

**The Holland Fen: social and topographical changes in
a Fenland environment, 1750-1945.**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Leicester.**

by

Betty Brammer BA (Hons), MA.

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ABSTRACT

Although much has been written about the consequences of drainage work carried out in peat fens, the result of eighteenth-century drainage and parliamentary enclosures in Lincolnshire silt fens has received little attention other than at a general level. This thesis explores the Holland Fen, to consider how an inflexible configuration of drainage and enclosure procedures in the eighteenth century was able to dominate the topography and all aspects of its social development and economy, for more than two centuries.

Central to this thesis are the complicated and unusual procedures taken by a group of eleven neighbouring parishes to drain and enclose a Lincolnshire fen in which they held undisputed common rights. How radical were these actions, and why were they taken? Particular use is made of contemporary documents including the drainage acts of 1762-6, the enclosure award and maps of 1769, various eighteenth-century London newspapers, and council minutes of a local borough. Data taken from proprietors' lists, census material, annual crop returns, and MAF documents reveal the progression of images of a confined and remote fen. These continue throughout its reclamation, challenges of extra-parochial areas, social development, economic growth and convoluted formation of civil communities.

While most studies of drainage and enclosure are only concerned with the first few years, or perhaps the first half-century after such events, the long-term nature of this topic, 1750-1945, has been determined by the direct interaction of these layouts with other important issues. These include plot sizes, leases, tenant rights, rebellion and social responses, migration, farmbuildings, and farm servants in late-nineteenth century Lincolnshire. Local documents, photographs, diaries, and oral testimony contribute useful insights. Could an unyielding topography also influence religion, education, the triumph of local enterprise in a depressed economy, emigration, leisure, identity, coastal defences, and national security in wartime? This thesis claims research into lesser-known fenlands is more likely to produce that wider range of information needed to fully appreciate the diversity of regional fenlands.

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this research to Rex Russell and the late, Dr 'Jim' Johnston.

B. Brammer

ABBREVIATIONS

AHR	Agricultural History Review
AOF	Ancient Order of Foresters
BAHS	British Agricultural History Society
BNL	Brownlow
BRL	Boston Reference Library
BSIDB	Black Sluice Internal Drainage Board
CWAEC	County War Agricultural Executive Committee
EHR	Economic History Review
GNR	Great Northern Railway
HVT	Heckington Village Trust
KQS	Kesteven Quarter Sessions
LAO	Lincolnshire Archives Office
LAHR	Lincolnshire Archaeology and Heritage Reports
LCC	Lincolnshire County Council
LCL	Lincoln Central Library
LRSM	The Lincoln, Rutland, and Stamford Mercury
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries
n.d. n.p.	no date. no page numbers
NFS	National Farm Survey
NUAW	National Union of Agricultural Workers
PRO	Public Records Office
RASE	Royal Agricultural Society of England
SRO	Surrey Record Office
TNA	The National Archives

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INTRODUCTION

'The topography of Central Africa is often more correctly delineated than that of the Fenland'.¹

Take any book, article, or webpage that aspires to describe the UK's fenland areas and it will almost inevitably focus upon the Cambridgeshire fenlands and on the work of the seventeenth-century drainage 'Adventurers'.² The efforts of Vermuyden, the Dutch engineer, and others to drain fenlands such as the Bedford Levels, Lindsey Levels, and Axholme fens during the seventeenth century have been widely documented, yet their drainage schemes appear to have been largely unsuccessful with a re-occurrence of flooding in diverse places. Unfortunately, the fenlands are by their very nature low-lying, damp areas and so without the exploits of the Adventurers to add some historical interest, they risk being misrepresented as rather dreary and uninteresting places. They also risk not being documented at all; there are dozens of small fens concealed within larger ones, these are in turn frequently surrounded by even greater fenlands.³ We can pinpoint but a minority of fens accurately because they have not all been researched, indeed, why should they be? Without more research at local levels we are at risk of making too many false assumptions about our fenland heritage. A county-by-county reference of all UK fenlands, establishing the (correct) name, character, and exact location of each fen might even be

¹ S.B.J. Skertchley, *The Geology of the Fenland* (London, 1877), footnote p. 34.

² *Lincolnshire Past & Present*, 69 (Autumn, 2007), p. 15, Hilary Healey, on reviewing a flawed TV documentary which purported to be about the fens and '...included such inappropriate places as Grimsthorpe, Woolsthorpe, Belvoir, Stamford, and Wittering - not exactly fenland sites ...normally they concentrate on the Cambridgeshire fens so I suppose it *is* a change'.

³ For instance, there are at least seventeen smaller fens inside the Holland Fen in Lincolnshire.

considered as a great step forward, and one that Skertchley would certainly have approved of. However without the historiography it would have little consequence.

This thesis sets out to challenge a literary perception that only the mammoth, seventeenth-century drainage events, the techniques of salt-making, or peat turbaries, or the role of drainage mills are able to provide the most practical and interesting of fen studies. While acknowledging that these were important milestones in fenland history we should now move on towards a much wider study of fens in regionally disparate areas, this would enable us to achieve a more balanced view of the environment and of the rural communities within them. The topic sets out to determine how an inflexible grid of eighteenth-century drainage and enclosure layouts imposed on a Lincolnshire silt fen was able to dominate its topography and thus manipulate all aspects of the fen's social development and economy for more than two centuries. How was this possible and could nothing have been done to remedy such a situation? The long-term nature of this investigation has been determined by the direct interaction of these layouts on many important issues.

The first part of this study looks at how the medieval Holland Fen emerged as a prime, common pasture shared by its neighbouring parishes. The study of prehistoric fenlands and rivers is essential to the origins of certain fens because they have so many different characteristics. An article by Lane and Hayes describes how accumulations of silt along the Witham valley forced the prehistoric river to negotiate three different routes in order to reach the Wash outfall via the Fen Basin and Holland Fen.⁴ On the work of medieval monks and the religious houses along the Witham valley, Owen has revealed

⁴ T. Lane & P. Hayes, 'The South Witham Fens', in T.W. Lane, *The Fenland Project No. 8: Lincolnshire Survey, the Northern Fen-Edge*, East Anglian Report No. 66 (1993), pp. 13-23.

how the monks played their part in society, the economy, and maintenance of fenland dykes and roads. This was complemented by Iredale's history of St. Gilbert and his Order which provided a useful insight into the work of Gilbertines in the south of the county.⁵ In reference to the fenlands and their drainage systems Taylor's study of fens from prehistoric to modern times also examined the work of Vermuyden and the Adventurers in the seventeenth centuries. While Taylor was clearly familiar with the distinctive landscape and glorious skies of our fenlands which 'most writers ignore', he too, appeared to be more at ease with the peat fens of Cambridgeshire and the Somerset Levels than with the so-called 'Eastern' fens, or the location of a 'Witham Fen'.⁶ There are numerous individual fens lying along the whole length of the Witham valley. Although its theme is the drainage and associated navigations lying mainly to the north of the Witham, Wheeler's atlas of the Witham fens clearly demonstrates the significance of location.⁷ The confusion of technicalities surrounding contemporary drainage systems in south Lincolnshire has been explained at length, and in some considerable detail by W.H. Wheeler, the nineteenth-century drainage engineer at Boston. His legendary tome on the history of the region's fenlands prior to 1890 remains a highly-respected source of reference material. Wheeler also reviewed the role of the Courts of Sewers and the protection of marshes and fens through sea defences, dykes, and flood gates. A useful account of the politics behind the Courts of Sewers, Charles I, and the Adventurers' drainage schemes in Lincolnshire has been written by Holmes, while the transcriptions made by Kirkus of late sixteenth-century

⁵ D.M. Owen, *Church and Society in Medieval Lincolnshire* (Lincoln, 1981); E. W. Iredale, *Sempringham and Saint Gilbert and the Gilbertines* (Pointon, 1992).

⁶ C. Taylor, 'Fenlands', in J. Thirsk (ed.), *Rural England: An Illustrated History of the Landscape* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 167-87, '...large areas were drained, such as the Witham Fen in Lincolnshire in 1762'. Does he not mean the *Holland Fen*, drained in 1762? The correct name and location of each fen are often unclear.

⁷ R.C. Wheeler (ed.), *Maps of the Witham Fens from the Thirteenth to the Nineteenth century* (Lincoln, 2008).

commissioners' records provide us with an amazing insight into the early-modern neglect of local defences in the county and the penalties that were incurred.⁸

Returning to the already familiar themes of Cambridgeshire and the southern fenlands, of old mills and peat turbaries, Hills also approached the subject of fen drainage from an engineer's viewpoint with a discussion on the drying-out and shrinkage of peat fens after they were drained.⁹ With the aid of old photographs he recalled the windmills, or drainage 'engines', that were once so numerous in the fens. On the same theme, Sly's book on the lives of people in the southern fens must also deserve a mention. Both Hills and Sly correctly remind their readers that all drainage schemes need to be continuously improved and maintained in fenlands everywhere. Moving away from the southernmost fenlands, a little booklet produced by the Black Sluice Internal Drainage Board on the occasion of their Golden Jubilee both provided and illustrated the technical details of a progressive repair and re-build programme of the sluices and pumping stations closer to Boston.¹⁰ There were many lessons to be learned from the failure of Vermuyden's drainage plans and the bitter opposition to them. We shall discover whether these lessons were learnt and what precautions, if any, the investors in 1762 and 1765 took to ensure that their drainage schemes would be successful.

⁸ W.H. Wheeler, *A History of the Fens of South Lincolnshire* (1896, Stamford, 1990); C. Holmes, *Seventeenth-Century Lincolnshire* (Lincoln, 1980); A.M. Kirkus (ed.), *Records of the Commissioners of Sewers in the Parts of Holland, 1547-1603*, 2 (Lincoln, 1959).

⁹ R.L. Hills, *The Drainage of the Fens* (Ashbourne, 2003). There is a sense of exasperation in Lincolnshire silt fen areas over the preoccupation with Cambridgeshire and the peat fens. According to Skertchley, peat fens occupy only half the fenland area of Lincolnshire, *i.e.* the south and west plus a small patch in the East Fen. Silt occupies the northern and central areas of fens bordering on the Wash and is approximately equal to half of the entire fenland district. Skertchley, *Geology*, pp. 4-5, 128-9; See also figure 1.6.

¹⁰ R. Sly, *From Punt to Plough: A History of the Fens* (Stroud, 2003); Black Sluice Internal Drainage Board, *Golden Jubilee, 1935-1985* (n.p., n.d.).

Enclosure plays a principal role in this study of a fenland. Drainage and enclosure procedures were customary bedfellows, especially in the Lincolnshire fens. In the chapters on division and on enclosure for severalty-use the reasons and proposed legislations behind the 1767-9 procedures in Holland Fen, a vast area to the north-west of Boston, are examined. This was a common fen of 22,000 acres and one that needed to be divided impartially between eight neighbouring parishes, two local townships, one tiny manor, and four claimants to the soil, mineral and brovage rights. It also entailed the legal participation of several hundred persons (all with 'rights of common' in the fen) and the enclosure, or division of the fen into 50 separate fen allotments. Later enclosures of just ten of these allotments was enough to create at least another thousand plots inside the fen. For the most part, it was a complex and unusual accomplishment compared to the general run of Parliamentary enclosures at a time when these were usually concerned with the open fields of single parishes and involved but a few major landowners. How were all the legal procedures to be resolved? For instance, what were the criteria used in order to allocate the Holland Fen fairly, how was the contentious issue of tithes resolved, and who contributed to the huge expense of surveyors, commissioners, solicitors, labourers, and fencing? Most importantly with so many interests at stake, what were the issues that could provoke a mass protest, and how protracted and violent might it become? This also brings us to the important issue of who all those so-called 'commoners with rights' were and whether they included the poor?

Although a trawl of libraries, archives, and TNA managed to unearth various relevant petitions, bills, awards, and old maps, these would have been confusing and of little use without some local knowledge of the area. Local and London newspapers provided useful background material regarding the legislation and aftermath of problems in

Holland Fen, c. 1765-7. Initially, the papers simply covered the usual notices about public meetings, the legislative proposals that had been made, or rejected, the nominations of commissioners, various official reports, and the advertisement of lands for sale. However, this coverage was soon followed by an unrelenting barrage of indignant letters to the editors regarding the ethics of the Holland Fen enclosure, many of which sustained some intriguing rumours about prominent local gentlemen before developing into full-blown, libellous attacks upon their characters.

So much has been written about enclosure that it is difficult not to confuse the issue by concentrating on the ideals of farming efficiency and questions of social injustice. Although the Hammonds' research methods may have been inconsistent, their book on the social injustices of enclosure has certainly fuelled debate. As an example of looking at the effects of enclosure 'from the bottom, upwards' their book had some serious accusations to make, including some dubious procedures that instigated the enclosure of Holland Fen as a case in point. On the other hand, in his motivating article on fields Williamson encouraged readers to examine the many different facets of enclosure, not only social and ideological implications, but its purpose, chronology, and the environmental effects. However, Neeson's suggestion that nearly all 'commoners' were either peasants or the very poor and that Northamptonshire's open fields, single parishes, and capitalist farmers were traditionally national, seemed less helpful and rather generalised when compared with Mingay's version of parliamentary enclosures in England. Mingay agreed that the issues concerning enclosure were extremely complicated and differed entirely from one area to another. His view that enclosure was 'essentially a regional experience' was encouraging during this part of my research. Local experience, maps, and documents need to be taken into account in relation to the national picture, leaving it difficult to generalise about

enclosure in a satisfactory way.¹¹ Although concerned mainly with parishes further north on the Lincolnshire Wolds, the work of the Russells provided excellent insights into the Award procedures and various stages of work carried out by commissioners and their surveyors. Like Tate and Turner's studies of national enclosures, this is valuable information and a major input towards further research on enclosures. By comparison, Bealby's eccentric novel about the dramatic enclosure of Holland Fen was never intended to be factually accurate; rather it was a compilation of traditional and local narratives written just over a century after the enclosure occurred. Nevertheless, Bealby certainly managed to recapture the atmosphere and turmoil of a fenland environment in a very vivid way. And so did the Kirton headmaster French Johnson who, as an [almost] impassive onlooker, annotated the local events in his diary.¹²

Landscape ranks highly in this research. The work of eighteenth and nineteenth-century enclosure and drainage commissioners remains easily recognisable in many of our landscapes today. The most obvious features to stand out in Lincolnshire fenlands are the tidy fields, wide straight roads and dykes, especially the rivers and drains with their banks raised high enough to contain the worst of flood waters. After the commissioners and labour gangs had completed their assignments, the devastated landscape left behind must have seemed stark and shocking to those who had known and enjoyed the fenland over many generations. While severalty-use and a high percentage of fen smallholders should

¹¹ J.L. & B. Hammond, *The Village Labourer, 1760-1832* (1911, Abingdon, 1995); T. Williamson, 'Understanding fields' *The Local Historian*, 33 (Feb. 2003), pp. 12-29; J.M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700-1820* (1993, Cambridge, 1996), unfortunately Neeson places Holland Fen in Cambridgeshire on p.377; G.E. Mingay, *Parliamentary Enclosure in England* (Stroud, 1997).

¹² E. & R. Russell, *Parliamentary Enclosure and New Lincolnshire Landscapes* (Lincoln, 1978); W.E. Tate & M. E. Turner (eds), *A Domesday of English Enclosure Acts and Awards* (Reading, 1978); J.T. Bealby, *A Daughter of the Fen* (London, 1896); F. Johnson, *Chronology and History of French Johnson, A.D. 1749*, Transcribed by Geoffrey Lee (Boston, 1998).

have made it possible to transform the scenery into a charming, pastoral kaleidoscope, the drains, rivers, and enclosure boundaries threatened to be too restrictive.

Changes in fenland landscapes usually occurred as a result of land utilization and in this study there are several different aspects of these applications to be examined. Topographical change within the agricultural landscape is an important issue and one that links naturally with that of agrarian themes, national economy, communities, industrial development, and even national security on a wider scale. Apart from one tiny manor at the edge of the fen, there were none of the main nucleated settlements, or natural village cores normally present in other Parliamentary enclosures. A sequence of maps, the 1821 map of the Fen, the first edition OS map, and later revisions exists for Holland Fen throughout the period under review and these are reproduced in Appendix 1. Settlement, migration, and labour are vital factors of social development in the fenland. Where, in a vast wilderness of barren plots separated by uncompromising grids of rivers, drains, dykes, roadways, and enclosure boundaries might a supportive, trading community develop? How did displaced fen communities and inhabitants of extra-parochial places cope without parish churches? The plight of settlers and their responses to the situation are examined against the background of national, social, cultural changes, and ecclesiastical matters.

Thirsk's comprehensive work on English peasant farming and the history of agriculture in Lincolnshire was essential reading in relation to the early-modern period of this thesis. Because pre-enclosure references to the Holland towns can be hard to find her description of the drainage problems and economy of these towns was particularly useful. Grigg also, in his regional examination of the effective changes in topography, farming, landownership, and arable crops during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries within south Lincolnshire, was also a welcome source of information. Like Mingay, Grigg

was emphatic about the importance of regional research and, as Beastall also maintained, he attributed much of the county's agricultural progress to its tenant-rights, and to the emergence of a new class of farmer.¹³ Some unique observations of what farmers were doing in Lincolnshire in the late eighteenth century were recorded by Arthur Young. Buildings, crops, inventive machines, and livestock were enthusiastically described and debated as Young delved into the contemporary farming practices of the county's gentleman farmers. Likewise, Clarke's prize report on mid-nineteenth century agriculture and Smith's twentieth-century report on pre-war agriculture contributed some useful evidence regarding crops and land usage of the period. Modern authors such as Wade Martins and Williamson, have looked at the transformation of the agricultural geography of England and the high degree of labour productivity and, although concerned primarily with East Anglia, they provided a comprehensive discussion of the several elements of the 'High Farming' period. In his book on farming and the rural landscape, Williamson also examined the history of agrarian changes and transformation of the English rural landscape, as well as demands made on the labour force by the high farming system.¹⁴ Whilst acknowledging that agriculture plays an integral part in the topographical and social changes taking place within the Holland Fen, its basic role in this topic will remain as a backcloth to those events.

While it was essential to consider the general depiction of rural society in England between 1790-1850, including those formulaic, if often impractical paintings of gracious

¹³ J. Thirsk, *English Peasant Farming* (London, 1957); D. Grigg, *The Agricultural Revolution in South Lincolnshire* (Cambridge, 1966); T.W. Beastall, *The Agricultural Revolution in Lincolnshire* (Lincoln, 1978).

¹⁴ A. Young, *General View of the Agriculture of Lincolnshire* (1813, Newton Abbot, 1970); J.A. Clarke, 'Farming of Lincolnshire', Prize Report, *The Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, 12 (1851), pp.259-414; G.I. Smith, 'Lincolnshire (Parts of Holland)', Part 69, L.D. Stamp (ed.), *The Land of Britain, Report of the Land Utilisation Survey of Britain* (London, 1937), pp. 1-83; S. Wade Martins & T. Williamson, *Roots of Change: Farming in the Landscape in East Anglia, c. 1700-1870* (Exeter, 1999); T. Williamson, *The Transformation of Rural England: Farming and the Landscape, c. 1700-1870* (Exeter, 2002).

farm workers, it was equally important to acknowledge the diversity of rural communities and not to stereotype them. In his examination of traditions, Thompson warned against making generalisations about popular culture and showed how communities could impact on their own local customs and culture. Reay also recommended that we think in terms of localization and of *many* rural Englands with at least two of his publications exploring the lives and culture of rural labourers across a wider range of topics. In this context, Mills' booklet on trade directories concentrated naturally upon local skills with a direct input to rural communities, as did Padley with his account of old fenland traditions including duck decoys and the pasturing and branding of livestock on fen commons. Other, smaller publications on fenland activities in Cambridgeshire and south Lincolnshire written by authors such as Barrett, Bloom, and Blawer highlight the personal experiences of local farming families and their struggles to reclaim and plough individual areas of the fenland.¹⁵

Just as the Hammonds' book continues to fuel debate on enclosure issues, Thompson's book on the emergence of a radical, revolutionary working class has also stimulated some critical discussions. Although the concept of rural revolution may not have been as imminent, or even as serious as some historians have tried to suggest, an inherent readiness across Lincolnshire to riot or rebel against various perceived injustices during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries was encountered on several occasions during this research.¹⁶ Anderson, Neave, and Carter also found evidence of this,

¹⁵ E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (1991, London, 1993); B. Reay, *Rural Englands* (London, 2004); B. Reay, *Microhistories: Demography, Society and Culture in Rural England, 1800-1930* (Cambridge, 2002); D. R. Mills, *Rural Community History from Trade Directories* (Aldenhams, 2001); J. S. Padley, *The Fens and Floods of Mid-Lincolnshire* (Lincoln, 1882); W. H. Barrett, *A Fenman's Story* (London, 1965); A. Bloom, *The Farm in the Fen* (London, 1944); D. Blawer, *John Peck of Parson Drove, 1787-1851* (Wisbech, 1997).

¹⁶ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1991); J.D. Chambers, 'The making of the English working class', *History*, 51 (1966), pp. 183-9.

and even Bealby's novel carried some element of authenticity.¹⁷ The peculiarities of the poor law are well-covered by Snell, Hindle, and Johnston who appear to be satisfied that although fairly strict, the system was working adequately well, at least relative to the standards of the time in Lincolnshire. Whyte's book on migration recognized that the Irish workers played a difficult but vital role in agriculture in both Lincolnshire and in the north of England, and that in-migration on our fen-edges also followed similar patterns to those of some northern areas.¹⁸

It seems unlikely that Methodism in the area of this research represented any 'chiliasm of despair'; it was more likely to have been an expedient replacement for the fenland's absent churches. The chapter on social development and fen communities, 1770-1870, will reveal how fen villages and their own chapels became established in some unexpected locations within the Holland Fen. Ambler's work on the 1851 religious census provided useful details about the Lincolnshire churches and chapels of that period, while his book on the development of religion in the parish communities offered a background to the changes of old values and responses. Russell also examined non-conformity and looked at some of the traditions and cultural changes that took place among those communities, while Shepherdson's little booklet obligingly listed all Boston circuit chapels past and present.¹⁹

¹⁷ C.L. Anderson, *Convicts of Lincolnshire* (Lincoln, 1988); D. Neave, 'Anti-Militia riots in Lincolnshire, 1757 & 1796', *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology*, 11 (1976), pp. 21-7; H. B. Carter, *Sir Joseph Banks* (London, 1988).

¹⁸ K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660-1900* (1985, Cambridge, 1995); S. Hindle, 'Power, poor relief, and social relations in Holland Fen, c. 1600-1800', *The Historical Journal*, 41, 1 (1998), pp. 67-96; J. A. Johnston, 'The management of the poor law in seven parishes of western Lincolnshire, 1790-1834', *East Midland Historian*, 8 (1998), pp. 11-22; I.D. Whyte, *Migration and Society in Britain, 1550-1830* (London, 2000).

¹⁹ R.W. Ambler (ed.), *Lincolnshire Returns of the Census of Religious Worship, 1851* (Lincoln, 1979); R.W. Ambler, *Churches, Chapels and the Parish Communities of Lincolnshire, 1660-1900* (Lincoln, 2000); R.C. Russell, *From Cock-fighting to Chapel Building: Changes in Popular Culture in Eighteenth and Nineteenth*

In the chapter on 'New Identities, 1870-1914', we see how parochial reforms had a significant effect upon the social structures of Holland Fen. Hitherto, the thesis concentrates upon the whole of the Holland Fen area, but because so much more was happening in the northerly area of the fen during the late nineteenth century, the main focus of research is shifted towards that area. During this period some of the old, smaller fen allotments were combined with their neighbours into new, or existing parishes, while extra-parochial places appear to have drifted alternatively between one parish or another. Those marooned in other administrative divisions of the county when the new river was cut found themselves being systematically exchanged for other parcels of land. The confusion was not only disruptive and annoying to the inhabitants, it was a continuing source of frustration for the census enumerators. Similar problems arose when the data of parish fen allotments were incorporated into those of the home parishes, and records made no distinction between the areas. Sadly, as with most areas subject to such boundary reforms, the census data was too unreliable to use here as a true indication of population growth or decline, except for a few selected periods.

The economy of nineteenth-century Boston was dependent upon the fenland and especially on the neighbouring Holland Fen. Wright's book on the railways of Boston described how the railways came into Lincolnshire, their routes, and their contribution to the development of the county's industries; this context was also useful for research into late nineteenth-century enterprise and modes of transportation in the fen. Wright's book on Lincolnshire towns and industry also showed how the county's engineering firms were

able to meet the demands for new agricultural machinery.²⁰ For this period of agrarian conditions the works of Collins and Brown provided the essential background material; Brown's work was of special value because it was directly concerned with the county of Lincolnshire.²¹ Despite a period of agricultural depression, local farming appears to have retained its attraction for business investment during the late nineteenth century, and with the aid of local accounts and diaries it was possible to identify and follow the fortunes of some of these people. It was also interesting to discover that there were groups of farm servants still living-in within the fen as late as 1891, a discovery that clearly endorses the calls of some historians for more work to be carried out into the complexities of local and regional labour-market variations.²²

Because of its distinctive topography, Holland Fen became more involved in the misfortunes of both World Wars than one would normally have expected of a fenland environment, thus adding a significant dimension to the long-term nature of this topic. Oral evidence was vital for contemporary insight into a period of agricultural depression, and also to observe the pros and cons of wartime technology, the roles of women, Wesleyan chapels, Irish labourers, and of social culture in the fen. Oral history plays an important role in this research; with the right approach it had the capacity to unearth priceless information such as lost documents, historic photographs, locations of old boundaries and buildings. It was also able to expose that special feeling of belonging, the confrontational situations, and raised many complex questions in need of some serious

²⁰ N.R. Wright, *The Railways of Boston: their Origins and Development, 1848-1998* (1971, Boston, 1998); N.R. Wright, *Lincolnshire Towns and Industry, 1700-1914* (Lincoln, 1982).

²¹ E.J.T. Collins (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, 1850-1914*, VII (Cambridge, 2000); J. Brown, *Farming in Lincolnshire, 1850-1945* (Lincoln, 2005).

²² A.J. Gritt, 'The census and the servant: a reassessment of the decline and distribution of farm service in early nineteenth-century England', *EHR*, 53, 1 (2000), pp. 84-106; A. Howkins, 'Peasants, servants and labourers: the marginal workforce in British agriculture, c. 1870-1914', *AHR*, 42, I (1994), pp. 49-62; G. Moses, 'Proletarian labourers? East Riding farm servants, c. 1850-75', *AHR*, 47, I (1999), pp. 78-94; A. Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1981).

answers. Reay used a great deal of oral evidence to shed more light on the wider aspects of social and demographic history in rural England. Blythe allowed his own *Akenfield* voices to portray rural life in an English village during the 1960s, and Taylor returned later to the same village in order to discover how its rural society had changed in the twenty-first century. In a similar way, Chamberlain set out to record the lifestyle and collective experiences of women living in an isolated village in the 'black' peat fenlands of Cambridgeshire.²³

Whilst rifling through papers in the local library it was somewhat disconcerting to discover the headline in an old local newspaper that announced 'There is no such place as Holland Fen: It's Brothertoft'.²⁴ It seemed that the author of this article was just as confused about the history of the Holland Fen as its inhabitants appeared to be. Even the Ordnance Survey people, he complained, could not be sure whether Holland Fen existed or not, was it a parish, and if so, then where should they 'stick it on the map'? At the time, the article seemed rather whimsical and of little value so it was put to one side and forgotten, until the subject re-emerged again during an oral history session. Conversations with the residents of a newly-created parish named Holland Fen-with-Brothertoft (situated within the Holland Fen itself), revealed that a strong rivalry existed between the two namesakes and that many of them held a negative attitude towards sharing a parish that had only been established in 1984. When asked for a postal address their replies were often confusing, 'well, I live in Pelham's Lands really', or 'this is not actually Holland Fen-with-Brothertoft, but Fosdyke Fen', or 'my farmhouse has always been in Shuff Fen'.

²³ Reay, *Microhistories*; R. Blythe, *Akenfield* (1969, London, 1999); C. Taylor, *Return to Akenfield* (London 2006); M. Chamberlain, *Fenwomen* (London, 1977); peat is an accumulation of decomposed organic matter in a wetland environment.

²⁴ *Boston Guardian*, 9 December 1953.

How many fens were there in this tiny parish? How many parishes in the whole fen? More importantly, why did some people retain an allegiance to these ambiguous places? One resident in the Brothertoft area was adamant that her land was not, and never had been, a part of Holland Fen. There was even some confusion, yet again, as to whether the original 'Holland Fen' actually existed, and if it did, then where was it? Once these complex questions had been raised there was no escaping the challenge. What was this locality, and what had *really* happened to it between 1750 and 1945? How significant were the topographical and social changes in Holland Fen? Now seems like an appropriate time to re-establish the historical importance of this physical environment.

CHAPTER 1

Drainage of the Haute Huntre, Eight Hundred, or Holland Fen, 1750-1766.

Location of the Fen.

As a county, Lincolnshire does not conform easily to a brief description. At best it could be summarised as consisting of three ancient administrative divisions with regional areas of uplands, fenlands, heath, and marshes, these contain a variety of topographical features, soils, husbandries, landowners, and farm sizes.¹ In the past it was deplored as an isolated and inhospitable county, although this may well have been justified at times during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when attempts to reclaim the fenlands were sabotaged by widespread acts of rioting and murder.



Figure 1.1 Location of the Holland Fen and ancient Divisions of Lincolnshire.

¹ For detailed analysis of the region's character and settlement see B.K. Roberts and S. Wrathmell, *Region and Place: A Study of English Rural Settlement* (London, 2002).

The location map in figure 1.1 shows Lincolnshire and the ancient administrative divisions of Lindsey, Kesteven, and Holland, all three parts being of unequal size and having diverse characteristics. Although not entirely lacking in fenland districts Lindsey and Kesteven were usually considered to be the more easily accessible of the trio, where attractions of Wolds, limestone cliff, heath, and woodlands encouraged many post-Reformation families of the aristocracy and gentry to accumulate large estates. By contrast the Holland division consisted almost entirely of remote fens and marshes, where the amount of land reclaimed by local townships over the centuries from Wash salt marshes is borne out by the seaward elongation of coastal parishes, see figure 1.2 below.

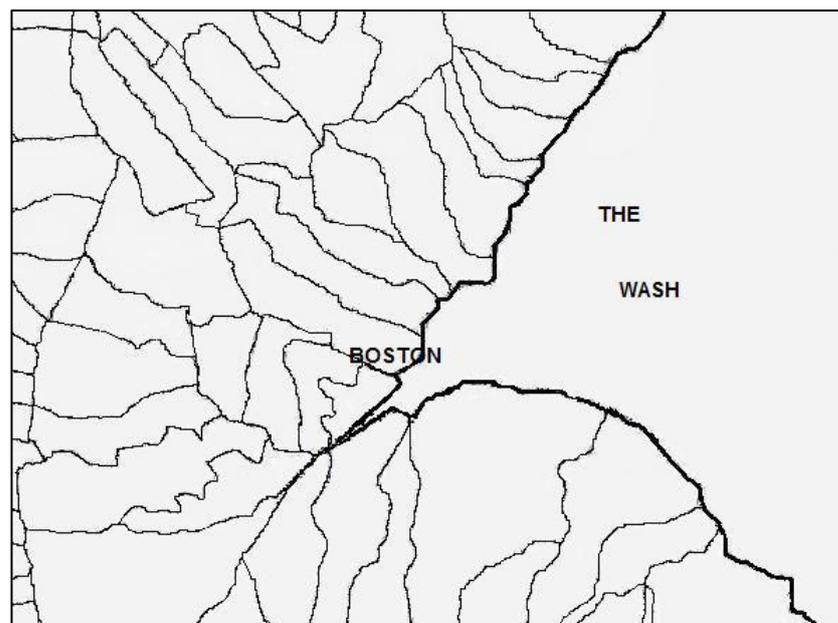


Figure 1.2 Outline of elongated coastal parishes and reclaimed land.

The 22,000 acres of Holland Fen are located in a strategic position at the most northerly spearhead of the Holland division, precisely at the point where it appears to invade and separate the neighbouring regions of Lindsey and Kesteven. The 1767 map in figure 1.3 shows those limits of the Haute Huntre, Eight Hundred, or Holland Fen delineated by East Lindsey and the River Witham on the north-east, and by North Kesteven with the waters of the Kyme Eau, the Holland and Hurn Dykes to the north-west.

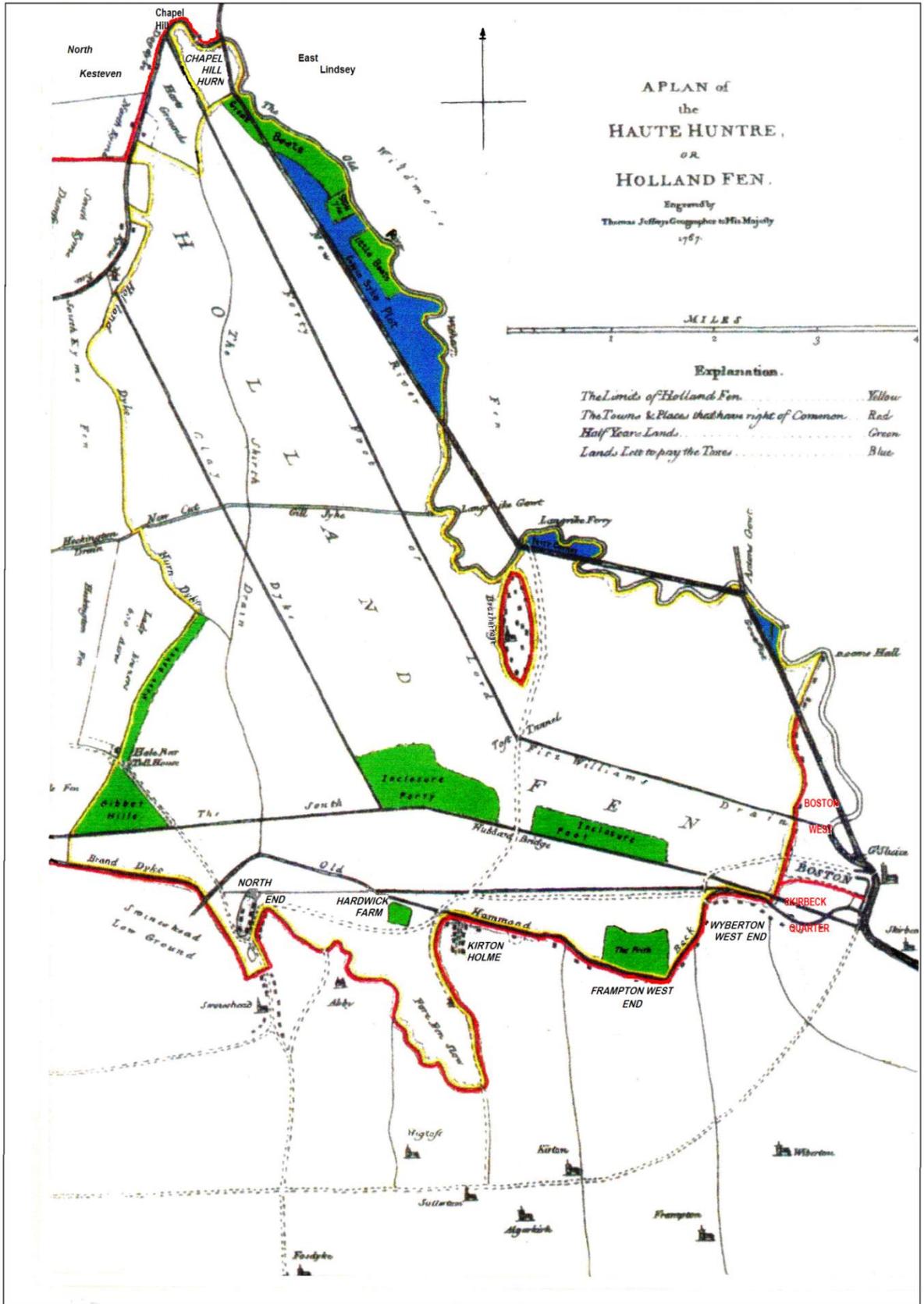


Figure 1.3. The Haute Huntre, Eight Hundred, or Holland Fen outlined in yellow as in Thomas Jefferys' plan of 1767. The plan has been adapted to include Boston West and Skirbeck Quarter (highlighted in red). Fen-edge settlements that will be discussed later have also been added.

To the east of Holland Fen lies the town of Boston also the Wash estuary into the North Sea, while the greater part of its southern boundary is marked by the Brand Dyke, the Old Hammond Beck, and environs of the parishes, or townships, that intercommoned in the fen before its enclosure in the late-eighteenth century. The fen is therefore virtually confined by its watercourses which, although appearing to isolate the area, has helped to contain it as an arable unit and retard the inevitable urban encroachment.

Before its enclosure in 1769, the fen was commoned by the inhabitants of eleven neighbouring parishes, or townships, each having the 'right' to common in the fen. As figure 1.3 shows, these were Boston West, Skirbeck Quarter, Wyberton, Frampton, Kirton, Algarkirk, Fosdyke, Sutterton, Wigtoft, Swineshead, and Brothertoft; all were situated in the Kirton wapentake and so had direct access into the fen. Of the eleven, only Brothertoft was located within the fen itself and therefore isolated from the ten other townlands. Originally an island of silty mud deposited by the sea and the prehistoric river Witham the toft supported a grange, a tiny chapel, and 144 acres of prime land farmed by the Gilbertine lay-brothers from Sempringham Abbey.² Although the toft was valuable land it was not mentioned in the Domesday Book most likely because of the late and hazardous occupation of some fenland areas. Identity of the original landowner who donated the land to the Gilbertines has been lost because many of the Sempringham cartularies perished in a fire at the Staple Inn and remaining charters are of little help. The name 'Toft' indicates a 'green knoll' or 'hillock' that supported enclosed farm dwellings and its medieval pre-fix was associated with the lay-brothers who worked the abbey lands.³

² Silt is fine dirt suspended in water and deposited as soil; 'A fine sand, so called from the upper part of the stratum having in it a portion of loam. The deeper we dig the cleaner and sharper the silt'. Young, *General View*, p. 301.

³ E.H. Gooch, *Place names of Lincolnshire* (Spalding, 1945), p. 26, Brothertoft was similar to Brotherhouse, 'where brethren from Spalding and Crowland monasteries collected their dues, toll-house'; G. Fellows-Jensen, *Scandinavian Settlement Names in the East Midlands* (Copenhagen, 1978), p. 137, the generic 'Toft' brought by the Danes and adopted into the English vocabulary at an early date remains to the present day. OE phrase 'one

The lay-brothers also maintained an important ferry between Brothertoft and Langrick used by travellers seeking to cross the river Witham on the north-south fenland route. The toft was developed by the Gilbertines from the twelfth century until the Dissolution, when it was recorded as '*Brodertoft*' in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*.⁴ After the Reformation, the tiny manor of Brothertoft was added to the estates of the Carrs of Sleaford and then owned by the Duke of Newcastle until sold in 1760, together with property in Wyberton and Frampton, for £7,750 to Sir Charles Frederick, KB., of Walton on Thames, Surveyor General of the Ordnance.⁵

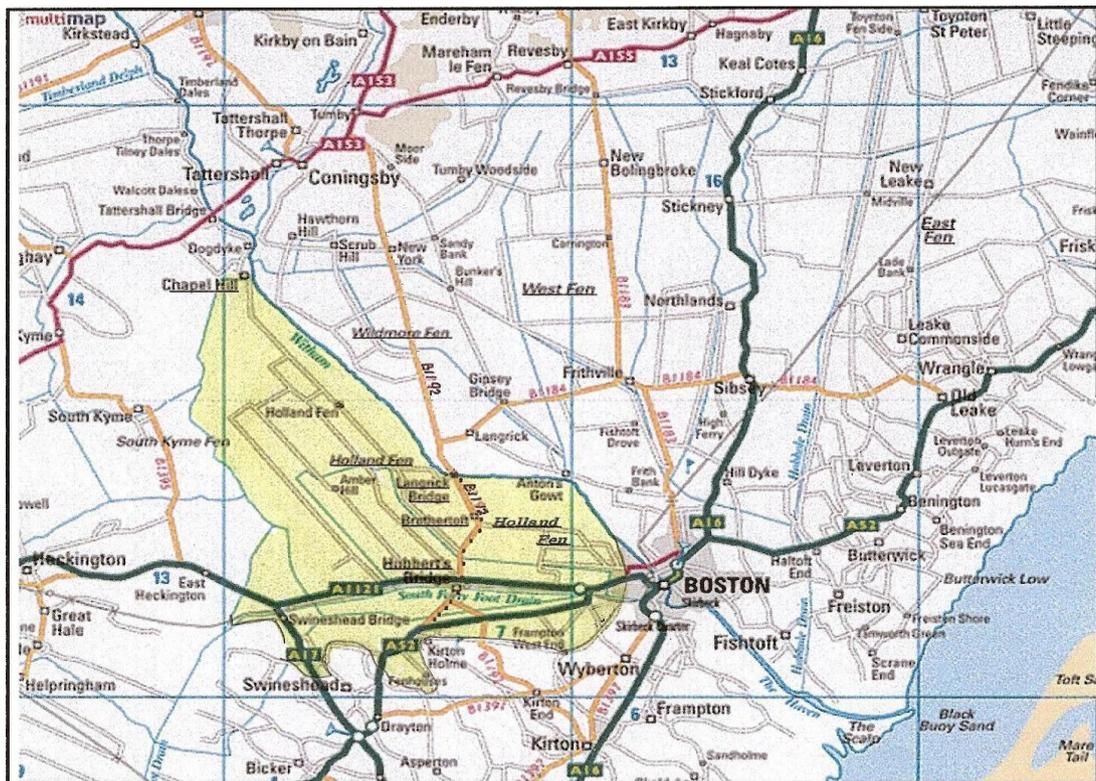


Figure 1.4 Route of the B1192 after leaving the A52 to pass through the Holland Fen (yellow area).

tofte and on crofte' (a building with a small field attached to it). Toft occurs most frequently in the Holland division of Lincolnshire.

⁴ '*Brodertoft*' was valued at £9.16s.1d. and ranked third highest value in a list of 39 other granges, lands, and tenements farmed by the Gilbertines in Lincolnshire, *Valor Ecclesiasticus, Henry VIII*, 4 (London, 1821).

⁵ *Abstract of Title*, docs. 1-18. An Abstract of thirty-six documents held with the Robinson family papers at Brothertoft Hall.

The busy B1192 was originally part of an old turnpike road through Holland Fen from Donington to the ferry at Langrick. Nowadays the modern road diverts heavy, northbound traffic away from the centre of Boston and conveys it over the river Witham via the Langrick bridge which replaced the old ferry in 1907. Figure 1.4 follows the B1192 as it crosses the South Forty Foot drain and the A1121 at Hubberts Bridge; it then passes the end of a drove road leading into the Sutterton and Kirton Fens before crossing over the North Forty Foot drain at Brothertoft. Small side roads along the B1192 lead to Boston West, to the North Forty Foot Bank, Hedgehog Bridge, and to the old village of Holland Fen which was amalgamated into the modern parish of Holland Fen-with-Brothertoft in 1984. In order to cross over the river Witham huge lorries and heavy traffic have to negotiate the single-span bridge at Langrick with caution.



Figure 1.5 On the Witham north-west of Boston, July 2006. The Langrick bridge and tiny mooring at Brothertoft.

Although the river Witham is integral to the fenland, it remains hidden from general view by the ten-foot high, grassy riverbanks and only from the bridge or a boat (as in figure 1.5), can the work of the eighteenth-century drainage engineers be fully appreciated. There is a tiny shop and river mooring at the foot of Langrick bridge although no other shops, garages, or public houses have managed to survive within the fen interior. The high banks of the straightened river are a prominent feature of the area, as are the numerous long drains which are wide, deeply cut, and fed by a network of smaller dykes. All the waterways are maintained the whole year round and this work is essential in keeping the land drained and fully productive. The arable landscape is flat and interspersed with isolated farmhouses, there are a few private dwellings as well as farm entrances scattered along the drain-sides, while a tiny church stands alone in the fields at Brothertoft against an unexpected backcloth of trees. This cluster of tall trees almost surrounds the old Hall while the garden ha-ha and parkland, where a few Highland cattle graze, afford it some further seclusion from the busy road.

Condition of the Fen.

The river Witham has always played a central role in the development of Holland Fen and the lives of neighbouring communities in South Lincolnshire. The fen basin contains physical evidence of several prehistoric and medieval courses of the river as it crossed the fenland seeking natural outfalls into the North Sea. The destination of the prehistoric Witham after leaving Lincoln and traversing the Witham valley appears to have been in a south-westerly direction, from Dogdyke towards Bicker Haven (located in figure 1.6), although this was long before accumulations of tidal silt forced it to change direction at Dogdyke for the second time and veer eastwards over the fen basin via the Haute Huntre, Eight Hundred or Holland Fen towards Boston. Here, it finally discharged into the North Sea by way of the Wash outfall.

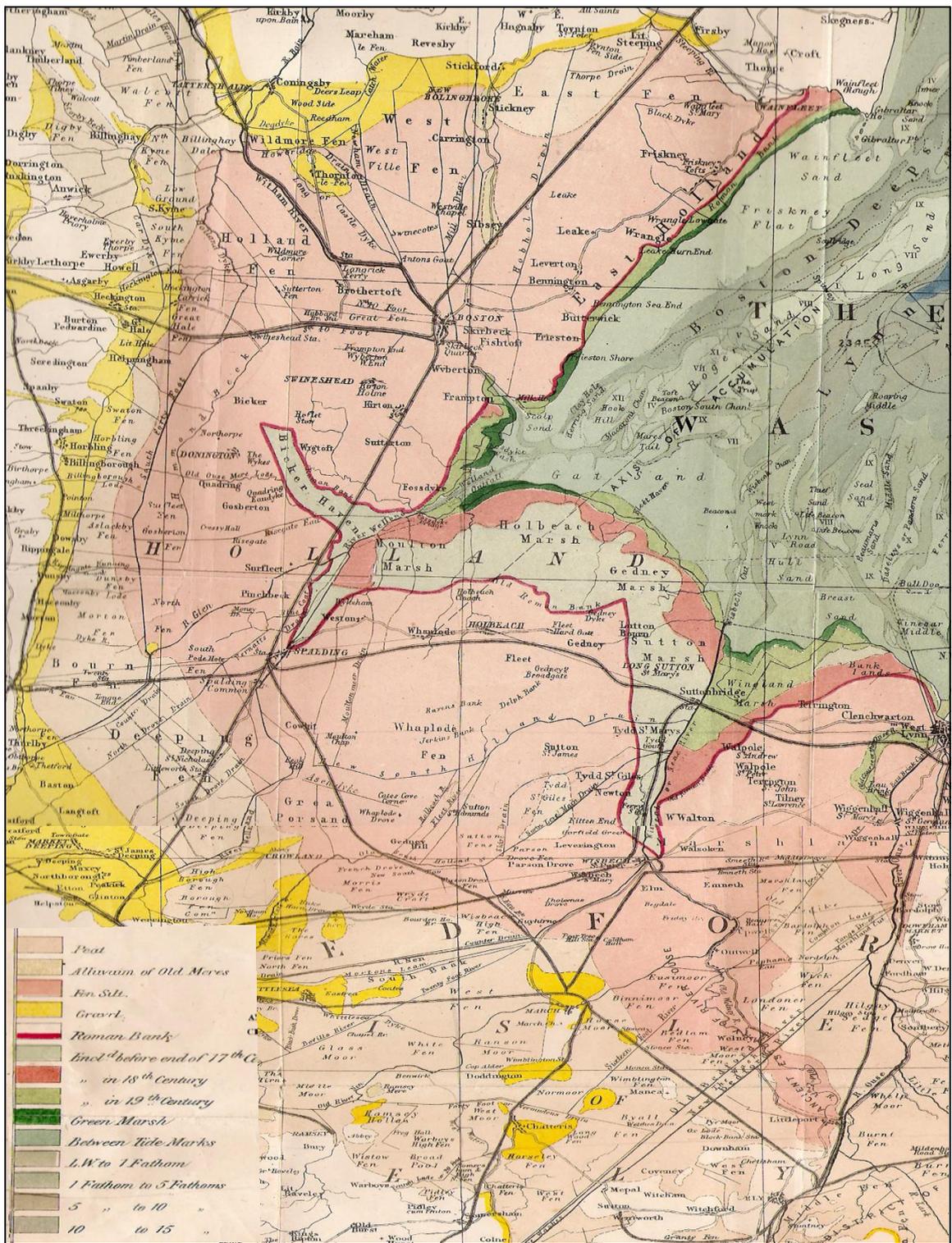


Figure 1.6 Bicker Haven, outlined in red, is featured immediately south of the Holland Fen and within the 'Roman Bank' area in Skertchley's geological map of the fenland. The map also differentiates between the areas of silt fens, peat fens, and marshland. Adapted from S.B.J. Skertchley, *The Geology of the Fenland* (London, 1877), frontispiece.

In 1993, a Lincolnshire survey of the northern fen-edge unearthed extinct channels and creeks gouged out by a (second) prehistoric Witham as it left the Kyme Eau and took a short cut eastwards through Pelham's Lands across the Holland Fen, towards the Wash. The survey established that this course of the Witham had also silted-up and been abandoned prior to the early medieval period when the (third) Witham re-directed itself along a new route south-eastwards from Chapel Hill into the Wash estuary near Boston. Whether the second detour across Pelham's Lands and the fen basin had been abandoned before or during the Roman period, or even the Middle Ages was undetermined and needed further soil surveys to date that period more precisely. Certainly the medieval course of the river was only established after a long period of time had elapsed and during which the fenland remained liable to serious flooding. Some evidence of the river's prehistoric and medieval wanderings can be seen on aerial photographs of Holland Fen and in the Cambridge University Collection.⁶

The medieval route of the Witham opened up a brisk overseas trade between Lincoln, Boston, and the Continental ports. In the early-twelfth century, religious houses used the river to transport huge quantities of building materials to their newly-founded monasteries and abbeys along the fens of the Witham valley. This area, between Lincoln and Dogdyke, was popular with the religious houses and, according to Wheeler's calculations, there were twelve monasteries situated on the banks of the Witham within a twenty-mile stretch of the river.⁷ Wealthy Boston merchants exported local woolsacks and traded in imported wines, cloths, and spices from their warehouses and cellars beside the river. Commerce brought such fame and prosperity to the town that its port was considered to be second only to London during this period. Depending on their size, sea-going vessels used the incoming tides to sail up the Witham from Boston to Dogdyke,

⁶ Lane & Hayes, 'South Witham Fens', pp. 13-23, Aerial photo plate III, p.22;

⁷ Wheeler, *History*, p. 2; However, Skertchley states 'within the space of 16 miles', *Geology*, p. 99.

located in figure 1.7, where their cargoes were assessed for tolls and then discharged into smaller boats before continuing the journey to Lincoln. Royal courts purchased large

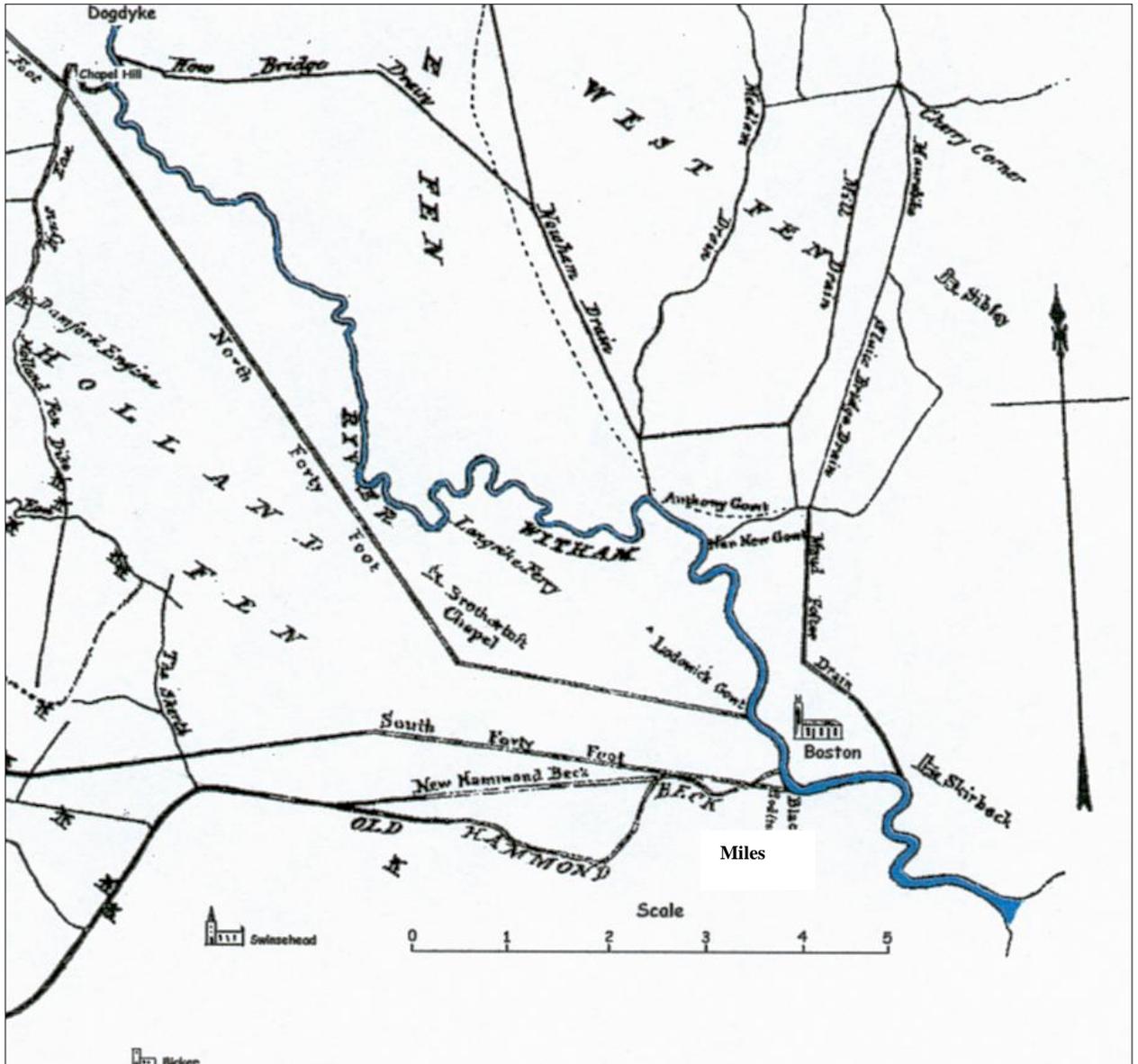


Figure 1.7 The old course of the River Witham (blue) from Dogdyke, across the Haute Huntre Fen to Boston, and into the Wash outfall. (Adapted from a plan by J. Grundy, 1762. LCL Map 649)

quantities of household supplies in Boston, so much so that thirty-seven barges and boats were needed to transport Edward I, his court, and all their local purchases when they sailed by river on route to Lincoln. Nevertheless, serious concerns regarding the Witham navigation and state of Boston harbour were already made manifest by 1142 when the first sluice was commissioned and presumably financed, by members of the Richmond and

Croun families, two of the three seigneurial houses with manorial control over Boston.⁸

Thronged with merchant traffic, the Witham quickly became the busy highway of shipping that transported people and merchandise throughout the fens and marshes from one market town to another.

The sluice was erected on the river Witham below the town in order 'to increase the rush and force of the waters by which the harbour is made clear' so that the channel might become deeper and 'the waters from all the marshes of Lindsey, Holland, and Kesteven, and from the lands of the whole country, might come down and flow into the sea more easily'.⁹ The flow of water down the Witham valley from Lincoln towards Boston tended to become sluggish after the Witham approached the reduced gradient of the fen basin at Chapel Hill. This meant that during periods of heavy rain its banks were liable to overflow with the increased volume of water rushing down from upland streams. As a result, the swollen river spread across the Haute Huntre fen leaving the main shipping channel shallow and almost impossible to navigate amidst 22,000 acres of flooded fen and wasteland. Without a steep gradient to regularly accelerate and force the fresh water to scour out the river bed the Wash outfall could not be expected to remain open, while at the same time the North Sea caused further obstruction in the harbour by continuing to deposit great quantities of sand and silt into the channels of the Wash with every high tide.

Any major attempt to maintain the sluice appears to have had negligible effect. At an inquisition held in 1316, the 'Great Sluice of Boston' was found to be 'ruinous and in great decay' to the great danger of Holland, Kesteven, and the marshes of Lindsey and Kesteven'. It was alleged that there were

⁸ Earls of Richmond, and the de Croun and Tattershall families.

⁹ Wheeler, *History*, p. 26; Skertchley, *Geology*, p. 99.

...many doors wanting and also 500 piles from the number with which it was constructed, and new fastenings have to be brought, and also beams, planks, piles, and binders of every kind suitable for use in water.¹⁰

Numerous complaints about the navigational state of the Witham and Boston harbour continued throughout the medieval period with desperate merchants sending petitions to their king and to parliament. Both Edward III and Richard II dispatched Royal Commissions to view the river between Lincoln and Boston which was said to be changing its course yet again in some places, having been obstructed 'with mud, sand, plantation of trees, flood gates, sluices, mills, causeys, and ditches'. These complaints were usually dealt with by the commissioners of sewers whose powers enabled them to order local communities to remove the obstructions and to labour, 'for the common good' in the unpopular task of repairing or rebuilding sea and river banks. A Royal Commission in the reign of Henry VII called for another new sluice to be erected in the middle of the Witham at Boston; on this occasion the acre books were produced and a statute duty was levied upon every township in Holland. This sluice, erected by a Dutchman named Mayhave Hake, was fitted with flood gates to prevent the tide from flowing up the river and was connected with the land on either side to form a much needed town bridge.¹¹

Severe high tides caused widespread flooding across South Lincolnshire, as in 1287 when the monastery of Spalding and numerous parish churches were damaged or destroyed after the tide burst through the sea banks during gales and some unusually high tides. On many other occasions, flooding was simply the result of neglect and poor reinforcement of these sea and river bank defences; occasionally, they were deliberately sabotaged in order to let the trapped flood water flow out again, or to divert flood water onto adjoining land.

¹⁰ Wheeler, *History*, p. 26.

¹¹ Wheeler, *History*, pp. 27, 140.

The accumulation of silt deposited in the fenland by both river and the sea meant that regular maintenance of the dykes and sluices was crucial. As Thirsk pointed out, a public-spirited onslaught to clean out the drains and to re-build river banks was often followed by long periods of complacency, during which nothing more was done until fresh deterioration caused the widespread flooding to resume with intensity.¹²

The numerous Royal Commissions, which were usually only activated as a result of disasters or petitions to the crown, needed to be renewed by each succeeding monarch, and so in 1531 an Act was passed granting perpetual authority for the establishment of a Court of Sewers.¹³ Commissioners of the Court of Sewers had judicial powers over all the existing watercourses in each wapentake where their courts, or juries, would meet annually in order to assess tax according to the rate of every person's portion, tenure, or profit, and to punish all offenders reported to them by the dykereeves. The court also considered the state of all drains, rivers, and sea-banks in their areas and compiled new reports detailing any work to be carried out. These were given to their Surveyor General, who had overall direction of the drainage operations and, in turn, passed the appropriate directives on to the two dykereeves elected in each of his parishes. The latter organised local people into carrying out the necessary work on their banks, drains, and sluices. The dykereeves also collected their parish's drainage tax assessment and kept records of local expenses; these were then submitted to the commissioners for payment and a possible re-assessment of the dykereeve rate.¹⁴ The embanking of all rivers, creeks, and coastal banks was taken very seriously indeed and the records of the commissioners of the Courts of Sewers for the mid-sixteenth century show that the commoners of Haute Huntre fen were regularly accused of

¹² Thirsk, *English Peasant Farming*, p. 206.

¹³ Wheeler, *History*, p. 44.

¹⁴ LAO., MISC. DEP. 111. *Case of the promoters of the Act for Dividing and Allotting the Haute Huntre, or Holland Fen in Lincolnshire*. Undated contemporary document.

failing to keep their extensive river banks in order. In their defence, this probably entailed the maintenance of a bank some twenty miles long.¹⁵

Like most religious houses the local monasteries of the Witham valley, Spalding, and Sempringham had been liable for the maintenance and repair of all roads, bridges, and river banks on their lands until the Dissolution of 1536, often a responsibility that was only carried out at the insistence of travellers and local inhabitants. However, after the Dissolution, sales of monastery lands continued until 1544 during which time it proved to be extremely difficult for local dykereeves to keep track of all the new landowners. Land changed hands so often that liability for some river banks, sewers, roads, or bridges might not be determined for many years, thus leaving them neglected and badly decayed. Even so, the jury of the Court of Sewers found Edward VI,

...our sovereign [sic] the lord king by the right of his dissolved monestary of Sempringham ought to make and amen reparre and maynteyn a comon way at Podmer Horne at Brothertofte [in Haute Huntre fen] for the passage of his graces subjects.¹⁶

Fishermen caused substantial damage to the river Witham and the fines were heavy:

...the sayd [sic] jury say that ther shall no fysharmen of none of all the Eight Townes nor Brothertofte mak any weresteades nor dammes for any manner of nettes or leppes to be layd in withyn the fen whereby the water shalby leyte to have ther right coursse and passage upon the payn of every werestead so mayd and founde xs to be levyd and payd of the gudes of any suche offenders to the chyff lordes of the soile.¹⁷

While fishermen were held largely to blame for the obstruction of rivers and dykes, destruction of the embankments was often caused by the dragging of boats over them, by groups of travellers, or by herds of sheep, cattle, and horses as they grazed beside the water

¹⁵ Thirsk, *English Peasant Farming*, p. 26.

¹⁶ Kirkus, *Records*, p. 66.

¹⁷ Kirkus, *Records*, p. 64.

and trampled the banks into muddy flats. During the sixteenth century, the Court of Sewers passed judgements to the effect that dykes and sykes should be made, scoured, or enlarged, and new sluices constructed at various locations in and around the Holland Fen; most of these stipulated a deadline for completion or the payment of a fine, for example

'before the feest [sic] of Seynt Marten the bishop nect comying upon payn of forfettyng yf they make default x li'.¹⁸

How successful the commissioners' judgements were is difficult to assess for many of the new improvements were disputed. When ordered that the new sewers and sluices to divert water away from the fenland should be paid for by each parish that the work passed through, some of the fen parishes of Kesteven contested the commissioners' powers to enforce such judgements for new work, and so refused to pay. Despite endless complaints of serious flooding and poor navigation for which Boston blamed the inhabitants of the Haute Huntre fen, and who in turn held the upland parishes of Kesteven and Lindsey responsible for the flood waters, very little was accomplished until the early seventeenth century when the drainers arrived in Lindsey.

Drainage and Conflict in the Seventeenth Century.

In 1626, Sir Cornelius Vermuyden and his drainage undertakers began to drain 60,000 acres of Lindsey fenland in the Hatfield Chase and Isle of Axholme areas, see figure 1.8, a scheme that was violently opposed by many landlords with rights of common in those fenlands. The undertakers had obtained the backing of the king, Charles I, whose royal authority was needed in order to gain control over the commissioners of the Court of Sewers and so manipulate the legality of the scheme. As Clive Holmes explained, 'newly devised legal machinery' was employed to facilitate the drainage because the

¹⁸ Kirkus, *Records*, pp. xxix, 23, 64, 66.

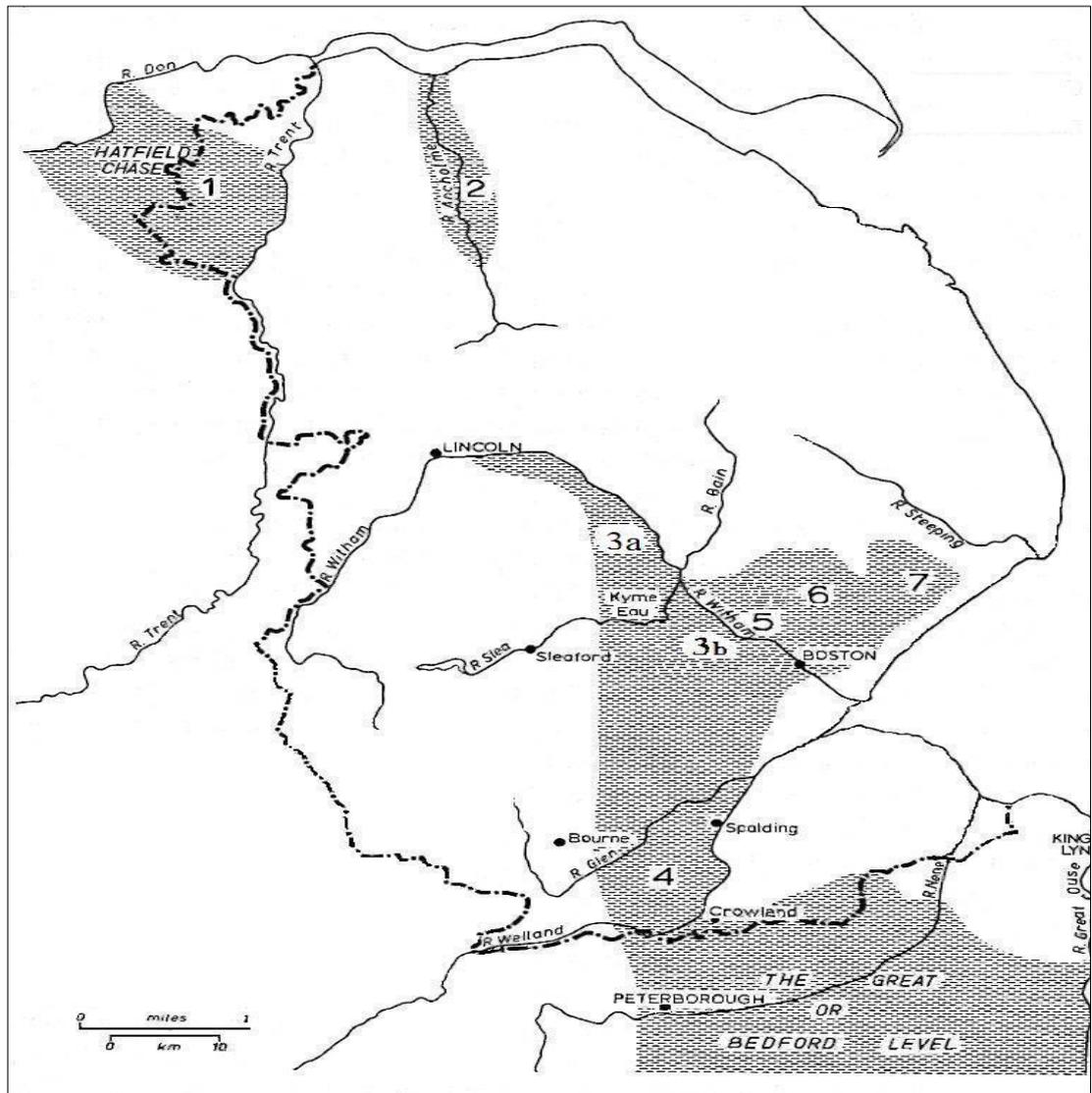


Figure 1.8 Active areas of the seventeenth-century fen drainers in Lincolnshire in 1. The Isle of Axholme. 2. The Ancholme Level. 3a. The Lindsey Levels (North from Lincoln to Kyme Eau, and South from Kyme Eau to the river Glen). 3b. Haute Huntre, Eight Hundred, or Holland Fen. 4. Deeping Fen. 5. Wildmore Fen. 6. West Fen. 7. East Fen. (Adapted from Holmes, *Seventeenth-Century*, p. 120).

authority of the commissioners rested upon phrasing that was 'dark and intricate' where powers to order new works, or to do no more than renovate old works, was concerned. The commissioners were therefore directed by the crown to declare that the lands were 'hurtfully surrounded' by water and to levy a deliberately high tax on the landowners. As expected, when the tax was not forthcoming the commissioners condemned the land which was then sold off to the drainage consortium subject to being restored to good condition.¹⁹

¹⁹ Holmes, *Seventeenth-Century*, pp. 123-27.

The fenlands of south Lincolnshire, also shown in figure 1.8, offered both the crown and drainage undertakers an even greater potential for profit despite there being far more landowners with fenland interests to contend with in the south of the county. It was hardly surprising therefore that the commissioners of sewers in the Holland district proved to be more resistant and the king was even forced to replace some of the commissioners with his own people so that legal compliance for the new drainage schemes could be obtained. Charles I took a more active part in the drainage of Haute Huntre fen where there were not only eleven towns or parishes holding rights of common, but also a few lords entitled to the erstwhile manorial grazing or mineral rights.²⁰ The king appointed his own undertakers to do the drainage work and once again the high tax, now increased from 13s.4d to 20s. an acre, was levied upon the fenland. Where the tax remained unpaid, the king obtained legal backing to the land and then passed his rights of 8,000 drained acres over to Sir William Killigrew, a partner of the Earl of Lindsey and his consortium of 'Adventurers' in the Lindsey Level drainage.²¹

During the 1630s, the Adventurers constructed several new drains in the Haute Huntre fen, these included the South Forty Foot, the Clay Dyke, Brand Dyke, the New Hammond Beck from Kirton Holme to Boston, and a cut to the Gill Syke to discharge water into the Witham via a sluice at Langrick. These drains and sluices are shown in figure 1.9. At a cost of £6,000 a great sluice, 55 feet in width with four pairs of doors, was erected on the Witham at Skirbeck south of Boston, to allow the waters of the South Forty Foot drain and New Hammond Beck to empty into the Wash outfall. All this work was said to have cost around £45,000.

²⁰ These will be explored further in chapter 2.

²¹ Holmes, *Seventeenth-Century*, pp. 128-29; Wheeler, *History*, pp. 252.

Although the drainage appeared to be successful the sheer scale of common land appropriated by the Adventurers was vigorously contested by all those whose livelihoods depended on the fenland, but the crown simply intervened by promoting the advantages of drained fenland and directed that all the law suits and petitions be dismissed.²² As in the Ancholme Level where the commoners had been deprived of two-thirds of their fenland, when rioting threatened extensive damage to the drainage works the Privy Council ordered local justices to protect the drains and sluices and arrest all the ringleaders. However, the extent of dissidence in the Lindsey Level, the East, the West, and Wildmore Fens was far more substantial and included many Boston gentry and graziers who, like hundreds of other commoners on the north-east side of the Witham, suffered heavily from the loss of their fen rights.

