

## GOSBERTON AND THE DRAINING OF THE FENS.

NO history of this parish could well be considered complete without reference to the vast work of draining the fens—a work begun in this district so early as the reign of Ed. I. (1272-1307). From the numerous records preserved, by Sir William Dugdale, in his “History of Imbanking and Draining,”—some of which we have seen in the British Museum, or Public Record Office, London,—we cull those we deem likely to prove of the greatest interest.

In 9 Edward II. (1315) Lambert de Trekyngham, Roger de Coppeldyk, and Robert de Malberthorp, King’s Justices of Sewers, sitting at Boston, said that the town of Quadring ought to scour and repair the “chanel” to Gosberkirk, and that the town of Gosberkirk ought to do the like from thence to the sea, as the stream of Byker was obstructed through the neglect of the people of Donyngton, Quadring, and Gosberkirk. And furthermore, that the sewer called Risgate Ees was stopped by the Abbot of Peterborough and town of Gosberkyrk, and that the said town ought to cleanse and repair it. Likewise that the sewer of Beche, for which Gosberkyrk, Pynsebek and Surflete were responsible, was obstructed, one William de Hodell, having raised a bank athwart the sewer.

That Gosberton was once a sea-side church, is abundantly proved by the quantity of silt and shingle found when digging in and near the churchyard. We have heard too, on good authority, that seaweed has been upturned during the laying of foundations for houses in the village. We read that the neighbouring village of Algarkirk was largely inundated by the sea in the time of William the Conqueror. And beyond this we have incontestable proof from an entry in the Registers of Peterborough, that the sea overflowed land in Gosberton in or about the year 1292 (Edw: I.): for in that year the Abbot of Peterborough brought an action against Ranulph de Rye and Philip Phiket and others, for dispossessing him of forty acres of marsh-land, etc., in Gosberkyrk. Defendants pleaded that the abbot was not seised of the premises, and besides, that when the sea "by its raging" overflowed any man's land and made a hollow place, it was his duty to drain it for the good of the country, and not to fill it up. They stated that they had drained such land eighteen years before. The Abbot however, maintained that this was "his own several ground," and obtained a verdict in his favour, with damages assessed at twenty shillings.

An inquisition was held in Gosberchirche in 1294, before Adam de Crokedayk and William Inge, which decided that the Rysgate Gote required repairing at hands of the people in the parish, and that the town of Gosbercherche should renew a sewer which formerly

ran into the marsh there; also that Ranulph de Rye should open at his own expense the sewer at Rysgate. And furthermore that the people of Gosberchirche must remove obstructions in the river of Biker, the sewer called New Gote, and the sewer of the Beche.

In the year following, the Abbot of Peterborough made an agreement with Sir Hugh de Cressey, Sir John de Ry, James de Bark, and other inhabitants of Gosbercherche and Surflete, whereby the Abbot released to them any action in respect of trespass done to them touching the sewer, and granted that they should make and maintain a sewer, twenty feet in width, to the sea.

A long suit was commenced in 1342 (16 Edw: III.) in which the Abbot of Swinesheved claimed 200, and Sir Nicholas de Rye, 140 acres of marsh, from the Abbot of Peterborough; but before the assizes at Lincoln, a number of influential gentlemen, including Sir John de Wilughby, Lord of Eresby, Sir John de Kirketon, Sir Saier de Rochford, Gilbert de Stanford, Cellarer to the Convent, John de Achirche, and John de Multon, parson of Skirbeck, with Sir Nicholas de Cantilupe, endeavoured at a meeting in the Chapter-house, to bring matters to an amicable settlement, with the result that it was resolved to refer the case to twelve arbitrators. On the day appointed they met at Gosbercherche, but without any satisfactory result.

(Dugd: p. 234).

