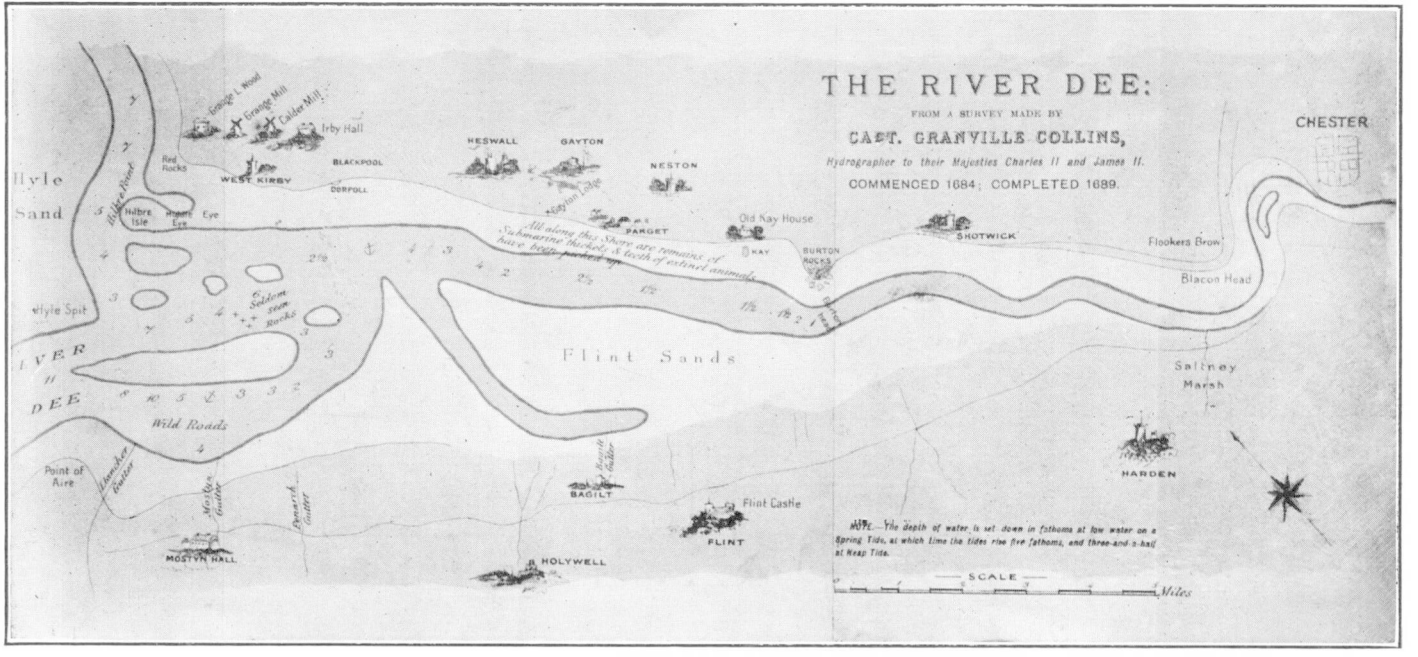

THE RIVER DEE:
FROM A SURVEY MADE BY
CAPT. GRANVILLE COLLINS,
Hydrographer to their Majesties Charles II and James II.
COMMENCED 1684; COMPLETED 1689.
CHESTER
Grange L. Wood
Grange Mill
Calder Mill
Irby Hall
Red Rocks
WEST KIRBY
BLACKPOOL
DORPOLL
HESWALL
GAYTON
NESTON
Hilbre Isle
Hilbre Eye
Eye
PARGET
Old Kay House
KAY
BURTON ROCKS
SHOTWICK
Flookers Brow
Blacon Head
All along this Shore are remains of Submarine Buckets & teeth of extinct animals
Flint Sands
Saltney Marsh
HARDEN
Wild Roads
Point of Aire
MOSTYN HALL
BAGILT
Flint Castle
FLINT
HOLYWELL
NOTE.—The depth of water is set down in fathoms at low water on a Spring Tide, at which time the tides rise five fathoms, and three-and-a-half at Neap Tide.
SCALE
Miles

The River Dee

BY FRANK SIMPSON

(Read 15th January, 1907)

THE River Dee rises in Merionethshire not far from Dolgelly, runs through Bala Lake, skirts the counties of Denbigh and Flint, and so through the lovely Vale of Llangollen, passes Bangor-Isycoed till it becomes a boundary to Cheshire near Shocklach. Passing by Farndon to Aldford it has Cheshire on both sides, thence running on through Eaton and Chester, it empties itself into the Irish Sea, much nearer to the Flintshire than the Cheshire side, and not far from the Point of Air.

It is one of the most historical rivers in the kingdom. Had it not been for the river the history of this City would not have been so unique, as the Romans would not have selected Chester as one of their principal "military stations"; for we know they always fixed upon sites where there was a constant supply of fresh water and, if possible, a communication with the sea.

Chester was a port of great consequence even in early times. It was a station for the English navy, and frequently the seat of the Court of the Mercian kingdom.

In 973 A.D. King Edgar sailed with his fleet from the estuary of the Severn to Chester on the Dee, and there came to meet him six kings, and they all plighted their troth to him that they would be his fellow-workers by land and sea.

It was at Chester that Edgar's son Æthelred assembled his fleet A.D. 1000. In this year the King went into Cumberland, and ravaged it well-nigh all; his ships should have come to meet him from Chester, but they were not able; then they devastated Anglesea.

In 1055, after supporting Ælfgar the fleet went to Chester and there awaited their pay which Ælfgar had promised them. Tolls were levied with a very stringent hand. If ships came or departed to or from the port of the City without the King's licence, the King and the Earl received from every man who was in them forty shillings.

