

# THE LEVEL AND PORT OF PEVENSEY IN THE MIDDLE AGES

By A. J. F. DULLEY

The history of medieval Pevensey is dominated by the changing relationship between land and sea and the use that man made of each of them. The documentary evidence for that relationship has already been discussed in these pages by Mr. L. F. Salzman.<sup>1</sup> However, in addition to the documents preserved in the Public Record Office and elsewhere, there remain the faint but visible vestiges of man's impact on the landscape, some of which, particularly some of the early sea walls, are still sufficiently noticeable to have been recorded on the Ordnance Survey plans, though many have only become apparent since the advent of air photography or have had to wait until excavation in other parts of the country has given a clue to their probable nature. It is the purpose of this paper to attempt a synthesis of these two types of evidence, in the hope that a fuller picture of the history of the area may emerge.

The first we hear of Pevensey under its modern name is in a charter of the 10th century, and the little that we know of the earlier, Roman, settlement is mainly a matter of conjecture. It is likely that throughout the historical period there has been a shingle beach roughly on the line of the present shore, but there is no evidence of Roman occupation on the marshland behind it, which was presumably unreclaimed, so that at high tide, much, if not all, of the level was a lagoon, with the Saxon Shore fort occupying a position analogous to that of Portchester in relation to Portsmouth Harbour.

Nor is it likely that much was done in the way of reclamation before the Norman Conquest. There are two surviving Anglo-Saxon charters which deal with land bordering the levels. The earlier, by which in 772 Offa of Mercia granted the Bishop of Selsey an estate centred on Bexhill, gives bounds of three hides at Barnhorne, the southern margin of which was 'salt marsh' as far as the Hooe Stream.<sup>2</sup> The second, which dates from 947, relates to land at West Hankham and Glynleigh.<sup>3</sup> The boundaries cast considerable light on the state of the marshland at that period. They begin at a watercourse called 'Landrithe' and follow a north-south road which can only be that from Rickney by Stone Cross to Langney, turning off it to 'marsh' in the upper part of Willingdon Level,

<sup>1</sup> 'The Inning of Pevensey Level,' in *Sussex Arch. Coll.*, vol. 53 (1910), pp. 30-60. Unless references are given below, the relevant sources are printed or summarised in this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Barker, 'Sussex Anglo-Saxon Charters, Part 1,' in *Sussex Arch. Coll.*, vol. 86 (1947), pp. 42-101. The Bexhill charter is No. xiv.

<sup>3</sup> Eric Barker, *op. cit.*, Part 3, in *Sussex Arch. Coll.*, vol. 88 (1949), pp. 51-99 (No. xxxii).

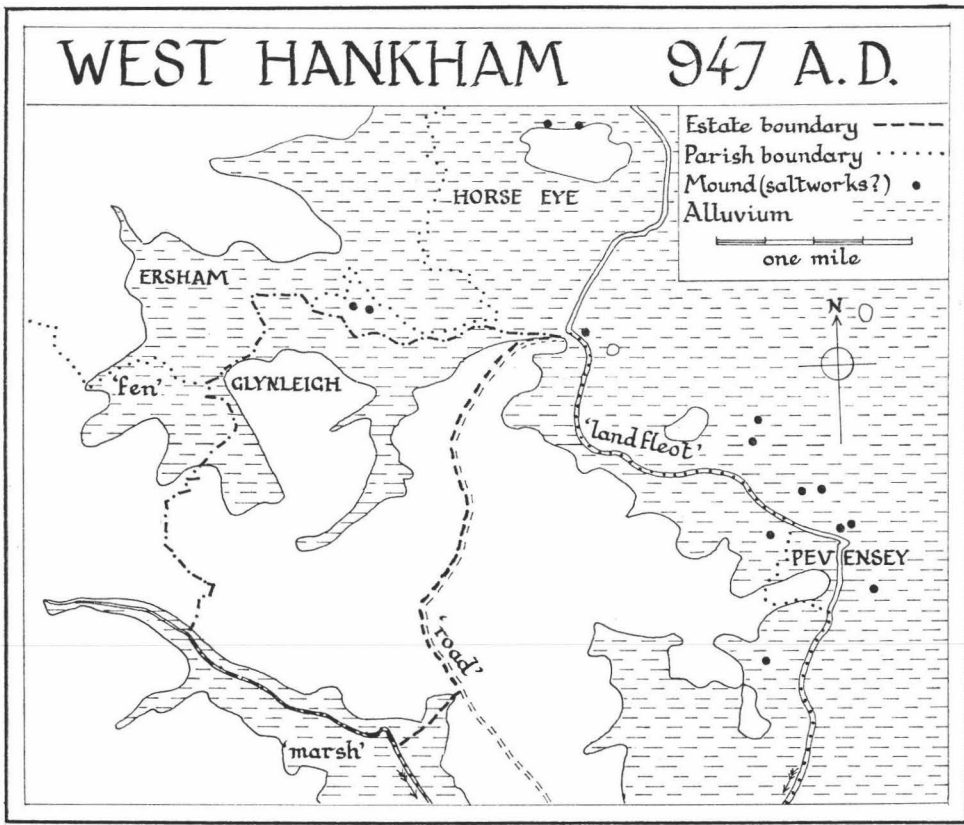


FIG. 1

presumably along the present parish boundary, as far as an unidentifiable 'border enclosure'; from there they went north through 'fen' to meet and march with the boundaries of Ersham and Horse Eye until they reached the 'Landfleet'. There was also a saltworks on the north side of this stream, opposite Pevensey. The name 'Landrithe' reappears in a manorial rental of 1292, when the 'bridge of Landrithe' spanned the Glynleigh Sewer at Rickney.<sup>1</sup> The Landfleet must have been the main channel of Pevensey Haven.

If the saltworks were using the normal medieval method of obtaining salt from sea-water, they must have stood on unreclaimed saltings, for the technique was to scrape up the salt-rich surface of sand or mud, leach out the brine and boil it to extract the salt. The process produced, as a by-product, mounds of desalinated mud, often used to provide a dry footing for the buildings. These mounds might attain a considerable size and remain as a permanent feature of the landscape long after the industry itself had ceased. They have recently been identified in the Adur valley, where salt production in the Middle Ages is well documented,<sup>2</sup> and it can be no accident that essentially similar mounds can be found in several parts of the Pevensey Levels, among them the area immediately to the north of the Saxon 'Landfleet'.

