Between 1639 and 1643 Beverley was caught up in the Civil War, almost entirely due to its proximity to Hull. Initially King Charles I and his two young sons were warmly welcomed in Hull when they arrived in March 1639 to inspect the munitions stored in the garrison. It is likely that the royal party subsequently visited Beverley on their way to York.

On April 23rd 1642 Charles left York and rode to the Beverley Gate, the north gate of Hull, to get access to the arsenal in the garrison. At the Gate he was refused entry by Sir John Hotham, governor of Hull. He rode to Beverley to consider his position, and stayed with Lady Gee, who had a house at North Bar. The bells of St Mary’s were rung to mark his arrival in Beverley.

The people of the town were caught between the royalist dominated area to the north and east and the Commonwealth area in Hull and to the south. Although Beverley had Royalist troops stationed in the town it was important for trade that it maintained good relations with nearby Hull. When the London merchants arrived for the Cross Fair in June there was a fear that the presence of the parliamentary Londoners would upset the royalists in their midst but the need for trade meant permission was granted.

To improve the town’s defences the Bars were repaired, the gates locked at night and ditches made across lanes leading to the Westwood with bridges only wide enough for foot-passengers.

Charles again visited Beverley on July 3rd to attempt another entry to Hull, and again stayed with Lady Gee. Many houses in the town had Royalist soldiers billeted with them. Towards the end of the King’s three-week stay parliamentary soldiers broke into the town and drove out the royalist soldiers.

In June 1643 during a parade of 800 parliamentary soldiers in Saturday Market a rider entered the market place. This was Sir John Hotham who had become disenchanted with the parliamentarians and was trying to reach his house at Scorable. He was knocked from his horse, taken back to Hull and then to London where he was later executed on Tower Green.

After a fierce battle in Beverley in August 1643 the royalists once again took over the town but took revenge on the townspeople for sheltering the parliamentarians. In October, after the failure of a third siege of Hull the king’s troops again caused destruction in Beverley as they passed back to York. After that, when the arsenal in Hull had been taken away, the actions of the Civil War moved away from East Yorkshire.
The Minster and the whole town of Beverley, 1188

In 1188, the Minster and much of the town was destroyed by fire. In the only report of the time Roger de Hoveden (Howden), the author of “Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi” says: “the whole town of Beverley together with the noble church of the Blessed John the Archbishop was burnt” on the eve of St Matthew – Sept 20 1188. After the fire a search was made for St John’s remains, but they were not found until 1197, suggesting a very considerable amount of damage, if not total destruction of the church.

Hengate House, 1912

St. Mary’s House was destroyed by fire in December, 1912. It was the home of Major Clive H.A. Wilson, D.S.O. who donated the land to the town eventually becoming the Memorial Gardens in 1921.

Wylies House (Conservative Club), 1941

In 1941, the Beverley Guardian reported on a fire at the Conservative Club. The Fire Brigade was called in but had difficulty getting the fire under control due to adverse weather, there being a blizzard at the time and ice and snow on the footpaths. Four hours after their arrival the firemen managed to bring the fire under control, but not before the roof had been gutted and much of the rest of the building damaged by water. The top floor of the building had to be dismantled, as photographs after that period show.

St Mary’s Boys School, 1946

In 1946 the Education Committee minutes record how the school building at Mill Lane was burned to the ground. Local boys couldn’t believe their luck as some, returning by train from a trip to Bridlington, saw the smoke rising from the site and cheered all the way into the station. Longcroft Hall was quickly adapted to accommodate boys; outbuildings were converted into cloakrooms and latrines and the swimming pool was boarded over.

Hodgson’s tannery, 1969

At Hodgson’s tannery on September 9th 1969 the ‘upper leather’ department was destroyed by a fire which caused £350,000 damage. The blaze was sparked by an electrical fault on a colour-spraying machine, and was out of control within 30 seconds. Five minutes later the whole department was a blazing inferno. Fortunately no-one was injured. A nearby warehouse containing stocks of highly inflammable chemicals was saved with the help of a turntable ladder spraying a powerful jet of water between the two buildings. Hundreds of bales of valuable shoe leather were saved by workers who formed a human chain.