Judges then appointed a certain day for hearing the case at Lincoln, and the defendants made ready, but no one appeared to prosecute—the plaintiffs being dissatisfied with the composition of the Jury. This having fallen through, still another day was fixed, through the mediation of Sir Adam de Welles; and again they met, only to part with their mutual grievance yet unhealed. So that a third trial was eventually arranged through the agency on this occasion of Alexander de Onnesby, Rector of Castreton. So far as the Abbot of Swynesheved was concerned the case was settled by the payment by the Abbot of Peterborough of forty merks (£26 13 4) to his brothers of Swynesheved. On the other hand six arbitrators—Sir Robert de Colevill, Lord of Bitham, Sir Philip le Despenser and John Cleymunt, for Sir Nicholas, and Sir John de Wilughby, Sir John de Kyrketon, and Henry Grene, and behalf of the Abbott—decided that the latter should pay the plaintiff £40, which should remove any claim of de Rye on the marsh in future.

Notwithstanding the tedious dispute and trial which had apparently terminated so satisfactorily, in six years, we find Sir Nicholas lodging another complaint against the Abbot, for purchasing 300 acres of waste land in Gosbercherche without permission from the King. This suit, however, was not decided until the 41st year of Edward III. (1367).

Sir Nicholas de Rye, John Claymond, Roger de Meres and others were appointed Commissioners to

survey the sea-banks and ditches within the towns of Flete and Holbeche, in the year 1360.

Two years later, in presence of Sir William de Huntingfield and others, an inquisition was held touching sluices or gotes in Sotterton, Byker, Swyneshed, Wygtoft, Donington, Quadring, Gosberkirk and Surflete. Amongst those which required repairing were the Angot at Quadring, the Surflete Newgote and Gosberton Thurgote.

Sir John de Crecy in 1369 was amongst those appointed to examine the banks and ditches of Holland.

The Wars of the Roses are possibly the cause for lack of information with reference to this subject, during the next century. Their influence was far-reaching in Lincolnshire, where the nobility and gentry largely embraced the Lancastrian cause, and many perished. The work of reclaiming the Fens was then brought to a standstill.

In 34 Hen: VIII., Charles, Duke of Suffolk, Robert Dymoke, Thomas Heneage, John Copledyk, John Hussey, and Robert Tirwhit, knights, Edward Dymoke and Richard Themolby, and others, esquires, sitting at Donyngton, decreed that a drain should be made on the east of Spaldyng, Pynchbec, Surflet,

Gosberkyrke and Quadring, by every one of the commoners in their own precincts.

Not until 1571 (*temp.* Eliz.) do we hear again of an inquisition, when at Boston, Sir Henry Clinton, Anthony Thorold, Robert Carre, Leonard Irby and John Bushey, esquires, decided that the sewer called Merlode should be widened and diverted to Gosberton Ee, near Challan Bridge; and moreover, that two new bridges should be erected at Rusgate [Rysgate ?] Ee mouth, by the inhabitants of Gosberkirke and Surflete: one in Quadring Fen on the road from Westrop, and one within the limits of Byker, so high as to admit of the passage of boats. They also decreed at the towns of Pinchbeck, Gosberkirk and Surflete should repair the Beche sewer.

The final reference to Gosberton in this connection occurs in 12 Car: I. (1636) when the Earl of Lindsey, for certain considerations, was awarded 24,000 acres of land, taken from various fens, to which Gosberkirke contributed 600 acres.

The result of these gigantic and long-continued operations has been to entirely transform the aspect of the south of Lincolnshire. A large marsh, subject to frequent inundation from the sea, studded with tiny islands, overgrown with oak and fir, and teeming with every product of wild nature, inhabited by a distinct race of men, expert swimmers, who knew too the depth of every little channel and were reputed by the popu-

lace to be web-footed, a place so wild and desolate and generally inaccessible, as to become the haunt of hardened criminals and a refuge to abandoned outlaws, —has given place to a well-favoured, fertile tract, dotted with pleasant villages, adorned with noble churches, and populated by a peaceable, honest, hard-working and law-abiding people.