The mounds in question are between three and five feet high, irregularly oval in shape, and about fifty yards in average diameter, although there is considerable variation in size. All are at present under grass, but where they are cut by drainage ditches, they seem to be composed of the same clayey alluvium as the rest of the marsh. The only exception to this is an isolated mound north-west of Boreham Bridge, which appears to rest on a bed of brushwood and is made up of a bright orange ferruginous or burnt material which contrasts vividly with the brown of the normal marsh clay. This mound however, is so far separated from the others, and a long way inland of them, that it can hardly be regarded as typical.

There are four principal groups of mounds, two alongside the stream that flows from the valley between Hooe and Barnhorne, another along the north bank of the Old Haven, and the fourth, the area described in the charter of 947, beside Pevensey Haven. There are in addition a number scattered elsewhere on the marsh. Nearly all of them are quite close to former tidal channels, though they are usually conveniently sited for access from solid ground, a fact that makes it unlikely that they were constructed as refuges for livestock in time of flood. In a number of cases it is clear that they antedate the reclaiming of the surrounding marshland, since they

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., Rentals and Surveys, S.C. 11/663.

<sup>2</sup> E. W. Holden, 'Salt Works at Botolphs,' in *Sussex Notes and Queries*, vol. 15 (1958-62), pp. 304-6. I am indebted to Mr. Holden for additional information about these and for drawing my attention to several of the Pevensey mounds.

are incorporated into the sea walls and are respected by the drainage ditches, which make a circuitous course around them.

Fieldwork by itself can only furnish presumptive evidence of their purpose, but there is ample documentary proof of saltmaking in the area during the early Middle Ages. The charter already mentioned is the earliest reference to the industry, but it is clear that by the end of the following century it had grown to some size, for Domesday Book ascribes over 100 saltworks to neighbouring manors.<sup>1</sup> The largest concentrations were at Hooe (34) and Eastbourne (16). It is probably a coincidence that the biggest group of mounds is in the southern corner of Hooe parish, for the attribution of eight saltworks to Netherfield shows that they could be located some distance from their parent manor. Some of these works were valuable assets to their lords, two at Eastbourne being together rated at 40s., more than the total worth of many of the smaller manors of the district. The general scale of production was smaller than this, however, the entries having a median value of 2s. 5d. per unit. Their economic importance was recognised by the new overlords of the rapes, for between them they controlled three-quarters of the total production.

There are intermittent references to the industry in the following two centuries. Shortly after 1148, Bishop Hilary of Chichester assigned to his Chancellor part of the Chapelry of Pevensy, which he had recently received from King Stephen, including a render of salt.<sup>2</sup> A saltworks called 'Guldensaltkote' was in operation in 1199, and in 1230-1 William de Monte Acuto, who seems to have held land in Bestenover (modern Pevensy Bridge Level), was receiving 18 ambers of salt from part of his lands.<sup>3</sup> In 1234 the Norman abbey of Grestain was confirmed in the right to 100 ambers from the saltworks of Pevensy Marsh, but it was probably a sign of the times that six years later, in another list of the rights of the abbey, the scribe wrote the phrase 'a share of the salt in the marsh of Pevensy according to the annual production' but later deleted it.<sup>4</sup> This is the last reference to active production. When we next hear of a 'saltcote', it is the name given, at least as early as 1292, to part of the arable land of the home farm of the Castle, just opposite the mounds that stand beside the Glynleigh Sewer.

There were several causes at work to bring about the decline of the industry, but most important was undoubtedly the progressive reclamation of the tidal flats, which first reduced the original lagoon to a network of narrow creeks and then cut these off from the sea.

<sup>1</sup> H. C. Darby and E. M. J. Campbell, *The Domesday Geography of South-East England* (1962), p. 457.

<sup>2</sup> *Chichester Cartulary*, ed. by W. D. Peckham (*Sussex Record Soc.*, vol. 46) (referred to below as '*Chichester Cartulary*'), No. 260.

<sup>3</sup> *Sussex Feet of Fines*, ed. by L. F. Salzman (*Sussex Record Soc.*, vol. 2), No. 264. One amber=4 bushels.

<sup>4</sup> *Cal. Close Rolls, 1231-34*, p. 496. *Ibid.*, 1237-42, p. 246.

Evidently the saltmakers could not follow the advancing frontiers of the reclaimed land, for it is noticeable that the surviving mounds are all some distance from the present coast, the nearest being about three-quarters of a mile from it. The decreasing salinity of the water in the creeks and the lack of extensive mud-flats were no doubt crucial factors, as well as the increased distance from which the large quantities of fuel needed had to be fetched.

The date at which reclamation began is uncertain. It would appear that little if any had been done by 1086, for the small amounts of meadow belonging to bordering manors contrast sharply with the large areas in the Ouse valley. There Domesday Book names three vills with 200 acres or more, and two others with over 100, while around Pevensey the largest holdings were of 60 at Willingdon, 38 at Wartling and 25 at Eastbourne. Significantly, there were only three vills in the Ouse valley with saltworks (23 in all), as against eleven with 102½ at Pevensey. There are also entries for pasture, but except at Pevensey itself there is no certainty that they relate to marsh grazing. The pasture at Pevensey was worth 7*s.* 3*d.* in 1066, while twenty years later Alured the Butler had 15*s.* 4*d.* from the 'herbage' (the distinction between the terms is obscure). Alured's descendants held land in Bestenover to the east of Pevensey in the 13th century,<sup>1</sup> and it may be to this area that the Domesday entry relates. His income may just as well have come from summer grazing on the flats as from reclaimed marsh, though a study of the surviving sea-walls makes it clear that this was one of the nuclei from which reclamation began.

The course of these walls is shown on Fig. 2. They are especially common on the seaward parts of the marsh, although they accompany the main channel of Pevensey Haven far inland. In their present form many date from the 16th or 17th centuries, when much of the work of enclosing the marshes had to be done anew, but all the indications are that the men of that period for the most part followed the work of their predecessors, re-using and strengthening the old embankments but leaving them substantially unaltered. Where they had to start again from scratch, they followed a different technique of construction, building a wall entirely of dredged material from a parallel tidal channel (a preoccupation at this time being to keep the channels open) rather than making them by digging two parallel ditches and piling the upcast in between, which was the method invariably used earlier. As a result it is easy to distinguish the last phase of the process, but the sequence in the earlier periods is not always plain, particularly since roads and sea walls were made by the same technique. Indeed the roads often follow disused walls, which offered a dry footway even in time of flood. But there is one feature which, if present, distinguishes walls from roads, namely

<sup>1</sup> W. Hudson, 'The Manor of Eastbourne,' in *Sussex Arch. Coll.*, vol. 43 (1900), p. 198, cf. Salzman, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

the tendency for the ground level outside a sea wall to build up slowly with the deposits of silt left by high spring tides while the level inside remains unchanged. If the process is allowed to go on for any considerable time before the land beyond the wall is reclaimed, there may be a difference of as much as two feet in the level of the marsh on either side, the higher always being the later to be reclaimed. There have been so many vicissitudes in the history of the Levels that one cannot use this as a criterion for absolute dating, but as an indication of relative date it is extremely valuable.

