

THE MARSHES BETWEEN HYTHE AND PETT

AN ATTEMPT AT THE RECONSTRUCTION
OF THEIR TOPOGRAPHY AS IT WAS
IN THE MIDDLE AGES

BY W. MACLEAN HOMAN, F.G.S.,
ASSOC.M.INST.C.E.

THERE is not a little uncertainty regarding the topography in the Middle Ages of the Marshes between Hythe and Pett: the Romney, Walland, Denge, Broomhill, Rye,¹ and Winchelsea Marshes, all together containing about 80 square miles and forming the delta of the rivers Rother and Brede.²

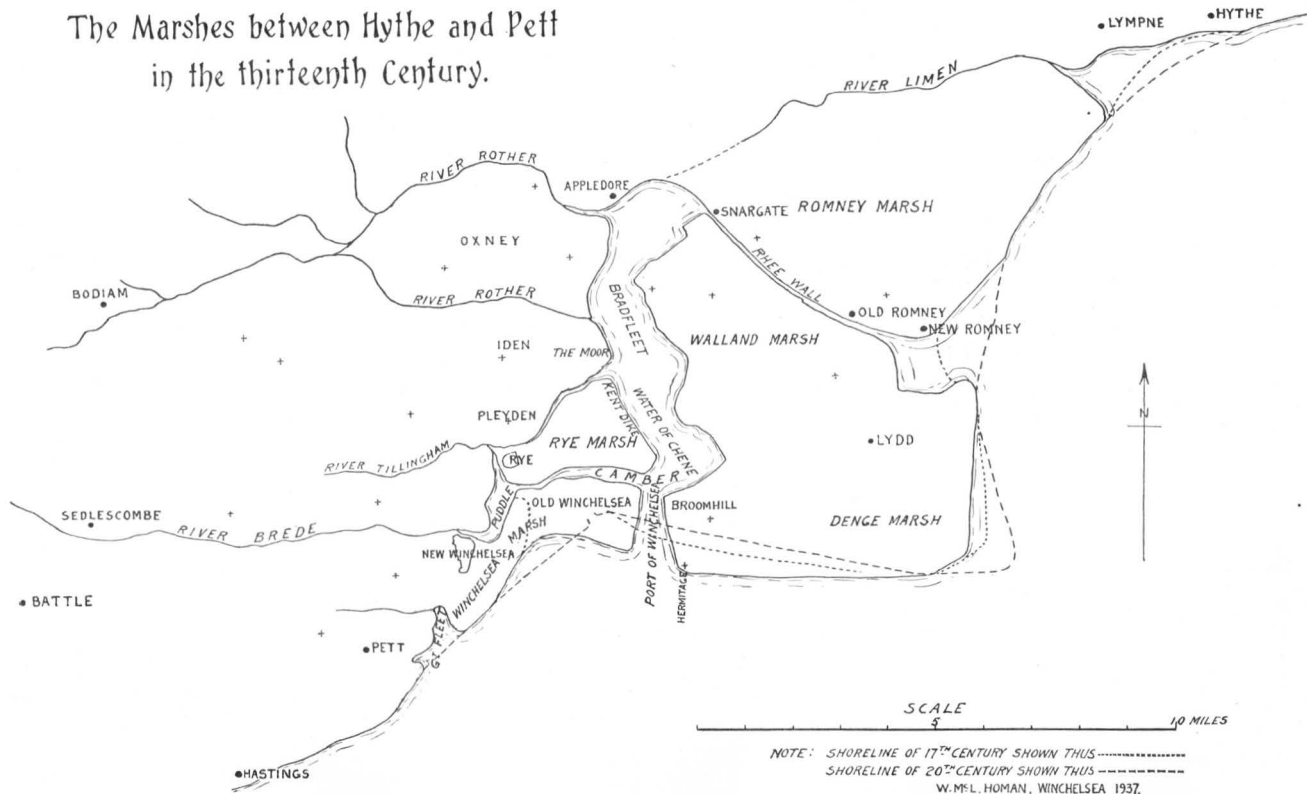
In the second half of the thirteenth century great changes took place in these marshlands owing mainly to extensive encroachments of the sea, which in places continued till the sixteenth century; probably the Marshes have at all times been subject to great changes caused by erosion and deposits. To obtain reliable results one is therefore obliged to base their reconstruction as regards any one period almost entirely on contemporary documentary evidence that is generally fragmentary and frequently unintelligible.

In the Marshes one cannot deduce what has happened in the distant past from what has happened in more recent times: it has been contended that Dungeness for thousands of years has been advancing in an easterly direction, as is the case to-day, and that the Bay of Rye has at the same time extended itself steadily farther and farther inland. There is, however, no proof that the eastward growth of Dungeness has been continuous, and the changes that have taken place during the last cen-

¹ Rye Marsh is now the parish of East Guldeford.

² For other attempts at reconstructing the early topography of the Rother estuary see *S.A.C.* LIII. 5-14; LXXV. 191-9; *History*, XI. 97-115; Lewin, *The Invasion of Britain*; Furley, *Hist. of the Weald*, II. 251.—Editor.

The Marshes between Hythe and Pett in the thirteenth Century.



NOTE: SHORELINE OF 17TH CENTURY SHOWN THUS
 SHORELINE OF 20TH CENTURY SHOWN THUS
 W. M^S L. HOMAN, WINCHELSEA 1937.

ture at Rye Harbour and Camber prove that the coast-line there is now advancing seawards. The changes in the coast-line and in shore erosion are due to changes in the Channel currents, the prevailing winds, and other matters of which we have not sufficient knowledge to gauge their influence in the past or in the future. Attempts at reconstructing the topography of the Marshes and their coast-line when no documentary evidence exists are therefore valueless.

Marshlands, such as these we are considering, which are at a low level and in part protected from the sea by artificial embankments and natural sand-dunes and shingle banks are liable to great changes owing to the sea breaking through these defences, to surface erosion, tidal erosion of the subsoil, deposits of silt, and various other causes. The effect of tidal erosion of the subsoil appears not to have been given the attention its importance merits: any area exposed to tidal action, especially any reclaimed area protected from the sea by embankments, will tend to subside when the subsoil is such that water can percolate freely through it and remove solid matter in suspension or solution. If the embanked area is inundated, the subsidence will tend to increase owing to soil and sand being washed into the pervious subsoil and removed from there by the action of the tides and subsoil drainage.

