

## 10. Medieval Farming and Flooding in the Brede Valley

Mark Gardiner

The eastern part of the High Weald is drained by a number of rivers – the Rother, Tillingham, Brede and Pannel – which flow outwards to Walland Marsh. The history of the development of the marsh and the river valleys are closely associated, for the drainage of one has had a profound influence on the other. An analysis of the lithostratigraphy of these valleys has been undertaken (Waller *et al.* 1988), but very little attention has been given to the more recent history, and particularly to the impact of human activity in these areas. With the exception of the work by Eddison on the Rother valley, the development of drainage in the valleys leading into the marsh has been almost entirely neglected (Eddison 1985; 1988; 1995). The present paper attempts to identify the main events during the medieval period in the reclamation of the marshland within and immediately to the east of the Brede valley, and to consider how the land, which was recovered with considerable effort, was used.

The River Brede originates as two streams which flow from near Battle and Netherfield in the Sussex Weald and converge near Sedlescombe Bridge. The river then flows

eastwards in a valley which increases in width below the confluence with Forge Stream and is crossed by a bridge to the south of the village of Brede. From there the river occupies a broad valley little or no higher than the adjoining marshlands. At its eastern end it runs through the marshes between Winchelsea and Rye. As the river leaves the valley it turns towards the south to run at the foot of New Winchelsea hill before following a northward course to join the Rother near Rye (Fig. 10.1).

Throughout the medieval period the lower part of the Brede valley was liable to flooding, both from the water of the river itself and from sea water entering the estuary. The valley from Lidham Brook eastwards seems to have been formed a single 'level' or area of administration for drainage purposes (Fig. 10.2a). Lidham Brook itself, which was possibly the area called *Sneppesmarsh* or *Snepbrok*, may have been managed separately. The area to the east, including the marsh called *Grikes*, was protected from marine flooding by the wall called *Damme* (*Curia Regis Rolls* 11, 22; Salzmann 1902, no. 504).<sup>1</sup> A second sea wall lay a little further down the valley and