If any ship came contrary to the King's command and against his peace, then the King and the Earl took the ships and the men and all things in it. But if she came in the King's peace and with his licence, then they who were in her quietly sold such things as they had; but on the ship's departure the King and the Earl had four pence for every last. If the ship had marterns skins on board, the præfect of the King might command the owners to sell to no one until they had been first shewn to him. Whosoever failed to observe this forfeited forty shillings.

Edward II. in 1311 made a requisition on the Mayor of Chester to supply two ships fully-equipped with men, arms, and provisions for his Scottish expedition.

The Black Prince's charters confer on the City admiralty powers, giving the Mayor authority to make attachments in the water of the Dee between Chester and the "Arnold's Eye," for tolls and customs and dues on imposts.

Richard II. appointed Chester as a rendezvous in 1392 for the ships which were to convey the Duke of Gloucester to Ireland; and it was one of the conditions of the pardon granted by Henry IV. in 1403 to the citizens for their share in Hotspur's rebellion, that they should furnish shipping for the relief of Beaumaris Castle.

Several times during the same reign the City was required to equip a small fleet to guard the North Wales coast against the Scottish cruisers, the Mayor of Chester acting as admiral.

As time went on navigation was greatly impeded by the shifting sands, and the port proper was gradually removed from the City nearer the mouth of the river.

The silting of the sand which destroyed the wharfages of Old Quay and Parkgate was subject for legislation so far back as 1499.

The ravages of the sea have been so great that Dove Point has been swept away; a road and part of a racecourse have been swallowed up; and an outer Leasowe lighthouse has been carried off; and at the present time, beyond the extension of the embankment, an average of two to three yards of land are every year being washed away at Hilbre. The tide here flows with great rapidity, and owing to this and to

fogs many lives have been lost in crossing the sands to and from the mainland. Eventually Dawpool, which is just below Caldy on the verge of the river, became the port and the rendezvous for the embarkation of the troops of Cheshire and Lancashire; near here the gallant Schomberg encamped August 1689, and soon after embarked for Ireland with his force numbering 16000 men, including the Cheshire Regiment. King William III. shortly afterwards sailed for Ireland from the place which is still known as the King's Gap.

Navigation had become so bad through this continual silting up of the river that an order was made dated 3rd March, 1541, addressed to Mr. Hennage, Master of the King's woods beyond Flint, directing him to deliver to the Mayor of Chester 200 trees of His Majesty's woods in Flintshire and Cheshire that be nearest Lightfote Pole, to be used in making a new haven there.

Henry VIII. having conferred a sum of £40 on the newly erected college in Chester[1] diverted this gift to the construction of this new haven.

In February 1547 the Lords of the Council, in reply to a petition for aid in carrying out the projected work, announce that they have advised King Edward in favour of it.

A further appeal was made 19th July, 1551, to the Lord Treasurer (the Marquis of Winchester) by the Magistrates of Chester, praying his intercession with the King for a sum of money in aid of the new haven or quay in Wirral, then building of stone in the face

[1] This would probably be the "Old King's School."

and belly of the sea, which would cost at least £5,000 or £6,000.

Among the City records in the Muniment Room at the Town Hall, Chester, is a book entitled "The book of benevolence or voluntary contributions made in 1559 towards the making of the new haven." They were called voluntary contributions; but there are records of some people being imprisoned for not paying.

In 1560 a collection was made "the Sunday after All Saints' Day" in all the churches throughout the kingdom, to raise a fund to build this new quay or new haven. A special assessment was levied in Chester for the same purpose.

The work was in progress in 1565 when Anthony Hurleston was appointed overseer at a weekly salary of 3s. 4d. Early in 1576 the work at the new haven, after lingering on for nearly thirty years, was approaching completion, and the City authorities appealed through the Vice-Chamberlain to the Earl of Leicester for a grant out of the customs.

In 1586 news was received in the City "that 700 Spanyardes ships had landed at Worrall"; this caused great excitement in Chester, but much to the relief of the citizens proved to be a false alarm.

Appeals for help to complete the quay continued until 1608, when through want of funds the work could not be continued; and at a later date was partly demolished and eventually sold (1779) to Sir Roger Mostyn.

In 1693 Evan Jones brought forward a proposal for making the River Dee navigable, and bringing up ships of a hundred tons burthen to the Roodee, at his own

expense, on condition that he should have all such lands as should be recovered on payment of the usual rent of recovered lands to the Crown, and one-fourth of the clear rents or profits to the City Companies; but this was rejected.

The credit for the first suggestion for recovering the navigation of the river is generally ascribed to a Mr. Yarranton, who made a survey of the Dee and its estuary in 1674. He drew a plan and formed the project of a new channel in a straight line from Chester, terminating opposite to Flint Castle; and also a scheme for recovering a large tract of land from the sea.

Yarranton published a book in 1677, the title of which was "England's Improvement by Sea and Land, to outdo the Dutch without fighting, etc." Such another scheme had been suggested fifty years before Yarranton's book appeared, by a Mr. Webb, a citizen of Chester.

In 1698 Francis Gell made a proposal to the corporate body nearly similar to that of Evan Jones; this proposal was at first rejected, but upon being brought forward a secoud time, and security being proposed by Mr. Gell, it was agreed to by the Corporation 16th October, 1698. A petition was in consequence presented to Parliament, and in 1699 an Act passed vesting for twenty-one years the right of reclamation in the Corporation of Chester; but at the expiration of that time very little had been accomplished, and after spending considerable sums, and much litigation with landowners, the scheme was entirely abandoned.