The outbreak and distractions of Civil War in 1642 provided a golden opportunity for the commoners to reclaim their fenland and, with virtually no opposition, the commons were restored swiftly and relentlessly to their natural habitat. On one occasion a huge crowd of protestors assembled in Boston to break up and set fire to the great wooden doors of the new 'Great Sluice'. Despite the Adventurers' repeated petitions to Parliament, the doors were left in such a broken and charred condition that the sluice remained black and useless for almost a century afterwards. In 1653, Sir William Killigrew complained bitterly about

...those that have, and are now pullinge [sic] that greate slues to peeces at Boston Towne's Ende, which cost about sixe thousand pounds: and if it should by this breaking up be suncke by the water gettinge under it, the sea will breake in all that side of the country where noe sea ever came... for by the ruine of that our maine

²² Wheeler, *History*, p. 143.

slues, I conseave a hundred thousand pound damage may be done... that doe steale and breake up the iron and the plankes of that great sluse.²³

After reverting back to its undrained state, the fen was frequently flooded and roads became impassable again in the winter. During this period, local inhabitants were able to take to their boats as it was then possible to transport local produce to Boston market by water. Occasionally the boats could reach into the town as far as the Rosegarth corner in West street, or even to the White Horse Inn at the town bridge. According to antiquarian accounts, there were times when Chapel Hill was only accessible across the Haute Huntre fen "by boat or riding a horse belly deep and more in water than mud". Inhabitants of the houses in Dogdyke were unable to communicate with each other during the whole of some winters, and even in some summers as well. Crops could remain under water for weeks and cattle drowned after they were seen swimming around trying to forage or find a piece of firm ground to stand upon. In 1720 Earl Fitzwilliam attempted to drain his lands at Billingham by cutting a channel across the Haute Huntre fen. Known as the Fitzwilliam's, Lodowick's, or North Forty Foot, the drain joined the river Witham via a new sluice near Boston called Lodowick's Gowt. However, the drain was not entirely successful as it caused flooding to occur in other areas and so reduced the essential scouring of the river bed.²⁴

It took a Civil War and almost a hundred years of neglect for the lessons to be learnt and for general resentment towards fenland drainage to soften. The drastic measure of altering the course of the river Witham was considered inevitable in 1733 after the surveyor, James Scribo, submitted his report on the navigational state of the river between Lincoln and Boston to the Mayor and Aldermen of Lincoln. He confirmed that large rivers

²³ P.T. Thompson, *The History and Antiquities of Boston* (Boston, 1856, Heckington, 1997), p. 635; Wheeler, *History*, pp. 252-3; Tradition has it the 'Great' or Skirbeck sluice was renamed 'Black' sluice during this period owing to its charred condition.

²⁴ Wheeler, *History*, pp. 34, 144, 252-3; The Witham overflowed into this drain in 1753, Wheeler, *Maps*, p. 7.

and brooks of the uplands discharged great quantities of water into the Witham above Chapel Hill on the northern edge of Haute Huntre fen. Because the river was very shallow and winding, it had a fall of only 16 feet for over twenty miles and in some places was not more than 18 feet wide, the banks were therefore unable to cope with any excess water that flowed into Haute Huntre fen and as a result, flooded several thousand acres.²⁵ Despite Scribo's recommendations and a warning that navigation would become lost forever on the river Witham, nothing more was done. In view of the widespread hostility that had been vented on the Adventurers during their attempts to confiscate fenland, it is not surprising that there was a reluctance to disturb the hornet's nest again. Nevertheless some of the seventeenth-century lessons do appear to have been heeded. It was agreed that neither the crown nor the drainage engineers would be entitled to a share of the drained land. Any division of the fen would have to be seen to be fairly distributed amongst those who could prove their rights to common in the fen, and a fair system of tax should be levied by independent parties. All this entailed some very lengthy and complicated legal processes.

The Drainage Acts of 1762 and 1765.

In 1744, John Grundy, the Spalding engineer and surveyor submitted the first of his propositions and estimates for restoring the Witham navigation to groups of local gentry and landowners in both Lincoln and Boston. Grundy's schemes involved either the widening and deepening of the river, cutting off some of the worst curves, or making an entirely new cut from Chapel Hill to Anton's, or Anthony's Gowt (named after Sir Anthony Thomas, one of the Adventurers). According to Wheeler, there were no less than thirty bends within just a twelve-mile stretch of the river before the new cut was made.²⁶ Meetings to consider other propositions and projects continued throughout 1752 and 1753

²⁵ Padley, *Fens and Floods*, Scribo's Report, pp. 15-20.

²⁶ Wheeler, *History*, p. 137.

as Boston Corporation was keen to explore every avenue that could lead to the right scheme, the best way to finance it, and a peaceful acceptance of the work by all concerned. It would be a daunting task to levy a tax on all proprietors of the fens or low lands between Lincoln and Boston, this included sixty-seven parishes on both sides of the river Witham and covered a total area of around 96,431 acres.

Finally, a joint commission of leading engineers, John Grundy, Langley Edwards and John Smeeton, adapted Grundy's scheme to re-cut the Witham and erect a new Grand Sluice in the centre of Boston. This sluice would have three pairs of seaward doors that could be closed to stem the tidal flow, and drop-doors on the landward side that could remain closed when fresh water needed to be retained for the use of cattle and navigation during dry seasons. The project, which also included a sluice at Anton's Gowt, bridges, locks, straight cuts, wide embankments, plus the purchase of land, was estimated to cost £45,219. 9s. 5d.²⁷

At a meeting of local landowners in 1761, a decision was made to go ahead with the proposal and to petition Parliament for a Bill. It may have taken decades to get this far but all the interminable groundwork of planning, legal issues, and especially the financial backing, had needed to be thoroughly investigated and ironed out before such an enormous project could be sanctioned by all interests involved.²⁸ Although the new drainage procedures were desperately needed, they were also fuelled by the enthusiasm for improvement which prevailed in the Georgian period; this was a time when almost anything seemed possible and land was seen as a premier investment for those on the

²⁷ Padley, *Fens & Floods*, pp. 54-6; Wheeler, *History*, pp. 146-54.

²⁸ Wheeler, *History*, p.152. The meetings of persons with an active interest in promoting fenland drainage included Chairman Lord Vere Bertie, John Chaplin, Richard Fydell, Rev. Charles Berridge, Sir Joseph Banks, Lord Manners, and Robert Banks, solicitor to the Bill.

social ladder. Obviously, after the losses sustained by the Adventurers in Lincolnshire fenlands, investors needed to be encouraged by some first-class security. Most of the prominent landowners and large graziers already owned some property or land in the surrounding parishes where prices were set to escalate as soon as the fen was drained. Inevitably, these would increase still further if the whole fen was then divided and enclosed. Four years earlier, in 1757, a meeting at the White Hart in Boston had been planned in order to consider an application to parliament for leave to enclose the fen ‘for the increase of Tillage and to encourage the Sowing a greater Quantity of Grain for the Advantage of this Nation as well as the joint Increase of both Landlords and Tenants in Possession of the same’. However, no action appears to have been taken at the time and their enclosure strategy may well have been deemed premature without drainage.²⁹ Following the drainage meetings in 1761, the Minutes of the Corporation of Boston confirm that the mayor and councillors were actively committed to restoring the Witham navigation and draining the fenland. Corporation payments, securities, and loans towards the expenses of the Act and work to be carried out were unanimously approved and revealed the extent of enthusiasm for the proposed venture.³⁰

The Witham Act of 1762 was entitled '*An Act for Draining and Preserving certain Low Lands, called the Fens, lying on both Sides of the River Witham, in the County of Lincoln; and for Restoring and Maintaining the Navigation of the said River, from the High Bridge in the City of Lincoln, through the Borough of Boston, to the Sea*'. It declared that the river was formerly navigable for lighters, barges, boats, and other vessels from the sea via Boston to the High Bridge in Lincoln and was now in a great measure stopped up, lost, and destroyed owing to the sand and silt brought in by the tides. It also estimated that the flooded lands and fens on both sides of the river amounted to around 100,000 acres and

²⁹ Advertisements carried in *The London Evening Post*, 21 May, 28 June, and 13 July 1757.

³⁰ *Transcription of Minutes of the Corporation of Boston, 1717-1763*, 5 (Boston, 1993), pp. 793, 808-9, 816.

were rendered useless to the great loss of the owners, the decay of trade and commerce, and the depopulation of the county.³¹ Lands designated by the Act were listed and divided into the Six Witham Districts shown in Appendix 1. Holland Fen³² was in the Second District, its boundaries comprised the Kyme Eau, the river Witham, Boston West, and Kirton Holme on the east and north, South Kyme, Heckington, and Great Hale on the west, and the south banks of Old Hammond Beck and Swineshead to the south.

Each parish, township, or hamlet within the six districts elected one district commissioner to have the 'care, management, and direction of the private works' within their own area. Electors in the Holland Fen area needed to be owners of ten acres or more or farmers at a rack-rent of £50 p.a. in their parish, and also holders of common right in the fen. Brothertoft was the exception because all its inhabitants were householders with common rights and therefore deemed to have 'a voice' in the election. After their election, the district commissioners met to elect thirty-one 'General commissioners for the Purposes of Drainage'.³³ In order that the new navigation work could proceed legally, the Act authorised control of the river to be removed from the commissioners of the Court of Sewers and passed to the Witham General commissioners. The latter consisted of the thirty-one elected General commissioners, the Mayors of both Boston and Lincoln, plus two councillors, and four Navigation commissioners for each of the two towns.³⁴ Except for the two Mayors, all members had to swear two oaths,

1. That they, or their wives, enjoyed the rents and profits of lands etc., to the clear yearly value of £100, or had a personal estate of £2,000 p.a.
2. That they would execute their duties under the Act, truly and impartially without favour, affection, hatred or malice.

³¹ LCL., L.WITH. 627.5, *Acts of Parliament relating to the Drainage of the River Witham in the County of Lincoln: Witham Drainage Acts* (Boston, 1853), pp. 1-72.

³² Because the *Witham Act, 1762* refers to the fen as 'Holland Fen' (the enclosure Bill does not) the term 'Holland Fen' and not the ancient Haute Huntre title will be used hereafter.

³³ i.e. District 1 elected 7 commissioners, 2 = 6, 3 = 5, 4 = 8, 5 = 2, 6 = 3, a total of 31.

³⁴ *Boston Minutes*, 5, pp. 802-3; *Witham Act, 1762*, p.43; The two mayors, eight councillors, and 10 of the General commissioners were also commissioners for Navigation.

The general commissioners were responsible for making and entering into contracts with engineers and labourers, the provision of machinery, utensils, and materials, and most importantly, the keeping of strict accounts for all their expenditures. They were also bound by a set of stringent regulations regarding non-attendance of meetings, deputies, qualifications, and a re-election after three years. Advance notices of all meetings had to be fixed in conspicuous places at local towns and in newspapers such as the *Stamford Mercury*.³⁵ The local newspaper was a popular source of advertisement widely used for public notices and during the mid 1760s there were many meetings pertaining to the subject of drainage and enclosure projects within the county. To finance the drainage work all six districts were to be charged an acre tax. This varied slightly but on average it was a yearly rate not exceeding 1s. per acre for private property, 8d. per acre for half-year lands, and 4d. per acre for common land. If the land was later enclosed and used 'in severalty' then it was to be charged at the 1s. rate.

The first work to be scheduled was the construction of the new Grand Sluice (begun in March, 1764) between Lodowick's Gowt and the town bridge in Boston. For this purpose the drainage commissioners had purchased a part of 'Harrison's Four Acres', a close of pasture situated near Wormgate on the west side of the river, from the corporation of Boston for £200.15s.³⁶ This may have been the land depicted in the foreground of an engraving of Boston by Dr William Stukeley, the Holbeach antiquarian and archaeologist, and which is shown in figure 1.10. 'Harrison's Four Acres' was likely to have been in, or very close to, that swathe of land jutting into the river from the right foreground.

³⁵ *Witham Act, 1762*, pp. 5-14.

³⁶ *Boston Minutes*, 5, p. 831; *Transcription of Minutes of the Corporation of Boston, 1764-81*, 6 (Boston, 2000), p.3. A remaining portion was purchased by the Navigation commissioners for £115.10s. in April 1764.

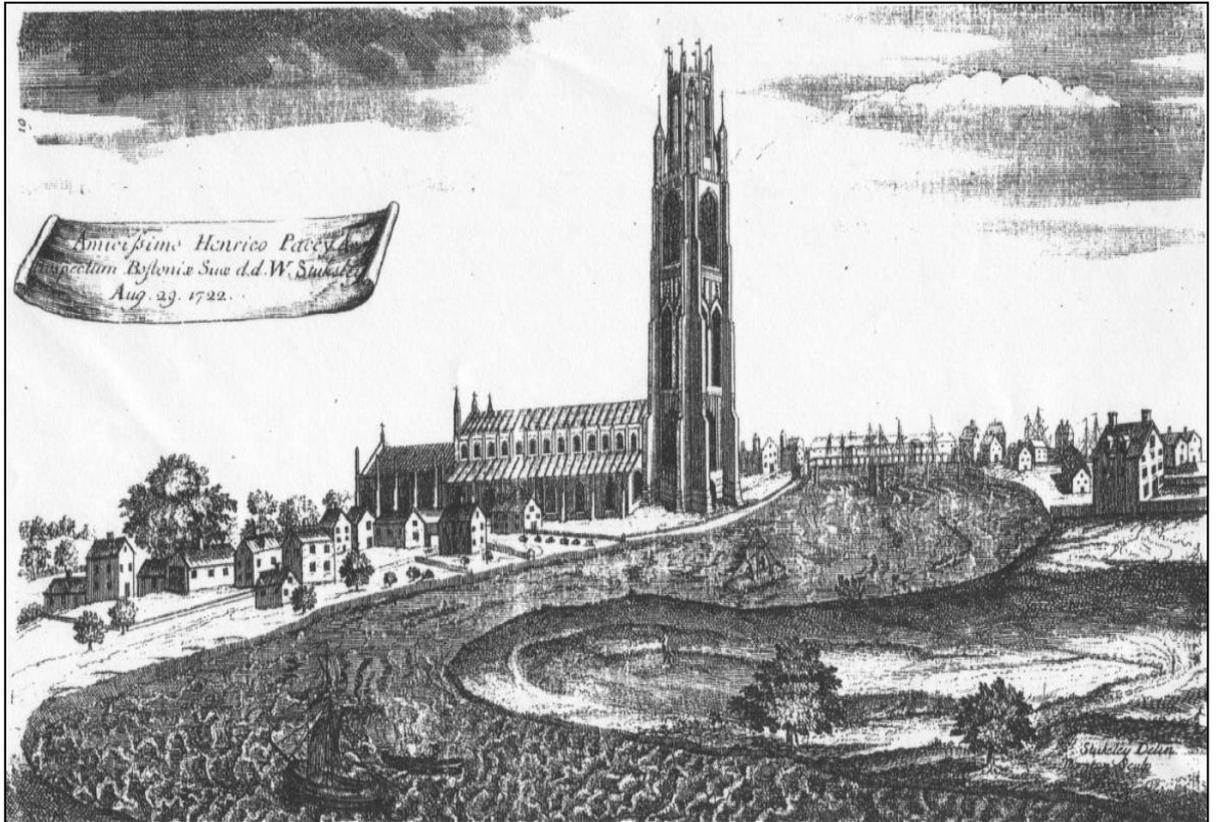


Figure 1.10 Dr William Stukeley's engraving of Boston and the river Witham, 1722, prior to building the Grand Sluice. 'Harrisons four acres' was probably close to the swathe of land, right foreground.

Once the Grand sluice was completed, the new, straight cut of the river up to Anton's Gowt sluice would then be excavated 80 feet wide x 10 feet deep, with the soil piled 10 feet high on either side of the river to form a 40 foot wide bank. Another new cut, 68 feet wide x 9 feet deep and still fortified by the 40 foot wide banking, would then continue north-westwards across the Holland Fen as far as Chapel Hill. Where possible, damage to the house and ferry at Langrick had to be avoided with no hindrance caused to the ferrying of people, cattle, and carriages across the river. The Witham was then due to be cleansed, scoured, widened, deepened, and embanked between Chapel Hill and Stamp End, near Lincoln.³⁷ Despite the planned, straight cut of the new river Witham the channel was eventually turned 'to run by Anthony's Gowt' in order 'to oblige one large proprietor',

³⁷ *Witham Act, 1762*, pp. 25-7.

and to accommodate another it was made to set off 'at a sharp angle towards Langrick'.³⁸ This alteration could explain a disparity of the river's course found in some eighteenth-century plans.

Navigation commissioners were appointed in order to restore and maintain the passage of boats along the river, to fine those whose boats damaged or obstructed navigation, to erect bridges, to make and safeguard the tow-paths and locks (lock-keepers would not be allowed to sell ales or liquors), to impose the essential tolls or duties on the amount of tonnage carried by vessels, and to fix a boom or chain across Lodowick's drain for the purpose of charging 6d. a ton on all loads carried along the drain. The inhabitants of Holland Fen were to be spared the latter charges, and no tolls were levied on pleasure boats. Threats of transportation abroad for seven years were issued as a dire warning to all potential felons seeking to cause malicious damage or destruction to the drainage and navigation schemes.³⁹

The heavy rainfall that persisted throughout the winter of 1763 and continued well into the following spring, caused yet more widespread flooding across the whole of Holland Fen; it left Brothertoft completely surrounded by water and cut off from other communities. According to Wheeler this was 'the greatest flood that was ever remembered'. French Johnson, the Kirton schoolmaster, corroborated this in his diary declaring that as he was a spectator of the shocking scene posterity could rely on what he had written 'with authority'. There was not a single dry acre in the whole of Holland Fen and those inhabitants of Brothertoft who were unable to leave in time had been forced to

³⁸ Wheeler, *History*, p. 154; Bealby, *Daughter of the Fen*, p.142, Lord Monson wanted the channel turned so that his upland drains could then empty into Anton's Gowt, while the Earl of Stamford needed the river to be returned in the opposite direction so as not to lose his ferry tolls at Langrick; See alteration of the river, and consequently the divisional boundary, in figure 1.3.

³⁹ *Witham Act, 1762*, pp. 43-51, 65.

live upstairs. Johnson also recorded that none of the banks were able to withstand the flood and when those at Bourne and Baston broke,

...the water came with such amazing fury upon the Eight Towns of Holland that the inhabitants every hour expected the waters to force itself over Old Hammond Beck, the only remaining guard left. In order to prevent which, great numbers of men attended day and night, cradging (as it is termed) nor did they ask leave for anything suitable for their purpose, as haystacks, fencing, wood, etc. Notwithstanding this attention, the water toppled over the bank in several places, but, providentially, the N.W. wind shifted, which, had it continued an hour longer, the whole district would have been, according to judgement, above two feet under water.⁴⁰

Such devastation, which on this occasion was actually caused by bad weather and not as a result of tidal inundations surging up the river, revived the old aspirations for a separate, major drainage of the entire fenland area. Plans were made which included the restoration and usage of parts of the old Adventurers' drains, the South Forty Foot, and its Black Sluice outfall.

At a meeting held in 1764, the investors and fenland landowners responsible for the Witham navigation and drainage improvement scheme agreed to obtain a further Act of Parliament, 'for draining and improving certain low marsh and fen lands lying between Boston Haven and Bourn [sic], in the parts of Kesteven and Holland'.⁴¹ The Black Sluice Act of 1765 authorised the construction of a new sluice on the site of the old 'Great' or Black Sluice, the scouring and cleaning of the South Forty Foot drain for eight miles, the addition of a new, thirteen-mile length, plus the scouring and embanking of sixty-five miles of highland streams. This second sluice and toll-house built upon the site of the original Black Sluice is clearly evident in a painting by William Lewin, which is reproduced in Appendix 1, Black Sluice watercolour. After the Adventurers had lost their

⁴⁰ Johnson, *Chronology*, pp. 15-16; The term 'cradging' means repairing and reinforcing the banks.

⁴¹ A report of this meeting in *St. James' Chronicle or British Evening Post*, 19 May, 1764.

claim to the fenland in the seventeenth century, control of the area's administration and dykereeve rates had reverted back to the commissioners of the Court of Sewers. The Black Sluice Act also removed the commissioners of the Court of Sewers from their control of the area concerned and authorised the constitution of a new Commission, whose members were to be elected by approximately fifty local parishes in a manner similar to that carried out in the formation of the Six Witham Districts. The new Black Sluice commissioners would then control a taxable, drainage area of about 64,000 acres.⁴²

In October 1766, two and a half years after the first stone was laid, the Grand Sluice built on a part of 'Harrison's Four Acres' in Boston, was at last ready for its opening ceremony. Celebrations began with 'Tea and Cards at the Cross Chamber [Boston] and with a Ball at the Town Hall in the evening', all at the expense of the Boston Corporation. The opening ceremony was performed by the engineer, Langley Edwards, before an estimated crowd of ten thousand people which included 'nobility and gentry from remote parts of the kingdom' who visited the town for the great celebration. This was at a time when the normal population of Boston was only around four thousand.⁴³

⁴² Wheeler, *History*, pp. 253-57; BSIDB, *Golden Jubilee*, pp.13-15; During this year, 1764, the Boston Corporation also agreed to subscribe £40 towards an Act of Parliament for the turnpike road between Boston and Spilsby, *Boston Minutes* 6, p.15;

⁴³ *Boston Minutes* 6, pp. vi, 45; Wheeler, *History*, p.156.

CHAPTER 2

Division, enclosure, and social responses, 1766-1773

Although known as the 'Haute Huntre, Eight Hundred, or Holland Fen' during the early medieval period this lengthy and archaic title soon became ambiguous. References made by the Commissioners of Sewers to the inhabitants of 'none of all the Eight Townes nor Brothertofte' narrows down the original eight towns, or hundreds, to Wyberton, Frampton, Kirton, Algarkirk, Fosdyke, Sutterton, Wigtoft, and Swineshead.¹ These were the eight substantial parishes that had developed on a 'townlands' ridge of silt around the Wash, they formed the wapentake of Kirton and so had direct access to the fen. As explained earlier and shown in figure 1.3, the tiny manor of Brothertoft was situated within the fen itself and therefore detached from the eight townlands. Later documents, while continuing to refer to the fen as the 'viiijC' fen, establish that the number had actually increased to 'eleven towns, parishes, and other places' entitled to common in the Holland Fen. Together with Brothertoft, the detached hamlets of Boston West and Skirbeck Quarter which had developed on the west side of the river Witham and therefore separated from the towns of Boston and Skirbeck, were included in this final analysis.²

Dividing the Holland Fen.

With so many people making use of the fen, it was essential for the sake of local harmony to have disputes settled quickly and legally, as in c.1216, when the question of apportioning 'rights' to the fen was dealt with during the reign of Henry III,

¹ Kirkus, *Records*, p. 64.

² *i.e.*, Wyberton, Frampton, Kirton, Algarkirk, Fosdyke, Sutterton, Wigtoft, Swineshead, Brothertoft, Boston West, and Skirbeck Quarter all of whom commoned in the Holland Fen. *N.B.*, Boston town and Skirbeck commoned elsewhere with other parishes in the East and West fens of East Lindsey.

...touching the partition of Haut [sic] Huntre or Mariscus Octo Hundredorus...by the consent of those who had rights therein, whereby the King gave command that each town might have its due proportion assigned to it.

In this instance twelve lawful knights were instructed to make a perambulation of the boundaries which were then 'properly fixed'. This enabled the Royal Commissioners to identify which townships were responsible for maintenance of certain banks and waterways surrounding the Haute Huntre fen. Later, when the justices of Edward II were sitting at Boston in c.1307, they declared that the old Hammond Beck sewer was obstructed

...and ought to be repaired by the men of Boston inhabiting the west side of the bridge [Boston West] and by the men of Skirbeck [Quarter]: and for that reason all the said inhabitants residing on the west side of the bridge ought to common in the Eight Hundred Fen.³

This may have been the occasion when it was officially declared that the 'eight towns' and Brothertoft should become the eleven, although in 1376, the Court of Sewers was still referring to the inhabitants 'of the Eight Hundred of Holland'. As previously shown in figure 1.3, all eleven townships had their own frontage or direct access onto the fen and most of these were arrayed in a semi-circle around its southern perimeter. Starting from the east were the limits of Boston West and Skirbeck Quarter, next came Wyberton, Frampton, and Kirton along the southern boundary of the Old Hammond Beck, followed by Algarkirk, Sutterton, Wigtoft, and Fosdyke with borders on the central Fore Fen. Swineshead was further west bordering the Brand Dyke. The parishes of Fosdyke, Algarkirk, and Sutterton were up to nine miles south of the fen edge and therefore quite remote with only drove roads connecting to the fen. On the north-eastern boundary of the fen, Brothertoft remained aloof from them all beside a tortuous river Witham.

³ Wheeler, *History*, pp. 245-247.

By the mid sixteenth century, the highly-populated wapentake of Kirton was the wealthiest in the Holland division and had the largest herds of cattle and flocks of sheep.⁴ With 228 families the town of Kirton was about half the size of Boston, while Swineshead was next largest with 209 families. Hindle elaborated further with an estimation that in 1563, Kirton had a population of 1,117, Swineshead 1,019, and Frampton 564. With no data available for Boston West, he estimated the total population of the ten other townships commoning in the fen in 1665 at 4,042.⁵

While a fertile ridge of silt supported the intensive, arable farming in the parish fields (Frampton had only 125 acres of arable available during the mid sixteenth century), the Haute Huntre fen provided essential grazing land for all their livestock. Apart from the breeding of large numbers of horses, sheep, geese, and fattening of cattle, the by-products also gave essential employment through dairy produce, hides, tallow, feather, and spinning industries. In addition, the fen provided local people with fish, fowl, and reeds for thatching, hay was mown for winter cattle food and dung was collected as fertiliser for arable lands. Predictably, because there was no 'stint' of cattle within the fen, there were graziers who were ready to exploit their grazing rights by bringing cattle in from other parts of the country, and this threatened to cause an acute shortage of pasture. The abuse of common rights appears to have accelerated in the period immediately following the Reformation. Fen laws such as those drawn up by the Duchy of Lancaster in Bolingbroke, 1573, attempted to define and control the privileges of commoners, to prevent disputes and robbery, and manage the practice of fishing, fowling, and livestock pasture in the local

⁴ Kirton, Skirbeck, and Elloe were the three wapentakes of Holland division. The Commissioners of Sewers occasionally referred to the individual towns as 'Hundreds', see Kirkus, *Records*, pp. 23, 66;

⁵ Thirsk, *English Peasant Farming*, pp. 13, 36; Hindle, 'Power', p.73; *Bingley's London Journal*, 31 October 1772, A 'Postscript' correspondent suggests that there were 'at least six thousand useful poor inhabitants' enjoying the use of the fen.

fens. Seventy-two articles, or codes, covered the general management of the fens. No 'foreigners' could use the fen, only the branded cattle of those with a right to common were allowed on, and each parish had to have its own brand. Penalties were incurred for the introduction of diseased animals onto the fens, for allowing dogs to disturb cattle, or leaving dead animals unburied, and strict regulations covered the driving of cattle, cutting reeds, mowing fodder, removal of wild birds, and use of approved fishing methods.⁶

Whether it was possible to uphold such fen codes within the Haute Huntre fen is difficult to ascertain, although unlikely across the entire 22,000 acres with its isolated and marshy areas. However, the Bill for enclosure sought to include a clause specific to the trespass of cattle. This authorized the pinders of each of the eleven parishes or townships to seize all stray sheep, horses, cattle, pigs, and geese found on the fen. Fold-keepers were empowered to detain and not release the animals until a fixed fine was paid according to the type of livestock, its brand, or estray mark.⁷ This item underscored the necessity for a strict, collective procedure on trespass to operate with full authority across the fen.

Numerous complaints relating to the overstocking of Haute Huntre were made to the Court of Exchequer during the 1570s. There were objections when one Frampton farmer agreed to graze two hundred northern cattle on the fen for five consecutive years, protests when flocks of up to a thousand sheep were left to forage there, and even more objections when flocks verging on a thousand geese were allowed to sour the fenland with their excrement. Brothertoft smallholders raised such huge numbers of geese that it earned the nickname of 'Goosetoft'. Although bringing livestock in from other areas to fatten up was a lucrative business at 1s. a beast, or 1s.6d. a horse, overstocking was not only unfair to the smaller

⁶ Wheeler, *History*, pp. 36-37.

⁷ LCL. L. HOLL.333.2, UP256, *A Bill for dividing and inclosing a certain Fen called the Haute Huntre Eight Hundred, or Holland Fen, and certain other commonable places adjoining thereto, in the Parts of Holland, 1766*, p. 12. For example, there was a 10s. fine payable to the pinder for every score of sheep, and 1d. to the fold-keeper for the brand on each sheep, 1½d. for the estray mark.

commoners, it was also hazardous for everyone concerned. The commoners of Holland Fen were said to have enjoyed the privilege of breeding and supporting not less than 100,000 head of cattle yearly' on the fen.⁸

There were also similar problems with overstocking on the Somerset Levels where Williams found that 'better-off' commoners wanted individual plots in lieu of right 'even if they were small ones'.⁹ Whyte also, observed that in Cumbria 'in contrast to the Midlands and southern England, there was general accord between major landowners, gentry and farmers over the desirability of enclosure as a result of the deterioration of the commons ... in some cases at least it was the customary tenants who were pushing their lord of the manor to initiate enclosure proceedings'.¹⁰ The agistment of livestock from other areas often introduced contagious diseases and so exposed all animals in Haute Huntre fen and the surrounding areas to infection.¹¹ Consequently, as the condition of the fen continued to deteriorate during the early eighteenth century, the accumulation of livestock inevitably encouraged contamination. Owing to the wetness of the fen, flocks of sheep were lost to sheep rot in 'devastating numbers' during the 1730s, while in 1747, more than half the cattle in the wapentake of Kirton were wiped out by an outbreak of distemper that eventually spread across the river into the adjacent Wildmore fen.¹²

Brovage and agistment rights, which the lords of the manors could claim when taking in livestock for seasonal fattening and feeding, were held by several in the locality and this added further complications to the overstocking. As will be observed shortly,

⁸ *Bingleys' London Journal*, 31 October 1772.

⁹ M. Williams, 'The Enclosure of Waste Land in Somerset, 1700-1900', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 57 (1972), p. 101.

¹⁰ I. Whyte, 'Wild, barren and frightful - Parliamentary enclosure in an upland county: Westmorland 1767-1890', *Rural History*, 14, 1 (London, 2003), pp. 28-9.

¹¹ Thirsk, *English Peasant Farming*, pp. 37-38; Neeson, *Commoners*, p. 126.

¹² Thirsk, *English Peasant Farming*, p. 206. It killed 6,628 out of 11,867 beasts from Kirton wapentake.

these lucrative privileges could be defended all the way to Parliament. In 1612, frequent complaints against Herbert Pelham for overstocking the Haute Huntre fen with his own and others' cattle, led to him surrendering his brovage rights in the fen in exchange for an allotment of 480 acres in the neighbouring Dogdyke Hurn.¹³ Once the Witham drainage scheme was accomplished and conditions in the Holland Fen began to improve, overstocking looked just as likely to continue, or even intensify as the quality of grazing and value of the land increased. The case for dividing and enclosing the Holland Fen was thus considerably enhanced by these many complaints of habitual common rights abuse. This was confirmed by the enclosure Award which stated that one of the reasons for enclosure was because the fen 'was also liable to many Incroachments [sic] from the putting on of Cattle by Strangers who had no Right therein'.¹⁴

Enclosure and Parliament.

An escalation of Parliamentary enclosure acts during the 1760s confirmed that value and acquisition of additional land was a fundamental issue for most business men during this period. It was no great surprise when a few months before the new Grand Sluice was due to be opened in October 1766, declarations of the intention to enclose Holland Fen were published nationally as well as in the local *Stamford Mercury* newspaper. One such advertisement stated that the 'Rt. Hon. Sir John Cust, Bart., Thomas Whichcot [sic], Esq., Willoughby Wood, Esq., Rev. Chas Berridge, John Cheney, Gent., Mayor of Boston, and Richard Fydell, Esq., for the Corporation of Boston, and about sixty other persons', had met earlier upon the full consideration of a general survey, to discuss the enclosure of Holland Fen. Furthermore, right from its inauguration a Mr Hildyard attended on behalf of Mr Pelham (who was a minor), in order to propose that Pelham should receive lands to the value of £100 a year plus an additional number of 'cattle gates', 530 in all, in lieu of his

¹³ Thirsk, *English Peasant Farming*, pp. 38, 206; LCL. L. FENS 627.5, *Holland Fen Award (1769)*, pp. 91-5.

¹⁴ *Holland Fen Award*, p.2.

brovage rights. The advertisements show that impropiators, rectors, and vicars of each of the respective parishes and towns were already keen to press their own claims. One proposal suggested that a tenth of each eleventh part be offered in lieu of great and small tithes, or one-fifth in lieu of the whole arising from enclosure of both the 'old and the new' lands. The Corporation of Boston was impropiator of tithes in both Boston West and Skirbeck Quarter.¹⁵

Public meetings were usually held at the Angel Inn, Sleaford, where in August 1766 a resolution was passed for a plan, or survey to be made of the Holland Fen together with a return of all the houses and toftsteads that had rights of common therein.¹⁶ These were to be prepared before '*A Bill for Dividing and Inclosing a certain Fen called the Haute Huntre Eight Hundred or Holland Fen, and certain other Commonable Places adjoining thereto, in the Parts of Holland, in the County of Lincoln*', was submitted to Parliament. Nevertheless, when some of those present at a public meeting of proprietors in October proposed to read out their Petition for the Bill, the greater majority objected because no survey or plan had so far been made available to them for inspection. It was widely held that meanwhile the Survey in question should be made and the Bill postponed until the following spring. This appears to have been the juncture at which the proceedings turned confrontational. In their discussion of enclosure methods, the Hammonds used the following quotation of what transpired at this meeting as a case in point, that the promoters were masters of the situation:

...but notwithstanding the said Request [for postponement], some few of the said Proprietors then present proposed that a Petition for the said Bill might then be signed; which Proposition being rejected by a considerable Majority, the said few

¹⁵ LCL. *Lincoln, Rutland, and Stamford Mercury, 1766-1773*, June, July, 1766; *Boston Minutes* 6, p. 125, Boston Corporation later demanded one-ninth of the Boston West allotments in lieu of tithes and after deductions for roads.

¹⁶ Reports of the meeting in *St. James's Chronicle or British Evening Post*, 31 July and 9 Aug 1766.

Proprietors declared their Resolution to sign such a Petition, as soon as the said Meeting was broke up, without any Resolutions being concluded upon, or the Sentiments of the Majority of the Proprietors either entered down or paid any Regard to, and without making any Adjournment of the said meeting; and that, soon after the said Meeting broke up, some of the Proprietors present at the said Meeting signed the Petition, in consequence of which the said Bill hath been brought in.¹⁷

It was also pointed out that the Petition for enclosure was signed by very few proprietors except those in Boston West. The manner in which it was signed coupled with the order in which the names of the eleven townships of Holland were recorded in the litigation, Boston West taking precedence at all times, underlines the Corporation of Boston's direct initiative and sponsorship of the enclosure bill.¹⁸ It was the more remote townships who reacted most strongly against the pressure. Even so, it seems that once the aldermen and councillors of Boston Corporation had set their drainage legislation in motion, a prompt division and enclosure of the fen was predetermined. Division would also make both the apportionment and collection of drainage rates for Holland Fen less complicated and a higher assessment rate of 1s. an acre could be levied when its 22,000 acres were enclosed in severalty. This was similar to Kings Sedgemoor where a comprehensive scheme of drainage had also preceded enclosure.

A petition for division and enclosure was presented to the House of Commons on 4 December 1766, when leave was given to Lord Robert Bertie, Lord George Sackville, and Lord Brownlow Bertie to prepare and bring in the Bill. This was read for the first time just five days later.¹⁹ However, on 4 March, 1767 a long petition against the Bill was received from a: the Rev Robert Smith, Doctor in Divinity, Master of the College, and the Fellows and Scholars of the Holy Trinity within the University of Cambridge,

¹⁷ Hammond, *Village Labourer*, pp. 44, 353; *LRSM*, 26 June 1766.

¹⁸ *A Bill for Dividing*, p. 1., *i.e.*, Boston West, Skirbeck Quarter, Wyberton, Frampton, Kirton, Algarkirk, Fosdyke, Sutterton, Wigtoft, Swineshead, and Brothertoft.

¹⁹ Hammond, *Village Labourer*, p. 353; *Journals of the House of Commons*, 31, 11 November 1766 to 10 March 1768, pp. 35-40.

(being the impropiator of great tithes and patron of Swineshead vicarage), from **b**: the Rev. John Shaw, patron of Wyberton vicarage, from **c**: Zachary Chambers, Esq., Lord of the Manor of Swineshead (plus land in at least four of the other parishes), and from **d**: several other gentlemen and freeholders entitled to right of common in the Holland Fen. The petition declared that the petitioners were greatly dissatisfied with the hasty method used to bring the said fen Bill into the House and that a survey, a plan, and a return of properties ought to have been made prior to its presentation so that they could have examined the way in which the fen would be fairly divided. It complained that, although signed by very few proprietors other than those within Boston West, there were estates of up to £20,000 p.a. involved, also several 'very large and populous' parishes among the petitioners, that others were more remote and therefore further time was needed for them to 'produce a unanimity in the Proprietors'. It was suggested that 'no injury or damage [would] accrue to any interested person if the Bill be not proceeded on until next Session'. The Bill was read a second time on 6 March 1767 and committed to Lord Brownlow Bertie, Mr Hume, Mr Pennant, Mr Knight, Mr Paters, etc., to be heard.

On 20 March, a petition was read from Sir Charles Frederick, K.B., of Brothertoft who had fifty-one cottages or toftsteads with right of common. He declared that the enclosure would be injurious to him. A week later petitions from Sir Gilbert Heathcote, Bart. (landowner in at least six of the parishes concerned), and 'others' also declared that the Bill was injurious to their interests.²⁰ Opposition to the Bill had to be taken into account and of the 614 persons who paid tax on their properties with common rights, there were 94 objectors, 53 missing, and 40 indifferent, leaving 427 persons agreeing to the enclosure. However, as Tate explained, it was the annual value of the opposition and not

²⁰ Hammond, *Village Labourer*, pp. 353-4; *Commons' Journals*, pp. 206, 240-1, 258, 329.

its numerical strength that was necessary to obtain either a three-quarters or four-fifths majority consent. Out of the annual tax value of £23,724.18s.5d. only £3997.14s.6d. was 'weighed' against it.²¹ Several amendments were made to the Bill before its referral to the House of Lords where petitions against were received from both Heathcote and Sir Samuel Reynardson. These were referred to the committee. Further amendments were made and a clause inserted giving proprietors or occupiers the same common rights over the parish allotments as over the whole fen. It received the Royal Assent on 29 June, 1767.²²

Enclosure: the Procedures.

As soon as the Bill for Dividing and Inclosing Holland Fen became a [private] Act of Parliament, the enclosure process began with the selection of Enclosure Commissioners.

For Boston West	- Robert Barlow, Esq., of Boston
" Skirbeck Quarter	- William Garfit Jun., of Boston
" Wyberton	- Charles Wood, Esq., of Thoresby
" Frampton	- John Tunnard of Frampton
" Kirton	- William Watson of Kirton
" Algarkirk	- John Noble Taylor of Heckington
" Fosdyke	- Thomas Robert Gates of Spalding
" Sutterton	- Rev. Dr. Charles Berridge of Algarkirk
" Wigtoft	- Rev. Mr. Ferne of Wigtoft
" Brothertoft	- John Chapman, Gent., of Boston. ²³

These men held the responsibility of carrying out the work in a fair and competent manner to the satisfaction of all concerned, and consequently the selection was made by a group of representatives elected by the eleven townships. The Award dated 1769 mentions only ten

²¹ *Bingley's London Journal*, 21 November 1772, a letter to the Editor stated that the opposition, which included Lord Willoughby de Broke, Sir Gilbert Heathcote, Messrs. Chambers, Reynardson, Pilkington, and Dr Shaw, '[together] could never be supposed to supersede four parts in five of the real property in Holland Fen'; Hammond, *Village Labourer*, p. 354; Tate & Turner, *A Domesday*, p. 27; 'They were weighed not counted', see Hammond, *Village Labourer*, p. 49; LAO. Misc. Dep. 111, Anonymous document headed *Case of the Promoters of the Act for Dividing and Allotting the Haute Huntre, Eight Hundred, or Holland Fen*. The values quoted from this contemporary document differ slightly from those given in Hammond, *Village Labourer*, p. 354.

²² Hammond, *Village Labourer*, p.354; *Commons' Journals*, p.329.

²³ *Holland Fen Award*, pp. 27-29; Most of these men were to suffer severe reprisals, see later, and also became the victims of a 'scurrilous', defamatory letter published in *Bingley's London Journal*, 31 October 1772.

names in this chosen group and it is possible that Swineshead was unable to select a willing representative by the deadline date.²⁴ The panel of representatives would have done their homework carefully and been aware of the applicants' experience and reputations; more importantly they would have known which of the commissioners could be most supportive of their demands. The group met at the Town Hall in Boston in August 1767, and appointed the following five Enclosure Commissioners:

William Bury, Esq., of Linwood Grange
 Daniel Douglas, Esq., of Folkingham
 Thomas Hogard, Gent, of Spalding
 Thomas Oldknow, Gent, of Nottingham
 William Elmhirst, Gent, of Stainsby.²⁵

As Mingay pointed out, for economic reasons in the eighteenth century such work was usually carried out by no more than two or three commissioners. However the size and number of the Holland Fen divisions plus the complexity of its enclosure needed the services of five such men.²⁶ Each commissioner would be paid £210 with two guineas deducted for each day's absence and needed to take two oaths, firstly, that he would act impartially and honestly accordingly to the best of his skill and judgment, and secondly, that he was not involved with any lands that were being divided. Three commissioners constituted a *quorum* and Edward Draper, Gent., of Boston, was appointed as Clerk to the Commissioners. Also appointed were three surveyors, John Thistlewood of Topholme, John Hudson of Legbourne and Louth, who carried out the survey and measurements of the northern part of the fen and other commonable areas, and John Creasey, who completed the remaining area to the south.

²⁴ *A Bill for Dividing*, pp. 2-4.

²⁵ *Holland Fen Award*, p. 29.

²⁶ Mingay, *Parliamentary Enclosure*, p.71; Hammond, *Village Labourer*, p. 355.

The first course of action for each of the parishes was to register individual claims of all proprietors of ancient houses and toftsteads with common rights in Holland Fen. Parish lists of all those who paid the dyke-reeve assessment rate were also recorded. Only nine parishes out of the eleven areas compiled these lists as there were special arrangements made for Brothertoft and Boston West where a different rate was paid.²⁷ As soon as the documents were completed, the fenland measured, and maps drawn, the commissioners were empowered to sell off certain, old enclosed, parts of the fen in order to defray the financial burden of enclosure expenses.²⁸ As the Russells explained, commissioners needed to have an income during the enclosure process so that they could pay for overheads such as advertising, journeys, meetings, food, fees, and even for the parchment used. To keep work running smoothly, money had also to be available to pay contractors for materials and wages of labourers building roads, bridges, drains, and planting division hedges.²⁹ Furthermore, legal expenses incurred by the Act had to be paid and it was essential that payment of rates and taxes levied on the fen by the Witham and Black Sluice Acts were maintained during the whole of the enclosure process.

Most of the lands destined to be sold were those separated from the fen by the new Witham cut and the South Forty Foot drain, as well as the 'Half-Year' lands which were let from Michaelmas to May Day, and Lammas to May Day (see figure 2.1). Some of the first purchasers of lands sold to defray the enclosure expenses included C. A. Pelham, who purchased a plot in Pepper Gowt and a portion of The Frith, Lord Willoughby de Broke, the remaining portion of The Frith, Thomas Hoggard, one of the five enclosure

²⁷ The rate was 1d. per acre. *Case of the Promoters* makes it clear that Boston West and Brothertoft paid 'By Head of Cattle or Pound Rent'.

²⁸ Whyte also found that 'the practice of selling a proportion of a common to pay for the expenses of the enclosure', occurred in 'about half the Westmorland awards'. See Whyte, 'Wild, barren and frightful', p. 29.

²⁹ Russell, *New Landscapes*, p.19.

All the transactions needed to be clearly advertised in the newspapers at least thirty-one days in advance and plots of land were sold only as necessary, when money was required for expenses. These plots included the Ferry Corner, Coppin Syke, Pepper Gowt, Brand End, Great Beets, Little Beets, Gibbett Hills, Mown Rakes, the Frith, plus seven acres of land beside the old river bed belonging to Sir Gilbert Heathcote. Wheeler assessed the total acreage of all plots sold by the commissioners at a little over 642 acres and that they had raised the sum of £15,121, an average of £23.10s per acre.³⁰

After the funding had been arranged it was the turn of the major landholders, many of whom had actively defended their rights in the House of Commons and who, as the missing commissioners' minutes and account books might even have confirmed, had besieged the commissioners with their demands for suitable allotments. The first allocations were made to Zachary Chambers, Esq., Lord of the Manor of Swineshead, and Charles Anderson Pelham, Lord of the Manor of Frampton, alias Frampton Regis, alias Earl's Hall, who were jointly entitled to the minerals and soil of the fen. In full compensation of these rights, Chambers and Pelham each received plots of 120 acres. Pelham also possessed the aforementioned brovage rights of 480 cattle in Dogdyke Hurn granted to an ancestor in 1612 as Lord of the Manor of Swineshead at that time, therefore the commissioners granted him a second plot of 571 acres in the Haute Huntre fen in lieu of the said brovage. Both of Pelham's new plots were adjacent to a third plot which had been purchased in trust for him by a Mr Hildyard.

Access was a key issue. Good roads and bridges were required so that each of the eleven communities could reach their own enclosure without driving livestock across neighbouring land. The surveyors then turned their attention to the planning of seven

³⁰ Wheeler, *History*, p. 286.

public roads at least sixty feet wide exclusive of ditches or fences, also twelve private 'carriage and drift' roads of varying widths, most of them twenty-six feet wide.³¹ Extra bridleways were added and footpaths leading to stiles, gates, and footbridges were deemed essential for those crossing the enclosures on foot. Bridges over the drains were directed to be twelve feet wide and 'hump-backed' so that boats could pass beneath them with safety. Division ditches which measured eight feet wide by four feet deep would then be planted with quickthorn, which had to be protected by four-foot high fences made with oak posts and double bars of fir or deal. All of the labour and materials were to be paid for initially by the commissioners under a strict ruling that each community would be held responsible for its own repairs and maintenance as soon as the Award was signed. Because there was a 'great scarcity' of road materials in the fen it was felt that the turnpike roads were especially vulnerable and so the commissioners ordered a thirty-acre plot of gravel known as 'Amber Hill' (shown in figure 2.2) to be set aside for road maintenance material.

When all the major allocations, including those for public and private roads were deducted from the original 22,000 acres of the Holland Fen, there remained 17,341 acres, 2 roods, and 19 perches statute measure to be divided amongst the eleven townships, and Dogdyke. The 'certain other commonable places', also referred to in the enclosure Act, included several old enclosed plots and the matter of Dogdyke's right to 'half-year common' in the fen which had to be taken into account. This may have been a return of part of the brovage land now vacated by Pelham. Earl Fitzwilliam, as sole owner of Dogdyke where there were twelve houses and sixteen toftsteads with right of common in the fen between May-Day and Michaelmas, was awarded 277 acres within the fen. This amounted to two-thirds of the allotment made to Sir Charles Frederick the sole owner of Brothertoft, 'reckoning and dividing such Allotment [Dogdyke's] into as many Parts as the

³¹ These widths were relative to the 1760-1770 enclosure period. Public roads widths were reduced later to 40 feet.

Number and Quantity of the said several Houses and Toftsteads [51] belonging to the said Sir Charles Frederick in Brothertoft'. The enclosure Award stated that Fitzwilliam's land was 'to be set out and allotted as near to, and as convenient as might be to other lands and grounds belonging to the said Earl in Dogdyke'. In their book *The Village Labourer*, the Hammonds referred to this clause with a suggestion that the commissioners were biased and had allowed Fitzwilliam an undeserved advantage here by placing his allotment 'near his gardens'.³² However, Beastall was of the opinion that small proprietors appeared to receive greater consideration than the large or absentee owners when it came to the placing of allotments.³³

There seemed little information available about the Holland Fen enclosure commissioners, most of whom were still at the beginning of their careers in 1766, although as the Russells' work on enclosures show, most went on to take part in the escalating number of enclosures that followed throughout the county.³⁴ Mingay has pointed out that the commissioners could only carry out the Act, which in itself was a creation of the local landowners anyway, and that although there were exceptions, on the whole they carried out their difficult work as competently and fairly as their remit allowed.³⁵ Indeed William Elmhirst, one of the commissioners, claimed that he had always considered public interests first and began to line out and allot for the smallest proprietors first, 'since there can be no partiality in defending those who cannot defend or help themselves'.³⁶ However, at this stage the remainder of the fen was only being divided amongst those parishes or townships

³² *Holland Fen Award*, pp. 18-19, 127-8; Hammond, *Village Labourer*, p. 101, the Award itself does not use the word '*gardens*' although the Dogdyke fen allotment did include 'Smeeth Hall' (see later) and the Tarry, or Terry Booth farm which was situated next to the Kyme Eau for access; There was also a hostile reaction by the Earl's tenants of Dogdyke Fen to the enclosure of Holland Fen, see footnote 42, page 69.

³³ Beastall, *Agricultural Revolution*, p. 43.

³⁴ Russell, *New Landscapes*, pp. 24-27.

³⁵ Mingay, *Parliamentary Enclosure*, p. 82.

³⁶ Tate & Turner, *Domesday*, p. 36: For Elmhirst's principles on enclosure see also Young, *General View*, pp. 105-7;

concerned and so did not involve individual proprietors, as in more conventional enclosures. The fenland itself was not part of any single parish or township in the wapentake. Approval of the fen portions assigned to their own use needed the full weight of the townspeople behind it and not merely a minority. Equally, disputes between the parishes and townships regarding the amount, quality, and position of their enclosures must have tested the diplomatic skills of any commissioner. No doubt many parts of the fen had already been written off locally as undesirable or useless wastes and these had to be fairly allocated as well. On the other hand, as will be discussed shortly, large crowds of protestors against the enclosure were already emerging although their grievances stemmed from the loss of these so-called wastes and a clearance of the whole fen. Land in Holland

TABLE 2.1 Holland Fen allotments to the eleven parishes, townships, or other places, also Dogdyke, and Lord of the Manor allotments.

PARISH, TOWNSHIP, OR OTHER PLACES	HOUSES & TOFTSTEADS	DYKEREVEE ACRES @ 1d.	ASSESSMENT £. s. d. p.a.	FEN PLOTS	TOTAL ASSIGNED FEN ACREAGE
Skirbeck Quarter	20 h, 7 t	400	1.15s.10d	4	277a,2r,15p
Wyberton	59 h, 43 t	1,500	6. 5s. 0d.	4	991a,2r,0p
Frampton	102 h, 56 t	1,920	8. 0s. 0d.	3	1,258a,0r,10p
Kirton	168 h, 75 t	3,200	13. 6s. 8d.	3	3,448a,0r,23p
Algarkirk	58 h, 55 t	1,600	6. 13s. 4d	1	2,380a,1r,22p
Fosdyke	27 h, 30 t	800	3. 6s. 8d.	1	879a,2r,30p
Sutterton	69 h, 22 t	1,680	7. 0s. 0d.	1	2,488a,2r,23p
Wigtoft	90 h, 19 t	1,440	** 6. 0s. 0d.	2	994a,1r,34p
Swineshead	194 h, 66 t	2,400	10. 0s. 0d	6	2,075a,1r,14p
Boston West			* 8 . 0s. 0d.	3	1,513a,3r,14p
Brothertoft (Sir Charles)	Frederick)		*4. 0s. 0d.	1	756a,3r,27p
Dogdyke (Earl Fitzwilliam)	Half-year	mineral	commons	1	277a,0r,7p
Zachary Chambers	Soil and	mineral	rights	1	120a,0r,0p
Charles A. Pelham	Soil and	mineral	rights	1	120a,0r,0p
Charles A. Pelham	Brovage	rights		1	571a,0r,18p

** The printed Award wrongly states £1.15s.10d.³⁷

* Assessed by head of cattle or pound rent.

Fen was duly allocated 'as near as conveniently as might be to each respective Parish, Township, or Place'. As Table 2.1 shows, Boston West was allotted three plots in total 1,513 acres, 3 roods, 14 perches, which were 'in the same proportion and value of the

³⁷ *Holland Fen Award*, p.117, the printed copy of the Award gives £1.15s.10d, however, it is more likely that the correct amount was £6 as stated in *Case of the Promoters*.

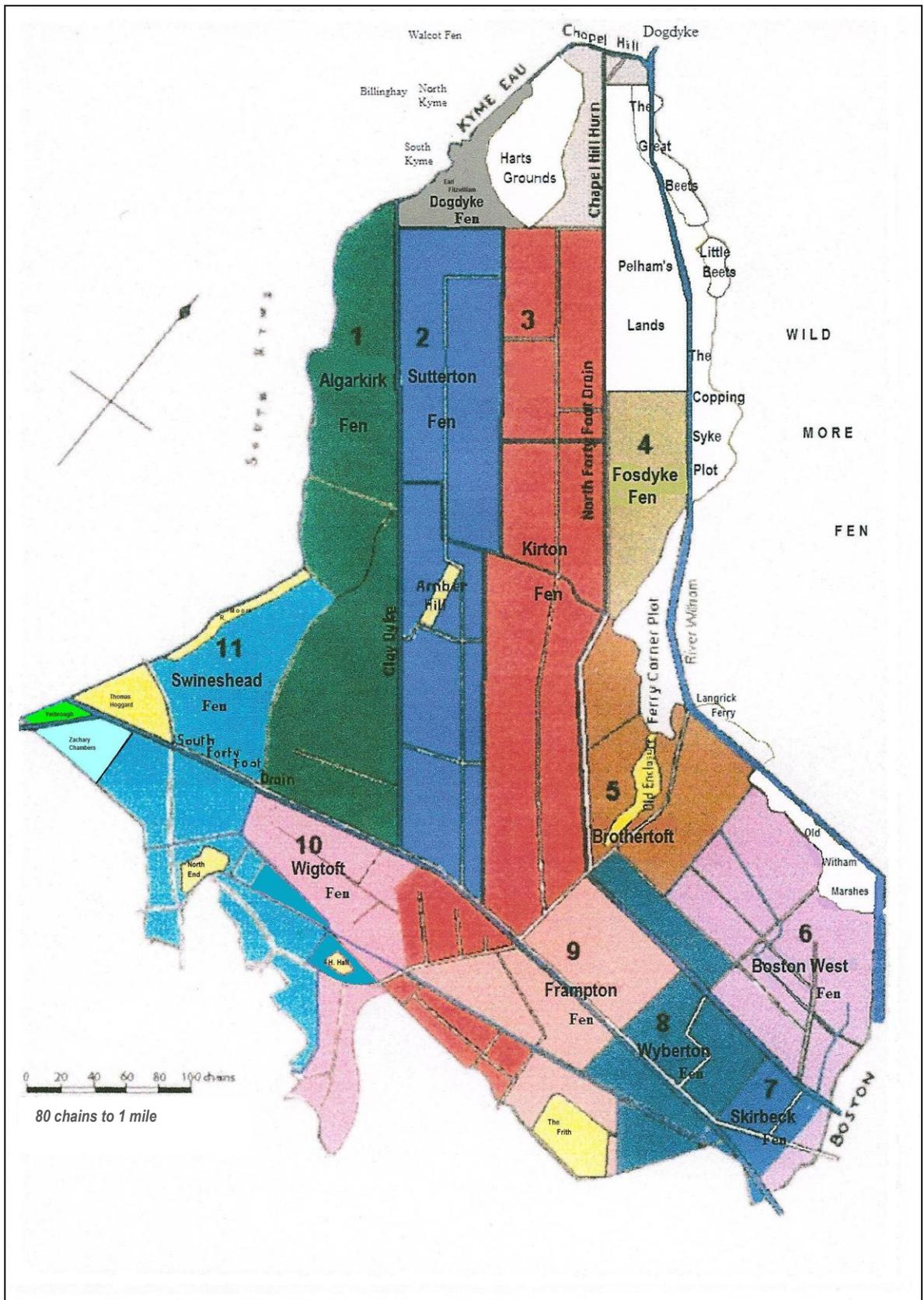


Figure 2.2 Main divisions and enclosures in the Holland Fen, 1767. Allotments 1-11 (coloured) are those awarded to the 'parishes, townships, and other places' having rights of common in the fen. Also showing are the extra-parochial areas (white infill) in both the Holland Fen and parts of Wildmore Fen, and the Amber Hill plot of gravel (centre).

Dykereeve assessment rate as paid by Frampton' [£8]. At Brothertoft, Sir Charles Frederick received for his own use as sole proprietor, one adjacent plot of 756 acres, 3 roods, 27 perches 'at the rate of half as many acres as Boston West'. The rest of the fenland was divided amongst the other nine parishes, firstly at the rate of four acres per house and two acres per toftstead, calculated according to the compiled lists. Secondly, the residue of land was distributed in proportion to the amount of annual Dykereeve assessment rate paid according to a table set out by the Court of Sewers before the 1762 Witham Act was passed.

When these allocations had been made, Holland Fen appears to have been divided into the areas and proportions equivalent to those illustrated in figure 2.2. The Award was signed and sealed on 19 May, 1769 by the five enclosure commissioners, also by Edward Draper, the Clerk of the Peace, and his clerk, Shadworth Smith. All previous common rights to the Holland Fen were extinguished and the new fen allotments were due to commence on 1 June, 1769, almost two years after the Royal Assent was given

Enclosure: the Conflict.

Massive topographical changes were already taking place within the Holland Fen. With the passing of the Witham Act of 1762 surveyors, contractors, and several hundred workmen, or navvies, had arrived in the Boston area to begin the construction of a Grand Sluice and excavation of a straight, new channel for the river Witham. Re-routing and embanking of that stretch of river across the north-eastern edge of the fen was totally disruptive especially with the movement of large gangs of workmen and equipment to and from Boston. Access through the islands and quagmires of the old Witham marshes had to be gained and land cleared of the many hovels and shelters strewn along the proposed new route; together with the occupants, rubbish, wooden piles, weirs, nets, eel-traps, boats, and jetties that were removed from the old river and its many creeks. Further along the river, Brothertoft was especially vulnerable because a majority of its poorer inhabitants relied on

this stretch of the Witham and its boggy marshes for their sole livelihood. These too, were destined to be infilled after the river was relocated into a new channel inside the Wildmore fen and the East Lindsey district.

The Black Sluice Act of 1765 initiated yet more construction and drainage activities; this time it was concentrated on Skirbeck Quarter where drainage commissioners had obtained leave to make their bricks in the mill pasture, and along the southern edge of Holland Fen where drainage work disrupted community life beside the South Forty Foot drain. Although major landowners and inhabitants of local townships appeared to have accepted the terms of the enclosure Act, many local people stood to lose their homes and livelihood as a result. The 'Anti-Projector', whose pamphlet described the economical advantages and productivities of Lincolnshire fenlands in his argument against the undertakers' reclamation schemes in 1606, had claimed there were 'many thousand cottagers which live in our [Lincolnshire] fens, which otherwise must go a begging'.³⁸ Within the fen a few 'inclosures' or 'intakes' of land had developed beside the fen edges and on the higher grounds created by centuries of silt deposits. These intakes and half-year lands were valued by the commissioners and then sold as freehold to defray the enclosure expenses. Tradition has it that smallholders on the intakes or half-year lands were allowed just thirty-one days to find the money and purchase before the land was auctioned. Others found their leases replaced by higher rents owing to improvement drainage of the surrounding fen. Local traditions in the form of a town play and local novel, recall the eviction of all smallholders or tenants in the fen together with their employees, and some mortgages were deliberately reclaimed to prevent them from taking part in the auctions.³⁹

³⁸ Wheeler, *History*, pp. 34-35.

³⁹ *Holland Fen Award*, pp.7-8; Personal copy owned by R. Tunnard of local typescript '*Brothertoft Ablaze*', local play performed 1986-87, author unknown; Bealby, *Daughter of the Fen*.

Also living in the Holland Fen were the land-less 'squatters' who lived in makeshift hovels within the isolated river marshes and wastelands. Despite the hazards of living in undrained fenland, the natural abundance of fish and fowl that was freely available provided many local people with a good livelihood from supplying regular wagonloads of wildfowl to the London markets. Bealby also described the plentiful supplies of hay, cranberries, 'thickets of gigantic reeds', ducks, geese, fish, and rabbits, plus the availability of fuel from 'clumps of Flemish poplars' and 'belts of dwarf willows lining the lodes and creeks'.⁴⁰

However it could be a scary environment, swampy pools of water often exuded 'foul mists' that rose up from the reed beds and swirled around the fenland, these hid many of the established tracks across the fen and caused travellers to lose their way when the mists suddenly enveloped them. This gave rise to wild stories of demons living in the fens. Any rider or pedestrian straying from raised causeways into the meeres and surrounded by eerie sounds caused, perhaps, by a grazing animal, croaking frog, a startled goose, creaking tree, or scream of a seagull, needed a strong nerve to suppress the imagination and journey on. Any fugitive from the law found it an ideal refuge. Contemporary references to the isolated and unsociable fen dwellers known as 'fen slodgers' were usually scathing and described them as 'barbarians', 'a race of people as wild as the fen', and 'a sort of half-amphibious beings' who enjoyed a 'wild liberty' and 'violently opposed any attempts to alter the state of the fens'.⁴¹ Bealby, whose sympathies obviously lay with certain evicted fen people, made a clear distinction between these unfortunate people and the unsociable fen slodgers whom he represented as a dark and threatening group. In his book on Boston, Pishey Thompson included an illustration of two fen slodgers drawn by 'a friend whose

⁴⁰ Bealby, *Daughter of the Fen*, pp. 1, 17-18, 73.

⁴¹ Wheeler, *History*, p. 35; Young, *General View*, pp. 254, 488.

memory reaches back nearly three quarters of a century'. Figure 2.3 shows how he captured the furtive appearance of these men wrapped in loose cloaks with large-brimmed hats pulled low over their faces. They carried long, iron-shod poles to propel their flat-bottomed punts along a succession of lakes or meres, the poles had an iron hook fitted at

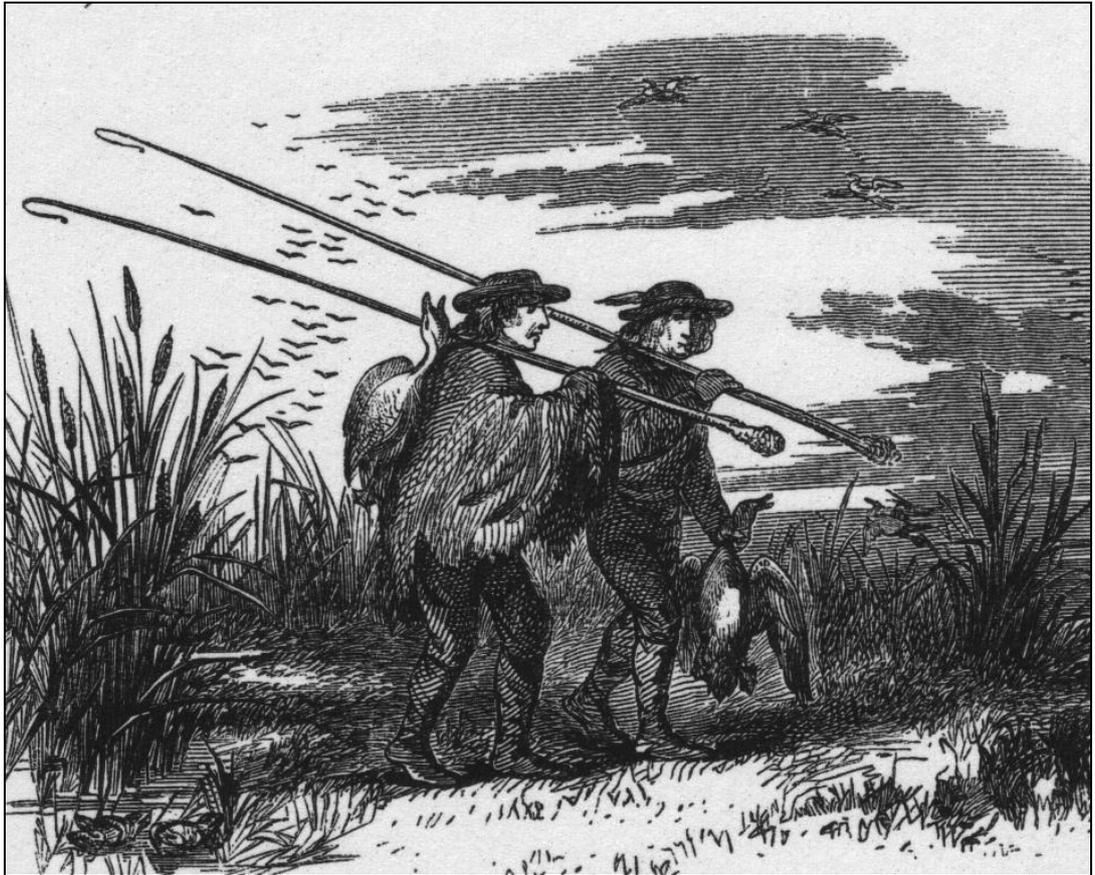


Figure 2.3 Sketch of two Fen-sloggers drawn for Pishey Thompson by a friend, *c.* 1896. (Thompson, *Boston*, p. 644).

the other end which they slipped around the necks of wildfowl or small animals to capture or kill them.⁴² Fen people strapped the thigh bones of horses and cattle under their sledges and feet to use as ice skates and also to provide balance as they crossed the meres, a similar action to that of wearing snowshoes.

⁴² Thompson, *Boston*, p. 644.

Sales of the Holland Fen 'intakes' or half-year lands in the Autumn of 1767 provoked a seething discontentment, but it was the gangs of navvies who had been working on the drainage schemes who inadvertently activated the hostilities. During the spring of 1768, the navvies found that local butchers and graziers had raised the prices of meat and owing to the lack of work and wages at that time they could no longer afford to buy meat. This infuriated the men so much that two hundred of them marched to the flesh market in Boston and seized the butchery, they then sold off the meat at three pence a pound to the local people.⁴³ This action was not lost on the Holland Fen protestors who decided to use their own great numbers to gain similar advantage. On 6 June 1768, a huge crowd of several hundred protestors assembled at Hubbards Bridge crossroads before marching three miles into Boston in order to confront Edward Draper, the solicitor, in his office and demand that he hand over all the enclosure papers. The ringleaders seized the box containing the documents, ripped them up and threw the pieces into the streets. After this, they marched to the home of Robert Barlow in Boston and threatened to wreck his house if he refused to sign a paper declaring that he would never again promote the enclosure of Holland Fen. He signed. The group of agitators then proceeded to Frampton where they threatened Messrs Tunnard and Yerburgh in a similar manner.⁴⁴

One of the ringleaders was a William Smith of Swineshead, known locally as 'Gentleman Smith' who lived in a large house on the edge of the fen. Tradition has it that he gambled away his inheritance and was forced to mortgage the family estate, which he had neglected badly. On learning that the fen was to be enclosed immediately after it was drained, Smith supported the enclosure and fully expected to sell some of his allocated

⁴³ One of only two food riots in Lincolnshire, Neave, 'Anti-Militia Riots', p. 21; Amateur local play called '*Brothertoft Ablaze*' performed 1986/7.

⁴⁴ Local men who actively represented or advocated the enclosure, see list page 54.

land for a good price and so clear his debts; unfortunately the mortgage holders took advantage of his unpaid bills and foreclosed before he could profit from any land. As a result, Smith changed his allegiance and joined the protestors as their bitter and persuasive leader. To protect Boston and the homes of gentlemen who promoted the enclosure of Holland Fen, four troops of Scotch Greys were billeted in the town, this was probably during May when the Corporation Minutes mention a payment for,

...making up the Stable in the Sluice Yard and the Expence [sic] of fitting up the Guard Room for the Use of the Horse and Soldiers now in Town And that he do provide Coals and Candles for their Use as oft as is necessary.⁴⁵

The situation got so completely out of hand that the deputies of Sir John Cust, Sir Charles Frederick, the Yerburchs, and the tenants of Sir Willoughby de Broke, formed themselves into an armed body of cavalry and paraded around the butter cross in Boston. However, they were asked to leave by the officer in command of the Scotch Greys and were subsequently disbanded. Part of a torn letter which appears to have been written to Sir Charles Frederick, referred to a meeting to be held at Boston 'to protect the Commissioners' and also complained that

...this is more necessary with complaint to your tenants at Brothertoft than any other as they were the foremost in the late Riot particularly and orgaised [sic] themselves in it. A notion has been infused into them that you have already contracted to let the whole land which shall be allotted to you to one person and that they are all to be turned adrift at best.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ *Boston Minutes*, 6, p. 86.

⁴⁶ LAO. Brownlow Box 2BNL/17/3. n.d. [Withdrawn and awaiting re-classification]. The LAO. Archivists' Report 10, 1 April 1958 to 14 March 1959, p.17, refers to this and to a similar letter addressed to Fitzwilliam's agent (Sir Matthew Lamb) regarding the conduct of his Dogdyke Fen tenants ; See also a further discussion of this matter in Chapter 3.

Early in 1769, organised resistance took the form of a continuous destruction of all boundary posts and rails erected in Holland Fen, also removal of the newly-planted hedges. Shortly after the enclosure Award was signed further destruction was carried out under pretext of holding football matches across the fenland, which meant that all barriers and hedges in the paths of these boisterous games were torn up by the crowd and burnt or taken away. Similarly in July 1765, opponents of enclosure at West Haddon in Northamptonshire also used football as an excuse to pull up and burn £1,500 worth of posts and rails during two days of rioting.⁴⁷ The commissioners found the cost of re-erecting fences and planting more hedges so prohibitive that a further act of Parliament, the Amending Act of 1770, was necessary to allow the boundaries to be marked instead by ditches 10 feet wide x 5 feet deep. It also allowed costs of £1,000 to be repaid to their solicitor for prosecuting felons. Rewards were advertised for information about the offenders and several prosecutions were carried out, the corporation of Boston subscribing £20 towards the costs in 1769 and again in 1770.⁴⁸

Gradually the public confrontations waned while a small, hard core of resistance continued with covert actions. Barns and haystacks were fired under the cover of darkness and many sheep hamstrung. Anyone who hired a plot of land in Holland Fen or appeared to be a supporter of further parish enclosures was liable to retribution.⁴⁹ Amongst those parish representatives who had been chosen to elect the enclosure commissioners were R.