When such subsidence is greater than the natural increase of the ground due to rotting vegetation and other causes, then the surface of the ground, including the surface of embankments, will naturally subside. Changes in level due to subsoil erosion have frequently erroneously been attributed to a general subsidence affecting the whole district; there appears to be no evidence that any such subsidence of the solid land has taken place within the last thousand years or more near the area which we are considering, and it is probable that any subsidence of the marshes during this time is due entirely to local causes.

Opinions differ as to whether or not the south-east of England has subsided since the Roman occupation,

but it may be pointed out that several recent authorities agree with the author in believing that no such subsidence has taken place; for instance, H. J. Osborne White (*Memoirs of the Geological Survey of England: 'Geology of the Country near Hastings and Dungeness'*, 1928), Clement Reid (*Submerged Forests*, 1913), and Cyril Fox (*The Personality of Britain*, 1932). It is true that the difference in the earliest and the most recent Ordnance Survey levels appears to indicate a subsidence of the south-east of England, or a rise of the north-west of the country, one can of course not say which; but it is generally admitted that the apparent difference in the relative levels of the south-east and the north-west of England may easily be accounted for by the less exact methods used in determining the earlier levels.

The remains of forests, which can be traced in the Marshes near the present low-tide level, are of unknown date and great age, and they are certainly very much older than the period which we are considering and need therefore not be taken into account except as proving that where the remains of the roots are now found above low-water mark they have never been submerged at all states of the tide. The ancient forest remains are obviously lower in relation to sea-level than when the trees were growing, but we do not know how far this is due to erosion of the subsoil.

In considering the changes in the Marshes since the thirteenth century, when records of the topography begin to become tolerably reliable and explicit, we must remember that until the fourteenth century or later the Brede and the Rother were navigable, at least at high tide, respectively to near Sedlescombe and to Bodiam, which probably were river ports of some importance, being apparently situated on a Roman road which connected them with London by way of Rochester. The gradual reclamation of the river valleys and of those parts of the marshland, which, when unreclaimed, had been flooded far inland at every high tide, has reduced the tidal scour in these rivers and caused them to get silted up.

Until the first half of the eighth century the main outlet of the Rother was probably that known as the Limenaea, which entered the sea at Lympne, but before the end of the eighth century this estuary seems to have silted up to a certain extent and the channel, the principal outlet of which, as will be shown, was called the Port of Wincenesel (Winchelsea), west of Broomhill, then became the main one, if it had not been so at an earlier date, as seems indicated by the fact that the boundary between Kent and Sussex follows its course.

It is probable that there were also branch outlets east of Broomhill and at Romney, and that the last-mentioned outlet, probably the Rumenea of a deed dated 895,¹ was improved by artificial means and converted into a straight channel along the Rhee Wall. There can hardly be any doubt that the Rhee Wall, an embankment about 40 to 50 yds. wide, extending from Appledore to New Romney, about 7 miles, was formed by the spoil from cutting a navigable channel along its south-west side. The name Rhee Wall also suggests that this was the case. Edmund McClure² says: 'Rhee, a generic word for stream in late English, representing Anglo-Saxon *Rith*, cognate with Irish *Riathor*, torrent, old Welsh *Reathir*, now *Rhaiadr*, waterfall.'

According to the document of which an abstract is attached (Appendix C) the Rhee channel appears to have been about 60 yds. wide and its south-eastern extension below Brenzett twice that width. We do not know when the channel and the adjoining bank of the Rhee Wall were formed; it may have been at any time before the middle of the thirteenth century. From a Patent Roll of 1258 (Appendix B) we learn that an artificial channel, obviously the one just referred to, was then silting up, as far as one can judge, mainly near its outlet at Romney, and measures were taken to improve it, as it was the only connexion by water between Romney and the Rother. The measures then recom-

¹ Holloway, *History of Romney Marsh*, p. 57.

² *British Place-Names in their Historical Setting*, p. 171.

mended by Nicholas de Haudlou consisted principally in placing a sluice across the Rother below Appledore in order to impound the tidal water coming 'from the direction of Winchelsea', that is to say, the mouth of the Rother west of Broomhill, so as to lead this water, together with the river water of the Rother, to the sea by way of Romney, and thus scour out the channel along the Rhee Wall. A sluice was to be placed at Romney, to prevent the tidal waters from entering the Rhee channel from that direction and filling it with gravel, and another sluice at Snargate, obviously to regulate the flow of the impounded water and to improve navigation at low tide. Evidently Nicholas de Haudlou's plan, if carried out, was not successful in keeping the channel open, and it may have played a part in the silting up of the Port of Winchelsea, for in 1318 complaint was made that much loss was occasioned by the trench made between Appledore and Romney; but nothing was done at the time to remedy this owing to the preparations for war.¹ According to a writ of 1337 (Appendix C), the channel at the Rhee Wall by that time had been closed by silt for thirty years and more; the sea had, however, at the same time made a new natural channel between Romney and the Rother, perhaps joining it immediately north of Broomhill, so that ships could pass that way instead of by the old artificial channel along the Rhee Wall. Apparently Romney was no longer connected by navigable water with the Rother in 1399, when, to judge by the Winchelsea Town Accounts in the Larking Collection (British Museum) and printed by Cooper in his *History of Winchelsea*, one got from Winchelsea to Romney by taking boat via the Camber to Snargate and continuing from there on horseback. But, according to Dugdale's *Imbanking*, a commission was appointed in 1377 to inspect, amongst other things, the embankments in the marshes 'from the town of Romney to Promhill church', which seems to indicate that the channel between Romney and the Rother was still in use in 1377.

¹ Holloway, *History of Romney Marsh*, p. 77.

Sluices such as those mentioned above in Nicholas de Haudlou's report no doubt temporarily improved the upper reaches of a river for shipping, but they would soon materially hasten the silting up of the river both above and below the sluice. For instance, when, about 1330-40, a sluice was built across the Brede River at Sloghdam, near where the Ferry Bridge now stands at Winchelsea, the effect of this sluice was that the channel of the Brede River both above and below the sluice got obstructed by silt and sand deposits. By 1357 this had become so obvious that, according to a Close Roll of that year, there was ordered the removal of all obstructions in the river, including the sluice, so that the tide might ebb and flow 'toward the town of Battle' as of old and thus clear the river and harbour of silt. As the Brede River was navigable for ships as far as Brede Wharf a generation ago, it is not unreasonable to suppose that it was navigable three miles farther, to Sedlescombe, in the fourteenth century.