Bartoline, 2003

160 firefighters, including some from Lincolnshire, fought the fire at the Bartoline works on Barmston Close, which began at 9.30 a.m. on Friday 23rd May and was still burning at 9 p.m. It was thought to have been caused by a discarded cigarette.
Bribery and corruption

For much of Beverley’s history the elections in the borough have been notorious for their corruption. Despite its size the town maintained two MPs until 1868 when it was disfranchised as being “a town unfit to send members to parliament”.

In 1534 Sir Ralph Ellerker of Risby took a house in Beverley in order to be qualified to be a burgess and then a town governor. Although this was only supposed to be for one term he ensured his re-election by kidnapping fourteen of the opposition leaders and with ‘terryball wordes, thretenynges and other opprobryous wordes not convenyent to be put in writing’ he scared off everyone else. The election was declared null and void and Sir Ralph was permanently barred from Beverley elections.

In 1727 one of the victorious candidates for election to parliament was unseated due to a petition, his agents were imprisoned and Parliament passed a new Bribery Act as a result. Between 1857 and 1868 six further petitions were presented against local election results, of which three were successful in unseating the candidate.

In 1857 the Conservative candidates paid their voters in Saturday Market, up to £3 per voter (equivalent to 3 weeks wages for a working man at that time). In 1859 the Liberals paid in a building that had one entrance in Walkergate and one in Toll Gavel, and the voters walked through to be handed money from behind a semi-closed door. The Globe Inn was also a Liberal party pub and was the site of many electoral frauds.

In the election of 1868 one of the Liberal candidates was the novelist Anthony Trollope who had long dreamt of taking a seat in the House of Commons. He described his campaign in Beverley as “the most wretched fortnight of my manhood”. Although he spent £400 on his campaign he took the rather unpopular position of not bribing the voters with beer, which inevitably killed his chances at the polls. When he came last of the four candidates he pressed for an enquiry into bribery at the elections.

In 1869 a Royal Commission looked into the bribery scandal which had influenced elections in Beverley since the early 1850s. They estimated that there were 800 voters who were open to bribery; 300 who “had no political principles or likings” and 250 who would not vote on either side unless they were bribed with money or vouchers for drink or provisions. It wasn’t until 1870 that the Commission decided that elections in the town were corrupt in 1857, 1859, 1860, 1865 and 1868 and Beverley was disfranchised, “a town unfit to send members to parliament”.

Daniel Boyes, known as the Prime Minister of Beverley and landlord of the Angel was called to give evidence to the House of Commons committee inquiring into the election scandal. He had admitted that ‘it might have happened’ that money had been left at the Angel to pay voters’ expenses. When he arrived back in Beverley he was met at the railway station by an admiring crowd and led through the streets in a torchlight procession. A few years later after another row over elections a crowd of 100 men attacked Boyes at the Angel.
Large areas of the north of England were flooded in 1875. Beverley’s market place was reported to be “like a pond, with water deep enough to have swum a boat” and at the Friary the “home occupied by the Misses Whiteing was inundated to that extent that the furniture had to be removed to a higher room”.

July 1912

On July 24th 1912, between about 2pm and 4pm, a localised cloudburst resulted in extremely heavy rainfall in Beverley and to the west, which flowed off the Westwood towards the town. Many areas were badly affected:

In Saturday Market the water was reported to be 12” deep across the whole market area, with horses up to their knees in many places.

The area of Butcher Row, Toll Gavel and Walkergate was seriously flooded, to the extent that carts were unable to pass along these streets.

Lairgate was said to be “like a river” as water drained off the Westwood and from the Minster Moorgate area, with water forced up out of the street drains to form fountains. The area around the Leases, and the gardens of Admiral Walker House were all flooded, as was the Tiger Inn as water built up along a wall behind Admiral Walker House and eventually broke through, flooding the Inn and many other properties. The Publican, Mr Joe Brown had been managing to keep most of the water out of the inn until that time. Water was also pouring into Minster Moorgate and by 4pm it had reached a depth of more than 2 feet.

A slight depression in the area of Well Lane and Well Place meant that water collected here and remained longer than in the rest of the town. Mrs Spivey of No 4 Well Place had 2 feet of water in her downstairs room and said “I’ve been married 18 years and have 11 bairns, but never had ought like this...”.