⁴⁷ J.M. Neeson, 'Opponents of Enclosure in Eighteenth-Century Northamptonshire', *Past and Present*, 105 (1984), p. 120.

⁴⁸ *Boston Minutes*, 6, pp. 101, 115; See other prosecutions reported in the *Lloyd's Evening Post*, 21 May 1770.

⁴⁹ John Parkinson of Asgarby wrote to Francis Russell at Gray's Inn, 'No gentleman on the spot cares to be the entire Promoter of so extensive an Improvement [the proposed enclosure of the East fen], particularly on account of seeing the Holland Fen Inclosure executed, in which those who were called Advocates either suffered by having their Stacks fired or such other Private damages which might be as injurious as the Advantages any Individual might Receive', TNA. DL 41/1159/8 Jun 1779. My thanks to Rob Wheeler for this reference.

Barlow, gent. of Boston and W. Garfitt, merchant of Boston who each had two of their coach horses poisoned, also J. Tunnard of Frampton who had fifty sheep hamstrung, and W. Watson of Kirton who was warned that he would be shot and his house demolished if he encouraged further enclosures. The method of reprisals became even more malevolent with the maiming and killing of animals carried out in a particularly cruel manner, horses perished as their stables burnt, new barns and houses set on fire whilst the occupants were asleep, and a group of armed men went about committing murders after dark. Many of the victims were easy targets within their own homes. John Woods, a Swineshead farmer was shot dead by his fireside, while a failed attempt on Robert Barlow's life resulted in the shooting and wounding of his wife as she sat by their fireside. Thomas Wilkes the bailiff in command of Sir Charles Frederick's guard at Brothertoft, was shot in the face through a window shutter and although he managed to survive he lost an eye and was 'dreadfully disfigured'. In July 1769 at a farm in Algarkirk Fen owned by Beridge, the assailants were shot at in retaliation and one of them was killed although the others fled. It seems that the law was never able to apprehend and convict the murderers.⁵⁰

It became evident that there was internal treachery afoot among some of the ringleaders when mystery surrounded the court case of one Crampton, a man accused of murdering John Woods, lest he should turn informer also his alleged accomplice 'Gentleman Smith'. Smith panicked and departed for London where he turned King's evidence against his partner in crime. When Crampton managed to set up an alibi for himself with sworn witnesses, he was found 'not guilty' and allowed to go free. Smith disappeared.⁵¹ Culprits faced hefty fines, prison, or even transportation for destroying the fences. James Rylatt of Chapel Hill was prosecuted under the Black Act for shooting cattle and burning fences belonging to Charles Pelham.⁵²

⁵⁰ Johnson, *Chronology and History*, pp. 39-42; Padley, *Fens and Floods*, pp. 40-43.

⁵¹ Padley, *Fens & Floods*, pp. 38-44; Johnson, *Chronology*, pp. 38-42.

On 23 September 1772, Edward Draper, the Boston solicitor produced a 'general account of expenses defrayed of prosecuting the persons concerned in the late riots and disturbances in Holland Fen', in which an amount of £1,473.2s 0d. was claimed. Curiously, this included £39.9s.1d. in costs received from the 'forfeited recognisance of Lineham's Bail'. Norris Lineham had disappeared while out on bail during the Holland Fen riots and so his bail money was forfeited. About sixty years later, in July 1833, the *Stamford Mercury* reported the recent unearthing of human remains buried in a hogshead [barrel] of lime in an orchard at Kirton Holme. One local remembered that Lineham, a local poet 'well acquainted with the persons and proceedings of the rioters' was suddenly missed and probably murdered in fear that he, or his songs, would betray the rioters.⁵³

It was mid June 1773 before the disturbances ceased in Holland Fen and by then, with the exception of Wyberton, Frampton, and Brothertoft, several parishes had already enclosed or were preparing to enclose their individual commons. The last known hostilities carried out were of arson attacks on barns and wagons. Division and enclosure of the fen had inflicted five years of terrorism on the neighbourhood and its inhabitants were at last able to breathe a sigh of relief and concentrate on reclaiming the waste lands. Although the scale and fury of anti-enclosure protests may have taken them by surprise, the eleven parishes/townships could hardly have anticipated a trouble-free enclosure of the Holland Fen. The promoters of enclosure were well aware of the more undesirable factions harboured by the fen and would have been keen to flush them out. As Williamson also found, in the late eighteenth century the commons and especially the more extensive

⁵² Hindle, 'Power', p. 78. The 'Black Act' of 1722 imposed the death penalty for offences against the Game Laws. It was repealed in 1827.

⁵³ LAO. ASW10/101/6 23 September 1772; *LRSM*, 5 July 1833; Or perhaps this was Smith, who had also 'disappeared'?

commons were usually seen as a threat to social order. The rich wetlands attracted not only the poor, the squatters, and gypsies, but also the criminals whose lifestyles were often vigorously defended when seriously threatened by enclosure, drainage, or reclamation.⁵⁴

The big landowners, whose residences were usually built elsewhere in the county and therefore out of the reach of the fenland mob (also local gentlemen whose homes were under the protection of the cavalry at that time) were a competitive group eager to acquire good land at the expense of small farmers. To the latter, the loss of land meant a loss of local prestige and security; this merely exacerbated the problems and produced bitter men, like William Smith, who sought to vent their fury on the lives of new, and unsuspecting tenants in the enclosures.

Costs of carrying out the Drainage Acts, or those works that were actually completed, were financed by proprietors who recouped their expenditure to some extent by increasing rents but mainly by levying rates and taxes on the land drained by the river, and by navigation tolls or duties.⁵⁵ The investment and work carried out in Holland Fen during this difficult ten-year period remained only partly successful in its attempt to bring the fen into a reformed agricultural condition and it would take yet another century before it was fully accomplished.

⁵⁴ Williamson, 'Understanding Fields', pp. 24-5.

⁵⁵ Grigg, *Agricultural Revolution*, p.39, Grigg puts the *combined* cost of enclosing and draining Holland Fen at £50,600 (he quotes the sole expenditure of the 1762 Witham Act at £50,650). However, Wheeler quotes £53,650 expended on the sluice and drainage works alone, and raised by mortgage, Wheeler, *A History*, p.156.; Clarke quotes the sum of £60,450 solely for the provisions of the 1762 drainage Act, Clarke, 'Farming of Lincolnshire', pp. 301-2.

CHAPTER 3

Economy and Agriculture in the Holland Fen, 1770-1870.

'In this way the map was re-drawn, and the new topography would begin to be realised on the actual landscape'.¹

This chapter will take a look at how each of the eleven parishes/townships took over administration of their own fenland commons after the Holland Fen Award was signed in May 1769. During the next four years, and despite active hostility in the neighbourhood, eight of them, namely Algarkirk and Fosdyke (in a combined Act), Skirbeck Quarter, Boston West, Wigtoft, Kirton, Sutterton, and Swineshead, obtained their own Acts of Parliament in order to subdivide, enclose, and hold the commons 'in severalty'. This raises key issues about the allocation methods of hundreds of individual plots, their average size, leases, tenant support, and the use of the land itself. These are examined against the background of a changing landscape as the determination to make the fenland productive began to have an effect on the topography.

Enclosing the Parish Fenlands.

According to the minutes of the Boston corporation the first of the parish fenlands to be enclosed were those of 'Algarkirk cum Fosdyke', where the corporation as proprietors of estates in both parishes did not see fit to consent to the Bill in October 1770. Despite this the enclosures went ahead.² The Rev. Charles Berridge, whose church at Algarkirk also served the inhabitants of Fosdyke, was one of the original proprietors who had taken

¹ J. Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840* (Cambridge, 1972), p, 95.

² *Boston Minutes*, 6, p.124; The Mayor and burgesses of Boston received one allotment of 23 acres in Algarkirk Fen and one of 5 acres in Fosdyke Fen.

part in the meetings at Sleaford in July 1766, when the Bill to enclose Holland Fen was under discussion. Tithe commutation awards were of the utmost importance to the clergy and other tithe-holders so their proposal that one-fifth of both the 'old and new lands' should be offered in lieu of tithes had been high on the agenda at the opening meeting. However, no such offer was written into the 1769 Holland Fen Award as it was up to the individual parishes to agree later on such matters, if and when they decided to subdivide and use their land in severalty. Tithe awards probably accounted for a large portion of the 745 acres (32 per cent) awarded to local clergy in the 2327 acres of Algarkirk Fen, plus the award of a further 109 acres (12.3 per cent) in the 887 acres belonging to Fosdyke Fen. The 1772 lists of Proprietors for Algarkirk and Fosdyke and accompanying maps show that these awards to the clergy were conveniently arranged within four separate allotments.³

In November 1770 the Boston corporation consented, as proprietors of estates in Skirbeck Quarter and impropiators of the tithes and proprietors of estates in Boston West, to the subdivision and enclosure of both these fen allotments. The proprietors of Skirbeck Quarter were instructed to insert a clause into their Bill stating that the whole of their enclosed fen would be within the jurisdiction of the court of requests (small claims) for the borough of Boston and Skirbeck Quarter. At the same time, Boston West proprietors were informed that **a:** the corporation expected to be allowed a ninth part of the enclosure after deduction for roads and bridges in lieu of tithes over the fen allotted to Boston West only, and that their fen allotments were to be enclosed with a ring fence at the expense of the proprietors; also **b:** that a clause should be inserted into the Bill stating that the whole, subdivided, and enclosed fen being now made part of the parish of Boston, should be deemed to be within the jurisdiction of the borough of Boston and entitled to all its the liberties, privileges, and franchises; and further **c:** that the town clerk should be admitted

³ E. Hare, *A Book containing Plans and Surveys* (n.p., BSIDB, 1783); In Algarkirk, 54 acres, 319 acres, and 372 acres, in Fosdyke 109 acres. Acreages quoted in whole numbers.

as one of the attorneys of the Bill (at the proprietors' expense) to take care of the dues and rights of the corporation.⁴ These orders were not well received by the proprietors of Boston West who objected to the town clerk meddling with their Bill. The following, terse resolution was inserted into the minutes of the corporation of Boston in December 1770:

That this Hall will treat no further concerning the subdividing and inclosing that part of Holland Fen allotted to Boston West until the Proprietors shall Consent that the Town Clerk of this Corporation be employed and paid by the said proprietors solely or as one of Two Sollicitors [sic] in Solliciting the Bill to be brought into Parliament for subdividing and inclosing the said Common And that the Town Clerk do send a Copy of this Resolution unto Mr. Samuel Thorneton to be by him Laid before the said Proprietors at their next Meeting.

Separated from the town centre of Boston by the river Witham, wealthy Boston West merchants had established their large houses, shops, inns, banks, stables, and storehouses along the busy High Street; the roadway ran parallel with the west bank of the river and had been the main thoroughfare to and from London since medieval times. Access to the town centre of Boston was either via the town bridge across the river at the north end of High Street, by the local ferry, or by one of the dozens of privately-owned boats sprawled beside a jumble of riverside gardens and quays. Because they were situated on the west side of the river proprietors in Boston West enjoyed the convenience of being able to graze both their own and their customers' animals in the adjacent Holland Fen, whereas Boston townspeople communed with fifty other parishes over in the East, West, and Wildmore fens of East Lindsey.⁵ Recent legislation concerned with turnpike roads, re-cutting of the river Witham, new sluices, and drainage improvements had resulted in new and heavier taxes/tolls being levied on Boston and its neighbouring communities; all these major undertakings had to be financed and maintained locally. Possibly, because the new river tolls and strict regulations affecting their businesses were immediately followed by

⁴ *Boston Minutes*, 6, p. 125; .

⁵ Wheeler, *History*, p. 227. East Fen 12,424 acres, West Fen 16,924 acres, Wildmore 29,348 acres.

yet more taxes and a threat to their fen management, the inhabitants of Boston West had found officialdom increasingly irksome and were determined to resist any further intrusion.

Although the proprietors of Boston West agreed later to accept the town clerk's 'assistance' in soliciting their Bill, there remained firm disagreements over the mode of subdivision. It was a period when both the corporation and the proprietors of Boston West resorted to the introduction of new resolutions in their minutes and the exchange of abrupt letters. Outwardly this appears to have remained a calm and dignified procedure despite the tense atmosphere that prevailed in Boston and some neighbouring parishes in the wake of lost commons; acts of arson and murder continued to accompany the enclosures and posed a serious threat to any local person involved in the negotiations.⁶ The mayor and burgesses of Boston objected to the method of enclosure that some of the Boston West proprietors had presented in their petition to the House of Commons, and so passed a resolution declaring it to be 'unjust and detrimental to the interests of the town of Boston'. Meantime they ordered the town clerk not to attend any more of the Boston West meetings or to assist them with their bill and voted to adhere to their own proposed mode which was as follows:

To Houses adjoining the Fen Six Acres each, to other Houses having Right of Common Five Acres, To every Toftstead Two Acres and an half, To every Acre of Land half Acre each To be sold for the Charges of the Act & c Fifty Acres When the Roads and Ditches are taken off and the Allotment for the Impropiator 'tis expected there will be about 150 Acres remain which is proposed to remain as Common pasture for everyone having Right of Common in the following manner, that is every Householder of Boston West to keep one Cow and one Horse upon the Common or if they have no Cow Two Horses, or no Horse Two Cows, the Common to be drove twice a year to see that no person not having a Right of Common has any Stock thereon. Every person having Twenty Acres allotted to him to be obliged to build and more than Twenty Acres unless there be a Farm upon the premises. Every person having Fifty Acres allotted to him to build and support Two dwelling houses upon his Allotment.

⁶ Of the ten parish representatives at least four of them, Barlow of Boston West, Garfitt of Skirbeck Quarter, Tunnard of Frampton, and Watson of Kirton, are also known to have suffered the reprisals mentioned.

Diplomacy managed to struggle through and both sides settled upon clauses that were more amenable to the other. By not insisting on a cow-pasture, the corporation hoped to obtain a clause that allowed the erection of farmhouses on land beyond twenty acres in certain parts of the fen, and also hoped that the commissioners would not rate any house inhabited by the owners at more than £20 a year. A further clause, that the bill be restrained only to houses and toftsteads with right of common in Boston West fen, was also desired. On 14 February, 1771 the Boston corporation finally withdrew its opposition and the bill went ahead. In December of that year five of their lessees who had lost either their rights to tithes, or to common on the fen, shared in a total compensation of £99; a payment of £50 to another lessee of two houses was withheld by the corporation because he had not paid his rent for a number of years. Boston corporation also decided that the parcel of land allotted to themselves as impropiators should be left open to the adjoining road and asked for the corresponding amount of £33.5s. to be paid to them in lieu of fencing.⁷

The mayor and burgesses of Boston were allocated four allotments of land in the Boston West Fen and these are located in figure 3.1. The corporation plot number 11 consisted of 7 acres pasture for the toll cottage near the 'fen gate', plot number 166 of 23 acres was assigned to the bailiff of the Erection lands, plot 167 containing 37 acres assigned to the corporation chamberlain, and plot number 168 of 205 acres to 'the same mayor and burgesses', probably in lieu of tithes.⁸ As the shape of the northern boundary indicates, the latter three plots were adjacent to the marshes and bed of the old river

⁷ *Boston Minutes*, 6, pp. 131-155. The Minutes provide no further information about the clauses.

⁸ Boston's Erection Lands comprised properties of all the old incorporated guilds with the exception of St. George's guild. They were granted by the charter of Philip & Mary on 17 Jan 1554/5 in order to support the bridge & port, to establish and maintain a free grammar school, to provide 2 presbyters for celebration of divine service, and to maintain 4 bedesmen. The Briggs, Fox, and Marjery lands were added later. My thanks to Ann Carlton for this reference.

Witham. The four plots contained just over 272 acres and accounted for approximately 18 per cent of the Boston West Fen allocation of 1,513 acres.

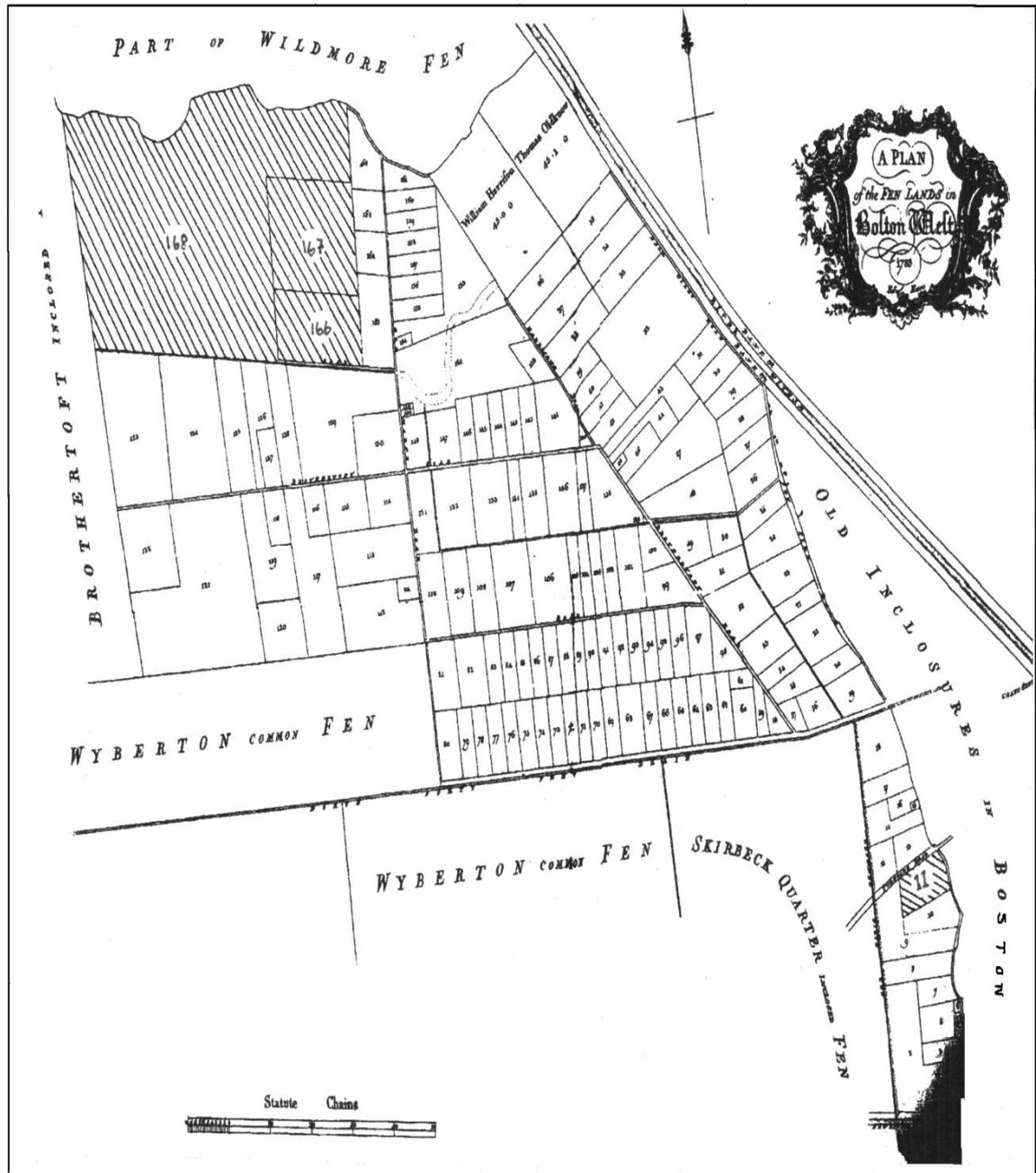


Figure 3.1 The four Boston corporation plots (shaded areas) in Holland Fen. Boston is located bottom right and the area marked 'Part of Wildmore Fen' corresponds to the 'Old Witham Marshes' shown in figure 2.1. (Adapted from Hare, *Plans and Surveys*).

Although none of the enclosure commissioners' accounts have been found, the Boston minutes provide a brief insight into some of the difficulties they faced. The full enclosure process of Holland Fen was a long and complicated procedure, one that had

begun in 1766 and yet remained unfinished until 1789 when Wyberton, the last of the eleven parishes/townships, finally sought litigation to enclose its fen allotment. The missing documentation might have shed some light on any special problems that arose when established communal rights were divided up between individual communities, each having its own set of priorities and powerful landowners. Some of the enclosures were infinitely more complex than others. Tithes made the work difficult especially where there were great and small tithes belonging to owners and tenants of various houses in different parts of the same parish. However, the existence of various Lords of the Manor, Lords of the Soil, and Lords of the Soke complicated procedures even further. As Grigg commented, *every parish* in Holland had divided ownership.⁹ The influence of aristocracy and gentry, albeit non-resident in the Holland Fen parishes, was evident as Pelham, Brownlow, the Earl of Exeter, and Zachary Chambers emerged not only as landowners in several parishes, but were also referred to as Lord of the Manor of Kirton, and Frampton, Lord of the Soke of Kirton, and Lord of the Manor of Swineshead, respectively. The King was runner-up in Wyberton where he was owner of the soil of all waste land within the parish except for the Manor of Tytton where John Frotheringham, gent, was owner of the manor and the soil.¹⁰ The Mercers' Company of London were landowners of considerable power in Kirton as was Magdalen College Oxford, in Frampton, and Trinity College Cambridge, in Swineshead. Other non-resident landowners who had seen fit to invest in parishes with common right in the Holland Fen included the Earl of Warwick, Duke of Newcastle, Lord Willoughby de Broke, Christ's Hospital in Lincoln, Lord Middleton, Sir Joseph Banks, Sir John Cust, Sir Charles Frederick, and Sir Gilbert Heathcote. On a lesser plane were the influential, local gentlemen, wealthy businessmen, farmers, graziers, and

⁹ Grigg, *Agricultural Revolution*, p.84.

¹⁰ There were several decayed manors within the parishes, for instance Tytton Hall in Wyberton parish and Stone, Earls, Multon, and Frampton Halls, in Frampton parish. For further details regarding the legal manorial and parochial context of common land, see S. Birtles, 'Common land, poor relief and enclosure: the use of manorial resources in fulfilling parish obligations, 1601-1834', *Past and Present*, 165 (1999), pp. 74-106.

clergy such as Messrs Garfitt, Barlow, Tunnard, Yerburgh, Whichcote, Pocklington, and Berridge. These were the men whose names appeared over and over again on Hare's lists of the proprietors who were allocated land in Holland Fen.

Several of the fen parishes availed themselves of the opportunity to include their other commons, marshes, and waste lands within the same legislation. Wigtoft had about 36 acres of 'other commonable places'. Frampton recorded a long list of places that included the Reaches Marsh and the 'Holmes' which was 'a wasteland let to answer the parochial rates'. Wyberton's 400 acres of other commons and marshes also included 25 acres of the Reaches Marsh, while Kirton declared about 600 acres of other commons in their enclosure bill.¹¹

Structure of the Fenland Plots.

Unlike those commissioners and surveyors responsible for the initial division and enclosure of the Holland Fen in 1769, the officials who were subsequently chosen to enclose the parish fen allotments (shown overleaf in Table 3.1) were presented with a considerably easier task than their predecessors. The interior of the fen had already been carefully surveyed, mapped, and each of the parish commons established within neat, straight sections by boundary ditches.¹² Initially, the commissioners prepared an up-to-date list of all proprietors who could prove their claims to fenland together with details of his/her allotted acreage. They then had to ensure that every square foot of the parish fen allotment was utilised and subdivided to the advantage and satisfaction of all concerned. Consequently the individual plots retained the same precise and orderly manner in which

¹¹ Boston Library, L.333.2, *Acts of Parliament relating to Parish Enclosures (n.p., n.d.)*; The Rev. Dr Shaw of Wyberton, prevented the enclosure of Wyberton Fen until his death in 1788 (Johnson, *Chronology*, p. 42).

¹² See figure 2.2, the Division and Enclosure map of Holland Fen.

the Holland Fen Award had been laid out, with each plot having its own access to roads and drainage.

TABLE 3.1 Enclosure commissioners in Holland Fen, 1771-1789.¹³

<u>Parish</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Enclosure Commissioners</u>	<u>Fee £</u>
Skirbeck Quarter	1771	William Gee of Swineshead	21
		Thomas Stavelly of Kirton	21
		Edward Hare of Castor, Northampton	21
Boston West	1771	Thomas Staveley of Kirton	84
		Peter Packharness of Benington	84
		William Elstobb of London	84
Wigtoft	1772	William Jepson of Lincoln	63
		Thomas Hogard of Spalding	63
		William Elstobb of London	63
Kirton	1772	Peter Packharnis of Bennington	84
		Thomas Hogard of Spalding	84
		John Hudson of Louth	84
Swineshead	1773	Peter Packharnis of Bennington	84
		Thomas Hogard of Spalding	84
		William Fillingham of Flawborough	84
Frampton	1784	John Parkinson of Asgarby	63
		Edward Hare of Castor, Northampton	63
		Joseph Newman of Boston	63
		William Thistlewood, Bardney, Surveyor	63
Wyberton	1789	Stanley Marshall of Freiston	63
		Joseph Newman of Boston	63
		John Parkinson of Asgarby	63

Although the parish fen allotments were subdivided into straight, regimented plots these were wide-ranging in size according to the required number of allocations, for example the 277 acres of Skirbeck Quarter Fen contained 45 plots while in the 2380 acres of Algarkirk Fen there was a mere 60. The proprietors' lists of 1772-74, which are only available for eight of the eleven parishes/townships, identified all the individual plots by

¹³ LAO. Misc. Dep. 482. Enclosure Acts; Wheeler, *History*, pp. 68, 89.

number and with the area of each one quoted in acres, roods, and perches.¹⁴ These varied greatly from the smallest plot of just 6 perches in Kirton Fen to the largest one of 372 acres in Algarkirk Fen. Within the eight fen areas, Table A in Appendix 1 shows that an astonishing 83.3 per cent (704) of the 845 plots contained less than 20 acres, 14.2 per cent were between 20 and 100 acres, and only 2.5 per cent consisted of more than 100 acres. Table B in Appendix 1 shows that there were approximately 116 women proprietors who were allocated plots, these varied in size from as little as 9 perches to 197 acres.¹⁵ Inevitably the more proprietors there were, the smaller the plots became. However, Williams deduced that the fields on the Levels were generally smaller than in the Mendip Hills, because their size was 'controlled by drainage considerations'.¹⁶

Individual enclosure acts show that the basic amount of fenland offered to houses and toftsteads with common right in Holland Fen differed slightly from parish to parish. This varied from 4 acres per house in Skirbeck Quarter to as much as 8 acres in Kirton, and between 2-4 acres for the toftsteads.¹⁷ The remaining land was then re-allocated in proportion and according to the annual, dykereeve assessment lists of rates paid, although this could be further adjusted where ancient lands had, or had not, contributed to the dykereeves and were still liable to pay tithes. Such amendments were found within the more complicated enclosure acts of Frampton and Wyberton. When the established pattern of land use within a community was altered by legislation, large proprietors would ensure that these complex paragraphs were inserted into official documents in order to safeguard their customary rights.

¹⁴ Hare, *Book of Plans & Surveys*. Hare was only able to include the lists of 8 of the 11 parishes/townships in 1883 (about 14,054 acres or 82.4 per cent of the 17,059 total acreage). Brothertoft was owned by Sir Charles Frederick and not enclosed, Frampton Fen was not enclosed until 1784 and Wyberton Fen in 1789. These 3 contained a total of 3,005 acres.

¹⁵ According to the female christian names given although many entries contained only proprietors' surnames.

¹⁶ Williams, 'Enclosure of Wastes', p. 113.

¹⁷ Where the cottage or building carrying right of common had existed within the last thirty years; LAO. *Misc. Dep. 482*.

Prior to the division, or enclosure of Holland Fen all impropiators, lords of the manor, clergy, landowners, tithe holders, tenants, copyholders, leaseholders, and cottagers had simply been known as 'commoners with rights' on the fenland. Further subdivision to use the land in severalty only served to remove this 'equality' and thus provoked local antagonism and violence, an effect which may even have influenced some of the proprietors in Frampton and Wyberton to delay enclosure of their fenland. This change of equality was the subject of a fable written by French Johnson, a Kirton schoolmaster in the eighteenth century. In it he likened the proprietors and commoners of Holland Fen to riverbank otters and rats.¹⁸

Early Settlement.

According to the Boston corporation minutes the first of their leases in Boston West Fen were granted in March 1772, when 'the Herbage' was let to six tenants for 10s. acre until the following Lady Day, 25 March 1773. In June 1772 the corporation lands in Algarkirk, Fosdyke, and Skirbeck Quarter fens were also let until Lady Day together with liberty to plough and sow with cole 'to be eaten on the said land'. Where the land was pared and ploughed, coleseed was the staple crop for newly broken up or reclaimed lands and Wheeler noted that a crop of cole would carry 20 sheep to the acre for 20 weeks with the sheep fattening on it 'with great rapidity'. 'Cole' was the green rape fed to sheep, when left to full growth the cole then became known as rapeseed which was threshed and used for making oil.¹⁹ The following month the remainder of Boston's fen allotments within Holland Fen were also let with instructions 'to plough the same or sow it with cole, the crop to be eaten off by Lady Day old style until Lady Day next'. The corporation then

¹⁸ Johnson, *Chronology*, pp. 31-33.

¹⁹ *Boston Minutes*, 6, pp. 353, 391, 1779-81; Wheeler, *A History*, p.397; TNA.HO/167/15/295, As explained by the incumbent of Fleet in his 1801 acreage return. Fleet is about 7 or 8 miles south of Fosdyke.

appointed a committee to parcel out their fenland into separate lots and to have them fenced and ditched. Subsequent leases were then granted for periods of 10 years each.²⁰

A personal 'Bondsman' was required to guarantee the tenant's performance of the covenants within the leases and without a suitable nominee the would-be tenant could not obtain a lease. Should the guarantor drop out or fail, a new bondsman had to be found quickly or the lease would have been terminated. In addition to the monetary rents, all corporation tenants had to provide a traditional payment of some of the 'best, hard sugar', the amount stipulated was usually between 1 lb. and 2 lbs but could be as much as 5 lbs and varied from lease to lease.²¹ Many entries in the Boston minutes suggest that the corporation was obsessed with preventing its tenants from removing the hay from their rented lands and when this occurred, as it did on several occasions, the guilty parties were ordered to spread the land with several loads of manure to each one of hay carried off. Eventually, the corporation resolved that their tenants should be allowed to remove the hay, having first arranged to pay the corporation surveyor one shilling a day to be present and ensure that six cartloads of strong manure for each one of hay was laid and spread on the land.²²

Enclosure of the parish commons led to the building of farmhouses, cottages, and cow-houses in the several areas of Holland Fen suitable for occupation. This prompted a need for locally-produced bricks. In some of the enclosed parish fens one of the first

²⁰ *Boston Minutes*, 6, pp. 164, 166; All their subsequent leases were for a period of 10 years. However David Grigg found that the great majority of tenants in Lincolnshire were on an annual tenancy and could be evicted with only 6 months notice. Grigg, *Agricultural Revolution*, p. 62; LAO. Misc. Dep. 482. 'Lands late part of Holland Fen. Lady Day to 1years' May Day, 1779'. From 1774, Pelham rented out the 770 acres of his lands 'late of Holland Fen' [Pelham's Lands] on annual leases to 3 tenants for £510, approx. 13s.6d acre; Young considered that the county's greatest obstacle to improvements was its general practice of giving 'no leases', perhaps he was referring only to estate lands. Young, *General View*, pp. 62-65.

²¹ The earliest reference to sugar (suker) as a payment is 12 Dec 1597 (*Boston Minutes*, 1, p.562) when the corporation paid one gallon of claret wine and 2lbs suker for discharge of certain amerancements imposed on the town. My thanks to Ann Carlton for this reference.

²² In March 1778. *Boston Minutes*, 6, pp. 310-11

duties was to investigate potential areas for brick making. When John Hobson of Brothertoft rented 42 acres and Thomas Reynolds of Frampton rented Lot No. 2 of 47 acres at 10 shillings per acre for one year in April 1772, they signed an agreement allowing the corporation to 'get materials for making bricks out of the land' in Boston West Fen.²³ Provided the clay could be found nearby and was readily available, the bricks were made as closely as possible to the building site, just as the Black Sluice commissioners had done in 1765 when they made bricks for their new sluice in the nearby mill pasture of Skirbeck Quarter.

On Pelham's Lands, situated in the north-easterly corner of Holland Fen, the building of a house on Thomas Weeks' farm is mentioned in one of the Yarborough estate books. The farmhouse consisted of three low rooms, two little cellars, a scullery and dairy, with four chambers and three garrets, there was also a coalhouse, pig sty, and a 'necessary' house. All equipment and moulds for making bricks had been delivered close to the building site where the 90,000 bricks were produced *in situ* using the heavy, river clay.²⁴ Portable brick making equipment was a most useful commodity in the fenland. Boston corporation found a ready buyer for their surplus bricks and 'Utensils for making Bricks' after the construction work in Boston West Fen was completed. Although there were ample opportunities on the fen for making bricks, just three miles to the north in the ruins of Tattershall castle, there were plenty of ready-made bricks lying around and waiting to be 're-cycled'. One farmhouse in Pelham's Lands still contains part of an old building constructed from some of these medieval bricks, and there may well have been others in the area that made similar use of them. The medieval bricks would have been transported

²³ *Boston Minutes*, 6, pp. 159, 160; The corporation plots adjoined the old river bed where access to considerable amounts of heavy, 'blue' clay would have been available; Evidence of brickmaking in the form of small clay pits still exist in the landscape, for instance at Hubberts bridge where the ponds are colonized by Mallards.

²⁴ LAO. YARB. 5/2/1/5, 1774, p. 34. Thomas Stavely appears to have been in charge of the construction work here and was probably the Thomas Stavely of Kirton named as commissioner for Skirbeck Quarter and Boston West in 1771 (see Table 3.1).

on barges from Tattershall along the rivers Bain and Witham to the farm site in Pelham's Lands in the late eighteenth century.²⁵

Because there was a demand for them the corporation were able to offer leases on properties before the proposed building work amounting to £1500 had actually begun. They leased out what appears to have been the whole acreage of their plot numbers 166, 167, and 168 in Boston West Fen, an area of approximately 266 acres. This was in six leases of pasture land for a period of 10 years each from the next Lady Day in 1773. Two of the leases stated 'on which a [farm] house is to be built' and the rents were given as 114 acres of pasture land at £140pa. plus 5lbs sugar, and 112 acres of pasture land at £151p.a. plus 5lbs sugar; both were let to tenants described as grazier farmers. The other four leases state 'on which a Cottage and a Cow-house is to be built' and came with 10 acres pasture land each letting for between £7.10s. and £8.5s. plus 1lb sugar; the lessees were described as labourers. When built, the cottages were known as 'the South West Cottage', the 'North West Cottage', the 'Cottage nearest Boston', and the 'Middle cottage next the Marshes'.²⁶

Hare's map of the Boston West Fen enclosure (refer again figure 3.1), shows that the three largest of the corporation plots, and thus the aforementioned six, leased properties, were adjacent to the marshland along the site of the old Witham riverbed.²⁷ This was where the mayor and burgesses had already seen fit to purchase land from the drainage commissioners at the time when the river was re-cut. Some of the hard work involved in reclaiming various sections of Holland Fen may be glimpsed from the 10-year lease of part of this marshland to George Hales, a tailor of Boston, who successfully

²⁵ N. Pevsner, J. Harris, revised by N. Antram, *Lincolnshire* (1989, London, 1990.), p.747. The (one million) Tattershall bricks each measured 8 – 8½" x 4" x 2" and were made locally in the 1430s.

²⁶ *Boston Minutes*, 6, p.174, 1773; References to Middle and South West cottages in 1781 show that the rents remained the same during further 10-year leases. (*Boston Minutes*, 6, pp. 390, 391.) The Acre tax in Boston West Fen was 22d. per acre in 1773.

²⁷ In 1767; This marshland was known as 'the Old Witham Marshes' although Hare referred to it as 'Part of Wildmore Fen', which it would have been prior to the river being re-cut.

petitioned for a lease to plough up 'the New March and the Lands lately purchased by the corporation'. Hales was granted a lease to

...continue it Tillage the first four years of the Term mentioned in the Lease upon Condition that the said George Hales shall take down the West Bank of the Old River and fill up the Ditch belonging to the new purchase... And also shall take down the Intake Bank and the Bank late Mr. Capp's and fill up the Old River And at the end of four years shall Lay the said Land down with Clover Grass seeds in a Husband like manner and continue it pasture until the End of the said Leas [sic] And the said George Hales Also begs leave to Build a Barn upon the said premises with liberty to take the Materials to his own Use at the End of the said Lease.²⁸

The Fen Allotments and Early Landscape.

Although hay, cole seed, and clover were often mentioned in early leases, it is impossible to ascertain how much arable use was being made of the interior fenland during the first two decades of occupation. The 'silty' land ranged in texture from fine, medium, or heavy silt, to clay which in some parts of Holland Fen could be amongst the heaviest of Lincolnshire soils. To make matters worse, the soil varied greatly even within very small sections and from one plot to another where the heaviest clay was usually to be found in the lowest parts. Clarke described the Holland Fen as being deep, loamy clay and sandy loam upon a subsoil of clay or silt. A soil survey in 1983-4 found that a central band of mud and clay was deposited by a prehistoric Witham as it took a short cut across Holland Fen from the Kyme Eau in the north-west and veered eastwards through Pelham's Lands; this was probably later on during this course of the river when the decreased flow had allowed the clay to accumulate. The surrounding creeks and levees of the river deposited silt each time the river overflowed and traces of these can still be seen from the air.²⁹

²⁸ *Boston Minutes*, 6, pp. 71, 72, 76; G. Hales was granted an additional term of 6 years.

²⁹ Smith, 'Lincolnshire (Parts of Holland)', p. 13; Clarke, 'Farming of Lincolnshire', p.284; Lane & Hayes, *South Witham Fens*, p. 17.

Grazing land prevailed in the fen and the corporation leases appear to have upheld the importance of grassland or pasture by threatening action against tenants who ploughed up their land without permission. Those who did so were forced to put the land back to hay and clover. Where the land was pared and ploughed oats were usually sown for several crops after the initial colseed because wheat was found to give a poor yield on newly-reclaimed land. A comment made by the parson of Boston West in the 1801

Acreage Returns suggests that 'the allotment to Boston West was at first almost wholly ploughed and sown with oats'. As the corporation leases have demonstrated, this was unlikely to have happened overnight or quite so literally across all the 168 individual plots within the allotment. However this observation was written in retrospect some thirty years after enclosure when oats had become the largest single crop and, possibly recalling the threat of imported foreign oats to fenland growers, he may have quoted a local legend as a caution to government officials.³⁰

A significant area of the landscape was still in a wild condition after it had been drained and enclosed, possibly even in a worse state than before in some parts owing to the debris of drainage, brick pits, old and new river banks, and drains. Although the unlawful settlements had long since been demolished, ongoing violence still deterred many people from expending large amounts of money and labour on land prone to vandalism.³¹ Even in 1773 the barns and crops grown on some of the established half-year lands and old intakes near the fen edge were still liable to be fired by arsonists after dark. As if these problems were not enough, 'incredible swarms of rats and mice' infested the fen during 1773.

According to French Johnson, where corn was being grown they destroyed 'great

³⁰ TNA. HO/167/15/109; Thirsk, *English Peasant Farming*, p. 221; Hindle, 'Power', p.71, Hindle suggested that in 1769 the Holland Fen 'was transformed overnight into a prairie of waving oats' however, this is unlikely as both the Frampton and Wyberton fen allotments, 2,249 acres, remained as unenclosed common land until 1784 and 1789; *Boston Minutes* 6, pp. 303-4, noted that in 1778, farmers 'of a large, low tract of land lying in Lincoln, Norfolk, and Cambridge', wanted the price of imported oats restricted to save them from 'utter ruin', to encourage cultivation after so much expense and pains, and to supply London markets.

³¹ See extracts of some of these accounts in *Bingley's London Journal*, 16 November 1771.

quantities' and 'ate up the grass by the roots so that most of the unplowed [sic] Allotments were destroyed'. Johnson described this infestation as being 'like an Egyptian Plague, the land stank of them so that the cattle were obliged to be removed for want of food'.³²

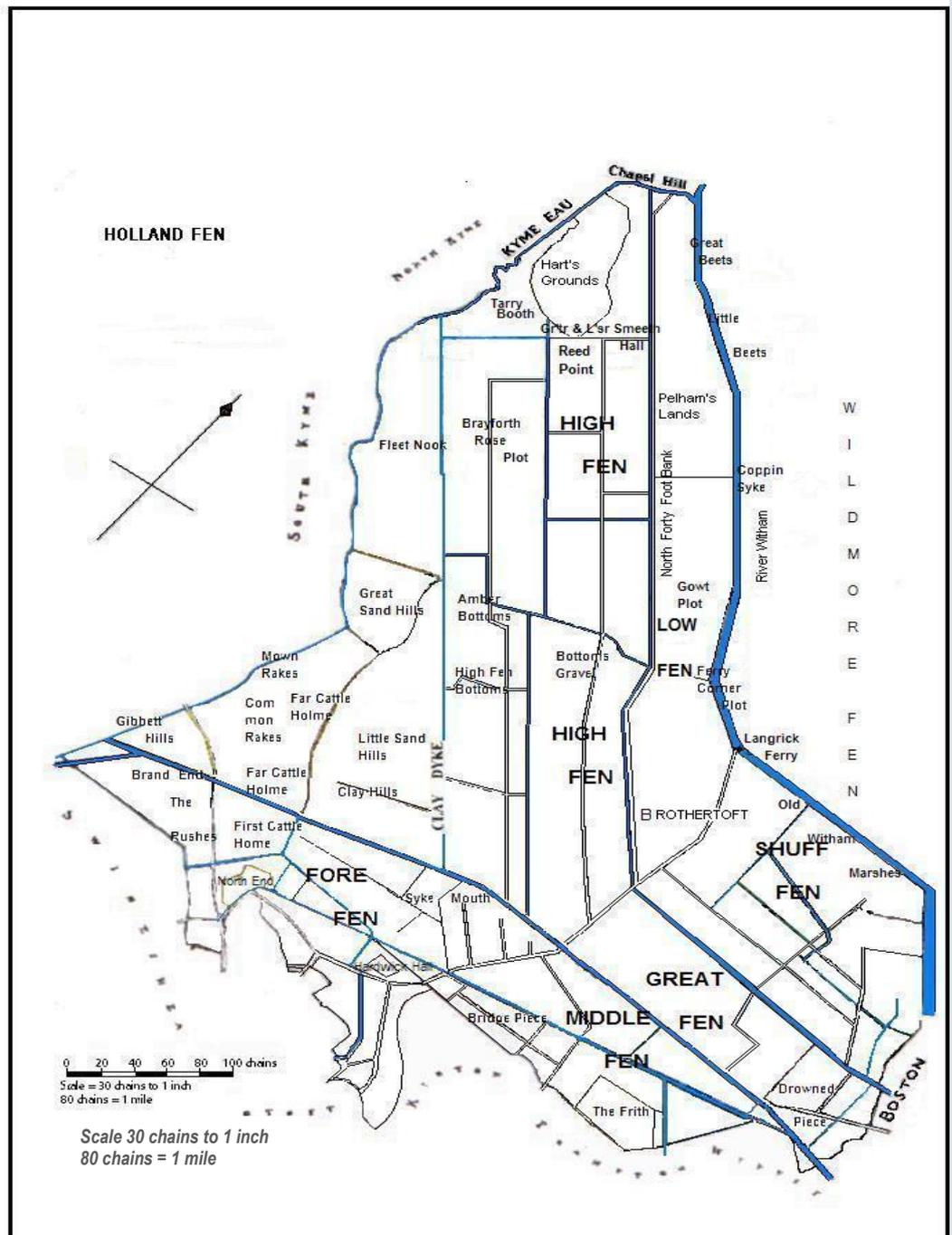


Figure 3.2. Approximate positions of fen areas according to place-names in the 1769 Award.

³² Johnson, *Chronology*, p. 38; Young describes similar infestations of mice in the Deeping Fen 1795-97 (Young, *General Review*, p. 482).

There was a huge acreage of land to reclaim and cultivate. Within the Holland Fen itself there were another six large fens and these were known as the High Fen, Great Fen, Middle Fen, Fore Fen, Low Fen, and Shuff Fen. Deep inside these were yet more fen areas which local people referred to by easily associated place-names. These names, shown in figure 3.2, conveyed a well-informed description of the state of the fenland and its topography and were also used by the enclosure commissioners to locate and identify certain allotments in the Award of 1769. Boston West and Brothertoft shared the 'Shuff Fen' where acres of straw-like reeds grew in abundance beside the old Witham salt marshes; Skirbeck Quarter's allocation included the sadly-named 'Drowned Piece', and there were several Gowt plots so named because they accommodated the soggy drain outlets; the Sykemouth and other sykes were low tracks of land where the drained water simply laid about on the surface and were described as 'unfit for tillage'.³³

An area where a tidal creek flowed from the Kyme Eau into Algarkirk Fen was known as Fleet Nook, while the Great Sand Hills, Little Sand Hills, Clay Hills, Amber Bottoms, Bottoms Gravel, The Rushes, and Three Gibbet Hills are self-explanatory. Greater and Lesser Smeeth Hall were lands adjacent to the Reed Point and prehistoric course of the Witham.³⁴ Reed Point was an important location for gathering thatching material. Favourite pastures containing safe or raised islands where livestock could be accommodated in times of flood were known as the First Cattle Holme, or Far Cattle Holme, whereas the Common Rakes and Mown Rakes were also half-year lands. The Ferry Corner plots were

³³ H. Healey, *A Fenland Landscape Glossary for Lincolnshire* (Lincoln, 1997) pp. 34, 40.

³⁴ LAO. HQS. Land Tax N. Holland 1724-1772. No archaeological remains although before enclosure of the fen, Lord Fitzwilliam paid £16 Land Tax for 'Chapel Hill and Smeeth Hall' in 1763. The drain from Billingham Dales, which he cut across Haute Huntre fen to Lodowick's Gowt in 1720, would have assisted drainage of Greater and Lesser Smeeth Hall lands.

areas of the old river bed near to the Brothertoft/Langrick ferry, while the Bridge Pieces referred to places where the townspeople drove their cattle over the drains into Holland Fen.

Although the initial enclosure of Holland Fen had imposed new roads, bridges, and enclosure ditches upon the landscape, it was the parish enclosures themselves that completely changed the identity of the fenland. Where it was stipulated, by Boston corporation for instance, many plots were delineated by lines of white hawthorn, or 'quick' hedging plants that had to be carefully protected by wooden posts until the hedges were fully established, and then maintained by the tenant. The quantity of plants used in Holland Fen is impossible to determine but the popularity of quickthorn during this active period of enclosure in Lincolnshire encouraged local nurseries including one at Wyberton to propagate thousands of young plants.³⁵ The Boston corporation ordered their surveyor to provide 5,000 'quick' and 300 Ash and Elm plants for certain plots in Boston West Fen, also to supply quick for a pasture in Skirbeck 'with an Ash tree to be planted in every 10 yards of quick'. For the purpose of 'raising timber' they also planted an acre of Ash, Elm, and 'Lombardian' poplars 'in rows 4 foot from each other', taking care to do the 'least damage to the tenants' within each of their two largest Holland Fen farms.³⁶

A striking aspect of the new landscape was the windmill and, as the map in figure 3.3. overleaf clearly shows, in 1827 these appear to have been more concentrated in the Holland Fen area where most of them were required for drainage purposes. The mills were fairly tall and quite distinctive. They could be seen for several miles across the flat landscape with wind-driven sails turning the scoop wheels below to raise water from the

³⁵ Russell, *New Landscapes*, p. 27.

³⁶ *Boston Minutes*, 6, 1779-81, pp. 342,389; According to Young, the wood of Ash and Poplar sold for 1s. per foot in the late 1790s. Cartwright brought the berry-bearing Poplar from Notts. into Holland Fen, where it exceeded the Lombardy in height and reached 18 or 20 feet within 6 years. (Young, *General Review*, p. 241); Called 'quick' because they were living, not [dead] wood fences.

dykes into the main drain. Over the decades levels of both the silt and peat fens contracted as they were drained, although peat dropped considerably more than the 2 or 3 feet lost by the silts. For centuries the lantern tower, or 'Stump', of Boston's fourteenth-century parish church, had been the only reliable landmark on a clear day for fen commoners and for travellers using the drove roads of Holland Fen on their way to and from Boston.

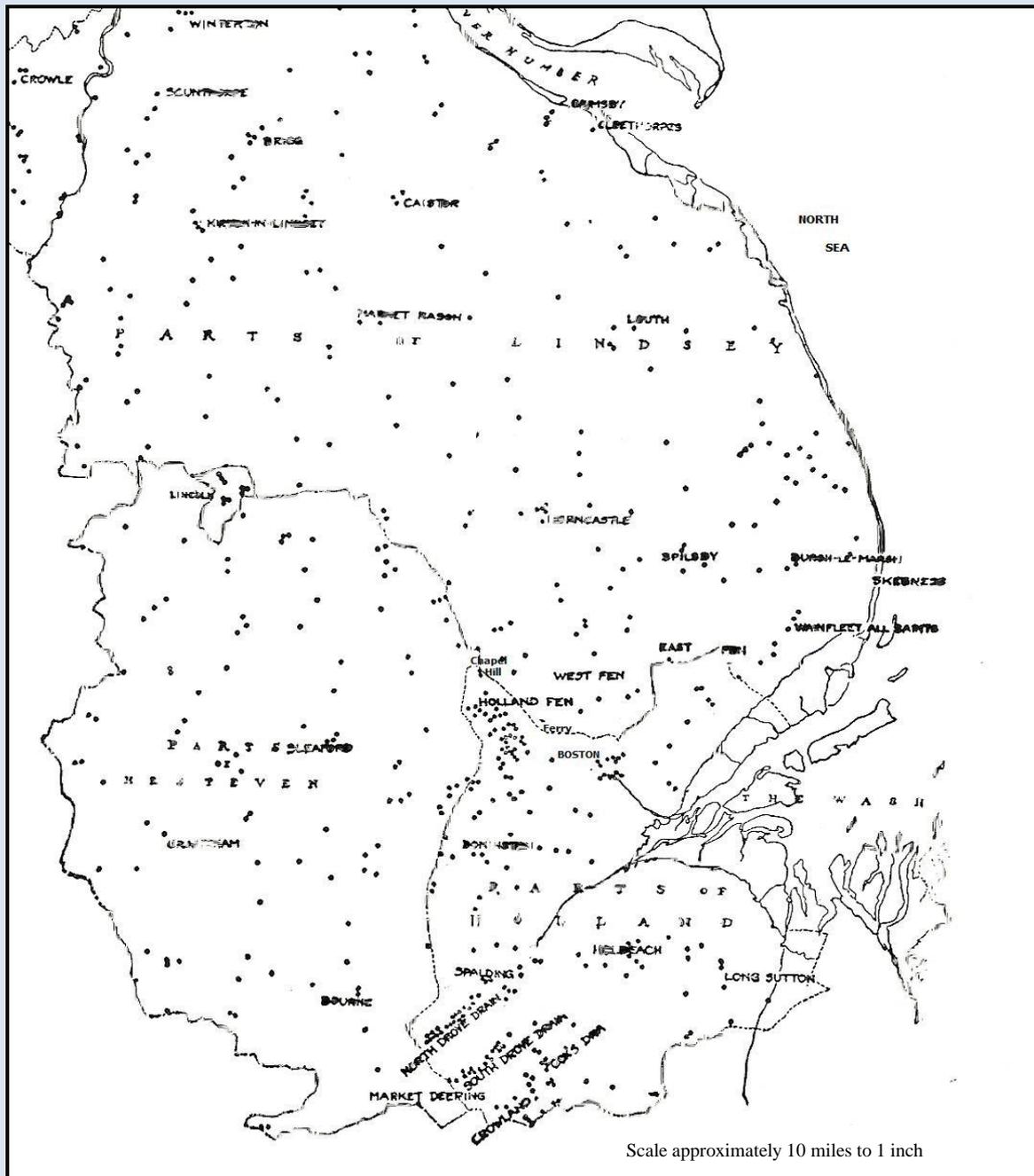


Figure 3.3 Windmills in Lincolnshire. Map shows a marked concentration of mills in the Holland Fen area c.1827. Adapted from R. Wailes, *Lincolnshire Windmills, Part One: Post Mills and Part Two: Tower Mills* (Heckington, 1991), Part II, Fig.1. Windmills shown on Bryant's map of 1827, p. 104.



Figure 3.4. Copy of a watercolour by W.A. Thomas showing an old drainage mill and paddle/scoop wheel beside the North Forty Foot Drain, in Holland Fen. Only a few bricks remain. The rear extension would have housed a steam or diesel engine to drive the wheel. Author's private collection.

When the new windmills, similar to the one portrayed in figure 3.4, were built alongside the drains in Holland Fen these too became familiar landmarks, albeit on a much smaller scale than the tower of St. Botolph's. As well as assisting the travellers, they

loomed out of the mist as navigational aids for all the small packet boats and barges that used the drains and were also providential as markers in locating the individual farms, allotments, and waterways. Windmills were used as identification for two of the fields adjoining the Fifteen Foot drain at Hill's farm in Kirton Fen, these were known as the 'West Engine Close' and the 'East Engine Close'.³⁷

Where the boundaries of Holland Fen followed old watercourses, intakes, and parish borders, the outer edges of some allotments like those next to the Kyme Eau in the west, could not conform to the neat, regular-shaped pattern that was now established within the fen itself. The eastern limits of some plots adjoining the old Witham marshes had to follow the same meandering route that the old, medieval river used to take. Because the disused river bed would take many generations to dry out (see sequence of Holland Fen maps 1821, 1890-92, and 1947-51 reproduced in Appendix 1), marshy hollows such as the Ferry Corner Plot, where the old river had twisted westward into the fen before turning back east again, meant that an area of approximately fifty acres extending well into the environs of Fosdyke Fen and Brothertoft remained unallocated to the parishes/townships. Areas such as the Ferry Corner Plot, which were not included in any parish and therefore exempt from liability to parish obligations, were classed as extra-parochial places. In and around the Holland Fen there were several of these areas (refer again to figure 2.2), caused by the drainage and enclosure of Holland Fen and these will be discussed further in a later chapter.³⁸

³⁷ There was 'a good smock corn mill' on one Brothertoft farm in 1787, *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 28 June 1787; LCL. Folded Map 6, The OS map of 1824 shows drainage mills sited along the North Forty Foot Drain, Gill Syke, and the Clay Dyke, also those on various other drains in Holland Fen; Light House Farm beside the North Forty Foot drain is said to have been so-called because its lights were used as a navigational aid by the packet boats; LAO. BNL/Surveys of the Holland Estates, 1793-1814.

³⁸ Lane explains that the sudden re-cut and infill of the Witham meant that the old channel did not have time to fill with sediments brought in by slow-flowing water and that not enough time has elapsed, even today, for the dry-land process to fill the hollows properly. Lane & Hayes, *South Witham Fens*, p. 22.

In Brothertoft itself, both the crescent shape of its original manor lands and the irregular demarcation of field boundaries provided sharp contrasts to a newly-regimented landscape of the surrounding fen. The owner, Sir Charles Frederick had emerged rather comfortably from the enclosure process with a compact estate of approximately 900 acres of prime land around the old hall at Brothertoft. Shortly after the Award of 1769 he was accused of inciting the enclosure riots in Brothertoft by contracting to let all his land to only one person, and in 1771 he was again publicly admonished when a London newspaper revealed,

We are informed from good authority that the village of Brothertoft in Lincolnshire which contained 73 families, in all about 218 souls, is entirely depopulated owing to the extreme hardships they laboured under by the cruelty of Sir Charles Frederick; instead of which the place is now inhabited by *one* tenant of Sir Charles' and a number of armed men, whom Sir Charles is obliged to keep to guard his new tenant's property against the resentment of the injured villagers and other poor commoners.³⁹

The accusations may well have been justified for the Poor Law accounts of 1770 show that there were only three persons assessed for the Brothertoft poor-rate during that year. One of them, W. Airy, was rated for the amount of £69, this was almost three-quarters of its total rate of £93. Four years later the account books do indicate a different situation with a total of 15 persons assessed to pay the poor-rate. Nevertheless, of the eight Brothertoft farms that Sir Charles Frederick chose to lease out in 1776 it appears that only one of them, Plumb Farm, had a Brothertoft tenant and he was described as the local shopkeeper. The rest of the farms were rented to grazier farmers living outside the Holland Fen or in other counties.⁴⁰

³⁹ *Bingleys' London Journal*, 16 November 1771; John Hobson came from Brothertoft where he had a valuable mare hamstrung during the 1770 protests, perhaps this had influenced his move to the Boston West Fen. (Johnson, *Chronology*, p. 39).

⁴⁰ LAO. Overseers of the Poor accounts, Brothertoft Par. 13/1, 1770; LAO. MCD. 863, 183/19. 1776. Extract from SRO list of Frederick Deposits. The eight were North, Castle, Manor House, Belmont, Chapel House, Monks, and Plumb farms, also one messuage with 45 acres. Tenants were farmer graziers in Boston, Wyberton,

Economy of the Fen.

Of course there was ample opportunity to buy, sell, or even exchange the individual plots once they were enclosed.⁴¹ Many of them would have been too big, too small, or too inconveniently placed for their owners to be able to use the land as they wished. When the Rev. Buckworth offered to sell Boston corporation his plot of 2 roods 23 perches adjacent to their land in Skirbeck Quarter Fen the corporation were keen to purchase it for the asking price of £30. They appear not to have been interested in the land offered for sale by Sir Charles Frederick at Brothertoft. Bearing in mind the availability and expense of hiring local labour, it may have seemed more practical to consolidate the land most easily accessible to their urban tenants, workers, and the local markets.⁴²

Despite the relatively easy access to and from Boston for supplies, equipment, markets, and labour, several of the corporation tenants in Boston West Fen did not necessarily take full advantage of their 10-year leases. Of the two largest corporation farms only one tenant, John Hobson, stayed on to renew his lease of the 114 acres and his son John continued the tenancy after his father's death in 1779. Again, in the four cottages having 10 acres of land each, only half of the labourer tenants renewed their leases, the other two were replaced by a grazier for the South-west cottage and a brewer (for his under-tenant) in the Middle cottage. The amount of dedication and hard work required to get a living out of the new fenland is highlighted by some of their petitions to the Boston corporation. Samuel Thompson, the common brewer whose land was 'very full of hollow places' complained that in order to fill in the land he would need an additional number of

Toynton St Peter, Kelham, Notts., and Kent.

⁴¹ In 1881 the Abstract of Title of John Cooper referred to Swineshead allotments, numbers 9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 21 in the Mown Rakes having been exchanged previously amongst their owners (Abstract held in a private collection).

⁴² Johnson's diary states that 'wages for reaping this year [1773] in the Fen was at the unreasonable rate of five shillings and three pence per day'. Johnson, *Chronology*, p.38.

years and permission to plough up the land. His lease was duly authorised. There were many complaints regarding lack of water available for the livestock in dry weather and the corporation subscribed to laying 'a tunnel through the new Witham bank opposite the dry lands in Brothertoft for the purpose of taking water' to the cattle. At one Boston West vestry meeting the corporation recommended 'the erecting of an Engine near the Forty foot [drain] to throw up water from thence'.⁴³

The mayor and burgesses made every effort to retain hard-working tenants and this was demonstrated by the attention paid to petitions asking for a reduction of rents 'owing to the badness of the times'. Although the corporation rents within Holland Fen appear to have remained steady, in other areas such as Wrangle there were complaints that the leases were too dear at the 'present high rent' and requests for them to be reduced again in line with the old rents. The hardship of fenland reclamation was further highlighted in June 1779, when John Hobson senior petitioned that ever since he had entered into his Boston West Fen lease in 1774 at £140 p.a. plus 5lbs sugar, he had in fact,

...used his utmost endeavors [sic] to improve it and to act conformable to the Covenants contained in his Lease that for the first Two Years he just got a living and paid everyone their Dues and Demands but that ever since then he hath been going back ward in the World and is very certain that except the rent be reduced he shall not be able to pay it much longer.⁴⁴

Hobson's petition met with some success because his rent was abated that year by £20 'in consideration' of him cleansing and taking care of all the quick fences on his farm, allowing the corporation to plant an acre of timber on his farm, and taking care of the said plantation. Another petition from Hobson 'owing to the badness of the times' in 1780 was

⁴³ *Boston Minutes* 6, pp. 187-8, 246-7, 271, 354, 376, 384; Young, *General Review*, p. 17. Young stated that ponds made for the cattle failed and the water in the silt was brackish; Hills, *Drainage*, p. 23. The words 'engine' and 'mill' were interchangeable and used to describe a water-raising windmill, e.g. 'Guthram engine', Hockerston's engine'; See also BSIDB, *Golden Jubilee*, pp. 15-16, 'Hockerston's Engine and Pepper's Engine' driving 15 feet diameter scoop wheels in Bourne Fen' in 1766.

⁴⁴ Hobson built a thatched dovecote over his 'necessary house' in 1776 and was allowed to claim £2.2s. for the bricks and lime, he was charged 12 pigeons rent p.a. *Boston Minutes*, 6, p. 256.

met with the same abatement of £20 on similar conditions plus the erection of gates and schottles on his farm where they were needed.

Despite all those aspirations in re-cutting the river, the North Forty Foot drain, the Hammond Beck, and the building of new sluices, drainage of the Holland Fen remained beset with many problems. The fen settlers found that not only was there a serious lack of water in dry seasons, there was still too much flooding in the wet periods. One such problem was the floodwater from the higher ground at Brothertoft which was said to 'override' the lands in Boston West Fen. In 1781, Hobson complained to the corporation that part of his farm in Boston West Fen was covered in water during the wet seasons, this area was described as being 35 acres of arable land and so establishes that Hobson had managed to prepare and cultivate at least 30 per cent of his 114 acres of fenland with crops during his eight-year tenancy. To assist in its drainage he was allowed to divide the arable land into two halves with a ditch and quick fence, also to provide a gate within the fence. Hobson was given leave to deduct up to 12 guineas from his next half-year's rent if he could produce the bills and receipts for the work.

After the death of Sir Charles Frederick in December 1785, the manor of Brothertoft passed to his son and heir and was then purchased in 1788 by Major John Cartwright of Marham, in Nottinghamshire, for the sum of £20,500.⁴⁵ The new owner soon increased the extent of his Brothertoft estate to approximately 1,150 acres; he then assigned the 200 acres of land he had purchased on the banks of the North Forty Foot Drain to the production of woad which was used for dyeing cloth. At Marham, Cartwright's father had used a system of moveable colonies in his manufacture of woad but

⁴⁵ LAO. MCD. 863,183/37/12-29, 1786-1788, Letters from H. Ingram, agent to Thomas Lennox Frederick with accounts concerning enclosure and sale of Brothertoft. 183/38/2, 1787. Capt. TL Frederick at Avignon, Power of Attorney; *Abstract*, 25, 4-5 Sept 1788; Sale of estate announced in the *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 28 June 1787.

Cartwright considered that the method of transporting the woad crop in large carts from the fields to the mill was 'a slovenly operation'; the crop also became soiled during the unloading and spreading process. By locating his woadmill on the woad-designated land at Brothertoft, Cartwright enabled both the machinery for grinding and crushing the woad leaves and the galleries of drying ranges to be kept in regular use, also his resident workforce remained fully employed. For this purpose Cartwright built a block of 29 brick and slate cottages nearby in order to retain his workers and house their families. As Arthur Young's illustration demonstrates in figure 3.5, specially adapted carts were used to hoist and tip the fresh woad directly onto the grinding receptacle. The great block of buildings 200 foot long and two storeys high, shown in figure 3.6, were capable of handling a yield of 200 tons of woad.⁴⁶

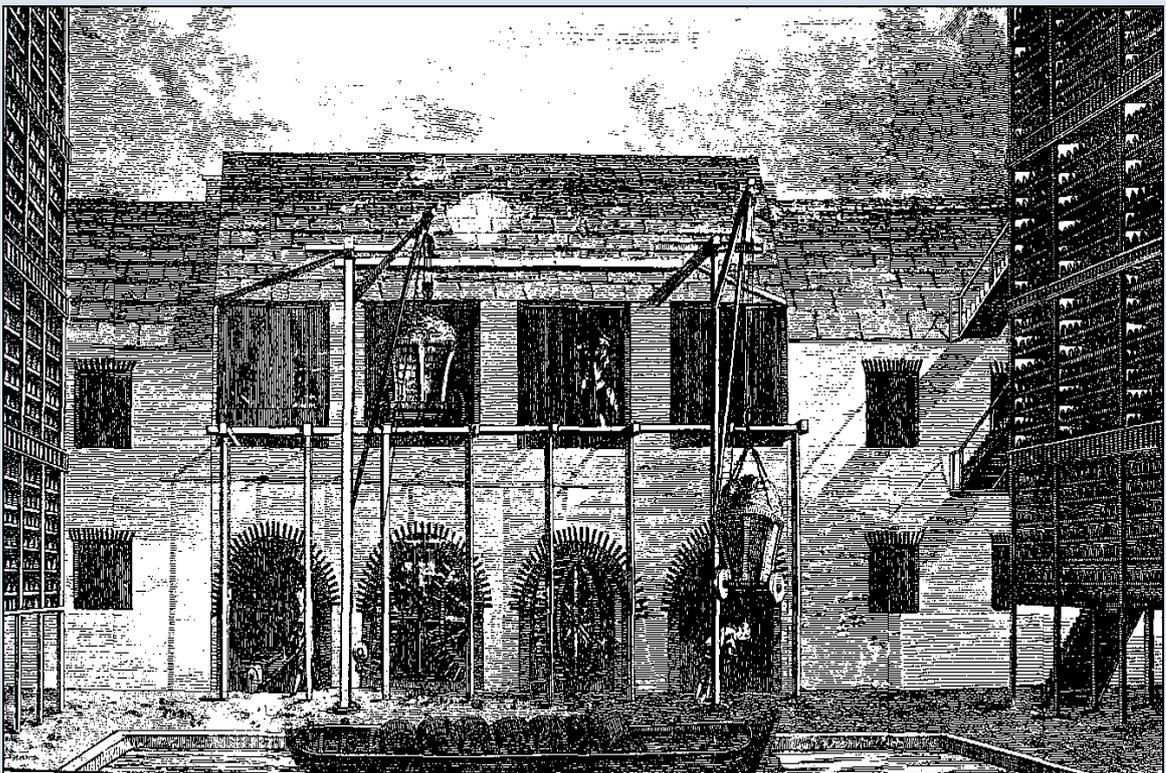


Figure 3.5 Cartwright's woad mill, Brothertoft. Carts are hoisted into the air and the woad tipped out into the grinder below. (Young, *General View*, pp. 174-175)

⁴⁶ For further details of the production of woad at Brothertoft see Young, *General View*, pp. 178-182.

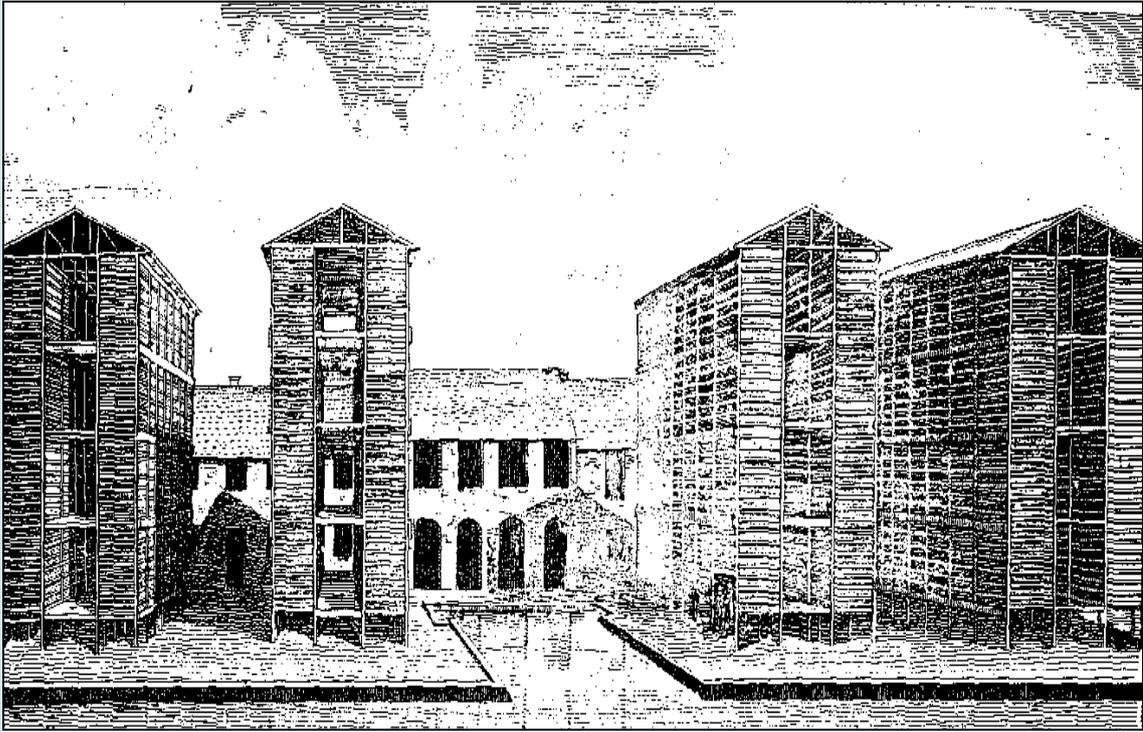


Figure 3.6 The drying frames at Brothertoft. (Young, *General View*, pp. 174-175)

Finally, the processed woad was packed into casks and despatched directly by boat from the mill to manufacturers in Yorkshire and Lancashire. Known locally as 'Isatica' from the woad plant *Isatis tinctoria*, Cartwright's woad production factory and its related commune would have introduced an unexpected, industrial element into the rural landscape of Holland Fen.⁴⁷ Although the general drainage of the old Haute Huntre fen had been deemed a great success in 1766, there were some who had warned that the erection of a sluice across the mouth of a [new] river was a serious mistake and would lead to further problems. By 1799 it was evident that they had been correct. The Grand Sluice, which was intended to exclude the tide from reaching the river above Boston, and therefore safeguard Holland Fen, had begun to silt up within a few years and the drainage of the fen became defective once more. By stopping the tidal flow from the Wash a muddy silt to the depth of 10 or 11 feet was deposited against the doors of the sluice and along the bed of the Haven outfall, thus damaging the shipping channels and preventing the sluice doors from

⁴⁷ *The Times (London)* 10 February 1797. An advertisement, '...no expence [*sic*] having been spared in the erection of the proper mill, works, and buildings, for grinding, drying, storing, and manufacturing Woad in the cleanest and most complete manner, on plans far superior to anything of the kind in Europe'.

opening. Inevitably, during the summer floods of 1799 the doors could not be opened to let the flood waters out into the Wash and resulted in thousands of acres being yet again, under water.