In 6 George II. (1732) a further Act gave the right of reclamation from Chester to the sea to Nathaniel

Kinderley and his heirs and assigns for ever, and allowed him for compensation such lands as he reclaimed in the vast estuary of the Dee, commonly known as the "white sands." This Act stipulated that there should be sixteen feet of water in every part of the river at a moderate spring tide; and also enacts that, if when the navigation is completed it "shall be proved that vessels laden with cheese, drawing fourteen feet of water cannot safely pass down the river, Mr. Kinderley or his assigns shall within twelve months after notice of this fact given, at their own cost and charges, make a wet dock or basin capable of holding twenty ships at least within two miles of the lower parts of the works of navigation."

14 George II. (1740) another Act was obtained by which the undertakers were duly incorporated by the name of "The Company of Proprietors of the undertaking for recovering and preserving the navigation of the Dee." Kinderley's successors, now duly incorporated, opened a new cut or channel ten miles in length from Chester down to Connah's Quay; the now existing river channel. The first sod was cut 20th April, 1733, by Mr. Manley, and the water of the old channel was turned into that of the new in April 1737; this enabled vessels of from 250 to 300 tons to come up to the City. Lands adjacent to this new channel had been reclaimed by Kinderley and his successors, and are to-day known as "Sealand," which comprises some of the richest farmsteads and most fertile soil in the kingdom. Some 27,300 acres of this reclaimed land was offered for sale by auction November 24th, 1906.

17 George II. (1743) a third Act was passed lowering the rates of tonnage from 6d. to 2d. per ton, and

reducing the depth of water from sixteen to fifteen feet from the sea to Wilcoxon Point (nearly opposite the Gas Works).

Little is known of Kinderley. He appears to have been an engineer, and was associated with the draining of the Fen country. Though nominally the original undertaker, he was in reality only the agent for the Manleys of Lache Hall, and would probably be brought into contact with Sir John Glynne and other riparian landowners.

It is more than probable that Kinderley's new inclosure scheme did more to destroy than restore the navigation of the river.

By the Act 6 George II. (1732) the passage across the river for passengers on horseback, or for carts or carriages, could only be demanded of the ferry boats when the river was so deep as that at low water the river was not fordable; a clause so indefinite in its construction as to give rise to constant disputes; to remedy that the Act of 17 George II. (1743) stated:—

"That two ferry boats should at all times be constantly kept by the company at their own proper costs and charges, with proper and sufficient attendants, and all good, substantial, and effectual ropes, tackle, and necessaries proper thereunto; and that the person or persons attending such boats shall ferry over all such passengers in the said boats at all times when required thereto, without being paid anything for the same."

By a fourth Act of 26 George II. (1752) the Company are directed to pay £200 annually for ever to Sir John Glynne, his heirs, &c., and other freeholders of the Parish of Hawarden, for the waste lands, commons, and salt marshes on the north side of the new channel.

This is now paid to the Hawarden Embankment Trustees, who receive and deal with a rent-charge of £250, called the Hawarden annuities.

From 1743 down to 1899 the original Company of undertakers founded by Kinderley did little to improve the navigation of the river. The Chester Corporation then obtained from Parliament an Act constituting a Conservancy Board for the maintenance of the navigation, leaving to the old Company (called the Dee Land Company) only the work of effecting further reclamation.

Past experience has demonstrated only too well the variable moods of the Dee. From damage done in 1851 enormous gaps still remain in the banks at Connah's Quay. The fact that the London and North-Western Railway Company voluntarily keep in repair the Flintshire embankments to protect their line from flooding is further evidence of the dangerous character of the coast. The enormous expenditure this entails may be gathered from the following extracts from the local papers :—

"October 8th, 1904. The London and North-Western Railway Company have been all week hurriedly preparing the defences of their important Holyhead line, near Holywell, against the high tides which are due this week-end, and must inevitably swamp the narrow ribbon of land separating the railroad from the Dee estuary. On Monday an additional hundred men were drafted to the scene, and now, altogether, there are six hundred men engaged in the fight against time and tide. The great sixty yards' gap, about a mile from Holywell station in the direction of Mostyn, is being daily visited by hundreds of people. Another big slice is almost gone. All is bustle. Platelayers, masons, and navvies are there in their hundreds heaving great sleepers, laying rails, unloading clay, and placing great stones. There are foremen urging them to their utmost."

Another account dated October 22nd, reads:—

"ANOTHER GREAT BREACH IN THE EMBANKMENT.

"The sea has made a fresh and most serious breach in the Dee embankment on the Mostyn side of the existing gap. It is about fifty yards distant from the original gap, and is about twenty to thirty feet wide. A section of the embankment is now intact, but cut off at both ends; and these ends are being eroded rapidly by the ebb and flow of the tides. The engineers of the L. & N.-W. have now realized that for just a mile of its length, the Dee embankment—thirty feet broad at the base and twelve at the top—will be washed away, and they are taking the necessary measures to limit the scope of the mischief by the sea to their trunk lines of railway.

"Now for over a fortnight 300 ten-ton trucks of quarry stone have been run daily to the foreshore, and either poured into the sea breach or utilised to form a fresh embankment. Three schooners are also bringing stone from Denbighshire quarries and landing them. It is estimated that the railway company have already brought upon the ground about fifty thousand tons of material, in addition to which they have pitched six thousand tons of quarry stone into the breach itself, in order to prevent the seas breaking over the land. Meanwhile the work of protecting the line itself by the construction of a sea-wall, a mile in length, is rapidly proceeding."

During the latter part of 1906 these embankments again received much damage, and proved silent witnesses of the tremendous forces of wind and wave even at a distance of many miles from the river's mouth.

Millions of money have been spent on it, and to-day it is in a worse state than when these so-called improvements commenced. During litigation which commenced in 1870 the late Lord Wenlock lost upwards of £125,000 which he had loaned on mortgage to the original proprietors.

During the 18th century many families of nobility were brought to the verge of ruin by investing in

Dee stock; many persons sold their shares at ninety per cent. loss.