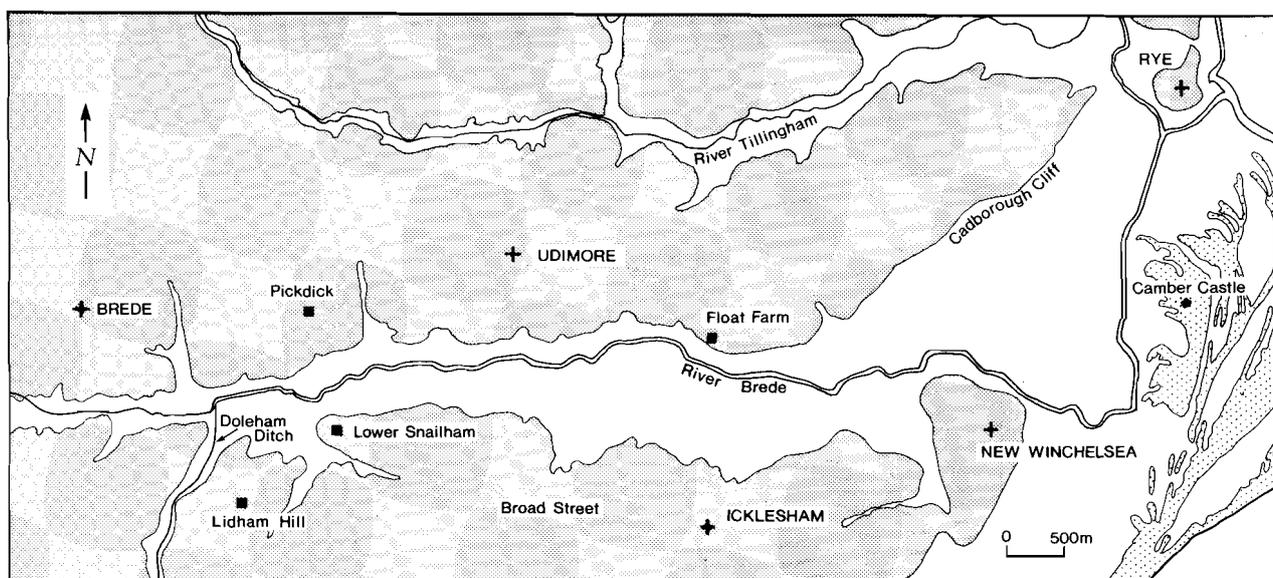
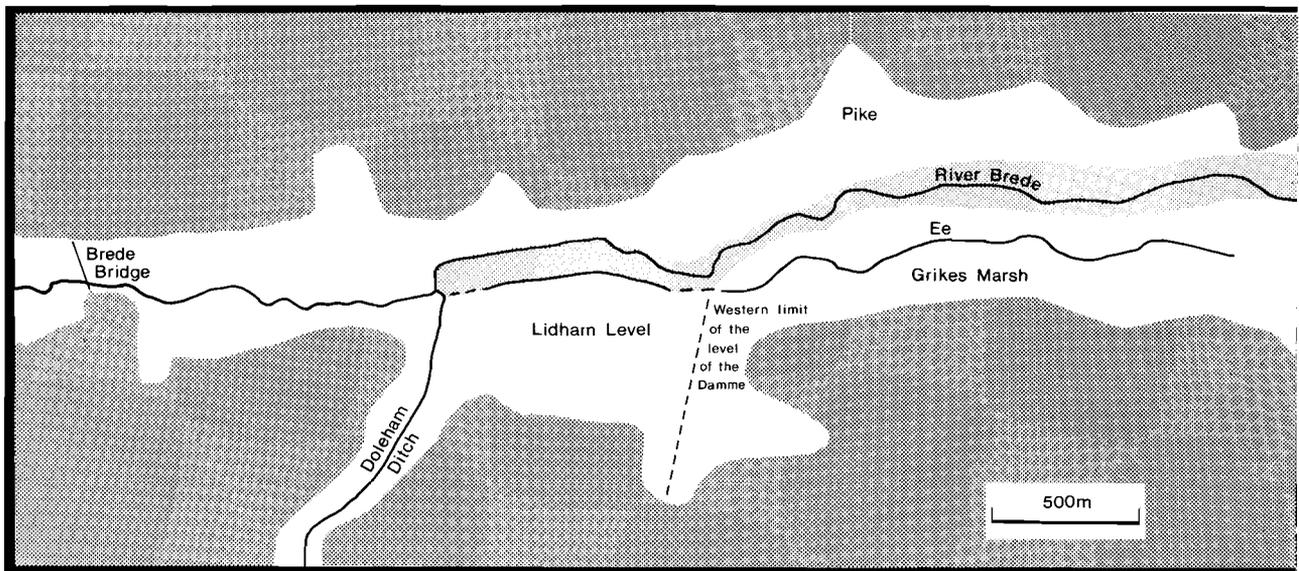


Fig. 10.1. The lower Brede valley and Cadborough Marsh.



KEY:  Upland

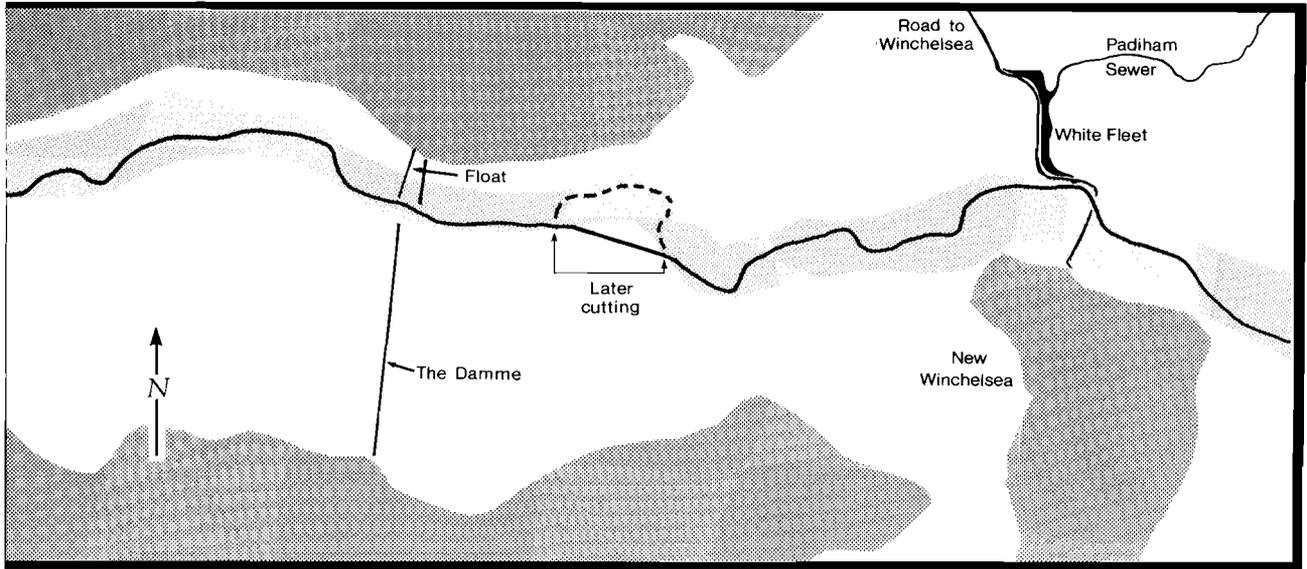
Fig. 10.2a. The lower Brede valley (western part).