Cartwright found this muddy silt 'superior' and very useful for warping some areas of his land; he went to the trouble and expense of transporting several tons of it from the lower side of the sea doors at the Grand Sluice and then applied it to his fallows at Brothertoft. During his discussions with Arthur Young, the secretary of the 1793 Board of Agriculture, Cartwright explained that on some of the fields with a top-soil of stubborn clay he had found the generous application of saline silt to be most beneficial and it had increased the value of the land from 12 shillings to at least £1 an acre.⁴⁸ Young appears to have admired Cartwright's farming techniques and made copious notes of the Brothertoft farmer's observations for use in his report to the Board of Agriculture. The innovative improvements of drilling machines, ploughs, and scythes made by his bailiff, William Amos, also received special attention and no doubt Cartwright's methods served to influence other local farmers as well. One of the few glimpses into life at Brothertoft hall was provided by Major Cartwright in a letter written in 1796 to his niece who was away at a college in Richmond Hill. He wrote that her father (brother Edmund, the 'mechanician') was visiting Brothertoft and that they were very busy making machines of his invention such as ploughs, reapers, straw-cutters, etc. He also mentioned that the 'agreeable Mr. Obbins' was building more cow-houses and barns for a dairy, and James the postilion had expressed surprise that anyone [Cartwright's niece] should think that Well Vales was as beautiful as Brothertoft.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Young, *General Review*, pp. 76-7, 301, 326. A clause in the Witham Act prevented John Cartwright from obtaining any more silt from that area. However the old manor and Gilbertine lands closest to the hall are the most fertile ('boys' land') in the entire Holland Fen.

⁴⁹ F.D. Cartwright, ed., *The Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright* (London, 1826) 1, pp. 410-11; Possibly the Sylvester Obbins of Boston, carpenter and master joiner. *Boston Minutes*, 6, 1780, p. 362. Cartwright's wife was Ann Dashwood of Well Vale, in North Lindsey.

All this building and farming activity in Brothertoft suggests that Cartwright was personally occupied with convertible husbandry and the integration of livestock with arable farming. His annoyance at having to pay full tolls on the Witham for the transport of fertiliser might even have encouraged his dairy-building project for the further advantages of manure and mixed farming.⁵⁰ The construction of cow-houses and barns by the Boston corporation for their tenants in 1772-3 could also have been supportive of the new methods. This gives rise to the speculation that 'new husbandry' methods were being practised on some of the larger farms in Holland Fen very soon after its enclosure in 1769. An early example of mixed, or possibly even proto-'high farming', can be found at Terry Booth Farm (former site of the old Tarry booth) on the banks of the Kyme Eau and in the north-westerly corner of Holland Fen.⁵¹ This isolated farm and group of buildings which were built in the late eighteenth century contains an enclosed crewyard, as the photographs in figures 3.7 to 3.9 overleaf illustrate.⁵² Terry Booth Farm is situated inside the fen allotment made to Earl Fitzwilliam [for Dogdyke] and where, as mentioned in a previous chapter, the enclosure Award ruled that his land was 'to be set out and allotted as near to, and as convenient as might be to the other lands and grounds belonging to the said Earl'.⁵³

⁵⁰ Young described a variety of husbandry implements on Cartwright's farm in 1797 with drawings of ploughs and corn stack covers. Also a machine for weighing live cattle and sheep that JC had '*erected while he pursued grazing*', as if this had already ceased. Young, *General Review*, pp. 75-92. Cartwright had experimented in cattle-breeding.

⁵¹ Grigg, *Agricultural Revolution*, p. 190, 'clearly some farmers in every region in S. Lincolnshire. had adopted the methods of the New Husbandry by the 1790s and *indeed may well have done so at a much earlier date*'; More research on these farm buildings is planned when access becomes available. See later reference to high farming on page 111; My thanks to Shirley Brook for her advice on farm buildings of this period.

⁵² Pevsner, *Lincolnshire*, p. 218; Wheeler affirmed that the use of oil-cake for feeding cattle had been 'in vogue since the last [18th] century', Wheeler, *A History*, p. 407; There is another Terry Booth farm on the opposite, western side of the Kyme Eau and outside the bounds of Holland Fen.

⁵³ *Holland Fen Award*, pp. 18-19, 127.



Figure 3.7 The isolated farmhouse and 'paddyhouse' (left) at Terry Booth Farm, Holland Fen.



Figure 3.8 Terry Booth Farm, the enclosed crew-yard, built *c.* 1790s.



Figure 3.9 Catslider roof on the northern side of the crew-yard, Terry Booth Farm

Access to the farm would have benefited greatly from its convenient riverside location. At the same time, the Fitzwilliam family had extensive other lands, notably in East Anglia, a region where innovative farming methods, high feeding, and similar farm complexes are known to have existed before *c.* 1780.⁵⁴

At Brothertoft, Young boarded the Langrick ferry and crossed over the river Witham into Wildmore Fen, where the contrast of seeing whole acres covered with nettles and thistles growing to a height of four feet over there, quite appalled him. This fen, together with neighbouring East and West fens, was still unenclosed and it was estimated that about 40,000 sheep, or one per acre, rotted on the three fens during 1793. On learning that 'incredible numbers' or whole flocks of sheep were stolen from the fens Young

⁵⁴ LAO. Archivists' Report 10, 1 April 1958 to 14 March 1959, p.17, Sir Matthew Lamb, a relative of Fitzwilliam, was his agent for Dogdyke *c.*1767-8; See Wade Martins and Williamson, *Roots of Change*, pp. 89-91.

observed that 'so wild a country nurses up a race of people as wild as the fen...for want of an enclosure'. On the occasion of a boat trip into the heart of East Fen organised by Sir Joseph Banks of Revesby (a mile north of West Fen), Young was horrified to see that that some parts of the East fen 'had the appearance of a chain of lakes bordered by great crops of reeds...three or four feet deep in water' and with blue clay the bottom.⁵⁵

To what extent grain was being produced in the Holland Fen during the Napoleonic wars remains unclear. Grigg's map of the distribution of grain crops in South Lincolnshire for 1801 provided no aggregate figures for grain or fodder crops in Holland Fen and the area is tantalisingly blank. Fen data for the early-nineteenth century was usually incorporated into the returns of the home parishes.⁵⁶ Farming conditions at the turn of the century appear to have been difficult in the fens. One pamphlet in 1800 reported that

...of the last six seasons, four have been so wet that most of the new enclosed fens bordering on the Witham were inundated and the crops either lost or materially injured. Many hundred acres of the harvest of 1799 were reaped by men in boats. Of the oats fished up in this way some sold in Boston at 25/- [sic] per last, when good oats were selling at ten pounds.

Another described the reaping as having been done 'by men standing up to their middle in water and clipping off the ears wherever they peeped above the surface'.⁵⁷ Young's observations on crops in the 'rich arable' of Brothertoft and Holland Fen' dismissed all corn in general as inferior and expensive to hand-weed; oats, cole, beans, and barley were commonly grown, and other products included potatoes, cabbages, flax and 'very few'

⁵⁵ Young, *General Review*, pp. 253-4, 263.

⁵⁶ Grigg, *Agricultural Revolution*, pp. 73-74, figures 10, 11. Grigg suggested that tillage occupied no more than a third of the area in S. Lincolnshire by 1801 (p.70); For the 1801 crop acreage figures of seven of the Holland Fen parishes/townships see Table C. in Appendix 1; Cole, coleseed, or rape, is a biennial plant of the turnip family.

⁵⁷ Wheeler, *A History*, p. 160; However a similar report in 1777 that 'all Holland Fen was under water', was fiercely denied by a 'large proprietor' who warned that such an uncontradicted report would deter many workers from coming into the fen for the harvest. *London Chronicle*, 21 August 1777.

turnips.⁵⁸ It took much experimentation by local farmers to discover the best methods of using the clay and saline silt areas of the fen. Barley was found to be a difficult crop to grow owing to its tendency to mildew and to infect succeeding crops such as wheat. None of the modern sprays for killing off dormant fungus in the soil having yet been discovered. However according to Young, the sowing of barley 'for mowing to soil horses, etc. within the stable' was 'a singular husbandry' in Holland Fen.⁵⁹ Cole too, was found to have its problems when it was suspected that sheep raised on cole were at risk of 'a fatal malady called the respe', supposedly owing to the narcotic quality of very luxuriant crops. Trials also showed that the yields of wheat often improved after repeated sowing of other crops, such as oats, had been made on new, fertile land in order to exhaust the high nitrogen content of the soil.

By the time of the grain shortage during the Napoleonic wars, the fenland soils had matured after repetitive ploughings and oat crops to become more suitable for growing wheat of a better quality; this enabled many farmers to switch over to wheat and increase their production. However, the drainage and ploughing of new fenland usually took many months or even years to prepare in difficult areas and it was some time before the newly-ploughed fields were able to take over the production of oats. Grigg's figures for 1811 showed that the total amount of wheat and oats exported from Boston, mainly to London, had managed to double in the years since 1803 (wheat had increased by 525 per cent, oats by only 88 per cent). Even so, by 1815 the overall increase in wheat and oats exports from Boston had fallen back to below 37 per cent when the peak in wheat prices had been halved.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Young, *General Review*, pp. 117-140.

⁵⁹ Young, *General Review*, p. 140. Barley was grown at Malt Kiln Farm in Fosdyke Fen to supply its malt kiln, see later chapter.

⁶⁰ Grigg, *Agricultural Revolution*, pp. 71, 117. Figures taken from his Table 5, p.71.

In the Holland Fen, drainage remained imperfect and flooding occurred regularly during periods of bad weather and high tides. In 1811 there had been yet more serious flooding and both crops and animals were lost, while the agricultural depression that followed the Napoleonic wars only added to the problems. Surveyors' reports continued to make it obvious that the entire navigation course of the river Witham, from above Lincoln to the Wash outfall below Boston, was still a problem and although there were many expensive schemes recommended, the cost of such a major undertaking was usually too prohibitive to be considered as a whole.⁶¹ Piecemeal repairs and the scouring of major drains usually had to be discontinued when the funding ran out. It was essential to consider the whole context of fenland drainage throughout South Lincolnshire for there were also serious problems with the area covered by the Black Sluice Internal Drainage Board.⁶² The latter comprised a catchment area, or Level, of over 134,000 acres south of the Witham and this included the Holland Fen; about 30 drains flowed into the main South Forty Foot drain, which then emptied itself into the Black Sluice and the Wash outfall. Progressive knowledge about the scouring and silting processes, the dropping of surface levels caused by land drying out,⁶³ and consequently the raising of water (aided by 63 windmills, steam engines, followed by diesel engines) from parish drains into the South Forty Foot drain was only acquired after centuries of disasters. These were disasters that each fenland generation had to face in varying degrees.

Investment in drainage as well as the cultivation of fenland was essential but the collapse of three commercial banks in Boston only made businessmen and landowners more cautious, especially those who had made recent purchases of land only to find that

⁶¹ Wheeler gave the financial estimates for some of these schemes up to £120,000. For a detailed discussion of the navigation reports and proposed drainage schemes see Wheeler, *A History*, pp. 157-181.

⁶² For a map of the Six Districts of the BSIDB, see in Appendix 1.

⁶³ This had a more serious effect in the peat fens.

the banks foreclosed or raised their mortgages. After the Napoleonic wars it was the fall in prices and break up of absentee-landlord estates that gave small farmers, and prudent labourers, an opportunity to purchase small freeholds. Although there was a severe shortage of buyers for the larger farms and estates, small farms were in great demand, careful tenants who had managed to make a profit and save a little money now found them within their budgets, while others bought smallholdings to run as family concerns. When he moved residence to Enfield in 1805, Cartwright had no heir to take over from him and appears to have leased his Brothertoft estate (possibly because he was standing as MP in the Boston elections of that period) to a William Seaton, while retaining William Amos as his steward at Brothertoft.⁶⁴ It seems that the profitable woad business had come to an end. When Cartwright decided to sell up in 1813 he found that he had to split the estate into separate farms and sell for less than he had hoped.⁶⁵ The decline in profits was so sudden that he declared in a letter to his wife, 'there will be less for those I love than I reckoned on *three months ago*' [my italics]. The first conveyance in 1814 was of one messuage divided into two tenements and a modest 35 acres of land which was purchased for £2,880 by Lancelot Barnsdale, a Brothertoft grazier. Brothertoft hall together with 140 acres of land was purchased by Henry Gee of Boston, a successful merchant, brewer, and banker who had been the Mayor of Boston on a couple of occasions.⁶⁶

The account books for Lord Brownlow's estates in Holland, Lincolnshire which commenced in 1793 show that the number of his tenants had slowly decreased in the area before the books ended in 1814; this leads to some speculation that he too, may have

⁶⁴ LAO. Overseers of the Poor accounts, Brothertoft Par. 13/1, 1804-05, a William Seaton was assessed for 1097.10 acres at 9d acre; My thanks to Barry Thomas for this information on William Amos.

⁶⁵ *Times* (London), 10 February 1797, Cartwright had sought £52,000 for his Brothertoft estate in 1797.

⁶⁶ Cartwright, *Life and Correspondence*, I, pp. 321-2, II, p.71. Cartwright found agricultural concerns 'irksome' while his energies remained focussed on radical politics; *Abstract*, 30, Final Concord. The whole estate had comprised 'the Manor of Brothertoft with the appurtenances, two messuages, 14 cottages, one mill, three barns, six stables, four gardens, two orchards, 800 acres of land, 50 acres meadow, and 300 acres pasture'; *Abstract*, 36, 37.

consolidated his larger estates at the expense of small fenland farms during this time. On one occasion his surveyor noted that a local person purchased land in Holland 'that should have gone to Lord Brownlow'.⁶⁷ Tenant farmers in South Lincolnshire found the post-war years an ideal time to further the local recognition of 'tenant-right'.⁶⁸ This was an agreed compensation payable by an incoming tenant for any unexhausted investment or improvements that the outgoing occupant had made and was due when the tenants entered or quitted their farms. As Grigg pointed out, tenant right was essential not only because land was more generally let on yearly tenancies, in this region there was also a great deal of land that could not be worked without having a substantial tenant investment. He concluded that the existence of tenant right must have been a major factor in accounting for the rapid transformation of South Lincolnshire farming between 1815–1850.⁶⁹

In 1846 a further Act of Parliament was obtained in order to build a new Black Sluice with wider spans and sills 6 feet lower than the existing ones. This was erected south of, and adjoining, the old Black Sluice and Lewin's draughtsman-like painting captured its construction (see again in Appendix 1).⁷⁰ At the same time the whole of the South Forty Foot drain was deepened although it still required forty windmills to pump water into the drain. Perseverance and improved technology helped the fenland to cope better with its drainage problems and by 1851 the steam engines were able to take over and provide the power to drive the windmills, the latter having proved so ineffective on days when there was little or no wind to drive them. Large areas of the Holland Fen had already been transformed despite the bad years when parts of the fen became, once again, under water. These were the times when continuous rainfall could create floods to a depth of

⁶⁷ LAO. BNLW. *Estates*, 1805.

⁶⁸ In 1768 Boston corporation had agreed to let G. Hales take his barn materials away at the end of his lease. Also in 1780, 'the crop now growing on the ground to be taken at a fair Appraisalment' by an incoming tenant. *Boston Minutes*, 6, pp. 197, 362.

⁶⁹ Grigg, *Agricultural Revolution*, pp. 132-35.

⁷⁰ BSIDB, *Golden Jubilee*, p. 20. The estimated cost was £100,000. This was the third Black Sluice to be built. For the site of the Black Sluice refer to figure 1.9.

between one to five feet across forty square miles of low land, and times when severe high tides caused the Witham to rise to record heights of 15 feet 11 inches on the sills of the Grand Sluice.⁷¹

Before 1848 when the railways arrived in the area, transport of goods to and from the Holland Fen was mainly by horse or water. Horses walked with a side-ways gait as they tugged boats along the banks and narrow tow-paths of the river Witham and beside the drains. The river was busy with barges loaded with coal from the Nottinghamshire pits, and with the Witham Steam Navigation Company that ran daily, inland steam packets to Lincoln. There were weekly journeys made from the Grand Sluice up to Hull. Lighter barges were able to navigate the drains. Waterman's Call at the junction of Clay Dyke and the South Forty Foot drain was, as its name suggests, a public house or depot for packet boats, and at Chapel Hill one of the 'turning' places for boats is still visible. High-arched bridges over the drains allowed packet boats with folding masts to pass beneath them and small barges travelling to Boston along the North Forty Foot drain were able to pass under the Langrick turnpike road via the Toft Tunnel, at Brothertoft. One of the original bridges can be seen in figure 3.10 overleaf.

The first trains to rumble past Holland Fen to and from Boston, via Peterborough and Lincoln, arrived in October, 1848.⁷² Because of the inflexible layout of fenland drains, the GNR Loop Line to Boston followed the north-eastern bank of the river Witham and the station was built at Langrick. This meant that access to the station from the Holland Fen side of the river needed to be via Brothertoft and the Langrick ferry. Fortunately the ferry

⁷¹ The worst of these years were 1852 and 1869.

⁷² Wright, *Railways*, p. 27.



Figure 3.10. One of the original bridges over the North Forty Foot drain. The high arch allowed small packet and carrier boats to pass underneath. Kirton Fen is on the left with the North Forty Foot Bank road from Toft Tunnel to Chapel Hill, just visible on the right.

was equipped with a jetty, a rowing boat, a larger broad-beamed boat and a flat ramper, together with a ramp and wagons to contain livestock. With another boat for passengers it seems to have coped with most situations.

Two years later the new GNR link line with Nottingham, Grantham, and Boston was also obliged to circumnavigate the network of drains and enclosures in Holland Fen. As figure 3.11 shows, this line followed the northern bank of the South Forty Foot drain where a well-placed station at Hubberts Bridge provided a more convenient access for Holland Fen farmers than Langrick. Although little more than a wooden structure on piles

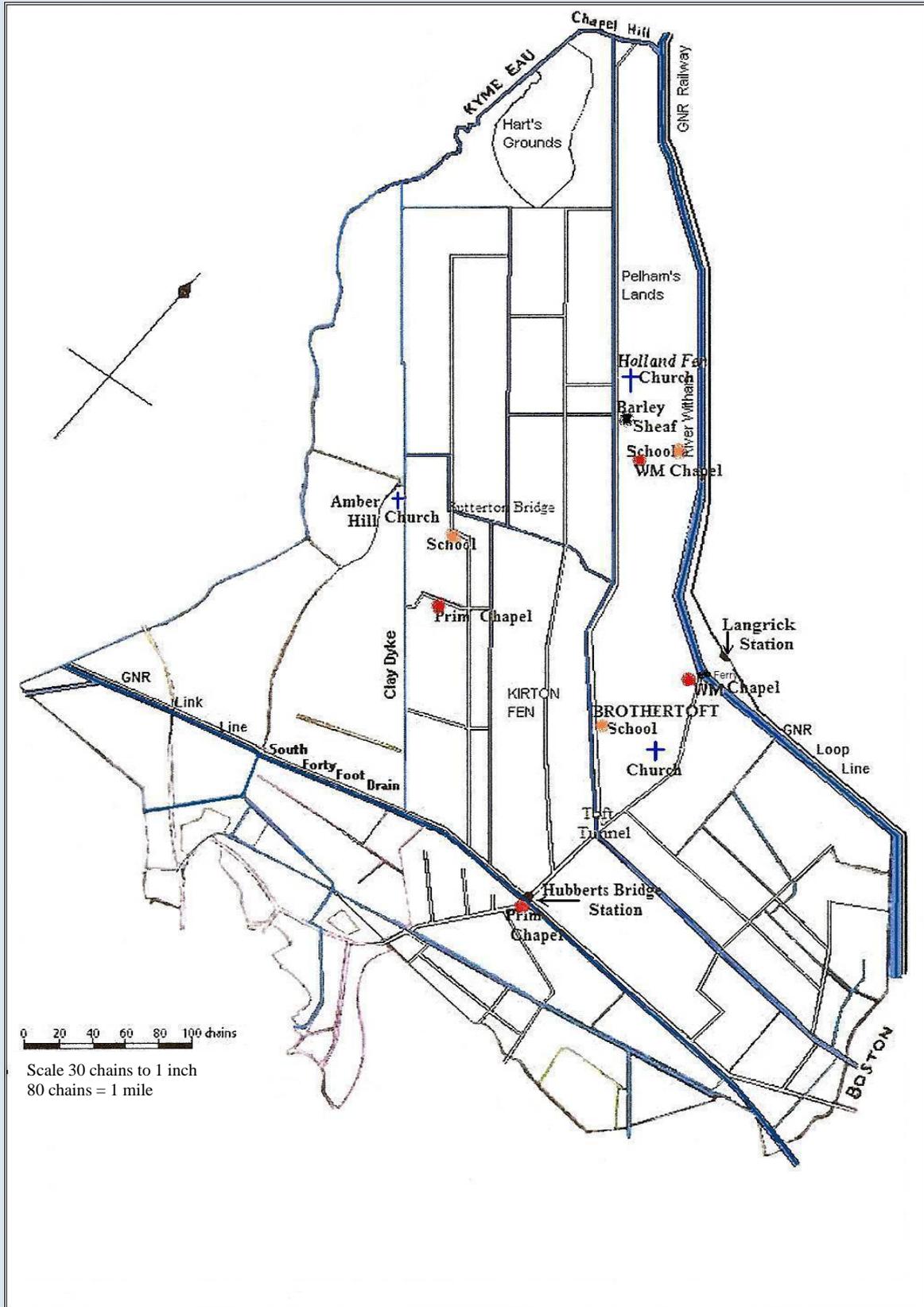


Figure 3.11 Showing Langrick Station and the GNR Loop Line (1848) running alongside the river Witham. Also Hubberts Bridge station and the GNR Link Line (1850) beside the South Forty Foot drain.

sunk into the South Forty Foot Drain at that time, the bridge was situated at the junction of several fen roads as well as the turnpike roads to Langrick Ferry and Boston. It was during this phase of building activity and increased prosperity that many Victorian farmhouses, together with new barns to store the grain, enclosed cattle yards, and stables were built in the fen. Agriculture experienced an acceleration of the so-called 'high farming' system, a period of progress and improvement that had peaked by the 1840s and continued until the late 1870s. It was a 'high-input, high-output' system geared to the use of imported, artificial fertiliser for improved crop growth, and the use of oil-cake as animal fodder. Oil cake allowed more livestock to be fattened in stalls and the organic manure produced was spread upon arable land. Agricultural machinery such as steam engines and portable threshing machines had become acceptable to the workforce, and so more emphasis was put on mixed farming, fodder crops, soil fertility, and increasing the supply of grain to feed a rising urban population.⁷³

The landscape of Holland Fen, where vast flocks of sheep, geese, cattle and horses had once grazed amongst a wilderness of sykes, dykes, and waterlogged marshes, continued to change as even more land was cleared for ploughing and farm building accelerated. In the Holland Fen there was always a shortage of farm workers and yet the methods of high farming demanded that greater numbers were required to look after livestock and work on the arable land. Before this could happen though, the problems of individual social groups who were isolated from their home parishes needed to be addressed.

⁷³ Grigg, *Agricultural Revolution*, p. 153, Grigg was confident that there was a remarkable improvement in productivity in South Lincolnshire between 1815 and 1851.

CHAPTER 4

Social Development and the Fen Communities, 1770-1870

Earlier chapters have centred upon the major drainage and enclosure procedures taking place in the Holland Fen during the eighteenth century. We have seen how the huge drainage operations of 1762 left an inflexible grid of rivers and drains across the fenland and how the structure of the fen was compromised by the incorporation of fifty fen allotments into this network of waterways. When just eight of the allotments (consisting of 14,054 acres) were enclosed for use in severalty the further integration of plots inside an already rigid framework changed the landscape completely and restrained any social development.

While other chapters have centred upon the external parishes and townships having common rights in the Holland Fen and on their allocated lands, it is also important to look at how landholders and rural workers settled into the various enclosures within the fen. This chapter will consider where the new fen communities were located and the manner in which they developed whilst surrounded by the inflexible layout of drains and enclosure boundaries. The significance of Brothertoft, its special relationship with the fen and new neighbourhoods will be explored, together with perimeter settlements, migration, extra-parochial areas, religion, and the growing need for civil integration.

Pre-enclosure settlement and society.

In order to apportion every useable acre of the commons the enclosure commissioners had first to ensure that Holland Fen was cleared of all unlawful settlers and

their dwellings before the work began. This included the many fishing booths, temporary shelters, and livestock pounds inside the fen itself, several intakes on the fen-edge, and the ramshackle hovels hidden on remote islets deep within the marshes. Just how many people lived illegally in this part of the fen or only during the summer months is impossible to ascertain although they appear to have been a substantial number. They were sufficient to spread their grievances throughout the eleven local parishes/townships and incite the crowds to march on Boston. Loss of the common land and its amenities was also a disaster for the many hundreds of local people who used the fen but did not actually inhabit it.¹ As the fen laws recognised, there were numerous aspects in which the fenland and its products subsidised generations of the local society. Countless people relied on the fenland for food, fuel, and the keeping of livestock, amenities that allowed some measure of independence and delayed the distress of asking for parochial help.

Social life changed forever when the old customs and traditional rites, especially communal events on the fenland, were unable to take place after enclosure. One such ritual, that of the haymaking ceremony which used to commence at a pre-arranged midnight in mid-summer, was an occasion when all local commoners could each claim their personal share of the hay by marking out an area that they could scythe before dawn. They could then collect, remove, and store the precious winter fodder at their leisure. Another annual custom was held on 8th July when the fen reeves drove all unmarked sheep found 'in their wool' to Brothertoft and there levied a fee of 4d. per animal on those owners having no common-right; this was the start of a week-long festival called the 'Toft Drift'. During this period about thirty large booths were erected for the vending of ale and provisions and 'many hundreds' of people arrived from Boston and the surrounding villages

¹ According to a London newspaper, 6,000 local inhabitants had 'for time immemorial enjoyed the privilege of breeding and supporting [on Holland Fen] not less than 100,000 head of cattle yearly', *Bingleys' London Journal*, 31 October 1772.

to be entertained by the open-door hospitality of Brothertoft inhabitants.² These occasions usually coincided with disorderly games of football played across certain acres of newly mown, common land such as the Mown Rakes in the west. After enclosure, any leisure pursuits such as these were made especially difficult by the erection of new fences and boundary ditches.

Whatever his motives may have been, Sir Gilbert Heathcote appears to have been the only person in his position to oppose the enclosure based on concerns that it would prove prejudicial to the poor.³ As for the poorest commoners the only acknowledgement of their condition was found in a document which refuted Sir Gilbert's objections to enclosure. His referral to the 'Inclosure... being prejudicial to the Country, and particularly to the Poor' was dismissed by this matter-of-fact reply,

...and as to the Poorer Class of Commoners, they must Evidently be benifitted [sic] by having a Near, Certain, and bounded common, instead of an Unbounded, And, as to great Part of it, a very distant Common.⁴

As the promoters of enclosure pointed out, the poorest classes of each parish were to have their own commons allocated in the fen and certainly these are to be found in most of the parish lists, although not always situated within their own fenland. For instance, the poor of Algarkirk qualified for 10 acres in Wigtoft Fen, the needy of Fosdyke had 16 acres in their own fen plus 2 roods 16 perches in Kirton Fen, while Brothertoft also had a little over an acre for its poor in the Kirton Fen plus some charity lands in Wyberton and Kirton. Indeed, Sir Gilbert should have had no qualms for his own underprivileged in Swineshead

² Mrs Guch & M. Peacock (eds), *County Folk Lore; Lincolnshire*, 5 (1908), pp. 308-9. Reproduced online at http://www.archive.org/stream/countyfolklore05folkuoft/countyfolklore05folkuoft_djvu.txt 15 March 2009.

³ *Bingley's London Journal*, 21 November 1772. In this newspaper 'A Friend to Truth' publicly attacks Sir Gilberts' real motives by suggesting that, 'his opposition was principally occasioned by his tenant Stavely, who at that time was desirous to preserve his sheep-ground in the Fens, and to dispossess every other person of it who had as good a right according to the true spirit of a fen-man'. An attempt was made on Stavely's life in 1771.

⁴ LAO. Misc. Dep. 111. *Case of the Promoters*.

where there were seven plots of land consisting of more than 30 acres for the poor, as well as several other charity lands. Sutterton parish allocated a magnificent 65 acres of land for its poor people in the Sutterton Fen. Although these designated poor lands were usually let to tenants, the revenue was important in caring for the parish needy and so helped to reduce claims on the poor rate. The impropriator, vicar, and churchwardens of Frampton gave a piece of land worth £20 'in trust for indigent and industrious persons who receive no weekly or monthly Collection from the parish'; the land was let 'for coals or other fuels for the benefit of the Poor'.⁵ Sir Gilbert's claim would therefore appear to have been unsubstantiated, unless of course he was actually referring to the loss of independence and wide range of commodities that the fen had provided. He may also have been concerned that the numbers of dispossessed would prove even more considerable than those who proposed enclosure had anticipated, thus placing an enormous strain on the poor rates of local parishes.

Those of the evicted fen people who were able to work found that there was plenty of employment available within the numerous labour gangs required for all ongoing drainage and enclosure schemes. It has been suggested that mobile gangs experienced in piecework were usually brought in from the outside areas to do this work and therefore restricted the employment of local workers. However, the amount of road-toll improvements, drainage schemes, and surge of Parliamentary enclosures taking place throughout Lincolnshire during the late-eighteenth century must certainly have increased the demand for local labour.⁶ In the south of the county there remained thousands of miles of ditches and drains to excavate and yet more rivers to be embanked. Migration into Boston was another option for the displaced while the Midland towns with their growing industries beckoned to those who were willing, or even forced to seek a new life away

⁵ LAO. Misc. Dep. 482, Frampton 1784.

⁶ Whyte, *Migration*, p. 155; Snell, *Annals*, p. 182.

from their own habitat. However, the poor, the elderly, and the infirm had little alternative other than to return to their place of settlement, to go to relatives, or simply throw themselves upon the mercy of the local authorities. Inevitably, the poor rate assessments of local parishes increased significantly during the 1770s as a consequence of the closure of the fen in 1769. In the parishes around Holland Fen, Hindle found that a vast majority of the settlement litigation was already concerned with the disputes between neighbouring parish officers as they 'scrambled to avoid liability for those whose settlement was in doubt'. At Frampton, he found that although the poor rate had hovered around 6d. to 7d. per acre for the period 1730-60, it jumped sharply to 19d. after 1769 when enclosures took effect in Holland Fen. This was the highest amount per acre that the Frampton vestry books had ever recorded.⁷ At Brothertoft the assessment was 24d. per acre in 1770, although this decreased to just 8d. four years later. Even though it continued to retain its own fen allotment as a common, Wyberton's rate of 14d. in 1771 soared during the ten years following until it reached a high of 30d. in 1781, it then decreased to a more acceptable 8d. Predictably, the rate in Wyberton increased again from 8d. to 18d. in the two years following 1789 when the fen allotment was finally enclosed.⁸ At a time when the last great enclosure of 4,500 acres in the parishes around Holbeach took place in 1793, the poor law accounts of Frampton for 1794-5 showed a marked increase of 51 per cent. By contrast, the poor law accounts elsewhere during the same period, for instance in Raithby, in the Lindsey district of Lincolnshire, and for Bassingham, in Kesteven, remained static and low.⁹

⁷ Hindle, 'Power', pp. 81-85. This was followed by another sharp increase in the rate after Frampton enclosed its fen allotment in 1784. See his graph in figure 1, p.82.

⁸ LAO. Brothertoft PAR 13/1, Overseers of the Poor rate assessment, 1770-1808; LAO. Wyberton PAR.13/1/1, Overseers of the Poor, 1771-1792.

⁹ LAO. Raithby by Spilsby 13/1, Poor Law accounts, 1789-1836; LAO. Bassingham PAR. 13/1, Poor Law accounts, 1789-1823.

Many of those landless squatters and itinerants who had managed to survive in the fen without any social order, as well as criminals who had chosen to live outside the law, may simply have moved on to inhabit other fens and marshes. Over to the north-east on the opposite bank of the river Witham lay the great unenclosed commons of the East, West, and Wildmore fens, the land that would cause Arthur Young so much dismay in the 1790s, and which remained unenclosed and undrained until the early nineteenth century.

Pre-enclosure settlement and the fen edges.

One of the numerous duties of the enclosure commissioners had been to survey the miscellany of medieval settlements along the fen boundaries and incorporate them into the complex enclosure plans. Many of these places were the legitimate communities of old monastery lands and had developed alongside the strategic road and water access routes around Holland Fen. Among them was the established hamlet of Chapel Hill (located in figure 1.3), which was situated at the most northerly point of Holland Fen on the Kesteven/Holland boundary. The Chapel Hill Hurn reached southwards across the boundary and over the Kyme Eau bridge to occupy a north-eastern corner of Holland Fen near the junction of the Kyme Eau and river Witham. It covered an area of approximately 88 acres between Harts Grounds and Pelham's Lands. Land in this area was two or three feet higher than the rest of Holland Fen and as its name implied, Chapel Hill with its ancient chapel and community was conveniently situated at the highest, driest, and most northerly access point of the fenland.¹⁰ The enclosure commissioners incorporated Chapel Hill Hurn into the list of fen allotments made to Swineshead parish.

¹⁰ Despite higher ground and the building of two wind-driven pumping 'engines', lands at Chapel Hill and Dogdyke (the latter had a 36' diameter scoop wheel), remained susceptible to flooding during prolonged periods of heavy rain and when unusually high tides surged up the river Witham from the Wash.

Elsewhere, on the south-westerly limits of Holland Fen, the settlement of North End was an old enclosure belonging to one of Swineshead's original manors. This tiny community had convenient access to the junctions of major drains as well as busy routes like the turnpike road between Swineshead and Boston to the east, and Donington to Hale on the west. As figure 1.3 shows, there were also homesteads such as the Creasey Plot and the Hardwick Farm in this vicinity, the latter being a grange farm of an adjacent Cistercian Abbey prior to dissolution. Near the farm was the convenient Hardwick Wharfe located at an intersection of both the Old and the New Hammond Becks. These legitimate, early settlements could not be cleared away or disputed by the commissioners and so these were also incorporated into the six fen allotments of Swineshead parish. Similarly on the eastern border of Holland Fen, the settlements of medieval origin in Boston West and Skirbeck Quarter had deployed themselves along the west bank of the river Witham. Soon after the completion of the new Grand Sluice in 1766, several warehouses, coal yards, and wharves were established in the area as the riverside businesses rapidly developed outwards and away from the centre of Boston. Despite regular flooding all of these suburbs preserved vital links to county and national markets via a network of road and water routes around the fenland. The parishes of Wigtoft, Kirton, Frampton, and Wyberton also contained small communities such as Kirton Holme, Kirton End, Frampton West End, and Wyberton West End. These had all developed along the extreme edges of their parishes close to the old Hammond Beck boundary and served as convenient access points into Holland Fen from the ancient drove roads. Until the new fenland communities were able to pioneer their own social and trading resources, these settlements located at strategic access points around the perimeter of the fen were able to provide some support to the settlers with trades and crafts.

Post-enclosure and early settlement.

As the Jefferys' map in figure 1.3 confirms, with the exception of Brothertoft none of the allotments within Holland Fen contained the main nucleated settlement, or a natural village core that was normally present in hundreds of other Parliamentary enclosures taking place across the county. Because the alignment of new allotments inside the fen was dominated by drains, dykes, and roadways, development of a community was restricted to the access routes. This was more noticeable in Algarkirk, Sutterton, and Kirton where the fen allotments were spread out along the length of several miles of roads and waterways.¹¹ In the more compact allotments of Boston West, Skirbeck Quarter, and Fosdyke fens the numerous small plots proved advantageous for a local exchange and joint hiring of labour, tools, and livestock breeding.

However, before any of this could happen those wishing to settle in the fen lacked any shelter there and needed to construct new farmhouses, cottages, and barns, work that the enclosure commissioners had expected to commence as soon as the awards were signed. Anticipating an initial surge of transportation into the fen and that unforeseen difficulties might arise because of restricted access to some lands, there was a stipulation that 'openings should be left for six months for passage of cattle, carts and carriages' to allow them to settle in.¹² Some of the landowners and tenants had probably gathered their own workforces, supplies, and transport in readiness to converge on the plots, hoping that the deadline would put an end to the disruption of husbandry and allow the seasonal work to continue without interruption. Most of the heavy supplies needed to be transported directly into the fen on boats via the interconnecting network of drains, before being

¹¹ For example, Algarkirk Fen was a narrow tract of land about 5.5 miles long and 0.75 mile wide.

¹² LAO. Misc. Dep. 482 (Acc. 85/99), Wyberton, 1789; LCL. L.HOLL.333.2, UP256, *A Bill for Dividing and inclosing a certain fen called the Haute Huntre, Eight Hundred, or Holland Fen, 1766.*

carried across the various fenland allotments by horse and cart.¹³ Of course, not all the owners of fen plots were able to take full advantage of their new land. The elderly, the infirm, and those without money to invest found that there were buyers and tenants eager for extra land, or to gain a foothold in the fen, especially if the plots were conveniently placed and in a reasonable condition.

Some of the first artisans and trades people located beside the drove roads and banks of drains where outlying farmers could gain access to their services via moorings and footbridges. For the farmer the most important of these was the blacksmith, and the wheelwright. Without the craftsmen's resources close to hand the horses, ploughs, carts, and wagons might all have come to a standstill while they waited for maintenance journeymen to arrive from neighbouring parishes. Later, where more land was cleared and the population had increased, there came a steady call for publicans, grocers, shoemakers, brewers, millers, and bricklayers to settle within the fenland. Meantime, as the small farmhouse communities co-operated with labour, the drudgery of reclaiming land, and essential supplies, farmers' wives in remote farmhouse areas stocked up with groceries and beer to retail to the agricultural workers and their families. Where small settlements of farmhouses and cottages continued to develop in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the bleak character and landscape of some parish allotments began to mellow slightly. This was more noticeable where orchards had been planted and some quick hedges had become well established around arable fields. The use of ditches rather than quick hedges to mark field boundaries was a traditional feature of the Holland parishes, a practice that was criticized by Lord Brownlow's estate steward. During his 1793-1814 surveys of a cluster of Holland estates in Gosberton, Bicker, Surfleet, Pinchbeck, Burtoft Fen, and Kirton Fen the steward, who was probably more accustomed to seeing an

¹³ This remained an established method of transporting bulky supplies and moving goods around the fen right up to the early twentieth century.

abundance of woods and green hedges around Lord Brownlow's holdings in Kesteven, seemed rather distracted by the bleak, fenland landscape. In 1805, he noted rather impatiently that the Holland estates 'were with scarcely anything but Ditch fences and of Course very bleak'. His survey notes were interspersed with suggestions for the improvement of fenland estates and he gave instructions that the arable land should be planted with quick hedges 'to form a proper shelter', or 'planted round with quick at the Tenant's expense'. On another occasion, he noted rather complacently that 'the Quicks are become very fine'.¹⁴

The isolated conditions in Holland Fen bear out Dennis Mills' observations about how many and how varied the types of rural communities could be, and at any given time almost all forms of such communities were present in the fen.¹⁵ For instance, there would have been the small communities within fen allotments that had shared the same friends and relations back in their home parishes, or even migrated from the same area of a distant parish where they had worked together. Population and access to amenities were also important factors. The Skirbeck Quarter allotment in the south-eastern corner of the fen was small and well populated, yet its close proximity to the township ensured that life there was vastly different to the lonely farmhouses in, say, the isolated Harts Grounds, or the more bleak areas of the Swineshead, Kirton, Sutterton, and Algarkirk Fens situated in the far north-west of the fenland. Although agriculture was the main pursuit of the fenland economy there was a variety of relationships within the confines of the fen. Within small communities there were the interactions that existed between neighbouring farms, or the employers and employees, between groups of skilled or non-skilled workers, of the trades

¹⁴ LAO. Survey books of the Estates of Lord Brownlow in Holland, Lincolnshire, 1793-1814. The stewards, some of whom were respectable gentlemen fallen on hard times, also acted as surrogate landlords when Brownlow was away; Young, *General View*, p. 112, Young found 'the whitethorn fences superior in Holland Fen but few seen in Deeping Fen'.

¹⁵ Mills, *Rural Community*, pp. 9-10.

people, and groups of women. There were also the exchanges between communities that had to share the same services, markets, or leisure, and others that were not actually of the same area but shared the same religion, interests, or working conditions; for example the members of nonconformist groups or the casual workers who moved from one community to another for the harvest work.

Migration.

To some extent the initial migration into Holland Fen had been protected by an enclosure process which ensured that only the inhabitants or taxpayers of each parish/township were the (original) beneficiaries of land.¹⁶ Any early migration of working-class people into Holland Fen would therefore have been intensely localised coming from neighbouring communities. Although the population gradually increased as more of the fen was brought under the plough, there remained a shortage of resident labour and this opened up opportunities to migrants from other regions. Nevertheless, census figures showed that as late as 1841, seventy years after enclosure, the vast majority of people living in Holland Fen had been born in Lincolnshire. As the Profiles lists in Appendix 2 illustrate, out of the eleven fenland areas from which it was possible to extract data, only 49 persons [2.3 per cent] of the 2,165 inhabitants were born outside the county.¹⁷ Was this typical of the situation elsewhere or were the rudimentary conditions in Holland Fen a deterrent to migration from other counties? Prompted by Whyte's conclusion that between the sixteenth century and the mid-nineteenth century 'most movement remained local, within communities or between neighbouring ones', similar data from the 1861 census was also examined.¹⁸

¹⁶ How quickly the plots were snapped up by outside buyers, in what quantities, and whether they eventually returned to local possession, awaits future research.

¹⁷ Algarkirk Fen, Boston West Fen, Brothertoft, Fosdyke Fen, Frampton Fen, Harts Grounds, Kirton Fen, North Forty Foot Bank, Pelham's Lands, Skirbeck Quarter Fen, and Sutterton Fen.

¹⁸ Whyte, *Migration*, p. 173.

Figures for the same eleven areas (Profiles, Appendix 2) showed that although the percentage of migrants from other regions had doubled in the following twenty years, only 102 [4.6 per cent] of the 2,235 inhabitants were born outside Lincolnshire. By 1861 most of the movement had indeed remained local or within the county.¹⁹ Although the 102 migrants came from a wide range of other counties including Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, two from America, and one from the East Indies, Holland Fen appears to have attracted most migrants from the neighbouring counties of Norfolk, Rutland, and Nottinghamshire.²⁰ Nevertheless, where the census enumerator provided an exact, local place of birth, 45 per cent of the inhabitants of North Forty Foot Bank, 43.2 per cent of Fosdyke Fen, 41.5 per cent of Algarkirk Fen, and 41.1 per cent of Kirton Fen were all born within the environs of Holland Fen itself. Census data for the other areas showed that fewer inhabitants (only 37.1 per cent of Brothertoft, 23.2 per cent of Skirbeck Quarter Fen, 18.5 per cent of Pelham's Lands, and 10.3 per cent in Boston West Fen) were natives of Holland Fen. These figures suggest that people working in the most remote fen allotments were more likely to have been encouraged to settle down and raise their families in the fen than in those where it was possible to commute more easily from Boston.²¹

The township of Brothertoft.

Brothertoft was unique given that it was already an established community situated entirely within a bounded area in Holland Fen and where it had commoned for at least five

¹⁹ In her examination of mobility in the Spalding fenland area (approximately 15 miles south of Holland Fen), Kussmaul also found 'a picture of constrained mobility', see A. S. Kussmaul, 'The ambiguous mobility of farm servants', *Economic History Review*, 34 (1981), p. 233.

²⁰ Of these 102 persons, 59 were either wives, children, relations, retired, or visitors; of the rest, 19 were labourers, servants, or carters, 9 were farmers, bailiffs, groundkeepers, or cottagers, 8 were lodgers, and 7 skilled tradesmen; P. Dewey, 'Farm Labour', in Collins (ed.), *Agrarian History I*, p. 831. Labourers' wages were much higher than in Norfolk and Rutland and slightly better than in Notts.

²¹ Sutterton Fen figures might have confirmed this but crucial information was incomplete, i.e. place of birth was indicated by 'parish' only; Pelham's Lands was extra-parochial; B. Short, 'Rural Demography', in Collins (ed.), *Agrarian History VII*, p.1276, his Figure 21.4 shows that Holland Fen was an area where natural gain exceeded out-migration.

centuries until enclosure restricted its access to the fen. Furthermore, the manor's higher terrain consisted of a rich loamy silt, a legacy that had been deposited by the meanderings of the prehistoric river Witham. Probably the earliest people to recognise the true value of the soil in Brothertoft were the Gilbertines whose lay-brothers farmed the land for arable crops, and the area might well have been perceived as the true 'heart' of Holland Fen itself. Its population at the time of enclosure is unknown although the Protestation Return of 1641-2, an oath signed by all adult males pledging themselves to defend the true reformed Protestant religion, was signed in Brothertoft by 74 adult males, a curate, two churchwardens, and an overseer of the poor.²² Recurring surnames of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Brothertoft wills suggest that the fen conditions and serious risk of flooding had not deterred several generations of established families from thriving there. Surviving documents show that there were Blysberys in Brothertoft from at least 1532 to 1671, and the Mablesons from 1538 to 1666 when Thomas Mableson bequeathed almost 24 acres of his lands in Wyberton and Kirton to eight poor families in Brothertoft. The Auwbyns lived in Brothertoft between 1590 and 1677 while members of the Raysar (yeomen) and the Rosse/Roos families were churchwardens and overseers of the poor in 1642. Possibly the longest-known surviving families in Brothertoft are the Tunnards with a will dated 1575, and the Pocklingtons of 1676; descendants of both families still reside within the Holland Fen area.

Brothertoft was a resolute territory despite its close proximity to the unpredictable North Sea tides, unstable river, and insecure drainage levels. The little township, or chapelry, had maintained direct contact with Lincoln, Boston, and other coastal ports by way of the river since medieval times; indeed the convenient new riverbanks, ferry crossing, and busy turnpike roads proved a great improvement for those who travelled

²² W.F. Webster, *Protestation Returns 1641/2 Lincolnshire* (Nottingham, 1984), pp. 8-9.

across the fenland from other areas. Several entries in the late-eighteenth century overseers of the poor accounts refer to some of the disbursements made to these travellers, for instance, a shilling to 'a woman with a pass' from Louth to Stamford, two shillings for 'relieving two sailors with a pass' [three similar entries in 1805], and four shillings in 1807 'to relieving seven Americans with a pass'.²³ Despite having had a non-resident lord of the manor and a vulnerable bailiff who had been attacked and seriously injured during the recent enclosure riots, settlement in Brothertoft appears to have been recovering according to the poor rate assessment book of 1770. Although small in number any settlement claims, removals, and bastardy orders were all pursued with the usual vigour and expenses. Between eight and fifteen people paid a rate that varied from 6d. in 1776 to 27d. in 1784, depending on the number of removals, sick inhabitants, church repairs, militia, and funeral expenses that accrued in any given year. The Brothertoft accounts convey an impression of a close-knit community and its disbursements seemed neither grudging nor overly generous. By 1790, the book-keeping had altered noticeably and taken on a tidier format, perhaps because Major John Cartwright had arrived recently at Brothertoft hall and was personally authorizing the accounts.

Cartwright's arrival as the resident lord of the manor in 1788 probably caused dismay amongst those who were used to following a more conventional way of life in the Lincolnshire fenland. Although strict, he was a thoughtful and benevolent man, but Cartwright held firm radical ideas about many things including the need for political reform. He called for annual parliaments, universal suffrage, the secret ballot, and he was also enthusiastic about agricultural improvement, scientific research, and moral behaviour. This probably meant that more of his contemporaries were irritated by him than admired him. As described earlier, his advanced ideas on farming with the development of

²³ LAO. Brothertoft PAR 13/1, Overseers of the Poor Rate Assessments, 1770-1808.

agricultural implements and intensive woad-production at Brothertoft were full of innovation and enthusiasm, drawing much attention from the experts. Juggling both his farming and his political activities must have been exhausting although he did find the time to concern himself with local affairs and attended various social gatherings of the county elite. Cartwright appears to have been equally at home with both the London aristocracy and the Lincolnshire gentry, although social life in south Lincolnshire must have contrasted greatly with the social and political functions that he attended regularly in London.²⁴

While it seems unlikely that Brothertoft witnessed any grand social gatherings at the modest hall, shown in figure 4.1, its occupants often entertained family members, and the eccentric Cartwright was visited frequently by his friends and political associates. Some of his friends in the more intellectual, social circles of Boston and the fenland during the 1790s were likely to have included the renowned explorer and naturalist Sir Joseph Banks of Revesby, and Thomas Fydell, a wine merchant of Boston, M.P., and Mayor upon three occasions. Both men had been strong advocates of the campaign to drain and enclose the Haute Huntre Fen and, although Banks was only nineteen years of age at the time, he was among those persons present at the inaugural drainage proposals in Sleaford. Although Banks did not approve of Cartwright's politics the men remained on friendly terms, especially since Cartwright was one of the general drainage commissioners.

The Sleaford meetings had led to the passing of the Witham Drainage Act, and therefore by way of its circuit of drains and dykes to the restraint of social development in Holland Fen, but the Act had an opposite effect on Brothertoft. The *bête noire* of the

²⁴ As nephew of Lady Elizabeth Tyrconnel (Sir John Brownlow's second wife), he spent school holidays at Belton Park, ancestral home of the Brownlows. Cartwright's wife Ann was the daughter of Samuel Dashwood, owner of a large estate at Well Vale Hall, near Alford, in Lincolnshire.

Brothertoft inhabitants had always been the tortuous river itself. While an entire region between Lincoln and Boston was vulnerable to the flooding of the Witham, the little



Figure 4.1 Brothertoft Hall, c. 2000, enlarged and greatly restored in the nineteenth century.

manor and its several farms had always been under pressure from the labyrinth of swollen creeks and marshes that emanated from the river.²⁵ As already explained, prior to the drainage operations and re-routing of the Witham many of these marshes and creeks had been colonized by the very poor and groups of lawless squatters. After the river had been re-cut all these areas were cleared and filled in, the ferry was re-installed in a more convenient place for the crossing to Langrick, and the new, high river banks served to protect both its lawful inhabitants and wildlife alike from the worst of floods. In figure 4.2, William Brand's drawing of Langrick ferry, captures the ferry crossing place as it looked in 1793 and features the high river banks in the background.

²⁵ Local tradition has it that the creeks used to pass close to the door of the chapel in Brothertoft.

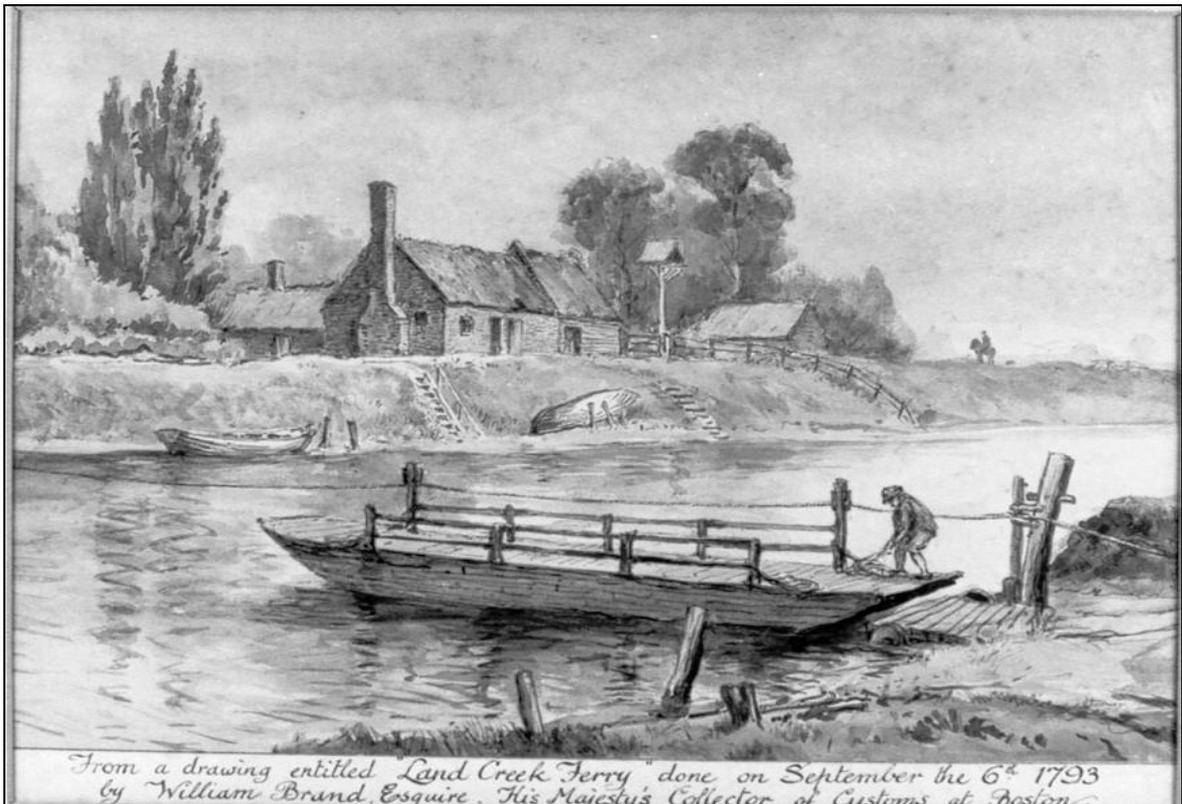


Figure 4.2 'Land Creek' or Langrick ferry on the Witham between Brothertoft and Langrick, 1793. (Drawing by William Brand, the Customs Officer at Boston). Author's private collection.

The length of the straight new river between Chapel Hill and the Grand Sluice in Boston was approximately ten miles and it proved to be a popular stretch of water for pleasure boats and fishermen.²⁶ Some fenland leisure activities could be very relaxed and resourceful, like the exclusive fishing parties that took place on the river. It was on social occasions like these that the navigational improvements to the Witham could be most appreciated; very strict regulations prohibited the usual dumping of ashes or waste into the river and prevented any obstruction of the river traffic by unauthorised jetties, weirs, and moorings. Passengers on board the leisure boats were able to admire the transformed scenery of Holland Fen on one side of the river whilst comparing it to the undrained and

²⁶ Before the Witham Drainage Act of 1762, this length of river was about 12 miles and consisted of thirty bends.

unenclosed wilderness on the opposite bank. From the river viewpoint, naturalists were able to sketch and study the wildlife of hawks, herons, brown hares, and the variety of

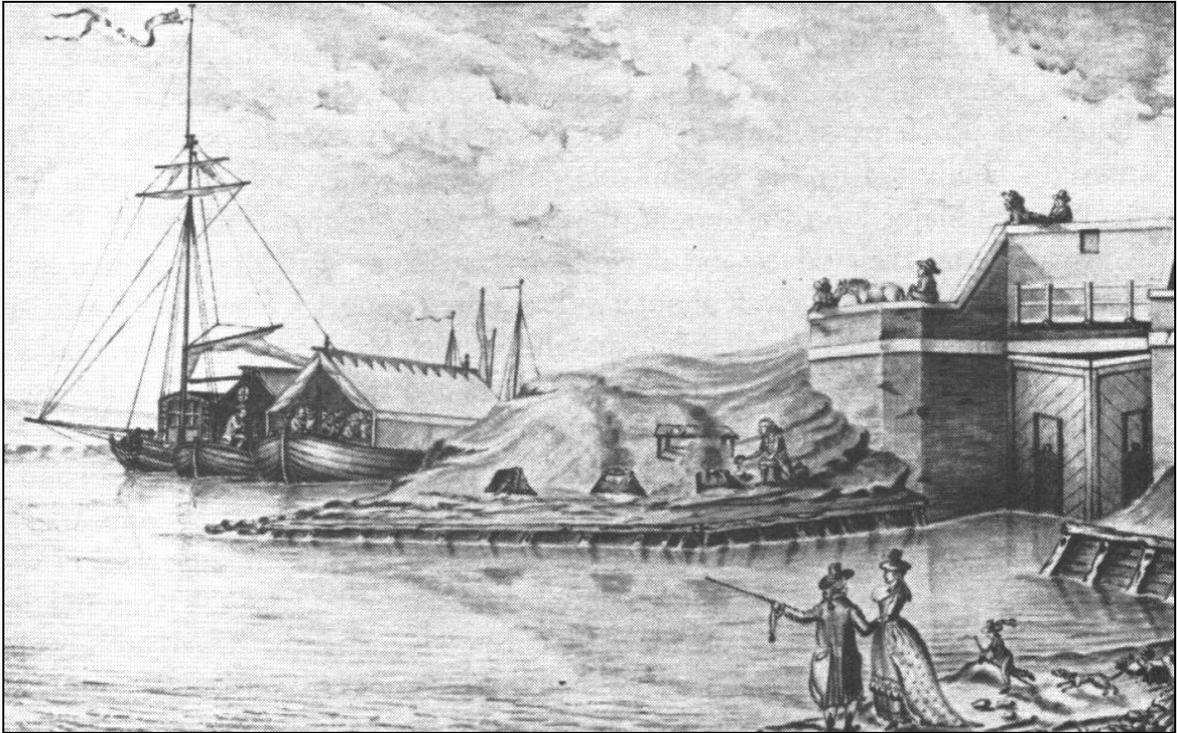


Figure 4.3 Leisure boats moored two miles east of Langrick ferry at Anton's Gowt lock, 1790. While their picnic is being prepared on the bank, guests survey the fenland wildlife and navigational improvements to the river Witham. (Drawing by William Brand, 1790). Author's private collection.

waterfowl nesting amongst the banks. Nature enthusiasts such as Banks anchored their boats at approved mooring places such as Anton's Gowt to picnic beside the river and this was captured in the Brand drawing of figure 4.3. All the fenland communities gained from the great variety of fish that was freely available in local drains and in the Witham. Sir Joseph Banks recorded catches of pike, carp, perch, tench, and even salmon from the river during the 1790s. The quantity of fish caught was considerable and his records also show that an average daily catch for his fishing parties in September weighed between 300lbs. and 400 lbs.; with a record 843lbs. caught on 2 September 1791.²⁷

²⁷ H.B. Carter, *Sir Joseph Banks* (1988, 1991), pp. 311-12, 348-50.

It would seem then, that by the end of the eighteenth century the Brothertoft estate had experienced both a social and an economic revival under a resident lord of the manor who appeared equally at ease in the forefront of London society as in his fenland habitat. The development and practical application of new methods of farming, new livestock breeds, the latest horticulture, and his latest ideas on technology were all a reflection of Cartwright's era at Brothertoft. In November 1806 Cartwright accepted an invitation to stand, albeit unsuccessfully, as MP for Boston in the general election, and Eckersley considered it likely 'that despite having previously stood for election as a publicity stunt [for his reforms], he had actively sought the nomination of this occasion'.²⁸ Cartwright made extraordinary profits from the production of woad which was exported directly from the fen by river, and his workforce was provided not only with good housing, but also with medical care and some education for the children. Unlike most of the other Holland Fen communities, inhabitants of Brothertoft had their own local chapel with a vestry committee, a constable, and overseers who were working within the community itself to provide them with law and order, as well as taking care of the poor, the sick, and the dying. Cartwright approved the concept of self-help through membership of a Friendly Society and as a result the local group in Brothertoft had recruited 91 members by 1803; these would therefore be less of a liability on the parish rates.²⁹ As a community of between 16 and 21 families, Brothertoft remained independent and fiercely territorial. It would always remain so. The new roads in and out of Brothertoft had made life much easier and the river was safer, but to the people of Brothertoft the settlers in Holland Fen were simply authorised intruders who had to be tolerated. Just as the landscape had been transformed, the wild and once-notorious Brothertoft had changed considerably from its disruptive pre-

²⁸ R. Eckersley, 'Of Radical design: John Cartwright and the redesign of the Reform campaign c.1800-1811', *History*, 89 (2004), p. 570. He stood again, unsuccessfully, in 1807.

²⁹ Wright, *Lincolnshire Towns*, p. 105.

enclosure years to emerge as a proud and genteel township. Certainly, this must have been the opinion of the Boston banker, Henry Gee, when he agreed to purchase the manor from Cartwright as a family home. The Gees were a devout and charitable family and, as we shall see later, contributed generously to the church and local amenities.

Diversification and the extra-parochial places.

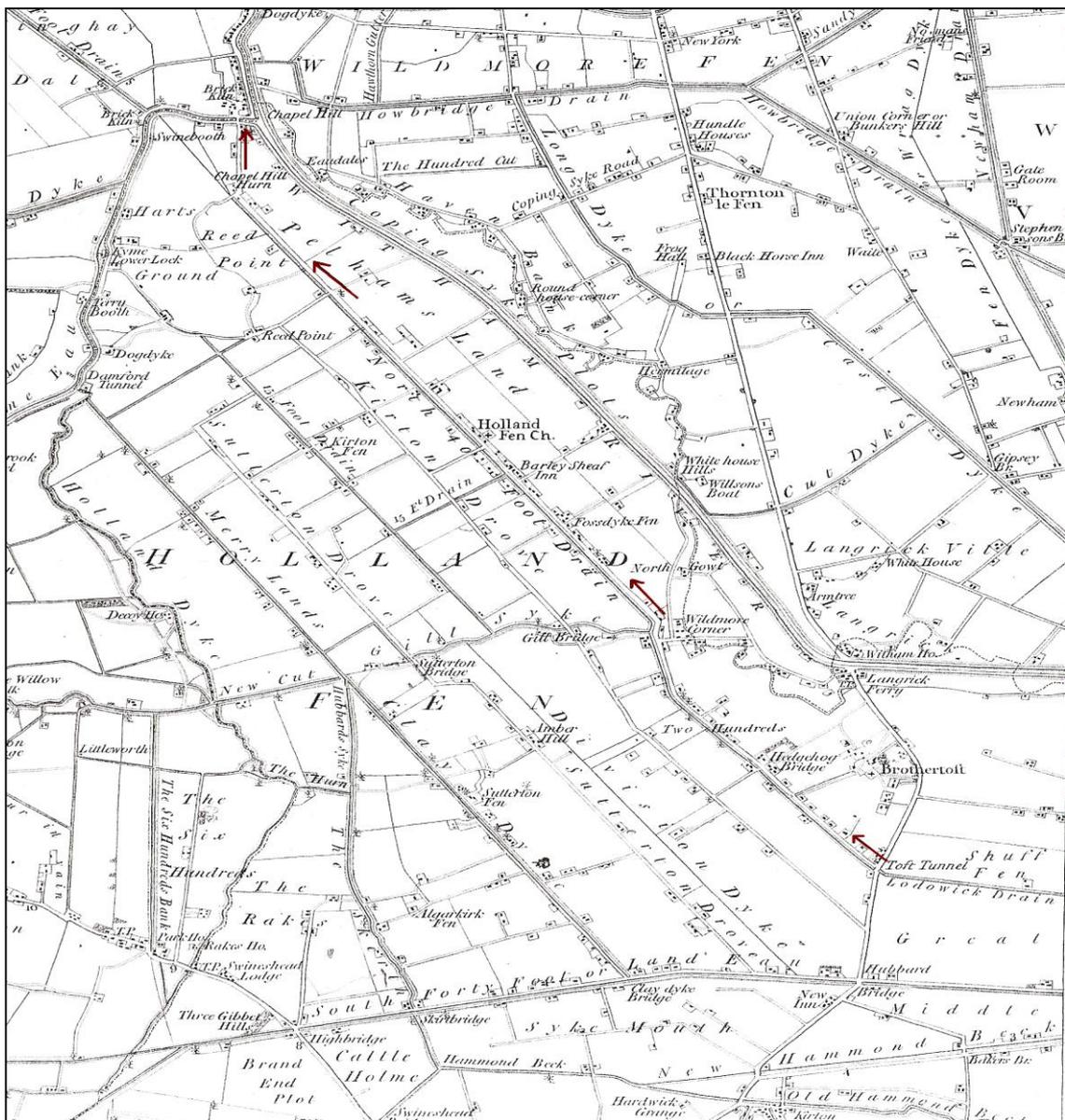


Figure 4.4. Chapel Hill Road accompanies the North Forty Foot Drain from Toft Tunnel to Chapel Hill Hurn and then turns towards Chapel Hill. OS Map 1824 LXX. 1" to 1mile.

The formation of several extra-parochial places throughout Holland Fen came about as a result of the complicated drainage and enclosure measures. The Beats plots, Coppin Syke, Ferry Corner Plots, Harts Grounds, and Pelham's Lands were some of the areas created from either the parts of the old Witham bed, the lands that had been sold to pay the taxes, enclosure expenses, or the brovage award territories. On the other hand, the 'North Forty Foot Bank' stemmed directly from none of these causes and its formation as an extra-parochial area was brought about in a very different manner. As such, it would eventually challenge the more privileged Brothertoft for a major part in the history of Holland Fen.

One of the public roadways set out by the 1769 enclosure commissioners was called the *Chappel* [sic] *Hill Road*, see figure 4.4; this began on the turnpike road at Toft Tunnel [Brothertoft] and accompanied the north-eastern side of the North Forty Foot drain as far as Chapel Hill Hurn, where the drain veered off across Harts Grounds towards the Kyme Eau.³⁰ At Chapel Hill Hurn the roadway continued on in a north-easterly direction as far as Chapel Hill, a total distance of eight miles from Toft Tunnel. At a breadth of sixty feet (or 22 yards with verges), this roadway was little more than a 'disgraceful' expanse of muddy holes and cart tracks running northwards between the North Forty Foot drain and the boundary ditches of Brothertoft, Fosdyke Fen, and Pelham's Lands. The 'North Forty Foot *Bank*' area simply developed for 6.5 miles along this unusually-wide enclosure road and it was here where the early groups of enterprising labourers and tradesmen set up their lodgings, shops, and services. They appear to have taken up approximately half the width of the original roadway as far as the boundary ditches. In figure 4.5 the modern roadway and remnants of the strip of extra-parochial land are clearly

³⁰ Here the North Forty Foot drain passes under the Kyme Eau and emerges on the other side as the '20 Foot Drains' in Billingham Dales.

visible, while figure 4.6 captures how the old cottages managed to tuck themselves so neatly into this space.



Figure 4.5 Remnants of the old North Forty Foot Bank area. Between the modern road and the boundary ditch directly behind the trees lies the original strip of (enclosure) roadway on which cottages, shops, chapels and pubs were built. The North Forty Foot drain is to the left, off photograph.

Small groups of cottages and occasional shops, or trading places were erected here and there along this roadside, some were built beside the road at Chapel Hill Hurn, a few near the corner of the road near Harts Grounds, others were beside the boundary ditches of Pelham's Lands and a cluster of buildings utilized the Fen Corner close to the turnpike road. Although the censuses taken before 1841 did not clearly define the precise location of all these clusters of extra-parochial buildings, it became clear later that the main growth area of 'North Forty Foot Bank' had developed along part of the frontage of Pelham's Lands, Fosdyke Fen, and Brothertoft's boundary ditches. These were ideal locations that allowed a predominantly agricultural group of labourers to be located in the more isolated area of the fen and so reduce the long journeys to Harts Grounds and the far reaches of the

Algarkirk and Sutterton Fens. In due course the North Forty Foot Bank became a parish and was later recognized as the 'village' of Holland Fen.



Figure 4.6 The North Forty Foot Bank where houses and shops occupied up to a half the width of the old enclosure roadway. Barley Sheaf school and bell can be seen to the right. Author's private collection.

Many of the original cottages built along the North Forty Foot bank were constructed of stud, mud, and thatch. This traditional type of agricultural cottage was found in most of the Holland parishes and remained popular with local migrants because they were cheap and easy to build. The materials were abundant and close to hand in the fenland, ivy was encouraged to cover the cottages in order to draw out the damp from the walls, sections of which could easily be repaired, demolished, or even replaced with brick when the time came for improvement. According to the notes made by Lord Brownlow's estate steward, brick houses (some tiled, some thatched) in the Holland parishes appear to have been gradually replacing a number of mud and stud buildings *c.*1805-1814. In Gosberton, which he described as 'a very populous village', the steward mentioned a

tenant's house 'of brick and tile newly built... the old house remains for offices', another had a 'brick house and thatched kitchen at the end, barn and stable of stud, mud, and thatch'. Where the steward noted 'two detached hovels of board, stud, and thatch' he also found a large, new granary of brick and tiled roof built over the brewhouse or washhouse. The granary had cost the tenant £120 to build. Some of the stud houses in the Holland area merited a comment of 'old but likely to stand many years yet with care', or a derisive 'poor low mean worn out thing'. The only [identifiable] Holland Fen farm that was mentioned in the estate books was situated in the Kirton Fen adjoining the North Forty Foot drain, and this had a brick and tiled farmhouse with a barn and stable of board.³¹

Although there were many settlers on the North Forty Foot Bank who seemed content to live in mud and stud cottages, the farmers and trades people preferred to build their premises with bricks. During the 1790s, and again in the early-nineteenth century, most of the more substantial houses and barns were constructed on core farms across the Holland Fen. Many of the old buildings are still sought by property developers more than 200 years later, although the mud and stud houses have long since disappeared. The photograph of one large, well-built farmhouse, barn, and stables in Pelham's Lands, see figure 4.7 overleaf, shows how some of these farmhouses were designed to accommodate the farmer and his family and to house their domestic and farm servants in a separate wing behind.³² On other remote farms there were small groups, or rows of brick cottages built especially to provide separate housing for the farm labourers and their families. A row of four, late-eighteenth century labourers' cottages in Fosdyke Fen is featured in figure 4.8.