In 1903 Messrs. Stephenson & Son, the eminent engineers, were asked to make a report on the Dee; this they did after making a careful survey, taking soundings, &c.

According to the report and plan prepared, the scheme was to construct a channel from Mostyn Deep to Saltney, fifteen miles in length, the cutting of five miles of the Bagillt clay bank, and the removal of a mass of freestone known as the "Rock Bar" at Connah's Quay; in addition to these trifles they advise the continuation of the northern training wall towards Mostyn Deep, some six or seven miles, and a fleet of dredgers, the whole at a cost of £500,000.

At a sitting of the Royal Commission on Canals and Waterways, held in London, October 31st, 1906, evidence was called with respect to the scheme for the improvement of the navigation of the Dee. It was stated that the Queen's Ferry Colliery Company, Limited, had sunk pits on the south bank with the view of driving under the river and working the coal that had been proved by boring to exist under the reclaimed land on the north bank. After tunnelling for the last three or four years they had now struck coal, and this expert added, there will be sufficient coal to come to that colliery to last the next one hundred years; at a low computation it is estimated at a hundred million tons, and that only so far as the one colliery was concerned.

No doubt engineering science has advanced, but very careful thought and investigation is required before spending such a huge sum of money. It requires more

than ordinary skill and foresight, especially as the embankment will have for its foundation the treacherous "Sands of Dee."

Supposing the pecuniary difficulty, in itself a "Rock Bar" to the scheme, were surmounted, the gain to Flintshire would be immense, to Chester problematical, as by parliamentary enactment the course of the river cannot be diverted to the Cheshire side.

Why should not our Welsh neighbours who harried us enough in days of yore now cease from troubling, work out their own salvation, and make Holywell a port to develop their mineral traffic?

During the 18th century Parkgate became a fashionable bathing place. Lady Hamilton, a native of Nesse, visited here in 1784 that she might receive benefit from the bathing in removing some eruption of her skin. She however complained about the expense of the bathing horse and cost of her dress, which amounted to the sum of 1/2 per day.

Handel stayed at the "George Hotel"; he was detained on account of the wind being unfavourable for his embarkation for Ireland. Whether he wrote his "Messiah" here or not, is uncertain: being unable to proceed on his journey, it was only natural that he should wish to try part of his great work, especially as there were trained singers close at hand. He therefore invited the services of those of the Chester Cathedral choir, and other musicians who could read at sight, to try the choruses; but after repeated attempts we are told they could not get through "And with his stripes." In a rage he said, "I thought you could all read at sight." "Yes, but not at first sight," they replied.

At spring tides the water near the "Old Quay House" (now a land-locked farm) is shown by Collins' survey to have been between thirty and forty feet deep. This house was for some years tenanted by Mr. Melling, a well-known marine artist. It is said that Samuel Warren, Q.C., wrote his successful novel "Ten Thousand a Year" in this house. On the Cheshire side of the river near to Neston is a large plain of sand intersected with numerous gutters, that eventually find their way to the bed of the river. This tract of land is rarely covered with the tide, and there is grass upon it which for many years was the winter habitation of the barnacle geese; they seldom fed in the day time, but sat out in the middle of the marsh motionless for hours until night, when they separated into small flocks and flew about to feed. As a rule these geese arrived about the 7th October, remained a few days, and then disappeared for a time, afterwards returning in great numbers. Many were shot and sent to Chester market, where they found a quick sale at 2/6 each. They have now disappeared from the Dee, a few stragglers only appearing in 1904. Passing Burton one cannot help but pause and call to mind "Kingsley's" pathetic verses "Sands-o'-Dee." Doubts have often been expressed as to whether the Chester or Scotch Dee was meant, but the following communication received by me some short time ago should remove any doubt that may have existed:—

"Keyes Eversley,
Winchfield,
March 3rd, 1906.

Dear Mr. Simpson,

It is always a pleasure to be of the slightest use to anyone in Chester; and in this case I am particularly glad to be able to settle the point about the "Sands of Dee" once and for all.

Not only did my father tell me that it was written about the Cheshire Dee, but a moment's thought I should have supposed would show those who claim the poem for Scotland that they are in error, if they read the first and second verses carefully. The Scottish Dee flows east. How, therefore, would it be possible for the "Western wind" to bring up the "Western tide"? Also, the poem was written in 1849, and at that time my father had never set foot in Scotland; though Cheshire, from which our family came originally, was well-known to him by study and affection, if not by close observation. . . . . .

Believe me,
Yours very truly,
ROSE G. KINGSLEY."

At Shotwick there were extensive salt works; the river here swept round and formed a bay, where vessels loaded the salt. Here also were the remains of an ancient castle whose walls had been washed by the waters of the Dee. This was one of a chain of fortresses built by Hugh Lupus to protect the frontier of his Palatine Earldom from the incursions of the Welsh, to which the shallow waters of the Dee rendered this part of the Hundred more exposed. Among the castles then erected for the purpose of defence, Shotwick was one of the most important. None of the stones now remain in their original position, but some may be seen in the village, having been carted away to repair walls, and in some cases to build pig-styes. It was from here Henry II. set sail on one of his expeditions to Ireland.

From Burton to Connah's Quay is a causeway erected by the Dee Enclosure Company for reclaiming the marshland, and converting it to grazing purposes. Thousands of acres have been thus enclosed, and are now used for pasturage. The enclosures were commenced in 1736, and are still in progress.

During the great storm of 1878 a heavy breach was made in this causeway. To repair this breach men were employed to remove the sub-soil which overlies the sandstone rock of which the "Cop" was constructed. In course of the work during 1877 about twenty-nine skeletons were discovered about five feet below the surface, lying side by side, their heads with one exception laid to the west and feet to the east. They measured from five feet ten inches to six feet; the teeth were white and perfect; not a vestige of clothing was about them; neither arms or ornaments of any kind which might serve as a clue to their identity.

