PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)

VOLUME XLVI

JANUARY 1952 TO DECEMBER 1952

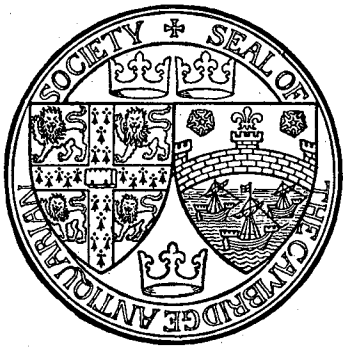
CAMBRIDGE
BOWES AND BOWES
1953

PROCEEDINGS OF THE CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)



VOLUME XLVI

JANUARY 1952 TO DECEMBER 1952

CAMBRIDGE
BOWES AND BOWES
1953

Published for the Cambridge Antiquarian Society (incorporating the Cambs and Hunts Archaeological Society) by Bowes & Bowes Publishers Limited Cambridge

Printed in Great Britain at the University Press, Cambridge (Brooke Crutchley, University Printer)

CONTENTS

Officers and Council of the Society 1952–1953 — *page* vi

Report and Summary of Accounts for the Year 1951 — vii

Jewelled Saxon Pendant from the Isle of Ely — 1
By T. C. LETHBRIDGE, M.A., F.S.A.

King John's Treasure — 4
By GORDON FOWLER, M.A., F.S.A., F.G.S.

Some Further Examples of Sgraffito Ware from Cambridge — 21
By G. H. S. BUSHNELL, M.A., PH.D., F.S.A. AND J. G. HURST, B.A.

Medieval Wells at Cherry Hinton — 27
By J. G. HURST, B.A. AND C. I. FELL, M.A.

An Early Iron Age Settlement at Linton, Cambridgeshire — 31
By C. I. FELL, M.A.

Index — 43

KING JOHN'S TREASURE

GORDON FOWLER, M.A., F.S.A., F.G.S.

Introduction

ABOUT twenty years ago, when I was commencing my Fenland researches, Mr T. C. Lethbridge asked if I had any views about the alleged loss of King John's treasure near Wisbech, as he doubted those generally accepted. This prompted me to investigate the subject, and it now seems high time to present the result, after piecing together the notes made at the time. Another reason for at last producing this paper is provided by an article entitled 'Six Men with a Clue to Buried Treasure', published in the *Daily Mail* on 3 February 1950, which has led me to believe that perhaps the remarkable treasure hunt of 1932–3 will be renewed before long.

I am indebted to Mr A. B. Steel, Mr Edward Miller, Mr Walter Blount and Commander John Scott-Hughes for correcting the proof of this paper and for making some valuable suggestions.

The Treasure Hunters

On 15 February 1906, Mr W. H. St John Hope, M.A., F.S.A., later Assistant Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries of London, read a paper to that Society entitled 'The Loss of King John's Baggage Train in the Wellstream in October 1216', which was published in *Archaeologia*, Vol. LX, pp. 93–110, later the same year.

This paper stimulated a great amount of interest, one result of which was the formation of a syndicate to explore the matter from every point of view, to endeavour to locate the treasure and, if possible, to recover it. After the 1914–18 war matters had progressed so far that they had obtained certain licences from the Crown authorizing them to make a search for the lost treasure. The first licence, dated 30 November 1929, was in respect of 420 acres called Wingland, near Sutton Bridge, which is 7 miles north of Wisbech, Cambs.; the second licence, dated 10 October 1930, referred to neighbouring land called Sutton Bridge Estate, extending over 1100 acres.

In 1929 a rich American became interested in the project, and the result was that, on 16 December 1932, a company named Fen Research Ltd was incorporated. The American undertook to finance it to the extent of a sum not to exceed £40,000. New licences were granted to the company by the Minister of Agriculture, the Commissioners of Crown Lands and the President of the Air Council. These licences extended the area for the search to about 5470 acres, the most likely part of which the company eventually decided was near Sutton Grange. The field operations were estimated to cost £24,000 for the first year and £10,000 for each of the next two

years. Eventually there was a difference of opinion between some of the directors of the company and its chief consultants on one side and the American on the other. This seems to have been due to the American wishing to employ a fantastic diviner to locate the treasure.

This dispute led to the resignation of the company's general manager, another director and of three of the consultants. In 1934 the company's general manager brought an action in the High Court against the American for alleged wrongful dismissal and breach of a service agreement, during the hearing of which it was alleged that though about £20,000 had been spent no excavations had been made. The action ended by the plaintiff withdrawing, and in 1936 the company was subject to compulsory liquidation. Accounts lodged showed liabilities of £27,548, assets £1853 and an issued capital of £1000.[1] It will be seen that I disagree with many of the conclusions in St John Hope's paper which seem to have misled the treasure hunters.

The evidence

Broadly speaking, three forms of evidence are acceptable in law: the evidence of an eyewitness, the evidence deduced from the examination of physical objects, and the evidence of an expert in the subject concerned. Hearsay evidence is not admitted. Furthermore, contemporary evidence, or evidence prompted by notes made at the time, is considered more trustworthy than accounts compiled later on. Also, where any remarkable incident is concerned it is considered that the least sensational report is probably the most reliable. It will be seen that the chief conclusions reached in this paper depend to a large extent upon the validity of these statements regarding evidence.

St John Hope relies to a large extent upon the evidence of certain chronicles written by persons who do not appear to have been witnesses of the events they record; indeed their evidence seems to be of a hearsay nature, but they are the only contemporary or nearly contemporary writers whose works have survived. Therefore, failing anything better, their evidence must at least be considered, though with caution. Otherwise we would have to dismiss the idea that an accident of any kind happened to King John's baggage train. In fact, if the rules of evidence outlined above were kept, very little ancient history would ever be written, much less believed. On the other hand it will be seen that I base my conclusions to a large extent upon real evidence: that is to say upon observations of physical facts, notes of which were made by me at the time, or upon the observations of reliable persons who recounted them to me. Where the hearsay reports of the chronicles have to be used, I deal with them critically.

The relevant parts of the chronicles quoted by St John Hope are as follows. I have used his translations, adding certain words in square brackets.

[1] My authority for these statements regarding the treasure hunt in question is *The Times* reports of 19, 24 and 26 July 1934 and 4 February 1936; *The Morning Post* reports of 17 and 18 October 1933; and an article in *John Bull* of 13 January 1934.