³¹ LAO. BNL. *Estates*, 1805.

³² The farm servants were usually single, hired by the year, and lived-in; some agricultural labourers also lived in but were paid by the day/week. See discussion in chapter 5.



Figure 4.7 Farmhouse and barn, c.1780s in Pelham's Lands, also showing the old North Forty Foot Bank strip of land in the foreground.



Figure 4.8 John Bourne's row of cottages were built in the 1770s and are amongst the oldest in the fen. His grandfather, Edward Hilton, purchased them at an auction in the 1930s for 60 guineas.

In the busy seasons there was usually a severe shortage of labourers in Holland Fen. According to Young, the Lincolnshire wages were 'probably higher than in any other county in the kingdom' and the poor rates were very low; a labourer in Brothertoft could earn up to 5s. a day during harvest and occasionally as much as 10s.6d. a day when labour was very scarce. Winter work paid an average of 10s. per week although the rate could drop to as low as 1s.6d. a day.³³ Those labourers who lived as far afield as the parishes of Sutterton, Algarkirk, or Fosdyke, had to walk 10 or 14 miles every day before starting work in the fen allotments. The same journey home at night was exhausting after a long day's work and accounted for a further loss of time and pay. By 1801, the North Forty Foot Bank had acquired an estimated population of 123 persons and 29 households.³⁴ Twenty years later, it had become a vibrant and fast-growing community with a population that had almost trebled.

Rebellion.

A darker side of the community spirit would reveal itself when an injustice was believed to have been committed and a public protest was called for, as for instance during the militia riots of 1797. On this occasion the riots were activated when threats of a French invasion and depleted militia numbers gave rise to the dubious expedient of raising of another 60,000 militia men. The wording of the notices suggested that a general enlistment of farmers' sons and servants for foreign service was intended, rather than of simply raising the quota of men required for the usual defence duties. Accompanied by the cavalry, Sir Joseph Banks and Thomas Coltman, the magistrate, rode on horseback for ten days around the Lincolnshire countryside quelling anti-militia disturbances that were created mainly at

³³ Young, *General View*, 444-45, 451-59. Between Christmas and Lady-day the wage could drop to 1s.3d. a day. Between 1794 and 1797 a reaper might average 4s.6d or 5s. per day.

³⁴ Refer to Holland Fen Profiles in Appendix 2; In 1811 it had only 11 households and 66 persons, this is at odds with growth in the other fens and the area may have been incorrectly defined.

the instigation of yeomen's sons and farm servants.³⁵ There were serious riots at Caistor, Horncastle, Spilsby, and Alford, although Boston managed to escape the worst insurgences when its magistrates summoned assistance from the Long Sutton and Spalding Troops of Yeoman Cavalry. The cavalry arrived in Boston only minutes before the mob of rioters wearing cockades and blowing their horns came in from all the surrounding villages, determined to destroy the militia lists.³⁶

Entries in the Brothertoft poor law accounts reveal some of the problems that the constable had to endure at that time while trying to complete and deliver his lists:

- 1796-7 From the Constable's Accounts [John Lealand]
 Nov 9 Writing the list of militia names
 Taking the list in
 Dec 6 Writing the list of militia names a second time
 8 Taking the militia list in again
 23 Attending commissioners of the cavalry
 Jan 14 Taking names of militia a third time
 20 Taking the third list in
 26 Attending the cavalry when drawn
 Feb 9 Attending the cavalry when sworn in.
1797-8 From the Constable's account [John Lealand]
 May 6 Attending when militia drawn
 9 Summons to militia man to give notice of drawn.³⁷

³⁵ Carter, *Sir Joseph Banks*, pp. 311-12. A similar militia-listing problem in 1756 had resulted in widespread rioting. Banks blamed the blunders on 'the Duke of Ancaster's drunken son-in-law'.

³⁶ Neave, 'Anti-Militia Riots', p. 24; W.R. Dawson (ed.), *The Banks Letters: Calendar of the Manuscript Correspondence (1958)*, p. 744, Jan 1797. According to J. Scrope 'the alarm caused by the riots led the Government to station some 'Fencible cavalry' at Louth and Boston'.

³⁷ LAO. Brothertoft PAR 13/1, Overseers of the Poor Rate Assessments, 1770-1808. Vestry note 7 November 1796, 'We whose names are hereunto subscribed agree to the sum of 10/6d. toward hiring a man for the militia if any of us should be drawn' followed by 16 signatures; Dawson, *Banks Letters*: Cartwright's mother-in-law, Mrs Dashwood, was forced to confront an assemblage of yeomen's sons and farmworkers at her Well Vale home during anti-militia riots in Alford, 1796. She asked Banks to place explanatory militia notices across the county to defuse the situation.

Bearing in mind the troubled history of Holland Fen and its neighbouring parishes, Boston appears to have narrowly escaped any further militia riots as a result of the cavalry remaining in the Boston area during this period. Although antipathy to militia service still remained after the reasoning behind the lists had been explained, an uneasy peace was maintained during the critical years of poor harvests and high food prices, while militia payments during wartime increased parish overheads even further. Poor law expenditure in Frampton, which also lay within Mingay's designated southern area of poorer wages, rose sharply from £387 in 1799-1800 to its highest amount of £866 in 1803-4.³⁸ Rates in Brothertoft were also inflated and hovered between 28d. and 24d. in the pound from 1798 to 1802 before dropping to 14d. Militia payments, high prices, and food shortages affected other areas of the county during the same period, Bassingham in Kesteven and Raithby in Lindsey also showed increases in their expenditure, while Raithby paid out £2.17s. for an unknown quantity of corn for its poor in 1800-1. The old poor law system appears to have coped well across Lincolnshire and any 'famine' or starvation of the impoverished was averted. As Johnston found in his investigation into the management of the poor law in western Lincolnshire during this period, the overseers 'defended their territories' against illegal settlers and 'managed the system of relief effectively in years of unprecedented difficulty'.³⁹ Occasionally there may have been some extra help as in December 1800, when Sir Joseph Banks despatched a ton of imported rice to be distributed among the poor in Mareham le Fen and also in Revesby; all recipients being provided with a recipe on how to cook the rice. In February 1801, Banks sent twelve casks of 18,000 herrings and a further eleven hundredweight of rice for the poor of Boston. The situation managed to ease slightly when farmers were able to get their workers back onto the land and in April

³⁸ G.E. Mingay (ed.), *The Unquiet Countryside* (1989) p. 37. Mingay found wages in the northern half of the country were on average 27% higher than in the south, his demarcation cut across Lincolnshire at Wash level and south of Holland Fen.

³⁹ Johnston, 'Management of the poor law', pp. 11-22.

1801, Banks instructed that the two casks of rice he was sending should be 'reduced to a half [portion] for families of labourers now able to work, but full ration to be continued for women and for the aged and infirm'.⁴⁰

Following the years of war, high taxes, food shortages, and low wages, the Home Secretary, Lord Melbourne, admitted in a circular to local magistrates in November 1830, that the country was in a 'disturbed state'.⁴¹ In southern counties and in East Anglia, where many of the short-contract farm labourers viewed the threshing machine as a final threat to their existence, they had begun to smash the machines and threaten reprisals upon any farmer who tried to use them. The 'Swing' riots were considerably less prevalent in south-east Lincolnshire than in the neighbouring county of Norfolk, where agricultural wages were lower and the out-of-season work for day labourers had been further reduced by the use of threshing machines. In 1830 however, arson attacks and some 'especially violent' destruction of property erupted in the southern-most Lincolnshire countryside around Stamford, Bourne, and Market Deeping. This resulted in large numbers of special constables being sworn in from the 'Gentry and respectable Yeomanry' of the surrounding districts. These associations of 'Gentlemen, Farmers, Graziers, &c. on Horseback' formed for the 'Preservation of the Peace, and Protection of Property' were all part of 'a plan' adopted by the county of Sussex in order to 'repress Tumult and maintain the public Tranquillity'. The plan had proved to be so successful that the Home Secretary recommended it be put into general use across the whole country.⁴²

By 8 December 1830, 932 Special Constables were sworn in throughout the Hundreds of Kirton and Skirbeck. This ensured that in the event of any disturbance the

⁴⁰ Dawson, *Banks Letters*, p. 203.

⁴¹ LAO. 4BNL. Box 2, 1830/5.

⁴² LAO. 4BNL. Box 2, 1830/5: LAO. Kesteven Quarter Sessions Clerks Papers, 1830/7/2/14.

adjoining parishes would be able to turn out a considerable body of constables, each of them mounted and armed with a staff of office, and capable of suppressing any riot. The rules and regulations stipulated that in the case of fire, local church bells were to be rung backwards. The constables were unpaid although any labourer who was called out as a constable received 3s. a day (or night) from the head of the parish out of the county rate. There were 23 constables sworn in for Holland Fen and Brothertoft where Thomas Gee, who had purchased the hall from Cartwright and was now lord of the manor, was nominated as 'head of parish'.⁴³

Arson was a constant anxiety for the farmers as the arsonists usually had an old grudge to settle and acted under the cover of darkness. It was an especially worrying period between 19 November 1830 and 12 March 1831, when there were some 26 instances of fires across Lincolnshire and a number of the fires were extremely serious. In his letter to Lord Brownlow, Francis Thirkill who was Clerk of the Peace for the Holland District at Boston, described one stack fire three miles north of Deeping which had 'totally consumed' a wood and tile barn, 4 horses, 13 cattle, a pig, 3 carts and gears, several tons of wheat, a dressing machine, and an 8HP threshing machine valued at £400. The total loss was put at £2,500 of which only £2,000 had been insured.⁴⁴ Riots and arson were deemed most likely to occur in the main-cereal growing areas where lower wages were paid to the labourers, as well as in larger villages where people might seem to be more anonymous and where there was a high ratio of labourers to farmers. Although there were a few cases of arson reported in Boston and in Freiston, there appears to have been none in the Holland Fen area and no specific activity against threshing machines. In his report on Lincolnshire thirty years earlier, Young had referred to the many instances of 'thrashing mills' being built on farms around the county; these old mills were horse-driven and operated by the

⁴³ LAO. 4BNL. Box 2, 1830/24; Holland Fen and Brothertoft were not yet civil parishes.

⁴⁴ LAO. 4BNL. Box 2, 1830/45; Brownlow was Lord Lieutenant of Lincolnshire.

farm workers. While a number of the thrashing mills, like so many other new implements on the farm, were experimental and home-made they appear to have received the approval of most farm workers who developed new skills and took pride in the mastery of such tools.⁴⁵ However, farmers of large estates who were wealthy enough to purchase new, portable models to transport from farm to farm at the expense of their labourers' wages, usually invited trouble.

On the other hand, some of the worst local riots were in protest against the influx of Irish labourers into the fenland and these broke out in Boston during August 1831. There were also serious incidents in Spalding, Holbeach, and Peterborough during the same month. Ireland was suffering great hardship owing to a potato famine and consequently hundreds of Irish workers came over to Lincolnshire to find work on the drains, docks, brickyards, and mainly on the farms. Hitherto, the Irish workers had not been subjected to such severe treatment in Boston, even when small groups of them were hired annually to help out with the seasonal work, as was often the case in the Holland Fen. Although Boston had once been a staunchly Protestant town that had suffered few Catholics to remain there since the early seventeenth century (there were only ten known Catholics in Boston in 1773), several of the Irish navvies working on fen drainage had managed to settle down and raise families in the confines of North Street. As its name implies, the street was on the northern edge of Boston conveniently situated to enable the farm labourers to walk into Boston West Fen and Brothertoft via the bridle paths; they could also gain access to the East, West, and Wildmore fens along the Maud Foster drainside. In 1825 the first Jesuit priest arrived in Boston from Nottingham and by 1827 he had managed to purchase a piece of land next to North Street and build a Roman Catholic

⁴⁵ Young, *General View*, pp. 93-97.

church. Although the area was known locally as 'Irish town' not all of its inhabitants were of Irish extraction.⁴⁶

The rioting began in August 1831 when local labourers, already poorly paid, became incensed after hundreds of Irish labourers descended upon Lincolnshire and gained much of the harvest work by undercutting the local rate of pay. In Boston itself, the violence led to a reading of the Riot Act after local people chased the gangs of Irish workers through the town and crowds of angry demonstrators gathered around North Street. As each of the Irish gangs arrived in Boston during the next few days they were lodged within the stables of the Red Cow Inn before being escorted into the fens by local constables.⁴⁷ It would seem that although the local parish churches had been able to collect money for the relief of starving families in Ireland, and the Irish had been able to settle peacefully in North Street, even to the extent of building their own church there, the stress of poor harvests, threshing machines, and lower wages was the final straw for local labourers. During 1831 violence continued to pursue the Irish workers as they followed the harvests northwards and up onto the Wolds in Lindsey.

Using information derived from Anderson's research on Lincolnshire convicts between 1789 and 1840, it would appear that crime increased drastically during this period. The number of transportations from the county soared after 1816 and an increase in petty crime coincided with the return of soldiers and sailors from the war.⁴⁸ Except for the militia riots in 1797 the use of, or need for, transportation had been spasmodic in Lincolnshire and was confined mainly to the southern half of the county until 1813-16,

⁴⁶ Ambler, *Churches, Chapels*, p. 78; TNA. HO/107/2099/274-300, 1851. In 1851 there were 37 houses in the street, 24 with Irish tenants. Of the 227 inhabitants, 97 [42.7%] were born in Ireland, 88 [38.7%] born in Boston, 32 [14.1%] in Lincolnshire, and 10 [4.4%] in other counties. Of those born in Boston, 83 [94.3%] were young children.

⁴⁷ *LRS*, August 5, 9, 17, 1831.

⁴⁸ Lists of transportations, 1789-1840 compiled by C.L. Anderson, *Convicts of Lincolnshire* (Lincoln, 1988).

when all areas became implicated. After 1816, coincidentally when rural poachers fell victims of the new game laws, the county magistrates resorted more often to transportation and hanging as shown by a massive 190 per cent increase in these sentences. The sentences remained at a high level in Lincolnshire until 1832 when they increased by a further 50 per cent. The special constables appear to have been most vigilant and the Home Secretary's 'plan' was working well. Overall, the south-eastern quarter of Lincolnshire, and thus mainly the fenland area, endured the most transportations while the south-west or Kesteven [Brownlow's area] suffered least. The distribution of sentences appears to have been fairly well spread across the whole county during 1821, 1824, and 1832. Documents belonging to the Brownlow family confirmed that there was a great deal of crime committed in south Lincolnshire during the 1830s, not only reports of murder, arson, and some machine breaking but a significant amount of petty crime. Farms in the Holland Fen remained a prime target for thieves. Between 1833 and 1837, two Boston men robbed farms on the Wyberton and Frampton Fens and at least five men from Brothertoft, North Forty Foot Bank, and Fosdyke Fen were convicted of stealing; they were all transported to Tasmania and New South Wales for terms of 7 years, 14 years, or even life. Most of the local thefts were of food: a cordwainer stole sundry goods and eggs from the Brothertoft blacksmith, two labourers stole sacks of wheat, and a couple of fishermen killed two ewes and stole the carcasses.⁴⁹

Religion and the fen chapels.

The little chapel at Brothertoft was already well established when the Order of St. Gilbert at Sempringham surrendered its houses and lands to the king in September 1538. It served a community large enough to warrant the endowment of a priest and records show that Otto Buttolle became the priest at Brothertoft *c.* 1547-74. Formerly a monk of Bardney

⁴⁹ LAO. Online database, <http://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/convictssearch.asp?catId=3169>, 29/01/05. Three other local men convicted 1845-53 for stealing wheat and a mare were transported to Bermuda.

Abbey with a gross pension of £5 p.a., Buttolle was unmarried and given the curacy of Brothertoft worth £3.6.8d. p.a. There are several references to the ancient site and medieval fabric of the old chapel pictured in figure 4.9. Pevsner mentioned its ‘medieval stones, and Marrat referred to ‘good stone Saxon arches over the windows’.⁵⁰ The baptism registers date from 1682, burials from 1684, marriages from 1708, and its Elizabethan chalice of c.1580 is on display in the Treasury showcase at Lincoln Cathedral, where it was placed for safekeeping.⁵¹



Figure 4.9 Brothertoft chapel from the south. The hall is behind the trees.

⁵⁰ G.A.J., Hodgett, *The State of the ex-religious and former chantry priests in the Diocese of Lincoln, 1547-1574, from returns in the Exchequer* (Lincoln, 1959), p. 113; Pevsner, *Lincolnshire*, p.192; W. Marrat, *History of Lincolnshire. Topographical, Historical & Descriptive*, 2 (Boston, 1814), pp. 187-195.

⁵¹ The chalice is 5 inches high with a deep, tulip-shaped bowl and inverted rim 3 inches in diameter. It has a filigree scroll etching with leaf effect around the outside of the bowl and maker's mark of an inverted shield with the letters 'I M'. The stem has no knob but a stepped base 2¾ inches diameter.

Visitations and churchwardens' presentments give some useful insights into the chapel's history but also show that there was some confusion as to which parish it may actually have belonged to. In 1602 the visitation stated 'Brothertoft, Bicker. Church and chapel of Brothertoft and this parish of Bicker are well repayred [sic] and kept decently', although in 1709 it was described as 'Kirton with Chapel of Brothertoft'. The Articles of Visitation for 1709 also gave a fuller picture of the interior, noting that it was,

...in good order. A good bible – common prayer book etc. New stone font and a good table for the sacrament. Surplice is duly washed. Chapel chest with three locks. Parchment register book. No house for the minister – was once but demolished before our time. No glebe lands.

During the period 1705-25 when Brothertoft chapel served sixty families, the visitations recorded that it 'had neither minister nor endowment and had a service every other Sunday, or later once a month, the officiating minister being paid 5s. each time by the parishioners'.⁵² It should be noted that none of these documents, nor indeed any registers of the period, ever referred to it by any name other than 'Brothertoft' or 'Brothertoft chapel'. With no record of it having been dedicated to a saint, the old chapel's lack of identity only confirmed its traditional nickname of 'the church with no name'.

One Anglican chapel in Brothertoft with seating for just 180 people was of little use to the inhabitants of other Holland Fen allotments. As discussed earlier, several of their parish churches lay many miles distant and while it could be a tiring walk for even the fittest of fenland parishioners, most of the elderly and the infirm found it impossible to

⁵² LAO. Brothertoft Ch/P/L 1663, 1668, Churchwardens' Presentments, Lincoln Archdeaconry No. 11390; LAO. Ch.P. Box 4/12 Articles of Visitation, 1709; R.E.G. Cole, *Speculum Dioceseos Lincolnensis sub Episcopis Gul, Wake et Edm, Gibson, A.D., 1705-1723* (Lincoln, 1913), pp. xvi, 76; C. W. Foster (ed.), *The State of the Church in the reigns of Elizabeth and James I, as illustrated by documents relating to the Diocese of Lincoln*, 1(Lincoln, 1926), p. 277.

attend services held in their home parishes. Fortunately for some fen dwellers the nonconformist groups were already firmly established in Boston by the late eighteenth century and were eager to take their gospel out into the neighbouring fenlands. The Boston circuits had been able to finance and build their own chapels in various parts of the town and the fen-edge inhabitants readily accessed several of these.⁵³ Circuit ministers were welcomed into areas of the Holland Fen where small congregations were willing to allow their own homes or local outbuildings to be used for preaching and prayer meetings.

The social background of a 'divided' village in the development of nonconformist institutions was a very important issue and, as Ambler noted in his discussion of village categories, the Brothertoft township, the parish of Skirbeck Quarter, and the Algarkirk parish all contained 'strong church parties that provided positive alternatives' to any local dissent.⁵⁴ Brothertoft had a strong Anglican chapel where the resident lord of the manor was also its owner and patron. In the parish of Skirbeck Quarter, where the patron of the living was held by Dr William Roy whose family was active in church building, there was no incentive for the fen allotment dissenters to establish their own chapel because they had easy access to the nonconformist chapels in Boston. In the home parish of Algarkirk where the rich living valued at £2,000 p.a. had been in the hands of the Berridge family for two or three centuries, the Rev. Basil Berridge was also lord of the manor, patron, and incumbent of the parish church.⁵⁵ Although Algarkirk itself was a divided parish and the Berridges were in a strong enough position to provide the positive alternatives to dissent, the inhabitants of its fen allotment remained very isolated indeed. With no Anglican chapel available for the inhabitants of Algarkirk Fen or its neighbouring allotments, there

⁵³ These include a General Baptist chapel, 1763, a Methodist chapel, 1764, and Baptist Salem chapel, 1801. See Shepherdson, *A List*, pp. 1-3, also Ambler, *Churches, Chapels*, pp. 108, 120.

⁵⁴ Ambler, *Lincolnshire Returns*, pp. lxxv-lxxxi.

⁵⁵ Ambler, *Lincolnshire Returns*, pp. lxxv-lxxxi.

was a serious threat that dissenting congregations might make their houses, or even land, available to the circuit ministers for meeting places or chapels.

In 1807, the Rev. Beridge and four other dignitaries formed a body of trustees and drew up an indenture to build a chapel of ease in the Algarkirk Fen; Beridge then gave the trustees £804.16s.7d. in consolidated stock and the Rev. Thomas Twigge donated £643.17s.3d. in bank annuities.⁵⁶ It was hoped that this would set an example and encourage others to contribute. In the event, it was considered more convenient to build the chapel, see figure 4.10, in the more readily accessible Fosdyke Fen where William Weeks of Pelham's Lands had donated the land, Beridge also being the rector of Algarkirk-cum-Fosdyke.



Figure 4.10 The Holland Fen chapel of ease built in Fosdyke Fen, 1812.

⁵⁶ The Rev T.F. Twigge of Tickhill, Yorks., the Ven. John Pretyman, Archdeacon of Lincoln, the Rev. Francis Swan of Kirton, and the Rt. Rev. George Pretyman Tomline, Bishop of Lincoln.

The work began soon after an Act of Parliament in June 1809 authorised the Holland Fen chapel of ease in Fosdyke Fen, and the chapel of c.340 sittings was consecrated in September 1812.⁵⁷ A gallery was added in 1816 by public subscription. For some of the Anglican communities of North Forty Foot Bank, Fosdyke Fen, parts of Kirton Fen, and Pelham's Lands, access to the new Holland Fen chapel via the North Forty Foot Bank roadway was a relatively easy procedure with none of the wide drains to negotiate. For the elderly and the very young of Algarkirk Fen, Sutterton Fen, and Kirton Drove cut off by several wide drains, it proved a long and difficult trek to the chapel, especially after traipsing across muddy fields and ditches to access the nearest crossing places over Clay Dyke, Fifteen Foot, and North Forty Foot drains.

Further northwards, the inhabitants of Chapel Hill and a large area of land that included Terry Booth, detached portions of Billingham and Dogdyke parishes, the Fifteen Foot Drain, and the extra-parochial Harts Grounds and Pelham's Lands, were also in a similar situation of being many miles from an Anglican church. Although a more convenient Wesleyan Methodist chapel had been erected near the Kyme Eau lock at Chapel Hill in 1817, anyone wishing to attend a church service had first to undertake the long and often dangerous winter journey to Billingham or Swineshead.⁵⁸ In 1826, the latter parish built an Anglican chapel of ease with 250 sittings on its fen allotment at Chapel Hill to serve a community that was twelve miles away from its parish church in Swineshead. By the 1820s, most of the neighbouring Holland parishes contained a nonconformist chapel and some, like the Wesleyan Methodist chapels at Kirton End, Kirton Holme, Wyberton West End, and the Wesleyan barn at Wigtoft, were established very close to the

⁵⁷ Adapted from a local typescript of *Church Notes* probably assembled by Rev. D. Askew c. 1972 and attributed mainly to the Rev. D.F. Button, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁸ According to both local tradition and *Church Notes*, pp. 6-7, there was a fourteenth-century 'chauntrie of Dockdyke' (called the Chapel of St. Nicholas), at Chapel Hill until 1538.

fen-edges. While several of the Holland Fen communities were able to access at least one of the nonconformist group chapels, those within the more remote interior fens had to rely on the use of private houses or outbuildings for their meetings.

By May 1841 the population of most fen allotments had increased, although this was most noticeable on the North Forth Foot Bank, and in the Sutterton, Fosdyke, Kirton, and Algarkirk fens. In Sutterton Fen, its 23 farmers and 81 agricultural labourers had the advantage of three public houses, three grocer's shops, two shoemakers, two blacksmiths, two wheelwrights, a miller, and a schoolmaster all within their midst. This community had developed in the vicinity of the extra-parochial field of Amber Hill, the 30 acres of gravel allocated at enclosure for the repair of fen roads. It was an easily-accessed location either by boat along the Clay Dyke or along the Sutterton Drove road and the settlement probably originated out of the intense activity taking place at the Amber Hill, not to mention the better condition of the surrounding land.

Similarly, on the North Forty Foot Bank area of the Chapel Hill road, a more central village community had evolved around the Barley Sheaf public house and local malt kiln buildings. The pub was one of thirteen in Holland Fen during one period and had become a popular headquarters for the local pig clubs, cow clubs, and the Ancient Order of Foresters to hold regular meetings and annual dinners. There was also a corn mill with barns close by and a track leading across the fields to waiting barges on the Witham. The busy focal point of the Barley Sheaf attracted the families and services of a number of tradesmen such as a butcher, two grocers, a baker, a tailor, and four shoemakers. In addition the unique fen community boasted the skills of a maltster, a brewer, three joiners, a blacksmith and journeyman, three watermen, and two schoolmasters. By contrast, inhabitants of the more remote Algarkirk, Kirton, and Fosdyke fens were primarily farmers

with their agricultural servants, labourers, and domestic servants, although the latter fen also included a miller and a brewer.

The predominance of agricultural servants, labourers, and domestics in the Holland Fen served to encourage the spread of Primitive Methodism, which was already very strong amongst the labouring population in Lincolnshire. In 1820 the Primitive Methodists, or 'Ranters' as they were often called, are said to have held meetings in a nearby house in Fosdyke Fen until their chapel was made ready. In 1843 the Primitives of Sutterton Fen also built their own local chapel, and this was followed by another built in 1871 at Hubberts Bridge. Three years after the Primitive chapel was built in Sutterton Fen the local farmers and tradesmen erected a Wesleyan chapel in the same area. These chapels were ideally situated to attract other members from neighbouring Algarkirk and Kirton communities on either side. In the absence of a convenient Anglican chapel they secured the dissenting communities of a growing, local population.

The Wesleyans were equally strong in other areas of the Holland Fen. They built a chapel on the edge of Fosdyke Fen in close proximity to the Barley Sheaf area and even contrived to open a 'chapel' right next door to Brothertoft itself. In fact this chapel was simply a portion of a house that had been built on the new riverbank next to Langrick Ferry and inside the extra-parochial Ferry Corner Plot. Circuit books record that the baptisms here were carried out in the adjacent 'river bottom'.⁵⁹ Shepherdson noted that

...an old lady, a Wesleyan, died at a house, or cottage, leased in 1812 and for family reasons her mother, husband, and by direction herself, were laid in a vault under one of the rooms. In her will she charged her nephew to make part of the house into a chapel and to give it to the Methodists.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ LAO. METH. C. Wesleyan Methodist /Boston Circuit. Book 1, Baptisms, 1839-1893.

⁶⁰ This old building can be seen in figure 5.8.

It was during this period that Thomas Gee inherited the Brothertoft estate from his late father, Henry Gee, and decided to renovate the hall and rebuild the Anglican chapel. Just when the old chapel had begun to fall into disrepair is unclear but local tradition recalls that at some point, probably during the 1840s, cattle were able to push their way into the interior of the chapel and walk around the altar. Encouraged by all the church and chapel building taking place throughout the county, Gee commissioned Stephen Lewin, a Lincolnshire architect noted for his work on the churches of Horncastle, Boston, Swineshead, Saleby, and West Keal. In 1847, Brothertoft's nave and bellcote were rebuilt in the Perpendicular style re-using some of the medieval masonry and the fifteenth-century priest's door. The chapel was further enhanced with an elaborate hammer beam roof, an east window by William Wailes the stained glass manufacturer, and a new chancel in 1854.⁶¹

In 1865, a separate ecclesiastical parish of Holland Fen was formed from the fen portions of the parishes of Fosdyke, Kirton, Sutterton and Algarkirk; this also included the extra-parochial areas of Harts Grounds, Pelham's Lands, Ferry Plot Corner, and the North Forty Foot Bank, whose inhabitants were also dependant on the vicar for pastoral ministrations. The ecclesiastical parish was said to have consisted of 10,462 acres with approximately 1,667 parishioners.⁶² Finally, in 1867 a third chapel of ease was built in Holland Fen, see figure 4.11 below; this was erected within the Algarkirk Fen by the Rev. Basil Berridge at a cost of £4,500 and dedicated to St. John the Baptist. Perhaps it had at last been recognized that the walking distance to the chapel of ease built in Fosdyke Fen, some eleven miles by road or three miles by bridle paths, was too far for

⁶¹ Pevsner, *Lincolnshire*, p. 192.

⁶² *Church Notes*, pp. 2-3.

local people to travel. Especially when several well-trodden footpaths led directly to the much closer nonconformist chapels in Sutterton Fen.



Figure 4.11 The 'Amber Hill' chapel of ease built in Algarkirk Fen, 1867

Rise of the Holland Fen villages.

In the previous chapter, we saw how the Great Northern Railway utilized major waterways in 1848 and 1850 to bring their two railway lines into Boston. The network of drains and enclosures in Holland Fen was avoided by the Loop Line as it followed the eastern bank of the river Witham to Boston and a station at Langrick Ferry. The Link Line kept to the northern bank of the South Forty Foot drain by way of the station at Hubbard's bridge. The railways brought artificial fertilisers and oil cake nearer to fenland farms and boosted agricultural improvements such as those associated with the high farming era. As already explained the more productive methods of arable farming needed specialised labour so the additional farm servants had to live-in or stay very close to their workplaces.

A comparison of the 1841 and the 1861 census returns for Holland Fen immediately highlights the wide-ranging changes in farming and agricultural occupations that had taken place during those twenty years. Where the numbers of agricultural labourers were fewer, as for instance in Brothertoft and the Algarkirk, Boston West, Frampton, and Fosdyke fens, many of them had been replaced by wagoners, horsemen, horsekeepers, carters, garthmen, ploughmen, and grooms.⁶³ It also found that there were many more horses being used as arable work increased in those areas. At the same time, the introduction of dairymaids in at least half a dozen of the fen areas indicated that the transportation of fresh dairy produce by rail to the local towns and London had made dairy farming a more viable option. The nearest urban market was Boston, a busy commercial town with a population that was growing as fast as its industries.

By 1861, there were 28 fewer agricultural labourers in Sutterton Fen and it would seem that eighteen of them had been replaced by farm servants who were living-in at some of the larger farmhouses. Similarly, there were at least a hundred domestic servants working in the Holland Fen, while the employment of governesses, nursemaids, housekeepers, and cooks also suggested that there was an increased prosperity in several localities.⁶⁴ Brothertoft also maintained its privileged air of gentility with the services of a footman and coachman at the re-furbished hall, while in Pelham's Lands the Inland Revenue Inspector was staying overnight during one of his more significant visits. The three schoolteachers who resided in Brothertoft, and the Fosdyke and Sutterton fens were

⁶³ Usually these were all living-in and listed by census enumerators as 'servants'. See later discussion on 'farm servants' in Chapter 5.

⁶⁴ For instance Algarkirk, Boston West, Frampton Fen, Harts Grounds, Sutterton Fen, and Brothertoft.

likely to have been teaching in village schoolrooms provided by the Anglican chapels; this brought education a little nearer to those children unable to reach the parish schools.⁶⁵

Although the 1861 census made reference to half a dozen farm bailiffs, the term 'foreman' had yet to make its appearance in Holland Fen. However the unusual title of 'groundkeeper' as head of house appeared on at least eight occasions (half of them in Algarkirk Fen). Glossaries fail to define this term and it is assumed that a groundkeeper was a farm servant, or the precursor of a working foreman who reclaimed and maintained outlying fenland with the aid of the labourers who lodged with him.⁶⁶ While the communities of Brothertoft, Sutterton Fen, and North Forty Foot Bank⁶⁷ continued to be the nerve centres of a huge range of services in Holland Fen, other communities were fine-tuning their own local trades and crafts according to the specific needs of their environment. For instance, the more southerly parts of Kirton Fen had become a venue for a brickmaker, a veterinary, policeman, chimney sweep, a curate, and a machine man; there was also a brewer who had the advantage of a cooper living nearby to make his casks. Dual occupations were a common feature in the fen, especially among the farmers and publicans who combined other businesses with part-time farming; these included the wheelwright/farmer, a banker/farmer, a publican/farmer, a publican/boat-owner/farmer, a publican/agricultural labourer and a publican/miller. It also made sense to combine the draper/grocery trades, the coal/flour dealer, miller/baker, and carpenter/joinery skills where the fen communities, or farm sizes, were too small to support a single trade or craft.

⁶⁵ Local schools are discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

⁶⁶ Heckington Village Trust, *Heckington in the Eighteen Seventies* (Heckington, 1980), p. 23, also suggests that the groundkeeper may have been a farm servant or working foreman.

⁶⁷ Like Algarkirk Fen its population had decreased by 1/8th, and Fosdyke Fen by nearly 1/4. This was attributed mainly to the migration of labourers into mining districts of Yorkshire.

Because there was a lack of good roads in the county, carriers and packet boats continued to bring regular deliveries of the basic materials to farms via the interconnecting drains. None of the communities was completely self-contained and there was always some produce ready and waiting to send to local markets. Like many of the barges that sailed along the Witham, their counterparts on the South Forty Foot drain were currently having to compete with the railways for trade. The railway station at Hubbard's bridge was now at the hub of a small trading community called 'Hubbert's Bridge' and one that could boast of a Post Office, a smithy, and a brickmaker with local clay pits. All of these services were conveniently situated across the road from the Wheatsheaf inn.⁶⁸ Behind the Wheatsheaf, pictured overleaf in figure 4.12, there was a coal yard stocked with the coal that trains had brought in from Nottinghamshire coalmines. The stationmaster's house was built beside the railway line, indeed the steam trains were literally on his family's doorstep and so was the adjacent South Forty Foot drain.

The main turnpike road from Swineshead to Langrick Ferry crosses the bridge over the South Forty Foot drain and cuts right through the centre of the railway station. As the old photograph in figure 4.13 just manages to show, the stationmaster's house used to be over on the Kirton Fen side of this road, while the railway porter and station buildings were built on the other side, in the Frampton Fen. In later years the signal box was moved across the line to join the other station buildings. As well as the hub of trades grouped together in the vicinity of the station, there was a second hive of industry in the village where the wheelwright, the pork butcher, the brickmaker, a second blacksmith, and a 'machineman' were all positioned along either side of the turnpike road.

⁶⁸ The Wheatsheaf was a popular venue for agricultural labourers; A 'club' was formed here in March 1871, when it was resolved to ask for 3s. per day of 9 hours. This was at a time when farm labourers at Mount Pleasant farm in the West Fen were on strike for more pay. R. C. Russell, *The Revolt of the Field in Lincolnshire* (Boston, 1956), p. 29.



Figure 4.12 Hubberts Bridge. On the bridge over the South Forty Foot drain showing the Wheatsheaf Inn, old coal yard, and chemical manure works of c.1890s. All situated in the Kirton Fen area with the railway station to the right, off photo. (Photo courtesy of the Tuesday night club)

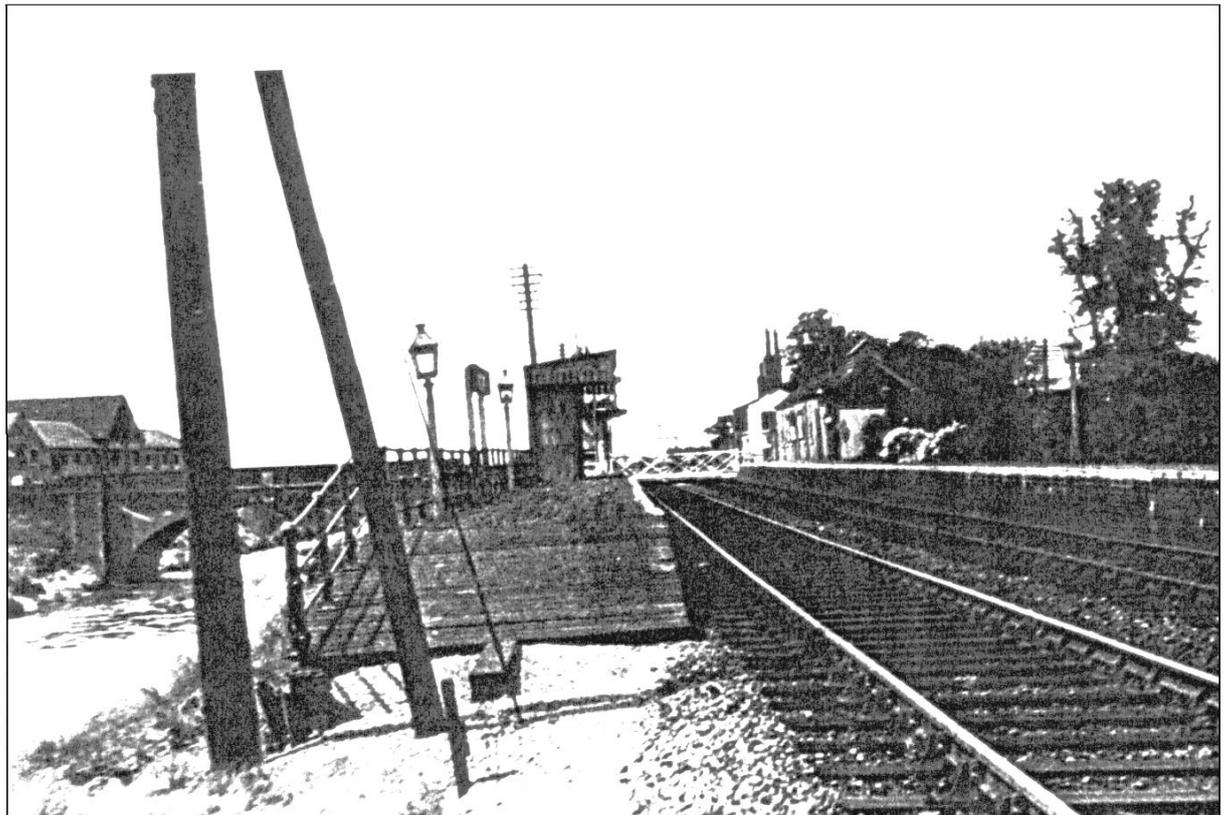


Figure 4.13 Hubberts Bridge station seen from the Frampton Fen side. The stationmaster's house is beside the line (centre, white with tall chimneys) inside the Kirton Fen area. The South Forty Foot drain and bridge, built 1888 (left) with part of the chemical manure works visible in the distance.

In the list of contemporary occupations the word 'machine' figured quite conspicuously. A 'machine maker' and two men who described themselves as machine men were involved in the making and repairing of agricultural machinery such as the ploughs, harrows, reapers, and drills in regular use on the farms. One man, in the Boston West Fen, gave his occupation as the 'proprietor of a steam threshing machine' and his equally-proud wife declared herself to be 'the wife of a proprietor of a steam threshing machine'. Over on the North Forty Foot Bank there were three more drivers of threshing machines; with the drivers were three 'feeders' whose job it was to throw, or feed corn into the threshing machine when in use in the farmyard. It is worth noting that the first portable steam threshing set was produced in 1842 by William Tuxford and sons at their Boston ironworks; this was judiciously located within only a mile or so of the edge of the Holland Fen itself.⁶⁹

Whereas Brothertoft had been Holland Fen's only established community or township before its enclosure in 1770, a century later there were four recognized village communities to be found in the fen. The early settlements of North Forty Foot Bank, Sutterton Fen, and Hubbard's bridge had each continued to adapt and develop into flourishing farming and business communities, principally because they were able to choose the most suitable locations from where they could use the waterways and roads to their own advantage. Unfortunately for all the growing communities the inevitable confusion remained when some portions of fen were in one parish for ecclesiastical functions and in another for civil purposes. As the map in figure 4.14 demonstrates (also in figure 1.3), parts of extra-parochial areas such as the Beats Plots and Coppin Syke

⁶⁹ Wright, *Lincolnshire Towns*, p. 84; Lincolnshire engineering was pioneered in Boston before Lincoln, Grantham and Gainsborough took over in the 1850s. The Tuxford ironworks was also opposite to North Street.

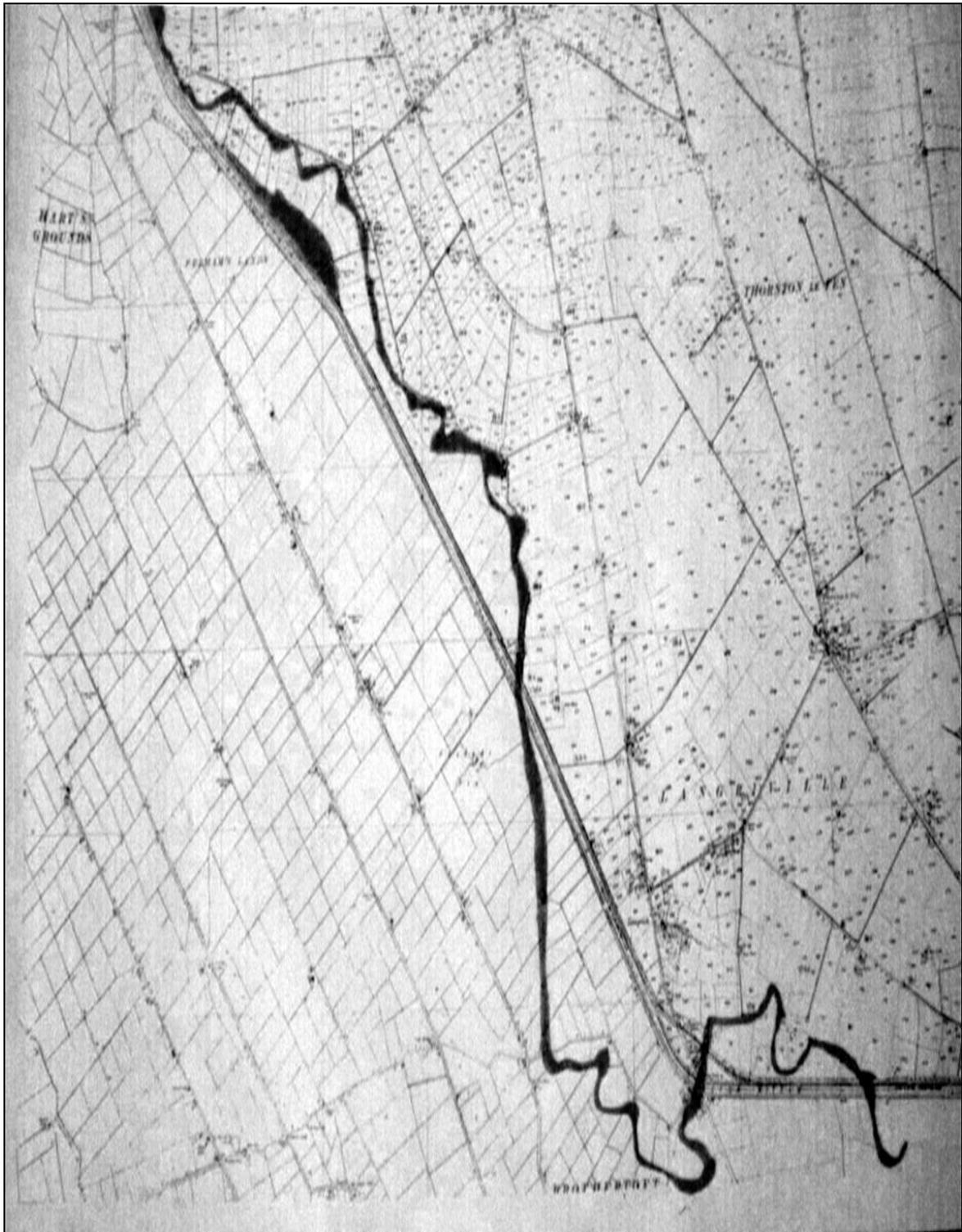


Figure 4.14 Field boundaries still retain the shape of the old river Witham as its course is superimposed (in black) over the new river cut. Extra-parochial areas such as the Beats Plots and Coppin Syke are shown to be marooned in the Wildmore Fen, top right of new river in the District of Lindsey. The Ferry Corner Plots are lower down in the District of Holland, bottom left of the new river at Brothertoft and also in Lindsey, right.

had been cut off from Holland Fen by the new river Witham and remained marooned over in the district of Lindsey. While a part of the Ferry Corner Plot belonging to Lindsey remained literally high and dry inside the Holland district. On-going attempts at government reforms in the late nineteenth century continued to leave several of the extra-parochial areas in an administrative vacuum for decades.

Nevertheless, by 1870 the Holland Fen had certainly undergone many great changes. Not only had the landscape matured and become less bleak, the fen allotments of Skirbeck Quarter, Frampton, Wyberton, Wigtoft, and [part of] Boston West, on the outer edges of the fen had been gradually absorbed into their external, home parishes. Similarly those fen allotments closest to Swineshead, Three Gibbet Hills, Great Brand End Plot, Royalty Farm, and the [Mown] Rakes Farm, all formerly extra-parochial were incorporated into the parish of Swineshead in 1894. The latter farms occupied around 220 acres and were situated on the 'Mown Rakes' grounds next to the old Toll house on the main Donington to Boston road.⁷⁰

Elsewhere, fen allotments isolated by the South Forty Foot drain and the Langrick Ferry road in the north-western and central regions of the fen, had developed their own groups of communities and some were preparing to cut the umbilical cord that tied them to home parishes. Because so much more was happening in the north-western and central areas of the fen during the late nineteenth century, future references and the main focus of this thesis will therefore be directed towards those groups.⁷¹

⁷⁰ These were some of the lands sold to pay enclosure expenses in 1767. The name 'Royalty' Farm is likely to have been associated with royalties paid at its Toll house as there is no record of the crown having owned land in this area.

⁷¹ This area includes Brothertoft and the Algarkirk, Sutterton, Kirton, and Fosdyke Fens, together with the adjoining extra-parochial places.

CHAPTER 5

*Building new Identities, 1870-1914***The Economy of Nineteenth-century Boston.**

As a result of the improved Witham navigation and enclosure of the Holland Fen in 1769, the century that followed was one of growing prosperity for Boston and its neighbouring fenlands. Furthermore, enclosure of the East, West, and Wildmore fens begun in the early years of the nineteenth century ensured that Boston was virtually surrounded by a great hinterland of exportable produce.¹ Not only were these fenlands producing massive amounts of cereals and other crops, there were also thousands of sheep and cattle fattening on the rich, marshland grasses. As a result Boston's commercial trade was rejuvenated and, as long as the busy Witham was able to deliver the vital freight for its coastal traffic and overseas trade, the port of Boston prospered again. The revived fortunes of the port encouraged many new industries to invest in the rapidly expanding town. There were refurbishments too, with a new town hall, fish market, fine new houses, banks, shops, and hotels; while the town's improved amenities included a vital supply of fresh drinking water and gas lighting to complement the re-vamped marketplace. For a population that had almost tripled between 1801 and 1851, extra housing was essential. As Wright observed in his assessment of modern Lincolnshire, Boston was 'the first town [in the county] to experience urban and commercial expansion and have engineering works with an international market'.² Supported by wealthy merchants, farmers, and graziers, the town

¹ An area 'in length in some places 50 miles, and in breadth above 30', according to *The Universal British Directory of Trade, Commerce, and Manufacture* (London, 1791), p.336.

² W. White, *History, Gazetteer, and Directory of Lincolnshire* (1856, Sheffield, 1968), p. 273. There were 5,926 inhabitants in 1801 and 15,132 in 1851; N. R. Wright, 'An Archaeological Resource Assessment of Modern

prospered and became the main commercial and industrial town of Lincolnshire. It was said to have been the largest and richest town in the county by 1848.

All this changed shortly after the Great Northern Railway arrived in Boston that same year. The smaller stations which opened up in the fens were able to intercept most of the grain that would normally have gone to the port and this resulted in a serious loss of river and harbour dues, the vital revenue that had maintained and improved the Witham and its outfall. Elsewhere in the county the railways had a more beneficial effect on urban economy. Towns such as Grimsby, Scunthorpe, Gainsborough, Grantham, and Lincoln were transformed and expanded as engineering firms such as Rustons, Marshall, Clayton and Shuttleworth, Fosters, Hornsby, and Robeys began taking advantage of the rail routes into neighbouring counties. Despite a stagnation of its port and coastal trade over the next forty years, Boston continued to support many local industries and was able to encourage the growth of new factories such as cigar making, luggage labels, seed-crushing, flour milling, and a feather bed industry.

Ironically, the GNR became one of the town's largest employers after it opened a passenger station and built its own goods yards, offices, and workshops on the western edges of Boston. Because of their reduced wages and poor working conditions thousands of agricultural labourers continued to emigrate to Canada, Australia, or New Zealand, while those who stayed behind looked for better-paid employment in the towns.³ Many of them found work on the local railways. Land around the new Broadfield Lane rail depot supported several new streets of housing for the Boston workforce and, together with the

Lincolnshire 1750-1960', *East Midlands Archaeological Research Framework: Resource Assessment of Modern Lincolnshire*, p. 9, <http://www.le.ac.uk/ar/research/projects/eastmidsw/pdfs/43lincmod.pdf>. 28/02/06.

³ Russell, *Revolt*, pp. 19, 81-6. Batches of emigrant labourers were leaving Boston by rail. For instance, in 1875 one special train passed through Boston station with 300 emigrants and their luggage on board. The 'best men...are leaving the country or turning to other occupations with better pay'.

adjacent new Station hotel and Great Northern public house, broadened the scope of the town's growing list of amenities. In 1871, the corporation of Boston saw fit to provide its townspeople with the first People's Park in the county, this was located on the southern edge of the town and consisted of 33.5 acres of riverside walks complete with a bandstand and swimming baths.⁴

Agricultural Depression

Although the wider picture of British farming showed that it appeared to be generally thriving before 1870, agriculture was already experiencing difficulties and there were basic changes looming ahead. Collins has suggested that farming in England was by no means uniformly prosperous during the so-called 'Golden Age' of high farming. He also saw the age as 'a paradox', with farmers carrying out a form of husbandry that required larger outlays in feeds and fertilisers despite the very uncertain returns. With no corresponding increase in output it might seem in retrospect that agricultural inefficiency had simply been compensated for by higher prices.⁵

Sharp rises in the imports of foreign wheat had already begun to undercut British prices with approximately 50 per cent of the national supply being imported by 1873-5, and this was set to increase to 60 per cent by 1880.⁶ At the same time there was a corresponding deterioration in the weather and several years of wet summers and poor yields brought on what was generally considered to be a period of 'great agricultural depression' in Britain. This remains the subject of many scholarly discussions with historians divided as to the main causes and severity of this rural depression, even

⁴ Wright, *Lincolnshire Towns*, pp. 183-4, 243; Wright, *Railways*, pp. 29-32.

⁵ E.J.T. Collins, 'Rural and Agricultural Change', *Agrarian History*, VII, pp. 125-6.

⁶ Brown, *Farming in Lincolnshire*, p. 123.

questioning whether it was a 'myth' or a 'reality'.⁷ On a national basis some of these issues were concerned with the potential yields of high farming and whether they had already been reached and fallen well short of expectations. There were reservations made about the large estate farms and whether they had been too big to run efficiently, or whether landlords ought to have reduced the rents of their farms and land much sooner than they had been prepared to. There also remained the likelihood that scientific advances in feeds and fertilisers could have been misused or misunderstood, and perhaps more investment in labour-saving machinery ought to have been made. Almost certainly a much-needed period of adjustment was imminent for all these issues. Yet the question remained, how large a role did the bad weather actually play in the perceived causes of depression at that time, and especially in the fenlands of Lincolnshire?

In 1869, a three-week period of rain which had caused extensive flooding across many areas of England south of the Humber, prompted *The Illustrated London News* to alert its readers to the stark devastation occurring in the Lincolnshire fens at that time. This was accompanied by the engraving reproduced in figure 5.1.⁸ As we have already observed, flooding was almost inevitable in the fenland during periods of prolonged, heavy rain, and especially where rivers were liable to rise above their banks. Rainfall recorded in the fenland area around Boston was said to have occurred on 214 days of the year in 1872, this was followed by two years that were 'wetter than average particularly at harvest time', while the winter of 1874-5 was declared one of the coldest winters of the century.⁹

⁷ Collins, 'Rural and Agricultural Change', pp. 140, 204.

⁸ Namely the Thames, Severn, Trent, and Witham regions; *Illustrated London News*, 16 Jan 1869, pp. 69, 73. <http://www.londonancestor.com/victorian-london/flooding-england.htm> 22/01/06.

⁹ Heckington Village Trust, *Heckington in the Eighteen Seventies* (Heckington, 1980), p. 22.



Figure 5.1. 'Flooded out'. Lincolnshire floods 1869. (*Illustrated London News*, 16 Jan 1869).

During the year November 1878-9, the Boston rainfall was 38% above average while the severe weather conditions of 1879 and 1880 were deemed to be the worst ever known in Lincolnshire, with rainfall measured at 33.5 inches in the fens compared to an average of 22 inches.¹⁰

The Reverend Thomas Campbell, the Anglican minister at Brothertoft, was so concerned about the depressed period of agriculture that he felt compelled to record his thoughts for posterity in 1886. In hindsight he was able to recognise that the so-called golden age of agriculture had already passed, and so he turned to the end page of an old poor rate assessment book and entered the following comments:

¹⁰ Brown, *Farming in Lincolnshire*, p. 120;

The whole of agriculture is suffering most acutely. From about 1876 for about 4 or 5 years we have had rain, rain, nothing but rain and following on all this cereals fall in price through foreign competition. In the Midland counties thousands of acres cannot find a tenant. Even in this parish [Brothertoft] land which has been let at 50/- 60/- an acre has been re-let at half this. At this moment November 8th [1886] the best wheat is not making more than 31/- or 32/- per quarter in Boston market. The present mortgagee in possession [of Brothertoft Hall] are the Melvilles, bankers of Lincoln, the land having been let to two tenants and the Hall only occupied by Mr Small of Boston. The Hall and its 140 acres of land is then traced from 1813 to 1871 as owned by Mr Henry Gee, father, and Mr Thomas Gee, the son. Between 1871 and 1879 it has passed through the Bank's liquidators and between 1879 and 1885 Mr Curtois had been and gone.¹¹

Here, Campbell appears to be laying the blame for a depressed rural economy upon continuous bad weather, foreign competition, and the low price of wheat. Although he refers to the general lack of tenants for agricultural land in the Midland counties, this was apparently not the case in Brothertoft at that time.¹² One reason may have been that the majority of holdings were less than 50 acres and, in cases where investment had not yet been repaid, the families worked longer and harder just to keep a roof over their heads. Campbell also mentions the reduction of rents. To avoid bankruptcies and the loss of good tenants, many landlords had agreed to delay or to reduce the payment of rents, and this was considered to be a valuable mainstay of proficient farming during the depression. There were of course local exceptions. The Marquis of Bristol refused to delay his Heckington rents in 1879, or even to return a 10 per cent rebate 'which was generally done in the neighbourhood'. Apparently, the 'toast of His Lordship's health' was duly omitted from the tenants' dinner shortly after this.¹³

¹¹ LAO. Brothertoft PAR 13/1, Overseers of the Poor Rate Assessments 1770-1808, a note at the end. Cartwright too, had needed to split up his land in order to sell, even at a loss.

¹² L. Jebb, *The Small Holdings of England: A survey of various existing systems*, pp. 34-5. Jebb also confirms there was a continual, great demand for smallholdings to rent in the Boston silt and fen areas.

¹³ *Heckington*, p. 22; Nevertheless, the marquis was forced to reduce rents on his estates by up to 50 per cent between 1879-1894, see Brown, *Farming in Lincolnshire*, p. 131.

Farm tenants needed the long-term financial support of landowners in order to adapt to leaner times, and it was essential that old agreements over which crops should be grown were relaxed so that the tenant could produce for the best markets. Some Holland Fen tenants under contract to Colmans of Norwich grew mustard seed where their leases allowed alternative crops to be grown. In 1893, the reduction of rents remained at the top of most farmers agendas and the subject was liable to be raised at almost any social event. When father of the bride, Richardson Dring of Brothertoft, proposed the toast to 'Our Landlords' at his daughter's lavish wedding breakfast, a Richard Harvey of Boston duly responded. The local newspaper quoted what it may have considered to be the only interesting portion of his speech at that time, namely

...that farmers and landlords must be united, and then in spite of such seasons as this, agriculture was not yet played out. It was certainly the duty of landlords to help their tenants through: and he (the speaker) should not hesitate for a moment if his tenants came to him and said they could not pay their rent this year to make them a present of it. (Cheers). He felt that by sticking together they would still pull through.¹⁴

Despite the economic situation at this time the wedding appears to have been a most lavish affair and, with a breakfast menu that included salmon, lobster, prawns, green goose, pigeons in aspic, chicken, sirloin of beef, quarters of lamb, ducklings, York hams, and ox tongues, Richard Harvey may well have felt re-assured that his rents were under no immediate threat from this tenant.¹⁵ Nevertheless, these comments do serve to underscore the serious concerns being expressed about farming in the locality during this period of agricultural depression.

¹⁴ BRL, A cutting from *The Boston Guardian*, dated 29 June 1893.

¹⁵ *White's Directory*, 1882, 'Richardson Dring, farmer and landowner' also at 'Sutterton Fen, Kirton Fen, Fosdyke Fen, and Amber Hill', p. 748.

Parochial Reforms

After a century of hard work and settlement the new village communities in the north-western and central regions of Holland Fen were ready to embrace civil change, and although part of the collective 'ecclesiastical parish' it was essential that they should also function as civil parishes. The preceding interlude of high farming had allowed village communities to continue to build their new homes, farm buildings, public houses, and not least, to rebuild and extend their nonconformist chapels. Reducing the jigsaw of tiny, isolated communities, extra-parochial places, marshes, and wastelands of Holland Fen into a tidy group of parishes, beginning with those similar to figure 5.2, would not be a simple matter.

The stark reality of the problem was the rigid network of drains and enclosure boundaries, these isolated many of the fen allotments from their neighbours as well as home parishes. Fortunately, in 1872 no-one could know that it would take at least another 112 years for all the fen communities to be fully recognised.¹⁶ The first civil changes of that period gave parish status to the extra-parochial Great Beats and Little Beats Plots which had been abandoned more than a century earlier in the East Lindsey Division of the county after the new river was cut (refer again to figure 4.13). These were followed in 1879 when the extra-parochial North Forty Foot Bank became a tiny parish and village, and the extra-parochial Harts Grounds and Ferry Corner Plot also became parishes.

¹⁶ The Divided Parishes Acts and Local Government Acts were enacted to deal with many extra-parochial places that paid no poor rates, also detached parts of parishes, and the county/borough boundaries. Not all Acts entirely fulfilled their purposes resulting in the long series of amendments. See <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report/7/04/06>; <http://www.homepages.newnet.co.uk/dance/webpjd/offstats/regevents.htm> 7/04/06; Kirton Fen remained a part of Kirton parish until 1984. The hamlet of Hubberts Bridge, also part of the Holland Fen ecclesiastical parish, remained divided between Kirton and Frampton parishes with no civil status of its own.

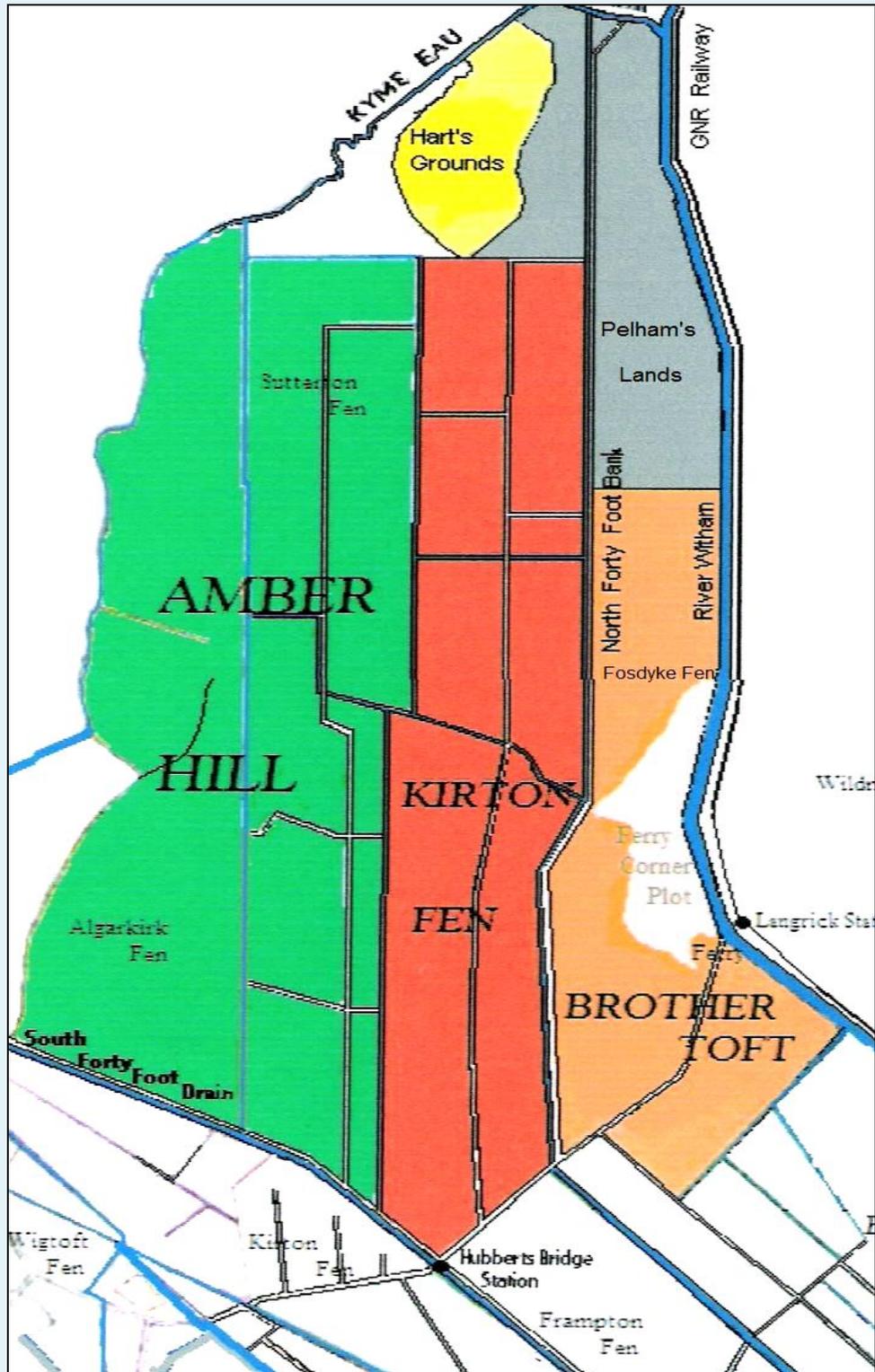


Figure 5.2 Parochial reforms in the north-western and central regions, *c.*1879-1901.

Probably the only constructive and enduring change of that period came in December 1880 when the Algarkirk and Sutterton Fens, together with the uninhabited 30-acre gravel plot known as Amber Hill and a detached portion of Dogdyke, were formally united into

one single parish under the name of Amber Hill. The new parish already featured its own church of St. John the Baptist which had been built within the Algarkirk Fen area in 1867 as a chapel of ease to Holland Fen. Its 607 inhabitants were widely dispersed across the 5,400 acres of sparse, clayey land, where dykes, drains, and two parallel roads running north-westerly for about 6 miles across the fenland served to partition most of the bleak expanse and separated remote farms. Although there were farm buildings spread out along these roads and drainsides, the original community of traders and craftspeople that had evolved around the original gravel plot in Sutterton Fen remained firmly at the heart of the new parish.

In 1880 the Fosdyke Fen allotment was transferred to the adjoining parish of Brothertoft, this more than doubled the size of the latter from around 900 acres to 1,835 acres. The new, north-western boundary of Brothertoft adjoined that of Pelham's Lands, which also became a parish when it was merged with parts of Chapel Hill and a fragment of the Great Beats' plot three years later, in 1883. The alteration and amalgamation of civil boundaries did nothing to help the 1891 census enumerators locate the remote areas of Holland Fen on the ground. According to some of the many alterations and comments scribbled on the census sheets, they quickly discovered that determining the new parish boundaries was a confusing and difficult task and were often unsure of their actual whereabouts. One enumerator, who carried out the Fosdyke Fen/Brothertoft census, complained in a letter to the Registrar General that the boundaries were 'so confused, the districts so intermingled, that it is practically impossible to define each separately'.¹⁷ Because of this confusion, few detailed addresses other than of specific buildings such as public houses were recorded on the census sheets, and this has impeded the identification and location of some individual farmhouses of that period.

¹⁷ TNA, RG 12/2576/23. Letter written by the enumerator on a blank census sheet; all these changes have severely compromised any attempt at making an accurate population chart of the fen.

Set at the apex of the fen, the random shape of the old Harts Grounds appears bizarrely out of place against the rigid lines of drains and enclosures elsewhere. At the time of the 1891 census this isolated parish contained eleven agricultural households and a total of 61 inhabitants. There were eight occupiers of land (not necessarily domicile) in 1890 and about one-fifth of the 576 cultivated acres was owner-occupied. Wheat, barley, oats, beans, and general fodder crops were the main produce and livestock included horses, cattle, sheep, and pigs.¹⁸ Individual parish tables detailing these acreages, holdings, crops, workers, and livestock are provided in Appendix 3.

By contrast, Pelham's Lands had an advantageous position next to the main Chapel Hill/ Boston road and was near to both the river Witham and the North Forty Foot Drain. Access to the 38 households was therefore relatively easy for its 165 inhabitants. Unlike Harts Grounds the acreage of arable land remained consistent here with only a few acres of owner-occupied land. There was a variety of trades in this farming community, two publicans, a miller/baker, two grocers, a draper, butcher, stonemason, carrier, fisherman, and railway platelayer.¹⁹ The miller/baker and his windmill were situated beside the North Forty Foot road, opposite to the chapel of ease built at Chapel Hill in 1826.

In the Kirton Fen enclosure on the west side of the North Forty Foot Drain, most of the 76 households were occupied by farmers, foremen, cottagers, and labourers. A wheelwright, a blacksmith, and a 'machinist' maintained agricultural services, while the local innkeeper, two publicans, and a brewer supplied hospitality and beer. The vicar lived in the vicarage close to his church. There were no shops in Kirton Fen on account of the restricted access and it remained almost entirely committed to husbandry. Because the

¹⁸ TNA. RG. 12/256/94;

¹⁹ TNA. RG. 12/2576/95-7, 105-6; See Appendix 3 for tables of acreage, holdings, crops, workers, and livestock.

Kirton Fen crop returns were integrated with those of the home parish of Kirton, no separate data was available during the period 1890-95. However, the returns of 1900 show that the 2,960 acres of Kirton Fen contained 43 holdings, 40 acres were owner-occupied and the remainder were rented.²⁰ In order to access their homes and lands the farmers whose farmhouses abutted the North Forty Foot Drain needed to erect their own footbridges across the drain and the condition of these varied considerably. Some farmers used the parallel Kirton Drove to the west and negotiated their way across the fields and ditches in order to reach their own farms. This procedure not only required the opening of gates to allow their carts and stock to cross neighbouring land, it often necessitated the payment of a fee for the privilege.

As already mentioned, the Brothertoft community seemed of a different calibre and comparatively urbane compared to other areas of Holland Fen. There was a constant hive of activity centred around the river Witham, the busy Langrick ferry crossing, and railway station located in the railway 'delph' directly across the river. Near to Langrick station and the ferry stood Witham House, built in the 1770s and where afternoon teas were served on lazy, summer days in the riverside gardens. As shown in figure 5.3 overleaf, barges and packet steamers still used the river Witham to get to and from Boston which was three miles further east, but the social life in Brothertoft appeared to revolve gently around the hall, its church, local shops, two schools, public house, and the parish hall. The aura of Victorian gentrification can be gleaned from Thomas Gee's will of 1872 with his references to 'gardens, stables, coachhouses, greenhouses, hot houses, and outbuildings'.²¹

²⁰ TNA. RG. 12/2576/113-19; See Appendix 3 for tables of acreage, holdings, crops, workers, and livestock.

²¹ LAO. LCC Wills 1872/11/926. Will of Thomas Gee of Brothertoft, 'To my wife a piano, carriage, horses and harness to her use, to enjoy use of my plate, linen, china, wines and other consumable articles, furniture and household effects. £200 paid half-yearly for life in addition to provision made to her under our marriage settlement, she to reside and use my Mansion house at Brothertoft'. Thomas Gee's wife was the daughter of a Suffolk clergyman.



Figure 5.3 Boats on the river Witham at Langrick Ferry *c.* 1890s. Looking towards Langrick from Brothertoft with Witham House in the background. Author's private collection.

Brothertoft was not just an agricultural community, there were professional men and trades people here, two schoolmasters, a veterinary surgeon, a draper/lay preacher in the Church of England, and a local police constable included in a total of 239 inhabitants. The parish crop returns refer to 28 occupiers of land, six of whom owned all their land and one was a part-owner. In all, 292 of the 1,806 cultivated acres in Brothertoft were owner-occupied and there were fewer labourers listed as householders.

The Fen Schools

There was already a school building at Brothertoft in 1776. This was some twelve years before Major Cartwright provided tuition for his estate workers' children, and about eighty years before the Gee's endowed their own school at Brothertoft. The original eighteenth-century school belonged to Brothertoft chapel and the following chapel expenses of £1. 4s. 7d are listed in the overseers of the poor accounts for 1776, as follows:

Dec 28 th .	
Coals for airing the school	4s. 6d.
Nails for the school	1s. 4d.
Deals for school	10s. 0d.
Carpenter for 3 days work at school	6s. 0d.
Blacksmith for work and for hanging tongue of the bell at the school	2s. 9d. ²²

The vicar of Holland Fen chapel of ease ran a day school in the Fosdyke Fen area c.1846-49 and this was held in his newly-built church hall. Thomas Gee followed his example in 1856 when he built a Brothertoft church hall beside the park gates; it also enabled his two spinster sisters, Martha and Mary, to endow their own school in the church hall. Miss Plant was the schoolmistress and the children paid one penny a week for their education. There was also a private school run by a Mrs Bowles in her front parlour, and just when it became obvious that there were more children than could be accommodated in the schools the Board schools took over the responsibility of education.