The bridge in the near distance is known as Hawarden Bridge, worked by hydraulic power, and over which the Great Central Company run their trains. In the immediate neighbourhood are a number of works employing many hands; one of them upwards of 2,000. The chairman of the Company a short time ago before a Royal Commission, stated that his firm came to the Dee simply and solely because of the water facilities; and that if the river were improved his firm would enlarge their works, and probably double the number of those whom they already employ.

Nearer Chester is another bridge, used for passenger and vehicular traffic. This took the place some few years ago of a ferry-boat, and was known as the higher ferry. The River Dee Company caused borings to be made through the reclaimed land, when it was found that the "sea sand" was twenty-four yards deep: it is therefore evident by this vast deposit of sand, that the silting up of the Dee estuary had been taking place even during the Roman occupation of Deva.

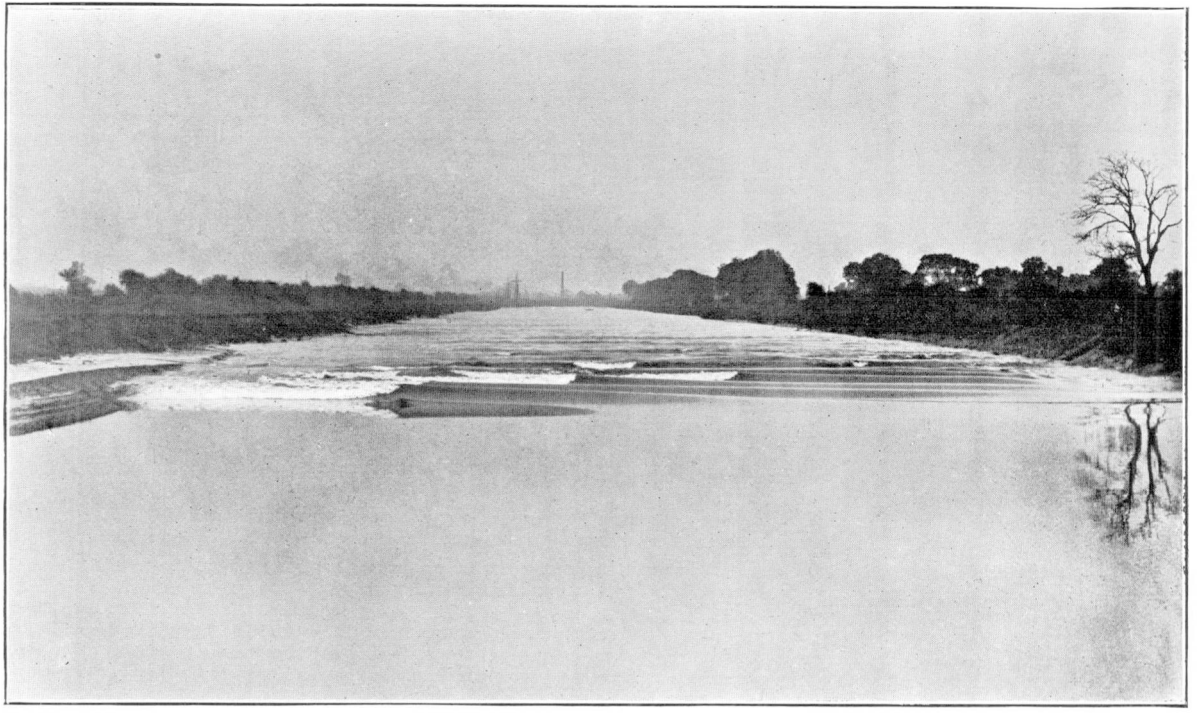
A few miles nearer Chester is "Saltney Wharf," used in connection with the Great Western Railway. From here we get a long straight stretch of the river, reaching to what was known as the "Cheese Stage." The stage has now entirely disappeared. This is a favourite place for people to assemble to see the "Dee Bore" or head of the tide, which has been estimated to flow at the rate of eight or nine miles an hour. When standing here we hear a rumbling sound, gradually getting stronger and stronger; shortly, we see coming round the Saltney corner a line of foam, getting larger, working from side to side as it comes in contact with the bank on either side, rushing along carrying with it any obstacle that may be in its way. The illustration is "the bore" which did such great damage to the Dee embankments in October 1904.

A little nearer the City is the "Crane Wharf," principally used by small coasting vessels. During the early part of the 19th century there was a daily communication between Chester and Liverpool by the packet from this wharf, and great numbers of passengers were conveyed. The water here at one time flowed up to the "New or Water Tower," as shown by *Braun's* map published about 1580.

Within a few hundred yards of the wharf are several large gasometers. Whilst preparing the foundations for one of these (June 1886) there was found beneath seventeen feet of river silt and five feet six inches of gravel, a Roman pig of lead, which may now be seen in the Archæological room of the Grosvenor Museum, bearing the following inscription:—

IMP . VESP . AUG . V . T . IMP . III . . S

DECEANGI



The Dee Bore

Frank Simpson, Photo.

The expansion is: Imperatore Vespasiano Augusto V. Tito Imperatore III Consulibus. The word "Deceangi" informs us that the lead came from the territories of the Ceangi, who then inhabited the present counties of Flint, Denbigh, and Carnarvon. This pig of lead had probably been brought from Flint by water, and had been lost overboard in process of landing. During the 16th century Flintshire was very prominent in regard to its lead production, and continues so to the present time.

Near to these gasometers a century ago were several noted ship-building yards. This industry had been carried on at Chester for many centuries; several vessels of war were built here carrying about twenty-four guns each; and merchant ships have been launched of upwards of five hundred tons burthen.