MATTHEW PARIS, *Historia Anglorum* (*Historia Minor*)
(Rolls Series, 440, 2, 190)

'Afterwards King John journeying towards the north [from Kings Lynn to Swineshead] while all the inhabitants fled from his face, as from a rapidly approaching storm, ventured to cross without a guide the seawater mixed with river water, which place is called Welstream,[1] barely escaping, he irrecoverably lost at the same spot the carts and sumpter horses carrying his booty and spoils, and all his treasure and furniture. For the ground was opened in the midst of the waves, and the sand, which is called quick, swallowed down everything, horses and men, arms and tents, and victuals, and the things which the King, next to his life, held too dear in the world. [Hope goes no further, but Matthew continues, as translated for me by the late Dr W. M. Palmer.] The King therefore, having *barely* escaped with the rest of his army, passed the following night at the Abbey of the Cistercian Order at Swineshead, exceedingly sad and consumed with grief.

This was written about a generation after the event, and is one of the more sensational accounts. All agree that Matthew's earlier account, in his *Historia Major*, is practically a word for word reproduction of Roger of Wendover's chronicle, which appears below. Also reference to the Latin suggests that even the *Historia Minor* is hardly an independent authority. Some phrases in it are precisely the same as those in Roger's chronicle, though there is in addition a certain amount of highly imaginative padding. Therefore, it is suggested that we should not rely upon Matthew's accounts of the accident.

ROGER DE WENDOVER, *Flores Historiarum*
(Rolls Series, 84, 2, 195, 196)

John with a large force had been committing terrible ravages in the Counties of Suffolk and Norfolk. At last he took his way through the town of Lynn, where he was received with joy by the inhabitants, and received large presents from them. [So far this is according to the translation by J. A. Giles. From here onwards St John Hope's commences.] Then, journeying towards the north, in the river which is called Wellstream, by *an unexpected accident* he lost all his wagons, carts, and sumpter horses with the treasure, precious vessels, and all the other things which he loved with so much care; for the ground was opened *in the midst of the waves*, and bottomless whirlpools, which swallowed them all up, with the men and the horses, so that not one foot escaped to announce the disaster to the King. The King nevertheless, having *barely* escaped with his army, passed the following night at the Abbey which is called Swineshead.

Roger was removed from the office of Prior of Belvoir in 1219. In 1216 he was probably a monk at St Albans[2] and therefore, in spite of what Hope says, not likely at that time to have been a near neighbour of Adam, Abbot of Croxton, Leicestershire, who attended the King on his death-bed in Newark Castle on the 19 October 1216, a week after the accident. That is to say, Roger probably did not hear details of what had happened until some time later, when the whole story had probably become exaggerated. His account, like Matthew's, is sensational, and, therefore,

[1] The reason why some history books say that King John lost his baggage train in the Wash is probably because their authors could not find the long extinct Wellstream river on their maps.

[2] See *Dictionary of National Biography*.

also suspect. His chronicle was probably written between 1219 and his death in 1235 and is full of errors and inaccuracies.[1] I have italicized certain passages in the above translations.

RALPH OF COGGESHALE, *Chronicon Anglicanum*
(Rolls Series, 66, 183, 184)

Besides this a very great distress troubled him, because he had lost on that journey at the Wellstream his Chapel with its relics, and certain sumpter horses with various household stuff, and many of his household were drowned in the sea waters and swallowed down in the quicksand in the same place, because incautiously and precipitately they had passed over before the tide had receded.

Ralph was Abbot of Coggeshall, Essex, between 1207 and 1218. His is the least sensational account and, therefore, should be the most trustworthy. Also he could possibly have obtained his information soon after the event from his brother Cistercian monks at Swineshead, where the King stayed on the 12 and 13 October 1216, presumably the day of and the day after the accident, when much was fresh in the memory of all concerned.

I suggest that the most we can gather from all of the above hearsay evidence, and especially if we rely upon Ralph of Coggeshall more than upon the other two chroniclers, is that an unexpected and extraordinary accident happened to *part* of King John's baggage train when it was passing over a tidal part of a river named Wellstream, near Wisbech, during the course of a journey from King's Lynn to Swineshead.

Our next task is to try to discover exactly where the accident took place, what caused it and what was lost at the time.

The site of the accident

First of all, let us examine why Hope selected the neighbourhood of the present Sutton Bridge, seven miles north of Wisbech, for the site of the accident. His reasons can be summarized as follows:

(*a*) He says 'that it [the baggage train] did not go the same way as the King [i.e. via Wisbech] is certain, since it would otherwise not have been lost in the estuary of the Wellstream'. This is an unwarranted assertion, because none of the three chroniclers mentions an estuary, but only tidal waters. Tidal conditions must have prevailed far up the Wellstream in 1216. They do so at Wisbech to-day and for five miles further up the present river there, the Nene, until stopped by the sluice gate at Guyhirn. Moreover, the Hundred Map of Wisbech, of which the original copy is earlier than 1597, names the bed of the old Wellstream as far south of Wisbech as Emneth *essuera de Well.*

(*b*) He shows that crossings were made between the present site of the Cross Keys Inn (at the east end of the present Sutton Bridge) and Long Sutton in the seventeenth

[1] See V. H. Galbraith, *Roger Wendover and Mathew Paris*, pp. 16, 21, 22.

century and later, over what was sometimes called the Wash Way. No doubt the silting up of the estuary, which will be dealt with later, had progressed far enough by then to make that possible, but it certainly had not done so as early as 1216, and it is significant that he finds no reference to crossings there earlier than the seventeenth century.

(*c*) He supposes that the baggage train was not less than two miles long and moving no faster than $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles an hour, and that the *whole* of it was lost in the accident and, therefore, that no narrower part of the estuary than the $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles long Wash Way would fit the circumstances.

But why should it have been so long, so slow or totally lost? Ralph of Coggeshall mentions as lost only 'his [the King's] Chapel with its relics', which could have been carried on a cart or waggon; 'certain sumpter horses', not many or all of the horses; and 'many of his household', which does not necessarily imply a great number of men. His *household* servants or staff would not be very numerous.

The less trustworthy Roger of Wendover reports the loss of 'the carts and sumpter horses carrying his booty and spoils and all his treasure and furniture'. Even if believed, that need not imply a great number of carts and horses, because, as will be seen later, no evidence has been found to prove that the King had much with him at the time. His more recent plunder, being probably light or consisting of small things like plate, could have been carried on a few horses or one or two carts. In view of the speed the King can be shown to have been travelling at for weeks previously, and as he was lodging in towns or monasteries each night, we are not justified in assuming that his 'furniture' was enough to need much transport to carry it.