Though the main channel of the Rother without doubt at one time was about where the county boundary now is, south of Oxney, in the thirteenth century apparently it lay north of Oxney, but elsewhere it more or less followed the present Sussex-Kent boundary, entering the sea to the west of Broomhill. The boundary of Kent and Sussex between Broomhill and a point east of Iden follows what is now called 'The Kent Ditch'. In Symonson's map of 1594 it is called the 'Kent Wall' and in Stonham's map of 1599 the 'Kent Dyke'. From this it would appear that the county boundary originally followed an embankment and not a ditch or stream at this place; the broad course of the Rother, often referred to as 'the Sea', lay immediately to the east of the Kent Wall. The Brede River evidently joined this wide channel through what was known as the Camber, and the wide joint estuary of the two rivers was known as the Port of Wincenesel (Winchelsea). Sometimes, however, the name Camber or Camera was used for the river mouth, as for instance when it is mentioned as

'Portus Camera' in Venetian documents of the fourteenth century.¹

The name Winchelese or Wincenesel appears first to have been applied to the Port (*Portus*), here, as frequently in the Middle Ages, meaning the estuary or river mouth; the name Winchelese Marsh was later used for the Marsh between the Port of Winchelese and 'the great Fleet' near Pett Level. The name Winchelese was possibly first used for the waterway and later for the town and Marsh, just as the name Camber was first given to part of the river, later applied to the land to the seaward of this, and finally in recent years to the village which recently has sprung up there.

The name Camber (*Camera*) generally signifies a land-locked harbour, and there can be little doubt that it was the land-locked Camber which was the harbour of Old Winchelsea. After the sea had broken through where the outlet of the Rother is to-day, the Camber would naturally tend to silt up, and this would especially be the case when the channel of the Rother along the Kent Wall and the old outlet of the river at the Port of Winchelsea became entirely closed by sand and gravel as happened, probably, in the fifteenth or early sixteenth century. The Camber then became a back-water which soon filled with silt and sand. As the road running north-east from the Kent Dyke at Great Cheyne Court on Stonham's map of 1599 is called Gillford Gate it probably follows the course of an embankment made by one of the Guldefords in the fifteenth or sixteenth century in order to reclaim the old wide bed of the Rother. Great Cheyne Court, now so called, is not shown on Stonham's map of 1599, and it is called New Chaine Court on the map in Dugdale's *Imbanking* (1662).

Symonson in his map of 1594 shows what is evidently the submerged forest about a half-mile south-east of Rye. It is also shown in Stonham's map of 1599 and is there and on John Prowez's map of about 1570 called the 'Black Shore'. If traces of the submerged forest

¹ *S.A.C.* xx. 225.

were then in existence in this spot it tends to prove that the River Rother had not long followed its present course in the sixteenth century. The course of the Puddle and the Camber (stretches of the Brede River) must, before the Rother changed its course, have run south of this 'Black Shore'. It has frequently been stated that the Rother altered its course to that immediately east of Rye owing to inundations and floods in the thirteenth century, but there appears to be no contemporary evidence of this, though we know that marshes in this neighbourhood were overwhelmed by inundations of the sea at this time. The existence of the submerged forest, the 'Black Shore', across the course of the present Rother south-east of Rye in the sixteenth century indicates that the river did not take its present course till a couple of centuries after the floods at the end of the thirteenth century.

It serves to confirm the theory that the outlet of the Rother and the Brede, the Port of Winchelsea, was situated between the present village of Camber and Broomhill that, whereas remains of the submerged forest are to be found *in situ* above low tide to the seaward of Broomhill, remains of the forest are absent where we believe the Port of Wincenesel to have been.

John Prowez on his map of about 1570 shows a branch of the Camber running into what he calls 'in Bromehill wyk' situated as nearly as one can judge where the writer places the Port of Winchelsea, and Stonham on his map of 1599 calls the place 'Saltes', suggesting that inundation by the sea at this place was still a regular occurrence in the sixteenth century.

As will be seen from the documents referred to in Appendix D, there was at the eastern side of the mouth of the Port of Winchelsea a Hermitage of the Hospitallers of St. Anthony, who, apparently in the thirteenth century, took charge of a light that was maintained to guide ships at night into the Port. The history of this Hermitage and the light is interesting and helps us to determine the medieval topography of this part of the coast. It will be briefly summarized from the small

amount of documentary evidence which we possess. In 1261 the citizens of Winchelsea received the right for two years to levy twopence on every ship entering the Port, for the support of the light which they had set up at the Port for the benefit of ships entering it at night. Though we do not know it for certain, the Hospitallers of St. Anthony 'above the Port of Winchelsea', who had charge of the light in the sixteenth century, may perhaps be assumed to have taken over the charge of it in 1267, when we find Henry III granting them protection for two years.¹ The Hermitage is mentioned and its position indicated in the description of the boundaries of the Liberty of (New) Winchelsea in 1330. A translation of this document is attached (Appendix F). We have after this no news of the Hermitage till 1537, when the men of Rye said that the men of 'the Admiral of Sluys', a Flemish pirate who, according to Froude (*History of England*), had troubled Rye and Deal, but whose ships were captured soon after, had out of spite burnt the Hermitage of the Camber and cut to pieces the image of St. Anthony (Appendix D).

