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TREVOR BEVIS

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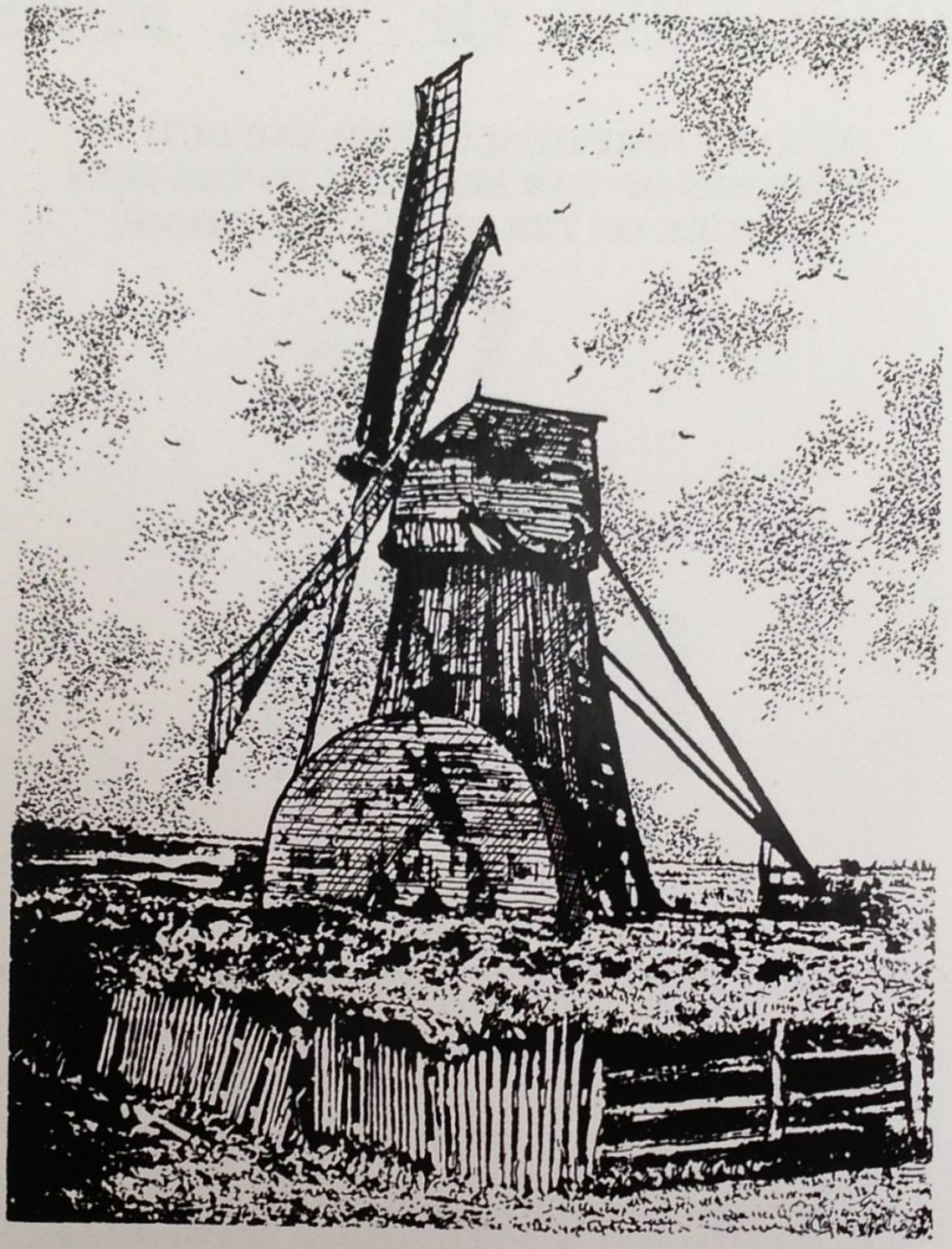

The wide open spaces seem vast nowadays and rivers, laboriously cut by Scottish and Dutch prisoners-of-war at great risk to health and loss of life, pursue their given course like silver rapiers towards the glowing sunset. Towering above them, sentinels in the form of windmills coaxing water along reed-fringed cuts, sails idling against the three-quarter sky, gave way to modern methods of drainage and no longer grace the Fenland scene.

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Civil War is the worst kind of war. Nothing is worse than when a nation's inhabitants take sides and vent wrath upon each other.

The English Civil War erupted in the mid-17th century, creating division and mayhem among families lasting for generations. Many famous, or more appropriately, infamous battles between Royalists and Parliamentarian armies were fought in various parts of the country, including landmark conflicts at Marston Moor, Naseby and Worcester.