In *Lysons'* "Magna Britannia," published 1810, it states:—

"There are now more ships built at Chester than at Liverpool, they being in great estimation among the merchants of that and other principal sea-ports of England and Scotland as particularly well founded, and in the mariners' phrase 'sea-worthy.'"

Passing under the railway bridge, erected in 1846, which collapsed the following year during the passage of a train, several people being killed, we get a view of the Roodee: it now contains 65 acres 1 rood 32 poles of land, but at one time was of much larger dimensions, extending from the Water Tower to the Bridgegate. It lay open to the tide till about the year 1587. At the close of the 16th century the Corporation, to whom it belonged, devised to one Thomas Lyneal, servant of Sir Francis Walsingham, this pasture for the term of

twenty-one years, together with as much land as he could gain from the sea. He was also to make at his own costs a quay for boats and barques to unload at full sea near the Watergate, for which he was at first to have twopence for every vessel passing with any lading, but after that the sum of fourpence, and Lyneal was to pay an annual rent of £20 to the City.

The name is taken from "Eye," the watery situation; and the Saxon word "Rode," later changed to "Rood," the cross which stood there.

In 1401 an award was made that it could not be tithed by the Rector of Holy Trinity in consequence of its being land recovered from the sea; although tithe free the Rector had the privilege of gratuitously pasturing one horse; this was in force up to 1820. The Rector now receives £5 per annum from the Chester Corporation in lieu of the former right.

The Grosvenor Bridge here passes over the Dee. The first stone was laid by the Marquis of Westminster 1st October, 1827, and it was formally opened by Queen (then Princess) Victoria October 1832. It was built with the approaches at a cost of £36,000. The bridge at that time was unequalled in the history of bridge building.

Following the course of the river, we arrive where once stood the Shipgate, sometimes called the "hole in the wall" (at one time the only entrance into Chester from the suburb of Handbridge), so named because ships of burthen came and unloaded near it: it was the landing place to the ferry from Handbridge prior to a bridge being erected. It was removed April 1831, but may now be seen in the Groves. If from this

point (where originally stood the Shipgate) we look across the river to the covered stand or shelter, we get the exact line of the old Roman ford. From about this spot King Edgar was rowed up the Dee by eight tributary kings, in token of their subjection to his rule. *Bradshawe*, the monk of St. Werburgh's Abbey, says:—

"Kynge Edgar approached the City of Legions,
Nowe called Chestre, specified afore,
Where viii kynges mette of divers nacions,
Ready to give Edgar reverence and honour,
Legiance and fidelite, deeply sworne ful sore
At the same cite; after to be obedient
Prompt at his callying to come to his parliament.

"From the Castell he went to the water of Dee
By a prive posturne through walles of the towne.
The kyng took his barge with mycle rialte,
Rowing upwarde to the Churche of Saynt John;
The forsayd viii kynges with him went alone.
Kynge Edgar keyt the storne, as most principall;
Eche kyng had an ore to labour withall."

The open space on the south bank has always been known as King Edgar's field: tradition says his palace stood there. The projecting rock is partially excavated, and known as "Edgar's cave"; at the entrance is a Roman sculpture representing Minerva, accompanied by her usual attribute "the owl"; this is now partly obliterated.

The Dee Bridge here crosses the river; this is a genuine relic of Plantagenet times. In 1280 a tax was laid on the whole county to rebuild it under an order from Edward I.; previously there had existed a wooden bridge from the time of Ethelfleda.

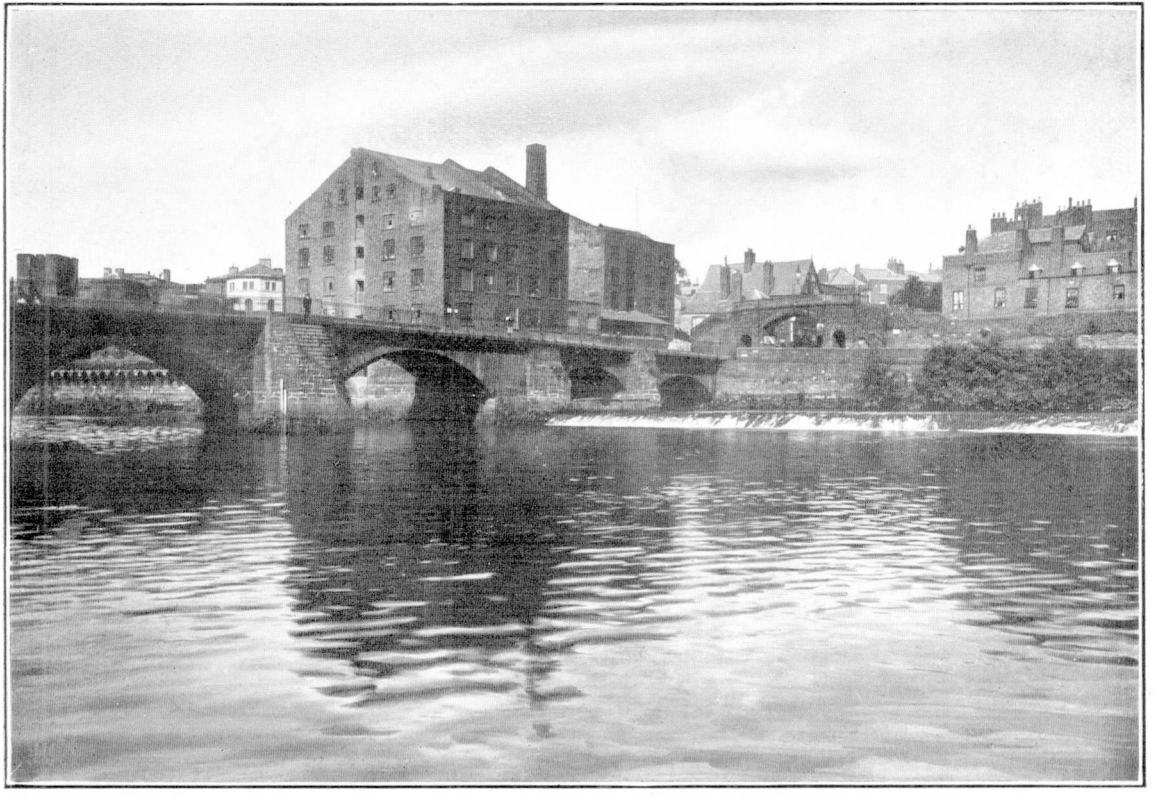
In 1227 one bridge collapsed, and the high tides washed its successor away in 1279. In 1499 the south