The Knights Hospitallers of St. Anthony, to whom the Hermitage belonged, were an order of a similar nature to the Knights Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem; it was founded about the year 1100 by Gaston, a lord of Dauphiné, and his son Guerin, in order to lodge pilgrims and to maintain hospitals. The order had many houses in Europe and at Acre and Cyprus. The fact that the order should have a house at the Port of Winchelsea suggests the importance of the Port's foreign shipping connexions in the thirteenth century. The St. Anthony here referred to is St. Anthony of Thebes, the hermit. In Cooper's *History of Winchelsea* there is shown a seal-matrix, probably of the fifteenth century, of a Preceptory of St. Anthony; it is said to have been found in New Winchelsea. Two persons are shown on the seal, the one is St. Anthony, as usual

¹ The House of St. Anthony 'on the other side of (*ultra*) the Port of Winchelsea in the town of Promhull' is mentioned about this time in Campbell Charter, xxv. 8.

accompanied by his pig, while the other holds what seems to be a large lantern. Whether this seal has any connexion with the Hermitage of St. Anthony at Broomhill, and whether the lantern shown on the seal has any connexion with the charge of the Port of Winchelsea Beacon Light, we do not know, but it seems likely.¹

Exchequer Depositions of 1593 (Appendix D) inform us that the Hermitage dedicated to St. Anthony had maintained the light for the Port of Winchelsea. The depositions also show where the Hermitage, and we must presume the light, had been situated; for several witnesses, old men born in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, stated that they knew that there had been a Hermitage near 'the old Camber Head', the site of which they said in 1593 lay half a mile out in the sea. As maps of 1594 and 1599, as well as the map in Dugdale's *Imbanking*, of about 1662, show the coast-line at this place considerably farther out than it is at present, and as, according to the description of the Liberty of Winchelsea of 1330 (Appendix F), one ought to be able to see Beachy Head from the shore near the Hermitage, we may probably conclude that Old Camber Head, by which we must assume is meant a bluff or sand-dune on the east side of the river mouth, lay about a mile to the south of Broomhill Farm. The coast-line between Denge Marsh and the present Rye Harbour in all probability consisted of protecting gravel and sand-dunes, the destruction of which would seem to have commenced in the thirteenth century, according to Matthew Paris (Appendix A) and Patent Roll of 8 March 1251, and continued at various points for at least four centuries, causing flooding and destruction of the Marshes by the inroad of sand, gravel, and salt water, as well as by the silting up of the Port of Winchelsea and the Camber. In *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, vol. IX and vol. LXIX, p. 182, will be found a translation of an entry on the Patent Roll, dated 12 May, 1 Henry IV (1400), which

¹ Any information as to the present whereabouts of this seal will be gratefully received.

explains one of the alleged causes of the silting up of the Port of Winchelsea and the lower reaches of the Rother: 'Many mariners daily trading to the Port of Winchelsea have filled up and obstructed the channel of the said port from a certain place called Camber (Camber) as far as Bodyham with stones, sand and other ballast, so that vessels laden with merchandise have been unable conveniently to enter the Port as formerly.' As mentioned in the paper on Timber Exports,¹ many foreign ships in the fourteenth century appear to have come to the mouth of the Rother in ballast and left with cargoes of timber and other merchandise, after having dumped the ballast which they brought with them.

This silting up and the inroads of the sea gradually caused the abandonment and destruction of Promhull (Broomhill) in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. Even as late as 1474 and 1478 it is stated that large tracts between Rye and Romney, including Promhull, were daily in danger of inundation from the sea and salt water (Dugdale's *Imbanking*). Jeake in his *Charters of the Cinque Ports* says Broomhill, together with Lydd, Dungeness, and Oswardstone near Lydd, was a member of the Port and Town of New Romney.

On Stonham's map of 1599 'Promehill' is shown and houses are indicated within embankments enclosing about one square mile of ground between the Camber and Broomhill Church, but not including the latter. The enclosing embankments, some of which can still be identified, extend beyond the present shore-line. Several medieval documents indicate that Broomhill town or village was on the Camber, and that there were stretches of grassland and gravel between it and the sea.

A place called 'waies ende' is shown on Stonham's map of 1599 on the shore fully a mile south-south-east of Broomhill Church. The *Records of Lydd* (printed and edited by Arthur Finn) state that about 1460 a watch-house and beacon were erected at 'wayes end' to guard against attacks by the French; they appear also to have

¹ *S.A.C.* LXIX.

been used during the intermittent state of war existing with Denmark, 1467 till 1476. The fact that a watch-house and beacon were erected at what we must assume to have been Old Camber Head in 1460 confirms the belief that the Port of Winchelsea, immediately west of Broomhill, was still used by shipping as the entrance to the Rother and the Brede Rivers at that date.

We do not know when the Port of Winchelsea became entirely blocked up by silt and gravel. It is probable that a Patent Roll of 1336 refers to the mouth of the river when it says: 'the port of the said town (Winchelsea) where ships lay to and ought to lay to and especially the entrance to the same port already is becoming so filled with sea sand and gravel' that ships loading twenty tuns of wine could hardly enter it. Though this shows that the river mouth was tending to get choked with sand and gravel, it is probably an exaggeration; if ships of 20 tons could enter the river at low tide, Winchelsea's largest ships, at that time, to judge by various documents, probably loading about 240 tons, could easily enter at mid-tide, whereas, if 20-ton ships could only enter near high tide, the river mouth would be dry most of the time. This is of course possible, but it seems unlikely, even after the already mentioned channel to Romney had been formed by the sea about 1300. As we have shown, this channel was probably silted up before 1400, which would no doubt again improve the Port of Winchelsea.

One should imagine that the old Port was not yet entirely blocked (or had not long been blocked) in 1537, when the Hermitage and presumably also the Port Light were still standing, and when apparently therefore the high ground on which the Hermitage seems to have stood on the east side of the entrance to the Port had not yet been washed away by the sea. By about 1570, the probable date of our earliest map, the Port was apparently quite closed and all ships entered the Brede and the Rother by more or less the present channel.

Documentary evidence appears to prove that the site

between Rye and the present Rye Harbour, where the Rother now flows, and where in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there was a wide estuary, was cultivated marshland in the thirteenth century. The Brede River then flowed past the south side of Rye and running in an easterly direction through the Puddle and Camber joined the Rother in the Port of Winchelsea.

Though the marshlands immediately east and south of Rye seemingly were inundated in the thirteenth century, it is probable that the new estuary of the Rother and the Brede, which eventually replaced the Port of Winchelsea and was situated about where it is to-day, first became navigable towards the end of the fifteenth century, and that a little later the old Port of Winchelsea silted up so as to become too shallow for navigation and was finally abandoned in the first half of the sixteenth century. This is supported by the fact that the Manor of Iham was granted to Sir Richard Guldeford, according to a Patent Roll of 1486, on the condition that he built a tower in the marsh near 'the Port called the Camber' (a name sometimes applied to the Port of Winchelsea) in order to protect it and the neighbourhood of the Kent-Sussex boundary against any enemy attacks from the sea. The tower built by Guldeford was presumably the 'Blockhouse at the Kevill'¹ (mentioned in 1528: *L. and P. Henry VIII*); about 1539 it was enlarged and became Camber Castle.