One of the most strongly contested battles was that at Worcester, the city eventually falling to the Roundheads after vicious hand-to-hand fighting. The besieging army found itself confronted by substantial numbers of Scottish soldiers – the Northern Foot – who strongly opposed advancing Parliamentary troops. Both sides engaged at first in the open countryside and the Roundhead troops had to cross over rivers by means of bridges supported by boats. There was heavy loss of life and hardly any quarter given or expected in the initial stages of the conflict.

The Scots, burdened with heavy firearms, had arrived at Worcester after a hard, debilitating trudge from the north. When they arrived they were utterly exhausted and, unable to march on, decided instead to make ready for battle in and around the city. The siege of Worcester proved to be one of the cruellest in the Civil War.

Parliamentary soldiers suffered many casualties but eventually over-ran the city defences. Numerous Scots were numbered with the dead and thousands taken prisoner. After plans had been devised to disperse them the prisoners were subjected to privations of particular severity. It was planned that many of the men be sent overseas in stinking, rat-infested holds of ships destined for the West Indies where they were made to work on plantations and at iron furnaces. Several died at sea and were hurriedly committed to a watery grave.

A large number of Scots embarked at London in 1651 en route for Charles Town, New England. They represented many Scottish clans and after a tempestuous crossing disembarked in February. Many failed to survive the passage and those that did were immediately put to work in an uncomfortable tepid climate at iron works and at saw mills where they laboured long hours. Lodges were unimaginable and so crowded several of the men slept on floors or several to a bed.

The Scots were regarded as nothing more than slaves, were numerous and slave markets experienced a rapid fall in prices. Deprived of basic necessities the prisoners received spiritual comfort from Scottish priests that had marched with them. These priests were given their freedom but continued to share the prisoners' discomforts and continued to administer to them. At Charles Town they were treated a little better than at London where they worked at iron works. Proprietors would not even feed them properly and complained about costs. The prisoners deteriorated rapidly while at the city.

Those destined for the West Indies had hardy constitutions but the five-week passage took its toll. Unused to the hot climate they were allocated to a number of tasks at animal yards and obliged to work as domestics in slave quarters. Long hours with seldom a break were spent at plantations and as many as twelve hours at a time at the mills. Prisoners suffered terribly operating iron furnaces and had little food and water to sustain them. The lodges where they slept were miserably unhygienic and harboured pests.

After Worcester it was Dunbar's turn. Commanded by Leslie the Scots repaired to defensive positions overlooking the town, but Cromwell with his New Model army wasted no time and thoroughly routed them. It is written that 3,000 Scots were killed and 10,000 captured many of them incarcerated at York. Cromwell was fortunate to gain the victory, many troopers suffering from bronchial maladies and several dying of pneumonia. Prisoners were marched to various English towns including Durham and Nottingham. The battles at Worcester and Dunbar were significant for the scheme to drain the Fens and thousands of Scots captured at those places were force marched to the low-lying areas of Cambridgeshire, West Norfolk and Huntingdonshire and allocated tasks of cutting drains and dykes.

Few Englishmen Would Help

The Scots were joined by five hundred Dutch sailors captured during a hard-fought engagement off Portland Bill. The Dutch lost seventeen men-o'-war as well as thirty seized merchantmen with at least forty destroyed. Thurlowe, Secretary of State and Cromwell's right-hand man worked energetically to obtain the Scots for work in the Fens, labourers being at a premium. He wrote a letter outlining proposals for the employment of Dutch prisoners on the marshy grounds, very few Englishmen willing to assist in the drainage scheme which they envisaged as a threat to their livelihood, for centuries their inherited "right" of taking wildfowl and fish from the Fens. Initially the Gentlemen Adventurers who had invested considerable sums of money in the scheme, laboured with formidable problems in acute shortage of voluntary manpower.

Prisoners-of-war had to be fed and clothed and were a drain on the nation's economy. Parliament agreed that the Scottish and Dutch prisoners could be put to work in the Fens. The men were given earth-carrying baskets and spades and shovels, and accommodation, usually huts, which could be easily dismantled and moved along the banks as work progressed. In these the prisoners slept and food could be prepared. The drainage project introduced massive problems and many believed it could not be done. Certainly it would never have been achieved without the prisoners.

Several drains had been cut in 1631 but the plans were flawed, few if any allowances having been made for geological hindrances such as land shrinkage, and that water excluded from one particular area tended to submerge neighbouring areas. Windmills, or rather wind engines designed to force water along drains relied, of course, on a fair breeze but were often becalmed. Several were built near Manea and they had the effect of discharging water into the village, creating a situation worse than had been experienced before the scheme commenced.