In 1880 when schooling became compulsory for children, the North-East Holland Fen School Board built its first school at Hedgehog Bridge next to the North Forty Foot Bank. It cost between £700 - £800 to build and had room for 95 children. The Admissions book of 1881-88 shows that it was attended by children from all over the fen including 'Langrick, Brothertoft, Fosdyke Fen, Holland Fen, Forty Foot Bank, Kirton Drove, Ferry Corner plot, Boston West, Sutterton Fen, Hubberts Bridge, the Wheatsheaf, Langrville, Boardsides, and Toft Tunnel'. Of the 433 names listed in the admissions book during those seven years, 341 (79 per cent) were the children of labourers, 58 (13 per cent) of farmers, the remaining 34 (8 per cent) of children belonged to schoolmasters, station master, trades

²² LAO. Brothertoft PAR 13/1, Overseers of the Poor Rate Assessments, 1770-1808.

and crafts people, and five widows.²³ However the building of these Board schools did not please everyone. The Rev. Thomas Campbell was so concerned about the closure of his school in Brothertoft church hall that he confided his fears that the building would be 'taken over by the Hall', to the back pages of the poor rate assessment book once again.²⁴ To prevent the building from being annexed, he managed to keep it open as a Sunday school by retaining the £20 fee paid by the Gee charity and so funded 'a schoolmistress to play the harmonium, sing, and teach the children on a Sunday'. In many schools where the clergy were in charge, the ability to play a harmonium was considered to be one of the main qualifications for the post of teacher.

One year after the Hedgehog Bridge School was opened a second school was built a few miles further north of the first school, not far from the Barley Sheaf public house. This middle section of the North Forty Foot Bank was now a village and parish, and as such it would manage to survive the civil reforms and not be transferred to adjacent parishes. The village, which had also assumed the name of '*Holland Fen*' in the manner of its church, was a vital centre of activity and amongst its 198 inhabitants lived the shopkeepers, the trades, and crafts people who continued to supply the fenland's demand for essential services.²⁵ These included the bootmaker, blacksmith, joiner, wheelwright, plumber, glazier, bricklayer, grocers, draper, miller, baker, beer sellers, boat owners, and local carrier. The Barley Sheaf School, pictured in figure 5.4, was built within the village of *Holland Fen* at a cost of £750 and there was 'room for a possible 111 children at 8 cubic feet space for each child'.

²³ LAO. Ref. SR 083/9/1-2. 1881-88. Brothertoft Hedgehog Bridge School Admissions and Withdrawals Registers.

²⁴ LAO. Brothertoft PAR 13/1, Overseers of the Poor Rate Assessments, 1770-1808, note at end of book.

²⁵ To avoid any confusion with the Holland Fen itself, or with the ecclesiastical parish of that name, italics will be used in all future references to the village of *Holland Fen*.

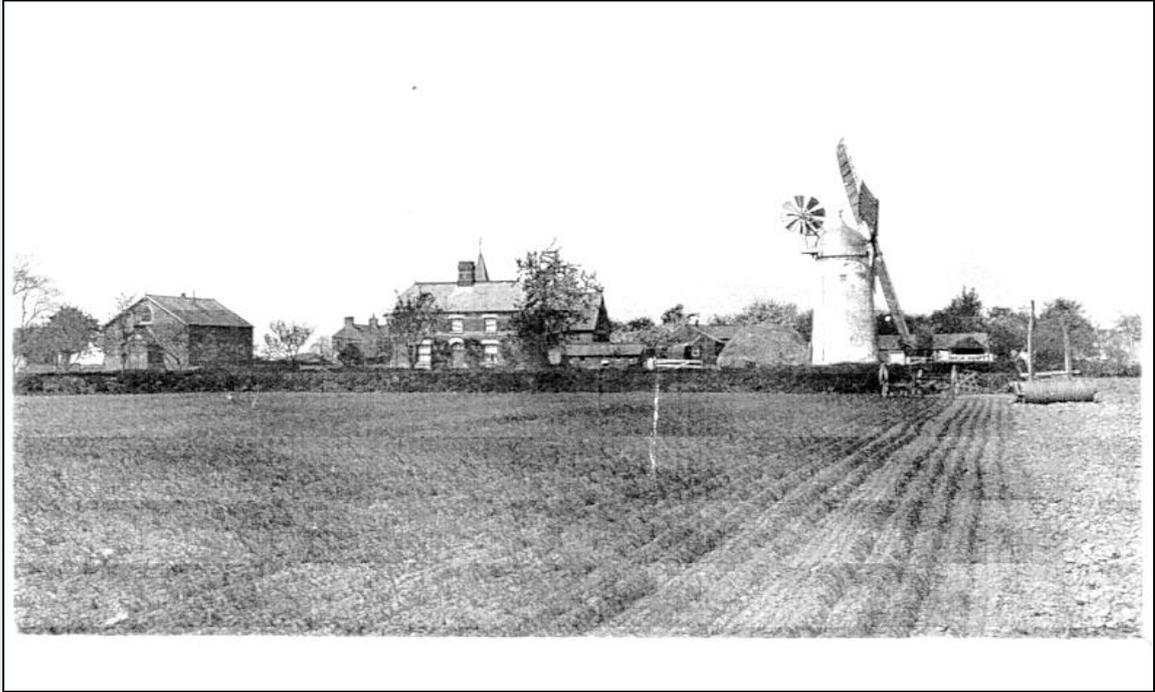


Figure 5.4 Barley Sheaf schoolhouse (centre) with the school and bell-tower behind *c.* 1890s. The village of *Holland Fen* and Wesleyan chapel, built 1864, are to the left of the school, the corn mill is on the right. Only the schoolhouse remains. Author's private collection.

At the same time a third new school, shown in figure 5.5 overleaf, and governed by a separate committee, was built in the neighbouring Amber Hill at a cost of £900 and designed to hold 137 children. All three were typical Victorian Board schools complete with turret and a bell to summon in the pupils. School fees which were payable until 1891 were listed as 2d, 3d, 4d, & 6d, rising with the age of the child. At both the Hedgehog Bridge and Barley Sheaf schools along North Forty Foot Bank, a headmaster and his wife were employed (at £6.5s. per couple, per month in 1897) and permitted to live rent free in the adjoining schoolhouse. The school log books and minutes of the school board reveal some of the earlier problems encountered when trying to provide education for rural children, especially those in fenlands intersected by wide drains. The chief complaint was of absenteeism.



Figure 5.5 Amber Hill is now the only school left in Holland Fen.

Many children had to walk two or three miles to reach the schools and in wintertime they were often kept at home because of the lack of daylight and the waterlogged state of the footpaths, most of which crossed the fen in a west/easterly direction. There were difficulties in crossing the deep ditches and drains, especially the Clay Dyke and the Fifteen Foot at Amber Hill with their slippery banks and unsafe footbridges. It was noted in the long, wet winter of 1885, that all those living at Chapel Hill, Reed Point, Pelham's Lands, Gill End, and Kirton Drove were detained at home 'a great number of times'. Late harvests and potato picking kept most of the children away from school, for instance in September 1882 there were only 21 children in attendance until late October, when a 'better attendance' of 82 scholars was attained. Complaints about the farmers employing children intensified again in the spring when the children were again absent 'owing to potato settings, leading drill horses, and other like work as well'. All the small farms and smallholdings were heavily dependent on family labour for their very survival, especially during this period of the agricultural depression when

children were expected to share in the work. Over the years, the Sunday school treats, chapel anniversary outings, polling days, New Year's Mart, and the Boston May Fairs also continued to take their tolls on school attendances.²⁶

There were many occasions when the low attendance was often the result of contagious diseases such as diphtheria, measles, yellow jaundice, tuberculosis, and whooping cough. In 1884 the schools were closed for five weeks because of an outbreak of diphtheria. Other attendance problems were related to the May Day hiring-fairs, also the Lady Day removals known locally as 'Packrag' day, this was when some of the agricultural labourers and their families left the farm's 'tied' cottages to take up employment elsewhere.²⁷ This usually meant that a number of scholars left the area and were replaced by new arrivals. The educational standards of some of these new entrants could cause an exasperated comment, or perhaps on rare occasions, an encouraging observation to be entered in the school logbook. The comments also allowed an insight into the prevailing moods of the teachers and their pupils at the time. A feeling of dejection could be detected when school Inspectors gave them a bad report, however this was confined to the early days when there was a great deal of absenteeism and much work to be done on the children who did 'not know their letters'. It took time for the discipline and the curriculum to produce better results, but the elation experienced in June 1885 was very obvious when there was 'special praise from the Inspector' for handwriting. A 'good report from the Inspectors, children and self jubilant', 'very good order and satisfactory

²⁶ LAO. Ref. SR/082/8/1. 1882-1909. Barley Sheaf school log book; Malt Kiln Farm private collection, *North East Holland Fen School Board Minutes Book, 1897-1969*.

²⁷ LAO. Ref. SR/082/8/1. 1882-1909., 2 May 1887, 'Boston May Fair – servants' general May Day holiday causes poor attendance'. 10 April 1906, 'scholars left through Lady-Day flittings'.

general efficiency', 'should have given half day holiday had we not had whole day off on Whit Monday in the week', were some of the proud observations made by the teachers.²⁸

Nevertheless, the continued absence of so many children during the harvest periods could not be controlled and after a prudent acceptance that this was inevitable, the school holidays were adjusted to suit the timing of the harvests. As the acreage of potatoes in Brothertoft increased by 134 per cent during the fifteen years, 1890-1905, this compromise was of vital importance to the local economy.

Farming as a Business Enterprise

During the agricultural depression there were plenty of opportunities for those who could afford to purchase or rent, to take on some extra land, but for the tradesmen with money to invest for the future a high-quality farm was still a viable business proposition. Multiple holdings could be accumulated and managed by hired foremen. Richardson Dring, whom we encountered earlier in this chapter, was a farmer and grazier with holdings at Wyberton, Amber Hill, and Langrick, as well as Brothertoft; he was also preparing to retire from active farming in 1896. As a 66-year-old widower he lived with his daughter, a housekeeper, a female servant, a wagoner, and young 'plough-chap' at the Malt Kiln farm, which was situated in the old Fosdyke Fen area of Brothertoft, and he was anxious that the tenancy of that farm should go to a relative with sufficient capital to maintain the farm properly. On hearing that his nephew Edward Whittaker Dring, a skilled saddler and harness maker at Billingham, was planning to invest in a farm near Chapel Hill, Richardson Dring persuaded him to take on the tenancy of his Brothertoft farm, where the land was in superior condition.

²⁸ Page 34 of the Barley Sheaf school log book.

Edward Dring knew that when his eyesight began to deteriorate and thus affect the quality of his craftsmanship he would have to give up his work in the family business. He already helped his brother manage their home farm at North Kyme and planned to take up a career in farming with a farm of his own that he could pass on to his heirs. The Malt Kiln farmhouse, outbuildings, and 150 acres of good quality land were on lease from a London landowner whom he hoped might one day be persuaded to sell the farm. It seemed like an opportune time for Dring to invest in farming for the nature of husbandry had changed to make better use of inputs, cereal prices had improved slightly, more attention was being paid to cash crops, and in 1896 the Agricultural Ratings Act allowed a 50 per cent rating relief for agricultural land.²⁹ On a national basis it had taken something like twenty years, plus the necessary capital, to change the established system of farm management, although this usually only followed a recognition that the downward trend of prices was likely to continue indefinitely. In the fenlands of south Lincolnshire the scope of agricultural diversity for other likely markets was gradually being developed, and by the mid-1890s some of the established grain and vegetable crops had been augmented with fresh vegetables, fruit, flowers, bulbs, dairy products, and poultry.

Dring's farming diary commenced on 25 July 1896. It was actually a small cashbook in which he entered brief, daily notes about which mare, gilt pig, or cow had been served, what brand of seed was drilled, what contracts had been made, and the jobs that the workers were currently engaged in.³⁰ He appears to have continued to practise his trade in Billingham and helped with the running of the family farm at North Kyme simultaneously,

²⁹ Brown, *Farming in Lincolnshire*, pp. 125, 142, 179, 181.

³⁰ Malt Kiln Farm private family collection, *Farm diary of E. W. Dring, 1896-1906*, and conversations with his grandson.

while his uncle remained at the Brothertoft farm until such a time as he was ready to move in. Although Dring despatched produce such as carrots via the local station, the wagons usually took cereal crops to 'Gilbert's boat', or 'Goose's boat'. Goose was one of the principal farmers in Pelham's Lands and Amber Hill, his carrier's barge was moored beside the drain towpaths from where the wagons would often return with bags of phosphate, or steam coal for threshing.³¹ Wilson Fox observed that many farmers considered the railway charges to be excessive; the railways charged between 3s. and 4s. per head to send cattle from Lincolnshire to Leicestershire, and because this absorbed their profits the cattle were sent by road instead at 1s. a head.³²

Farming in the fenland had its own special problems, the heavy land and lack of roads meant that wagon axles and wheels broke with alarming regularity and their loads had to be rescued. Livestock fell into the drains and drowned if they were not hauled out quickly enough. One of Dring's neighbours had 42 sheep drown after dogs had chased them headlong into one of the drains. In any case, the numbers of sheep were declining rapidly in Lincolnshire. As Jonathan Brown has observed, the low price of wool, epidemics of liver rot, and foot and mouth diseases all had spectacular results on the flocks of sheep, which caused stocks to drop by about 50 per cent in the fens during the 1870s-1890s. Many farmers were giving up raising sheep altogether.³³ According to his diary, Dring was also experiencing some trouble with sheep as in 1897-8 he was 'salving the sheep with ointment' during December, while many of his ewes were giving birth to stillborn lambs in

³¹ Grain was being exported through Boston's new port. Construction of a fresh channel in 1881 had enabled a modern port with a seven-acre dock to be opened in 1886, within three miles of the sea; *School Board Minutes*, first meeting, 10.3.1897. Both Goose and Richardson Dring (chairman) were on the school managers' board which was comprised of seven local farmers. In 1903 they became the managers of council schools.

³² LCL. L.63. *Royal Commission on Agriculture. Report by Mr. Wilson Fox (Assistant Commissioner) on the County of Lincolnshire (excepting the Isle of Axholme)* (1895), pp. 108-9.

³³ Brown, *Farming in Lincolnshire*, pp. 158-9.

February. When a brief entry proclaimed at last 'the first live lamb', it was followed two days later by the dejected observation of only '2 lambs [live] all night'. Table 3 of parish crop returns for Brothertoft in Appendix 3 for this period appears to confirm Brown's observations on the decline in flocks of sheep, for the numbers of sheep in Brothertoft fell from 1,628 to 717 between 1890-1900, a drop of 56 per cent.³⁴

Entries in the farm diary also revealed the occasional social occasion such as an outing to see the famous Barnum and Bailey's circus show at Lincoln on 6 August 1898, and a visit from Horace who 'is going to America and leaves home tomorrow'. There was also the proud statement in 1899 that the farm - he does not say whether it was the Kyme farm or Malt Kiln farm - was 'sold by Auction at Boston and purchased by selves for £4290...opposed very strongly by John B.'. In July 1902, Dring signed an agreement for the Barley Sheaf farm which was just a few hundred yards away from the Malt Kiln farm, and he was also involved with other lands in Hart's Grounds, at Terry Booth next to the Kyme Eau, in Walcot, North and South Kyme a few miles west of the fen, and cattle were pastured in the neighbouring Haverholme park. In 1910 the rateable value of Dring's land and property (house and buildings, three houses, 147 acres land) in Brothertoft amounted to £148.5s.³⁵

Farming activities revolved around the horses, these might include the teams of Shire horses for ploughing, the horses and carts used for transporting produce and supplies, or a pony and trap for personal shopping trips and leisure. Like many other farmers in south Lincolnshire, Dring bred most of his own horses and carefully noted the dates and sire of each foal. The horses worked long, hard days and when they suffered wounds or

³⁴ See tables of parish Crop Returns in Appendix 3, Brothertoft Table 3. I am grateful to Dr Jonathan Brown for his advice regarding these tables.

³⁵ LAO. 1910 Valuations 6/TAX/12/Brothertoft

blisters he recorded these as well, listing the medicines and treatments that were used on each occasion. Every evening after work the horses had to be fed and groomed, they were carefully inspected for injuries, and the harnesses were cleaned. This was usually the wagoner's job before he retired for the night, and early each morning the animals were fed and harnessed before work began. Wagoners always worked longer hours than anyone else because the welfare of his horses was crucial to his job. As his name implies, the wagoner was in control of the wagons and transportation of produce and livestock, but he was mainly in charge of the ploughing and was usually assisted by a 'second man', or a 'third man' depending on the size of the farm and number of teams required. He was normally a single man with free board and lodging at the farmhouse as part of his salary.

Dring recorded the hiring of his wagoners which was usually accompanied by the 'fasten penny', an amount that varied between 2s. and 10s. In 1898 he 'hired wagoner for £12.10s', in 1899 he 'hired wagoner £15 wage', and in 1900 the wage was £18. In February 1901, a man was hired 'as horseman and to attend to other stock with the assistance of a boy, his wages to be 14s. per week, 18 gallon barrel of Ale at Harvest, a 30 stone pig at Xmas and 4 sacks potatoes during the year'. A horseman was usually associated with the care and breeding of horses, travelling with the stud stallions, and occasionally with the breeding of other livestock.³⁶ The job itself, like that of the shepherd, gradually disappeared in this area as sheep and horses gave way to arable crops and tractors, leaving horse-breeding to become a specialised occupation.

Farm Service and Farm Servants

'Farm servants' usually lived-in on farms where there were plenty of chores and activities related to livestock. Unlike the agricultural labourers, farm servants were usually

³⁶ TNA. MAF 68/2130/23. In 1905 there were 132 horses in Brothertoft, 53 in Pelham's Lands, 34 in Harts Grounds, 176 in Kirton Fen, and 306 in Amber Hill. A total of 701 horses in this region of the fen.

hired on yearly contracts and resided in the homes of farmers and farming families where the boys could provide continuous all-round care and management of the animals. The structures of farm service and the causes of its decline, for instance its social implications, the avoidance of settlement claims, national economic and price circumstances, and agricultural changes, have been the subject of much debate by historians.³⁷ It was generally established that an early decline had indeed occurred in the south and eastern counties (except for some parts of Devon and Cornwall) and that farm service had persisted mainly in the north and west of England until the mid-nineteenth century and beyond. However, this concept of a north/south divide in the pattern of farm service has prompted calls for more research to be done on regional variations, including fenlands.³⁸

Despite Kussmaul's suggestion of an 'extinction' or national decline of their numbers by 1851, there were at least 56 'farm servants' identified as living-in on farms within the north-western region of Holland Fen in 1891.³⁹ As graph A in figure 5.6 overleaf demonstrates, all were male and unmarried with 48 of them (86 per cent) aged between 14 and 23 years. In some farmhouses there were two or three farm servants of varying ages living-in at the same time to maintain a continuity of skills and training. Of the farm servants 33, or 59 per cent, resided with the farmer and his family while a further 13 lived-in with farm bailiffs or foremen, nine boarded with agricultural labourers, and one with a cottager. This was, in many ways, a fairly traditional picture and one which would have been familiar to people in the eighteenth century. In contrast, the agricultural

³⁷ For instance, Snell, *Annals*, pp. 67-103; Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry*; Howkins, 'Peasants, servants', pp. 49-62; S. Counce, 'Twentieth-century farm servants: the horselads of the East Riding of Yorkshire', *AHR*, 39,2 (1991), pp. 143-66; Moses, 'Proletarian labourers?', pp. 78-94; Gritt, 'The census and the servant: a reassessment of the decline and distribution of farm service in early nineteenth-century England', *EHR*, 53 (2000), pp. 84-106.

³⁸ Howkins, 'Peasants, servants', p.62; Gritt, 'Census and the servant', p. 105, 'we need a deeper understanding of regional variations... within geographically disparate areas'.

³⁹ In Amber Hill, Brothertoft, Harts Grounds, Kirton Fen, North Forty Foot Bank, and Pelham's Lands, an approximate total of 1,437 inhabitants in 1891.

labourers worked fixed hours and were hired by the day, week, or month for seasonal labour, while some confined labourers with renewable Lady Day contracts lived in tied cottages close to their farms; some of them perhaps having already served their time as farm servants before getting married.

In figure 5.6, graph B demonstrates how the starting age of 24 years for married agricultural labourers coincided with the completion of their farm service at the same age, in graph A. In 1891, 125 (or 68 per cent) of the 184 agricultural labourers in Holland Fen were listed as married and head of a household, the others as shown in graph C, figure 5.6, were aged between 12 and 73 years (63 per cent of them under 24 years), they were unmarried or widowed, and lived either with relatives (63 per cent), or boarded out. Here we see a less traditional picture, with teenagers described as 'labourers'. The number of extra-parochial areas, changing boundaries, and confusion of farm locations during the late-nineteenth century obstructs any detailed local comparison of the 1891 farm servants with those of the 1841 and 1861 census returns. However, a survey of the earlier returns did show that where figures were available for most of the *original* Holland Fen area, there was a total of 74 'male servants' [presumably farm servants] living-in the fen in 1841.⁴⁰

In spite of a confusion in the traditional terminology between different fenland enumerators there were approximately 39 farm/general servants or farm boys found to be living within a similar area in 1861; 18 farm servants had replaced 18 agricultural labourers in Sutterton Fen alone. As already noted in chapter four, other 'servants' described as wagoners, horsemen, horse keepers, carters, garthmen, ploughmen, and grooms were noticeable newcomers in the 1861 census returns. Bearing in mind that the

⁴⁰ *i.e.* the original Holland Fen area before study converged in Chapter 4 upon the six north-western and central parishes; Both of Gary Moses' grandfathers lived-in in south Lincolnshire just after the First World War. I am grateful to him for this discussion.

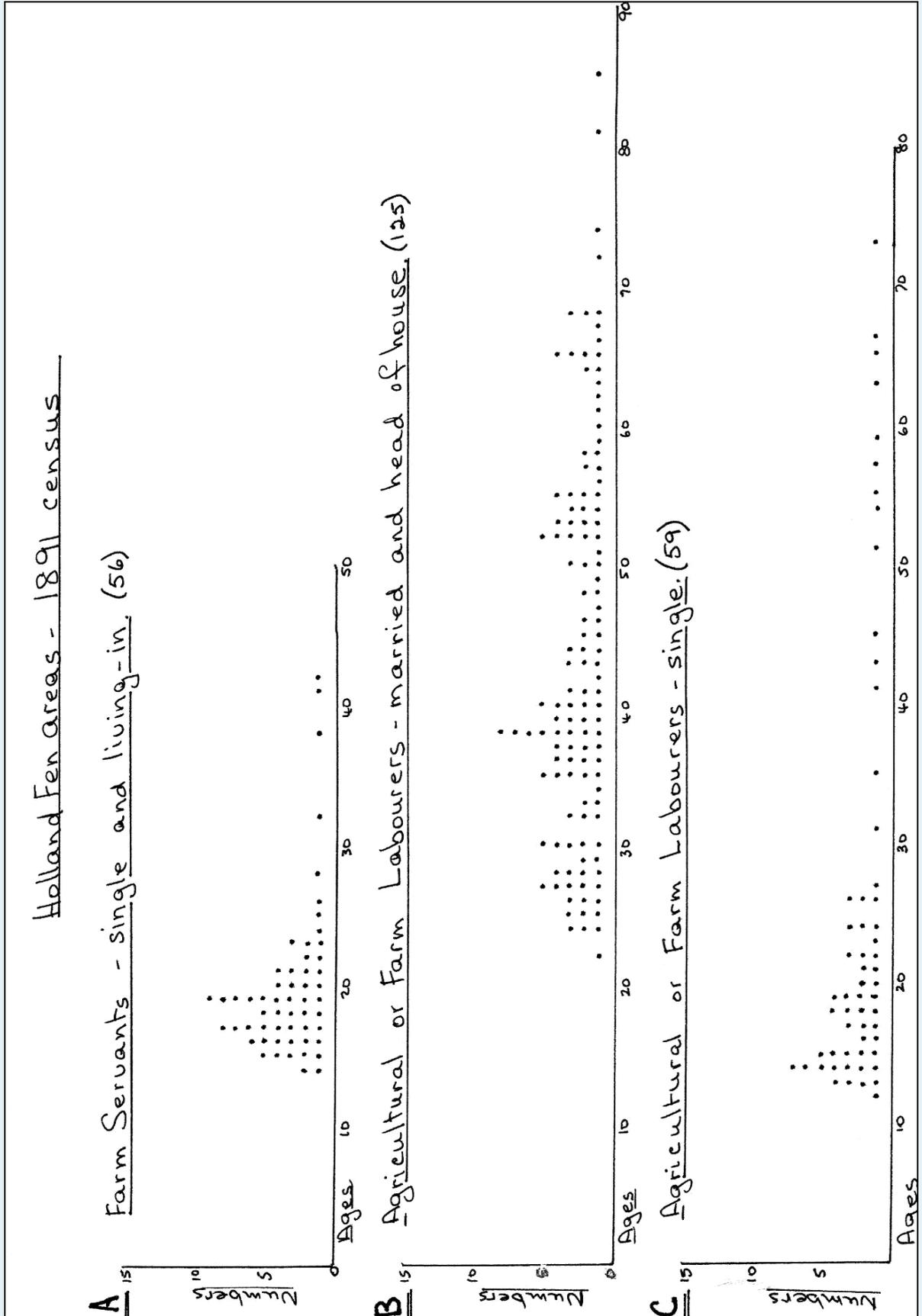


Figure 5.6 Ages and status of farm servants and labourers in certain areas of Holland Fen according to the 1891 census.

number of farm servants had increased to 56 by 1891, and there was 23 per cent more farm servants than agricultural labourers under the age of 24 years in a greatly reduced portion of Holland Fen, it would seem that they remained an indispensable and reliable taskforce in the fenland, especially during the periods of depressed grain prices, and despite the lure of local, urban-fringe industries.

Where a farmer lived elsewhere or owned several farms, he would employ a foreman to live in the farmhouse. The foreman's wife ran the household with the aid of her daughters or domestic servants, provided a meal and ale for the farmer on his visits, and also cooked and cleaned for the single men such as wagoners and farm servants who lived in at the farm. Meals had to fit in with the variety of work that was in progress and also during the breaks for bad weather. The foreman received 9s. a week from the farmer towards the wagoner's board whose main meals at the farmhouse were always timed to fit in with his unsociable working hours.⁴¹ Dring's horseman probably lived rent free in a farm cottage instead, according to the conditions of his engagement he appears to have had the alternative, 'small cash payment and an allowance of pork, potatoes, beer, or other food' as described by Wilson Fox.⁴² Both foremen and horsemen appear to have been more likely to settle on the farms whereas according to the diary, wagoners seemed to be hired much more frequently.

The provision of a fattened pig at Christmas played an important part in the hiring agreements and it is clear that a weight of between 28 and 30 stones was easily attained. Dring always noted the killing of 'Andrews' pig' or 'Fred's pig' and these invariably weighed more than a smaller one that was killed 'for selves'. Bacon was the main diet of

⁴¹ *Farm Diary of E. W. Dring*, April 1903, Paid to 'Brown for Waggoner's Board, 3 weeks £1.7.0d'.

⁴² *Wilson Fox Report*, pp. 84, 86.

many a labourer's and smallholder's family during the depression; in 1895 when Wilson Fox visited the small holders in the Boston district he was told that 'our dinner today is bacon, rice pudding and potatoes'. Pigs were cheap and easy to feed where there was likely to be a surplus of arable produce and were very popular with small farmers. In the 20 years between 1890 and 1910 the number of pigs rose by 32.6 per cent in Amber Hill and by 52.4 per cent Brothertoft, where there was a large number of smallholdings.⁴³

Essential Change and Maintenance

As well as the usual duties of drilling, ploughing, and harrowing there were the maintenance jobs such as cleaning dykes, ditches, rat-catching, shooting crows which were 'very troublesome', and fetching gravel or silt to mend wheel ruts and potholes in the lanes. Because there were no proper roads across the far northern end of the fen communication was very difficult in that area until 1885-88, when a Highway Board was established to manage the main roads in Holland Fen. During its existence the Board 'metalled' the roadway that ran along the length of North Forty Foot Bank and passed through the village of *Holland Fen* at a substantial cost of £2,049.⁴⁴ The Board also opened out a cross-road from Cheetham's Bridge to Reed Point in the northern end of the fen, and erected a much-needed 'Sutterton bridge' over Clay Dyke to make a connection between the Algarkirk and Sutterton fens.⁴⁵ Even so, at harvest time the wagons and carts were kept busy transporting the fen produce along farm lanes that were usually little more than single tracks. These were so badly rutted and slippery in wintertime that leading had to be abandoned on many consecutive days in case the horses and carts slithered into the drains. The poor state of local roads was also seen as a main contributor to the continued presence of agricultural

⁴³ *Wilson Fox Report*, p. 69; See Appendix 3, Brothertoft and Amber Hill Tables 3.

⁴⁴ As described earlier in Chapter 4, this section of road was about 6.5 miles long (or 8 miles to Chapel Hill) and would have needed substantial maintenance owing to the numbers of heavy steam engines that it carried.

⁴⁵ Wheeler, *A History*, p. 442.

traffic on the Witham in 1900; Perren maintained that Lincolnshire was probably the only county where its lack of roads encouraged the railways to retain canals for feeder traffic.⁴⁶

The diary acquired a more authoritative approach to the demands of farming when Edward Dring gave up his work as a saddler in 1903 and entered into full-time farming. There were still the incidents of stillborn lambs, piglets, calves, and foals, the bad winters when his men as well as the animals were sick, and there was still the flooding that threatened his land on several occasions. In February 1900, heavy rain had caused such a flood that he was forced to instruct his men to cut a nearby bank, and then watched anxiously as the floodwater stopped just short of his land. Dring paid meticulous attention to his weights and measures, he recorded the type of drill used on certain fields, the different varieties of potatoes or seeds that he was currently setting, and how much phosphate had been mixed with them. He appears to have been fully aware of the need to understand the use of modern chemicals and attended horticulture lectures. For instance, an entry on 19 March 1903 recorded,

Ploughing headland. Mr Pike's Horticulture lecture advocates one part sulphate ammonia, 3 parts Kanite and 5 five parts super phosphate with farm yard manure, very deep ploughing and well working and manuring in the winter'.

His interest in new methods and new varieties was still very much in evidence in 1905 when he 'received by kindness of Mr Pike the Lecturer on Horticulture, 8 Potatoes New Seedling named Delicacy also a little Fern leaf Parsley and one Artichoke New White'. During that year he appears to have been experimenting with several varieties of potatoes

⁴⁶ R. Perren, 'The marketing of agricultural products', in Collins (ed.), *Agrarian History VI*, pp. 970-71; T. Gilbert's barge traffic in Holland Fen stopped in 1906.

such as 'Sir John Llewellyn potatoes from Scotland', 'Duke of York', 'Royal Kidney', 'Evergood', and 'Up-to-date'.

By 1900, permanent pasture and the expansion of cattle farming was steadily increasing in Lincolnshire. Crop return figures show that cows and cattle in the Holland Fen area between 1900 and 1910 had indeed increased (as did their prices); in Brothertoft by 5 per cent, in Kirton Fen by 25 per cent, Amber Hill 7.6 per cent, Pelham's Lands 29.5 per cent, and in Harts Grounds by 119.4 per cent.⁴⁷ Reclaiming wasteland and turning it into permanent pasture was time-consuming and costly, this was substantiated by Dring himself as he documented some of the many procedures that it required. In May 1905, Dring hired Ward and Dales the contractors to steam-cultivate the new 'Causeway field' he had just purchased. Presumably it was heavy wasteland or very rough grazing and therefore needed deep ploughing to bring it into use. Steam ploughs, like the one in figure 5.7, were among an ever-growing number of machines which could be hired together with the owner-operators. Firstly, the contractors ploughed the 11-acre field twice over and this required two tons and five hundred-weights of coal to fuel the steam engines.⁴⁸ After that came a further three months of hard work on this field as some of the diary entries revealed:

June 8.	Ploughing in Causeway field 5 teams to do up to 10 [unclear].
14	Finished ploughing with 6 more teams.
July 8	Ploughing the field 3 rd time.
13	Finished ploughing the field, 5 days.
14 - 15	2 teams dragging over, 2 days.
19 - 20	Dragging with Martin Cultivator.
31 - Aug 1	Ploughing the field
Aug 19 - 23	Horses ploughing the field

⁴⁷ Brown, *Farming in Lincolnshire*, p. 154; See Appendix 3, parish Tables 3, Reviews of crops, workers, livestock.

⁴⁸ Coal varied in grade and prices but appears to have averaged around 1s. per cwt, so the cost of fuelling the cultivator would have been about £2.5s. (5 week's board for a wagoner). Cost of the contractor's hire not stated.

Sept 9 - 11 Dragging, harrowing and rolling twice more.
 13 -14 Drilling with permanent grass seed – twice over with Gilbert
 Clarke drill. Rolling field down after drilling

All this extra work had to be fitted into tight schedules of all the other farming duties at North Kyme and Brothertoft. Other fields were ploughed and set with crops, livestock was moved between farms or selected pastures elsewhere, the sheep had been clipped and dipped, the celery and potatoes crops were hilled, carrots hoed, and the barley, oats, and wheat had all been harvested.



Figure 5.7 A demonstration of steam ploughing. <http://www.steamploUGHclub.org.uk> 10/10/2005.

Between 1905-10 there was an overall reduction in the percentage of arable crops grown on the Holland Fen holdings. This was apparent in Amber Hill where there was a drop of 6 per cent and where most crops other than barley and peas were down. In Harts Grounds and Kirton Fen the decreases were similarly of 6 per cent, while the percentage of

arable crops in Brothertoft declined by 2.5, and in Pelham's Lands by 2 per cent.⁴⁹ In most cases, despite the popularity of potatoes and the large-scale potato merchant, William Dennis, who operated in the area, the acreage of potatoes also fell, probably at the expense of barley and cattle which were still commanding good prices at the time.⁵⁰ The augmented permanent pastures also heralded some significant alterations to the topography. Many of the remaining ditches surrounding the fields were filled in and hedges were encouraged to grow taller in order to protect the grazing animals, there were also small plantations of trees added to act as windbreaks and to provide some shade for them. Changes in husbandry brought many subtle changes to the appearance of the landscape, especially after the introduction of new crops took on new and important roles. Where alternative crops such as mustard, potatoes, onions, broccoli, salad vegetables, and rows of flowers and bulbs had been introduced, a variety of new and vibrant colours was added to the scenery as each of the crops ripened for harvesting. Then of course, there were the orchards.

Commercial Diversity

Orchards were major contributors to the appearance of the landscape, they softened the bleak horizons and added a concept of maturity to the fenland. Although most farms and smallholdings had a few fruit trees, it is difficult to equate the extent of major orchards in Holland Fen from the annual crop returns. Coppock recommended caution when using the returns of market gardens and orchards, and as he pointed out, the number of changes in definition and interpretation before 1900 has created many discrepancies and

⁴⁹ See Appendix 3, parish Tables of crops and land usage.

⁵⁰ Brown, *Farming in Lincolnshire*, p. 168, William Dennis of Kirton; *Ibid.*, p. 179, cattle prices increased 20 per cent 1905-14 and potatoes were a labour-intensive crop.

inaccuracies.⁵¹ On the ground, the location of old orchards can still be traced from names such as the 'Orchard Street' in Fenside area, this was adjoining the boundary of Boston West Fen and where there used to be numerous orchards. Certain varieties of fruit are also remembered, for instance the site of the old Hessle House public house commemorated a popular hazel, or 'hezzel' pear which was grown in the vicinity. Although the 1891 OS map locates at least three significantly large orchards in Holland Fen vestiges of only two of the orchards remain and are adjacent to buildings called Orchard Barn, or Orchard Park.⁵² These commercial orchards were a legacy of William Mells' family. One of the orchards, in Punchbowl Lane, was at least thirty years old in 1891 when William Mells Junior, an apprentice at W.W. Johnson the plant growers in Boston, decided that he would gradually replant the whole orchard with new fruit trees.⁵³ After 12 of the 14 acres were assigned as an orchard, the remainder consisted of a house, garden, paddock, stable, an eighteenth-century barn, pigsty, and farmyard. Another 16 acres of pasture land were purchased on the opposite side of the lane.

The fruit trees were planted in rows approximately 10 or 12 square yards apart and the avenues of land between the apple trees, being long and straight, were known as 'plaits'. The plaits were sown with barley, beans, peas, mangolds, or swedes, they were also mown for hay, and the cows were allowed to graze the orchard during autumn. Three-quarters of the orchard was devoted to the Bramley cooking apple while the rest was an assortment of dessert apples, pears, damsons, plums, and nut trees.⁵⁴ At each of the orchards, several

⁵¹ J. T. Coppock, 'The statistical assessment of British agriculture: evaluation of the returns', *Agricultural History Review*, 4 (1956), pp. 75-9.

⁵² Ordnance Survey map 1;10,560 1891

⁵³ D.R. Mills, *Twentieth-Century Lincolnshire* (Lincoln, 1989), p. 65. W.W. Johnson, plant-breeders, founded in 1820.

⁵⁴ The Bramley Seedling produces excellent crops of large cooking apples which are picked in October for storage whilst they are still green; originated in Nottinghamshire during the early nineteenth century and first exhibited in 1876 by the Royal Horticultural Society's Fruit Committee.

tons of apples were carefully gathered every autumn and half the crops were packed into barrels, loaded on to wagons, and taken to Hubberts Bridge station where they were despatched to wholesale markets in Manchester, Bradford, and Leeds. The remainder of the Bramley apples were then stored knee-high on the cold floors of the barns, leaving an aisle down the centre for access; here they remained until wintertime when all the wholesalers' telegram orders had either been fulfilled or the crop sold. It was essential for the prompt despatch of orders to have close access to a railway station and all three of Mells' orchards were situated within easy reach of the Hubberts Bridge station. Orchard Park was only a few yards away from the station.⁵⁵

As commercial fruit farms, the orchards proved to be very profitable although they were unlike those of traditional fruit growers elsewhere. The heavy soils in Holland Fen were selective in their agricultural uses and not very suitable for the large-scale commercial farming of soft fruits such as currants and berries; although the gooseberry did prove to be one of the most reliable and prolific fruits in the area. William Mells planted several varieties of gooseberry bushes between all of his apple trees, and when picked in June the gooseberries were much in demand for use in jams and pies. Like other orders for pears, damsons, and plums, gooseberries were packed into wicker baskets and despatched to local traders and the markets. After all the fruit had been gathered the cows were allowed back into the orchards to graze and clean up any spoilt fruit that remained on the ground. Then the work of pruning all the trees and bushes had to begin again.

⁵⁵ LAO. HQS B/2/2. Another of the Highway Board's accomplishments in 1888 had been the construction of a new bridge at Hubberts Bridge. A small, but sturdy, brick-built structure costing £1,950 replaced an old wooden crossing over the South Forty Foot drain. This small bridge now struggles to cope with the huge lorries that pound over it day and night on their journeys northwards.

The Last Frontier, 1907-1914

The river crossing at Langrick was not only a great inconvenience to the inhabitants of Holland Fen, but the ferry journey across the Witham had become increasingly busy and very dangerous by the beginning of the twentieth century. Bounded by water on both its north-eastern and north-western edges, the only access into the fen between Chapel Hill and Boston was via the old ferry, and this restricted the movement of coaches, carriages, and pedestrians alike. Travellers arriving from the north found that there were only two bridges across the lower Witham river and these were inconveniently situated at Tattershall and in Boston, some twelve miles apart. For centuries the ferry had managed to survive with the aid of ramps for stock and wagons and another boat for passengers, Cartwright himself had used the ferry on many occasions as he travelled in his own coach attended by his groom. The Gees also had their own carriages and used to travel with their head coachman, Mr Mells [an ancestor of William Mells Junior], and a groom seated in all weathers on top of the horse-drawn carriage.

As figure 5.8 shows, the ferry was old-fashioned, dilapidated, and not suitable for modern motor vehicles and so finally, after ten years of negotiation and the sanction of Parliament, the 'fine and commodious' bridge shown in figure 5.9 was built in place of the ferry. The bridge was a massive construction for the time. It measured 174 feet in length with a central, single span of 120 feet wide, weighed 324 tons, and had cost £8,490 to build. When it was completed a 'grand inaugural ceremony' on 7 September 1907 declared the new Langrick bridge across the river Witham open. However, not everyone was pleased about the expenditure, although many people who had experienced the panic of



Figure 5.8 Langrick Ferry, looking across the Witham towards the Ferry Corner Plot, in Brothertoft. The tall house (centre) marks the site of an old house used as a chapel before the new Wesleyan Methodist chapel (far right of picture) was built. Elm House Farm is far left of photo. Author's private collection.



Figure 5.9 The Langrick road bridge nearing completion in 1907. Author's private collection.

flood-time crossings, or suffered accidents on the ferry, had changed their opinions soon after those incidents. Some considered that the bridge would be the means of opening up a practically 'derelict country' whereby the only means of communication between Lindsey and Holland had been that unreliable and 'antiquated structure used as a ferry'. One dry comment suggested that a bridge would only provide a connecting link for those 'who churn up our roads and permeate the atmosphere with the delightful and health-giving odour which we associate with £700 motor cars', in all probability similar to those shown in figure 5.10.⁵⁶ Whatever the consensus of views at the time, the bridge certainly opened up the fen and brought with it a new sense of freedom, making travel easier and the world outside seem so much nearer.

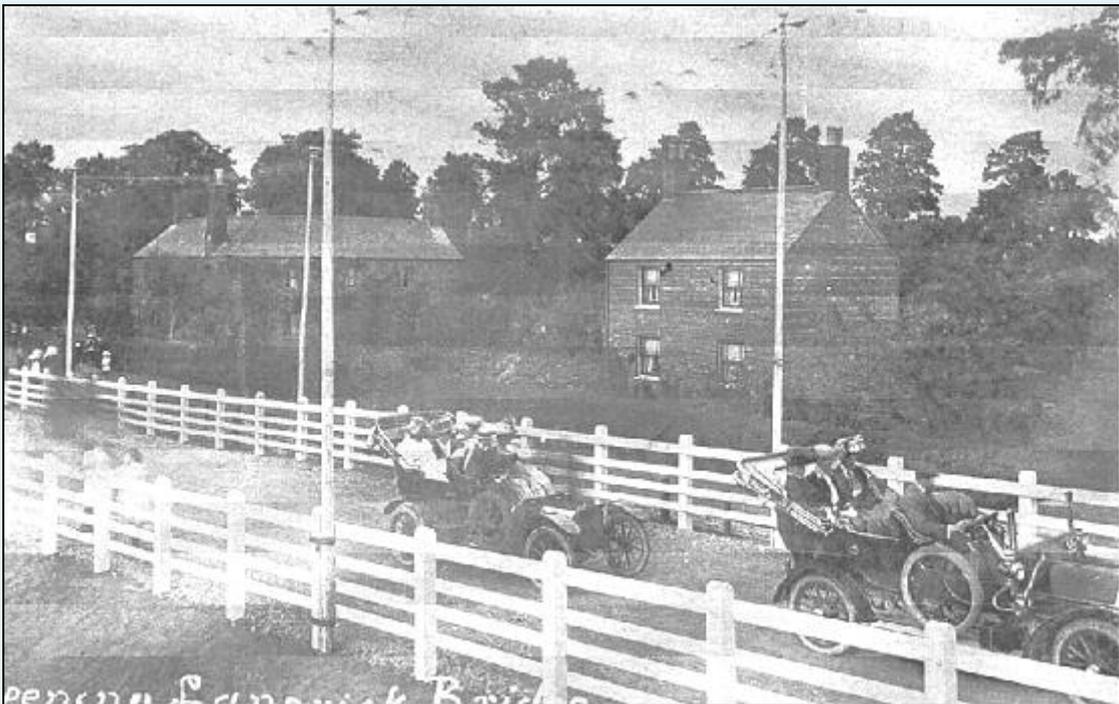


Figure 5.10 Motor vehicles arriving for the opening of Langrick Bridge, 7 September 1907. 'Providing the connecting link...'. Author's private collection.

⁵⁶ *Boston Guardian and Lincolnshire Independent*, Saturday 7 September 1907. Such persons might now view a stream of gargantuan lorries negotiating their way across the single span with utter disbelief.



Figure 5.11. Keal Leggott and his wife (seated centre) with 10 of their 11 children outside Elm House in Brothertoft. The boys are (back row l to r), Frank, William, Edward, and Robert. Grace (left) and Arthur seated in the foreground. Photograph was probably taken in 1907, shortly before the two boys emigrated to Canada. Author's private collection.



Figure 5.12 Elm House, Brothertoft, a century later in 2007.

From the vantage point of her sister's bedroom window, Grace Leggott could see the ferry and watch the new bridge as it was being built. As figure 5.8 showed, Elm House farm was close to the riverbank at Ferry Corner and directly opposite Witham House on the other side of the river. At 17 years old Grace was the second-youngest of Keal Leggott's eleven children in 1907. Her five brothers and six sisters had all been born and raised at Elm House (see also figures 5.11 and 5.12). The farm was conveniently less than a hundred yards away from both the old ferry and the new Langrick bridge and had the benefit of direct access onto the main road from Hubberts Bridge. As well as the 113-acre farm in Brothertoft, Leggott had a substantial amount of land at Leverton and although he was the chairman of the local school managers his eleven children had all attended private schools in Boston.

Each farming generation hoped for an heir to take over the farm, carry on the tradition, and the family name. The Drings, the Mells, and the Leggotts were just a few of the prosperous, middle-class farmers who had settled into Holland Fen and raised large families. The 1910 Valuations for Brothertoft and part of Pelham's Lands show that a majority of property and land before the First World War was locally owned, some by family trustees or charities. Others, such as Farr of Staunton Grange, Notts. with land and property at the rateable value of £258, Rogers of Holt Hall, Norfolk with £288 r.v., (£109 r.v. leased to Keal Leggott), and Mrs G.A. Cartwright of Kensington, with land and property of £230 r.v., were landowners outside the county who had invested in the Holland Fen.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ LAO: 1910 Valuations 6/TAX/12/Brothertoft.

Keal Leggott had five grown sons and knew that the land he owned, in the region of 200 acres, would not be enough to provide a good standard of living for each of them. His two eldest boys, William and Edward, acquired his Brothertoft and Leverton farms until William married Gertrude Mells, thus relating the two local families by marriage, and moved to one of the Brothertoft orchards. Although the three youngest Leggott boys, Frank aged 23 years, Robert 22 years, and Arthur 21 years had found employment at the GNR offices at Boston and Gosberton stations, it seems that the work was disheartening and in 1907 they were obviously restless. This was confirmed by an entry in Grace's diary, 'Frank and Robert start for Canada on Thursday April 4th [1907] – mother is upset but thinks they will have more chance to get on there than in England'. Subject to certain conditions land in Canada was virtually free at the time and British subjects were welcomed, this attracted many local men who dreamt of owning a large farm and were not afraid of hard work.

Almost a year later, Arthur Leggott sailed on the 'Empress of Ireland' to join his brothers in Canada and their letters home told how they had found work on a farm in Manitoba.⁵⁸ By 1909, Frank and Robert had each acquired a quarter-section of land (160 acres) and were home-steading near Moose Jaw in Saskatchewan. Arthur was working on the local railway to provide financial support while they cleared their land and farmed it together. Before they were able to claim their homesteads, the boys had to complete certain obligations and these included building a home and then residing on the homestead for approximately six months of the year, over at least a three-year period. During this

⁵⁸ The liner collided with a collier during fog in the St. Lawrence river in May 1914 and sank immediately with the loss of over 1,000 lives.

time they also had to improve their homestead by clearing and cultivating at least 30 acres of the land, and planting a crop on a minimum number of acres.⁵⁹

Just as in the 1770s, when their ancestors had migrated from the limitations of the townlands to tame the seemingly vast Holland Fen so, generations later, many of their descendants were forced to leave the limitations of the reclaimed fenland and go in search of work and yet more land. Now, it seems, it was the turn of the immense prairies of the New World to be reclaimed and these too, offered great rewards for many decades of hard labour. But a war was threatening to endanger their old homeland and this would create conflicting loyalties for those with family roots in the Holland Fen.

⁵⁹A homestead was 160 acres and an application plus entry fee of \$10 was required for entitlement to the land. Once a settler received the homestead patent, there was an option to purchase another quarter-section for \$3 an acre. My thanks to N. Wolowyk, Librarian, Alberta. Genealogical Society Research Services Committee for her help with links to this information. [research@abgensoc.ca]

CHAPTER 6

*Moving on: triumph of the parishes, 1914-45.***Misfortunes of War, 1914-18.**

The mutually profitable trade that had existed between Boston, German, and the Baltic ports came to an end in 1914 with the outbreak of World War One. Indeed all merchant shipping had to be severely curtailed because of the U-boat threat, a serious disruption that affected the economy of both Boston town and its port during the war. In response to local recruitment campaigns, approximately 6,000 men and women from Boston and the neighbouring villages went away to serve their country. In Canada too, the Leggott brothers were so concerned for the safety of their family back home in Brothertoft that it prompted both Arthur and Robert to enlist in the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary force; Frank stayed behind in Canada to work the homesteads. The East coast of England had always been at risk of attack or invasion in wartime; Cartwright had been deeply concerned about the ‘unprepared state of the Lincolnshire coast’ during the Napoleonic wars and had remained indefatigable in his warnings to the government, sponsoring local plans for defence ‘against the invasion so generally expected’ at that time.¹

Nevertheless, it soon became evident that enemy *shipping* was not the greatest threat to towns and ports on the East coast during World War One, the real and imminent danger came from *airships*, the Zeppelins. The existence of airships was already legendary and even Grace Leggott deliberated on the new airship in her Brothertoft diary in 1908, comparing its lack of manoeuvrability with that of the aeroplane. The first bombing raids

¹ Cartwright, *The Life*, 1, pp. 10, 310-11, As a naval officer at the taking of Cherbourg in 1759 he was also very aware of how easily enemy ships could slip into tidal rivers and wreak havoc on coastal ports.

carried out by an airship, or Zeppelin, took place on Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn in January 1915 and, because the Zeppelins were able to cross the North Sea and strike with very little warning, frequent raids along the East coast were soon followed by attacks on London and towns further inland.

Major topographical features could take on a whole new perspective when viewed from several thousand feet above ground. Strategic landmarks such as industrial areas, main roads, railways, canals, and rivers seen from the air often assisted navigation and could also become targets of the Zeppelins. One such target was the Grand Sluice on the river Witham in Boston which was struck by one of four bombs dropped on the town in September 1916, an impact that caused considerable damage, loss of life, and several injuries. As a result of this shocking incident the defence of Boston was taken much more seriously with the hitherto relaxed, blackout regulations being reviewed, tightened up, and four anti-aircraft guns were stationed in the town.²

According to the account books of E.W. Dring & Sons the business of farming appears to have carried on just as usual during the war. Dring was now living at the Malt Kiln farm with his own young family and also working the Barley Sheaf farm in Brothertoft. He was busier of course so his entries were correspondingly brief. In most of the fen's parishes the acreage of barley decreased during the war at the expense of wheat, beans (or peas), and the acreage of potatoes was also increased. The County War Agricultural Executive Committees [CWAEC] were established to organise labour, report on shortages, and to oversee the progress of a 'plough-up' grassland policy. Although cereal prices had risen in 1914 the government also introduced a guaranteed minimum

² <http://www.bostonuk.com/index.cfm?id=864> 19 February 2007; According to Grace's diary, the 1915 blackout regulations allowed no lights on vehicles or street lights in the town, and all house windows were darkened.

price to encourage farmers to maintain an increased production of wheat and oats. As a result of the wartime recruitment campaigns farmers were left with a shortfall in labour and the ensuing demands for higher wages intensified as the war dragged on. The wages paid by Edward Dring at Malt Kiln Farm reflect this escalation. Accounts show that the wages of two regular, full-time workers earning 14s. per week in 1914 had risen by 6s. a week in 1916, and then reached 28s. to 30s. a week by April 1918. When Dring became a member of the Brothertoft parish council in October 1917, the minutes for that month show that it was not considered necessary to build any more new houses in the parish because there were already several unoccupied at the time.

Of those persons who left Boston and the surrounding villages to serve their country, 945 died. Both the Leggott brothers from Canada and twelve other local men who also gave their lives are remembered on the war memorial inside Brothertoft's little church.³ The memorial in Amber Hill parish church records the twelve names of their own dead, while the Roll of Honour in *Holland Fen* church lists their 32 serving men together with another eight who died. Of those who did return many carried the mental or physical scars of their ordeal. In Pelham's Lands, John Bourne's father was lucky enough to return home after being gassed in the trenches; sadly, while working as a farm foreman he caught pneumonia and died aged 37 years. At that time John was only seven years old so he and his mother were forced to leave the farmhouse and move into a cottage next to his grandfather.⁴ The war changed everyone and everything, especially the rural economy. Financial difficulties in the years that followed the 1914-18 war were further exacerbated by the sudden repeal of the minimum prices for wheat and oats in 1921. Had guaranteed

³ Includes 435 dead from Boston and 510 from the villages; Amber Hill's memorial plaque was moved from the [now redundant] church to a recess in the wall of the local school; Grace left Brothertoft in 1915 and sailed from Liverpool under an American flag to join her brother Frank in Canada and teach local children. Her sister Bertha was already there having gone to keep Frank company soon after the boys enlisted.

⁴ Transcript Holland Fen/BB/BB2/10.11.00; John told of how the Allied soldiers had to hurriedly remove their socks and wrap them around their faces when the Germans resorted to using poison gas; John inherited this row of cottages, shown in figure 4.8, from his maternal grandfather Edward Hilton.

prices remained this could have helped to protect farmers from financial loss in the lean years that followed, especially when many had to exist on borrowed money.

Role of the Wesleyan Chapels

Just as the old 'Haute Huntre' title had faded into obscurity during the enclosure period and been replaced by the more practical 'Holland Fen', so this name also managed to outlive its usefulness. The combination of social and topographical changes over such a long period meant that the name no longer represented the fen as a whole and presumably alluded to the *Holland Fen* village itself. Although civil adjustments to the extra-parochial areas remained confusing throughout the early twentieth century, the emerging parishes developed around their own fen churches, or as near to them as their inhabitants could travel.

Nonconformist chapels also played a significant role within the fen's new parishes, especially in the years after the 1914-18 war. Although the Wesleyan chapel in Amber Hill had closed during the war owing to a lack of members the two Primitive Methodist chapels at Amber Hill and Hubberts Bridge, shown in figures 6.1 and 6.2 overleaf, remained open and active, as did the two Wesleyan Methodist chapels at *Holland Fen* and Langrick Ferry. Circuit books show that Langrick appears to have been the most popular chapel until its membership plummeted during the last decade of the nineteenth century, this decline can be seen in Chart A, figure 6.3.⁵ The energy and enthusiasm of a chapel's membership usually determined its success, or failure, so when the *Holland Fen* chapel lapsed into debt with no money for the circuit board in 1904 its sponsors were galvanised

⁵ *Holland Fen* chapel was known locally as the 'Barley Sheaf' chapel c.1855-70s. It was referred to as 'Fosdyke Fen' in circuit books prior to 1900, probably to distance itself from the local public house, and finally as '*Holland Fen*', 1900-93; Amber Hill chapel was built in the Sutterton Fen area of Amber Hill parish. Langrick Ferry chapel had to compete against the local Primitive chapel and Brothertoft church, both with strong local patronage at that time.

into action. The recruitment of an additional five members, 1905-06 (refer to Chart A), appears to have helped with the organisation of teas, sales of work, as well as a Harvest Festival. These were events that quickly raised a balance of £21.5s. to be spent on renovations, purchase of a railway carriage, gravel, and the organ fund. Chapel income depended not only upon the enthusiasm of its members, but on the size of its congregation.



Figure 6.1 The Primitive chapel at Amber Hill. Sold as a private dwelling in 1971.

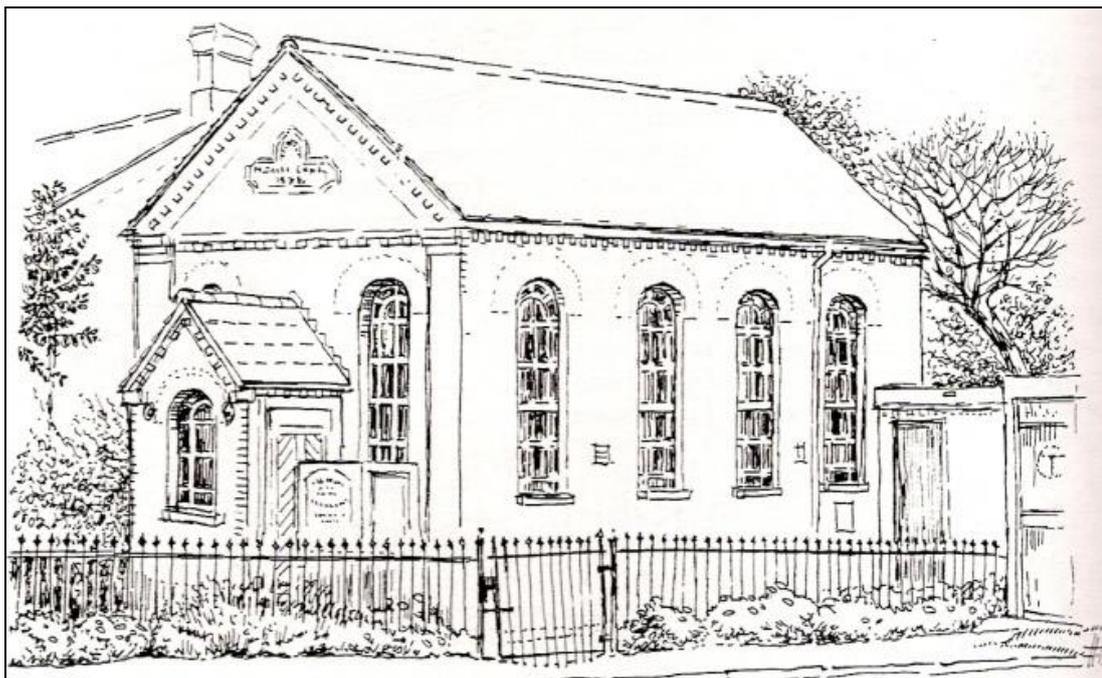


Figure 6.2 The Primitive chapel at Hubbets Bridge. Sold as a private dwelling in 1998. (Drawing by Hilary Healey).

CHART A

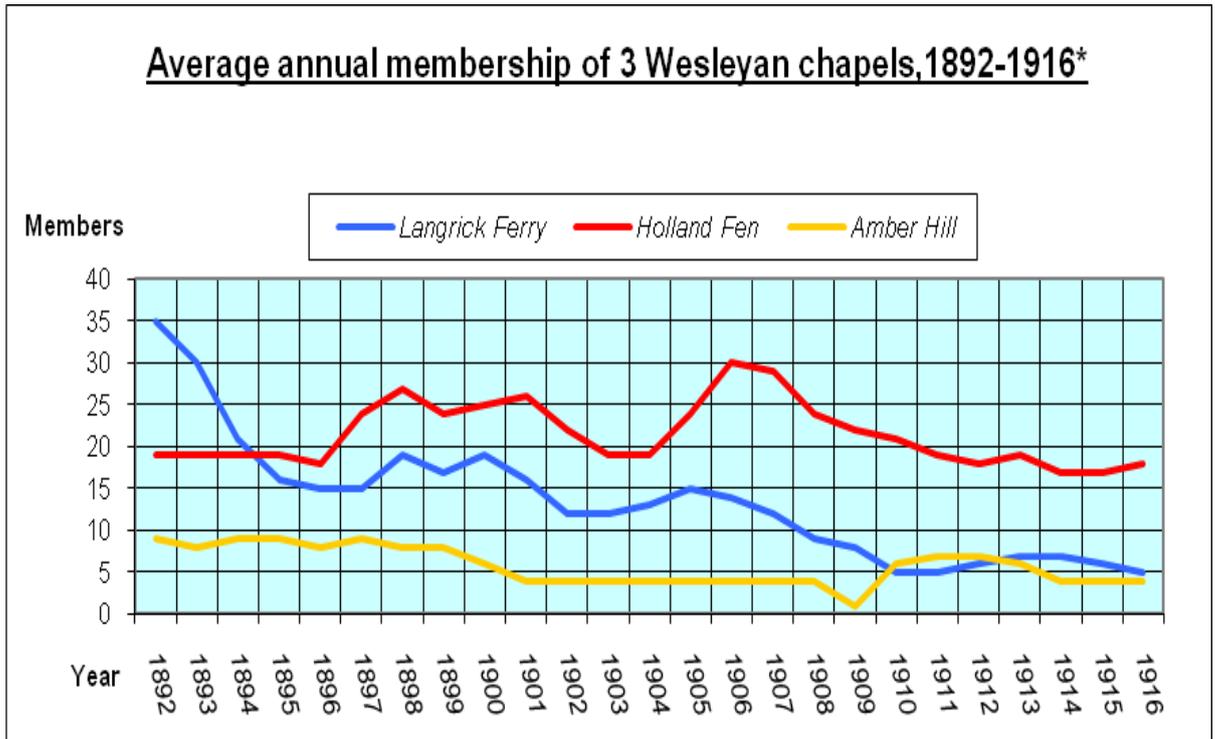


CHART B

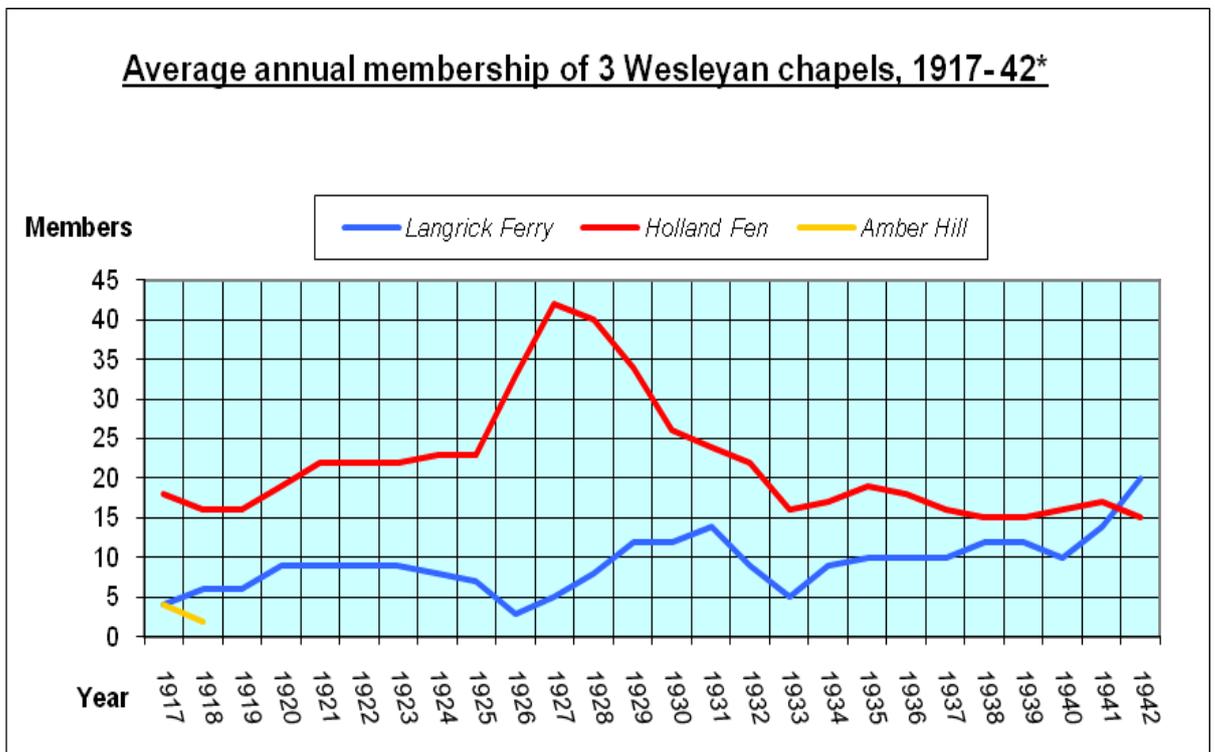


Figure 6.3 Charts showing the average annual membership of three Wesleyan fen chapels, 1892-1942.
 * Charts compiled from LAO. Meth B/ Boston/ 4/1-4 Boston Wesleyan Methodist circuit books.

According to Leary, ‘the congregation of a chapel was always greater than the number of its members and although only estimated, was proved by analysis to be about three times greater’.⁶ Although chapel incomes may have depended on the generosity of its loyal congregation most of these people would have been drawn from the smaller farms and smallholdings; it is worth noting here that just over half (52 per cent) of holdings in the four local parishes consisted of less than fifty one acres in 1915.⁷

As mentioned earlier, ease of access to their own fenland church or chapel was essential for worshippers dressed in Sunday clothes, especially where dykes and muddy fields had to be coped with. Photographs in figures 6.4 and 6.5 illustrate the enthusiasm of local people (and children) to be smartly dressed and participate in chapel gatherings.



Figure 6.4. A smartly dressed, local group (unidentified local chapel) pose for the photographer. Author's private collection.

⁶ W. Leary, *Lincolnshire Methodism* (Buckingham, 1988), p.119; John Bourne remembers ‘60 or 70 children’ attended the *Holland Fen* chapel Sunday school.

⁷ Amber Hill, Brothertoft, Harts Grounds, and Pelham's Lands. See Appendix 3, Parish Tables 1, Acreage and Holdings, also Appendix 3, Charts of Holding sizes in 1915.

Proceeds from such social events helped to maintain the individual chapels and pay off their debts. Unsurprisingly, a run of expenditure on new windows and floors, oil and coke, new books, blinds, seats, and a ‘tuneful’ organ left the *Holland Fen* chapel funds seriously depleted yet again. With twenty more members recruited between 1925-7, possibly enticed from the Langrick Ferry chapel (Chart B, figure 6.3), a new strategy of Anniversaries with related treats and collections, Sunday School outings and choir contributions followed, together with various sales of work that raised extra cash. As soon as these annual events and sporadic concerts settled into regular and well-organised activities, the average membership of the two Wesleyan chapels appears to have returned to its customary pattern.



Figure 6.5 Outside the *Holland Fen* Wesleyan chapel, the children and a local Swineshead band get ready to parade through the village. Author's private collection.

According to local testimony, the Anniversary activities were highlights of the summer, especially for the children. After parading dutifully through their village and struggling to make their voices heard above the noise of the band, the procession finally

arrived at Malt Kiln Farm, see figure 6.6 below, where everyone was able to relax and celebrate in Dring's field. Pensioner Donald C. had some fond memories of chapel anniversaries also the school treats at *Holland Fen* and was able to recall them with great enthusiasm,

...we used to have the [Sunday] school Anniversary on a certain Sunday and the school treat on the following Monday in Dring's field, it was always in Dring's field. There was penny in the panchion, there was bowls, hoopla, there was Auntie Scott with her ice cream and liquorice sticks, and there was all sorts of athletics or [field] games with bean bags, and obstacle races where they used to put things round the grass to run and creep under, you know. It was a real do, it was.⁸



Figure 6.6 The Sunday school children arrive at Malt Kiln Farm. Edward Dring (a staunch chapel man) leans on the fence next to the farmhouse while Mrs Dring, who has organised cold drinks and strawberries for everyone, poses with the children, front left. Author's private collection.

⁸ Transcript HF/BB/C&L/02.10.00.

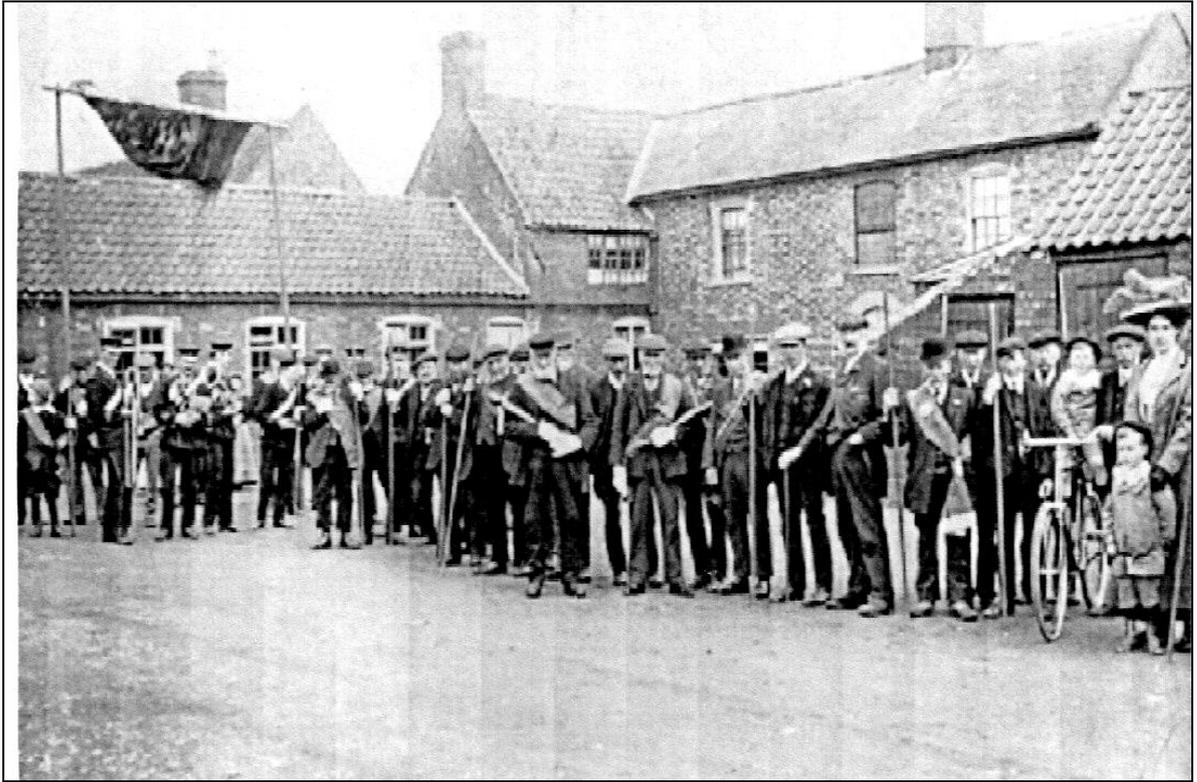


Figure 6.7. Members of the *Holland Fen Ancient Order of Foresters' Friendly Society* pose for photographs outside the Barley Sheaf public house. Author's private collection.