When the Town of Winchelsea was moved to its new site in 1292 (though commenced before this, 1292 was the date when the inhabitants got the title to their plots), the Camber continued to be controlled by the town and to be used by it as an anchorage (Winchelsea Town Accounts of end of fourteenth century in the Larking Collection (British Museum), quoted *in extenso* by Cooper in his *History of Winchelsea*). This was

¹ The Kevill was apparently the spit of land and shingle between the channel from Rye to New Winchelsea and the sea. In 1523 a deponent, then aged 55, said that in his time the channel leading from Rye to Winchelsea used to come nearer to Winchelsea, 'by reason that the Kevell poynt ys mor esed and so the haven of Wynchelse growen': Aug. Off. Misc. Bks. 436.

indeed a matter of vital importance to Winchelsea. It is a significant coincidence that New Winchelsea, which in the fifteenth century had recovered some of its earlier importance, appears to have been abandoned by its merchants, by shipping, and by trade just about the time when the Blockhouse that became Camber Castle was built (probably about 1490) on a site that protected the new estuary. This new estuary, which took the place of the Port of Winchelsea, gave Rye a decided advantage, as shipping to it would no longer have to pass through the Camber, which was controlled by Winchelsea. Camber having become a backwater by the silting up of the Port of Winchelsea, soon commenced to silt up. The increased commercial activity of Rye at this time is shown by the improvements made to its docks and quays in 1480 and succeeding years (Vidler, *New History of Rye*, p. 41).

The Winchelsea Marsh between the Port of Winchelsea and 'the Great Fleet' near Pett Level was probably enclosed in the eleventh century. It was protected against the sea by an embankment known as the Daunswall, a name possibly meaning Danes Wall. The name Dimsdale, which does not occur till the fourteenth century, was given to what is apparently a diversion of the Pannel stream, caused by the inundations of about 1300; it may be a corruption of Daunswall. Probably the Daunswall may still be traced in the old embankment on which Holford's Farm and the Harbour Farm are situated, though the foreshore stretched some distance to the seaward of it, as is proved by remains of the submerged forest which existed from the 'Old Ship Inn' westwards to Cliff End within man's memory and for another mile in a north-easterly direction as late as 1594 (Symonson's map of that date).

As will be seen from Appendix G, the Winchelsea Marsh, especially the part known as Spadeland between the present Winchelsea and the sea, was in the thirteenth century held in small lots by a great number of tenants; many of these were inhabitants of the town of New Winchelsea, which no doubt drew part of its

food-supply from these marshes. The Winchelsea Marsh shared the fate of many of the other marshes at the end of the thirteenth and the first half of the fourteenth centuries, and was inundated by the sea through the embankments giving way.

From a document of about 1195, mentioned in *Hist. MSS. Com. Penshurst Place*, vol. I, p. 46, and other documentary evidence, mostly in the same volume, as well as from remains of ancient embankments still in existence, it would appear that between the Winchelsea Marsh and the present Cliff End there was a shallow fleet or a piece of unreclaimed marshy land about a mile wide at its entrance, flooded at high tide. The fact that submerged ancient forestland, partly covered with clay, is still to be found at the mouth of this inlet proves that it was dry or a lagoon at low tide. The shallow bay was known as 'the Great Fleet'. To the north of it, near the cliffs at Wickham, was perhaps the land known as 'le Fodre' belonging to Robertsbridge Abbey, but this is uncertain. There were apparently salt-pans in this neighbourhood as also in the low-lying ground near the Port of Winchelsea.

By the second quarter of the thirteenth century almost the whole of the Marshes had come into the hands of the Church or of religious houses, and, at least in the case of Robertsbridge Abbey, the monks added to their properties by reclaiming new marshland: Robertsbridge Abbey held Playden and most of the ground in the Rye, Walland, and Broomhill Marshes, as well as the eastern end of Oxney and the marshes between that and Snargate, and apparently ground in the valley of the Pannel and near the western end of Winchelsea Marsh. Battle Abbey had a large area between Dengemarsh and Broomhill. The Archbishop of Canterbury had ground at Dengemarsh, Romney, Fairfield, Snargate, and elsewhere. The Abbey of Fécamp had the greater part of Winchelsea Marsh as well as large areas in the Brede Valley. It also held Winchelsea and Rye, and held or had held a considerable amount of ground in the Rye Marsh, the marsh then extending from

the Town of Rye to the channel of the Rother on the Kent-Sussex boundary. The abbey's possessions at Winchelsea and Rye, both the towns and some of the marshlands, were taken over by the King in 1247 (Appendix E).

It has already been mentioned that great changes took place in the Marshes from 1250 onwards, and even as early as 1236 a commission spent three days at Rimnal (Romney), Winchelsea, and Apelder (Appledore) to consider the preservation of the country and the marsh from inundations of the sea. The Town of Winchelsea was apparently not yet threatened. It should be noted that always it is the sea and not the rivers which is mentioned as threatening damage to the embankments and the reclaimed land. The thirteenth-century chronicler, Matthew Paris, records the damage done to the neighbourhood of the Port of Winchelsea both in 1250 and 1252, but the Town of Winchelsea appears so far to have escaped damage (Appendix A). From then onwards for more than a century inundations are recorded and in some places, as for instance near Broomhill, the sea apparently, as already stated, continued to encroach still farther at least till well on in the seventeenth century. A Patent Roll of 1280 states that the old town of Winchelsea was for the most part submerged by the sea, and a Patent Roll of 1283 says the town was threatened with total submerision by the inundations of the sea. This was probably due to some of the protecting sand-dunes having been washed away and dispersed by the violent storms and exceptionally high tides recorded. If it had only been flooding to which the town was exposed it would seem that it could have been protected by new embankments. It is therefore probable that the town was threatened of being submerged by the sand and gravel deposits which to-day cover parts of its probable site. An Inquisition of 1302 says that the Marsh of Winchelsea (the Marsh between the Port of Winchelsea and Pett) could not be saved by the old embankment. A Patent Roll of 1331, amongst others, shows that the embankments in the Brede Valley were giving way and other documents

show that this was also the case along the course of the Rother. A Patent Roll of 1333 shows that by then the Abbey of Robertsbridge had lost the then very large sum of one hundred pounds of annual revenue through the inundation of its property in the Winchelsea, Rye, and Broomhill Marshes. As already mentioned, in 1336 a Patent Roll states that only boats loading 20 tons and less could reach New Winchelsea owing to deposits of sea-gravel at the entrance to the Port, by which the estuary of the Rother and the Brede is no doubt meant. By 1351 the Spadeland (Winchelsea) Marsh had been destroyed by the sea, and a Patent Roll of 1379 says that the complete destruction of Dynsdale (Winchelsea) Marsh within the Liberty of Winchelsea by inundation by the sea was inevitable without a speedy remedy.