From 1250 attempts were made to exclude water from relatively small areas of fen, as at Thorney where the monks devised ring ditches to drain higher ground and transform reclaimed land into vineyards of excellent reputation. The successful drainage of the Fens

transpired from laudable examples of trial and error. Many things went wrong during the early stages of the scheme and it became necessary to devise a second scheme to improve the efficiency of existing work by making additional drains and erecting extra engines and sluices. In several areas natural rivers were deepened, straightened and some widened. These plans were put into operation in 1651 and Scottish and Dutch prisoners-of-war worked on the new scheme for about three years before being released. During that time many died and it must be assumed that due to inconvenience of transporting bodies to distant churchyards, most were laid to rest in the isolated reaches of fen and even in the river banks the men helped to raise.

The extended scheme provided for a second (New Bedford) river running parallel with the Old river (1630) between Earith and Denver, a distance of 21 miles, separated by wash-land generally a quarter-of-a-mile to three-quarters-of-a-mile wide. In periods of excessively heavy rain, water is allowed to flow automatically from the embanked rivers onto adjacent grazing land acting as a safety valve, thus preventing the rivers breaching banks and flooding arable fields.

Scottish prisoners captured at the Battle of Worcester began to enter the dreary and vaporous Fens from October 1651 and were immediately set to work on the new scheme covering parts of Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Huntingdonshire. It was a hostile environment they came to, far removed from the bracing air of the Scottish Highlands and stifling heat being experienced by their colleagues in the West Indies. Samuel Pepys, visiting his uncle at Parson Drove in the Isle of Ely, had nothing good to write about the Fens, describing it as a "heathen place" and that inhabitants constantly aggravated by stinging gnats struggled with their horses, often sinking up to their bellies in foul smelling mud.

Malaria was rife and, while the Fen people seemed to take it in their stride and even made light of it, the few visitors that did pass through (no-one in his right mind stayed for long) were prone to fever and laid low by the ague. Such were the environmental hazards facing Scottish and Dutch prisoners and one cannot help thinking that at that particular time the climate of the West Indies was far preferable to that of the Fens.

The ambitious scheme ran into considerable opposition from Fen people and it was handicapped by severe financial problems. In 1649 workmen engaged in staking out river sites organised a strike, and several hundred signed a petition protesting they were owed wages amounting to £5,000. Local labour was difficult to obtain, people holding forth their natural right to a traditional livelihood employed at the fisheries. The drainage work was constantly being delayed and the company at its wits' end as to where sufficient labour could be obtained. The prospect of obtaining cheap labour made up of prisoners-of-war was envisaged with considerable relief.

After a period of receiving sick prisoners it was realised that only the most able and sturdiest men could be considered for work in the Fens. Before arriving at a decision a few eminent Gentlemen Adventurers journeyed to Tottenhill Fields and inspected the prisoners. They were impressed with the robustness of the Scots and made application to the Government to acquire several hundred men for allocation to the drainage sites. The influential approach of Lord Chief Justice Oliver St. John, the Company's patron and well known to Oliver Cromwell, helped to clinch matters in persuading the Government to acquiesce to the request resulting in prisoners marching to the Fens under armed escort. Their first task was to define the boundaries and complete the work already started in the north section of the Bedford Level. The company then turned its attention to the work begun in the south of the region.