As has been said, one of the centres from which reclamation proceeded was in Bestenover, around the square ditched enclosure on Moat Marsh (TQ 661060). A start had been made here well before 1200, and by 1263 a lagoon or swamp to the east, on the site of the later Wrenham Marsh, had recently been drained. The drainage of Hooe Level was presumably already confined to the narrow embanked channel, still traceable, which followed a curving course to the north and west of the site of the lost village of Northeye to join the Wrenham Stream and eventually debouch into the sea south of Rockhouse Bank. It was known in the Middle Ages variously as the 'Esthaven', 'Godyngeshaven' or 'the old port of Coding', which last suggests that at one time drifting shingle must have pushed its mouth further east towards Cooden. Though too narrow to take any but the smallest craft, it was enough to justify Northeye's status as a non-corporate member of the Cinque Port of Hastings.

As the process of reclamation advanced, the owners of the newly enclosed lands found it necessary to guard themselves against un-neighbourly conduct that could imperil the precarious balance between land and sea. Although there were no formalised regulations until those of Romney Marsh were adopted in the 15th century, the description of the inning of the swamp in 1263 already mentioned alludes to the customary procedure for dealing with landowners who would not co-operate in reclamation. In the following century, and probably already, the Lowy courts were exacting fines for obstruction and neglect of watercourses within their jurisdiction.<sup>1</sup> But there was need for private agreements for the disposal of surface water. We find the Abbot of Battle in 1248 granting part of his marshland at Barnhorne to his neighbour William de Northye in return for the right to drain the rest through William's demesne lands, which lay between them and the sea.

In the western and northern parts of the marsh the same process was going on, although it is not possible to reconstruct it in detail, perhaps because it was substantially complete at an earlier date, when documents were fewer and less informative. But the fact that the Prior of Lewes found it necessary to secure his rights to

<sup>1</sup> For the workings of these courts, see the Pevensy Custumal, ed. by L. B. Larking, in *Sussex Arch. Coll.*, vol. 4 (1851), pp. 209-18.

water to turn his tidesmill at Langney c.1160-65 suggests that most of Willingdon Level was already enclosed, even though a lagoon or lake long persisted behind the shingle of the Crumbles, to support a fishery and fishmarket into the 15th century. So too, south of Horse Eye, much had been accomplished by 1223 and the tideway reduced to a narrow channel, the reclamation of which was already envisaged and had been completed by 1292. Across to the east of Hurst Haven the foundation of the chapel of Manxey c. 1240 implies the existence of a congregation and land to support them.<sup>1</sup> The endowments of the chapel are marked on the Tithe Map as 'Rectory Lands', either side of the road from Chilley Bridge to Pevensy.

On the eve of the great flood of 1287, which had serious consequences for this as well as other parts of the Sussex coast, almost all the present marshland was reclaimed. The tide flowed between the sea walls as far as Rickney Bridge and along the Old Haven from Pevensy to Waller's Haven, as well as in the Esthaven, while between Pevensy and the sea was an archipelago of islands of marsh or shingle intersected by tidal creeks. This archipelago seems to have suffered badly in the flood, but the sea also broke into the marshes north of the Castle and probably in other places as well. The damage was such as to cause the appointment, two years later, of the first recorded Commissioners of Sewers for the Sussex coast, Roger Lewkenor and Luke de la Gare, the former a landowner in the marsh and the latter Bailiff to the Honour of Aquila, of which Pevensy formed part. They decided to dam Pevensy Haven, either at the modern Pevensy Bridge or, more probably, just to the north, at the junction with the Old Haven. This provoked protests from other local landowners, who believed that the new dam and sluice would cause flooding by fresh water, which would have greater difficulty in flowing away if the scouring effect of the tide was lessened by reducing the tidal part of the estuary. Though their fears were in the event justified, their protest seems to have been ineffective, for the survey of the demesnes of the Castle made in 1292 includes 36½ acres of salt marsh between the bridge of Landrithe and Pevensy and 15 between Chilley and Rickney Bridge, worth 8*d.* per acre (as against 12*d.* for the rest of the pasture) 'on account of the sluice.' This must plainly be the area either side of Pevensy Haven known later as the King's Salts or Queen's Salts, now reclaimed for the first time and not yet as productive as the older innings.

Reclamation went on steadily during the following century, but it is not until its end that the general pattern can be seen in a clear light. By 1396 the danger feared by the objectors a century earlier had materialised. An Inquisition of that year attests the deterioration of Pevensy Haven and recommends various improvements.

<sup>1</sup> E. W. Holden, 'Manxey,' in *Sussex Notes and Queries*, vol. 15 (1958-62), p. 319.



The old channel at this time discharged by what would appear to be an artificial cut through the shingle south of Pevensey.<sup>1</sup> The channel was still tidal but needed widening, with the addition of a new outfall at the mouth, parallel with the old. The site of this is marked by old sea walls behind the shingle of the Crumbles, and they include traces of an old embanked channel parallel with Willingdon Haven but diverging southwards to the sea (A, Fig. 2). However, since all this region was again tidal in the late 16th century, when ships of 60 tons could sail through it up to Pevensey Bridge, these embankments in their present form at least must belong to a later period. Indeed there must be considerable doubt whether the recommendations of the jury at the Inquisition were ever put into effect, for the landowners in the marsh, who would have had to pay the cost, asserted that the old channel was beyond repair and claimed to use a totally different method for draining their land. This involved bringing the water from Hurst Haven through Manxey Level into the Old Haven and thence by a cut that can still be traced into the Old Port of Coding (Godyngeshaven: B-C, Fig. 2).

