



THE WHALEBONE MYSTERY

By Charlotte Miller

In the 18th and 19th centuries, displaying exotic objects on country estates was not just fashionable but a competition between landowners to welcome and surprise visitors. At Little Ponton Hall, just outside of Grantham, the desire to amaze guests reached an extraordinary peak with a towering arch constructed from the bones of a whale.

Along what is still known as Whalebone Lane, visitors would have once passed beneath an 18-foot arch formed from the skeleton of a whale before they even arrived at the house itself. They were confronted with something strange and memorable, a feature designed to spark conversation and signal the owner's taste for the unusual, setting the estate apart with its display of curiosity.

It is a compelling yet almost disorienting image, a sea creature reimagined as a rural gateway, standing in quiet fields miles from any coastline. Whether the arch was made from jawbones or ribs is still debated, adding to the mysterious character of this unusual and slightly unsettling feature. The most intriguing part of this feature is not the style or intention but the origin.

By 1811, official historical records were already referring to the road as Whalebone Lane, suggesting the arch had been standing for longer than historians once thought. The most likely explanation is that the bones came from a whale stranded on the east coast, later transported inland and reused as an ornamental feature. In the 18th and 19th centuries, country estates often collected unusual objects to display wealth, curiosity and taste so this explanation is certainly plausible. Nevertheless, its journey from deep sea giant to somehow becoming part



of a landlocked landscape as an architectural curiosity is still a strange one.

The arch stood, welcoming visitors, for over a century. It withstood storms and seasons

until it eventually crumbled in the late 1960s due to the gradual removal of fragments by souvenir hunters.

Today, the arch is gone, but Whalebone Lane remains and so does the same lingering question: what was a whale doing far from the Lincolnshire coast?