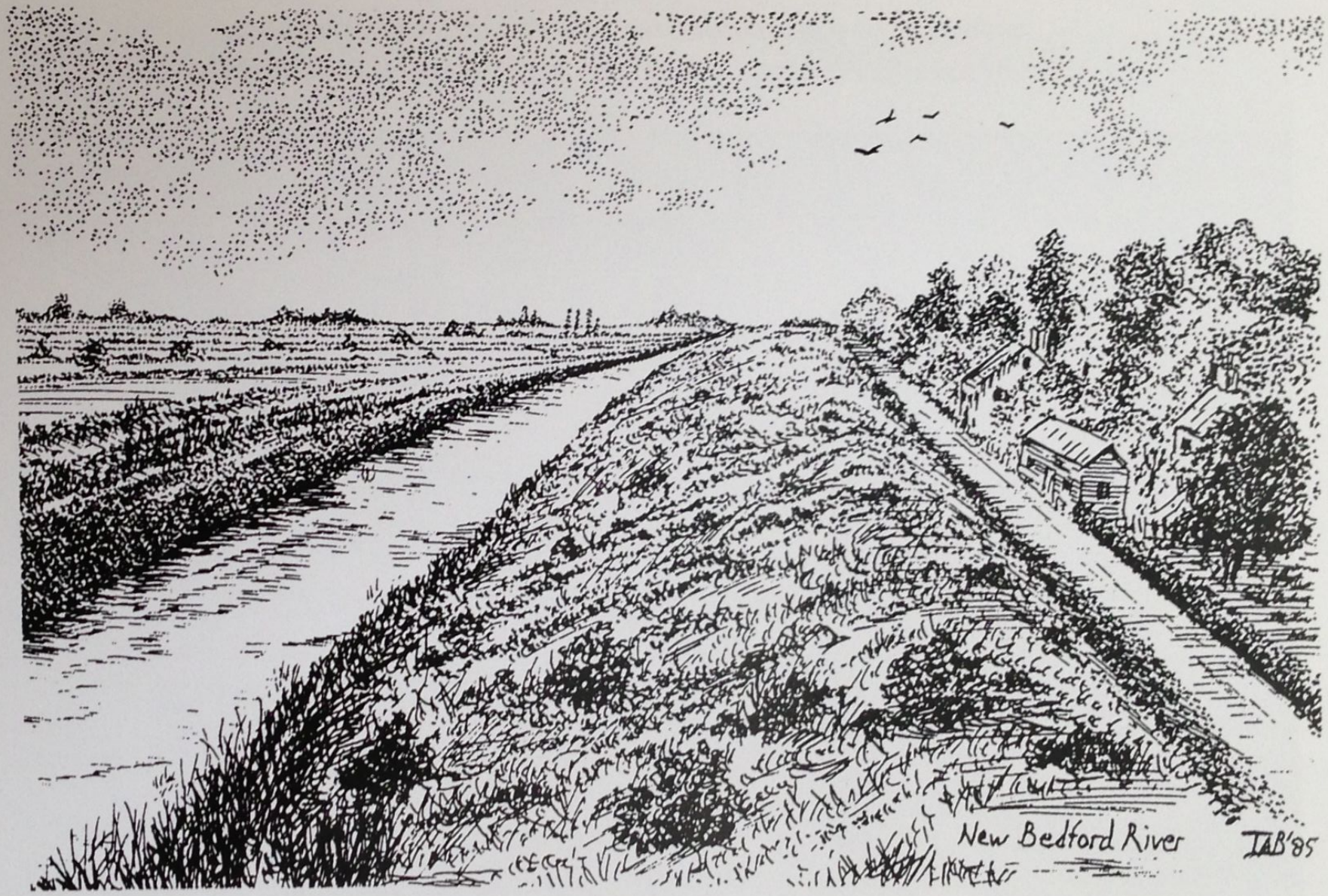
Transfer of one thousand Scots to the Fens was authorised by the Council of State on October 1st, 1650 followed by more meetings resulting in "common soldiers" (the prisoners) being held at Tottenhill Fields and at York to await transfer to the Fens for the purpose of reinforcing the original workforce, prisoners or otherwise.

More prisoners were necessary and on October 16th Scottish soldiers retained at Durham and Newcastle received their marching orders to the Fens. These had been captured at the Battle of Dunbar in 1651 in the third phrase of the Civil War conducted by Parliament in the far north. Even today individuals insist that the Scottish army would not have been so roundly beaten had it been recruited from traditionally hardened clans of the Highlands. Opinion has it that

Scots thrust into that particular conflict which heralded the end of the Civil War were "sons of clerics and more adapted to indoor work".

Mindful of the possibility that prisoners would try to escape, the Government warned that any caught attempting to do so would face immediate execution. It was perfectly feasible that some would escape and several captives were, in fact, successful. Considerable time elapsed before the Company finally accepted terms and agreed to a proviso that for each escaped prisoner crossing the River Trent, or who acted in such a way as to prejudice the State, the Company would be obliged to pay five pounds, then a not inconsiderable sum.

Working in difficult circumstances in a vaporous waterlogged environment sorely aggravated prisoners' health and many died. They had to toil in vile, muddy conditions and stand ankle deep and sometimes knee deep in water for hours on end. In winter they were battered by chilly winds and suffered from all kinds of bronchial disorders, pneumonia in particular. Due to illness and death and increasing escapes the Company was obliged each month to provide returns to the Government of prisoners unfit for work or who had died and of those that had escaped. The Adventurers reluctantly accepted this imposition which seriously affected financial outlay. Eventually it was necessary to appoint a provost marshal, John Johnson, assisted by an overseer, John Kelsey. It was the responsibility of these men to devise a system by which prisoners might be effectively observed at all times by armed guards under direct authority of the overseer, he to receive a weekly wage of ten shillings.