Matthew Paris's account in *Historia Minor*, if it is worthy of any serious consideration, mentions the loss of 'the carts and sumpter horses carrying his [the King's] booty and spoil and all his treasure and furniture', but, as stated above regarding a similar account made by Roger, this need not imply a great number of carts and horses. Matthew also reports the loss of 'horses and men, arms and tents', but such horses and men he does not say were many. The 'arms' were probably only those carried by the men in question: as to the 'tents', a fast-moving army in those times would not have many, and they would probably be only those needed for the King's personal use when no town or monastery happened to be available for his lodging. The 'victuals' are also not likely to have been bulky, because it seems that in those days armies lived off the land and the towns through which they passed.

In view of all this it is reasonable to suppose that the King's baggage train was not a large one in numbers of horses, vehicles and men. As to its speed, unless it could keep up with him and his army it would soon have become not only vulnerable to his many enemies but useless for its purposes. Another aspect of this matter is provided by the itinerary of the King's remarkable journeys at that time. Hope points out that the Patent and Close Rolls indicate that the King's movements during October 1216 were as follows (I have added the approximate mileage):

On	2 October 1216	Lincoln to Grimsby	About	37 miles
,,	4 ,, ,,	Grimsby to Louth	,,	16 ,,
,,	5 ,, ,,	Louth to Boston	,,	31 ,,
,,	6 ,, ,,	Boston to Swineshead	,,	7 ,,
,,	7 ,, ,,	Swineshead to Spalding	,,	14 ,,
,,	9 ,, ,,	Spalding to King's Lynn	,,	33 ,,
,,	12 ,, ,,	(Wednesday) King's Lynn to Swineshead	,,	47 ,,

(But it is probable that on the afternoon of 11 October he went from King's Lynn as far as the east bank of the Wellstream—13 miles—when the tide was not suitable for crossing to Wisbech.)

On	14 October 1216	Swineshead to Sleaford	About	12 miles
,,	15 ,, ,,	Sleaford to Newark (where he died on the 19th)	,,	18 ,,

This makes a total of about 215 miles in 13 days. How could any but a very light and mobile baggage train have kept up with the King at that speed on the unmetalled roads of the time during the short October days?

It may be as well to note here that the King's movements cannot be precisely identified from the Patent and Close Rolls. They may be right, but are not necessarily better than those given in the chronicles, which differ slightly. T. F. Tout's *Chapters in Medieval Administrative History* (vol. 1, p. 531) shows that King John had a privy seal and sometimes used it for letters close only, which at that date, but not in later times, were duly enrolled in the Close Roll, as if sealed by the Great Seal. But these are rare. Tout only quotes two or three instances. Moreover, one of these instances shows that John was sometimes separated from his Great Seal. Thus on 10 May 1208, he issued from Tewkesbury a letter close, sealed with his privy seal, in which he explains that he uses the privy seal because he has not his Great Seal with him. Tout stresses the size and weight of the Great Seal, which at that date had long been in the custody of a Chancellor and a small staff of clerks, who were perhaps not infrequently separated from the King. However, I think that, in view of the circumstances ruling at the time we are considering, both the seal and its custodians were most probably with the King.

(*d*) Hope makes the King and his army cross the Wellstream at Wisbech, but, as has already been said, the baggage train at Cross Keys-Long Sutton. He dismisses local antiquaries' and local historians' views in favour of a Wisbech crossing for both army and baggage train as of no value whatever 'owing to [them] having ignored the plain statement of the chroniclers that John and his army escaped'.

But the chroniclers do not say that. Ralph mentions no escape. Both Roger and Matthew say that they barely escaped. Surely if the King and his army barely escaped the accident to the baggage train it can only mean that they were with it at the time? Another point is this. To-day there is nearly an hour's difference between the flowing of the tide at Sutton Bridge and Wisbech, which are about 6½ miles apart.

As the river's channel had not been straightened out between those two points in 1216 (see map, Fig. 2) the difference in the flowing of the tide must have been even greater at that time. How then, if the King and his army crossed at Wisbech, did they 'barely' escape an accident due to an inrushing tide and supposed quicksands so far away?

(*e*) As another indication that the baggage train crossed at Cross Keys-Long Sutton, Hope points out that the medieval villages of Clenchwarton and Terrington, which lie between King's Lynn and the Cross Keys Inn, show that the ancient highway led to the latter place. They certainly do, but he ignores the fact that four other such ancient villages, the two Walpoles, West Walton and Walsoken, lie between Cross Keys and Wisbech, which could equally well prove that the highway continued through those villages to Wisbech, as no doubt it did. The sites of the towns of vills recorded in Domesday Book, in that part of the Fenlands, appear to have been determined by the course of the pre-Norman seabank or *fossatum maris*. If one takes an outline map of the Fens and places on it the position of all Domesday vills from King's Lynn to 24 miles north of Boston, one sees that those nearest the coast follow the line of those banks.[1] Yet another though minor point against his belief that the baggage train crossed there, is that a journey by that route would only be about nine miles shorter than by Wisbech. Is it likely that the King would take the risk of being separated from his baggage train for such a small saving in its travelling time?

The treasure hunters also seem to have been misled regarding the site of the accident by the fact that before the seventeenth century there was a waterway named King's Creek meandering down from Long Sutton to the estuary of the Wellstream a little north of the present Sutton Bridge.[2] Also there is a house named King John's Farm midway along its now extinct course in reclaimed marshland. But they have overlooked the point that the waterway in question probably got its name from John of Gaunt, titular king in England of Castile and Leon, who owned land at Long Sutton, and is said to have resided there sometimes. As to the name of the house, W. Faden's map of 1790 calls it only 'King's House', a name evidently derived from the creek. 'John' has been added since then.

Apart from the above comments, there are other reasons for rejecting Hope's views regarding the site of the accident. Those reasons are based upon the observations I have made over a number of years regarding the past and present waterways of the Fens, and of the rapid silting up that occurs in the tidal parts of fenland rivers and in their estuaries when their waters are either diverted or reduced in volume.