Probably it was towards the end of the thirteenth century that the Rother began to change its course between Snargate and the Port of Winchelsea, undoubtedly owing to its earlier channel along the Kent-Sussex boundary getting obstructed, perhaps by the action of storms. From the Camber the sea gradually forced its way over the marshes immediately east of Rye; these were inundated and partly washed away by inroads of the sea between 1285 and 1291.¹ From there the sea found its way along what was probably then the Tillingham to the Rother. Apparently the old course of the Rother was not yet entirely closed, as we find that a commission was appointed in 1377 to inspect the embankments 'from Romney to Promhill and thence by the sea coast to Appledore'.²

The question of where Old Winchelsea, abandoned about 1290 for the present site on the Hill of Iham, was situated has not been definitely settled. It was apparently first shown on a map by Symonson in 1594, and the information then given can hardly be relied on, as an earlier map by Prouez of about 1570 shows the site as the open sea, and as maps of 1599

¹ Rentals and Surveys, Record Office; Surveys of the Manor of Iham.

² Holloway's *History of Romney Marsh*, p. 131.

(Stonham) and 1662 (Dugdale) show different sites for the old town. It seems probable that what was taken to be an indication of Old Winchelsea was a sandbank, or the remains of the submerged forest that had become exposed at low tide and would naturally have been imperfectly understood in the sixteenth century.

Though the site of Old Winchelsea is shown as an island on the maps mentioned above, this need not mean that the surveyor thought or had been told that the town actually was on an island. It is the believed situation and not the nature of the site which the maps show. There is no reason for believing that the site of the old town was better known in 1594 than it is now. The sites on the 1594 and 1662 maps partly cover what was probably dry land in the thirteenth century. From documentary evidence and for other obvious reasons, we believe that Old Winchelsea Town was mainly situated on the north side of the peninsula bounded by the Camber, the Port of Winchelsea, and the sea, and facing the sheltered harbour of the Camber. We gather from the 1247 Charter Roll, of which we attach a translation (Appendix E), that a highway, almost certainly the one to Uckfield leading through Udimore and Brede, that crossed the Roman Road leading to Rochester near the present-day Cripps Corner, led to the north side of the Camber, and we may safely assume that it served the town of Winchelsea by the ferry, which we know from the Pipe Rolls existed in the thirteenth century near the town of Old Winchelsea.¹ No trace of Old Winchelsea remains, but this is not surprising. During its gradual destruction and evacuation, stone and other building materials of any value would be removed and probably most of the buildings were of wood; besides, a large part of its site is now probably covered with gravel, sand, and soil, and some of the site has no doubt been washed away and later been filled in with silt and gravel. No trace but a shapeless mass of stones, where the church stood, remains of the

¹ 'The Eastern End of the Ridgeway', by the author: *Sussex Notes and Queries*, August 1937.

town of Broomhill, which probably remained in existence for a considerable time after Old Winchelsea was abandoned.

The accompanying map (p. 200) is constructed on the basis of the documents summarized in the accompanying Appendix G and other evidence.

APPENDIXES

A. MATTHEW PARIS, *Chronica Majora* (Rolls Ser.), v. 176, 272

1250. Matthew Paris mentions damage done by storm 'at Winchelese, an eastern port, besides salt-sheds (*tuguriis salinariis*) and fishermen's hovels, and bridges and mills, more than three hundred houses in this neighbourhood together with certain churches were destroyed by the stormy high tide.'

1252. 'And if we say nothing about other damage and losses, we will mention some which we know of and have experience of. At the Port (*portus*) of Wynchelse, very necessary to the English and especially the Londoners, the tide of the sea, as if contemptuous and furious at having been turned back the previous day, by seizing the coastal area flooded mills and houses and swept away and drowned a great number of people.'

B. THE RHEE CHANNEL

1258. 21 June. As the King has understood that the port of Rumenal is perishing, to the detriment of the town of Rumenal, unless the course of the river of Newenden, upon which the said port was founded and which has been diverted by an inundation of the sea, be brought back to the said port, and now hears by inquisition made by Nicholas de Haudlo, whom he sent to those parts to provide measures for bringing the river back to the port by the old course or by another, that the river cannot be brought back or the port saved unless the obstructions in the old course be removed and a new course made through the lands of certain men of those parts near the old course, to wit, from a cross of the hospital of infirm persons of Rumenal which stands near Aghenepend as far as Effaton, and from Effaton to the house of William le Wyll, and so to Melepend and from Melepend down to the said port; so that a sluice be made below Apeltre to receive the salt water entering the river by inundation of the sea from the parts of Wynchelse and retain it in the ebb of the sea, that such water with the water of the river may come together by the ancient course to the new course and so by that course fall directly into the said port; and so that a second sluice be made at Sneregate, and a third by the port where the said water can fall into the sea, to retain merely the water of the sea's inundation on that side that it enter not the said course;

reserving nevertheless the ancient and oblique course from the said cross to the port. The King, therefore, commands the said Nicholas to go to the said port and by a jury of twenty-four knights and others of the vicinage make an estimate of how much land would have to be taken . . . to remove the obstructions of the old course and to cause the new course and sluices to be made. . . . (*Cal. Patent R.*, 1247-58, pp. 635-6.)

C. RHEE CHANNEL

According to a writ *ad quod damnum* of 11 Edward III (1337), quoted in Dugdale's *Imbanking* (p. 43) and in Holloway's *Romney Marsh*, 'the ancient trench leading from an arm of the sea called Apuldre towards the town of Romeneŷ', passing through the ground of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Prior of Christchurch, had become 'obstructed for thirty years or more by silt and sea sand', there was, however, 'a certain other channel leading from the same arm of the sea to Romeneŷ made recently by the force of the sea by which boats and ships might pass without impediment as they were wont to do by the other before it was filled up'. The old channel was 700 perches (about $2\frac{1}{3}$ miles) long and 10 perches wide (about 60 yds., if Flemish measure was used, as generally was the case in the marshes).¹ The new channel was 500 perches (about $1\frac{2}{3}$ miles) long and 20 perches wide. These measurements apparently refer to the artificial channel along the Rhee Wall. The distance from Snargate to Old Romeneŷ is $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles, from Old Romeneŷ to New Romeneŷ about $1\frac{3}{4}$ miles.