A drawing of the New Bedford river at Welney. Forming the second part of the drainage scheme, the river was cut in 1651-52 by hundreds of Scottish and Dutch prisoners-of-war in the most traumatic conditions. The moisture-laden environment affected the men and several died from bronchial and malarial-related diseases. They were given suits of Kersey wool and any caught trying to escape were shot.

A charming view of the River Nene (old course) between March and Benwick.
Natural rivers were deepened and straightened by prisoners.

Confined between artificial embankments, rivers cut by Scottish and Dutch prisoners-of-war belie the severe conditions experienced by the men in the mid-17th century. Many died of bronchial-related diseases and exhaustion.

Cold, Debilitating Climate

The vaporous Fens had a cold, debilitating climate and it was necessary to attire prisoners in warm clothing made from coarse Kersey wool, so-named after the Suffolk village long ago renowned for its contribution to East Anglia's wool trade. The material was white to distinguish prisoners from other workers. It was hoped that dressed uniformly the men would be discouraged from attempting to escape. They were given close-fitting woollen caps of a different colour and sturdy shoes.

A large number of Scots was billeted at Earith and later reinforced or replaced by a similar number of Dutch sailors taken prisoner during the sea battle between English and Dutch men-o'-war off Portland Bill. Previously the English suffered defeat at the hands of Admiral can Tromp who was in the habit of carrying a broom on the prow of his vessel and openly boast he would sweep the English from the sea. The tables were well and truly turned in the return engagement off the Dorset coast, hundreds of Dutch sailors being captured and at least seventeen Dutch ships and a large number of merchant vessels sent to the bottom of the sea. The men were interred at camps in the south.

During the initial work on the drainage scheme the Dutch prisoners began cutting the New Bedford river at Earith and they and the Scots were certainly familiar with Parliament's Civil War fortress built between the Old and New rivers. It is feasible that the garrison supplied men for guard duty for that particular section of operations.

In October 1651 the Company decided to allocate more prisoners to Earith and instructed Hugh Fordham and Thomas Bunbury to make ready for the arrival of 166 prisoners escorted from London by Corporal Foster and guards. The escorts received a gratuity of two pounds for transporting the prisoners who, on arrival, were in a terrible state and it is doubtful that the men had the strength to carry out the strenuous work of cutting the river.

The first prisoners to arrive were insufficient in number and, taking illness into consideration, it became obvious to the Company that far more men would be necessary. Following enquiry to the Secretary of State more prisoners were obtained from various camps.

From knowledge gained previously as regards prisoners drafted to the Fens the Company stipulated that only "hayle and harty" men, physically and mentally capable be obtained to perform hard tasks in the Fens. Thomas Bunbury had this in mind when he was sent to prison camps at York hastily constructed to accommodate thousands of prisoners from Dunbar. It was equally important that the men had no "wives," a term arising from the practice in those times of women given to prostitution following the prisoners from camp to camp. They would prove to be a financial burden to the Company. Everything involved in the transportation of prisoners was considered from the point of view of economy. Rules were strictly enforced.

The Company expected the State to bear the costs of feeding prisoners in transit. The men had to walk considerable distances from the north to reception camps at Nottingham and Peterborough. Inevitably the prisoners rapidly wore out shoes and the Company undertook the responsibility of providing them with new footwear usually in sizes twelve to fourteen. Sizes in modern times are comparatively smaller. Most men walked to the Fens in shoes they had worn en route to Worcester from the north.

Bringing the prisoners to the Fens and providing them with long-handled shovels to dig drains, and baskets to carry earth and clay for use in building up embankments was very costly. Thousands of implements and baskets had to be manufactured for the purpose. To some extent costs were off-set by allocating prisoners to local farmers on a sub-contract basis. The men were given tasks such as digging dykes and they "hassacked" the land, digging it deeply, leaving clumps of earth to weather on the surface. This was carried out at the rate of six shillings per acre, the income helping to reduce costs to the Company, or Gentlemen Adventurers.

However, sub-contract labour introduced another problem – that of security. Prisoners lodging on farms had far better chances of escaping. While working on the main drains in large numbers the captives were constantly watched by armed guards. Some prisoners did attempt to merge with the mist and disappear. The matter was discussed at Parliament and an order issued that any Scot or Dutch prisoner-of-war caught trying to escape "will be put to death

without mercy." The Order was duly published, five hundred copies being distributed throughout the Fens and read out to prisoners assembled at their work, in the lodges and on the farms. Nonetheless, escapes continued to take place and several escapees were helped by the Fen people, farmers one supposes, who resisted the drainage scheme right from the beginning and displayed some sympathy for the poor prisoners who suffered abysmally from the hard work and unfamiliar climate. Farmers were inclined to think that for every Scot or foreign prisoner that escaped, the loss to the Company would strike a blow at the "infernal scheme" which threatened to change their lives forever.