carried another causeway across the marshland to a bridge over the river. This gave access to the north side of the town of New Winchelsea through Pipewell Gate, otherwise called Land Gate (*Cal. Pat. Rolls 1374–77*, 58). Beyond the second wall the Brede flowed through the marshlands between New Winchelsea and Rye to reach the sea. When the harbour of New Winchelsea was established on the river and the new town was built on Iham Hill above it in the late 13th century, the Brede evidently ran close to the south side of the mouth of the valley (Homan 1949, 38–9). It then flowed along the seaward side of the marshes between New Winchelsea and Rye, but the growth of the shingle on the west side of the Rother estuary from at least the early 14th century deflected the outfall of the Brede progressively northwards. This process was evident to witnesses in the early 16th century.<sup>2</sup> When work began on Camber Castle in c.1486 it was sited on Kevill Point to defend the port of Camber, but by 1626, such were the changes in the coastline, the guns of the castle were out of range of the harbour (*V.C.H. Sussex 9*, 185).

The area between Winchelsea and Rye to the north of the river was known as Cadborough Marsh. In the 13th century this was divided by a network of tidal channels or fleets; *Mareflet*, *Betelesflet*, *Pipenesellesflet* and White Fleet are mentioned in documents of this period.<sup>3</sup> During the following 150 years most of these were reduced to minor watercourses and a document of 1460 refers to a piece of land near Cadborough Marsh bounded by a 'ditch called *Oldeflete*' (*Cal. Close Rolls 1454–61*, 430). Only the broad course of White Fleet survived in part to be recorded on the Ordnance Survey first-edition six-inch

map of 1877 (Fig. 10.3). The landscape of the marsh had by then been so completely transformed that many of the medieval marshland place-names had been lost. Even in the early 16th century there was considerable disagreement about the place-names and boundaries of the land here. The geography of the area can, however, be reconstructed in part from a survey of 1330 of the Liberty of New Winchelsea and from the same boundary shown on the six-inch map (Fig. 10.3).<sup>4</sup> The survey proceeds from the town of Winchelsea to the site of the ferry across the Brede, now marked by Ferry Bridge, and thence to Whitefleet. The boundary continued along the fleet to Hope Marsh and Padiham Marsh, which must have been close to Padiham Sewer. It passes along to Kettlefleet and then to the Puddle, which is marked on early maps, and so to the Camber.<sup>5</sup>

The present name of the River Brede is a back-formation from the village which stands on the north side of the valley and that name was derived from Old English meaning 'breadth' referring to the width of the valley it overlooks (Mawer and Stenton 1930, 514). The earlier name for the river was the *Ee* or *Ree*, from Old English *ēa*, 'river' (Smith 1956, 142–3).<sup>6</sup> During the 15th century a new course was made for the river to the north of and parallel with the *Ee*. This, the present day course of the river, was known as 'the Channel', though John Stoneham's map of 1599 labels it *Pyke Dyke*. No other reference to the latter name for the river has been found, though it does survive in the farm called Pickdick in Brede (Fig. 10.1). A field nearby adjacent to the river was called *Pike* and the name *Pyke Dyke* was evidently a rhyming formation from this.<sup>7</sup>



Channel

Fig. 10.2b. The lower Brede valley (eastern part).