But this channel also was giving trouble. The *Inquisitio Nonarum* makes it clear that flooding was widespread in the valley of Waller's Haven in 1340. Hooe had 400 acres flooded, Wartling 200, and at Ninfield 'the greater part of an estate called "Morhale" "<sup>2</sup> was under water: the tithes from it would be worth 6s. 8d. In 1402, when an inquiry was held into the drainage of the whole valley, now entirely flooded, two alternative improvement schemes were approved. The former, which seems to have presumed that the measures advocated in 1396 were acted on and proved effective, was to clear out the Old Haven and build a sluice at its Pevensey end. If this failed—as it did—another cut was to be made between the old Haven and Godyngeshaven (D-E, Fig. 2).

This cut itself proved of only limited effectiveness, for in 1455 it had to be extended (F-G, Fig. 2), cutting across the neck of the bend in the tidal channel, the upper reaches of which were now cut off, although its seaward parts remained a tidal creek at least until the 16th century.

The risk of flooding by fresh water was thus alleviated, but the sea now reasserted itself. From about 1540 onwards the greater part of Bestenover was reduced to salt marsh, partly through neglect of the sea walls of those marshes which had been former monastic property, and partly because drifting shingle was blocking the tidal channels. The net result was that by the date of the Armada Survey, which is the earliest recognisable map of the whole district, the

<sup>1</sup> L. F. Salzman, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> This can hardly be the modern Moorhall, which is on a hilltop. Perhaps the area round the moated mound called 'Castle Croft' on the O.S. maps (TQ 681116) is intended. This has an area of 30-40 acres (about adequate for a tithe of 6s. 8d. by marshland standards), and is bounded to the south by the Moorhall Stream.



Godyngeshaven had disappeared or been reduced to a backwater, and the old channel south of Pevensey had been revived, curving in a horse-shoe to join the Willingdon Sewer and reach the sea at Wallsend. This in turn was affected by shingle drift, so that the mouth moved rapidly eastward, leaving a long, narrow channel parallel with the coast as far as the original Godyngeshaven mouth.

Further surgery was necessary. This time the work can be followed with greater certainty and in some detail in the Decree Books of the Commission of Sewers, which survive from 1609 and are now in the East Sussex Record Office. The first hint of trouble comes on 24 September 1617, when it was presented that 'the great open place neere to the Havens mouth was very much swarved up for that the water that came in by the Tide came up by the old haven which haven beinge but narrow was more than half swarved up by means whereof . . . there passed noe water downward to the sea after half ebb, but only a little drill in parte of the old Haven. Soe that above the said parte of the Haven the water laye toward Pevensey bridge very deep and cold not choose in reason but make the water swell above the bridge.' Expenditure on a new sluice was sanctioned on 8 August 1623, and later that year the Willingdon, Bourne and Langney Levels were assessed to contribute, at one fourth of the rate for Pevensey. Two years later the cost was spread over the eastern levels as well, on the understanding that they could use the new sewer, the 1455 channel being no longer adequate. The total expenditure is not stated, but £207 had been spent in the twelve months prior to 26 August 1630, and a dispute about payment of £212 'lately disbursed about cuttinge forth of Pevensey Haven at a place called Ollivers Gutt' occupied the Commissioners in 1633. By 21 April 1634 the work was finished, although next year more groynes were needed to stop the shingle drifting back across the new mouth. The big horse-shoe bend described above had been cut across its neck by the modern channel from Fence Bridge, where the sluice was erected, towards Wallsend.<sup>1</sup> This proved satisfactory until the end of the century, for the Decree Books refer to nothing except routine expenditure until 1687, when a scot was levied to keep open the haven mouth. On 12 April 1694, 'upon a view of Pevensey Haven mouth . . . it is thought fit and absolutely necessary that imediate action be taken for mainteyning and keeping open a havens mouth.' On 1 November, William Markwick, 'Engeneer,' was engaged to see to the building of a new sluice and allowed to carry timber for it across neighbouring lands. Markwick's sluice was at the very mouth of the haven and cut off all the remaining tidal creeks, which were soon drained. To compensate for the loss of a haven for shipping, such as it was, the Commissioners arranged for the building of the present road from Peven-

<sup>1</sup> If Salzman is right in dating this to 1396, the same breach c.1542 cannot have flooded both the Hundred Acres to its SW. and Bestenover to its NE.

sey to Norman's Bay, partly across the dry bed of the old Godynges-haven, 'the said way to be free for all manner of carriage employed by any person or persons whatsoever which anyways concern navigation.' Barring unhappy accidents, the sea was now shut out from Pevensey for good.

The details of the story outlined above are many of them obscure, but one thing is certain: that over the years an immense amount of money and toil was expended on keeping the sea out of the marsh. It remains to see why this expense was entered on at a period when much of the upland of the county was still virgin, and why it was maintained even through periods of economic depression.

Some idea of the scale of work involved can be obtained by considering two examples. One of the earliest pieces of reclamation must have been that centred on the moated site in Moat Marsh. This is surrounded by a bank about two miles long, which in its present much-denuded state contains about 20,000 cubic yards of earth, enough for a wall about five feet high and 18 feet wide. What this meant in terms of man-hours is largely guesswork: on the results of the Overton Down experiment,<sup>1</sup> where chalk was dug with primitive tools at a rate of 5 cu. ft. per man-hour, about 14,000 man-days of eight hours each would have been required. This is probably too slow for medieval tools, but makes no allowance for other work than digging and carrying, so that the total is in all likelihood not too far wide of the mark.

The other example is the new sewer of 1455. This was to be eight furlongs long, 30 feet wide and six deep, requiring a total of about 25,000 cubic yards of soil to be removed, enough perhaps to occupy 100 men for eight months, if one takes into account the extra distance that the earth would have to be moved. The work could only be done at certain states of the tide and would have to be pushed forward with some speed if it was not to be filled up by fresh silting, and hence the labour force at work was probably sizeable, even if it was only employed seasonally.

The uses to which this expensively drained land was put were various. At the present day almost the whole of the Levels is used for grazing cattle and sheep, and this has been the case since Tudor times. It seems too that this was the earliest use that they were put to. Apart from the references to pasture in Domesday Book, the earliest evidence we have is that, some time before 1200, the tenant of 100 acres in Bestenover did service yearly to his lord 'of 20s. with 50 sheep which he had from him.'<sup>2</sup> Though there are many references to land in the marsh in the following century, there is no information about land use until near its end, in a series of farm

<sup>1</sup> P. Ashbee and I. W. Cornwall, 'An Experiment in Field Archaeology,' in *Antiquity*, vol. 35 (1961), pp. 129-34.

