

# MAJOR FLOODING OF THE RIVER GLEN

Although there has been a long history of drainage in Thurlby Fen, major flooding of the River Glen has continued during extreme weather conditions.

Generally, this has been freshwater flooding, as it was in 1947, however there was tidal flooding in 1953.

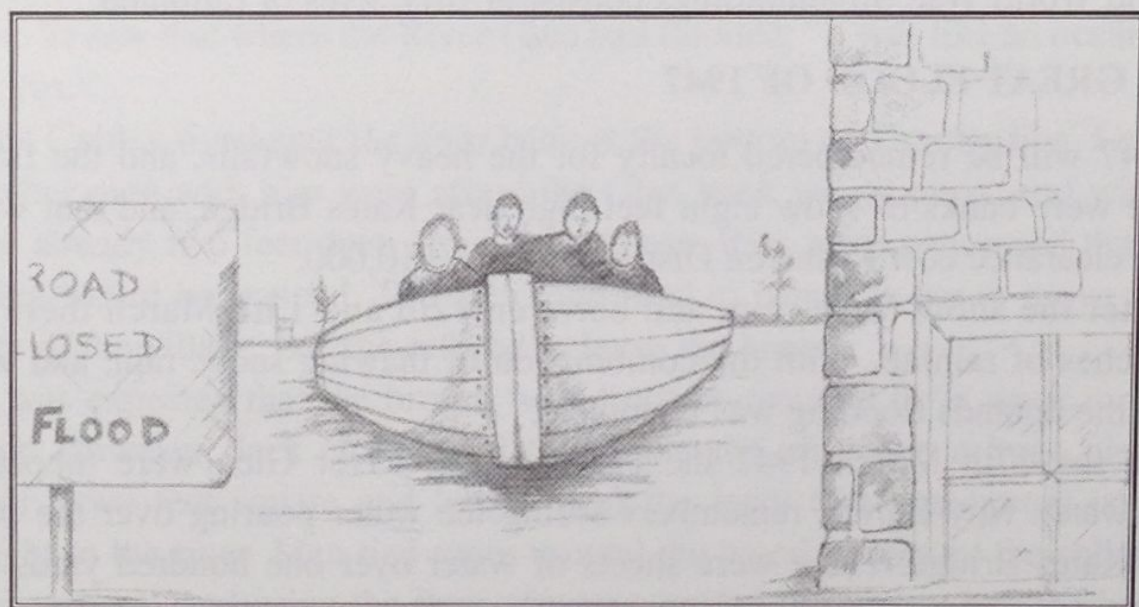
## 12th January 1877

### BOURN – ANOTHER BREAKAGE OF THE NORTH BANK OF THE RIVER GLEN

*“In the Mercury of the 5th last it was stated that early on Friday morning the 29th ult. the North bank of the river Glen broke at a distance of about half a mile east of Tongue-end, the breach being seven or eight yards long. This was repaired on the following day, and it was then hoped that if no further breach occurred the greater part of the water might soon get off the fen; but unfortunately these hopes were not realized. The great quantity of rain which fell on Wednesday 3d brought an immense volume of water into the Glen, and on Thursday afternoon it became evident that unless the water speedily subsided the banks would be unable long to bear the pressure that was upon them, and that consequently they must soon give way somewhere. On the night of the 4th, at a little before 8, the North-bank again burst, at a distance of about a quarter of a mile nearer Tongue-end than the breach of the 29th ult., being about half-way between the points where it broke on the 29th ult. and the 3d April, 1872; so that there have been three breaches of the North-bank of the Glen at Tongue-end within about half a mile. The breach on the 4th was much more serious than anything that had occurred before; the bank about twenty yards in length and four or five feet deep, is supposed to have given way at once, and the gully was continually being increased by the rapid flow of water out of the river until the opening was 30 yards long. During this time the rush of the flood into Bourn North Fen was fearful, dashing across the fen as far as the Spalding road like the waves of the sea. It was not until Sunday morning that sufficient quantity of materials could be got to the spot to justify an attempt to stop the breach. In the meantime many of the residents in the fen left their houses; and the stock and other things in many cases had to be removed for safety. By Sunday night a large quantity of timber and sacks of earth had been (apparently successfully) got into the gully, and it was hoped that the worst was past, but at about seven o’clock on Monday morning (the 8th) it again blew in the same place, carrying away the bank right down to the bed of the river, making matters worse than ever. The traffic on the Bourn and Spalding line was stopped on Friday 5th, and it is feared it is not likely to be resumed at present, in consequence of the ballast being washed away by the floods. On the South, or Deeping fen side, about 80 yards of Glen bank was said to be so far damaged*

and forced out of its place that had not the bank given way elsewhere it could not have stood the pressure much longer. Altogether matters have a very grave appearance, for besides the great damage done by the floods there seems to be the fact staring somebody in the face that a very large outlay will be necessary to make the banks of the river Glen such as to give those interested in the land adjoining anything like a reasonable amount of confidence in the security of their property. Though an effort is being made to repair the breach this has only been partly accomplished and the water is still (Wednesday afternoon) pouring into the fen with great force. On Wednesday about a dozen of the Black Sluice Commissioners, with Mr Wheeler and Mr Lancaster, visited the breach and made an inspection of the Glen Banks, and it is understood that vigorous efforts are to be made to remedy the evil; but under the most favourable circumstances it is not thought likely that the water can be got off the fen for many weeks to come, though the Bourn North Fen and Dyke Fen Drainage Trustees have obtained an extra engine to assist at Guthram to pump the water out of the fen into the Forty-Foot."