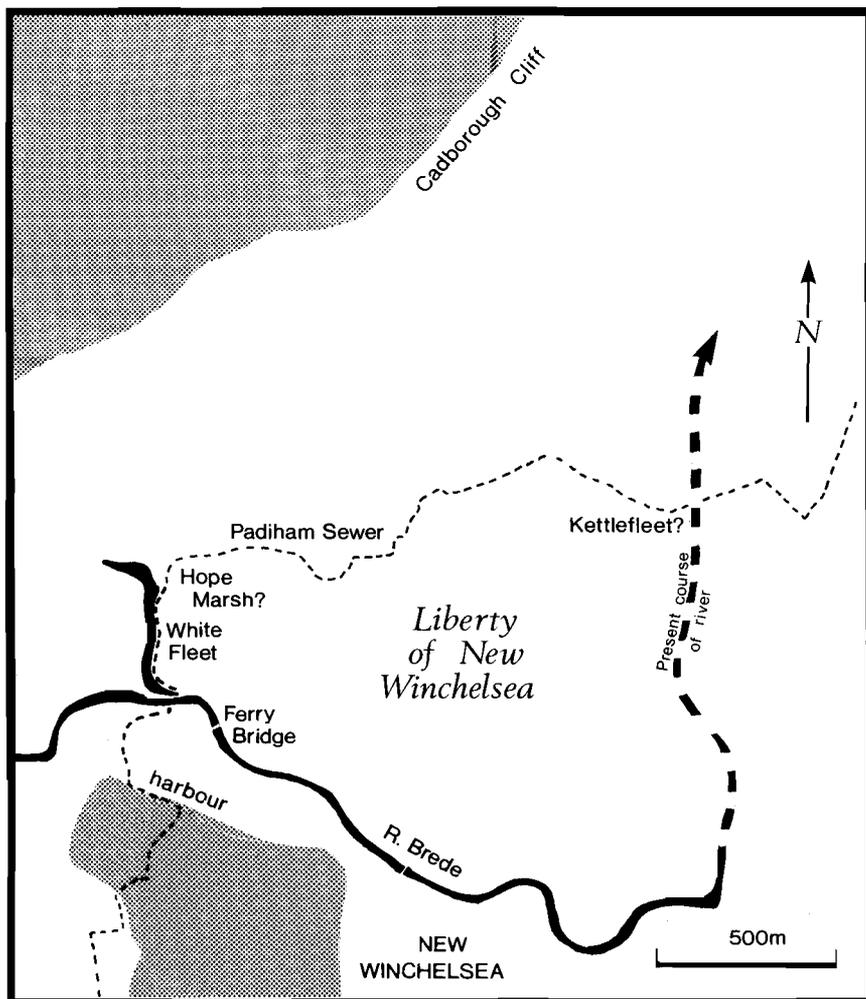


Fig. 10.3. The boundary of the Liberty of New Winchelsea across Cadborough Marsh between New Winchelsea and Rye. Upland is shown by dark tone.

## Enclosure of the Marshland to 1250

The early history of the enclosure of the marshes to the east of the Brede valley is not well recorded. Enclosure seems to have begun below Cadborough Cliff and extended southwards towards the River Brede. By the end of the 12th century Hope Marsh had already been inned and grants were made to enclose further areas of land in the vicinity (Salzmann 1902, nos. 4, 12).

This work seems to have taken place in parallel with similar enclosure to the east at Broomhill. It is probable that there was a continuous bank of shingle running between the high land at Fairlight in Sussex and Broomhill on the county boundary. Behind this lay a band of marshes protected from the sea by the bank, and many of the individuals enclosing land at Broomhill also carried out similar work at the east end of the Brede valley (Gardiner 1988). Ellis de Rye, who, before his death in 1206, drained land at *Grikes* marsh in Broomhill, also inned land in the Brede valley (*Curia Regis Rolls* 5, 202–4; Salzmann 1902, no. 25).<sup>8</sup> John de Guestling was enclosing land throughout his holdings which extended from Guestling itself, on the south of the Brede valley, to Old Winchelsea and beyond to Jury's Gut in Broomhill (Salzmann 1902, nos. 12, 13, 167).<sup>9</sup> In 1208 John granted half the enclosed marshland at Broomhill to the men who had reclaimed it (*Curia Regis Rolls* 5, 202–4). Amongst these were Luke, son of Reinger and Walter Niger, both of whom also held land in the Brede valley.<sup>10</sup> We lack further information about these early 13th-century entrepreneurs who were funding the very substantial works necessary to inn and drain the marshland, but it seems at least possible that local merchants from Winchelsea and Rye were investing in land in the vicinity as they certainly were later.<sup>11</sup>