Along Willow Grove water pouring off the Westwood affected nos 2 to 6 most badly. Unfortunately the owners of nos 2 (Mrs Moore) and 5 (Mrs Stephenson) were away at the time. Mr Grantham (a studman) and Mr Parcel (a chauffeur) helped by breaking glass to get into the houses and moving furniture upstairs or raising it off the ground. They also took carpet to the stables at the back of Willow Grove, where they both worked for Mr Phil Hodgson, and hung them up to dry. Mrs Cunningham (at No 6) had chickens in the yard and the two men also took them to safety in the stables.

June 2007

June 2007 was one of the wettest months on record in Britain with average rainfall across the country being more than double the June average. On 15 June East Yorkshire was hit by heavy rain, with even heavier rainfall on June 25th. In Beverley the groundwater drainage system was unable to cope, with the result that large areas were flooded to waist height and many properties, particularly in the area of Willow Grove again, were seriously affected.
Quarrel over the churchwardens’ pew

In Beverley Minster by 1833 the pew dedicated to be used by Churchwardens had unfortunately been reduced to only five stalls and this brought about an extremely unpleasant dispute between the two sets of Wardens over their right to sit in it. The dispute was so serious that it went to the Ecclesiastical Court. In a letter to Mr. Hudson, a proctor in the spiritual court for the Archbishopric of York, Matthew Empson, the solicitor for Gillyatt Sumner (one of the churchwardens), described what happened:

“Nutchey laid hold of Mr. Bugg by the collar, pulling him out of his seat and said to him, ‘You scoundrel you have got my seat, what are you doing here? I will take care you will not come here again. You got my seat last Sunday. If you come here again I will kick you all out of the pew and give you unto custody of our constable.’ Mr. Sumner told Mr. Bugg to keep his seat and then Mr. Plaxton said ‘You scoundrel, keep yourself quiet,’ and violently struck him on the breast with his clenched hand. Gillyatt made no reply whatsoever. On the conclusion of the sermon and before leaving the pew, Plaxton clenched his hand several times in Sumner’s face, threatening that if he came there again he would throw him over the pew and kick him out. Mr. Sumner, “through fear was under the necessity of sheltering himself behind Mr. Bugg.”

Quarrel over a cast of the Percy Shrine

The animosity between the two sets of Churchwardens developed into a national matter after a request that a cast of the Percy Shrine in the Minster should be made by Hull sculptor Mr. W. Day Keyworth in order for it to be put on display at the Crystal Palace after it was moved from Hyde Park to Sydenham in 1854. The cast-iron and plate glass building had been erected for the Great Exhibition in 1851 and the move cost £1,300,000. The idea was to “re-produce the whole monument (the Percy Shrine) as probably the most beautiful specimen of purely English design which has remained in a fair state of preservation.”

In April 1854, the St. Johns Churchwardens issued a Notice:- “To the Ratepayers of St. Martins, Men of Beverley! You have been shamefully misrepresented and disgraced by the illiberal and narrow-minded Policy of Messrs. Ireland and Clarkson in refusing admittance into the New Crystal Palace at Sydenham of a Cast of the Percy Shrine. You are called upon this day to elect men who will redeem your good name and take from the Town of Beverley the DISGRACE of being the only place in the World that has refused to contribute to that magnificent and unparalleled undertaking, that Museum of the World The New Crystal Palace that has for its object the Social, Moral and Intellectual Advancement of the great masses of the People.”
Riots

Affray on Beverley Westwood

May 1825 saw the usual pre-races football match in the town disintegrate into a riot. The Mayor had decided to try and put a stop to what he called “this disgraceful practice” which involved young men of the town and neighbouring villages assembling on the race-course on a Sunday evening before the commencement of the races. Not perturbed by the posting of notices by the Mayor around the town, the would-be footballers assembled as usual, but were surrounded by constables with orders to prevent the match. Unfortunately the constables were no match for the rabble and were soon “overpowered”. The military had to be called out and some arrests were made, with a reward of ten guineas being offered for information of any others guilty of assaulting the constables.