<sup>2</sup> P.R.O., Curia Regis Rolls, 24, m. 2d.

accounts for the Castle demesne for the years 1283-94.<sup>1</sup> These may not be typical years, and they include that of the great flood, 1287, but they give a detailed picture that is available from no other source.

Most of the farm was pasture, 177 acres out of 277. Here was kept a flock of between 400 and 600 sheep, valued for their wool and cheese, but not for their meat. The remainder was arable, with a dairy herd of 25-30 head grazing on the fallow until 1289, when it was moved to Willingdon. On average 71 per cent. of the arable was under crop, but the proportion rose to around 80 per cent. after the removal of the cattle. The 71 per cent. was made up mainly of oats, with wheat and beans and occasionally an acre or two of barley (see Table 1). None of them fared particularly well. There was wide variation from year to year, especially in the wheat, which no doubt suffered from winter flooding: in a good harvest there was a return of more than five-fold, but a bad one did not bring in enough to cover next year's seed. The arable land, so far as one can tell, was on the older marshland, and the newer marshes were devoted to sheep, with disastrous results in the flood of 1287, which drowned the whole yearling flock. In normal conditions, however, it was no doubt sound husbandry to keep the sheep where parasites were likely to be fewest.

The demesne was leased out after 1294, and so detailed accounts for its farming cease, but the returns made to the *Inquisitio Nonarum* of 1340 show that this form of mixed husbandry persisted and was profitable.<sup>2</sup> The figures given for the relevant parishes are set out in Table 2, and for comparative purposes the statistics of corn-tithes for East Sussex as a whole are summarised in Table 3. Although these returns were extracted from the parishioners on oath, they need to be viewed with a certain scepticism. The values given are usually approximations or at least add up to a round total even when the component parts include odd halfpence for the sake of artistic verisimilitude. More serious is the possibility of deliberate misrepresentation. The basis of the valuation was the *Taxatio* of Pope Nicholas, which assessed the wealth of benefices in 1292 for ecclesiastical purposes. Against this the commissioners offset income from sources other than the great tithes and from land exempt from secular taxation. The Barons of the Cinque Ports enjoyed this exemption both inside and outside their territories, and as both the Lowy of Pevensey (the parishes of Pevensey, Westham and parts of Hailsham and Wartling) and the Liberty of Northeye were members of Hastings, by far the greater part of the marsh was subject to exemption; and indeed the parish of Westham does not figure in the record at all. Northeye is included, where it belongs,

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., Ministers' Accounts, S.C. 6/1027/17, 20, 21, 22.

<sup>2</sup> *Inquisitiones Nonarum in Curia Scaccarii*, ed. by G. Vanderzee (Record Commissioners, 1807), *passim*.

in Bexhill parish. Most, if not all, of Pevensey is assessed under Chiddingly, for in 1292 both were treated jointly as part of the emoluments of the Chancellor of Chichester Cathedral. It was in the parishioners' interest to exaggerate the yield of these lands, and this may in part account for the high valuations put upon them. But they cannot be entirely discounted when the parishes in the lower valleys of the rivers flowing through the downs, all of which have sizeable areas of alluvium, also tend to be valued above their neighbours. There can be no doubt that these districts, along with the coastal plain west of Brighton, contained the most productive corn-land in the county in the 14th century. The impression is confirmed when we consider land values as given in contemporary surveys. The Battle Abbey estate of Barnhorne lay partly in the marsh and partly on the upland. The upland parts were worth between 3*d.* and 6*d.* per acre in 1311, flooded marshland towards Hooe 4*d.* (rising to 10*d.* if properly drained), and the seaward marshes 12*d.*<sup>1</sup> Twelve pence per acre seems in fact to have been an average valuation for marshland in the locality, for this was the rent-charge imposed on the endowments of Manxey Chapel *c.*1240 and most of the Castle demesne was reckoned to be worth the same. But when the Bishop of Chichester's scattered estates came to be valued in 1388, 12*d.* per acre was the maximum. Pasture (probably marsh) in Bexhill reached this value, but the arable there was only worth 3*d.*, as in many places elsewhere in the county.<sup>2</sup>

The general impression, then, of remarkable agricultural prosperity in 1340 is not to be rejected, even when among the bordering parishes Eastbourne, Hooe and Ninfield all had upland fields that had gone out of cultivation since 1292. Nor can one lightly dispute the detailed figures, despite the similar totals for corn at Manxey and Horse Eye and the overwhelming predominance of Portsman at Hailsham. They clearly imply that, although sheep-keeping was important (the figures for fleeces indicate a population of 4-5,000), most of the land was under corn except in the flooded valley of Waller's Haven. At Horse Eye and on the coastal marshes of Pevensey there were seemingly no sheep at all, and in Hailsham corn provided 96 per cent. of the Portsman's tithe, though Bayham Abbey had a moderate flock. These Hailsham figures are doubly interesting, for, since they list individual payments, we can gain some idea of the size of holdings. The Abbot of Bayham paid a total of 20*s.*, 14*s.* for corn, 3*s.* 6*d.* for fleeces, and 2*s.* 6*d.* for lambs. In 1528, just before the Dissolution, he held 96 acres at Otham, plus another 164 in Horse Eye Quarter, part of which may also have been in Hailsham. How much of this should be attributed to his

<sup>1</sup> *Customals of Battle Abbey*, ed. by S. R. Scargill-Bird (Camden Soc., 1887), pp. 17-19.

<sup>2</sup> R. A. Pelham, 'The Agricultural Geography of the Chichester Estates in 1388,' in *Sussex Arch. Coll.*, vol. 78 (1937), p. 209.

predecessor in 1340 is uncertain, but 96 acres is a minimum, and the total may have been nearer 200. Among the 73 Portsmen there were seven who paid as much as the Abbot and 14 others paying at least half as much. The median payment of 3*s.* 4*d.* would represent a minimum of 16 acres and a maximum of about 35, while the poorest, who paid 1*s.*, must have had at least five.

These figures are only very approximate: there is no means of telling how much of each holding was fertile marsh and how much relatively infertile upland. But they are probably a more reliable index to the size of individual farms than the only alternative source, namely the rentals and surveys of the manor of Pevensey. Four of these survive, for the years 1292, 1363, 1564 and 1649,<sup>1</sup> and all give details of acreages as well as rents, while the last two provide a great deal of topographical information. Much of this is difficult to interpret, but the general distribution of the lands that owed suit to the manor court is clear. There were two categories of tenant: bond portreeve service tenants (*tenentes nativi*, 1292), who owed suit of court, rent and tallage and served in rotation as Portreeve of Pevensey; and free portreeve service tenants (*liberi tenentes per cartam*, 1292), who only owed suit of court and rent, often nominal. The formers' lands were concentrated in Glynleigh, Hankham and Downash, and the latters' in Manxey, but they were not always contiguous with each other, and a farm might easily contain land both within the manor and outside it.