From time to time changes have taken place in the physiography of the area we are considering owing to the diversion or part diversion of waterways which used to have their passage to the sea through Wisbech or, in the case of the original river Nene, north of that place. Work of that kind had been carried out in the Fens before

[1] See map facing p. 421 in Darby, 'Human Geography of the Fenlands', *Geographical Journal*, vol. LXXX, no. 5, November 1932.

[2] See seventeenth-century maps.

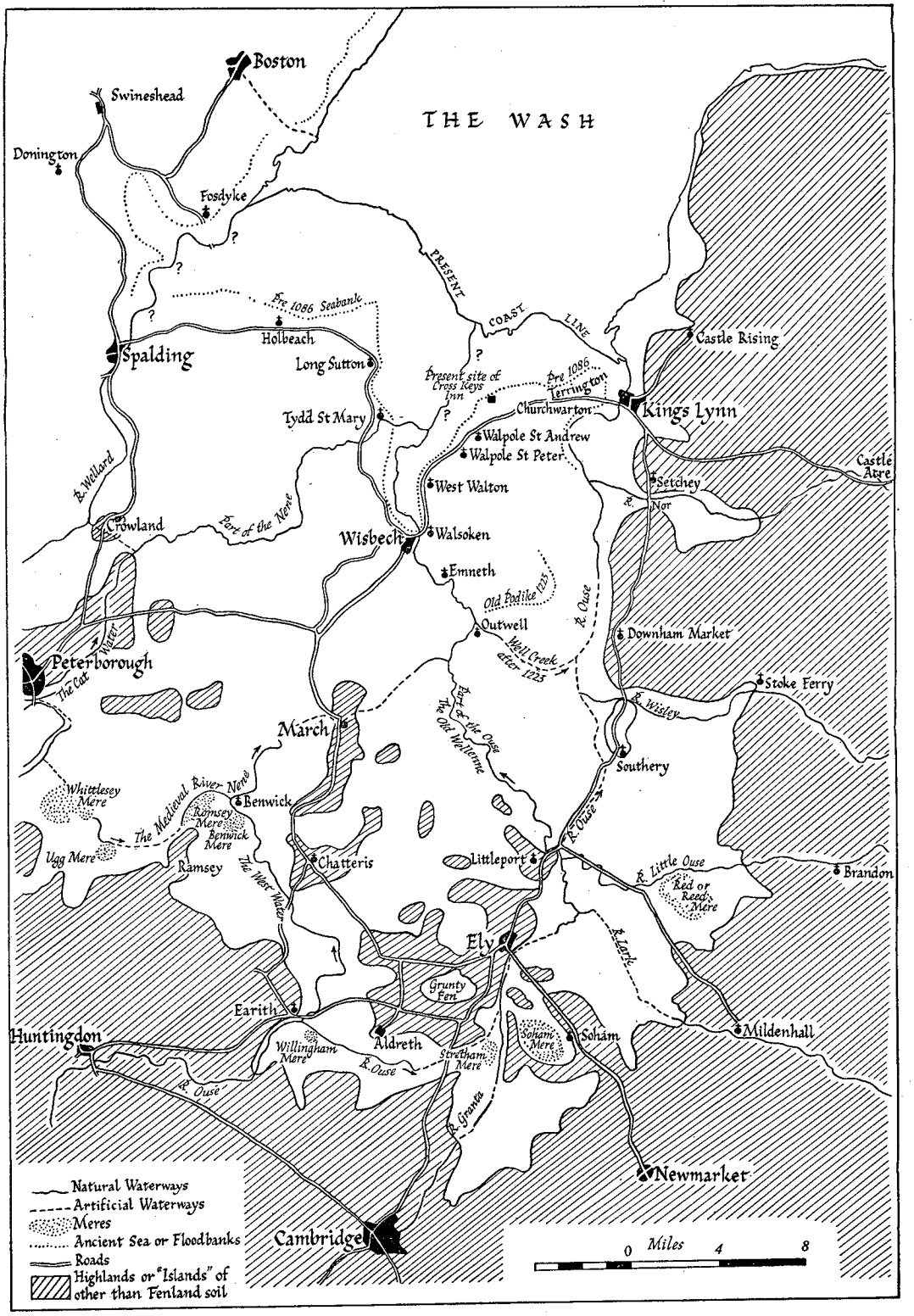


Fig. 1. The principal waterways of the south-east Fenlands at the beginning of the thirteenth century.

1216. Indeed, it was commenced in early Romano-British times. Its purpose was to provide either more direct navigation or better drainage. Originally the Wellstream received as tributaries all of the waters of the rivers Granta (called the Cam only since the seventeenth century), Lark, Little Ouse, Wissey, and the Great Ouse. But by