Riotous affray

In May 1862 a “disturbance of rather a serious nature” took place in front of the Guildhall (Town Hall) when a number of militia men tried to release a comrade who was being held in custody. The prisoner, John Jones better known as ‘Nut Dick’, had been arrested for being drunk and creating a disturbance the previous night when he and his wife had been fighting in the Garibaldi Inn, Flemingate, “they fought each other like tigers and the floor of the chamber they occupied was smeared with blood”. When the landlady refused to serve them the following day he threatened her and then struck her. A policeman who was called in by the landlady was also struck, and although Jones was asked to leave he continued to be defiant and was arrested. Once inside the Town Hall he resisted the constables and a “desperate struggle” ensued. While this was going on 30-40 militia men pelted the building with stones, “of which there was a large supply” because of recent road mending. The doors of the hall were “deeply dented” and several windows were smashed. Superintendent Pattison, who had arrested Jones, and another constable “with undaunted courage” stood at a side door and “put to flight the cowardly destructives” although the Superintendent was struck with a stone. Jones was committed to prison for two months and his wife was discharged.

Fishwick’s Mill riot

Beverley’s most infamous riot took place on the Westwood in 1861 and was related to the townspeople’s objections to the Westwood mills taking land that they thought should be part of the common. Robert Fishwick had a 60 year lease on the post mill standing adjacent to St Giles Croft, and when the lease expired the corporation dismantled the mill and tried to reclaim the land for the borough rather than returning it as part of the Westwood. A notice was put up declaring that trespassers would be prosecuted and three policemen were stationed at the mill.

John Duffill, the town crier, gathered a large crowd to march on the mill, initially only asking for admittance, but when this was refused they threw down the gate and occupied the area. Although the crowd was quite orderly at this time, by 8.30 the house had been set on fire by placing straw under the staircase. By the following day the premises had been reduced to a charcoal shell.

At the quarter sessions John Duffill was accused, with 50 or more other men, of “maliciously injuring a dwelling house and premises on the Westwood belonging to the Corporation”. Five of the men were fined 6/- each for damage and paid costs of 14/-. The rest were acquitted, and the land reverted to the common.
Church catastrophes

Beverley Minster

After the disastrous fire of 1188, which destroyed much of Beverley including the Minster, the subsequent reconstruction of the Minster tower was overly ambitious. In 1213 this resulted in the newly-heightened tower collapsing, bringing down much of the surrounding church. The canons had assembled for morning service when blocks of stone began to fall from the tower, so they moved to the west end of the nave to complete the service. Shortly after they returned to their homes the tower, which was above the crossing, collapsed. The greatest damage was caused to the quire, into which the tower fell, rather than onto the nave.

In the 18th century the marshy ground beneath the Minster’s foundations, caused the north transept to start to lean. The foundations had also been weakened by an earthquake in 1703. The effects of the lean can be seen within the north transept today. From 1717 to 1731 an extraordinary feat of engineering was required to restore the transept to the vertical using a technique derived by Nicholas Hawksmoor. Fortunately the technique was successful and the Minster went on to survive yet another potential catastrophe.

Diagrams showing Hawksmoor’s proposed structure to restore the north transept to vertical.

St Mary’s Church

During the service on Sunday 29th April 1520 the upper part of the tower collapsed onto the nave, killing men, women and children. The tower had been weakened by many additions and changes since it was built in the 12th century. There had been attempts to buttress the north, south and east sides, but the west side was vulnerable. Eventually the west side either suddenly moved or gave way causing the nave arches to concertina and distort and bringing down the clerestory (upper level of the nave wall pierced by windows). Probably half the nave collapsed and the roof fell inward. The west front itself was largely undamaged. Although records at the time stated that the church was “in ruins” this is probably an exaggeration since mainly the nave was ruined. However, on that tragic day in April 1520 the sight of a half-demolished nave, open to the sky, and the tower with its west side missing must have been daunting.

The necessary reconstruction of the nave arcade and central tower was completed within just four years, largely because King Henry VIII was already threatening to confiscated church lands and a derelict church would be a highly vulnerable one, particularly with the Minster only half a mile away. Since St Mary’s was “the town’s church” many members of the town, including the Guild of Minstrels, helped to raise the funds required to restore it. The work was completed by 1524.

From John Phillips

Chris Hairsine

This beautifully carved pew, which commemorates the lives lost in the disaster in 1520, is now kept in the priests’ rooms at St Mary’s Church.

The ‘Minstrel’s Pillar’ in St Mary’s Church commemorates the contribution of the Guild of Minstrels, which was powerful in Beverley at the time, to the rebuilding of the church.
Plagues and pestilence

Until the early 20th century plague and pestilence were always with us. Beverley was no exception, its problems heightened by the number of watercourses flowing through the town. The town was also slow in installing modern facilities to improve the situation.