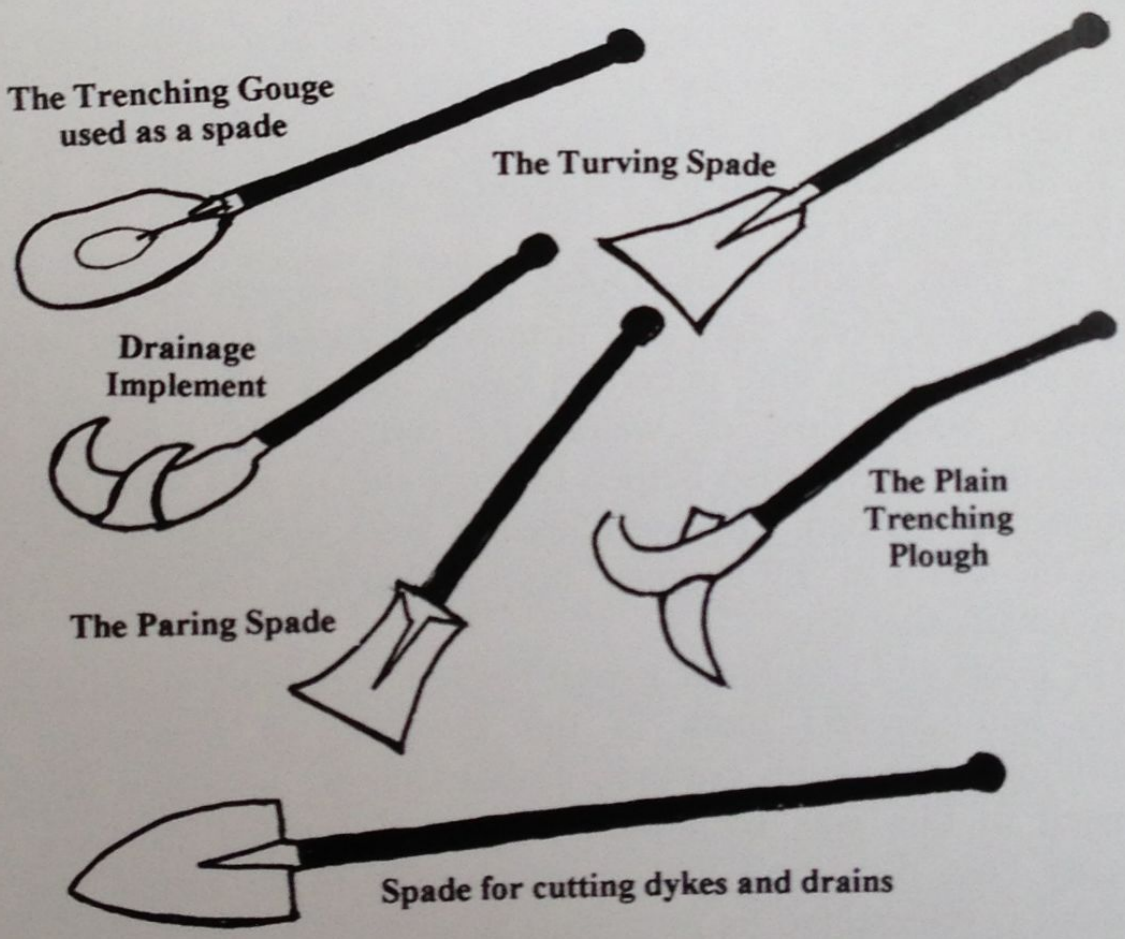
Always more prisoners were needed and on December 31st 1651 another batch of Scots were herded onto ships and brought to King's Lynn. They were destined to join operations at the northern end of the New Bedford river. They worked hard and were generally described as indefatigable and inoffensive. When the prisoners arrived they were described as utterly destitute, wearing worn-out shirts, suits and stockings. The Company, anxious to conserve the workforce as far as was practicable placed an emergency order for two-hundred-and-fifty-six shirts, one-hundred-and-twenty suits and sufficient pairs of thick stockings for distribution among the prisoners. The Scots were distributed to many places in the Fens, a few here and several there, and this contributed to the costs of administration. It was necessary to devise a more economical system of distribution and the prisoners were divided among Company members, exact numbers of men tallying with the accounts.