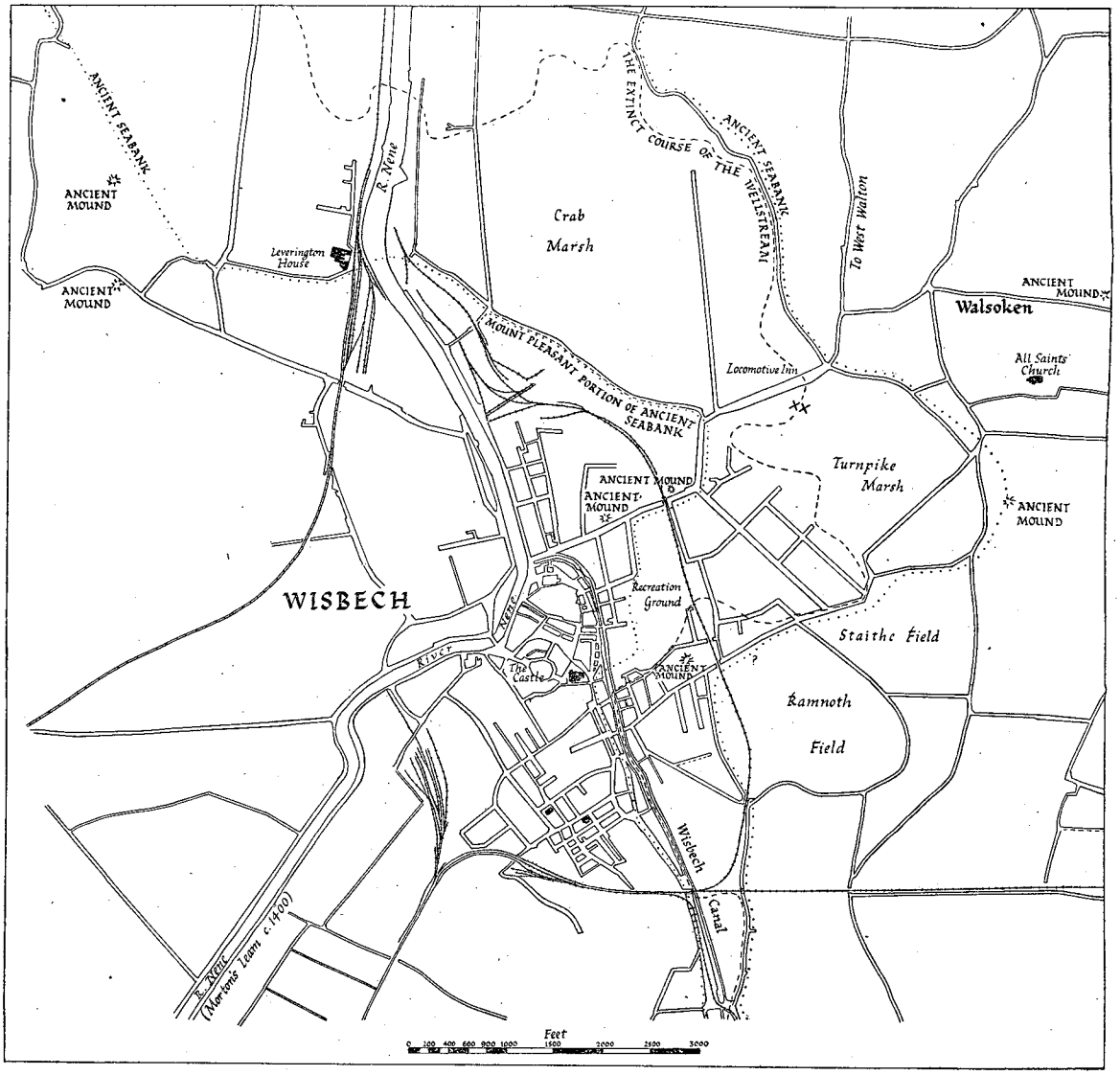


Fig. 2. The Wisbech-Walsoken area at the present time.

1216 it carried through Wisbech to the sea only parts of the waters of the Granta, Lark, Little Ouse and Great Ouse and the major portion of the water of the Nene, which by that time had been diverted away from its natural course to a partly artificial waterway which I have named the Medieval Nene. (See map, Fig. 1.) Since the volume of water had been reduced, the estuary of the Wellstream, which

then began at Wisbech,[1] had probably silted up to some extent by 1216. However, the Wellstream still carried a considerable amount of water and spring tides must have had a free run over the salt-marshes between the old sea banks, so the silting up of its estuary would not have been so high then as later on, when the whole of its water was diverted from Outwell to King's Lynn and thence to the sea. That diversion was through a partly artificial channel named Well Creek, and Professor Darby[2] dates the completion of the work as some time before the end of the thirteenth century. I consider that it was contemporary with the building of the old Podyke bank in 1223. It must have cut off the water of the Wellstream completely between Outwell and Wisbech.[3] Then, with only the water of the little Wisbech stream or beck to scour it, the estuary must have silted up rapidly. It should be noted here that yet another diversion of the Nene, via Morton's Leam from Peterborough to Wisbech, which formed the present large river through the latter town, did not occur till about 1490.

What it all comes to is this. It is most unlikely that either the estuary of the old Wellstream *north* of Wisbech, or the river's frequently changing channel through it,[4] was passable or fordable at any state of tide in 1216; if that is so, the obvious crossing place then would be at the head of the estuary where the old seabanks close in to within a quarter of a mile of each other between the Domesday Vills of Walsoken and Wisbech. (See map, Fig. 2.) The very fact that those two places are so close together and with the Wellstream between them suggests that they came into being each side of an important ford. The Wellstream ran close to the bank at Walsoken and can be traced in the soil even to-day. It appears to have had an unchanging course there not more than 40 yards wide, and is marked approximately by the county boundary.[5] The present Locomotive Inn, on the north side of that part of the Lynn road that lies between Wisbech and Walsoken, stands on this long extinct, first silted up and later filled in channel. The line of the supposed ford and of the quarter mile causeway across the one time salt-marshes west of it, as far as the recently destroyed Mount Pleasant portion of the old seabank, is probably marked by the course of that road.[6] Therefore it seems that it must have been here, opposite the Locomotive Inn, where the present road crosses the extinct channel of the Wellstream, that the accident occurred. It will be seen later that treasure hunters should not dig there, even if they get permission to pull up the road, but just south of that spot, where the river started to turn south-west, if, after reading this paper, they think there is anything of value left to recover.

[1] See course of the earliest seabanks on map, Figs. 1 and 2.

[2] See Darby, *The Medieval Fenlands*, p. 96.

[3] See Dugdale, *History of Drainage*, p. 260. It also had the effect of widening and deepening the river at King's Lynn considerably. In King John's time it must have been easy to cross there.

[4] See map in Watson's *History of Wisbech*, p. 80.

[5] Mr E. J. Rudsdale made an extensive study of the old seabanks and of the course of the Wellstream through Wisbech, but the result had not been published when he died.

[6] The excavations showing in the back garden of the Locomotive Inn were made to get soil to fill in the remains of the concavity of the old channel of the Wellstream when the present hard road was made.

The cause of the accident

The actual cause of the accident evidently mystified the chroniclers. Hope does not make the matter any clearer in spite of a long discourse in support of his assumption that the baggage train was quite 2 miles long, moved no faster than $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles an hour, and was totally lost. The mystery is deepened by the fact that apparently the King and his whole party had made a similar crossing of the Wellstream, but in the reverse direction, quite safely when travelling from Spalding to King's Lynn[1] only three or four days earlier. One also gains the impression from the chronicles that what happened was most unusual.

It has been seen that Ralph says that the things and men lost were 'drowned in sea waters and swallowed down in quicksands (*in vivo sabulone*)'. Roger says 'for the ground was opened in the midst of the waves and bottomless whirlpools which swallowed them all up'. Matthew mentions 'seawater mixed with river water' and 'for the ground was opened in the midst of the waves and the sand which is called quick (*et sabulo qui vivus dicitur*) swallowed down everything'.