Until the early 20th century many of the inhabitants of Britain’s towns and cities lived in squalid unsanitary conditions caused by a lack of efficient drainage and provision of fresh water, both factors contributing to the cause and spread of disease. In Beverley the traditional misuse of the numerous watercourses flowing through meant that many had become open sewers. An early chronicler wrote that, “wandering dogs and rooting pigs ran loose among the filth of the streets”.

The first recorded outbreak of disease in the town and its surrounds was in 1349 when the plague, or black death, accounted for the deaths of approximately 2000 people including the wiping out of the monastic community of nearby Meaux Abbey. Further outbreaks of varying intensity occurred over the years with Beverley being infected in 1604 as the result of a serious plague outbreak in both Hull and York, which revisited the town in 1610 and 1665. Strict quarantine regulations imposed in Beverley, including the banning of groups of more than 10 people, helped save the townspeople from further outbreaks, which in the years from 1635 to 1638 accounted for the deaths of approximately 3000 people in nearby Hull.

It was not until the early to mid 19th century that the causal link between poor sanitation and disease was established, with Beverley reported as being slow in installing modern facilities. Until these facilities became available the town’s population obtained its water supply from 900 water pumps, 33 of which were provided by the corporation with the remainder being privately owned.

In 1848 the government passed the first Public Health Act which started improvements in sanitary conditions in English towns. Local Boards of Health were created where the death rate exceeded 23 per 1,000 of population or where a local petition from at least ten percent of the ratepayers requested a local Board.

Beverley with its high mortality rate, qualified for such a Board, no doubt influenced by the serious cholera epidemic raging in nearby Hull which resulted in the deaths of 1,834 people and ‘causing the deaths of 10 paupers in the Beverley Workhouse’.

The Board’s Inspector, Mr. G.T. Clark commented in his negative report that the town’s lack of interest in spending money was “a recipe for disease to take hold”. He was no doubt aware of the comment from a colourful local politician, Daniel Boyes the landlord of the Angel public house, that Mr. Boyes much preferred to use the privy at the bottom of his garden “expressing a conservative dislike for the water closet”.

It was not until 1883 that a piped water supply was established in the town but the townsfolk had to wait until 1889 for the installation of a viable sewage system. These two improvements put an end to the epidemic of typhoid, a disease caused by drinking water contaminated by human faeces.

Of the non-waterborne diseases recorded in the town there were serious outbreaks of typhus, a disease spread by lice and ticks, in 1847/8 in Wilbert Lane and Keldgate. In 1865, 95 cases of measles were reported with 84 cases of dysentery being admitted to the dispensary. More seriously, 22 children died of scarlet fever in the same year.
Society scandals

Scandals were common in society, often involving elopements, affairs or unsuitable marriages. Here we also have other scandals, however, including the theft of the town mace, and a wife who sued her husband for return of her furniture.

Norwood House elopement

In April 1792 the talk of the town was the elopement of Mr William Beverley and Miss Mary Midgley. Mary Midgley was the daughter of Jonathan Midgley, an attorney, who had built Norwood House and was mayor of Beverley twice. When he died he left the house to his wife who in turn left it to their eldest daughter, Anna. Mary lived in Norwood House at that time and whether or not there was family disapproval over Mary’s choice of husband is not known, but Mary and William felt obliged to journey to Gretna Green to be married. As Beverley diarist John Courtney described it: “they went out of the dining room window and walked down Pighill Lane in the rain and got into the chaise in Westwood.” When Mary died aged 33 William Beverley (a cousin of George Washington) inherited the Midgley estates, including Norwood House to which he added the library block in 1825. Eventually, however, he went bankrupt and was forced to flee the country.

Theft of the mace

In 1833 Billie Constable known locally as Napoleon Bonaparte, saw an opportunity to get even with the Magistrates who were always punishing him for his drunk and disorderly behaviour. In a drunken state one Sunday morning he saw the Guildhall door ajar, slipped in and stole the mace but dropped it in Walker Beck where it remained for several months before he confessed and it was retrieved, much to the relief of the whole town.

The Blacksmith’s wife and the Golfer

Early March 1894 saw the town’s gossips talking about the sudden departure of a professional golfer. Apparently the golfer had been conducting an affair with the wife of a local blacksmith and the pair had been staying (secretly so they thought) at the golfer’s lodgings. Unfortunately for them, the lady’s husband and his family had located them and turned up at their lodgings. The golfer was subsequently given a “sound thrashing”. The couple left the town the next morning.