The Stamford and Rutland Mercury



*In 1897, the road from Bourne Fen being under water, some children went to school at Tongue End by boat!*

## THE GREAT SUMMER FLOOD OF 1912

'A very severe flood was experienced in the summer of 1912, and a breach occurred in the north bank of the River Glen fronting the Black Sluice District. Over 4,000 acres were flooded to considerable depth.'

W. D. Miles.

'Flooded Field 1912,' by Mrs Frances Griffin, showing corn stooks standing in floodwater during the summer floods of 1912. The field is near the Fishing Creek. During the summer of 1912 the corn crops were mowed with a scythe, and as the corn was cut a worker would gather it in



his arms to prevent it falling into the floodwater. He then made a sheaf and set up stooks on the higher ground away from the flooded corn field.

In the background of the painting is the 'Black House'. The 'Black House' was demolished to make way for three Smallholding properties after the Second World War. Smallholdings consist of fifty acres of farmland.

## THE GREAT FLOOD OF 1947

1947 will be remembered locally for the heavy snowfalls, and the floods. There were banks of snow eight feet high near Kates Bridge, and that winter snow clearance cost Kesteven District Council £10,000.

After the snow came rain, and between 12th and 13th March there was 1½ inches of rainfall. With the combination of thawing snow, rain, and water from the uplands flooding was inevitable.

On the 17th March 1947 the banks of the River Glen were topped by floodwater. Roy Barnes remembers seeing the water pouring over the banks near Kates Bridge. There were sheets of water over one hundred yards long flooding the river banks into Thurlby Fen. With water levels rising in the Slypes, sheep and cattle grazing near the river had to be moved to higher ground in the village.

James Arnold remembers sitting on the Jubilee Bridge and the bridge was swaying with the flow of the floodwater.

During that day, Jack Gray had a similar experience whilst standing on the Jubilee Bridge. The floodwater was flowing over the bridge around Jack's feet. He experienced a sudden sensation that the river bank was going to give way. He ran quickly off the bridge; collected his bike; and cycled for all he was worth up Thurlby Fen!

That night Charlie Griffin, realising that a breach in the river bank was imminent, raised the alarm. Men throughout the village joined Charlie and George Griffin sandbagging the banks of the Glen all night.

Tom Courton recalls: "In 1947, after the terrible snow we had, thawed, the River Glen was full to the top. All available hands were called to Tongue End to fill sand-bags, to try and fill the breach. But this did not succeed until all Thurlby, Northorpe, and Bourne South Fens, were completely flooded!"

The day after Jack Gray fled from the Jubilee Bridge, he too was sandbagging the Thurlby bank of the Glen near Tongue End.

He remembers: "It was mid-morning and we were told to leave a small gap between the sand-bags, as this relieved the pressure by allowing a limited amount of water to drain through. It was hard, heavy and strenuous work which we continued throughout the morning.

At lunch-time they told us to stop as the river-bank had burst downstream, on the Deeping Bank." (The Glen burst its banks opposite White House Farm at Tongue End).

Len Wade had also been sandbagging near Tongue End. When he left to go home, he saw that where the River Glen had flooded, "It was like an ocean over the Fens."

Mrs Cobley lived near the river bank at the bottom of Thurlby Fen. Len and the other men with him were afraid the Glen bank would burst, and with the water already two feet deep around the house, they were concerned that Mrs Cobley would be trapped. The men tried hard to persuade her to move to the safety of the village, but she refused to leave the house.

It was expected that the breach would not be repaired for a week, or even longer. However, Jack Gray heard that, the same afternoon a huge piece of timber, (two feet square and longer than the lorry that transported it), was brought to the river. Men tied ropes around the wood to control the roll down the river bank, and using the flow of water, guided the timber into the breach, thus stemming the flood.

W.D. Miles, Drainage Engineer, once wrote: "And finally the River Glen – 14 breaches of its banks between 1821 and 1882, and again in 1912 and 1947... Remember a river embankment is similar to a chain, the strength of which is governed by its weakest link.

To those... who probably do not remember the great flood of 1928, 1937 or even 1947 – take heed of the advice of a fenman and a fen drainage engineer who has seen them all –

Never turn your back on the River Glen."