As will be seen later, the presence of waves can be explained, and indeed helps to provide the key to the problem, but the question of wet quicksands is quite another matter. It appears that the following factors are essential to their formation: Sand consisting of small grains of very clean and incoherent quartz unbound by any clayey material, such sands being kept in a state of semi-suspension or condition of incoherency by water rising through them, the movement of water being due either to underlying springs or to fast rising tides percolating through the base of the sands and then being driven upwards by a lower stratum of a less permeable nature.

I have inspected many excavations in the area of the Fenlands concerned, and read about a number of others. Nowhere on the surface, nor down to at least the 1216 land level of the estuary, has the presence of such sands been noted, much less any indications that the factors necessary for their formation ever existed there. From time to time I have walked over the present saltmarshes down to the low water line of spring tides, guided by men who made their living off them by collecting cockles and samphire in the summer, and by wild-fowling in the winter. No signs of any wet quicksands were seen and the marshmen declared that they and their forefathers in the same trade had never known any there. For instance, in 1930, one of those men, Charles Smith of 14 Dilk Street, King's Lynn (now probably dead), who worked on the marshes north and east of the old east bank lighthouse north of Sutton Bridge, said that he had known those marshes for long before 1906, and there never were any wet quicksands there. And yet Hope at about that date wrote about 'the quicksands which are still the terror of the Wash'! I have also waded in the river at Sutton

[1] William Earl of Warren, of Castle Rising, and William Earl of Arundel, of Castle Acre, both of which places are near King's Lynn (see map, Fig. 1), had just deserted the King's cause and, therefore, he was probably on his way to attack those strongholds. That he did not go far enough to do so was possibly due to the receipt of news of the success of Louis of France and the rebel Barons in the south-east, which led him to return northwards before he had fulfilled the purpose of his journey.

Bridge and into the neighbouring river Ouse below King's Lynn at low water and later, and found the bottom firm. I have sounded the bottom of the Ouse with a bargeman's pole all the way from Denver Sluice to King's Lynn and found the same state of affairs, and Mr Victor Jackson, of Stanground, Peterborough, who has frequently navigated barges in the present river Nene north of Wisbech, tells the same story. Therefore it is suggested that there never have been any wet quicksands anywhere near the course of the old Wellstream and its estuary.

Apart from the chronicles, Hope also quotes Gibson, in his 1695 translation of Camden's *Britannia* of 1586, and Brady, in his *Complete History of England* of 1685, as stating that there were quicksands in the area concerned in their times. But if Hope was so demonstrably wrong about quicksands being there in 1906, why should not the others be equally in error for want of local knowledge? Long persisting misstatements are not uncommon in history.[1] It is suggested here that the chroniclers guessed at quicksands as a contributing cause for the accident simply because they could not think how else it could have happened, and that Camden, Brady and Hope were just uncritical copyists.

Camden's and Brady's local knowledge was probably limited to the no doubt common and true report, current in their times, that crossings of the river were sometimes dangerous, and the salt-marshes always so. The latter, where they still exist along the coast, are still dangerous to strangers. As the tide recedes numbers of deep, steep-sided and very meandering little creeks are exposed and drain rapidly. It is then easy to pick one's way between them down to low-water-mark, but as soon as the tide begins to flow they fill up again quickly. Once they have overflowed on to the marshes their course becomes invisible; then none but those with intimate local knowledge can avoid falling into one after another while attempting to reach the seabank guarding the land, and all the time the water deepens rapidly. However it is not suggested that in 1216 there were similar creeks so far up the estuary of the Wellstream as the narrow crossing-place between Walsoken and Wisbech, but if there were it is likely that they were kept filled in to facilitate the passage. Some Wisbech people still believe that there are wet quicksands in the area, and they base their conclusions upon the fact that, when one is making an excavation and reaches the level of the water-table in the subsoil, water seeps in quickly and the sides of the excavation fall in, form an incoherent bottom and submerge anyone down there at the time. But this is not a wet quicksand in the usual meaning of the term because it occurs under a *firm* land surface.

Old marshmen have told me about what they call 'stolen tides'. They are very rare and flow violently *as much as two hours earlier than local knowledge would expect*, or, since they have been printed, tide-tables predict. They are generally accompanied by an exceptionally fierce eagre (pronounced eager) or tidal bore, also sometimes called 'a shuff', with steep fast-moving waves. They said that stolen tides had caused

[1] For example, 'Yorkist', in a letter to *The Times* of 29 December 1950, and E. L. G. Stone, in another letter to that paper of 3 January 1951, showed that the consensus of text-books was in error in stating that Edward III agreed in the treaty of Northampton to send the Coronation Stone back to Scotland.

the death of members of their trade from time to time in past generations. One gained the impression from these men that the devil or some such powerful identity had a part in the matter. In this respect it is interesting to remember that the *word* eagre may be derived from the Scandinavian sea-god Aegir.

Charles Smith, mentioned before, reported that a stolen tide and eagre occurred in August of the year 1923. Luckily for him he was not out on the marshes at the time but on the bank just east of the east bank lighthouse, about 3 miles north of Sutton Bridge; he heard it coming some minutes before it could be seen. It rushed over the salt-marshes at a great rate in the form of a breaking wave, and then up the river. Very soon the level of the water against the seabank was so high that it filled a cattle trough which he showed me (in 1932) permanently fixed half-way up the bank not many yards east of the old lighthouse. An early account of an eagre is given by Ralph Thoresby in his Diary in 1680. It is quoted by Walker and Craddock in their *History of Wisbech* (p. 29) as follows:

> This morning, before we left Wisbech, I had the sight of an Hygre or Eagre, a most terrible flush of water that came up the river with so much violence that it sunk a coal vessel in the town, and with such a terrible noise that all the dogs in it did snarl and bite at the rolling waves, as though they would swallow up the river; the sight of which, having never seen the like before, much affected me, each wave surmounted the other with extraordinary violence.

The same *History of Wisbech* (1849) also states:

> On the opening of the Nene Outfall in 1830 the eagre, which had formerly preceded every tide [this is unlikely unless the authors meant every spring tide], vanished. It was formed among the obstructions and shallows at the mouth of the river, and used to come rushing on to Wisbech raising the water there suddenly from one to four or five feet.