D. HERMITAGE AT PORT OF WINCHELSEA

1221. Hugh d'Auray, Prior of the Hospitallers of St. Anthony, gave as an annual rent to Abbey of Fécamp all the goods which Brother Manasses had given to the Hospitallers of St. Anthony at Winchelsea. (*Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Coll. Moreau, cxxx, f. 56, Cartulaire Générale, No. 1703.*)

1261. Citizens of Winchelsea authorized to levy twopence from every ship with merchandise entering the Port of Winchelsea for maintaining the light which they had at their Port for the safety of the sailors entering it at night. (*Patent Roll.*)

1267. Protection for the Hospitallers of St. Anthony above (*supra*) the Port of Winchelsea. (*Patent Roll.*)

1537. The men of the 'Admiral of Slews' burnt the Hermitage of the Camber and hewed the image of St. Anthony with their swords bidding it call on St. George for help. (*Letters and Papers of Henry VIII, XII. (1), 718 (4).*)

1593. There had been a Hermitage dedicated to St. Anthony on Camber Beach in Parish of St. Thomas of Winchelsea for maintaining a light for the Port. A man born 1527 testified that he had

¹ See 'Flemish Land Measures in the Marshes', by the author: *Sussex Notes and Queries*, VI, No. 8 (Nov. 1937).

heard of a Hermitage near Old Camber Head. Two men born 1513 testified that they knew of a Hermitage near Old Camber Head, about half a mile out at sea. (Exchequer Depositions, Mich. 35-6 Eliz. No. 7.)

Note. Obviously the erosion was very considerable here in the sixteenth century.

E. BOUNDARIES OF OLD WINCHELSEA AND RYE

1247. Boundaries of Winchelsea and Rye, as transferred by Abbey of Fécamp to Henry III.

As the sea and the estuary (*mare et portus*) surround the town lands (*villa*) of Winchelsea as far as the fee of Gestling and the boundaries of Rye are as follows namely, as the sea (this evidently means the wide tidal estuary of the Brede River) goes from the entrance of the mill lade to the fee of James of Northye (Playden) in such a manner that the whole waterway to both sides belongs to the said town of la Rye; and from there as the King's Highway goes as far as the stair which is above the fee of Brice Palmer, and from this stair by a certain footpath as far as the ground of the Hospital of St. Bartholomew and from there towards the west along the ground of the said Hospital as far as Dodeswall' and from there the whole of Blikeshulde as far as the cross of Horlyngden, and from the Cross as far as Fingerlin where there is a certain ditch which runs through the middle of the embankment and from this ditch through the middle of Colemershe as a certain old ditch runs, from there as far as the fee of William de Echingham (Udimore) and then along his fee as far as the sea. (Charter Roll, 31 Henry III.)

F. BOUNDARIES OF LIBERTY OF NEW WINCHELSEA

1330. The Boundaries of the Liberty of Winchelsey taken and enrolled the seventh day of July in the fourth year of the reign of King Edward the Third: First from a certain cross outside New Gate go towards the north by the bank of the Fosse called le Towne Dyke and then through the middle of a marsh called Pewes Mershe to the King's Highway leading from Ickelsham to Winchelsey and then along the North side of this road to the ditch of the Manor of Ickelsham which leads to the inlet called St. Leonard's Creeke until you come opposite a certain fountain in Poklande called Walewell and then towards the west (evidently an error for east) . . . between Croked Acre and Bel Moris to the King's Highstreet and then towards the North across the land and field of Thomas Allard to the extreme boundary of the Fifth Quarter of the Town of Winchelsey and then to 'le rynge' on the west side of 'le Stone Myll' and thereafter to the end of 'Pypewell Cawsey' and then by the street on the left hand to 'Grynpepper Well' as the road leads to the Ferry (over the Brede River at New Winchelsea) and then to Whitefleete, as the water runs through hope pad' (Padiham?) marsh to

Kettlefleete; and then the whole of the Puddle and the whole of the Camber and over the shore of the sea where the Hermitage stands until you can see Beachy Head beside Bourne and then across the sea to the wall (or embankment) called Courtwall and then towards the west to the above mentioned cross outside New Gate. (Translation of Add. Ch. 18623, British Museum; seventeenth-century copy.)

G. EARLY MENTION OF MARSH PLACE-NAMES AND LOCALITIES

Note. Abbreviations of references: *S.A.C.*, *Sussex Archaeological Collections*; *S.R.S.*, *Sussex Record Society's Publications*; *B.A.*, *Thorpe's Cat. of Battle Abbey Charters*; *H.*, Holloway, *History of Romney Marsh*; *P.P.*, *Penshurst Place* (Hist. MSS. Com. Rep., 1925).

Marshes that were east of Rother in the Thirteenth Century

A.D.

724. Limenaea River: *Arch. Cant.* XLV.
 732. Limenaea River: *Arch. Cant.* XLIII.
 774. Lydd and Dengemarsh: *H.*, p. 48.
 791. Orgerswick, Agonhie, Midley, and Romney: *H.*, p. 49.
 820. Warehorne: *H.*, p. 53.
 848. Burmarsh and Wyk: *H.*, p. 54.
 895. 'Wefingmerse', 'Weringmerse' north of Rumenea: *H.*, p. 57.
 946. Limenaea River: *Arch. Cant.* XLV.
 1020. Streete and Burmarsh: *Arch. Cant.* XLV.
 1031. 'The Port called Wincenesel.' Canute's grant to Fécamp Abbey. Cartulary Abbey of Fécamp. Bibl. Nat. Paris, publ. *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, 1918, XXXIII. 342-4.
 1035. Hythe and Saltwood: *H.*, p. 58.
 c. 1050. Blackmanstone, Newchurch, and Midley: *H.*, p. 60.
 c. 1070. Dengemarsh: *B.A.*
 1087. Aldington: *H.*, p. 59.
 1087. Brenzett and Walland Marsh: *H.*, p. 61.
 1110. Prumhelle beyond Winchelese hard by Dengemarsh: *B.A.*, p. 40.
 1128. Port of Winchenesel. Cart. Abb. Fécamp. Bibl. Nat. Paris.
 1189. Ivychurch: *H.*, p. 66.
 c. 1190. Snave and Fairfield: *H.*, p. 67.
 c. 1200. Middleham: *Chron. B.A.*
 1203. Swaynesmere and Chene: *B.A.*, p. 43.
 c. 1220. Shingle of Promhelle (Broomhill) on South side of road from Winchesse to Rumene (Romney): *P.P.*, p. 77.
 c. 1220. Highway in front of Chapel (at Broomhill) toward Winchelese and the Boundary of Kent in Vike and Promhell: *P.P.*, p. 80.
 c. 1220. Road passing the Chapel of Promhell to the Port of Winchelsea: *P.P.*, p. 72.