Figure 6.8 The AOF membership certificate of local man, James Ingham, dated 16 July 1862. Author's private collection.

Organised parades demonstrated a public desire to equate with the strong community spirit within these individual parishes and often emulated those performed by the local Ancient Order of Foresters. On special occasions the *Holland Fen* branch of the AOF used to assemble outside their meeting place, the Barley Sheaf public house, before parading through the village to the rousing accompaniment of a local band. Their banner, seen in figure 6.7, portrayed huntsmen, or foresters with hunting dogs. Fortunately, the AOF membership certificates also used the same emblem as the banner which is illustrated more clearly in a local certificate of 1862 (see figure 6.8). In earlier times the various Sunday School outings began as a trip to the popular Freiston Shore which was approximately eight miles due east of Boston and considered by many of its townspeople to be a fashionable bathing resort. There were bathing huts on the shoreline and a couple of hotels waiting ready to welcome and accommodate all the holidaymakers. Occasionally there were coach-loads of enthusiasts from further afield who came to watch the horse racing on the shore. One of these hotels, the Marine, is featured in figure 6.9.



Figure 6.9 Holidaymakers and staff at the Marine hotel on Freiston Shore, c. 1915. Author's private collection.

At low tides the children were able to walk across the mud-flats and creeks to the distant, sandy shoreline where they played and tried to fill their buckets with crabs. The children usually travelled some fifteen miles from their parishes to Freiston Shore on wagons that had been specially decorated for the occasion by the local wagoners. Competitions were held between the new parishes to find the best-decorated wagons which were usually bedecked with willow branches bent and tied together into arches, and then hung about with paper bunting. The horses wore tassels, their manes and tails carefully plaited, and they paraded in specially polished harnesses. In later years when silting-up placed both the sea and beach too far out the Sunday school outings, usually held around St. Swithin's day, consisted of a trip to Skegness either on the train or by bus. According to John Bourne there could be as many as eight or nine busloads setting out on the journey.

A Period of Depression

The lean years following the war appear to have affected the farmers in Holland Fen mostly between the years 1930-33, with local shopkeepers complaining that they were needed more in the bad times than in the good simply because they allowed credit. Farmer's daughter Joyce T. looked back on 1931 as being the worst year for her family because although they had plenty to eat, they had no cash. She remembers her mother telling her that crop prices were 'abysmal' and that her father was 'afraid to open the door' in case someone had called for money. In those days her father farmed about 100 acres in Amber Hill and it was only through the guarantee of a substantial local farmer that they were able to avoid bankruptcy by mortgaging their crops to seed merchants, and then paying off the following year.⁹ Edward Dring's grandson related an anecdote about the time when his grandfather and family partners sat round the kitchen table at Brothertoft

⁹ Transcript HF/BB/JT/15.03.00.

perusing the financial accounts for 1933. Finally his grandfather announced, ‘Well, we haven’t lost anything’, then he drew a deep breath and added, ‘But then, we’ve not made anything either!’.¹⁰

True to form, in 1933 the average membership of both Wesleyan chapels plummeted simultaneously to a remarkably low number (refer back to chart B, figure 6.3), an indication in itself that some key, farming members may have been hit quite severely. And yet in *Holland Fen* the chapel continued to raise sufficient funds and was able to avoid any suggestion of impending debt during 1930-34. The disbursements included redecoration, new lino and new blinds, the chapel was painted inside and outside, and new hymn books were purchased at a cost of £4.6s.6d. [the sale of four old ones fetched 9s.].¹¹ All this appears to have coincided with a period of enterprise within the fen when resourceful farm workers invested in a small piece of land, or worked an allotment for cash crops, and even ventured into small commercial sidelines like transport.¹² Andrews, one of Dring's waggoners, occasionally took time off to plough 'his own land', albeit rented.

Messer has established that the rich, fen soils of Holland were less seriously affected by the agricultural depression than in Lindsey where the position ‘was very serious indeed’, also in Kesteven where larger holdings were divided and ‘farms were being given up in all directions’. Holderness too, concluded that ‘any convincing evidence of a widespread depression in the fenland was difficult to find except briefly between 1930-33’.¹³ This is confirmed by the agricultural landscape of Holland Fen during 1935. As well as a marked increase in arable crops such as potatoes, oats, and peas in at least four

¹⁰ My thanks to Alan Dring for this information.

¹¹ LAO. Meth C/Fosdyke Fen/4/1 chapel accounts book.

¹² For instance, a rare item of twenty-five acres of strawberries and small fruit recorded in the 1930 crop returns.

¹³ M. Messer, *The Agricultural Depression of 1931: its Nature and Incidence* (Oxford, 1932), pp. 24-25; B.A., Holderness, ‘Agriculture’, Mills, *Twentieth-Century Lincolnshire*, p. 41.

of the local parishes crop returns show that the acreage of wheat had risen between 12 per cent and 46 per cent, while permanent grass in three of the parishes had decreased as much as 23 per cent.¹⁴ As well as the changes in distribution of arable and pasture, the patterns of land holding were altering, although how much this was related to the continuous exchange and re-allocation of extra-parochial lands into the existing parishes remains unclear.¹⁵ For example since 1915, apart from Pelham's Lands which had lost more than 200 acres, three of the four parishes had gained land with Brothertoft doing particularly well from an extra 530 acres. According to the chart figures in Appendix 3, crop returns of 1935 show that while the number of holdings above 100 acres had grown by 4 per cent, the middle range remained virtually the same with the number of holdings below 20 acres decreasing by about 4 per cent.

Local Travel and Transport

As already observed, travelling around the fen was always time consuming and difficult owing to the rigid network of wide drains and long, straight roads. Boats and horses were the most convenient modes of transport before railways appeared on the outskirts of the fen in 1848, and they continued to be for long afterwards. An underpath bridge was incorporated into the building of Langrick bridge in 1907 so that horses could carry on towing the barges along the Witham. They remained in constant demand simply because boats and barges were able to penetrate the interiors of the fen and could moor up

¹⁴ Amber Hill, Brothertoft, Harts Grounds, and Pelham's Lands. However permanent grass had increased 11 per cent in Harts Grounds. See also Appendix 3, Tables 2 Land Use, and Tables 3 Review of Crops; See also Smith, *Lincolnshire*, pp. 44-5, 50, 52, 54, 57.

¹⁵ In 1872, the extra-parochial Beats Plots became a parish. In 1879, the extra-parochial Ferry Corner became a parish, Harts Grounds a parish, North Forty Foot Bank a parish and village. In 1880, Sutterton Fen, Algarkirk Fen, and the Amber Hill gravel allotment formed the parish of Amber Hill, and Fosdyke Fen was transferred to Brothertoft. In 1883, Pelham's Lands formed into a parish with parts of Chapel Hill and the Beats Plots. In 1906, part of North Forty Foot Bank added to Pelham's Lands and part of Pelham's Lands added to Dogdyke. In 1911, Ferry Corner, Shuff Fen, parts of Frampton Fen, Kirton Fen, North Forty Foot Bank, and Wyberton Fen were added to Brothertoft. In 1931, part of Kirton Fen added to Brothertoft and part of Swineshead Fen added to Pelham's Lands. In 1932, part of Boston Fen added to Brothertoft. In 1934, Brothertoft exchanged parts with Langrville. In 1935, the Holland boundary with Lindsey was altered.

beside remote farms or small communities. Indeed, many people continued to own their own boats in order to move their produce and to collect supplies from Boston or other local depots.

Freda S's home was a family shop on the North Forty Foot Bank (Post Office, groceries, and hardware) and her grandfather used to fetch building supplies from Boston with his own boat which was pulled by horses. At certain times when the boat was not in use he would moor it crossways on the drain that so that the people of Kirton Drove and Amber Hill could walk across the boat to visit his shop. On other occasions he positioned planks for customers to cross over the drain, 'but the ladies would not venture onto them'.¹⁶ Local people often found it more convenient to transport their furniture by boat along the drains when moving house. As for instance Mr Pocklington proved when he moved from his farm in Amber Hill to another in Boston West during the 1920s; he was able to despatch all of his farm equipment and furniture by water from Maryland in Amber Hill down to Benton's bridge on the North Forty Foot Drain.

Horses remained indispensable and the requisitioning of surplus horses in 1915 for use in the war left the fen with an overall shortage of 10 per cent. In Amber Hill, Harts Grounds, and Pelham's Lands the overall loss of horses was as high as 21 per cent. By contrast Brothertoft and Kirton Fen with more holdings fared better as the latter lost only a couple of horses and Brothertoft (home to horse breeders such as Messrs. Fox and Messrs. Allen) had gained another 19 by 1915. Although the numbers peaked again in 1920, there was an overall 18 per cent reduction of horses within the fen by 1930.

¹⁶ Transcript HF/BB/FS/03.02.99; Unless perhaps when the water froze, there was a big freeze in 1938-39 when people were able to walk across the river Witham.

Carriers provided an important service and some travelled considerable distances to bring goods to the fenland communities; many of the carrier's carts contained small wooden seats that tipped up when not in use and so conveyed both passengers and produce to local markets. The fen lanes were usually busy with horses and wagons taking produce to the stations, this was where the atmosphere became tense around 'truck-shunting time' when all the clatter and clanging threatened to startle the horses. Indeed, the steam trains themselves were so noisy that a high wooden fence had to be erected beside the roadway adjacent to Hubberts Bridge station; this helped to shield the sight of oncoming trains from passing horses and deterred the animals from bolting. It also ensured that the same stretch of roadway became permanently known as 'the Boardsides'.

Fetching heavy produce such as potatoes and sugar beet from off the muddy land was usually time consuming and hard work when both horses and wagons were liable to get bogged down in the quagmire. For that reason, one Terry Booth farmer built a light 'railway' of rolling stock constructed from ex-WD trench materials over his farmland, the tracks made it easier for his horses to pull the heavy wagonloads of beet and potatoes as far as the nearest lane. Similar tracks were also used in Amber Hill and in other parts of the fen.

There was certainly no lack of resourcefulness, especially when it came down to transport and haulage. Although Johnny B's father was 'just a farm worker' he managed to buy an old lorry in 1928 and then went into 'the lorry business'. He transported gangs of potato pickers, mainly women, straight to the farms on his lorry first thing in the morning ('we used to do all Mr Dring's work around the fen') and then spent the rest of the day collecting sacks of potatoes from farmyards before delivering them to the railway stations at Hubberts Bridge and Langrick for 6d. per ton. He also transported 'tates' to London two or three times a week for £1 per ton. Unfortunately 'the bottom dropped out

of his business' during the 1930s when others started doing the same thing and undercut him by 1d. per ton.¹⁷

Albert E's parents were poor and lived in Amber Hill so his father was 'always trying to make an extra bob or two'. He 'had a go' at baking bread and sold it to neighbouring families, then he tried his hand at servicing steam engines before he eventually moved into haulage. A friend lent him £20 to buy an old 'Model T' Ford bus which he modified to take labouring gangs to their work on the farms before he too, transported sacks of potatoes to the local stations during the daytime. In those days the farms used to riddle and grade all the potatoes on site and this meant that the chopped, the cracked, and the small ones that were not fit to be sold were put aside for use as 'pig tates'. Albert thought that these were

...sold for a shilling or two for a hundredweight sack. We took the sacks of pig potatoes to Grantham on a Saturday morning [when the gangs were not working], stopped in all the little villages like Rauceby, Caistor, Ancaster, and Sleaford dropping off one or two bags at most of the houses, it was like delivering coal I'm sure some of them must have sorted out the best ones to use for themselves as the pig tates weren't stained with a purple dye in those days. We used to sell vegetables, apples, and strawberries as well.¹⁸

Lorries also came in handy for social events in the hard-working parishes such as the chapel outings when merrymakers would load a piano onto the back of a lorry to provide entertainment after the parish tea. On August Bank Holidays, local people would travel on the lorries to Frampton Marsh where everyone filled their buckets with samphire and cockles gathered at low tide. Samphire was a rare delicacy often referred to as sea asparagus and used as an accompaniment to fish or as a starter.

¹⁷ Transcript Holland Fen/BB/JB2/10.11.00.

¹⁸ Transcript HF/BB/AE/21.11.00. This was the start of W. Epton & Sons' fleet of lorries.

Horses and carts were gradually replaced by motor vans and farmer John L. could remember quite clearly when the 'the old Brooke Bond Tea van came along here [North Forty Foot Bank], used to come down to the shop, it was a Trojan with a chain drive, you could hear him coming miles away'. Motor cars too became almost commonplace 'the old school boss used to have a Ford 8', one or two of the farmers, blacksmiths, and tradesmen had cars as well some of the bigger farmers'.¹⁹ We know that Dring also owned a car c.1930 for his accounts show a payment of £15 for a car licence, and the insurance for it was supplied by the National Farmers' Union.

Of course, the cheapest and best form of individual transport had to be the bicycle and there must have been hundreds of them in the fen. 'Bikes' were indispensable for local labourers who had to travel the long, straight roads in the fen to get to work, and for children who had several miles to cycle to school in the days before a school bus was introduced. On the other hand, bicycles were also essential for visits to the local pub, parish meetings, and for getting to the cinema in Boston. After a visit to Boston market, many a cyclist pedalled home with heavy shopping bags swaying perilously from the handlebars and with young offspring strapped onto the pillion seat behind them. The milkman managed to deliver fresh milk on his bicycle with a milk churn and ladle carefully balanced on the front, and pedlars from Boston rode out to the fen with their baskets full of useful sewing accessories such as ribbons, cottons, press studs, hooks and eyes for the ladies.

Women of the fen parishes

Bicycles, it seems, were especially handy for 'long-distance courting' in neighbouring villages if 'one was a bit bored' with the local girls, although most men

¹⁹ Transcript HF/BB/L&C/18.03.99.

agreed that they didn't go too far away, 'more often than not it was somebody you went to school with, and who knew the fen'.²⁰ Local courting often consisted of walking up and down the interminable drainsides 'where everyone could keep an eye on you', or perhaps meet up near the blacksmith's shop where 'it was warm in the winter and he often got some of the lads to help him in the evenings, a bit of extra muscle', later on they might go to the cinema in Boston. Although Johnny B. married at the early age of 19 years, he said that really 'it was considered a crime to get married young in those days – well you got talked about – usually waited until well into their 20s and not before 21years'.

Many of the unmarried girls left to go into service or to work in the shops of larger towns and cities; others preferred to work nearer to home in the Boston shops and factories, or to go into local service. Maids were always needed at Brothertoft Hall and in other large houses such as Witham House.²¹ Most of the bigger farms employed uniformed maids as well as cooks and nursemaids, while the local vicar employed three maids 'all at the same time'. 'Only the well-to-do had maids, they [the girls] used to have to wear white aprons, hats, and cuffs and whatnot'; other women and girls often became housekeepers or did general work around the house and yards. Doing the menial domestic work was always called 'skivvying'.

There was always work available for women in the fen, those who were unable to join gangs or work part-time in the fields found plenty of ways to ease their housekeeping bills. The Fogarty factory in Boston not only provided employment they would also purchase sacks of feathers from local people, as Nora L. explained,

²⁰ Potential for a study of endogamous marriages within the fen.

²¹ Witham House was the home of Eric Dring whom we shall meet later on in this chapter. There were two separate 'Dring' families in Holland Fen and Eric was a distant relative of Edward Dring through Richardson Dring.

...when you killed the poultry and plucked the feathers these were put in different bags, you threw the wing feathers away and kept the better ones separate, and you made your own feather beds as well as your cushions and pillows. The whole family would have a good feather bed so of course everything was used.²²

Butter, eggs, dressed chickens, milk, fruit, flowers, cakes, pies, jams, sweets and many other varieties of home produced items were despatched to the market stalls or swapped locally for some other useful product. There was a going-rate for most items; John L. found one or two of his mother's old grocery books and these clearly showed how the butter that had been made on their farm could be taken to the local shop and credited against her purchases. It wasn't always necessary to go into town to do the shopping as the baker, the grocer, and even the butcher made weekly rounds 'with a weighing machine' on the back of his horse and cart.

The women probably concerned themselves not only with the appearance and behaviour of their children and teenagers, but with the general moral standing of the fen itself. Although no-one was able to confirm whether such a thing had actually happened in Holland Fen, 'ran-tanning' certainly occurred in the adjoining village of Langrick during the 1920s-30s, so perhaps even the merest threat of such an event could prove a deterrent.²³ Certainly according to Paddy K. the women were able to exert some influence over the conditions of their husbands' employment. Towards Lady Day the men would look in the local paper for new jobs, check to see if the farm had more horses 'we always looked at the horses first', or a few more pennies in the wages, and a better house and a bathroom, 'the wife would say let's have a house with a bathroom next time – what the wife wanted could make a difference'.²⁴

²² Transcript HF/BB/NL2/06.03.01.

²³ For this information I am indebted to Ann Carlton whose mother lived at the station cottages in Langrick as a child and witnessed women 'ran-tanning' a transgressor in the village; 'Ran-tanning' was generally a serenade of 'rough music' with the banging of kettles, pans, tea-trays in derision of unpopular or immoral persons.

²⁴ Transcript HF/BB/Vintage Day/08.10.00. Despite his nickname Paddy was a local man and not Irish.

Fen Society and Culture, 1930-1940.

A vast majority of the Holland Fen inhabitants were fiercely proud of their own select corner of the fenlands and few, it seems, had any desire at all to leave and work on farms in Kesteven or Lindsey. When asked how local people felt about being a part of the fen Donald C. replied, ‘well if you’re a fenman and you were born in the fen that’s it, you stay here’. However he was able to recall that one foreman on the next farm departed to take up work as a manager on the Belvoir [Kesteven] estates, and did remain there. Paddy K. carried out contract work at harvest time and declared that he hated working up on the Wolds where the fields were much larger, they were chalky, and having no sub-soil were not ploughed so deeply. On his first visit there he’d been amazed to learn that farm workers on the Wolds had to ‘tip their hats’ when they saw the farm owner coming or else they were told off by the farm foreman – or even sacked! No-one ever tipped their hat in the fens, so rather than demean themselves they ‘always used to avoid seeing the owner, never looked at him and concentrated on our job, or made sure we always looked the other way. The farmers up there were all church and hunting’. He was always glad to get back to the fen where there was no hat-tipping and ‘some of the farmers even went to chapel instead of church’. When queried about an inherent self-respect that came with belonging to the fen, Paddy replied, ‘well you didn’t feel that you were below anybody else, that was how you grew up’. John Bourne also agreed that ‘there was no snobbery anywhere, but you could get a bit of stick if things didn’t go right’.

Basically the fenlands were not grand enough for the upper classes or even the wealthier farmers to reside in,²⁵ and with no arrogance or grandeur to overshadow them it allowed the fen people to get on with their own lives. Nevertheless, there was an internal

²⁵ Although they owned land there. The Duke of Portland owned 600-700 acres in Holland Fen in mid-1940s.

hierarchy amongst the farmers which became evident when the status of a farmer was referred to as, say, ‘a forty-acre farmer’, or perhaps a ‘three hundred-acre farmer’. This in turn had some reflection on the workers themselves who were proud of ‘their’ farms, ‘their’ farming families, ‘their’ horses, and who shared a mutual loyalty with their employer whether it was on a farm of average size, or not.²⁶

The Irish Workers

To avoid the consequences of flooding it still remains essential that the maintenance of dykes and waterways, indeed of all the fen drainage systems, is carried out the whole year round. Teams of navvies using planks and wheelbarrows in the 1930s, as figure 6.10 shows, were employed to clean out all main drains such as the North Forty Foot and the South Forty Foot. The Black Sluice commissioners and eighteen separate Internal Drainage Boards were integrated into one Black Sluice Internal Drainage Board in 1935, with sole jurisdiction over the drainage of the Black Sluice area.

Farmer John L. was familiar with the method of ‘jackballing’ that was used later to clean out the North Forty Foot Drain and described how the gangs of men,

...were paddies, aye all paddies, and the drain was actually dug out by hand in the village [*Holland Fen*] up here, [they made a dam] at the bend where the blacksmith’s shop is and they put one the other side the village and they actually emptied it by hand over the dam and then that was all dug out to that depth. They was all stood one behind the other, chap down the bottom used to have a spade and he used to pass it [the mud] to the man behind, in steps [up and] down the bank, and they’d bring it out like that and that was what they called ‘jackballing’. It was all done like that through the village.

²⁶ Smith, *Lincolnshire*, p.63, described the average holding in Holland Fen as 45.8 acres in 1935.

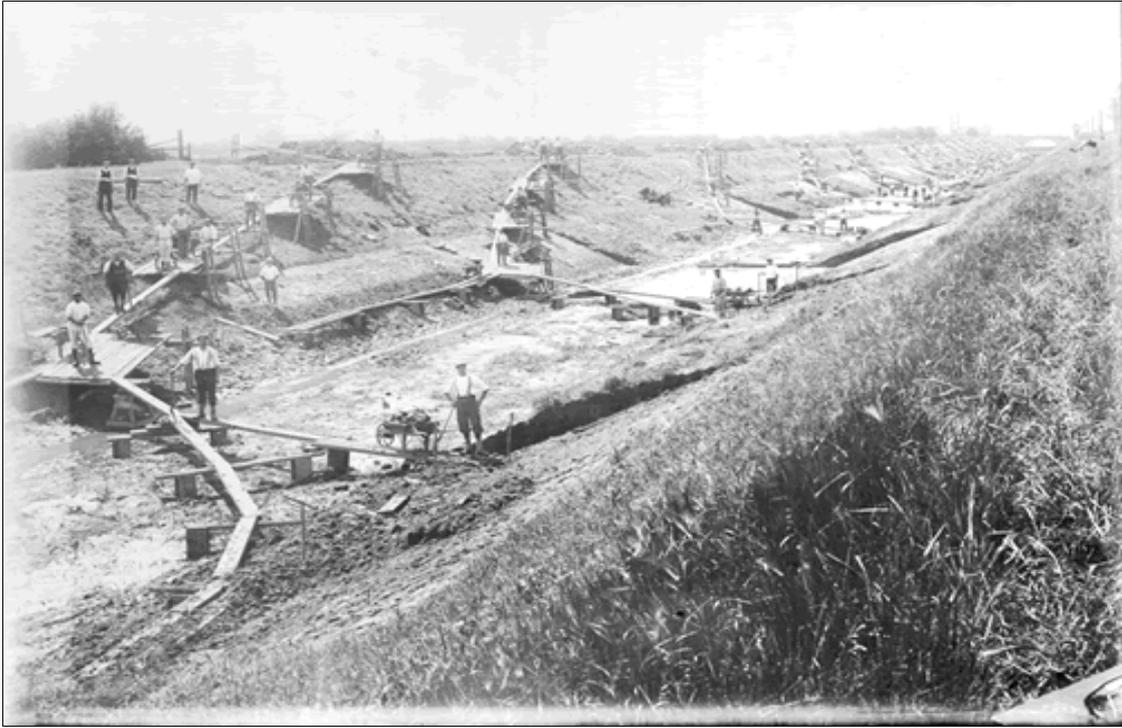


Figure 6.10 Cleansing the South Forty Foot Drain at Hubberts Bridge (top, right), 1910. Author's private collection.

He also described in some detail the implements that were used:

...their wooden spades were all made of wood, you see mud doesn't stick to wood, if you used a metal spade it stuck to it. When we used to dig a dyke out in the winter time we always used wooden spades, I've still got one somewhere it had a copper tip on it for sharpening, and I still have some new tips. The shaft and spades were all made in one piece and then you had a metal tip on that you could sharpen and so the mud never stuck to the wooden spade. Then there was one with a heart shape to use on top of the bank at an angle and that used to cut the top shape of the bank.²⁷

On the larger farms there was always plenty of harvest work waiting for the Irish workers when they arrived in Holland Fen and several of them would return to the same farms every year. Cottages, good stables, or the special 'paddy-houses' that consisted of a long room connected to the farmhouse were set aside as accommodation for the men. Many were regular, annual visitors and treated almost like old friends by the farming

²⁷ Transcript HF/BB/C&L/02.10.00; This might have been the long extension that abuts Terry Booth farmhouse, refer back to figure 3.7.

communities. The gangs would arrive in time to cut and lead the hay early in June and continued with other ongoing work pending the harvest in August, this was followed by potato harvesting early in October, and then 'knocking' sugar beet until it was almost time to return home for Christmas. When Donald C's grandfather 'had' Dovecote farm, his grandmother 'fed the paddy gang for nothing' during a six-week period of rain just to keep the men around in time for the potato harvest. Hardly surprising that one of the largest paddy-houses in the fen was situated at the Terry Booth farm in one of the most remote areas of the fen and where, according to Donald,

...there was a proper paddy-house that was separated from the farmhouse and there was a room in the farmhouse where the paddies used to have their meals. There was often ten or a dozen paddies on the farm and there was a big copper in the corner that was used for the cooking. I've seen old Mrs Carter make a damn great apple pie in a bowl like what you'd wash in and it was filled full. They used to feed themselves, bought their own stuff and the women used to cook it.²⁸

John L's farmhouse situated on the Kirton Fen side of the North Forty Foot drain is reached by crossing a narrow bridge over the drain, it is almost opposite the old Holland Fen shop and post office where Mrs Sharp's grandfather used to moor his boat. With John and Donald (an old friend, now retired) seated round his kitchen table and with both men in an expansive mood, it seemed like an opportune moment to ask for their personal thoughts on the Irish workers:

Well, they... [JL] they use to drink it all didn't they...? [DC] Oh aye, used to go to the pub every night and if they couldn't pick a fight with you they used to fight among themselves on a Saturday night, didn't they? They used to all have blue suits on, walking one behind the other up the street. Yes, and when they walked from the farm to the pub they'd all be walking behind one another [JL]... not together... [DC] No, not together and then I can remember my grandmother saying to me if we walked one behind the other as we went up to town "Come on here, you're like a lot of Irishmen walking about".

²⁸ Transcript HF/BB/L&C/18.03.99.

Despite all this jocularly, there was an obvious feeling of respect for the hard-working, Irish labourers and the way in which they toiled at jobs the local men found demeaning. The extent to which the Irish gangs were prepared to go in order to find work as well as their independent style of catering seems to have intrigued many of the Holland Fen inhabitants, ‘they did not pack up sandwiches [like us] but cut up loaves and onions with pocket knives and had billi-cans, I can remember one having a big lobster for his lunch one day’. Some of their comments revealed a brief insight into what was considered the fundamental customs of local life and social behaviour in the fen. Undoubtedly before the wartime transition over to agricultural technology got under way the Irish working gangs remained a curious, but essential, part of the fen’s economy and everyone was fully conscious of their value.

Agricultural Machinery in the Fen

The Drings of Malt Kiln Farm were the first farmers in Holland Fen to own a tractor, together with a ‘duckfoot’ drag-harrow it was purchased in 1937 for £273. This occasion must have been something of a milestone in the fen because even today, most of the elderly inhabitants can remember that ‘Malt Kiln was the first farm to have its own tractor’. John Bourne, the present owner of the now seventy-year old machine, declared that it was an ‘Allis Chalmers tractor, an orange colour, and my son gave it a run just the other week’.²⁹ There appears to have been no rush towards a transition from horses to tractors in the fen, perhaps the Drings’ additional expense of a 250 gallon oil tank, plus its contents, might have been seen as a bit of a drawback. Not everyone in the fen approved of mechanisation. Farmer Richard L. could remember the occasion when three bachelor

²⁹ Sadly, John died in July 2008, aged 86 years. He was born in Pelham's Lands and lived all his life in the fen, a well respected member of the community, a churchwarden, and patron of the annual *Holland Fen* village fêtes which were held in his paddock.

brothers who ran one of the local farms in the late 1930s also decided to buy their own tractor. They knew that their father would strongly disapprove of such a purchase and made sure that the tractor was always put away after use and carefully hidden when he was due to visit. Unfortunately he guessed that his sons had a tractor when he recognised the horizontal track marks left by its metal wheel 'spuds' in the farmyard mud. This brought home the realisation that the fundamental changes taking place in agriculture were sweeping over the old farming practises of his day.

There were a few tractors in the Holland Fen when the Second World War broke out in 1939 and as the war progressed agricultural machinery became more popular, although availability and government officials controlled both the numbers and types of machines available. Farmers who applied for a tractor would be told what was on offer and needed to make a quick decision. Because Britain was importing up to 70 per cent of its food the CWAECs were re-organised in 1939 to ensure that there was an increase in food production and to co-ordinate another campaign of ploughing up acres of grassland. The CWAECs also controlled much of the allocation of fertilizers as well as farm equipment during wartime, and while they were not intended to compete with the agricultural contractors they did hold a quantity of machinery available for hire in the area.

A spot-check of the National Farm Survey returns showed that by June 1941 there were approximately 34 tractors in Brothertoft, Pelham's Lands, Harts Grounds, and parts of Kirton Fen and Boston West. The most popular makes of tractor were the Fordsons of which there were ten (one farmer had two), ten Allis Chalmers (three farmers had two each), five Internationals, three David Browns, two Oliver's, one each of Case, Massey

Harris, Ferguson, and one Morris Minor that had been ‘converted’ into a tractor.³⁰ With the exception of only two holdings, these tractors were all on the very largest of farms.

The Malt Kiln account books for June 1941 show that the Drings purchased another tractor, a Fordson (£207) and a Ransome plough (£41), later acquisitions included a Hornsby plough (£51), and a farm cart (£50); again, these were all were purchased from Gratton’s, the main agricultural suppliers at Horncastle. Gradually the wagoners moved out, adapted to other jobs on the farms, or simply learnt how to use the tractors; most men were keen to drive the tractors despite a few initial mishaps. Women also helped to make up the workforce and as farmer John L. confirmed, they could also drive the tractors as well as potato carts,

...our Shirley could drive a crawler. Gradually we moved up and up from a little 'Fergy' until we got to the bigger ones. I think it was the middle of the war when they really came in because we had a lot of tractors arrive from America on what they called the Lease/Lend thing.

Nevertheless, the wartime acquisition and use of these early tractors did not bring about a sudden demise of farm horses in Holland Fen or the loss of related farm jobs; fuel in wartime was rationed and so the horses were essential, especially on all the smaller farms and smallholdings. A certain amount of land was necessary before the purchase of a machine became feasible, and with just 50 acres of land it seemed more practical to set another man on. Indeed, horses were still used in the fen right up until the late 1950s because tractors could not manage all the tasks on arable land, very often the width of their wheels between the rows of sugar beet would not match that of other equipment and ‘it

³⁰ TNA: MAF 32/778/23; MAF 32/782/27; MAF 32/786/30; MAF 32/783-4/28.

was simpler to get the horses to do it'.³¹ Small fields impeded the use of tractors so hedges were removed to accommodate them more easily and some instances of this in the North Forty Foot Bank area are visible in OS. maps, 1890-1951, see Appendix 1.

As well as tractors farmers hired specialised, heavy machinery from contractors who also carried out the work themselves, this was often a form of entertainment for the local boys who used to bike down to the fields in order to watch contractors such as the Hall Brothers doing heavy work with crawler tractors and a variety of other machinery. After the harvest when it was time to bring out the threshing machines, gangs of 'tramp-threshers' from surrounding villages would follow the threshing machines as they moved around from one farm to another; the men would race after the machines on their bicycles and then wait at the farm gates for the farmer to come and offer them work. Threshing time was usually a communal event, when small farmers and their friends helped each other out and the last day of threshing was always celebrated with great enthusiasm and the traditional barrel of ale.

The threshing machine was a huge lumbering piece of equipment and farmer Richard L. remembers one occasion when the threshing operators drove down North Forty Foot Bank in order to gain access to his farmyard, which was over on the other side of the drain. The men obviously did not trust his bridge to carry the weight and so the driver lined up the threshing machine with the bridge, set the accelerator, tied the wheel securely, and then jumped off as it moved forward. As soon as the threshing machine reached the other side of the bridge, which is shown in figure 6.11, another man jumped back onto it again and drove it into the farmyard.

³¹ Transcript HF/BB/RL/02.07.01. As in parts of West Cornwall, horses were still being used in Holland Fen in work such as rolling, harrowing, and leading potatoes and fertilizer as late as 1958-61.



Figure 6.11 The bridge on the North Forty Foot Drain over which threshing contractors had to manoeuvre their machine across in order to access Richard L's farmyard in the Kirton Fen.

Holland Fen at War

As the Germans advanced through Europe in 1939 the risk of an invasion on the East coast was taken more seriously and local plans for the defence of Boston were drawn up and put into action. The emergency services included three hundred men from the town and surrounding villages who volunteered for local defence duties. In Holland Fen the local Home Guard used local vehicles such as the baker's van for their transport and met at various outposts like the chapel at Langrick bridge and in caravans allocated at other strategic access points around the fen. When asked about the defences in Holland Fen, George H. thought that 'there were about 40 men in one platoon and 30 in another, eight or nine of them would be on duty at any one time, and they had a Boston sergeant attached to

one of the Lincolnshire regiments'.³² Structural defences meant that road-blocks and pill-boxes were erected in the area, all signposts indicating specific locations were removed, and a number of trenches were dug at key positions.

Because Boston was considered to be a potential landing place for the enemy during an invasion there were several resistance parties formed in the neighbourhood such as the recruitment of a small group of local men under the authority of the Chief Engineer of the Black Sluice Drainage Board. Their task was to blow up vital bridges and installations should an invasion take place. One local man, Eric Dring of Witham House, served in the Special Services division of one of the army's Lincolnshire regiments during the war, this was a secret resistance division with the deployment and access of many hideouts and concealed bunkers.³³ Eric was in charge of a large area of the south Lincolnshire coastline defences and spoke later of a wartime bunker that was excavated 'complete with an air pipe' and concealed in Holland Fen. To prevent enemy aircraft from landing on the long, straight roads of the fen, the army ensured that wires connected to roadside poles were strung above and across them. There was also a searchlight station nearby manned by eight soldiers and a sergeant, while 19 local observers based on the banks of the North Forty Foot Drain were fully trained in aircraft recognition and reported all aircraft movements to the RAF daily, throughout the war. Major Cartwright would surely have been most impressed.

³² Transcript HF/BB/GH/05.12.98; Possibly veterans of the 6th Battalion of the Queen's Regiment, <http://www.bostonuk.com/index.cfm>.

³³ Transcript HF/BB/ED/08.02.99; As mentioned earlier, Eric belonged to a another family of Drings at Dovecot Farm in the Sutterton Fen. Eric Dring's grandfather was a native of Hubberts Bridge, a grazier and farmer of approximately 1,000 acres of land (including land in other counties), and a county alderman.

Despite all these defensive, ground preparations little could be done to conceal the distinctive topography of the Holland Fen, the straight lines of the river and drains were clear navigational aids for the modern day aircraft and especially for enemy bombers flying inland from the direction of the North Sea. As in the 1914-18 war, the Boston Stump was an important landmark that could be seen for many miles over land, sea, and air and this may have been the reason why it was not bombed. Strings of incendiaries were dropped on parts of the fen throughout the war so prompt action had to be taken by the Home Guard to arrive in time to save the vital harvests, stacks set alight in the Toft Tunnel farmyard lit up the sky and surrounding area for miles, and one land mine left a huge crater just behind the council houses on Parsons Drove. Several bombs caused minor local damage while one that fell close to Malt Kiln farmhouse caused an anxious, three-hour wait before it finally exploded causing no serious damage to the building.

Sadly, the bombing of the fen resulted in several deaths. When the tall chimney of a pumping station at Chapel Hill, featured in figure 6.12, attracted the attention of one German bomber pilot the house took a direct hit. Because it was a Sunday lunchtime the whole family were in the house and the only person to survive happened to be working in the pumping station at the time the bomb was dropped. The force of the explosion almost broke the bank of the Kyme Eau river and witnesses remember seeing the great wooden beams that were used to hold the water back bending under the pressure as the bank was being repaired.

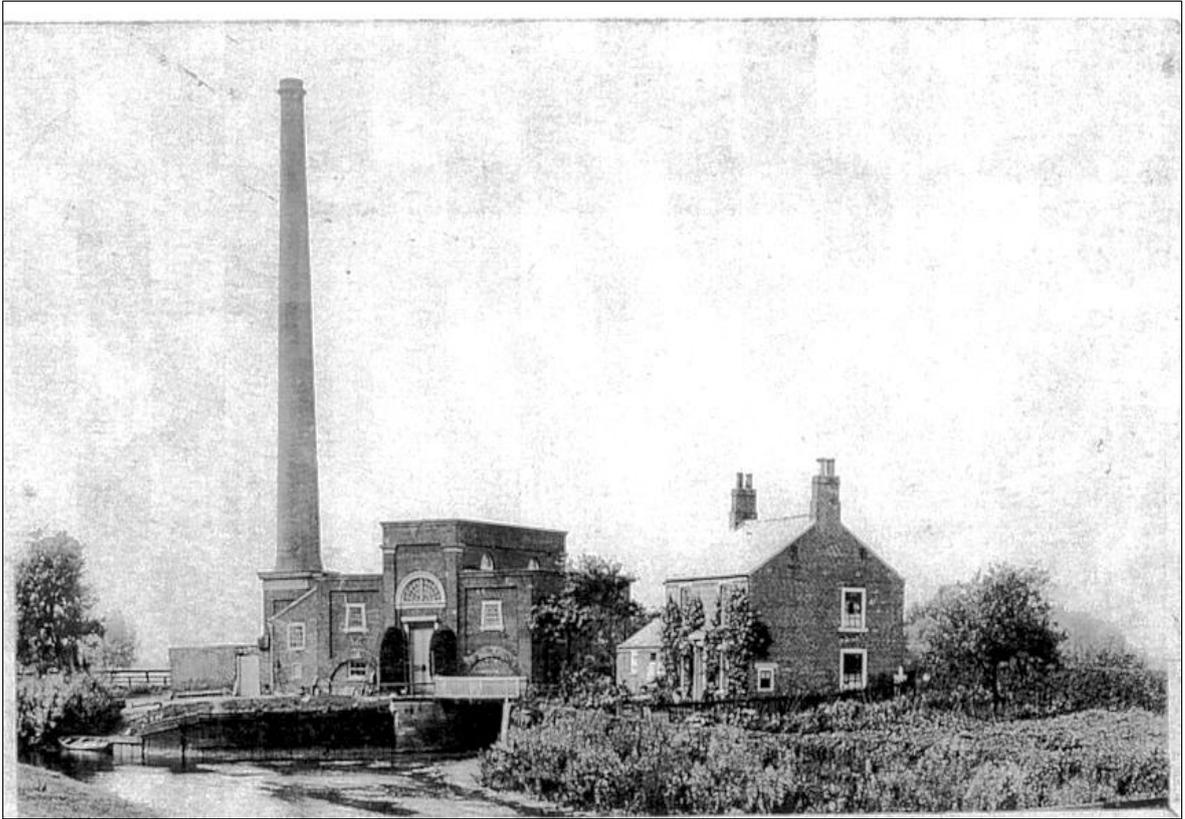


Figure 6.12 The old pumping station and house on the Kyme Eau, near Chapel Hill. Author's private collection.

During the night time, RAF planes could be heard taking off from the neighbouring aerodrome at Coningsby and circling over the fen before setting out over the North Sea on bombing missions. Local people recall how they counted the aircraft out and then counted them back home again the next day. Although the RAF usually flew in quite low over the fenland there were times when some of the aircraft struggled to return to Coningsby and were seen virtually ‘hedge-hopping’ over the fields in order to conserve fuel. And of course, there were those who never made it back at all. Several locals still remember an RAF plane that almost made it back to the airfield before crashing. John Longbottom’s father was ploughing one of his fields with his new tractor in September 1942 when a Halifax bomber trying to reach Coningsby ‘broke up’ over Holland House farm; one of its engines fell away and crashed down on top of the tractor, killing John’s father instantly. This tragedy was witnessed by local people working in the neighbouring fields and also by

children just leaving school at the time. Luckily the crew and some of the research scientists who were on board managed to abandon the plane and parachuted to safety.

Some local girls and married women went into the forces during the war, or worked in tinned food factories such as United Cannery, Beulahs, and Willer and Rileys in Boston; these were factories whose trade benefited from the effects of wartime rationing. Other women worked on munitions at Grantham especially during the wintertime when there was less work available on the land. The Women's Land Army were brought in to replace men who had gone into the forces and there were also German, Italian, and Ukrainian prisoners of war brought into the fen from Moorby near Horncastle, or from Kirton. Eventually, some of the POWs lived-in on local farms, a few lived in the farmhouses, or in the barns and were not actually kept under lock and key. According to Albert E., not all the prisoners had been used to working on the land before the war. Some had other trades such as engineering craftsmen, or blacksmiths and there was one, he remembered, who had been a master blacksmith in his own country. The general consensus of opinion was that some of the prisoners were 'good chaps who made lots of friends locally', indeed, one or two of them married local girls and stayed on in the fen after the war.

Throughout the summer months local children would swim in the river Witham. Albert described how one of the German prisoners taught them to swim, 'during the evenings, we used the old tubes out of lorry tyres to swim with and the German would look out for us from the bridge' whilst they played below in the river. Apparently the most popular location for swimming was 'from the horse bridge [towpath] that went underneath Langrick bridge, and we had a diving board there too'. Sometimes they swam 'in the Forty Foot, but it was usually a different group of lads who swam there'. The children often

worked after school to earn pocket money, they picked potatoes for about three hours, jumped into the river to 'clean up', and then biked home for supper and bedtime.

In the early days of the war the risk of air raids on major cities and towns was taken so seriously that their children were evacuated to more rural areas of the country while air-raid shelters were being built. Several evacuees arrived from Hull and attended the local schools although like many others across the country they returned home after only a few months when the expected raids did not immediately happen in their home town. While urban schools were provided with proper air-raid shelters the Holland Fen schools were told to use the dykes for shelter, and even as late as June 1940 when they were putting up 'netting against flying glass for the windows', the schools were told 'to clean out the [old brick drainage] tunnels under the roadway by the chapel and the mill as offering the best cover'.³⁴ In view of all the air traffic over the fen and the insistence of the school managers, the building of air-raid shelters was finally commenced in May 1941, almost a year later.

Workmen from Sheffield, mostly the steel workers, came into the fen at weekends for the fishing, some travelled in on hired coaches while others arrived by train at the Dogdyke, or Langrick stations. Bert S. recalled that there seemed to be 'hundreds of Sheffield fishermen all over the place during the war and the pubs were drunk dry'.³⁵ Leisure time for the men in Amber Hill, *Holland Fen*, and Brothertoft was usually taken up with the football, bowls, and darts, plus the ever-popular ploughing matches; with thirteen public houses in the fen, dominoes, crib, draughts, skittles, and club meetings were all amply catered for. Should their pub happen to run out of beer then local volunteers had to

³⁴ LAO. Ref. SR 082/8/2.1909-69, Barley Sheaf School Log Book.

³⁵ Transcript HF/BB/BS/19.05.99

fetch a fresh barrel from Boston via the nearest bus service, and then transport it all the rest of the way on a pram chassis left conveniently been left for them at the bus stop.

Some of the men joined the National Union of Agricultural Workers [NUAW] and Donald's main reason for joining was because,

...you could get coupons for wellingtons and thermos flasks during the war, and you could get other things too, you had to belong to the union and they got them for you. Well, the local union secretary worked on the same farm as I did and that was how I come [sic] to belong to one, he used to collect the local subscriptions.

The NUAW was popular with the workers [although not with farmer John L.], because a wage sheet came out each year listing the payments for harvesting barley, peas, and other crops. They contained a wage structure and the rates varied, 'they used to fight for your wages and whatever they said, it was legislated with the wages board'. Although wages for farm workers in the Holland Fen were higher than in other areas by 1d. or 2d. an hour, many went for the better wages in canning factories, or at Fogarty's in Boston, the sugar beet factory at Bardney, Geest's in Spalding, Ruston Bucyrus at Lincoln, and Perkins' diesel factory at Peterborough. However, without having friends or relatives in those areas it could often be a problem finding somewhere to live in the towns.

Council houses built in Amber Hill, Kirton Fen, and Brothertoft during the late 1930s enabled local farmworkers to vacate their old, run-down cottages. A further spot-check of NFS forms for the area previously mentioned found that only 36 per cent of their farm cottages and 60 per cent of the farmhouses were classified as being in good condition.³⁶ Barely twenty of the holdings had piped water and only two had an electricity supply,

³⁶ In Brothertoft, Pelham's Lands, Harts Grounds, and parts of Kirton Fen and Boston West.

which was supplied by their own generators.³⁷ The NFS was involved in a national drive to improve housing conditions and encourage more people to stay on the land, also provide homes for rural workers within easier reach of the farms. Mechanisation was equally to blame for the falling number of land workers and the consequential run-down of surplus accommodation. This decline in housing along the North Forty Foot Bank is confirmed by the OS maps in Appendix 1. The aforesaid NFS forms also showed that approximately 92 per cent of the farmers and smallholders assessed for that area were given a top grading and this endorses how much farming had persevered and succeeded across the Holland Fen. All the fen parishes remained committed to arable farming after the war and fresh vegetables, as well as potatoes, became a speciality of the fen. A few years later when the variety and acreage of vegetables for human consumption was at last acknowledged by the Crop Returns, it confirmed that production of fresh vegetables, especially brassicas, was already well and truly established in large areas of the Holland Fen.³⁸

By 1945 the social development, arable role of the fen, and its crucial topography had been firmly established although one aspect of its civil administration was yet to be resolved.³⁹ Meanwhile, because the old Holland Fen claimed no further hold over the parishes and all aspects of their economy it faded into history and so became largely forgotten; as the resilient parishes forged ahead it was left for posterity to analyse the extraordinary heritage of the Haute Huntre, Eight Hundred, or Holland Fen.

³⁷ There was no supply of electricity in the Holland Fen until 1958.

³⁸ TNA. MAF 68/ 4317/23, 4317/30, 4317/27, 4317/50; Percentage of fresh vegetables grown in Brothertoft, Pelham's Lands, and Harts Grounds continued to increase from 12 per cent of the total cultivated acreage in 1950, to 21 per cent by 1970. Kirton Fen also increased 14 to 24 per cent.

³⁹ Brothertoft parish council minutes, 1907-77, p.93. For example, Brothertoft needed to apply to Kirton for any overheads such as half the rental of a public telephone box which was also used by the Kirton Fen inhabitants. Kirton Fen remained tied to its home parish until 1984 when as a result of the 1979 Boundary Commission review, the new parish of *Holland Fen-with-Brothertoft* was formed.

CONCLUSION

'There is no reason, anyway, to fear that we shall burn our fingers by restoring the historical importance of the physical environment'.¹

Had the topic of this thesis been concerned solely with the topography of Holland Fen, or perhaps exclusively confined to the period of its drainage and enclosure, then the writing of this conclusion would have been so much easier. The topic might also have conformed to, or complemented, other studies of fenland reclamation limited to the ensuing gamut of political, environmental, and drainage consequences. On the other hand, it would have left no scope for a long-term investigation into the aftermath of major topographical upheaval, of the challenges to settlement and social development in a unique environment, the adaptation of local economy, emergence of fenland identities, and so on.

While topographical changes remain an important issue it was the motivations behind them and the continuing sequence of events that followed which became the core essences of this study. After the misfortunes of the seventeenth century any major speculation into fenland drainage was temporarily shelved, giving rise to situations where piecemeal attempts at flood protection in some areas often deflected the water onto the neighbouring lands, just as Fitzwilliam's drain had done in the Holland Fen. Similarly, while flooding of the fen basin was brought about by a sluggish river Witham, the prolonged periods of heavy rainfall, severe gales, and inundations of high tides from the

¹ D. Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape and the Making of Modern Germany* (New York, 2006), p. 18.

North Sea only exacerbated the problem. Clearly, the economy of mid-eighteenth century Boston had depended upon its ability to provide the borough with an effective flood protection and improved navigation of the Witham. Although drainage engineers were keen to learn from past mistakes their surveys continued throughout many decades during which period various drainage schemes were proposed, examined, and then rejected until such time as the investors could be assured of success. The Witham Drainage Act of 1762 was symbolic of the new period of forward thinking when it was finally accepted that in order to be successful, better flood protection needed to be undertaken on a far grander scale than had ever before been envisaged. As observed in chapter one, this entailed the recut of several miles of river and drains, the building of a new Grand Sluice and a Black Sluice, plus the appointment of new commissioners with full authority over the maintenance of navigation and flood protection. It also required massive financial investment. To all intents and purposes the drainage work between Boston and Chapel Hill appears to have been accomplished according to plan. The lessons had indeed been learned for it attracted no local hostility and promised to be largely successful. Other areas hoping to drain their own fenlands were greatly encouraged by this outcome.² That a crowd of ten thousand people should have seen fit to attend the Grand Sluice opening ceremony in 1766 provides clear indication of how public interest in drainage engineering was gaining momentum in the mid-eighteenth century. That it attracted 'nobility and gentry from remote parts of the kingdom' also highlights the calibre of interest being generated, confirming that this long-awaited drainage project was looked upon as a pioneering enterprise in drainage engineering at that time.

The topographical and environmental effects of drainage procedures in the fen were far-reaching and generated some challenging issues. Just as the improved navigation

² Although silting up of the sluice gates became a serious problem later on. For instance, the drainage of East, West, and Wildmore fens.

and flood protection brought new security and confidence to the area, there were other related benefits such as the dispersal of criminal groups secreted within the fen wastes, the clearance of all riverside staithes, hovels, and a general crackdown on illegal trading and dumping. Above all, when they dried out the levels of silt fens were not expected to shrink so drastically as the peat fens to the south and west. Nevertheless, the drainage work had some disadvantages. It was heavily subsidised with taxes including those levied upon all river imports and transport of local supplies into the fen. Where there was a relocation of the river and therefore the divisional county boundary, the displacement of several acres of fenland remained an unresolved issue for several generations to come. Furthermore, crossing the fen on foot involved longer detours and hazardous negotiation of extra dykes and drains for both local people and the movement of animals. The drainage work also destabilised natural areas of water catchment within the fen resulting in severe shortages of water for local crops and animals. This became a serious issue after the enclosures. Inevitably there was some decline in biodiversity, the depletion of wildlife habitats caused some species of wild birds, ducks, geese, eels, and fish to diminish, or leave the area altogether. This was a consequence of the uninviting, but tidy, new river banks which were recently lacking in shelter, safe breeding places, and adequate supplies of certain algae and molluscs.

The fen may have been drained peaceably enough but it was quite a different matter when a petition to 'inclose' Holland Fen was rushed through by the Boston West promoters under the auspices of Boston Corporation. Clearly, it was the autocratic (and possibly, dishonest) way in which some of the promoters obtained petition signatures which triggered off much of the ensuing resentment. The condemnation of what had transpired at this meeting managed to seethe on throughout the whole of the legislative proceedings and, since there was an unusually large number of parishes involved, a substantial

demonstration against the enclosure must surely have been expected. Perhaps the deep-rooted ferocity of it was not.

Essentially, to achieve full enclosure the fen was forced to undergo two separate phases of legislation, each stage having a devastating impact upon the topography and the development of a social environment. After the first parliamentary enclosure had divided the fen into fifty key allotments the stark nature of the landscape was intensified by a panorama of wide open ditches left unadorned and lacking the green hedges and tidy fences so typical of enclosure environments; these had been uprooted and destroyed by protestors. The intention of this first, private enclosure act of 1767 was simply to apportion the fen as impartially and efficiently as possible between all major parties holding rights of common. It did not involve any open fields. The act was also unusual in that it had been petitioned early on during the first upsurge of interest in parliamentary enclosures (1750-1780) and that prior to this, 'private acts of enclosure not including open fields' had only occurred in just three small areas of the county.³

The 1767 enclosure was therefore a different procedure to that of the average open-field arable with its associated commons, as for instance in 96 per cent of the Northamptonshire enclosures. Used by several thousand people the fenland was not owned by a single parish, manor, or overlord, and had never been set aside as a common for 'the poor'. There was no evidence to show that cottagers had ever been authorized to live *within* the Holland Fen itself, as could be the case elsewhere in open-field commons.⁴ A letter in a national newspaper claimed that there were approximately six thousand

³ Tate & Turner, *A Domesday*, pp. 168-9, *i.e.*, 1738 Binbrook, 2,985 acres (1740), 1744 Mareham le Fen, 623 acres (1745), 1765 Aslackby and Dowsby, 2,700 acres (1767). Holton cum Beckering also petitioned in 1748 but no further details given.

⁴ Similar to those described by Neeson, *Commoners*, Hammond, *Village Labourer*, and Mingay, *Parliamentary Enclosure*.

'cottagers', including wives and children, residing within the eleven Holland Fen parishes/townships in 1771 and using the fen for common grazing and fuel. The letter made no reference to any cottagers living inside the fen.⁵ Conversely, Thomas Jeffery's plan of the fen does show the existence of a small number of half-year lands or 'intakes' inside the fen-edges, some of which were sold later to defray expenses and the others confiscated. As in the Cambridgeshire fen-edge parishes, smallholdings found it easier to survive in areas where there were plenty of fen commons nearby. While the acceleration of Frampton's poor law assessment rate from 7d. to 19d. in 1769 might suggest that many of its parishioners had been dependent on the common fen for their livelihood, it is quite likely that a local infiltration of the Frith intake beside Frampton West End (see figure 1.3), was displaced when the land was confiscated and sold by the commissioners, thus placing the extra burden on its parish rate.⁶ Similarly, the practice of selling portions of the common land to defray expenses was a popular move in about half of the Westmoreland enclosure awards.

Elsewhere and with no legal right to live in the fen, criminal fugitives and the wandering homeless were forced to move out, and in so doing they simply retreated into numerous other fens and marshes in the region. No doubt they added to the 'race of people as wild as the fen' which Arthur Young alluded to on his excursion into the Wildmore Fen. Nevertheless, apart from those unfortunate cottagers of Brothertoft and Dogdyke, both of whom were 'burdened with the tyranny and injustice' of a greedy and absent landowner, the enclosure act of 1767 should not have posed an immediate threat to cottagers inside the neighbouring parishes, or to their common rights *at that point in time*. In all probability

⁵ *Middlesex Chronicle*, 25 April 1771. 'Thus we poor cottagers residing within the said townships... with our wives and children amount to above six thousand'. The total population of 10 townships was only 4,042 in 1665.

⁶ Jefferys' map suggests a similar infiltration of the fen at Wyberton West End (where the parish rate also remained high), a coincidence perhaps that both Frampton and Wyberton delayed enclosure of their fen allotments. I intend further research into this at a later date.

the poor state of the fen and overstocking of cattle had already detracted from its value just as it did in Cumbria, while the elderly or infirm in remote parishes would have been precluded from gathering firewood or other subsidies regardless of availability. Even so, by 1771 the situation had certainly changed when despite the earlier 'assurances from respectable proprietors that no subdivision was intended or to be applied for', plans for subdivision of the fen allotments and an end to all common rights were finally exposed.⁷

Between 1770-73, the second stages of parliamentary enclosure were put into action as eight of the Holland Fen parishes/townships petitioned to use their fen allotments in severalty, thereby introducing almost a thousand extra plots into just 14,054 acres of the fen. Although this fractured the fen even more, the bleak landscape was somewhat redeemed and softened by a vast new patchwork of interwoven hedges and trees made possible after hostilities turned to more covert actions. With each subdivision the promoters continued to suffer terrible reprisals, especially where the legislation threatened to include town fields, marshes, and commons such as in Kirton, Frampton, and Wyberton. Consequently, the latter two parishes opted not to enclose their fen allotments until 1784 and 1789, though whether this was owing to clerical opposition, tensions between manorial and parish interests (non-resident landlords were not responsible for the local poor),⁸ the threat of severe reprisals, or a desperate need of commons for the poorer people, remains undetermined. However, we do know that evicted cottagers in Brothertoft and Dogdyke were the precursors of a hard core of rioters joined by rebels from neighbouring parishes at each enclosure of the fen allotments. On the other hand, throughout the rest of the parishes/townships those smallholders, toftstead owners, or cottagers owning common rights over the last thirty years were in a position to claim small plots of fen for

⁷ *Middlesex Chronicle*, 25 April 1771; Boston corporation tried (unsuccessfully) to force Boston West to include a 'cow-pasture' in their subdivision plans to alleviate the poor in their loss of these common rights.

⁸ Birtles, 'Common land', pp. 101-3.

themselves. Alternatively, where the loss of common was known to cause serious hardship, as in the case of some tenants, it was customary to apply for some compensation through parish poor relief. Fortunately there was plenty of work currently available for all kinds of labourers and farmworkers in the area thus enabling many of the able-bodied to find work, although in so doing they risked becoming dependent on regular employment and wages. Debates still query the extent to which enclosure is said to have forced cottagers and labourers to become immiserated, or proletarianised, lose their common rights to pasture a cow, or gather fuel.⁹ Perhaps, instead of using these groups for such downtrodden statistics, we should extend the regions of popular research beyond the manors and turn our attention to the ways in which it was possible to adapt, combine group resources, use the wages system to advantage,¹⁰ specialise in essential services, and become tenants of small fen plots. As chapter six has shown, it was during the worst of times when determined labourers and smallholders found new or enterprising ways to make ends meet.

Leaving aside the demonstrations of discontent and bloodshed, the division and subdivision of the Haute Huntre provides us with a prime example of the logistical skills of the mid-eighteenth century enclosure commissioners and surveyors. Before its enclosure in 1767, the five commissioners concerned would not have acquired a great deal of practical experience in the enclosures of large and intricate common fens in Lincolnshire, especially where so many major parishes were actively involved. It is disappointing to find that other than in journals and local history books dedicated to the subject of

⁹ L. Shaw-Taylor, 'Parliamentary enclosure and the emergence of an English agricultural proletariat', *Journal of Economic History*, 61 (2001), pp. 640-662, also 'Labourers, cows, common rights, and parliamentary enclosure: the evidence of contemporary comment c. 1760-1810', *Past and Present*, 171 (2001), pp. 95-126. J. Humphries, 'Enclosures, Common Rights, and Women: The proletarianization of families in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', *Journal of Economic History*, 50 (1990), pp. 17-42.

¹⁰ For instance the higher wages and very low poor rate in Lincolnshire, see J.D. Chambers, 'Enclosure and the Small Landowner', *EHR.*, 10 (1940), pp. 118-27.

enclosure, the lives and work of enclosure commissioners and their surveyors has not received more in-depth attention.¹¹ At varying periods during 1767-89 there was a combined total of thirty commissioners and surveyors employed solely in the division and parish enclosures of the fen. With all interested parties contesting every last inch of the fen as well as the defence of tithes, brovage rights, land parity, and accessibility, the enclosure procedures must have seriously challenged the diplomacy and skills of all commissioners involved. Throughout the period there was an added pressure to achieve a speedy and efficient completion since the enclosure situation was receiving much adverse publicity in the national newspapers. As a result of their prestigious accomplishment several of the commissioners and surveyors went on to participate in the escalation of other enclosures around the country.

While most enclosure plans needed to incorporate the established nucleus of a manor, village, or small community, the new parish allotments in Holland Fen contained no such features other than major drains, bridges, and roadways. In such circumstances, enclosure commissioners would have had the potential to manipulate the entire parish allotment, thereby raising the question of whether they were able to promote the formation of communities by a strategic layout of plots. They certainly had substantial powers but how practical would it have been to actively encourage new settlement areas? Despite a restructuring of the topography there was no evidence in the enclosure maps to suggest that commissioners sought to influence development of new communities by a strategic lay-out

¹¹ In his work on parliamentary enclosures and new landscapes, Russell identified 67 commissioners and 24 surveyors who had worked on Lincolnshire enclosures. Forty two commissioners and 9 of the surveyors were resident within the county although only a minority became well-known. Russell, *New Landscapes*, pp. 25-7; Edward Hare of Castor, who took part in the Holland Fen enclosures and compiled a book of plans and surveys, later became a major figure in enclosure. Chapman calculated that Hare was involved with almost 200 enclosures and as a commissioner was responsible for 133 of these with a total area of 273,407 acres. J. Chapman, 'Enclosure commissioners as landscape planners', *Landscape History*, 15 (1993), p. 51-3.

in core locations. However, it was evident that the largest plots were grouped together and located at the furthest extremes of the fen, thus allowing the medium-sized and smaller plots to be placed somewhat nearer to their home parishes. Where a person had been allocated a small plot as well as a large one these were integrated to reduce the costs of fencing, although a separate access for each was maintained. Smaller plots were also used to balance out the irregular contours and to tidy up any intersections. For instance, William Brickles' tiny plot of just six perches in Kirton Fen and six other plots of less than an half acre each were used to fill up a small gap between Long Road and the Swineshead/Boston turnpike road. Any social development in the fen was therefore left entirely to the inhabitants' needs and their peculiar circumstances, for example the emergence of that innovative group of agricultural services and shops close to the Barley Sheaf pub (known later as the village of *Holland Fen*), or the amalgamation of Algarkirk and Sutterton Fens into a single village bordering the local gravel pit. Nevertheless, it seems that social change within the fen was only able to make progress where strong roots and a sense of belonging already existed. Nowhere else in the fen was more qualified for this than the little manor of Brothertoft.

One of several intriguing situations brought to light during this research was the contrast in ownership of Brothertoft by two consecutive lords of the manor, Sir Charles Frederick and Major John Cartwright. Frederick, the government official, was an absentee owner whose 'tyranny and injustice' was so 'despised by the whole neighbourhood' that he was obliged to maintain a bailiff and guard of armed men at the hall for several years during the enclosures to protect his property.¹² Cartwright, on the other hand, took up

¹² In April 1749, Frederick was Comptroller of the King's fireworks at the ill-fated firework display in Vauxhall Gardens when one of the grand pavilions caught fire and was burnt to the ground. It was rumoured that Frederick used his later position as Surveyor General of the Ordnance to maintain these armed men at Brothertoft.

personal residence in Brothertoft where he renovated the old manor house and embarked upon the reclamation of wasteland; his agricultural innovations gradually improved the standing of local agriculture and sponsored more efficient husbandry. He also endowed the manor with its brief, but prosperous woad industry. All this might not seem unduly remarkable, but the provision of housing, education, healthcare, and security for his workforce was certainly innovative; while the very idea that a respectable landed gentleman well-acquainted with the London nobility should take up his lowly residence in a remote Lincolnshire fen, must have appeared quite shocking to his contemporaries. Cartwright's sixteen years as lord of the manor endowed Brothertoft and its inhabitants with a special air of civility and lasting respect, popular attributes that charmed a major Boston banker into purchasing the hall for his family home. It was probably during Cartwright's ownership that the people of Brothertoft re-affirmed a fierce pride and enduring sense of their place in the fen.

Social changes in the remaining areas of Holland Fen tended to reflect the settlement and escalation of farm houses, barns, stables, and cottages associated with expansion and improved methods of food production;¹³ this included changes to the hierarchy of farm workers as well as domestic employees. There was an increase of farm servants, shepherds, horsemen, and wagoners, while household servants incorporated not only the cooks and scullery maids but governesses, housekeepers, nurses and parlour maids. The continued prevalence of so many small farmers and smallholders in the fen and their adaptability to supply popular fresh vegetables, fruit, flowers, and services during periods of agricultural depression emphasises just how enterprising the inhabitants of Holland Fen could be in stressful times. As a result of intensive wartime efforts the fen

¹³ While there was not enough time during this research to establish the significance of high farming in Holland Fen the subject remains high on the list for future enquiries.

achieved its status of a fully-productive fenland, certainly no mean achievement for one that was largely isolated by water and rigidly constrained by a grid of dykes, drains, and enclosures boundaries.

During this thesis it has been possible to respond to some of those issues highlighted by historians in their pleas for more research on regional enclosures, acreage of plots, migration, leases, tenant right, uprisings, farm servants in the late nineteenth century, and the social values of fenland people. As a historiography, this research demonstrates that the study of regional fens can reveal the vital information that could alter all our perceptions of fenlands. Throughout centuries of topographical change each generation may have viewed their fen landscape differently, although prior to enclosure the common fen presented itself in many different disguises. Hundreds of local families looked on the Haute Huntre fen as a pleasant, friendly, and bountiful place to go for a day's outing. For those outside the law and with nowhere else to go, the marshy islands and meeres deep within the fen provided a grim and menacing hideaway, for graziers and fen slodgers alike it was a rich source of unstinted income, and a wasted environment for those who yearned to see the fenland fully cultivated. In the period immediately after enclosure the fen's appearance probably resembled that of an alien landscape, partitioned in every direction by a limitless expanse of newly-dug ditches and drains. As increasing demand for cereals and other produce encouraged more farm workers and their families to settle into the fen, the new cottages, schools, chapels, bridges, and railway stations were a sure indication of social and topographical change. While leaner years served to stimulate local enterprise and trials of alternative agriculture, it was left to a wartime economy to reclaim stubborn wasteland and to secure the fen's arable heritage. Unlike the Somerset Levels where cattle are more important than crops, the numerous small farmers of this fenland are renowned for fresh vegetables like onions, cauliflowers, cabbages, potatoes, broccoli and sprouts.

With different crops being grown to suit all fenland soil conditions, the bulb fields of South Holland promote Spalding's famous spring parades and flower-decorated church festivals. Further to the south-west in the Wisbech area are the apple orchards and soft fruits such as strawberries are grown, leaving the dark peaty soils of Ely and Chatteris to specialise in celery and its tasty 'black land' carrots.

What then, of the parishes that prevailed over the old Holland Fen? Oral testimony has shown that some older inhabitants are aware of their enclosure heritage and that only Brothertoft's history pre-dates 1769, reaching back to the early-medieval period. Although the sturdy parish of Amber Hill was only established in 1865, its residents take satisfaction in knowing that their roots are allied with the prehistoric hill of amber gravel. They also have the remarkable advantage of retaining their own school, so far the only one to remain open in the fen. The tiny hamlet of Hubberts Bridge remains divided between two remote parishes and alienated by the heavy traffic pounding through it. As a hazardous place for families to settle it struggles to retain any identity within a commuter environment. Nevertheless, it is the confusing presence of a village called *Holland Fen* located in a fen called Holland Fen that so easily generates confusion in the minds of those unfamiliar with the area. Where then, *is* the Holland Fen? Sadly with its history largely forgotten, both the fen and its name, have been engrossed by the modern *Holland Fen* village. This is a village whose vulnerable location and identity has resisted so many civil challenges that its sense of belonging is now on a par with that of Brothertoft, its old rival and neighbour. The two fen villages challenge each other vigorously, and so successfully that they are able to maintain separate but fully developed and vibrant communities within one tiny parish. Consequently, this new parish of *Holland Fen-with-Brothertoft* supports two villages, two churches, two redundant vicarages, two parish halls (with alternate parish meetings), two summer fetes, harvest festivals, and so on. It would appear then, that social development

in this fenland has successfully outmanoeuvred the old restraints of artificial topography and gained the upper hand.

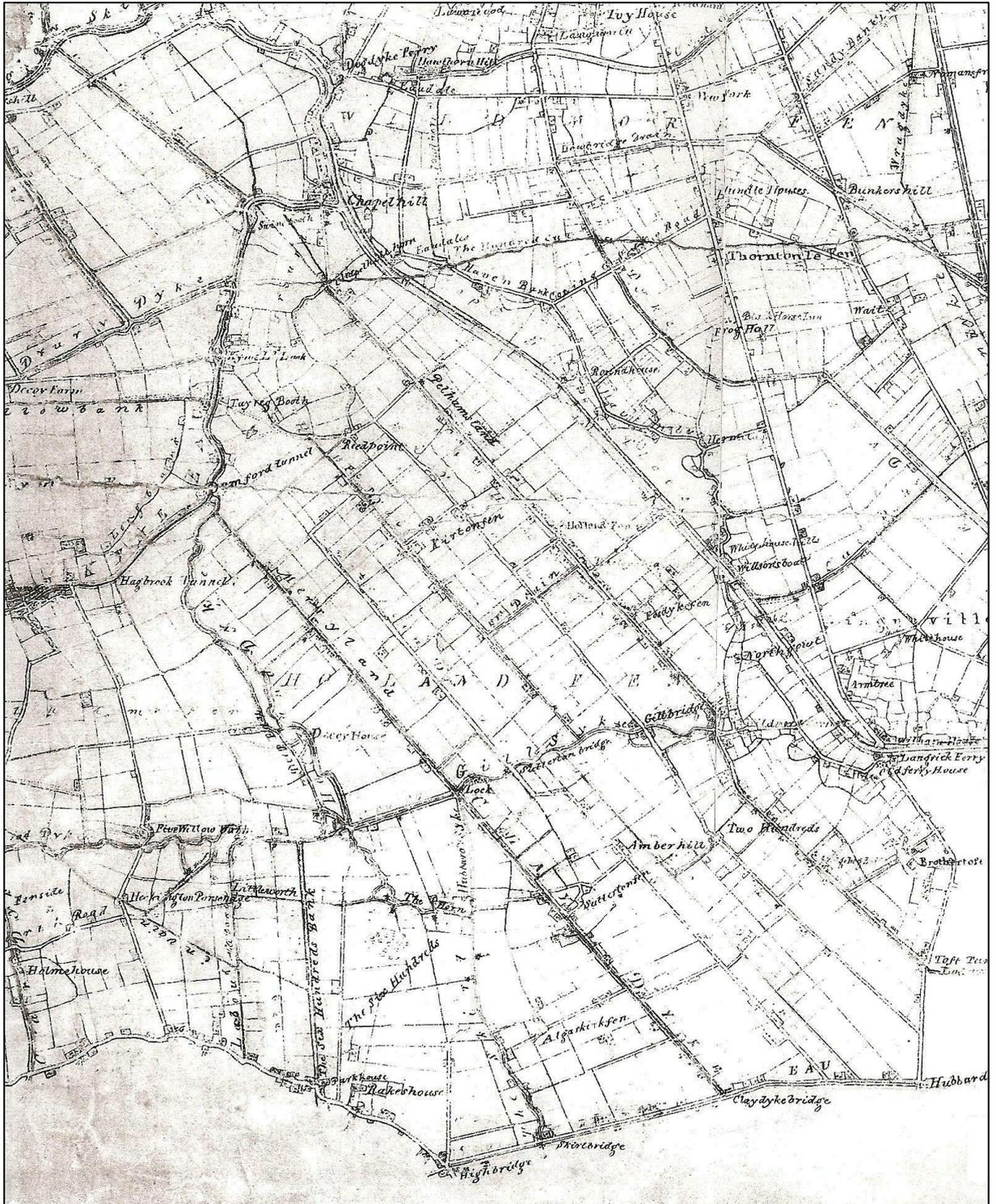
The new millennium has brought significant changes to a fen where re-structured farming methods and sophisticated agricultural machinery have deprived it of so many farmworkers. While the greater part of the fen remains committed to arable farming its new topography has become multi-faceted with up-to-date leisure activities blending into the rural landscape. Walkers and bird-watchers enjoy 45 acres of new woodlands planted around the edges of the fen,¹⁴ while other features include a 24-hole golf course and modern hotel, a new sports arena with training facilities for the 2012 Olympic games, a small private aerodrome, a static and touring caravan site, modern holiday cottages, boarding kennels, riding and horse-breeding stables, cafés, and licensed restaurants. Along the main roads several acres of horticultural greenhouses and other small industries compete with car showrooms, department stores, and supermarkets for roadside spaces. The fenland rivers and drains have now taken on a new lease of life and their usefulness extended even further with more innovative leisure projects and developments.