Man elopes with his wife’s sister

October 1893 saw the arrest and conviction of John Addy of Keldgate for deserting his wife and children. The case had been complicated by the fact that Addy had run off with his wife’s sister, Hannah. The couple had declared “they loved the ground each other walked on”, and Addy was so serious about the affair he had sold his horse and ruly in order to set up a home and business in Driffield with Hannah. According to the Hull Daily Mail the elopement had “disturbed the moral East Riding Borough to its utmost depths.” Addy was sentenced to a month’s imprisonment for deserting his family.

The Countess of Ravensworth

The Countess of Ravensworth, who was a famous society figure and renowned beauty, took a 7 year lease on Norwood House in 1905 but only stayed a year. During this time she scandalised Beverley by riding around the town with her husband, the 27 year old groom of her former husband (she herself was 59).

Wife sues husband for furniture

In August 1913 Mary Greasley left her husband, Joseph Greasley of Lairgate, to set up home with his best friend. When the Greasleys had married originally, Joseph had settled the furniture and some clothes on Mary as a gift. Some time after leaving her husband, Mary returned to the family home to claim her children. She managed to collect one child and demanded of her husband that she should take “either the furniture or little Vera”. Joseph refused to give up his daughter so Mary took him to court to retrieve her furniture. When Mary had first gone back to the house she found that another woman had moved in. She told the court “she was wearing one of my blouses when I called about the furniture, and I told her to take it off.” The parties finally agreed to a division of the furniture.
When London became “too hot” for Dick Turpin he moved north to Lincolnshire and took the alias John Palmer. In the 1730s he moved to the Brough area, where he lived for several years, but in order to pay for the gentlemanly lifestyle he now practiced, returned to Lincolnshire to rob. In 1737 John Palmer, noted as a “butcher and horse dealer” lodged for five months with the innkeeper at Brough ferry, William Harris, saying that he lived at Long Sutton, near Spalding. At other times he also lodged in Welton and North Cave and often went out shooting with the locals.

On 2 October Palmer shot his landlord’s cockerel and, when “reprimanded” by Abraham Green, a labourer, threatened to shoot him too. This was reported immediately to a Justice of the Peace. Although Palmer was charged with Breach of the Peace he could not, or would not, pay the surety. This proved to be his big mistake, because he was therefore committed to the House of Correction in Beverley to await the Quarter Sessions whilst investigations were made into his claim of being a Lincolnshire gentleman. Turpin was escorted to Beverley by the parish constable, Carey Gill. He made no attempt at escape, and it has been suggested that Turpin may have been depressed about the failures in his life. While he was in the custody of the Beverley magistrates his horse is alleged to have been stabled in the Beverley Arms (then the Blue Bell Inn).

William Harris, on oath, before three Justices related John Palmer’s story that he had left his father’s house in Long Sutton because of debt and was “feared of being arrested by Bailiffs … if they once caught him they would kill him”. Harris thought “it would be very hard to kill a man for debt”. He described how his lodger, Palmer, boasted of owning pistols and how he regularly “went over the water into the County of Lincoln” and returned with several horses at a time. These he sold in East Yorkshire. The Justices began to wonder about their man in the House of Correction and decided to investigate the Palmer family in Long Sutton. They did not exist.

The East Riding JPs now considered that the Beverley House of Correction (located adjacent to the Guildhall until 1811) was not secure enough to hold Palmer, who might prove to be dangerous. In February 1739 he was transported to York Castle and charged with horse-stealing. At this time no-one realised that John Palmer and Dick Turpin were the same person, until he wrote a letter to his brother-in-law asking for a character reference. His brother refused to pay the sixpence postage due on the letter and it was returned to the local post office – where Turpin’s old schoolmaster recognised his handwriting.