While the rentals are therefore valueless as a guide to the absolute size of farms, they are useful for internal comparison. Though there had been a certain amount of sub-division between 1292 and 1353, these two years stand together in marked contrast to the two later years (see Table 4). By the mid-16th century there had been an increase in the average size of tenant holding and a dramatic decrease in the number of dwellings on the manor. While almost every holding in the 14th century had a house attached, hardly any had 200 years later. The reason must lie in the change from the arable husbandry implied by the *Inquisitio Nonarum* to the modern pastoral regime, with most of the land in the hands of absentee owners and used principally for summer grazing under the superintendence of a hired 'looker'. The contrast in numbers employed was great, and as the old pattern of farming survived at least the first outbreak of the Black Death, which is known to have raged violently in the district, it seems that this is not simply a case of depopulation by plague. Indeed, if anything, the marsh was more densely inhabited after the plague than before it. Any holdings that were tenantless must have been eagerly snapped up by landless men, perhaps immigrants from the poorer soils of neighbouring parishes, some of which were reported poverty-stricken in 1340. Indeed, the population of

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., Rentals and Surveys, S.C. 11/663; 666-7; Duchy of Lanc., Misc. Books, D.L. 42/112; Parly. Surveys, E. 317, Sussex, 39.

the marsh probably remained fairly high at least until the beginning of the 15th century, for a dispute between the Chancellor of Chichester and the Vicar of Pevensey in 1406 resulted in the collection of some useful information about the state of the parish.<sup>1</sup> There had been little change in the balance between arable and pasture since 1340, and it was reported that 'the cure of the church [of Pevensey] and chapels [at Manxey and Horse Eye] is large and burdensome for they are a mile and more apart and the parishioners of the chapels have no easy access to the church in winter owing to the dangerous roads and floods', from which one would gather that there was still a sizeable population at both the latter places.

How soon after this the decline began is uncertain. In 1440 the Common Fine of the eight hundreds of the Honour of Aquila was reduced, being restored to its original form as a poll-tax of *1d.* per head on inhabitants over the age of twelve.<sup>2</sup> The date when this had been commuted to a round payment by each hundred was probably during the latter part of the previous century, if not earlier. The reductions were large, equivalent to a cut in taxable population from *c.*6,700 to *c.*1,500, and they were most marked in the seaward parts of the Honour, where nine villis were said to be almost depopulated and their lands untilled as a result of the plague. The district concerned did not include the Lowy of Pevensey but bordered upon it to the west and comprised about half the Rape, so that it is likely that it too was a victim of the same epidemic.

The mid-15th century then can reasonably be taken as marking the end of the old farming community of the marsh. It also seems to have marked the decline of the town of Pevensey, though the relations of town and marsh are by no means simple.

The origins of the town, like the early history of the marsh, are obscure. The charter of 947 is the first to use the modern name but does not indicate whether it applied to a settlement or not. If it did, it is hardly likely to have been of much consequence; otherwise its absence from the list of burhs in the Burghal Hidage is puzzling, when its position and its Roman defences suited it for that purpose. But by 1066 at least a town had developed, for Domesday Book records a total of 52 burgesses, 24 belonging to the king and the rest to various ecclesiastics. They suffered severely from the Norman landing, and only 27 were left when their town was transferred to Robert of Mortain, but rapid growth followed, now that Pevensey was the administrative centre of its Rape and the site of a permanently garrisoned castle. The port, too, which had been of some importance before the Conquest, was more frequented now that links with the Continent were closer. As a result, by 1086 there were 110 burgesses, more than double the number of King Edward's day, and the income from tolls had

<sup>1</sup> *Chichester Cartulary*, No. 1072.

<sup>2</sup> P.R.O., Duchy of Lanc., Ministers' Accounts, D.L. 29/442/7117.

quadrupled. A mint and a mill were other, apparently new, assets.<sup>1</sup>

The Counts of Mortain were active in church building as well as fortification, to judge from the remains of a substantial 11th-century structure which form the core of the present parish church at Westham. This is probably to be connected with their creation of the Chaplaincy of Pevensey.<sup>2</sup> This included the cure of souls in the present parishes of the Lowy as well as the duties of a domestic chaplain at the Castle. The two parishes may not have been divided until King Stephen gave the chaplaincy to the Bishop of Chichester, who gave Pevensey to his Chancellor, while Westham ultimately came into the hands of the Norman abbey of Grestain. However, there had probably been a church at Pevensey before the Conquest, since those burgesses who were not tenants of King Edward held of the Bishop or of other priests. Topography suggests, even so, that the church in its back-street position was a late-comer to the town plan, when both sides of the main street from the Castle and market place to the ferry and the quays had been occupied by burghages, and back lanes had already begun to develop to the south. Excavation at a number of points south and south-east of the church has failed to disclose anything earlier than the 12th century in this quarter, which was probably never very intensively built over.<sup>3</sup>

This century in all likelihood saw the apogee of the town's prosperity. Already at the beginning of the next the inhabitants were contemplating removal to a new site between Pevensey and Langney, somewhere on the shingle bank at the mouth of the haven. In 1207 they paid 40 marks for a charter empowering them to make the move,<sup>4</sup> but nothing further seems to have been done, despite the steady silting of the haven which must have provided the chief incentive for the proposal. Pevensey was still a port of some local importance, ranking perhaps third or fourth among Sussex ports, but a long way behind Winchelsea, Rye and Shoreham, if we may judge from the details of shipping movements given in the Close Rolls (see Table 5).<sup>5</sup> The same source hints that Pevensey ships may have carried a considerable amount of goods which never saw Pevensey itself. In 1242, for example, there is mention of a ship of Pevensey at Dunwich with a cargo of wool and leather belonging to a Winchelsea merchant.<sup>6</sup> In 1304 another Pevensey vessel was

<sup>1</sup> A manorial mill was in operation at least to the end of the 13th century, and accounts for building works at the Castle in 1288-91 (*Sussex Arch. Coll.*, vol. 49 (1906), p. 9) refer to men digging for stone in the moat and mill-pond. This must be for debris from the Roman walls. The pond was SE. of the Castle where a complex of embankments marks the site.