It should be noted here that these eagres need not necessarily have been accompanied by a 'stolen tide' which appears to occur only very rarely. There are records of dangerous tidal bores in the neighbouring river Welland further north before its lower reaches were straightened out near Fossdike. The origin of the name of that river may be *Vēlandi*, 'the treacherous one'.[1]

Mr Ben Lee, foreman skipper of the Ely sugar factory, reported to me the same day as it happened that, when towing empty barges to King's Lynn, he unexpectedly met an eagre near Stow Bridge on the tidal part of the Ouse at 6.30 a.m. on 15 March 1933. It consisted of a wave with a broken crest about 3 feet high followed immediately by a smaller one; it was moving faster than a man could walk, and there was at least 3 feet more water in the river immediately it had passed. The tug was thrown up so suddenly that the chains coupling the last barge broke.

A tidal bore seems to be due to a high spring tide, the flowing of which is checked for a time by sandbanks and shallows at the mouth of an estuary, through which it eventually bursts and rushing on breaks into a wave or series of waves when it meets

[1] See Ekwall, *English River Names*, p. 446.

the outflowing fresh water of the river where the estuary narrows down. It seems that the more fresh water coming down at the time the greater are the waves. In this respect it should be noted that October is often wet and stormy, and that Brooks, in his *Climate Through the Ages* (pp. 372–3), indicates that the early thirteenth century falls within a period when violent storms and high tides combined to bring about abnormal marine inundations along the coasts of the North Sea. He attributes this to great solar activity at a time when the tidal range was approaching its maximum. Another point is that tidal bores are always greater in meandering river mouths. The lower reaches of the Wellstream were not straightened out till long after 1216 (see Map, Fig. 1).

Exceptional tidal surges occur from time to time in the North Sea between the Humber and the Thames; they have broken into the Norfolk Broads and endangered London's riverside, and they have been known to rise as much as seven feet higher than ordinary spring tides.[1] They seem to be the cause of stolen tides in the Wash. *The Morning Post* of 29 November 1932 gave an account of these tidal surges by an official of the London County Council. It was to the effect that a sudden veering of the wind from south-west to north-west and north had largely been the cause of a recent one. He went on to say:

> we have it on the authority of the Liverpool Tidal Institute that this veering of the wind, which also preceded the 1928 flood, is essential to the formation of an exceptionally high tide. The other conditions are that it should be followed by a northerly gale in the North Sea, and that the predicted tide should in any case be a high one. The effect of the wind is to drive a 'storm surge' southwards down the North Sea, and if its passage happens to coincide with high tide the level may be appreciably affected. It may be taken that this happens about twice a year, but it is estimated that the very high 1928 level may be expected on an average *only about once in sixty years.*

Hope quotes good authority to show that the *normal* time of low water at Wisbech on 12 October 1216 was about noon, and that it was a time of new moon, and only two days short of the highest spring tide. Therefore, we can assume that the King would be advised that the best time for his forces and baggage train to start fording the river would be about 10 a.m. that day, or two hours before expected low water.

In view of this I suggest that we are justified in believing that only such a small part of King John's baggage train as could fit into the supposed ford, or the quarter of a mile space between seabanks at Walsoken and Wisbech, was overwhelmed and deposited on the bottom of the river a short way up stream, where it started to turn south-west.[2] This was due to the combination of a very early-flowing or 'stolen' tide and a violent eagre due to a great tidal surge in the North Sea. Such a conclusion disposes of the need to suppose that any of the party attempted to cross the river at a time which would normally be too early or too late, or without a guide or directed by a treacherous one.

[1] See 'Recent Coastal Changes in South East England', *Geographical Journal*, vol. XCIII, May and June 1934.

[2] I now hear that since I was last in Wisbech, some years ago, houses and roads have been built over this area, which was, in those days, a field.

What was probably lost

Mrs Hilary Jenkinson's article 'The Jewels Lost in the Wash'[1] is valuable for its lists of the treasure the King collected at Corfe Castle between 24 June 1215 and 29 March 1216, and for a list of the regalia of his son, Henry III, when fully crowned in 1220. These lists are most impressive and should be studied by all treasure hunters (see Appendix). I cannot agree, however, with her conclusions as to what was lost: she seems to have been over-impressed by Hope's paper.

The King was not at Corfe Castle after August 1216. No evidence has been found to show that when he went on his last expeditions he took all or any part of this large collection of valuables with him, apart from the 'chapel' mentioned by Ralph of Coggeshall.

In view of the circumstances ruling at the time, what good reason could he have had for taking much with him? Since March that year he could have re-dispersed much of the treasure among people he had more reason to trust—to the monks of Westminster perhaps, who were the legal custodians of at least the regalia of the crown. Much of it may have remained at Corfe. There exists a receipt for a crown and robes brought back to London from Corfe for the coronation of Henry III in 1220.[2]

Another point worth considering is this: the King's army for some time past had been largely a mercenary one: also it seems likely that his normal revenues had been much reduced. Is it not therefore probable that he had been paying his soldiers with money raised by disposing of much of his treasure? History records many instances of such disposals by impecunious kings and nobles: hence the great rarity of medieval plate. It is likely that apart from the 'chapel' the only treasure with the King was the spoil from recent lootings, which could have been carried by the 'certain sumpter horses' mentioned by Ralph. There could not have been much to prevent local people recovering at low tide much of what had been lost, after the King had left for Swineshead that day. There would be no record of such finds if they became known because daily indictments did not start till a century later; neither did the Cambridgeshire coroner's rolls: nor were there any Cambridgeshire eyre rolls so early. The *curia regis* rolls contain no such details.

The following also seems to support my thesis.

Rot. Lit. Pat. (ed. T. D. Hardy, 1835, p. 199)

Rex omnibus etc. SCIATIS QUOD res et mercandise que sunt in navi quam Rad(uejus) filius Walteri ducit nostre sunt: quas quidem duci percepumus usque Grymesby. Et ideo vobis mandamus quod eidem Rad(uejo) vel rebus vel mercandisis in nave sua contentis nullum faciatis vel fieri permittatis dampnum vel impedimentum. Durent autem littere iste a die Veneris proxima post festum Sancti Dionisii a.r.n. xviii. in viii dies sequentes et in huius etc. fieri fecimus. T. me ipso apud Wysebeche xii die Oct. a.r.e. xviii.

Godefr'le Pohier, Osbs' fil'Walteri, Benedictus de Beautr', Thom' de Beaupre, Will(elmu)s Alemann (us) Reg' But et Johannes fil'Alan habent similes litteras in omnibus. T. Reg. apud Wysebech xii die Oct. a.r.n. xviii.

[1] See *History*, N.S., vol. VIII, no. 31, October 1923.