end being much decayed was taken down and rebuilt, and a tower for its defence added at the Handbridge entrance; this was taken down about the time (1782) the present gate was erected. It was widened on the east side in 1826 by a footpath. There are seven arches visible, no two being alike.

At the north end of the bridge stand the "Old Dee Mills"; the date of their first erection is not known; mention is made of them in a deed of Hugh Lupus which dates them back at least to the Norman Conquest. These mills have been destroyed by fire four times; the first conflagration broke out about twelve o'clock at night on Saturday, September 26th, 1789; the second about the same hour on Saturday, March 6th, 1819, on which occasion the progress of the flames was so rapid that the whole of the premises with the exception of part of the outward wall were destroyed in less than six hours, and the loss sustained was upwards of £40,000. A third fire took place in January 1847; and on May 9th, 1895, they were for the fourth time wrecked by fire.

In the year 1284 they were leased by Edward I. for twelve years at a rental of £200 per annum to Richard the Engineer; this would be equivalent to about £5,000 of our present money: at this period and until 1648 every inhabitant of the City lay under obligation to grind at these mills, excepting the tenants of the Abbot and monks of St. Werburgh: this may account for the heavy rental.

The Black Friars of Chester in 1396 were made "tolfre" and "hopper free" at these mills; a privilege also extended to the White or Carmelite Friars of the City February 13th, 1400, on the petition of the Prior



Dee Bridge, Mills, and Weir

Frank Simpson, Photo.

and Convent, which set forth that they were so impoverished by a great murrain and a raid committed in the parts round about them, that they could not serve God or live honestly without aid.

Ray in his proverbial phrases has the following:--"If thou hadst the rent of the Dee Mills thou wouldst spend it." The Black Prince granted them for life to Sir Howell y Fwyall, Constable of Criccieth Castle, in reward for his bravery at the battle of Poictiers, where he took the French King prisoner.

From these mills the song of the "Jolly Miller of the Dee" derived its title.

The Causeway or Weir on the east side of the bridge is recorded to have been first built by Hugh Lupus, the Conqueror's nephew, who granted the fishing above the weir to several of his dependents, reserving to himself the "Earl's pool." On the south side of this pool once stood the salmon cage, now, with the buildings and skin-yard adjoining, abolished.

On February 5th, 1601, a great part of the causeway broke down, so that no water could come near the mills until the breach was stopped in the May following.

During the 17th century there was much litigation respecting the causeway, which was deemed not only an injury to the lands above, but was supposed to prevent the stream of the Dee from having its natural effect in cleansing the harbour from the accumulating sands.

In 1646 Parliament made an Order for the destruction within four months both of the causeway and mills, but it was never carried out. Some such

measure as this had been brought forward by Sir Richard Trevor[2] in 1608, and was then resisted by the Gamull family: the matter was referred to the Privy Council, and by them to the Judges, who agreed that the causeway should remain.

Many able authorities of to-day attribute this silting up of the Dee to the erection of this causeway, as materially lessening the natural scour. The citizens began to complain (1377) about depression in trade, consequent upon the destruction of the port and the gradual silting up of the river. A similar complaint was made in 1508.

King Edward VI. granted the mills with the fishery at Chester, in exchange for the estates of Bourne and Moreton in Lincolnshire, to Sir Richard Cotton, from whose family they were purchased in 1587, subject to a reserved rent of £100 per annum, by Thomas Gamull, father of Sir Francis Gamull, Bart., and were inherited by Sir Francis' coheiresses: since that time they passed through successive hands until they were purchased by the Corporation, together with the water-rights pertaining to them.

Looking east, we see the Suspension Bridge erected in 1852, forming a connection between the suburb of Queen's Park and the City. The bridge has a span of 262 feet, and is 417 feet in length. The meadows on the right were anciently known as the "Earl's Eye," and were covered with water at every tide.

A little beyond the bend of the river are Boughton Fords; here the river is wide and very shallow. During the Roman occupation of Chester there was a properly constructed ford for the passage of man

[2] Sir Richard Trevor owned Marford Mill.

and beast. Several Roman rings have been found here, which are now preserved in the Archæological Society's collection at the Grosvenor Museum.

From the "Red House" onwards towards Heron Bridge stretches the long reach, on which the regatta is held each year. For nearly six miles the woods of Eaton may be seen along the right bank. On the opposite side Huntington Hall is just visible: it belonged at one time to the Cotton family, and after that became the property of the Beverleys, and at a later date of the Spencer family. In 1772 Huntington Hall belonged to Richard Williams, Esq., of Mold, whose father was Rector of Hawarden. This Hall was at one time a residence of importance, but all trace of the ancient manor house has disappeared: there is, however, a moat still left in a piece of land adjoining the present hall, and within it the mansion stood. There are four empty moats within a little more than a mile of Huntington Hall, and no record is left of the domiciles that they formerly encircled: the moats in this part of Cheshire are almost innumerable.