<sup>2</sup> *Chichester Cartulary*, Nos. 110, 115, 260.

<sup>3</sup> A. J. F. Dulley, 'Excavations at Pevensey,' in *Sussex Notes and Queries*, vol. 16 (No. 2, 1962), pp. 63-4.

<sup>4</sup> *Cal. Charter Rolls*, vol. 3, p. 220.

<sup>5</sup> Compiled from *Rotuli Litterarum Clausarum*, vols. 1 and 2, ed. by T. D. Hardy (Record Commrs., 1833, 1844).

<sup>6</sup> *Cal. Close Rolls, 1237-42*, p. 480.



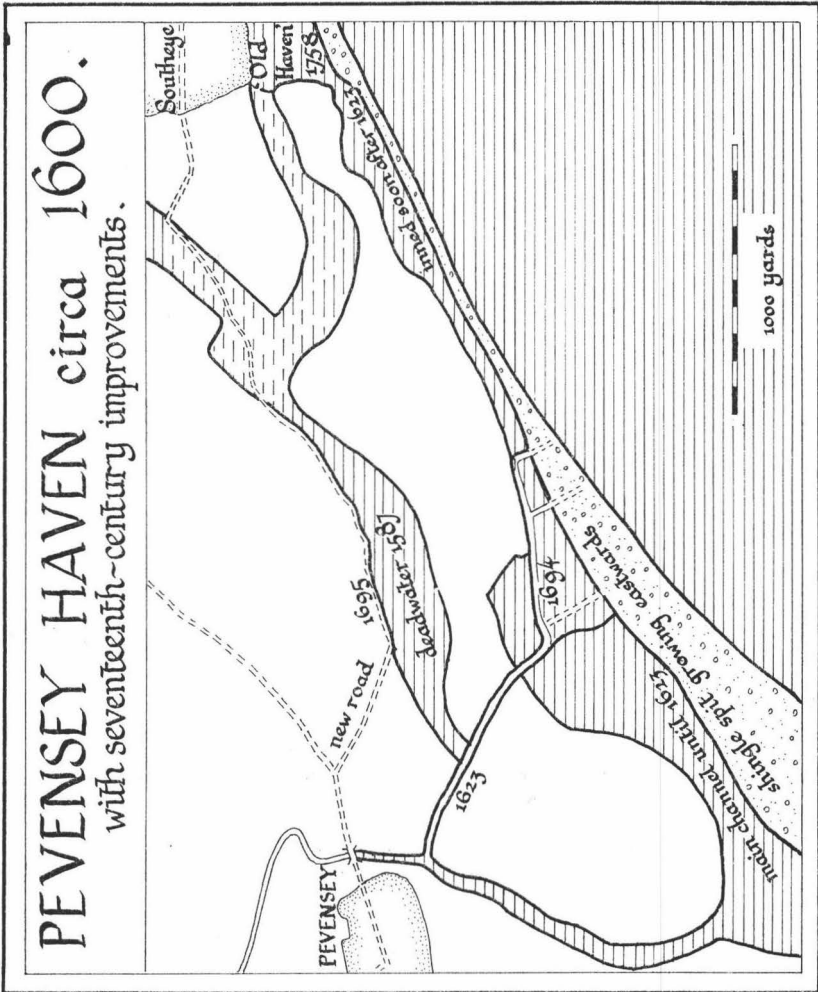


FIG. 3

robbed by pirates between Flanders and Sandwich while carrying spices and other goods for a Londoner.<sup>1</sup> Fishing, too, provided employment for local ships in distant waters. Pevensey's membership of the Cinque Ports confederacy implies participation in the Yarmouth herring fishery at least as early as 1207 and probably much earlier still; instructions about keeping the peace there were addressed explicitly to the town along with the other Ports in 1298.<sup>2</sup> So far as local trade is concerned, the import of wine is vouched for in the Close Rolls for 1239, as well as being implied by finds in the Castle.<sup>3</sup> Archaeology also suggests that there was trade down the Channel as well as across it, since fragments of Devon slate have been dug up in some number. As for exports, these were almost entirely of wood in the 14th century.<sup>4</sup> Pevensey provided a natural outlet for the forest products of the Weald, although by this period its harbour could not vie with that of Winchelsea. Earlier it is likely that the local saltworks also exported part of their production.

In the 14th century trade was in a decline. Already in 1288 the Castle building accounts indicate the difficulty of landing goods. Most of the stone used was quarried at Eastbourne, and in summer this was brought to Pevensey by road, but in winter the roads were impassable and boats had to be used. Sea-going vessels could not sail direct to Pevensey but had to unload into lighters at the Ilonde at the haven mouth for the journey to the Castle, at a total cost of 4s. per 100 stones as against 3s. by road. The state of the haven may have been made worse by the storm of the previous year, but nothing that was done in the succeeding century can have improved it. In the 15th century we find mention of boathouses on the beach, now subject to erosion. Harbour dues seem never to have amounted to more than 1s. per year as against between 4s. and 5s. at the end of the 13th century, and it is not until the reign of Queen Elizabeth I that we again hear of sea-going vessels berthing at Pevensey itself. But this was only a temporary revival, due to the great inroads of the sea in the previous few decades. A survey of the ports and harbours in Pevensey Rape made in 1565 records the presence of a haven, but no vessels, mariners or fishermen belonging to it.<sup>5</sup>

The town, however, was not wholly dependent on the harbour and survived its decay for some time. The rental of 1292 names 46 burgess tenants holding 62 tenements, with six others empty. In 1353 the total number of tenements was the same, though there had been some subdivision and amalgamation in the interval. The

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, 1302-07, p. 260.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 1296-1302, p. 206-7.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, 1237-42, p. 159; G. C. Dunning, 'A Norman Pit at Pevensey Castle and its Contents,' in *Ant. Journ.*, vol. 38 (1958), pp. 205-17.

<sup>4</sup> R. A. Pelham, 'Timber Exports from the Weald during the 14th Century,' in *Sussex Arch. Coll.*, vol. 69 (1928), pp. 170-82.

