From the earliest times, low lands lying to the west and south of Lincoln have suffered flooding and before the time of the Romans every flood passing down the Trent valley overflowed the low lands between Torksey and Lincoln and passed through the Lincoln Gap. The water then spread over the present fen areas and flowed into the sea at Boston, Friskney and Wainfleet Havens.

**Fossdyke Navigation**

The Romans appear to have either deepened or improved an existing watercourse or cut a new channel along the line of the present Fossdyke Canal.

In 1670 an Act was passed “for improving the navigation between the Towne of Boston and the River Trent”. The act recited “that for centuries there had been a good navigation between Boston and the Trent through the City of Lincoln but this was then obstructed and gone to decay by reason of the rivers Witham and Fossdyke being silted up”.

Commissioners were appointed and the Mayor and Corporation of Lincoln were empowered to make navigable and passable the channels of the Witham and Fossdyke, to improve the channels or make new channels, banks, sluices, locks, etc. and to collect reasonable tolls.

**J. Smeaton’s Report**

In 1762, the year in which the Witham Act was passed constituting the Witham General Commissions and providing for extensive improvements to the River Witham below Lincoln, Mr. M.J. Smeaton recommended the carrying out of extensive works in and above Lincoln. In his report he said, “the lower lying lands lying west of Lincoln, being the general reservoir of the waters that in floods – brought down by the Witham from the upland country – were being constantly flooded and the owners were finding great difficulty in obtaining an efficient drainage”. The works, substantially those carried out following an Act passed in 1804 were not, however, carried out at this time.

**The 1795 Flood**

In February 1795 the bank of the River Trent at Spalford was breached and nearly 20,000 acres of land to the west of Lincoln was flooded, including the lowlands of Boultham, Skellingthorpe, Burton and South Carlton and Broxholme, these being swamp lands. Also lands in Saxilby, Broadholme, Harby and Wigsley, growing only gorse and ling. The flood was solely due to the melting of snow, a severe frost over a period of two months having preceded the thaw.

It was reported at the time:

“The bank is formed upon a plain of sandy nature, and when it was broken in 1795, the water forced an immense breach, the size of which may be judged from the fact that eighty loads of faggots and upwards of four hundred tons of earth were required to fill up the hole, an operation which took several weeks to complete.

The water found its way to Lincoln, but the High Street being raised more than ten feet above the level of the adjoining lands became a dam and stop to the flood, causing it to remain above Lincoln. Failing to egress by its ancient outlet, the water spread out like a lake over the twenty thousand acres and continued to cover them for nearly three weeks. The flood-mark at that time was nearly eight feet above the ordinary height of water in the Fossdyke, or ten feet above the present level of the land.

Many of the houses in Saxilby were flooded, and the families had to be removed to the upper town, indeed several of them had to live in the church Broxholme, Hardwick, Hathow, Thorney, Fenton, Kettlethorpe and Wigsley were cut off from all communication with other parts except by boats. The villages of Torksey, Brampton, Fenton, Kettlethorpe and the lower parts of Saxilby were flooded”.

In his record of eyewitness accounts published by Padley in 1850, both Mr. Edward Cavill and Mr. William Harrison of Saxilby recall that at the ‘Sun’ public house, the water was level with the top of the bottom sash of the ground floor windows.

Following further Trent floods in 1824 and 1852, all five ‘gaps’ along the Trent at Spalford, Newton, Torksey Lock, Torksey and Marton, which can potentially flood Lincoln, were thoroughly repaired under the jurisdiction of the Courts of Sewers at Lincoln and Newark.

**Lincoln North and South District Awards**

Following the Spalford Bank Disaster, an Act was passed on the 20th July 1804 in the 44th year of the reign of George III, “For embanking, draining and improving certain Lands in the City of Lincoln and County thereof and in the parishes or townships of Boultham, Skellingthorpe, Saxilby, Broxholme, North Carlton, South Carlton, Burton and Hathow in the County of Lincoln and for inclosing Lands in the said parish of Skellingthorpe”.

The lands affected by this Act were divided into two Districts as follows:

Lincoln West (North District) Drainage Board – 625 ha

Lincoln West (South District) Drainage Board – 943 ha

The Boards were empowered to levy an annual tax on the owners of the lands which were to be embanked and drained.

The main outfall for both the North and South Districts at this time was the sunken tunnel under the River Witham at the south east end of Coulson Road, Lincoln. Gravity discharge thus being obtained into the Great Gowts Drain and the Sincil Dyke.

Amongst other matters, the Commissioner of the North District was empowered, to construct “a tunnel of cast iron of such dimensions as he thought expedient” beneath the Fossdyke at Bishop Bridge, together with a new main drain to connect with the main drain in the South District and also “cause a Catchwater Drain to be made and embanked along or near the course of the High Lands bounding the District so as to conduct the Highland Waters into the Fossdyke at Bishop Bridge.”

Similarly the Commissioners of the South District were empowered “to make and embank a Catchwater Drain along or near to the High Lands adjoining the said District on the south, of adequate dimensions, to discharge the waters from the said Lands into the River Witham”.

Therefore, the Act of 1804 produced the main outline of the drainage system in the area as it exists today.

Prior to 1930 only small areas of land in the present Upper Witham District were pumped, mainly in the Boultham, Skellingthorpe, Saxilby and Broxholme areas, the pumps being maintained by the Church Commissioners and private individuals. The outfalls from the remaining areas were protected by automatic or hand operated sluice doors. In times of flood the drainage system was far from satisfactory due to the rapid increase in water level in the Main Drains. At times when the water levels in these drains exceeded a certain height, operation of the internal pumps had to be prohibited just when they were most required.

**Land Drainage Act 1930**

Upper Witham Internal Drainage Board as it exists today, was constituted by the Witham and Steeping Rivers Catchment Board (Scheme No. 1 under Section 4 (1) (b) of the Land Drainage Act 1930, dated 14th September, 1932,) the appointed day being 1st April, 1933.

Under the Scheme, the rights, powers, duties and obligations of the Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire Commissioners of Sewers were abrogated, and the Lincoln West (North District) and Lincoln West (South District) Boards were abolished.

Successive enactments transferred the duties of Witham and Steeping Rivers Catchment Board to the Lincolnshire River Board, Lincolnshire River Authority, Anglian Water Authority, National Rivers Authority and to the now Environment Agency.