On 22 March 1739 Dick Turpin was tried at the York Assizes on a charge of stealing a black mare and foal at Welton, a crime that had carried the death penalty since 1545. He was found guilty and sentenced to death. On 7 April 1739 he was taken to the Knavesmire in York to hang. Ever the showman, he waved to crowds, including his five hired mourners, on the way and then addressed them for a full half hour before he threw himself off the scaffold and died five minutes later. After his death his body was stolen briefly to sell to anatomists, but it was restored and buried in the churchyard of St George’s Church in York.
Rebellion

Bishop John Fisher (1469-1535)

John Fisher was born in Beverley, one of four children, in 1469. He was educated at the Beverley Grammar School, when it was situated adjacent to the Minster, and went on to attend Cambridge University. One of the houses in the Grammar School is still named in his honour. In 1504 he became Bishop of Rochester and, with the support of his patron, Margaret Beaufort, he founded two colleges at Cambridge University.

Bishop John Fisher believed in the authority of the church and was opposed to anything that might undermine the power of the pope. When Henry VIII separated from the Catholic Church Fisher refused to sign the Act of Supremacy in 1534 that annulled the King’s marriage to Catherine of Aragon and was imprisoned in the Tower of London. In 1535 Bishop John was brought to trial for treason for refusing to accept Henry as the Supreme Head of the Church in England, and was executed on Tower Hill. 400 years after his death he was canonised by the Roman Catholic Church.

The Pilgrimage of Grace (1536-37)

In 1536 smaller religious houses (those worth less than £200 a year) were being suppressed by the king’s commissioners, and the monks and nuns forced to leave. Medieval hospitals, such as the St Giles Hospital on Lairgate, were also taken into ownership of the Crown and then sold or given away. The commissioners were also instructed to value the possessions of parish churches, and the Dominican and Franciscan friaries in Beverley were also visited. People began to fear the results.

In autumn 1536 the north of England rose against the king’s policies, although the leader Robert Aske argued that the uprising was not a rebellion but an attempt to protect the Roman Catholic Church and show Henry the shortcomings of his advisers. The rising, which became known as the Pilgrimage of Grace, began in Louth on October 1st 1536.

News of the uprising reached Beverley on October 5th with an appeal for support by Robert Aske that was initially rejected by the governors. By October 8th the uprising was more widely known; bells were rung in the market place and all men were told to take an oath to support the rebels on pain of death. Men gathered at Westwood Green, near Greyfriars (the Franciscan friary) and were told to return to the Westwood the next day with any arms, armour and horses they could obtain.

Between October 8th and 11th the rebellion centred on Beverley, with daily gatherings on the Westwood to swear men in, make plans and organise the rebels. Within a few days 40,000 men had risen in the East Riding and were marching on York.

As the rebellion spread the activity moved away from Beverley. The company from the town was involved in assemblies at Hunsley and Market Weighton, and was stationed at Sculcoates for the siege of Hull from 15th to 20th of October. They then briefly joined the main army in the West Riding until a truce was negotiated at the end of the month in which the king promised to right many of the grievances.

In Beverley an agreement was negotiated between the archbishop and the townspeople but the town remained agitated during the truce. In January 1537 John Hallam of Cawkeld near Watton and Sir Francis Bigod of Settrington, Yorkshire, led a further uprising in Beverley sparked by rumours that Hull was being fortified for the king. Sir Francis entered Beverley with an army of several hundred men but they were driven out by Sir Ralph Ellerker. This uprising was opposed by Aske and was quickly stopped.

Despite the king’s promise of a pardon for the leaders of the uprising, when the threat was over he reneged on his promise and many of the leaders of the uprising, including Aske, Hallam and Bigod, were executed. A general pardon was given to the people of Beverley.
**Accidents and incidents**

19th century newspapers seemed to relish reporting the full details of life's incidents, major and minor. A taxi travelling at 8 miles an hour could result in death; in other instances, such as that of Charles Bartle, there were miraculous escapes, and some people of the time, such as the hawker called Woodward, obviously did not understand the consequences of their actions.

**Shocking Railway Accident, May 1852:** A luggage train was at Beverley Station preparing to leave for Hull. The train had been left in the charge of the stoker, the engine driver and guard being absent for some reason. Somehow the train ended up on a side line that terminated near Grovehill Road, where a number of people were waiting to cross the line. Here the train ran off the end of the rails and knocked down a wall and many of the bystanders. A pregnant woman called Hewson was injured and, although her child was delivered a few hours later it was thought that Mrs Hewson would not survive. A child was also badly hurt and several days later was still "in a state of insensibility." No lives were lost at the time of the accident, however.

