



GRANTHAM'S FORGOTTEN LIFELINE

By Charlotte Miller

Quietly sat at the side of the marketplace in Grantham, the Conduit is surprisingly easy to overlook. It is the kind of building we all grew up seeing but never truly knowing anything about. With its battlements, parapets and decorative details, it looks like a miniature castle that has been dropped into the centre of town and left watching over the market. In reality, it is far more significant than it first appears.

Although fun to look at, the Conduit's purpose was not decorative. It was part of Grantham's first public water system before plumbing even existed. Its story starts when the Greyfriars, a group of monks, arrived in Grantham in the late 1200s. They realised that the town's water source, the River Witham, was being used as a waste site for animal remains, sewage, butcher waste and more. Unsurprisingly, this made the water unsafe to drink and a serious health risk for the people of Grantham. To save the town, the monks captured water from a spring near Gonerby, built an intake house at the source and channelled water through an underground pipe system all the way into town. The system used lead pipes which, in hindsight, turned out to be poisoning Grantham, but once they were eventually replaced with iron, water quality improved dramatically. At the Conduit itself, water became accessible to everyone. In fact, historical records suggest there was a public fountain on the east side, meaning people could walk into the marketplace and



collect drinking water straight from the town's public supply. Even after the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 1530s and the disappearance of the Greyfriars, the system lived on. The town took it over, maintaining it for centuries. The original intake house near the springs, however, didn't survive due to

vandalism in the 20th century which sadly left it demolished. Although the system is no longer in use, Grantham's history still sits in plain sight quietly watching the world go by as a reminder of a hidden system that once kept Grantham's water safe and its people healthier for centuries.