[2] See M. R. Holmes, 'The Crowns of England', *Archaeologia*, vol. LXXXVI (1937), pp. 76–7.

This can be translated to read:

The King to all etc. Be it known to you that the goods and merchandise which are in the ship which Ralph Fitzwalter brings are ours; we have ordered them to be brought to Grimsby. And therefore we command you neither to do nor to allow to be done any harm or hindrance to the said Ralph or to the goods or merchandise on board his ship. These letters are to be valid from Friday next (the 14th October) after the feast of St Denis in the 18th year of our reign and for eight days after. (And in witness of this we have caused, etc.) *Witness myself* at Wisbech, 12th October in the 18th year of his reign.

Godfrey le Pohier, Osbert Fitzwalter, Benedict de Beaupre, Thomas de Beautre, William the German (Alemanees), Reginald But and John Fitzalan have letters similar in all respects. Witness the King at Wisbech 12th October in the 18th year of our reign.

It should be noted that Wisbech was on the west side of the Wellstream. That is to say, the King must have crossed the river before he conducted this business. So here we find him ordering away to the north as many as eight shiploads of his property (which could have included any treasure he may have had with him at the time) just after he is supposed to have lost everything he possessed!

Conclusions

On the morning of 12 October, during a journey from King's Lynn to Swineshead, only part of King John's baggage train was overwhelmed by an abnormally early-flowing tidal surge when crossing a ford over the now extinct Wellstream river between Walsoken and Wisbech. Little of value was lost that could not have been recovered by local people at low water the following day.

APPENDIX

[*The following is taken from Mrs Hilary Jenkinson's Article 'The Jewels Lost in the Wash':* History, *New Series, vol.* 8, *No.* 31, *pp.* 164–7, *October*, 1923.]

During July 1215, King John gathered together at Corfe Castle:

'143 cups and 14 goblets, 14 dishes, 8 flagons, 5 pairs of basins, 40 belts, 6 clasps, 52 rings and two pendants; besides 4 shrines, 2 gold crosses, 3 gold combs, a gold vessel ornamented with pearls, 2 candelabra, 2 thuribles and 3 golden phylacteries.... The cups were mostly of white silver, but 10 were silver-gilt and one at least jewelled with sapphires.... The belts were of black and red leather or of silk, with a great diversity of ornamentation—green jasper, sapphires, turquoise—and silver and gold fittings. The same previous stones went to ornament the various clasps, in addition to garnets and pearls. The staffs seem to have been of extraordinary magnificence, being severally studded with rubies, sapphires, diamonds, garnets, a heliotrope, topazes and emeralds. The rings were chiefly set with rubies and sapphires, and there is mention of an episcopal ring with a great sapphire and pearls and garnets. One of the pendants was composed of nine sapphires and the other of a bedewin stone, a citron coloured stone and a pregnant stone. Three of the shrines came from Reading Abbey and contained relics: a silver shrine set with onyx and other stones, a small ivory shrine, and a red one with jewels; the fourth, from Ford Abbey, was jewelled gold and contained a cross with three sapphires and a coral formerly belonging to the Lord of Chester.'

On 1 March, 1216, 'the monks of Sibton handed over to him silver vessels by weight 134½ marks, besants and other gold by weight of 3 marks 1½ oz. and four great mazers with gold feet and bands'.

On 28 May, 1215, the Knights Templars delivered up to him the regalia of his grandmother Lady Empress Maud. It included 'a great Crown that came from Germany, a tunic of purple, sandals of the same cloth, a belt of embroidery with stones, a pair of shoes with frets of embroidery, a pair of gloves, dalmatic of dark purple, a royal pallium of purple with morse and brooch of gold, a silk cloth for bearing above the King in his coronation, a great sapphire of the same regale, a golden wand with a dove at top, two swords, to wit the sword of Tristram and another sword of the same regale, the golden spur of the same regale, a cup of gold of 8 marks 2 oz. weight, and a cross of gold of 3 marks 7½ oz. weight'.

On 29 March, 1216, the Knights Hospitallers handed over the King's regalia: it consisted of 'one wand of gold with a cross, to wit a sceptre, a red belt with precious stones which belonged to the regale, another belt of black skin, padded with red sendal, with previous stones, cut, set in a chase; another belt of leather padded with red sendal with great stones set in a chase; another belt of red leather padded with white leather with great stones set in a chase; another belt of black leather with roses and bars of gold with stones; a necklace or collar set in the middle with diamonds surrounded by rubies and emeralds; nine great necklaces with many precious stones; a crown with precious stones with a cross and seven flowers; a royal tunic of red samite with embroideries with previous stones in orles; a pair of gloves with stones and another pair with flowers of gold; a white tunic of diaper banded with embroidery; a regale of red samite orled and marked all over with the cross in embroidery, with stones, great divers and precious, with two brooches for attaching the said pall; a pair of sandals of samite with embroidery; two pairs of samite shoes, and eleven pairs of basins weighing 62 marks 17 oz.'.

POSTSCRIPT

Since this paper went to press some confirmation of my statements about 'stolen' tides and tidal surges has been given by the great transgressions of the sea which occurred along the east coast during the night of Saturday, 31 January, 1953. *The Times* of 3 February reports that the Minister of Agriculture, speaking at a parliamentary debate the previous day, said: 'The evening tide on Saturday was two hours earlier than predicted, and maintained itself at a high level for several hours. At all places along the east coast it was six feet and more above predicted level and was accompanied by strong winds and heavy wave action.'

PROCEEDINGS OF THE CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY

VOLUME XLVI
JANUARY 1952 TO DECEMBER 1952
15*s. net.*

CONTENTS

Officers and Council of the Society 1952–1953 — *page* vi

Report and Summary of Accounts for the Year 1951 — vii

Jewelled Saxon Pendant from the Isle of Ely — 1
By T. C. LETHBRIDGE, M.A., F.S.A.

King John's Treasure — 4
By GORDON FOWLER, M.A., F.S.A., F.G.S.

Some Further Examples of Sgraffito Ware from Cambridge — 21
By G. H. S. BUSHNELL, M.A., PH.D, F.S.A. AND J. G. HURST, B.A.

Medieval Wells at Cherry Hinton — 27
By J. G. HURST, B.A. AND C. I. FELL, M.A.

An Early Iron Age Settlement at Linton, Cambridgeshire — 31
By C. I. FELL, M.A.

Index — 43