The part known as Heron Bridge is one of the most beautiful spots on the river: on the right bank stands a house approached from the road, but its chief front is towards the river; it lies among beautiful trees on a bank overlooking a bend of the Dee. There was a Heronry here at one time; and on either side of the river at this point there were two very large willow trees whose branches met and formed (as it were) a natural bridge; from these facts the place derives its name.

Eccleston Ferry, better known to old Cestrians as "Jimmy-the-boats," is now a favourite resort for

pleasure seekers during the boating season. The ferry house is a modern timbered building of very different design to the old house of 1810: the ferry-boat was worked with ropes, but now has more modern appliances worked with chains under the water. According to Domesday Book, Eccleston has had her ferry-boat for upwards of nine hundred years. There was a weir about here at one time, and a salmon fishery farmed by a London Company.

In connection with the Dee was an ancient office called the "Sergeancy of the Dee" *(custos ripariæ aquæ de Dee)*, an office originally pertaining to the Earldom of Chester.

During the early part of the 14th century Robert de Eton claimed, by right of himself and his ancestors who had held the same beyond legal memory, the Sergeancy of the Dee from Eaton weir to Blacon. It included the right to remove all nets unlawfully placed in the river, and a certain proportion of all nets forfeited and of the fish therein; and to have a ferry-boat at Eaton over the water, for which he should be paid by the neighbours according to their pleasure; but from every stranger, if he has a horse and is a merchant, one halfpenny; if not a merchant the payment to be at his option.

Rival claims seem to have been made by the Chester Company of "Drawers in Dee" in 1700, which led to the abandonment of some of the Grosvenor claims in 1705; and a dispute of long standing between the Corporation and the Grosvenor family, as to certain fishery rights, was settled in favour of the Corporation in 1710.

Passing Eaton Hall on our right we are at the part called "crooked Dee," where it makes a considerable loup, going out of its way for half a mile and returning to its former course. The bridge crossing the river is known as the Iron Bridge. This ornamental structure of 150 feet span was erected by Lord Westminster in 1824, at a cost of £8,000. This locality is known as Aldford, deriving its name from a ford across the Dee; so great was its importance, that a strong castle was built for its defence to prevent the Welsh from crossing into Cheshire. It was also the ancient communication between the northern and southern Watling Streets. The form of the castle was singular, resembling in its plan when added to the surroundings, a great Welsh harp laid flat on the ground. The outer court was triangular, with the exception of a corner rounded off by the moat of the keep: the three sides were about 130, 120, and 55 yards in length, and it was defended by a fosse about twenty yards wide. The site of the keep is now called "Blobb Hill," and the other parts the "Tower Hall Croft." Blobb Hill is in a field to the right of the avenue leading from the Iron Bridge to Aldford Village. There are still some remains of the earthworks and mounds of the castle, but no relics of the stones, which have probably been used in farm houses and buildings. At some of the houses in Aldford, among rockeries, very curious stones, carved and otherwise may be seen, some of which probably came from the ruins of the castle. The ford may still be seen at very low water.

Aldford brook rises with others in the Cheshire hills, and joins the Dee close by the village, where a picturesque bridge crosses it.

Our next point of interest is a bridge crossing the Dee joining the townships of Holt and Farndon. It is composed of ten arches with the vestiges of a guard-house in the middle. Just beyond the bridge, close to the river bank, are the ruins of Holt Castle, insulated by a vast fosse cut through a deep bed of soft sandstone which seems to have been thus quarried for the building of the castle.

The fortress consisted of five bastions; and the work cut into that form to serve as a base to as many towers. An ancient survey in the British Museum, among the Harleian MSS. taken in 1620 by John Norden when it was entire, will give a true idea of this curious structure: it had been defended in three parts by the great chasm formed by the quarry, on the fourth side by the Dee, into which jutted a great quay still to be seen in very dry seasons, for it has long since been covered by the encroachment of the river. Originally, this place had been a small outpost to Deva; slopes and other now obsolete works may be seen near the castle and on the opposite side of the water. Coins have been found here, including those of Antoninus, Gallienus, Constantinus, and Constantius. The Roman name was "Castra Legionis," and the Welsh name "Castell Lleon," because it was garrisoned by a detachment of the legion stationed at Chester. This castle was besieged during the Civil Wars (1645).

Time will not permit more than the briefest reference to the many interesting features of the river. Bangor with its coracles, its very venerable bridge and church, demands a moment's attention, and deserves much more, for from here 1,200 monks marched to the assistance of their Christian brethren at Chester,

and were slain almost to a man by the Pagans of Northumbria, who afterwards destroyed their monastery. In the Church Tower is the following instruction for the ringers:—

"If that to ring you would come here,
You must ring well with hand and ear,
But if you ring in spur and hat,
Fourpence always is due for that.
But if a bell you overthrow,
Sixpence is due before you go.
But if you either swear or curse,
Twelvepence is due; pull out your purse.
Therefore the clerk must have his due.
If to our laws you do consent,
Then take a bell; we are content."

An almost identical effusion may be seen at Tattenhall, but with a significant variation:—

"But if you ring with spur or hat
A quart of ale must pay for that."

Overton Cemetery and Llangollen Bridge are enumerated among the seven wonders of Wales; but so wide a field is here opened out we dare not more than mention them.

We are told Owen Glendower took to wife the sister of an ancestor of Lord Hanmer, whose seat Bettisfield, lies not far from the Dee beyond Farndon, and whose verse may very fitly conclude this paper:—

"By the Elbe and through Rhineland
I've wandered far and wide,
And by the Save with silver tones,
Proud Danube's queenly bride;
By Arno's banks, and Tiber's shore,
But never did I see
A river I could match with thine,
Old Druid-haunted Dee."