<sup>5</sup> P.R.O., S.P.D., Eliz., vol. 38, No. 28.

number of tenants had declined by one, but only two holdings were untenanted. Later rentals, particularly that of 1564, which gives a great deal of topographical detail, make it clear that these tenements did not make up the whole area of the town, though they did include part of the village of Westham. They had their origin, presumably, in the 60 burgesses of Count Robert in 1086, but their intervening history is obscure. In the 16th century they included most of the houses in the village, but there is no means of telling what the proportion was at the time of the earlier documents. Two things, however, they do make plain: firstly that this was still a genuine town in the 14th century, despite the loss of its harbour, for there was no agricultural land attached to the tenements, and very few of the burgesses figure as landholders elsewhere in the rentals; secondly, that the initial onset of the Black Death left no permanent mark on the town. How soon its decay commenced we cannot be sure. The depopulation of the surrounding countryside and the gradual neglect and decay of the Castle must have been potent factors in causing its decline. The manorial accounts show that great difficulty was found in obtaining tenants for the burgages in the middle of the 15th century,<sup>1</sup> and by 1564 there were only about twenty houses in Pevensey and another seven in Westham for which rents were still being paid. The former harbour had been drained and parcelled out among the few remaining burgesses. Barns, stables and gardens occupied the sites of former houses and, except for the outward forms of municipal government, there was little to distinguish the place from a village.

TABLE 1: DEMESNE FARM 1283-94

<i>Crop</i>			<i>Average Acreage (%)</i>	<i>Sown (bu./acre)</i>	<i>Average Reaped (bu./acre)</i>
Wheat	..	..	19.7	4	9.5
Barley	..	..	0.7	5	15.4
Oats	..	..	34.5	6	12.9
Beans	..	..	16.4	3.5-4	7.3
Fallow	..	..	28.7	—	—

TABLE 2: INQUISITIO NONARUM: MARSHLAND PARISHES

<i>Parish</i>	<i>Value of one-ninth of</i>									<i>Corn value per acre</i>	<i>Acres flooded</i>	
	<i>corn</i>			<i>fleeces</i>			<i>lambs</i>					
	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	s.	d.	
Bexhill .. ..	7	4	0	13	4		6	0		2	4	—
Eastbourne ..	32	7	2	£4	6	8				15	4	—
Hailsham .. ..	24	19	2	14	0		13	0		11	2	—
Herstmonceux ..	10	14	2	10	0		10	0		5	1	—
Hooe .. .. .	4	17	0	1	6		1	10		4	7	400
Ninfield .. ..	4	0	3	1s.	6d.					3	7	(1/9: 6s. 8d.)
Northeye .. ..	5	0	0	1	0	4	13	0		13	7	—

<sup>1</sup> e.g. P.R.O., Duchy of Lanc., Ministers' Accounts, D.L. 29/442/7120.

Parish	Value of one-ninth of						Corn value per acre s. d.	Acres flooded			
	corn		fleeces		lambs						
	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.		
Pevensay:											
Manxey ..	14	13	4	1	10	0	1	5	0	} 19 1	—
Horse Eye ..	14	13	4	—	—	—	—	—	—		
Estenovere ..	3	6	8	—	—	—	—	—	—		
Newelond ..	2	13	4	—	—	—	—	—	—		
Wartling ..	13	13	1	10	10	—	12	6	—	6 9	200
Willingdon ..	11	5	4	—	—	—	£1 4 0	—	—	6 3	—

*Lands exempt as belonging to Portsmen (included in list above)*

Bexhill ..	18	4	—	—	—	—
Eastbourne ..	1	1	4	—	—	—
Hailsham ..	22	6	8	10	0	10 0
Hooe ..	17	0	—	—	—	—
Northeys ..	all	—	—	all	—	all
Pevensay ..	all	—	—	all	—	all
Wartling ..	1	14	3½	10	—	2 6

TABLE 3: INQUISITIO NONARUM: LEWES ARCHDEACONRY

Region	Value of corn crop (pence per acre)							Total Parishes
	below 2.5	2.5- 4.9	5.0- 7.4	7.5- 9.9	10.0- 14.9	15.0- 19.9	20 & over	
High Weald ..	15	35	9	4	—	—	—	63
Clay Weald ..	1	7	5	—	2	—	—	15
Down: Scarpfoot ..	—	2	5	5	3	3	1	19
Down: Summits ..	1	3	5	2	3	—	—	14
Down: River valleys	—	—	3	5	2	2	3	15
Coast Plain and Alluvium ..	—	—	—	—	2	4	3	9
Total ..	17	47	27	16	12	9	7	135

*Note:* The acreages upon which this and the previous table are based are those for the modern parishes as given in V.C.H., *Sussex*, vol. 2 (1907), pp. 217-28. Calculations based upon them can only be approximate and the error may be large in some of the coastal parishes, where erosion has taken place. But the table may serve to indicate the background against which the Pevensay figures should be viewed.

TABLE 4: MANORIAL TENANTS (EXCLUDING BURGESSES)

Total holdings ..	1292	1353	1564	1649
Average acreage ..	92	119	49	63
Messuages and tenements ..	34	26	55	52
Average acreage per messuage, etc.	72	74	9	12
	45	42	273	220

TABLE 5: SHIPPING ARRESTED 1205-27: SOUTH-EAST COAST PORTS

Port	Vessels released			Total	Sent from other ports:	Owned at:	Writs sent to:
	Cargo	Fishing					
Sandwich ..	26	8	34	5	—	x	
Winchelsea ..	19	—	19	4	—	x	
Shoreham ..	14	—	14	—	1+	x	

## LEVEL AND PORT OF PEVENSEY

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<i>Port</i>	<i>Vessels released</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>Sent from other ports:</i>	<i>Owned at</i>	<i>Writs sent to:</i>
	<i>Cargo</i>	<i>Fishing</i>				
Romney .. .. .	6	—	6	4	5	x
Hastings .. .. .	3	1	4	—	—	x
Pevensay .. .. .	3	—	3	—	—	x
Seaford .. .. .	3	—	3	—	—	x
Milton Regis .. .. .	2	—	2	—	—	—
Pagham .. .. .	2	—	2	—	—	—
Dover .. .. .	1	1	2	—	—	x
Hythe .. .. .	1	1	2	1	3	x
Chalk .. .. .	1	—	1	—	—	—
Northfleet .. .. .	1	—	1	—	—	—
Rochester .. .. .	1	—	1	—	—	—
Wittering .. .. .	1	—	1	—	—	—
Rye .. .. .	—	—	—	8	2	x
Fordwich .. .. .	—	—	—	2	—	—
Faversham .. .. .	—	—	—	—	1	x
Bulverhythe .. .. .	—	—	—	—	—	x

*Note:* The vessels released include: Sandwich, 2 cogs; Shoreham, 2 boats; Seaford, 2 boats, 1 'sornecca'. Those owned at Shoreham and Romney were fishing boats, the rest merchantmen.