When hostilities had ended and peace declared it was usual that certain ex-prisoners-of-war gained the affections of local women and married them. This has happened in every war and was no exception as far as the Fens were concerned in the seventeenth century, the blood of the Scottish Highlands and the Netherlands merging with that of the Fens' inhabitants. The Dutch prisoners were probably far better suited to the area, their native country being not dissimilar to the Fens. Scots returning to their native land received a rapturous welcome but some were greatly affected by their experiences. The release of prisoners went ahead on a certain condition. Setting them free

could well expose them to the riotous intentions of fellow countrymen and they themselves be encouraged to support rebellious attitudes and become fodder to troublemakers inciting rebellion in the north. It was a calculated risk and the men were obliged to sign documents to the effect that they would not, in future, take up arms against the Commonwealth. Even so, it was later proved that some former prisoners-of-war had in fact been responsible for disturbances in Scotland.

In the early stages of the prisoners' forced labour in the Fens those that were very ill were sent home with money in their pockets and adequate clothing; but it was stipulated that they should not loiter and had only just sufficient time to cross the border to their homeland. Those imprisoned at Durham, Gloucester, Shrewsbury and York were given their freedom in the early months of 1652.

TOOLS USED FOR IMPROVING 17th CENTURY DRAINAGE



Suffered Severe Hardship

In 1653 prisoners were still contending with the tempestuous sea crossing to Massachusetts, and many that eventually returned to their country were penniless and reduced to begging. It is unlikely that they received much help from the English who were known to be not over-generous to maimed soldiers who had fought for Charles The First and Parliament.

Village and town officers looked upon beggars as a burden on parish coffers. Sometimes former soldiers were given a penny and escorted away from towns and villages by constables. The effect upon beggars was predictable and some became members of large and small robber bands terrorising lone travellers and small communities. Hundreds of Scottish gentry who had been involved in the Civil War lost everything, suffered financial ruin and had no choice but to abandon their estates. The Scottish people underwent shortages of food, and starvation fuelled rebellion leading to the uprising of 1654. In England, former soldiers bereft of limb and disfigured by the brutality of war descended upon villages and received minor sums from parish officials. In some places churchwardens organised appeals for destitute soldiers and for the relief of soldiers' widows. Such was the harsh reality of civil war.

In the Fens, Scottish and Dutch prisoners-of-war not only created the drains and rivers, they also improved natural rivers by deepening and widening them and, in certain cases, taking out bends in rivers to enable a better flow of water and reduce the pressure against embankments. They also helped to erect sluices and wind engines so despised by Fenmen. The wind engines were supposed to force water along the drains to "lift engines" discharging into tidal rivers.It did not always work that way.

The Scots and Dutchmen rowed English surveyors along drains and rivers and assisted them in the handling of measuring chains ascertaining the width between embankments. Jonathon Moore was assisted in this way by Dutch prisoners engaged in work on the Twenty Foot river near March which used to be called The Chain. Fenland is intersected by numerous man-made rivers fed by dykes in the fields: Stonea Drain, Moore's Drain (Twenty Foot), Thurlow's

Drain (Sixteen Foot) named after Cromwell's Secretary of State, the Old Bedford River (100 Foot, 1631), New Bedford River (1651), Vermuyden's Drain (Forty Foot) having along its length between Chatteris and Ramsey no fewer than forty wind engines, Conquest Lode (leading into Whittlesey Mere, the largest freshwater lake in the south of England, completely drained in 1851).

The prisoners cut Tong's Drain (Marshland Cut) and helped to erect the original sluices at each end. Several older waterways cut in 1631 or even before that year were improved to facilitate increased flow of water. Some bore the names of influential individuals engaged in some way in the country's challenging land drainage undertaking. One of the major works was provision of a river one-hundred-and-twenty feet wide and ten feet deep from Denver Sluice to Stow Bridge. It was the planners' intention to name it after Lord Chief Justice St. John but the gentleman declined the honour.

Prisoners worked arduously in all respects and undertook additional tasks other than digging drains. The vast flood plain gradually transformed into ultra-rich land, but there were setbacks when drained fields became inundated mostly because wind engines were becalmed.

High embankments provided the ideal opportunity to introduce a meaningful road system to the area. In pre-drainage times boats and ferries were traditional means of communication with Fen villages, towns and fisheries and the rivers were rightfully regarded as highways. Only a few causeways could be found in the Fens and most were impassable in the winter months. The new drains were indirectly linked with natural rivers and there was far less risk of boats becoming embedded in mud as was often the case in marsh areas and meres.

As the prisoners raised the embankments they flattened the tops and made tracks in order to facilitate greater convenience between communities several miles apart. In the event of land becoming flooded, possibly through a bank bursting, getting men to the breach along the raised tracks was far easier than using boats carrying soil. The tracks were convenient to drovers and, of course, farmers.

