbeck River, while waters from the massive drainage schemes in the Black Sluice District and Northern Fens were directed into the River Witham via sluices at Boston in the 18th and early 19th centuries. The Grand Sluice on the Witham itself was completed in 1766 to prevent tidal surges and flooding by controlling water levels upstream as far as Bardney Lock. With the

FACING PAGE: **Packhouse Quay view.** Before the construction of Boston's docks in the 1880s, trading vessels used the quays and wharves along the Haven in the town. Numerous warehouses were located on both sides of the river here.

RIGHT: **18th century terrace housing, Witham Place**