For those intent on exercise or tranquillity the latest waterway cycle routes and the recent navigational links are available; phase one of the Fens Waterways scheme, the Boston Lock Link between the Witham and South Forty Foot drain, is now open at the Black Sluice. The circular Lincolnshire Fens Waterways Link, one of the biggest waterways enhancement schemes in Europe, will soon connect the cathedral cities of Lincoln, Peterborough, and Ely, also incorporating the market towns of Boston, Spalding,

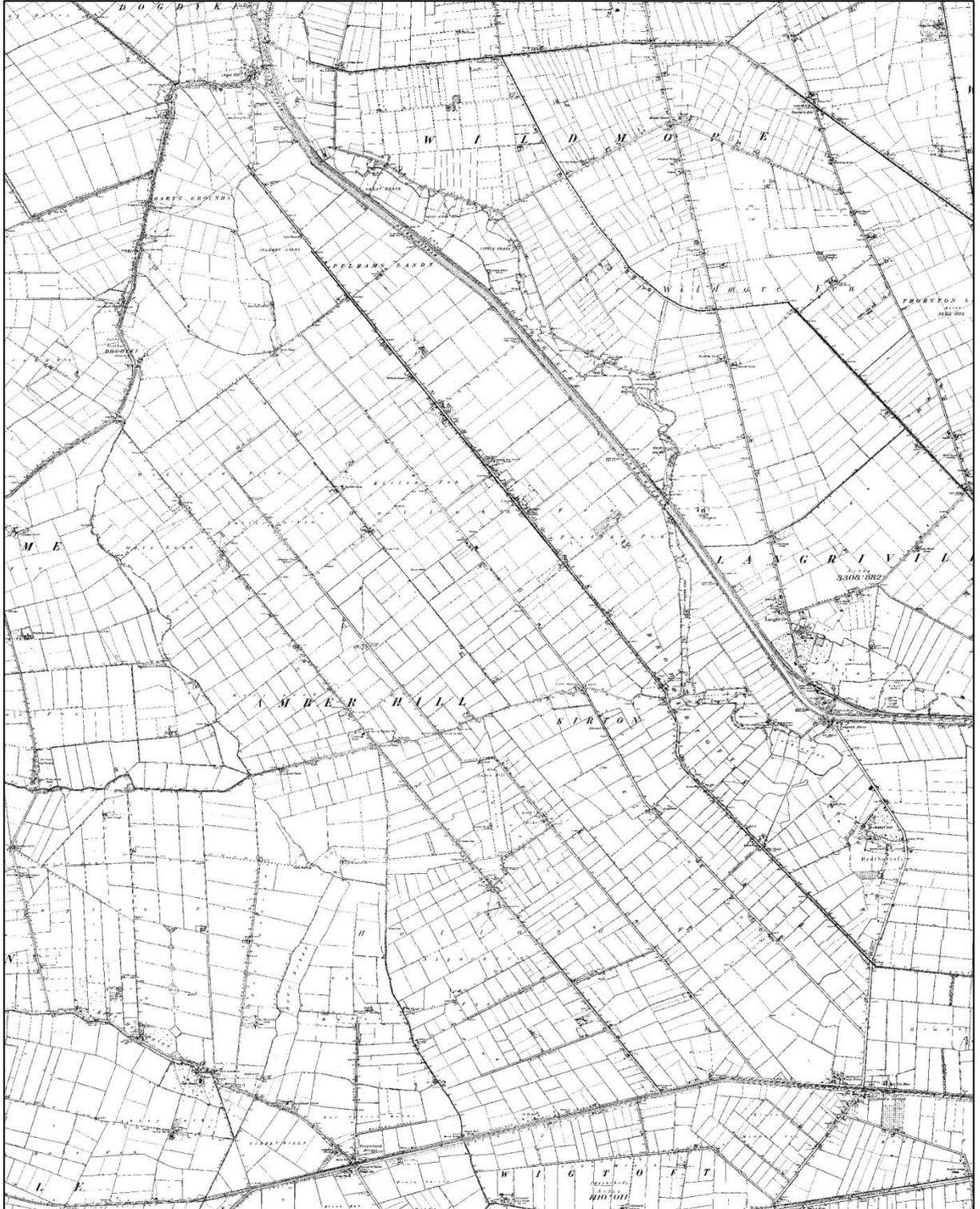
¹⁴ *i.e.* Westgate Wood beside the Old Hammond Beck in Frampton Fen, and the Grange and Beech Woods beside the Witham at Boston West Fen.

Crowland, and Ramsey.¹⁵ Marinas on the Witham at Boston and Dogdyke, plus the new floating moorings along the South Forty Foot Drain already encourage leisure boats to take advantage of the waterways where their passengers can relax, fish, and admire the fenland wildlife. All this is very reminiscent perhaps, of bygone days when Sir Joseph Banks was able to hold his own state-of-the-art fishing parties along the Witham.

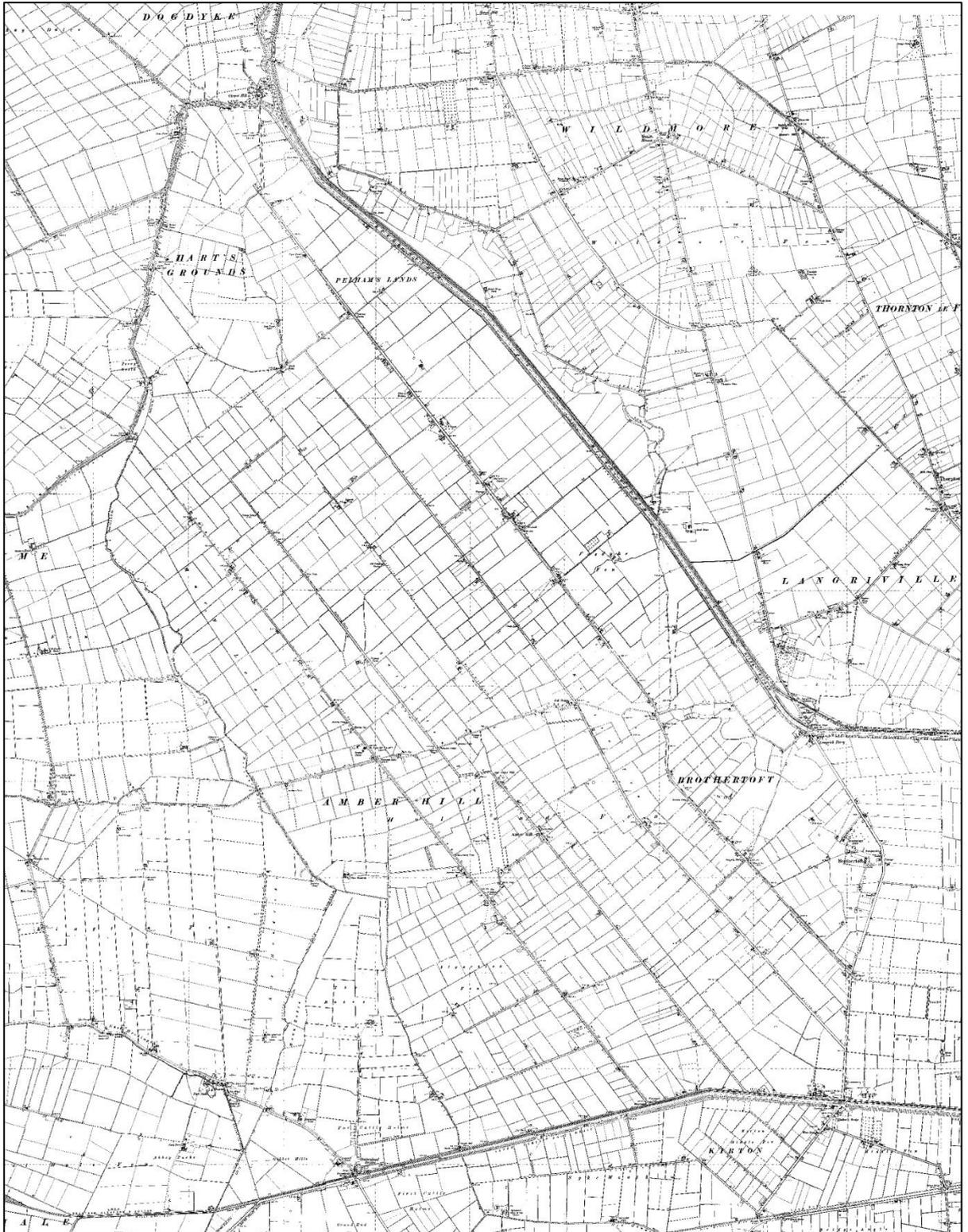
¹⁵ For further information see <http://www.fenswaterways.com/FurtherInformation/tabid/56/Default.aspx>

APPENDIX 1**Holland Fen Map 1821**

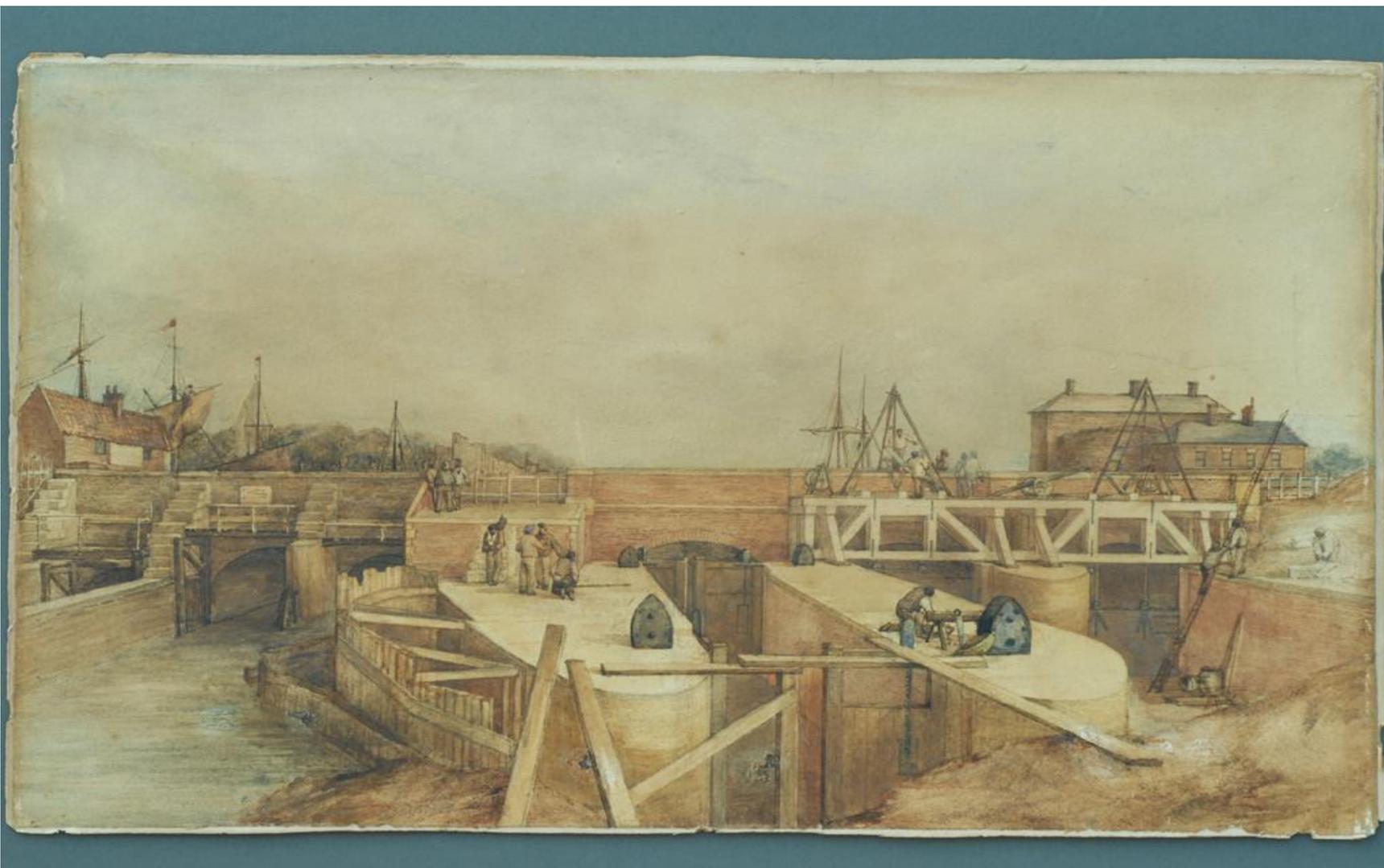
This 1821 drawing shows the rough northern area of Harts Grounds and also the un-reclaimable wastes left by the bed of the old river Witham. (Adapted from Wheeler, *Maps of the Witham Fens*, 126:3, 126.4, n.p.)

APPENDIX 1**Holland Fen OS 1890-92**

In this map the northern clay area of Harts Grounds has been reclaimed for agricultural use, although difficult areas of the old riverbed around Ferry Corner are still able to dominate the land on either side. Emerging villages of Hubberts Bridge, Amber Hill, Brothertoft, and Holland Fen are clearly evident.

APPENDIX 1**Holland Fen OS 1947-51**

Although the shape of the old river bed is unmistakable, efforts to reclaim as much of it as possible are still ongoing. Extent of the village communities appears to have declined.



The Black Sluice, Boston

APPENDIX 1

William Lewin painting of the third Black Sluice (centre and right) under construction 1847-8. On the left is the second Black Sluice, built 1765 upon the site of the 17th century sluice. William Lewin (1794-1863), a surveyor and civil engineer, was also resident engineer to the River Witham Commissioners. My thanks to Lorraine Heyes for this copy of the painting.

TABLE A. Analysis of plots enclosed by eight of the eleven parishes/townships in Holland Fen. *

Parish	<u>Allocated Acreage</u>	<u>% Total 8 Allocated</u>	<u>No. of Plots</u>	<u>Under 1 acre</u>	<u>1 – 5 acres</u>	<u>5 - 10 acres</u>	<u>10 - 20 acres</u>	<u>20 - 40 acres</u>	<u>40 - 100 acres</u>	<u>100 - 200 acres</u>	<u>200 – 300 acres</u>	<u>300+</u>
Fosdyke	879	<i>6.25%</i>	21	-	6	4	5	-	3	2	-	1
Skirbeck Q'tr	277	<i>1.98%</i>	45	15	17	8	2	2	1	-	-	-
Algarkirk	2380	<i>16.93%</i>	60	1	9	14	13	11	7	3	-	2
Sutterton	2488	<i>17.70%</i>	101	14	15	19	22	15	12	2	-	2
Wigtoft	994	<i>7.07%</i>	112	36	40	18	13	-	3	2	-	-
Boston West	1513	<i>10.77%</i>	168	9	82	42	24	9	1	-	1	-
Swineshead	2075	<i>14.77%</i>	168	11	62	50	26	13	3	1	2	-
Kirton	3448	<i>24.53%</i>	170	22	29	40	36	19	21	1	1	1
TOTALS	14054		845	108	260	195	141	69	51	11	4	6
<i>% plot sizes</i>				<i>12.8%</i>	<i>30.8%</i>	<i>23%</i>	<i>16.7%</i>	<i>8.2%</i>	<i>6%</i>	<i>1.3%</i>	<i>0.5%</i>	<i>0.7%</i>

*Acreage in whole numbers. Information gathered from Hare's book of *Plans and Surveys (1783)*. Frampton and Wyberton not enclosed until 1784 and 1789 therefore not included, Brothertoft owned by Sir Charles Frederick. Acreage of above eight parishes constitutes approx 82.4% of area awarded to the eleven parishes/townships.

TABLE B. Plots allocated to women in eight of the 11 parishes in Holland Fen *

<u>Parish</u>	<u>Total Plots</u>	<u>Plots allocated to Women</u>	<u>under 2 acres</u>	<u>2 - 12 acres</u>	<u>12 - 20 acres</u>	<u>20 - 60 acres</u>	<u>Over 60 acres</u>
Fosdyke	21	2	1	1	-	-	-
Skirbeck Quarter	45	6	3	2	1	-	-
Algarkirk	60	5	-	2	2	1 (max 59a)	-
Sutterton	101	26	5	10	6	5 (max 56a)	-
Wigtoft	112	13	7	4	-	-	2 (max 197a)
Boston West	168	20	1	18	1	-	-
Swineshead	168	23	5	12	4	2 (max 25a)	-
Kirton	170	21	2	13	4	2 (max 44a)	-
TOTALS	845	116	24	62	18	10	2

* Acreage in whole numbers. Information gathered from Hare's Book of *Plans and Surveys (1783)*. Not included are Brothertoft (owned solely by Sir Charles Frederick), also Frampton and Wyberton not enclosed until 1784, and 1789.

APPENDIX 1

Map of the six Black Sluice Drainage districts, c.1868

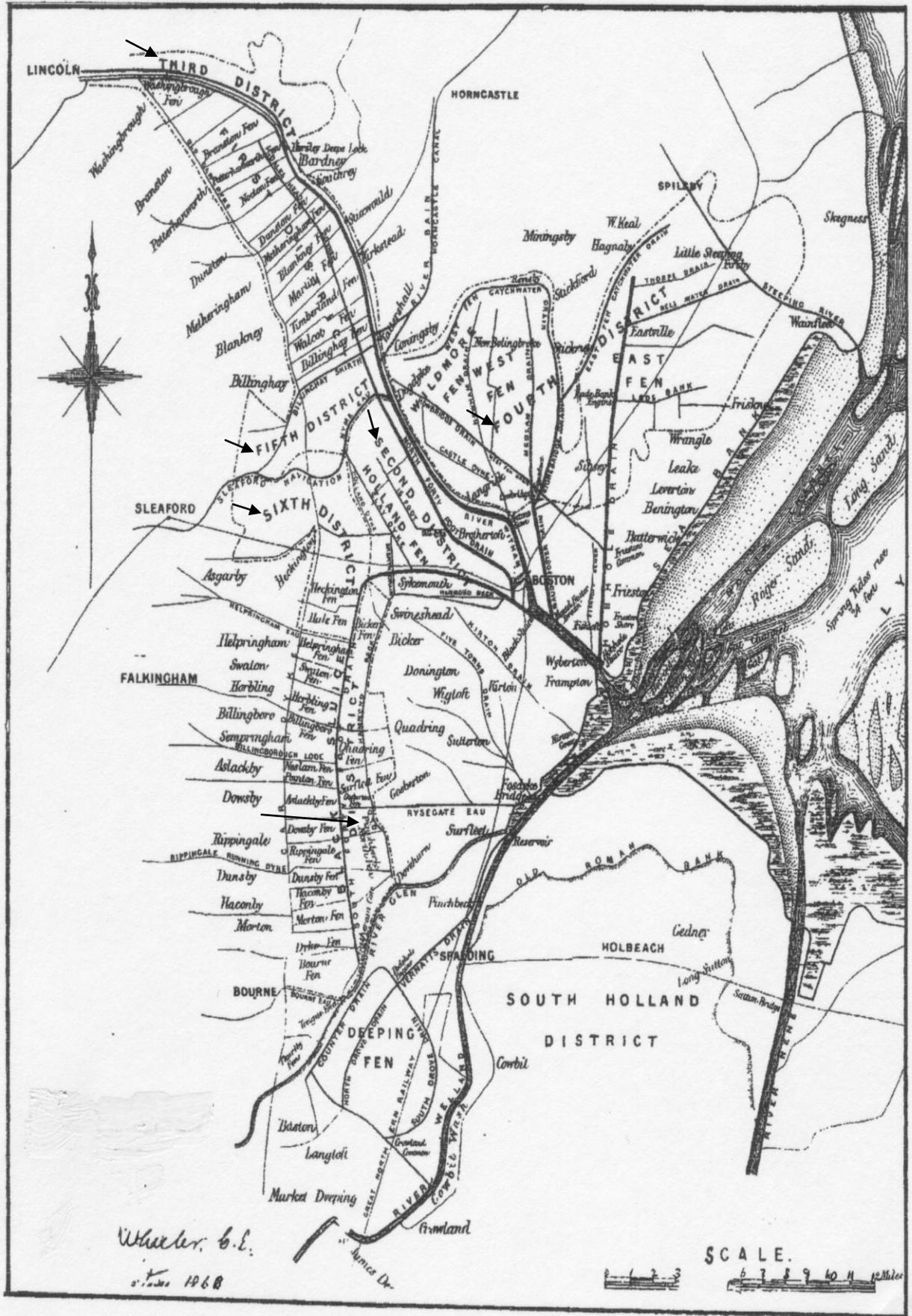


Table C. Estimated acreage of crops produced by seven of the Holland Fen allotments 1801.*

Ref.	Parishes	Wheat	Barley	Oats	Potatoes	Peas	Beans	Turnips/Rape	Other
7	Algarkirk	880	34	1094	46	6	100	(175)	
109	Boston West	272	41.25	270	11.50	3	44	(135)	
304	Frampton	300	60	400	25		105	(209)	
466	Kirton	650	80	750			50	(400)	
681	Skirbeck	85	31	113	20	11	64	(45)	
854	Wigtoft	256	59	412	35	12	34	(107)	
900	Wyberton	239	31	482	15	4	38	(142)	Woad 170
	<i>Total acreage 6 main crops</i>	<i>2682</i>	<i>336.25</i>	<i>3521</i>	<i>152.50</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>435</i>	<i>*</i>	
	<i>% of total acreage 6 main crops</i>	<i>37.44%</i>	<i>4.69%</i>	<i>49.16%</i>	<i>2.12%</i>	<i>0.5%</i>	<i>6.07%</i>	<i>*</i>	

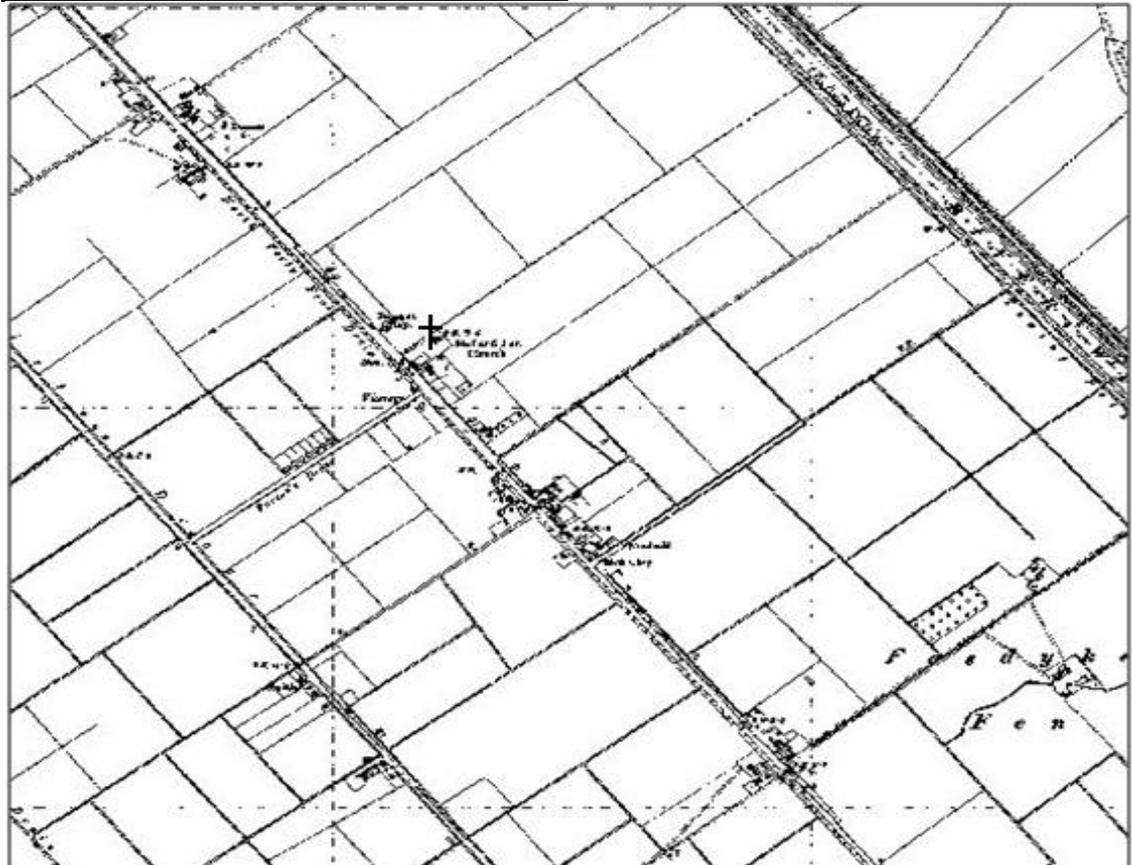
N.B. Cole, coleseed, or rape is a biennial plant of the turnip family. A note made by vicar of Fleet in 1801 returns explains that 'by turnips and rape is meant green rape as it is called here, cole for sheep. By rape seed is meant as such as stands for seed and thrashed out'. Table collated 1801 Acreage Returns, TNA/HO/167/15/.

APPENDIX 1

North Forty Foot Bank OS Map 1890-92



North Forty Foot Bank OS Map 1947-51



Maps show a 50-year decline in the built-up area with a few local fields having been enlarged.

APPENDIX 2**Profiles of Holland Fen parish allotments 1769-1861****ALGARKIRK FEN ¹**

- 1769** Allocated 2380acres.1rood.22perches in one enclosed plot (2327a.1r.19p after roads etc.).
- 1770** Divided into 60 plots ranging from 0a.1r.20p. to 372a.1r.32p.
- 1801** Estimated population 189
- 1811** Estimated population 204
- 1821** Estimated population 239
- 1831** Estimated population 253
- 1841** 54 households, 288 persons (161 male + 127 female)
10 of total inhabitants born outside Lincolnshire (4 Irish).
- 1851** 52 households, 280 persons.
- 1861** 44 households, 253 persons (130 male + 123 female)
105 inhabitants born Holland Fen (41.5%)
8 persons born outside Lincolnshire, i.e. Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Leicestershire, Middlesex, and Norfolk.

BOSTON WEST FEN ²

- 1769** Allocated 1513a.3r.14p. three enclosed plots (1502a.2r.5p. after roads etc.)
- 1771** Divided into 168 plots ranging from 0a.0r.32p. to 205a.3r.6p.
- 1841** 43 households, 219 persons (110 male + 109 female)
2 inhabitants born outside Lincolnshire.
- 1861** 50 households, 251 persons (122 male + 129 female)
26 inhabitants born the Holland Fen (10.3%)
16 persons born outside Lincolnshire i.e. Middlesex, Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire, Cheshire, Huntingdonshire, Norfolk, and Suffolk.

¹ TNA. 1841,1861 Census; Census Great Britain 1851, Part I, Population Tables 1801-1851, II (HO. 1851) p.34.

² TNA. 1841, 1861 Census.

BROTHERTOFT ³

- 1769** Allocated 756a.3r.27p. in one enclosed plot. Owner Sir Charles Frederick.
- 1788** Total area 900 acres purchased by Major John Cartwright.
- 1801** Township. 16 households, 20 families, 102 persons (49 male + 53 female)
- 1811** Township. 21 households, 112 persons (61 male + 51 female)
16 families chiefly employed Agriculture.
5 families chiefly employed trade, manufacturing, or handicraft.
- 1821** Chapelry. 23 households, 24 families, 111 persons (64 male + 47 female)
21 families chiefly employed Agriculture.
3 families chiefly employed trade, manufacturing, or handicraft.
- 1831** Chapelry. 22 households, 23 families, 123 persons (58 male + 65 female)
21 families chiefly employed Agriculture.
2 families chiefly employed trade, manufacturing, or handicraft.
- 1841** Chapelry. 20 households, 122 persons (65 male + 57 female)
Head of house = 7 farmers, 8 agricultural labourers, 1 banker, 1 carpenter, 1 blacksmith, 1 miller, 1 female.
2 inhabitants (wives) not born Lincolnshire.
- 1851** Chapelry. 22 households, 122 persons (65 male + 57 female).
- 1861** Chapelry. 23 households, 124 persons (58 male + 66 female)
Head of house = 4 farmers (72 to 227 acres), 5 agricultural labourers, 2 farm bailiffs, 1 banker/farmer, 1 gardener, 1 coachman, 1 groundkeeper, 1 road repairer, 1 carpenter, 1 horsekeeper, 1 tailor, 1 blacksmith, 1 machine man, 2 widows.
46 inhabitants born Holland Fen (37.1%)
4 persons not born Lincolnshire i.e. Lancashire, Suffolk, Rutland.

³ TNA. 1841, 1861 Census; Census Great Britain 1801, Abstract Answers and Returns, Part I, Enumeration (HO 1801) p. 185; *Census 1851*, Part I, Population Tables 1801-1851, II (HO. 1851) p. 34;

FOSDYKE FEN ⁴

- 1769** Allocated 887a.?r.?p. one enclosed plot (879a.2r.30p.after roads etc).
- 1770** Divided into 21 plots ranging from 1 to 343acres.⁵
- 1801** Estimated population 98 persons.
- 1811** Estimated population 135 persons.
- 1821** Estimated population 152 persons.
- 1831** Estimated population 186 persons.
- 1841** 34 households, 201 persons (101 male + 100 female)
2 inhabitants not born Lincolnshire.
- 1851** 31 households, 172 persons.
- 1861** 31 households, 155 persons (72 male + 83 female)
Head of house = 9 farmers (5 to 175acres) one also grocer, and one also wholesale brewer, 10 agricultural labourers, one a church clerk, and one also a horseman (wife schoolteacher), 1 coal/flour dealer, 1 groundkeeper, 1 gardener, 1 retired landowner, 1 schoolmaster, 1 innkeeper/butcher, 1 drayman, 1 collar/harness maker, 1 working brewer, 1 miller, 1 invalid, 1 charwoman.
67 inhabitants born Holland Fen (43.2%)
3 persons not born Lincolnshire i.e. Middlesex, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk.

FRAMPTON FEN ⁶

- 1769** Allocated 1258a.0r.10p. three enclosed plots.
- 1784** Division, no details however 1836 plan shows 57 plots.⁷ Largest 219a. smallest 3r.1p.2r.
- 1841** Approx. 17 households, 111 persons (60 male + 51 female)
3 inhabitants not born Lincolnshire.
- 1861** Approx. 28 households, 160 persons (79male + 81 female)
Head of house = 11 farmers, 8 agricultural labourers, 4 farm labourers, 1 blacksmith, 1 wheelwright/farmer, 1 butcher, 1 police constable, 1 widow/fieldworker.
Places of birth not clearly defined, parish stated only.
6 inhabitants not born Lincolnshire, i.e. Huntingdonshire, Rutland, Ireland, Cambridgeshire, London.

⁴ TNA. 1841,1861 Census; *Census 1851*, Part I, Population Tables 1801-1851, II (HO. 1851) p. 34;

⁵ Hare, *Plans and Surveys*, Edge of photocopied page blurred, roods and perches unreadable.

⁶ TNA. 1841, 1861Census.

⁷ LAO. Frampton PAR. 23/8, Holland Fen Allotments 1836.

HARTS GROUNDS ⁸

- 1769** Formerly part of the old river Witham and extra parochial, 444 acres. Owned by Earl Fitzwilliam.
- 1811** Extra-parochial. 7 households, 52 persons (23 male + 29 female). 7 families employed agriculture.
- 1821** Extra-parochial. 13 households, 15 families, 67 persons (35 male + 32 female). 15 families employed agriculture.
- 1831** Extra-parochial, 1,110 acres. 7 households, 8 families, 43 persons (17 male + 26 female). 8 families employed agriculture.
- 1841** Extra-parochial 1,110 acres. 13 households, 58 persons (33 male + 25 female) 6 inhabitants not born Lincolnshire.
- 1851** Extra-parochial 1,110 acres. Estimated population 63 persons.
- 1861** Extra-parochial 1,110 acres. 9 households, 60 persons (31 male + 29 female). Head of house = 7 farmers, 2 agricultural labourers. 20 inhabitants born Holland Fen (33.3%) Remainder born Lincolnshire.

⁸ TNA. 1861 Census; *Census 1851*, Part I, Population Tables 1801-1851, II (HO. 1851) p. 34; Abstract Answers and Returns 1811, 1821, 1831, 1841;

KIRTON FEN ⁹

- 1769** Allocated 3448a.0r.23p. three enclosed plots (3391a.0r.11p. after roads etc.).
- 1772** Divided into 170 plots ranging from 0a.0r.6p. to 317a.1r.29p.
- 1801** Estimated population 204 persons.
- 1811** Estimated population 243 persons.
- 1821** Estimated population 258 persons.
- 1831** Estimated population 289 persons.
- 1841** 55 households, 308 persons (163 male + 145 female).
Head of house = 22 farmers, 27 agricultural labourers, 2 publicans,
1 molecatcher, 1 schoolmistress, 1 clerk, 1 other.
4 inhabitants not born Lincolnshire.
- 1851** 64 households, 365 persons.
- 1861** 73 households, 375 persons (195 male + 180 female).
Head of house = 22 farmers (one a widow), 34 agricultural labourers,
1 farm bailiff, 1 Inn/coalyard keeper, 1 machine man, 1 brickmaker, 5 cottagers,
1 station clerk, 1 bricklayer, 1 vet, 1, wheelwright, 1 blacksmith, 1 curate,
1 carpenter, 1 brewer/farmer.
154 inhabitants born Holland Fen (41.1%)
21 persons (5.6%) born outside Lincolnshire, i.e. Norfolk, Cambridgeshire,
London, Sussex, Suffolk, Staffordshire, Leicestershire, Hertfordshire, Yorkshire,
Northampton, Rutland, Somerset, Gloucestershire, Middlesex, Nottinghamshire.

⁹ TNA. 1841, 1861 Census; *Census 1851*, Part I, Population Tables 1801-1851, II (HO. 1851) p. 34;

NORTH FORTY FOOT BANK ¹⁰

1769 Allocated at enclosure, a generous roadway of 60 feet in width, known as the Chapel Hill Road. It ran alongside the eastern bank of the North Forty Foot drain from Toft Tunnel, Brothertoft to Chapel Hill.

1801 Extra-parochial. Settlement known as the 'North Forty Foot Bank' along the eastern side of above road from Toft Tunnel for approximately 6 ½ miles to the corner of Harts Grounds. Area quoted as 3,990 acres but undefined by the Census Returns. Wheeler described North Forty Foot Bank as 'a narrow strip of land, about one chain wide and 6½ miles long, running by the side of the drain'.¹⁰ Estimated population 123 persons, 29 houses.

1811 Extra-parochial. Estimated population 66 persons, 11 houses.

1821 Extra-parochial. Estimated 30 households, 31 families, population 342 persons.

1831 Extra-parochial. Estimated 62 households, 61 families, population 261 persons.

1841 Extra-parochial. 72 households, 343 persons.

Head of House = 1 farmer, 46 agricultural labourers, 1 gentleman, 1 butcher, 2 schoolmasters, 1 maltster, 2 joiners, 4 shoemakers, 1 gardener, 1 blacksmith, 2 watermen, 2 grocers, 1 brewer, 1 baker, 1 dressmaker, 2 independent females, 1 female labourer, 2 unclassified. 4 Uninhabited.
5 persons (1.4%) born outside Lincolnshire, e.g. 1 Irish.

1851 Extra-parochial. 73 households, 350 persons. 5 Uninhabited.

1861 Extra-parochial. 68 households, 300 persons (157 male + 143 female)

Head of house = 0 farmers, 40 agricultural labourers, 2 carpenters, 1 brewer's drayman, 1 nurse, 3 widow/widowers, 1 working maltster, 1 blacksmith, 1 grocer, 1 draper/grocer, 1 miller/baker, 1 foreman miller, 1 tailor, 2 shoemakers, 1 cordwainer, 1 butcher, 1 driver of threshing machine, 1 glazier, 1 boatman, 1 brickmaker, 2 Chelsea pensioners, 1 feeder of threshing machine, 1 female working for farmer, 1 farrier, 1 miller.
135 persons born Holland Fen (45%)
14 persons (4.6%) born outside Lincolnshire, i.e. America, East Indies, Nottinghamshire, Suffolk, Bristol, Ireland, Scotland, London, Cambridgeshire, Buckinghamshire.

¹⁰ TNA. 1861 Census; Wheeler, *History*, pp. 253, 442; *Census 1851*, Part I, Population Tables 1801-1851, II, p.34.

PELHAM'S LANDS ¹¹

- 1769** Extra-parochial land. Lands allocated to and part purchased, by C.A. Pelham.
771a.0r.38p. in 3 enclosed plots
- 1821** Extra-parochial land of 740 acres. 6 households, 27 persons (16 male + 11 female).
5 families chiefly employed agriculture.
1 family chiefly employed trade, manufacture, or handicraft.
- 1831** Extra-parochial land 740 acres. 6 households, 41 persons (22 male + 19 female).
5 families chiefly employed agriculture.
1 family chiefly employed trade, manufacture, or handicraft.
- 1841** Extra-parochial land 740 acres. 6 households, 42 persons (21 male + 21 female).
Head of house = 4 farmers ¹², 2 agricultural labourers.
All inhabitants born Lincolnshire.
- 1861** Extra-parochial land 740 acres. 7 households, 54 persons (34 male + 20 female).
Head of house = 2 farmers, 1 farm bailiff, 1 groundkeeper, 1 horsekeeper,
1 carpenter, 1 agricultural labourer.
10 inhabitants born in Holland Fen (18.5%)
5 born outside Lincolnshire, i.e. Worcestershire, Rutland, Northamptonshire,
Nottinghamshire, Ireland.

SKIRBECK QUARTER FEN ¹³

- 1769** Allocated 277a.2r.15p. in 4 enclosed plots (277a.0r.2p. after roads etc.).
- 1771** Divided into 45 plots ranging from 0a.0r.20p. to 83a.1r.25p.
- 1841** 12 households, 58 persons (24 male + 34 female).
Head of house = 5 farmers, 7 agricultural labourers.
All inhabitants born Lincolnshire.
- 1861** 10 households, 63 persons (38male + 25 female).
Head of house = 4 farmers, 2 agricultural labourers, 3 cottagers, 1 groundkeeper.
10 inhabitants born Holland Fen (23.3%).
3 persons born outside Lincolnshire, i.e. Nottinghamshire, Norfolk.

¹¹ Census Great Britain, Abstract Answers and Returns 1821, 1831, Part I, Enumeration; TNA. 1841, 1861 Census.

¹² All 4 farmers in Pelham's Lands were unusually elderly (3 of 60 years and one of 70 years) compared to majority of other Holland Fen farmers at this time. The Weeks' family still farming original (1774) farm mentioned in Chapter 2.

¹³ TNA. 1841, 1861 Census.

SUTTERTON FEN ¹⁴

- 1769** Allocated 2488a.2r.23p. in one enclosed plot (2481a.0r.29p. after roads etc.).
- 1772** Divided into 101 plots ranging from 0a.0r.15p. to 309a.2r.17p.
- 1801** Estimated population 203 persons.
- 1811** Estimated population 276 persons.
- 1821** Estimated population 304 persons.
- 1831** Estimated population 368 persons.
- 1841** 80 households, 415 persons (224 male + 191 female).
Head of house = 23 farmers, 40 agricultural labourers, 3 publicans, 3 grocers,
1 cottager, 1 miller, 1 miller journeyman, 2 shoemakers, 2 blacksmiths,
1 blacksmith's journeyman, 2 wheelwrights, 1 schoolmaster.
15 inhabitants born outside Lincolnshire.
- 1851** 87 households, 445 persons.
- 1861** 86 households, 440 persons (235 male + 205 female).
Head of house = 25 farmers, 1 farmer's son, 30 agricultural labourers, 9 farm
labourers, 1 publican/farmer, 1 publican/miller, 1 publican/boat owner/farmer,
1 publican/agricultural labourer, 1 farm bailiff, 2 cottagers, 1 miller journeyman,
3 blacksmiths, 1 blacksmith journeyman, 2 grocers, 1 miller, 1 butcher/grocer,
1 carpenter, 1 boot maker, 1 cordwainer, 1 needlewoman, 1 charwoman.
Place of birth not clearly defined by enumerator, parish stated but not fen area.
22 inhabitants (5%) born outside Lincolnshire, i.e. Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire,
Cambridgeshire, Hampshire, Northamptonshire, Norfolk, Rutland, London,
Carmarthen.

¹⁴ TNA. 1841, 1861 Census; *Census 1851*, Part I, Population Tables 1801-1851, II (HO. 1851) p. 34.

SWINESHEAD FEN

1769 Allocated 2,075a.1r.14p. in 6 enclosed plots (2118a.?r.?p. after roads etc.)

1773 Divided into 168 plots

Swineshead census forms do not allow the fen allotment area to be determined with any certainty.

WIGTOFT FEN

1769 Allocated 994a.1r.34p. in 2 enclosed plots (975a.2r.26p. after roads etc.)

1772 Divided into 112 plots.

Wigtoft census forms do not allow the fen allotment area to be determined with any certainty.

WYBERTON FEN

1769 Allocated 991a.2r.0p. in 4 enclosed plots

1789 Enclosure details not known however a list of houses, toftsteads, and dykereeve assessments showed 70 applicants.

Wyberton census forms do not allow the fen allotment area to be determined with any certainty.

Amber Hill **Table 1. Acreage and Holdings, 1890-1935. ***

AMBER HILL (parish 21)	1890	1895	1900	1905	1910	1915	1920	1925	1930	1935
No. of Holdings	58	52	52	49	50	51	51	52	48	48
Total acreage Holdings	4861	5413.5	5264	5487.75	5577	5450.75	5417	5522^	5540.25	5495.25
Acreage Rented & Occupied	3538.25	4787.25	4827	5372.75	5094.5	4554.75	4276			
Acreage Owned & Occupied	1322.75	626.25	437	115	482.5	895.5	1141			
Up to 5 acres				2	4	3	1	2	3	2
5 to 20 acres						6	9	9	6	5
5 to 50 acres				20	15					
20 to 50 acres						15	14	10	9	12
50 to 100 acres						8	9	11	9	8
50 to 300 acres				22	27					
100 to 150 acres						3	5	8	5	5
150 to 300 acres						13	9	8	12	12
over 300 acres				5	4	3	4	4	4	4

^ Total acreage in 1925 return falls 1 acre short of total crops figure.

Amber Hill **Table 2. Land use, 1890-1935.**

	AMBER HILL	1890	1895	1900	1905	1910	1915	1920	1925	1930	1935
A	Total acreage Holdings	4861	5413.5	5264	5487.75	5577	5450.75	5417	5522	5540.25	5495.25
B	Total acreage grown Corn/Other Crops	3363	3504.5	3450.50	3595.75	3321.5	3323	3242.25	3491.25	3604.25	3606.5
C	% acreage of crops (B) grown in A	69%	65%	63%	65.5%	59.5%	61%	60%	63%	65%	65.5%
D	Perm & Temp Grasses	1381.5	1719.25	1561	1706.5	1801.5	1712.25	1617.5	1644.5	1705.25	1672.75
E	Rough Grazing	0							12	4	9
F	Bare fallow	116.5	189.75	252.5	185.5	454	415.5	557.25	387.25	230.75	216
G	Non-arable acreage (C to E)	1498	1909	1813.5	1892	2255.5	2127.75	2174.75	2030.75	1936	1888.75
H	% of non-arable acreage in A	31%	35%	34%	34%	40%	39%	40%	37%	35%	34%

* Tables collated from TNA. MAF 68/1275/1560/1845/2130/2415/2700/2979/3249/3519/3765 crop returns, Holland parish 21.

Amber Hill

Table 3. Review of crops, workers, and livestock, 1890-1935. *

AMBER HILL	1890	1895	1900	1905	1910	1915	1920	1925	1930	1935
Wheat	1225.25	799.5	1052.75	1002.75	780.25	1294.75	870.75	1141	1166.5	1372.75
Barley	541	786.75	577.25	602.5	901	443.5	468.75	474	261.5	111.25
Oats	402.5	665.25	583.5	549.5	479	489.25	475.25	466.5	482.75	354.75
Beans	339.25	159.75	238.25	287.75	283	400.5	228.75	318.25	311	196.5
Peas	140.5	302.75	371	306	329	204	352.5	339.75	306.5	506.5
Potatoes	85.75	159.5	179.5	258.25	135.25	209.25	394	402.25	709.25	777.25
Turnips & Swedes	182.25	195	117.25	76.25	79	14.75	25	11.5	29.5	0
Mangolds	104.25	87.25	98	102.75	112.25	113	113	94.75	107	53.25
Rape	273	203	126	336.5	155	9	69	22	0	0
Cabbages, green crops, etc.	69.25	132.75	107	72.75	66.75	60	56.25	50.75	47.25	68.5
Mustard						65	134.5	75	64	38
Sugar Beet	0	0	0	0	1	0	30	0	45.5	105
Misc. (Flax, carrots, rye, etc)		12				20	10		3	
Orchards	2.25	2	2.75	2	1.5	6.25	76.25	(Tr 13433) 77	70.25	17.75
Small Fruit	0	2	0	.75	0	0	14.5	15.25	.25	5
Regular Workers								161m 11f	146m 3f	153m 1f
Total Reg. Workers								172	149	154
Casual Workers								36m 24f	31m 8f	21m 8f
Total Casual Workers								60	39	29
Horses	# 232	# 277	280	306	355	291	# 320	# 310	# 283	# 227
Cows & heifers	(109)	176	200	247	(136) 264	(122) 241	(143) 273	(175) 345	(165) 254	(163) 231
Cattle	518	429	730	709	737	560	520	584	428	580
Sheep	3412	2431	2986	2491	1912	1405	503	743	627	982
Pigs	503	477	521	581	667	619	653	605	751	1584
Poultry									F 7460 D 230 T 265	F 15306 D 244 G 2 T 203

N.B. # = Breeding mares where listed. () = Cows and heifers in milk. 'Tr'= Fruit trees. Poultry = F=fowls, D = ducks, G = geese, T=turkeys.

* Table collated TNA. MAF 68/1275/1560/1845/2130/2415/2700/2979/3249/3519/3765, Holland parish 27.

BROTHERTOFT

Table 1. Acreage and holdings, 1890-1935.*

BROTHERTOFT (parish 23)	1890	1895	1900	1905	1910	1915	1920	1925	1930	1935
No. of Holdings	28	27	24	25	25	30	32	31	30	32
Total acreage Holdings	1805.50	1745.5	1787	1935	1983	2271.75	2572	2609.5	2640.5	2802.25
Acreage Rented & Occupied	1513.25	1737.5	1780	1932	1733	2177.75	21475			
Acreage Owned & Occupied	292.25	8	7	3	250	94	424.5			
Up to 5 acres				2	2	3	2	1	2	3
5 to 20 acres						5	5	6	4	3
5 to 50 acres				10	8					
20 to 50 acres						9	11	10	10	12
50 to 100 acres						2	3	4	4	4
50 to 300 acres					15					
100 to 150 acres						7	7	6	4	4
150 to 300 acres						3	4	2	4	4
over 300 acres				13		1		2	2	2

Brothertoft Table 2. Land Use, 1890-1935.

	<u>BROTHERTOFT</u>	1890	1895	1900	1905	1910	1915	1920	1925	1930	1935
A	Total acreage Holdings	1805.50	1745.5	1787	1935	1983	2271.75	2572	2609.5	2640.5	2802.25
B	Total Acreage of Corn/Other Crops	1219.5	1153.5	1199.75	1345.5	1326.25	1563.5	1797.25	1889.5	1974.5	2175.5
C	<i>% acreage of crops(B) grown in A</i>	67.5%	66%	67.5%	69.5%	67%	69%	70%	72%	75%	77.5%
D	Perm & Temp Grass	543.75	567.75	520.75	542.5	534.75	617.75	702.25	664.5	639	574.75
	Rough Grazing							18	30	30	38
E	Bare fallow	40.5	18	66.5	47	122	90.5	72.5	55.25	27	52
F	Total acreage non arable (D + E)	586	592	587.25	589.5	656.75	708.25	774.75	720	666	626.75
G	<i>% acreage non-arable in A</i>	32.4%	34%	33.5%	30.5%	33%	31%	30%	28%	25%	22%

* Tables collated TNA. MAF 68/1275/1560/1845/2130/2415/2700/2979/3249/3519/3765, Holland parish 23.

BROTHERTOFT

Table 3. Review of crops, workers, and livestock, 1890-1935. *

<u>BROTHERTOFT</u>	1890	1895	1900	1905	1910	1915	1920	1925	1930	1935
Wheat	403.75	245	307	353.25	304.75	478.5	489	561.75	465.5	681.5
Barley	215.25	285.75	233.75	195.75	306.5	233.5	215.5	182.5	163	54.5
Oats	120.5	184.75	158	195	156	199.5	231.5	188.25	210.75	170.75
Beans	147.5	108.75	90	71.5	102.25	186.25	107.25	141	166	109
Peas	75	88.5	112.5	150.5	140.5	88	123	110.5	126.25	211.5
Potatoes	84.5	70	109.5	198	137.75	247.75	387.25	544.25	534	688
Turnips & Swedes	78.75	57.5	85.5	33	34	30	79.75	16.5	77	40.5
Mangolds	32.5	28.25	43.25	43.5	57.5	60.5	58.5	67.25	87.25	49.5
Rape	52.5	29	10	7	6	1	1	0	0	0
Cabbages, green crops, etc.	9	50	44	94.25	80	22	7.5	25	24	15
Mustard						16.5	84	15	37	32
Misc. (Flax, carrots, rye, etc.)	.25	6					13	14	8	
Sugar Beet	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	61	109
Orchards	9.5	6.5	11.5	10	14	9	3	15.5 (Tr.2476)	14.75	14.25
Small Fruit	1.75	6.25	6.5	3.75	1	0	0	8.5	4.25	12
Regular Workers								93m 13f	84m 3f	91m 1f
Total Reg. Workers								106	87	92
Casual Workers								15m 16f	9m 6f	7m 6f
Total Casual Workers								31	15	13
Horses	# 83	113	104	132	119	140	# 178	# 155	#134	132
Cows & heifers	52	47	79	107	(59) 88	(64) 438	(67) 99	(68) 115	(68) 129	(80) 107
Cattle	248	221	295	263	305	334	326	330	284	338
Sheep	1628	973	717	186	421	211	10	50	0	5
Pigs	189	295	233	246	288	405	339	427	543	698
Poultry									F 8927 D 2321 G 53 T 58	F 8378 D 400 G 7 T 21

N.B. # = Breeding mares where listed. () = Cows and heifers in milk. 'Tr' = Fruit trees. Poultry = F = fowls, D = ducks, G = geese, T = turkeys. * Table collated TNA. MAF 68/1275/1560/1845/2130/2415/2700/2979/3249/3519/3765, Holland parish 27.

HARTS GROUNDS

Table 1. Acreage and Holdings, 1890-1935.*

<u>HARTS GROUNDS</u> (parish 27)	1890	1895	1900	1905	1910	1915	1920	1925	1930	1935
No. of Holdings	8	4	4	4	4	3	2	3	3	3
Total acreage Holdings	576	405.5	412.5	580.5	889.5	308.5	224.5	414	436	543
Acreage Rented & Occupied	453	151.5	412.5	580.5	658.5	308.5	224.5			
Acreage Owned & Occupied	123	254	0	0	231	0	0			
Up to 5 acres				0						
5 to 20 acres										
5 to 50 acres				1	1					
20 to 50 acres						2		1	1	1
50 to 100 acres										
50 to 300 acres				3	2					
100 to 150 acres							2	1		
150 to 300 acres						1		1	2	1
over 300 acres					1					1

Harts Grounds Table 2. Land Use 1890-1935.

	<u>HARTS GROUNDS</u>	1890	1895	1900	1905	1910	1915	1920	1925	1930	1935
A	Total acreage Holdings	576	405.5	412.5	580.5	889.5	308.5	224.5	414	436	543
B	Total acreage of Corn/Other Crops	452	255	294.5	412	576	176	101	231	257	351
C	% of crops (B) grown in A	78%	63%	71.4%	71%	65%	57%	45%	56%	59%	65%
D	Perm & Temp Grass	124	145.5	118	168.5	289.5	120	87.5	161	167	185
	Rough Grazing								0	0	0
E	Bare fallow	0	5	0	0	24	12.5	36	22	12	7
F	Total acreage non-arable (D + E)	124	150.5	118	168.5	313.5	132.5	123.5	183	179	192
G	% of non-arable acreage in A	22%	37%	28.6%	29%	35%	43%	55%	44%	41%	35%

Tables collated PRO. MAF 68/1275/1560/1845/2130/2415/2700/2979/3249/3519/3765, Holland parish 27 crop returns.

HARTS GROUNDS

Table 3. Review of crops, workers, and livestock, 1890-1935. *

<u>HARTS GROUNDS</u>	1890	1895	1900	1905	1910	1915	1920	1925	1930	1935
Wheat	147	94	102	153	141.5	62	25	78	93	135
Barley	64	37.5	49	64	148.5	33	15.5	27	39	17
Oats	64	42	53.5	63	101	24.5	22.5	17	17	23
Beans	48	1	6	10	29	31	16	40	44	59
Peas	36.5	30	35	29	48	0	16	15	11	31.5
Potatoes	29.5	7	17	29.5	15.5	18	2	33	31	47
Turnips & Swedes	40	17	19	6	10	0	0	0	0	0
Mangolds	13	9.5	13	22.5	24.5	6.5	2.5	9	4	8.5
Rape	10	12	0	33	31	0	0	12	0	0
Cabbages, green crops, etc.	0	0	0	2	27	1	1.5	0	0	0
Mustard							0	0	0	0
Misc. (Flax, carrots, rye, etc.)		5								
Sugar Beet	0	0	0	0	0		0	0	18	30
Misc. (Flax, carrots, rye)										
Orchards	.75	0	0	0	0	0	0	Tr 13	0	0
Small Fruit	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Regular Workers								11m 1f	9m 3f	17m
Total Reg. Workers								12	12	17
Casual Workers								1m 2f	2m 2f	2m 5f
Total Casual Workers								3	4	7
Horses	33	18	24	34	35	13	14	# 18	20	17
Cows & heifers	18	19	38	30	(31) 55	(16) 35	(4) 7	(26) 31	(20) 23	(14) 16
Cattle	47	83	65	91	171	61	50	79	84	120
Sheep	287	170	117	150	237	0	0	129	0	39
Pigs	65	76	41	80	39	77	22	98	104	67
Poultry									F 1430	F 563 D 11 G 4

N.B. # = Breeding mares where listed. () = Cows and heifers in milk. *Tr*'= Fruit trees. Poultry = **F**= fowls, **D** = ducks, **G** = geese, **T** = turkeys. * Table collated TNA. MAF 68/1275/1560/1845/2130/2415/2700/2979/3249/3519/3765, Holland parish 27.

KIRTON FEN

Table 1. Acreage and holdings, 1890-1935.*

Kirton Fen (parish 29)	1890	1895	1900	1905	1910	1915	1920	1925	1930	1935
No. of Holdings	N/A	N/A	43	44	40	40	40	35	39	N/A
Total acreage Holdings			2960[^]	2995.75	2962.75	2951	2867.5	2980	2974.5	
Acreage Rented & Occupied			2919.75	2824	2900.5	2944	2252			
Acreage Owned & Occupied			40.25	171.75	62.25	7	615.5			
Up to 5 acres				6	5	6	5	5	6	
5 to 20 acres						7	10	5	4	
5 to 50 acres				17	16					
20 to 50 acres						8	8	8	9	
50 to 100 acres						10	8	8	12	
50 to 300 acres				20	18					
100 to 150 acres						5	4	4	3	
150 to 300 acres						3	4	4	3	
over 300 acres				1	1	1	1	1	1	

[^] Crop Returns figures 1900 show 100 acres short of this total.

KIRTON FEN**Table 2. Land use, 1890-1935.**

	KIRTON FEN	1890	1895	1900	1905	1910	1915	1920	1925	1930	1935
A	Total acreage Holdings	N/A	N/A	2960[^]	2995.75	2962.75	2951	2867.5	2980	2974.5	N/A
B	Total acreage of Corn/Other Crops			2100.5	2148.5	1946.25	1980.25	1932	2078.5	2151.75	
C	<i>% acreage of crops (B) in A</i>			<i>71 %</i>	<i>72 %</i>	<i>66%</i>	<i>67%</i>	<i>67%</i>	<i>70%</i>	<i>72%</i>	
D	Perm & Temp Grass			687.75	778.25	801.5	857.75	770	777	783.75	
	Rough Grazing								.5	2	
E	Bare fallow			71.75	69	215	113	165.5	124.5	39	
F	Total acreage non-arable (D + E)			859.5	847.25	1016.5	970.75	935.5	901.5	822.75	
G	<i>% non-arable acreage in A</i>			<i>29 %</i>	<i>28 %</i>	<i>34 %</i>	<i>33%</i>	<i>33%</i>	<i>30%</i>	<i>28%</i>	

Tables collated TNA. MAF 68/1275/1560/1845/2130/2415/2700/2979/3249/3519/3765, *Holland parish 29.*

KIRTON FEN

Table 3. Review of crops, workers, and livestock, 1890-1935.*

<u>KIRTON FEN</u>	1890	1895	1900	1905	1910	1915	1920	1925	1930	1935
Wheat	N/A	N/A	625.75	520.25	554	637.5	592.5	580	591.5	N/A
Barley			247.5	351	430.25	273.5	288	265.5	134.5	
Oats			388.5	336	327.25	325.5	254.25	243	279.5	
Beans			108.5	155.25	187.5	218.75	174	241	204.5	
Peas			226.75	282.5	98	74	153.75	137.75	195	
Potatoes			148	233	172.75	280.5	251.75	442.75	554.75	
Turnips & Swedes			132	63.5	22.5	21.5	6.5	27	13	
Mangolds			86.5	73.5	73.5	69	78.25	82.75	62.5	
Rape			69	78.5	17	0	0	0	0	
Cabbages, green crops, etc.			63.5	53.75	63.5	70	55	23.25	12	
Mustard						10	78	24	40	
Sugar Beet			0	0	0	0	0	0	31.5	
Misc. (Flax, carrots, rye, etc.)				1				4.5	29.5	
Orchards			2.5	.75	1	1	0	(Tr 158) 7	.5	
Small Fruit			2	.25	0	0	1	0	3	
Regular Workers								96m 14f	99m 12f	
Total Reg. Workers								110	111	
Casual Workers								15m 12f	12m 6f	
Total Casual Workers								27	18	
Horses			171	176	184	182	# 191	# 179	# 144	
Cows & heifers			101	128	(63) 119	(92) 125	(88) 144	(63) 95	(42) 80	
Cattle			307	349	391	361	312	271	280	
Sheep			1352	1094	875	526	317	41	225	
Pigs			364	416	469	422	293	566	391	
Poultry									F 4305 D 167 T 97	

N.B. # = Breeding mares where listed. 'Tr'= Fruit trees. () = Cows and heifers in milk. Poultry = F= fowls, D = ducks, G = geese, T =turkeys
 * Table collated TNA. MAF 68/1275/1560/1845/2130/2415/2700/2979/3249/3519/3765, Holland parish 29.

PELHAM'S LANDS

Table 1. Acreage and holdings, 1890-1935.*

PELHAM'S LANDS (parish 30)	1890	1895	1900	1905	1910	1915	1920	1925	1930	1935
No. of Holdings	14	13	10	13	12	11	13	15	16	11
Total acreage Holdings	1062	926.5	933.75	1120.5	886.75	1162	1208	1053.5	1063	957.25
Acreage Rented & occupied	1048.75	926.5	933.75	1120.5	870.75	932	1200.5			
Acreage Owned & occupied	13.25	0	0	0	16	230	7.5			
Up to 5 acres				1	1	1	2	3	3	2
5 to 20 acres						4	2	5	6	2
5 to 50 acres				6	6					
20 to 50 acres						1	3	2	2	3
50 to 100 acres						1	1	1	1	
50 to 300 acres				6	5					
100 to 150 acres						1	1	1	1	1
150 to 300 acres						2	4	3	3	3
over 300 acres				0		1				

Pelham's Lands Table 2. Land use, 1890-1935.

	PELHAM'S LANDS	1890	1895	1900	1905	1910	1915	1920	1925	1930	1935
A	Total acreage Holdings	1062	926.5	933.75	1120.5	886.75	1162	1208	1053.5	1063	957.25
B	Total acreage of Corn/Other Crops	802.5	711.75	722.5	896.5	688	825	799.5	815.25	819.5	769
C	<i>% acreage of crops (B) grown in A</i>	<i>76%</i>	<i>77%</i>	<i>77 %</i>	<i>80%</i>	<i>78%</i>	<i>71%</i>	<i>66%</i>	<i>77%</i>	<i>77%</i>	<i>80%</i>
D	Perm & Temp Grass	259.5	194.25	198.25	219	183.25	298.5	283	207.25	220.5	168.75
	Rough Grazing								11	3	0
E	Bare fallow	0	20.5	13	5	15.5	38.5	125.5	31	23	19.5
F	Total acreage non-arable (D + E)	259.5	214.75	211.25	224	198.75	337	408.5	238.25	243.5	188.25
G	<i>% of non-arable acreage in A</i>	<i>24%</i>	<i>23%</i>	<i>23 %</i>	<i>20 %</i>	<i>22%</i>	<i>29%</i>	<i>34%</i>	<i>23%</i>	<i>23%</i>	<i>20%</i>

• Tables collated TNA. MAF 68/1275/1560/1845/2130/2415/2700/2979/3249/3519/3765, Holland parish 30, crop returns.

PELHAM'S LANDS

Table 3. Review of crops, workers, and livestock, 1890-1935. *

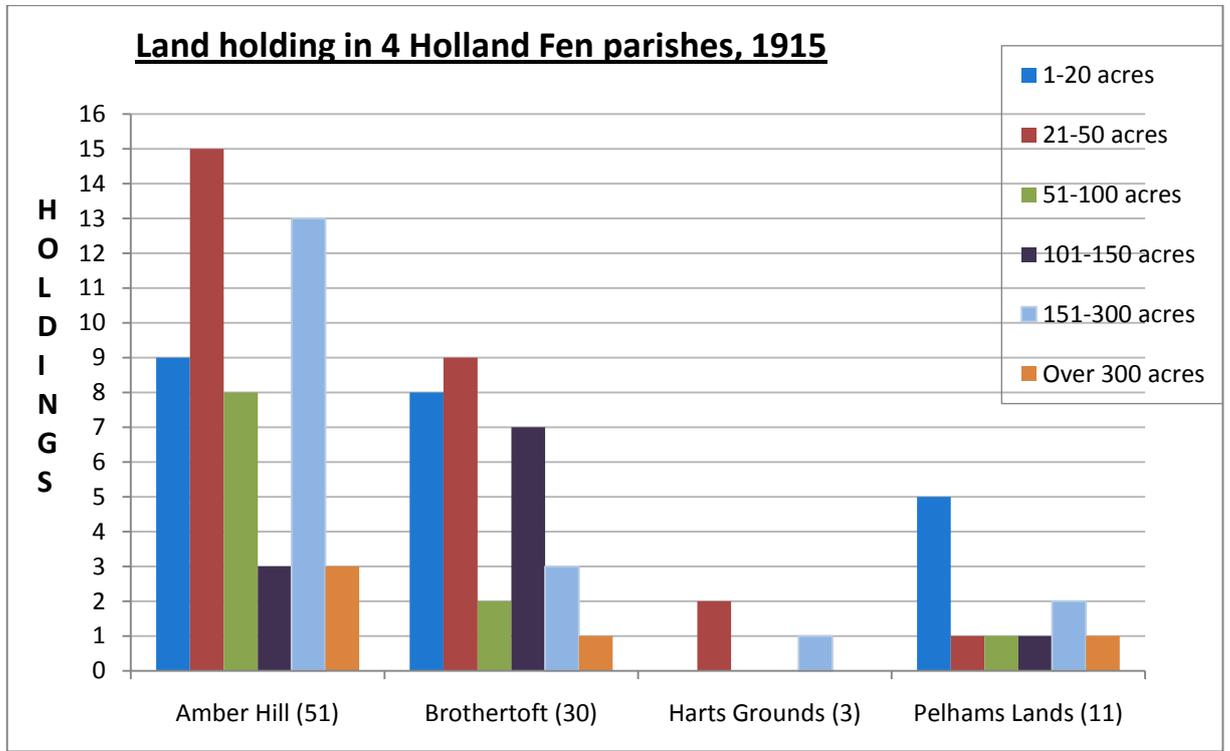
PELHAM'S LANDS	1890	1895	1900	1905	1910	1915	1920	1925	1930	1935
Wheat	297.5	194	213.5	233.25	190	285.5	258.5	224.5	232	259.5
Barley	135.75	137	148	182	158.5	89	103.5	47	52	6
Oats	85	128	95	173	131	114	98.5	130	104	92
Beans	61	38.5	37.75	46	12	62.5	60.5	62.5	51	29
Peas	32.5	69.5	91.75	58.75	41	94	72	86.75	25	94.5
Potatoes	30.5	28.5	23.5	43	34.25	116.5	120.25	165.5	193	162
Turnips & Swedes	71	53.5	43	17	37	7.25	10.25	34	2	11
Mangolds	35.25	22.25	28	27.25	23.25	25.25	21	52	33	6.5
Rape	27.5	22	24.5	104.25	44	0	13	0	17	0
Cabbages, green crops, etc.	26.5	18.5	17.5	10	16.5	13	33	13	15.5	2
Mustard						18	9	0	32	32
Sugar Beet	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	38	67.5
Misc. (Flax, carrots, rye, etc.)				2						
Orchards	0	0	.25	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Small Fruit	0	0	0	0	.5	0	0	0	25	7
Regular Workers								27m 1f	31m 3f	30m
Total Reg. Workers								28	34	30
Casual Workers								4m 22f	2m 12f	2m 17f
Total Casual Workers								26	14	19
Horses	55	# 51	52	53	51	46	# 64	# 69	51	41
Cows & heifers	21	18	29	37	(26) 29	(21) 45	(31) 35	(22) 43	(28) 32	(9) 20
Cattle	57	64	76	127	107	130	125	89	73	77
Sheep	516	193	150	212	197	25	4	21	10	0
Pigs	135	93	117	177	156	141	120	215	133	142
Poultry									F 13753 D 87	F 1494 D 62

N.B. # = Breeding mares where listed. () = Cows and heifers in milk. Poultry = F = fowls, D = ducks, G = geese, T = turkeys.

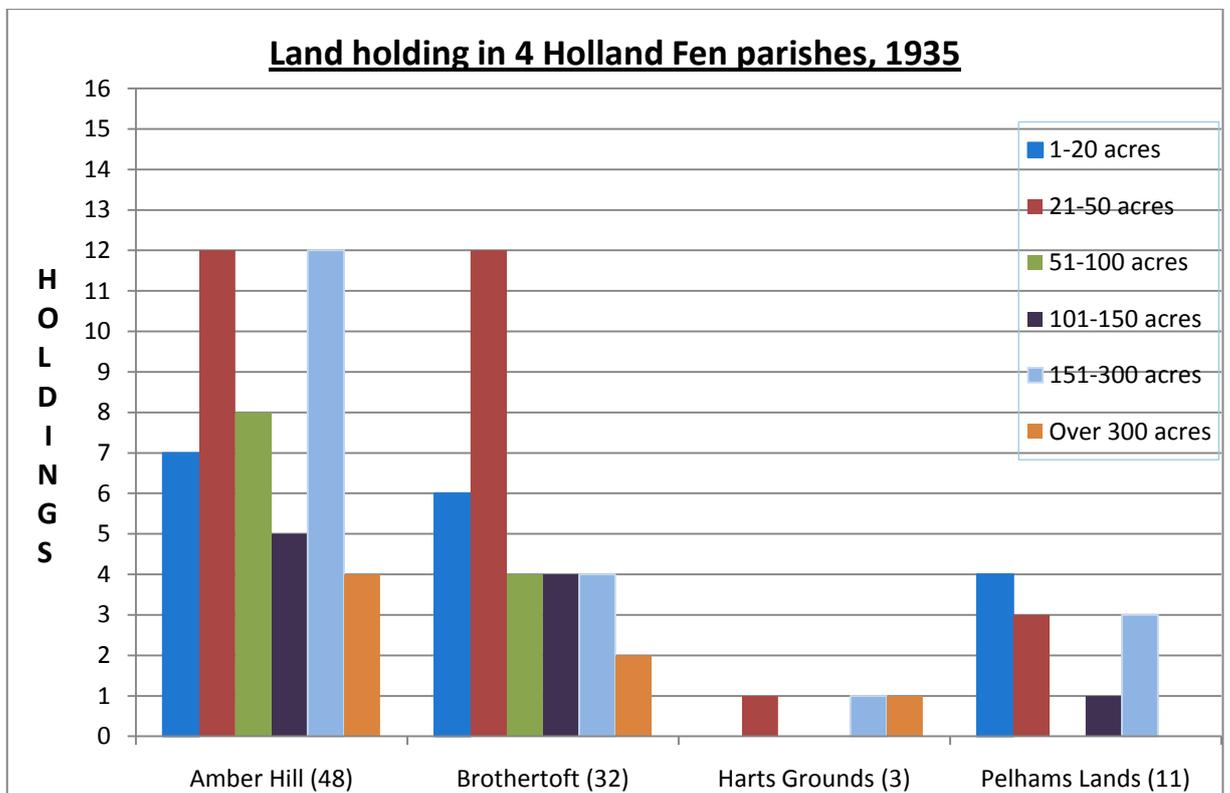
* Table collated TNA. MAF 68/1275/1560/1845/2130/2415/2700/2979/3249/3519/3765, Holland parish 30, crop returns.

APPENDIX 3

Charts of Holding sizes in 1915 and 1935



TNA. MAF 68/2700



TNA. MAF68/3765

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