Eventually minor roads were provided through the fields and the prisoners were employed to make them. It was the custom in the Fens for farmers to keep roads in a good state of repair by employing them

on sub-contract basis. Seasonally the badly rutted roads which were no more than earth tracks were ploughed and harrowed to restore them to a relatively smooth surface. New rivers introduced greater prosperity to the Fens and towns in the area became minor ports, some having their own fleets of barges and lighters.

To facilitate improved water flow, prisoners excavated tunnels beneath the Old Bedford river at Welney and through the embankment at Earith. The men in white suits were a familiar sight in the area and without any doubt they came into contact with several hundred Huguenots and Walloons (see *"The River Makers"*) that had settled at Whittlesey and Thorney and performed sterling work on drains and fields in the area. Often the prisoners' and colonists' work was jeopardised by vexed Fenmen always hotly disputing the scheme and who embarked on clandestine, destructive missions to disrupt work.

Visitors to the Fens see stretching in an arc before them from horizon to horizon, a vast flatness of prolific fields, vivid colours, matchless sky and unforgettable sunsets. Here, indeed, is the land of the three-quarter sky reclaimed in one of the greatest undertakings ever known in Britain. Initially designed by Sir Cornelius Vermuyden the scheme brought hope, despair and frustration to the Fen people over a period of more than two hundred years.

People living in the Fens, a region liberally endowed with great historic happenings, benefit from the existence of a superb drainage system arguably the finest in Europe. For generations conflict between men and water bonded to the country's lowest-lying level has led to near perfect comprehension of water movement achieved through trial and error. Continuous application of relevant technology ensures confident control and water can be held back, forced, discharged and allowed to overflow into deliberately designed wash land.

Shamefully there is no monument to laud the efforts of early drainage engineers and their labour force, Scottish and Dutch prisoners-of-war working in the bleak reaches of Fen, determined Huguenot and Walloon refugees and English that followed them. With justification it could be said their monument is all around – rivers, drains, embankments, the wash land, pumps and sluices, roads and acres of rich soil wrested from former marsh. The debt is entirely ours.

NOTES:

ONE THOUSAND Scots were transferred to the Fens on October 1st, 1651. More "common soldiers" held at York and Tothill Fields followed from time to time. Prisoners arrived at Earith on October 16th of the same year. This labour force was reinforced with the arrival of hundreds of Dutch prisoners-of-war that had taken part in the sea battle off Portland Bill. On December 3rd five hundred Scots were shipped from Durham to King's Lynn and commenced work on the New Bedford river project, working south from Denver. Most prisoners held at York, Shrewsbury and Durham were released in 1652 but many prisoners in the Fens continued to be employed on the drainage scheme until work was practically completed. The earliest groups of prisoners arriving in the Fens were in poor physical condition and several died, and later arrivals were chosen for their robustness. Nothing is mentioned of the disposal of prisoners who had died and it is feasible that a few were interred in churchyards nearby but the majority working in isolated areas were buried in dry land adjacent to the rivers and quite possibly laid to rest in the embankments. Prisoners were constantly being replaced.

DESIGNER of the original scheme to drain the Fens, Sir Cornelius Vermuyden was only partly successful in his detailed plans. He had unluckily drawn the conclusion from his knowledge of drainage schemes in Holland and Flanders, countries utterly dissimilar to the Fens. In Holland areas were recovered from the sea to which the land was contiguous. Land in Flanders was many miles distant from the ocean to which it never yielded, except to the partial rise and fall of tides overcoming waterways. The major error of Sir Cornelius arose from a fundamental neglect of the outfalls to the sea.

FOUR natural rivers affected the Fens, the Welland, Ouse, Nene and Grant. The obvious course was to scour out, widen, deepen and straighten the rivers and "feeder" streams and properly embank their sides with heavier earth obtainable from the vicinity. Instead, Sir Cornelius completely altered the Level by abandoning in many cases the natural rivers, and cutting straight drains through porous soils. For the want of a continuous current the drains quickly filled up again. As one error occasioned another, sluices were necessary and endless unnecessary work carried out at an expense much beyond what would have been required had the system been confined to a natural instead of an artificial plan of drainage. The idea of providing straight drains for the Fens was first entertained by Bishop Morton in the late 15th century. He devised the Leam from Guyhirn to Stanground. It was insufficiently wide and deep and doomed to failure. The Duke of Bedford in 1652 advised the drainage company to enlist the interest of Barance Westerdyke, an eminent Dutch drainage engineer to give his opinion to the plans then being prosecuted in the Fens and his views were unfavourable. The success of the existing drainage is due to modern technology initiated by steam power.