**Miraculous Escape, May 1862:** Mr. Charles Bartle was lying on the Westwood watching the East Yorkshire Militia in training. One of the militia "discharged his rifle with the ramrod in the barrel." It came into "violent contact with the watch in Mr. Bartle's waistcoat pocket and rebounded. The watch was completely smashed, the vest torn and the ramrod when picked up was found to be bent almost in the shape of the letter 'S'. The only ill effects experienced by Mr. Bartle from the shock was a pain in his side."

**Singular Accident, September 1878:** A servant of Mrs. Cook of St. Mary's Terrace was wandering among some new houses in Westwood Road and whilst doing fell into a well which had been left uncovered. Although she fell a distance of about 50 feet she was alive when found and was gropping about at the bottom which was dry. It was some time before she could be extricated. Her head was cut in 2 or 3 places.

**Accident, May 1865:** Another, much more minor accident was also reported in the same paper as the Woodward incident. In this case the carriage of Mr and Mrs James Holden was caught on the gate leading from Westwood Road and spun round causing damage to one of the carriage panels. This must have been sufficiently noteworthy at the time to warrant a mention in the newspaper!

**Railway Tragedy at Beverley**

**Singular Accident, May 1865:** A woman hawker named Woodward was a passenger on a train bound for Market Weighton but missed her station. When "she discovered her mistake she immediately leapt from the carriage as the train was proceeding." After lying unconscious for some time she was seen by people on a passing goods train and brought back to Hull on a first class carriage that was sent for her.

**Railway Tragedy at Beverley, December 1915:** The "shockingly mutilated" body of John William Boynton, a lorryman who worked for Hodgson's Tannery, was found on the railway near Beverley Station. At the inquest it was noted that he had left home as usual but had no need to cross the railway to get to his place of work. He had been wearing his overcoat but when found the coat was some distance from the body as was his belt, which was felt to be strange. When it was discovered that his father had taken his own life previously it was decided that Mr Boynton had committed suicide "by placing himself on the railway."
The right of sanctuary existed in Beverley, possibly from Saxon times, until it was abolished in 1540. Between 1500 and October 1539, when the last sanctuary man was received at Beverley Minster, 365 people sought sanctuary. Most were accused of debt, homicide or other crimes. Two such sanctuary seekers were Elizabeth Beaumont of Hetton who confessed on the first Thursday of October 1479 to a murder that had taken place on September 26th, and Elizabeth Nelson (from Pollington near Goole) who sought sanctuary for infanticide on 12th March 1509.

A number of more recent murders are recorded in the local newspapers, often in grisly detail.

In October 1857 a gardener, Henry Baker, in the Registrar's House adjacent to the Guildhall, murdered his girlfriend Helen Hatfield, who was a housemaid, in "a fit of jealousy and passion" and then tried to cut his own throat. He had tried to cut Helen's throat "from ear to ear". Her hands were cut, suggesting that she had struggled and it was not a double suicide. They were later found on a bed of artichokes in the garden. He was badly injured and later died and she was already dead. When they were trying to save his life they fed him, but the Beverley Guardian reported that "the greater part of the nourishment administered to him came out again in the wounds in his throat".

In August 1888 Harry Harper, an ex-corporal of the East Yorkshire Regiment, shot Edith Carr in the face. He met her after she had attended service at the Minster and tried to persuade her to go for a walk with him; she refused. Harry Harper was already married, but his wife was working in York at the time and he was living at the Black Swan Inn (25 Highgate), where Edith was the landlady's daughter. The incident took place near the north transept of the Minster, against the wall and partly shielded by a buttress, observed by PC Knowles, who heard the shot and tackled Harry Harper. Edith was hit in the cheek and the bullet lodged in her larynx, but she survived. Harper committed suicide with the pistol as PC Knowles approached. The jury at the inquest decided that he "had committed suicide whilst in a state of mental derangement".

Another attempted murder took place in 1877 when Henry Suggitt, who had been injured by a horse whilst serving with a cavalry regiment in Dundee and subsequently suffered "mental aberration", had violently attacked his neighbour Miss Hannah Taylor of Hengate with fire tongs. In addition to "shocking wounds on the skull the poor creature had one arm and two fingers on each hand broken". Suggitt was taken into custody after he was found "standing at his mother's door idly playing with the broken tongs". A strait jacket was procured from the workhouse and Suggitt was "conveyed to the House of Correction in a cab". At the time of the report it was not clear whether Hannah Taylor would survive.