- c. 1220. Spikespich Marsh and Cumers Marsh in Broomhill: *P.P.*, pp. 73, 74.
- ? Cumers Marsh between Spikespich Marsh and the House of St. Anthony on the other side of (*ultra*) the Port of Winchelsea: Campbell Charters, xxv. 8.
- c. 1220. Saltmarsh of Promhell called Swanmere between 'Terra Perjurata' and Capeness: *P.P.*, p. 73.
- c. 1225. Capeness: *Arch. Cant.* v. 217.

Marshes north of Brede River and east of Rye in the Thirteenth Century

1193. Swokenerse in the Moor below Rye: *S.A.C.* VIII. 151; *P.P.*, pp. 46-68.
1196. Reinger's Marsh: *S.R.S.* II, No. 4.
1198. Marsh called Ria bounded towards the east by water running from Rye to Winchelsea: *S.R.S.* II, No. 13.
- c. 1200. The Moor below Eures, between the stream which runs from Rye to Moorbrigge and the stream called Bradeflete with the 'forland' between those streams and the embankment round the marsh: *P.P.*, pp. 53, 57.
1285. The Moor, Salt Marshes, and Fleets in parish of Iden. (Original parchments in author's possession.)

Site of Old Winchelsea Market

1200. Abbot of Fécamp paid 5 marks for moving the Market out of the Cemetery. Pipe Roll.
1209. Fair held in John of Gestling's Fee near Winchelsea.
1215. Market moved to a site in front of St. Thomas's Church in Winchelsea (*S.A.C.* VIII).
1262. Market site moved because threatened with inundation by sea. Close Roll.
1271. Nov. 6. Owing to the failure of a quay on the south side of the church of St. Thomas the Martyr of Winchelsea, which has been carried away by the floods and tempests of the sea, a great part of the said church has fallen and both the King and the community are like to experience irreparable loss unless speedy provision is made for the repair of the said quay. Gift to St. Thomas the Martyr and the barons and community of Winchelsea of a strip of ground 12 ft. in width from the highway adjoining the wall of the churchyard on the north and running from the east corner of the said wall to the west corner, that shops may be built thereon and their rents applied to the maintenance of the said quay. (*Cal. Chart. R.* II. 177.)

Winchelsea Marsh

1180. Alured de St. Martin to Robertsbridge Abbey all his ground at Bremlesford between the Great Fleet and 'le Fodre', and beside the field at the Brook. (*P.P.*, p. 46.)

1196. Gilbert de Pette to Robertsbridge Abbey: marshes between Abbot of Fécamp's fee and Winchelsea, and the ground called 'le fothre', and the cliff opposite le fothre and opposite the salt-pans, and the ground which they hold in the Marsh of le fothre; also the $3\frac{1}{2}$ acres to the north of the embankment between the salt-pans and the cliff, the gift of William de St. Martin; also the grounds of Robert of Waililand in this marsh; also 3 acres which the Abbey bought of Walter Huilard in the same marsh. (*S.R.S.* II, No. 5.)

1251. Abbot of Robertsbridge complained that the chaplain of Pett had taken tithes from the Marsh between Fothre Mill and Ramesham, which the monks cultivated. (*P.P.*, p. 105.)

1235. Robertsbridge Abbey to Simon de Somery. Ten acres in Clivex. The Abbey's granary called Fodra outside Winchelsea mentioned. (*S.R.S.* II, No. 302.) Clivex is a little distance east of Ashes Farm.

1248. Agreement between James son of Valentine and William Beaufiz. North Marsh, Grykes Marsh, Ketelsfleet, Colmarsh, Marsh of Iham, Stamford Marsh, Pudele Marsh, mentioned, also the revenue derived from the 'Portus' of Winchelesse. (*S.R.S.* II, No. 504.)

1251. Commission to see how Winchelsea could be saved and the Marshes of Winchelsea, Rye, Hyham, Iclesham, Farly, Odymer, and Brede could be protected against the sea. (Patent Roll.)

1285. The Manor of Iham had 178 acres with 60 tenants between the Hill of Iham and Daunswall; 282 acres with 78 tenants in other parts of Winchelsea Marsh; 86 acres with 17 tenants in Reynger Marsh; 14 acres with 5 tenants in the new Marsh. (Survey of Iham: Rentals and Surveys (P.R.O.).)

1300. The King, James de Audele, John de Ore, John Heryngaud (Icklesham) and Isabel de Gestlynge are the chief lords of the Marsh of Winchelsea. The ground called Spadland in this Marsh which was held by their tenants totalled $518\frac{5}{8}$ acres. Names of 81 tenants are given. (Chan. Inq. Misc., file 59, No. 12.)

1302. The Winchelsea Marsh could not be saved by the old wall existing towards the east, and a new wall 350 rods in length should be built: 60 acres will remain exposed outside this wall, 50 of these are held of the King. (*Cal. Inq. Misc.* II, No. 1911.)

1351. 'The Marsh of Spadland lying between the Town of Winchelsea and Daunsewalle, and between Pykam Myll' (near the top of the Pannel Valley) 'and Trecherie' (below the Strand Gate of Winchelsea) 'is utterly torn and destroyed by storm of the sea, so that the lands of the King and of others are inundated at every high tide.' (Patent Roll.)

1329. Lands in the Marshes of Rammeshorn, Westbrook, Coubrook, and Daunesmersh mentioned. (*P.P.*, p. 138.)