Many of the pieces of enclosed marshland seem to have been named after their 13th-century improvers, just as 300 years later the new parish of East Guldeforde took its name from the reclamer of the salt marsh, Sir Richard Guldeforde. Ellis Marsh and Valentine Marsh apparently recall Ellis de Rye and his son (Salzmann 1902, no. 504).<sup>12</sup> James, the grandson of Ellis still held land at *Grikes* and Ellis Marsh in 1249. Similarly, Reingers Marsh in Icklesham was called after the person of that name whose son, Luke is later found holding land in the same area (*Curia Regis Rolls* 1, 50; Salzmann 1902, no. 94).<sup>13</sup>

Land in the lower Brede valley and on the west side of Walland Marsh was commonly measured in 'Flanders acres'. A survey of the manor of Iham made in 1285 explains that four Flanders acres were equal to five English acres (Homan 1937).<sup>14</sup> One of these larger acres was therefore equivalent to 1.25 English acres. This is very close to the customary acres of Romney Marsh measured with a 20-foot perch, one of which was equal to 1.21 English statute acres (Teichman Derville 1936, 20). Flanders acres by name are not, however, found generally on Romney Marsh proper.

'Flanders acres' were more than a colloquialism used to describe the larger land measures. They were part of

a system of measurement apparently derived from the Continent which included the Flemish unit of mensuration, the *ymetta*.<sup>15</sup> Medieval immigration from Flanders to eastern Sussex is well attested and the surname, le Fleming, which refers to the origin of the holders or their ancestors, occurs commonly in 13th-century sources. There is, for example, reference to Bolde and Fugel, the Flemings who in c.1200 were holding land in the marsh adjacent to the River Rother near Iden (Searle 1974, 471; *Hist. Man. Comm.* 1925, 1, 53). It is likely that Flemish immigrants introduced their system of land measurement to this marshland, which had possibly been drained using expertise from their homelands, just as in later centuries the work of drainage was often directed by experts from Low Countries (*Cal. Pat. Rolls 1436–41*, 485; Mayhew 1987, 265).

There is little evidence of the progress of the drainage of brookland further upstream in the Brede valley, though much of the land seems to have been improved either in the early 13th century or before. A grant of c.1230 of 23 acres below Udimore park refers to the land as marsh, but from the rent of 9½d. an acre it is evident that it was improved, drained, land.<sup>16</sup> Land in the Doleham valley is described in early 13th-century deeds as brookland and meadow, and had also been improved.<sup>17</sup> Further up the Brede valley at Sedlescombe, however, drainage of the valley bottom seems to have been only partially complete by the 1240s when the monks of Battle Abbey purchased land there. New works were undertaken; the marsh was ditched and a mill was constructed at *Iltonsbath*, near Sedlescombe Bridge.<sup>18</sup> Other land nearby had already been improved, possibly by the joint action of groups of tenants, for the Battle charters mentioned adjoining meadow land held by 'the men of Whatlington' and 'of Wickham'.<sup>19</sup>

## Enclosure of the Marshland from 1250

The conditions which had been so favourable for inning began to deteriorate during the second half of the 13th century. An increasing number of storms culminated in 1287–8 when the town of Old Winchelsea, already severely damaged, was overwhelmed and there was widespread flooding in Walland Marsh. It is likely that in the first half of the century the shingle barrier which stretched from Fairlight to Broomhill had been breached, and the River Rother had changed course to flow out to the sea through a new channel near Rye (Green 1988). This breach allowed the storms to drive the sea up into the new estuary of the Rother, raising the level of water and threatening the marshes to the west of Rye and in the Brede valley itself. An extent of the manor of Iham, the future site of New Winchelsea, made in 1285 prophetically mentions that land in the marshes was in danger of the sea.<sup>20</sup> The great storm of 4th February 1288, which did so much damage in Walland Marsh and the lower Rother valley, also broke down the walls and flooded the Brede valley (Stubbs 1890, 293).<sup>21</sup> Later that year John Thomas claimed

damages from William Harengod, lord of Icklesham for 20 acres of marshland his grandfather had been granted by Sibyl de Icklesham, William's grandmother. Sibyl had undertaken to maintain the walls around this marshland, but these had been overwhelmed by the sea in that storm.<sup>22</sup>

The marsh of Whitefleet lying to the south of Cadborough Cliff was flooded at the same time and it remained under water for 15 years, until 1302 when John Thomas made an agreement to reinclose and divide the land.<sup>23</sup> His grandfather, Reginald Poun, had purchased 60 Flanders acres in Whitefleet Marsh in c.1230 from Valentine, the son of Ellis de Rye and this possibly formed the core of the land held by his descendants.<sup>24</sup> By the later 13th century John Thomas was one of the leading holders of land at the east end of the Brede valley and in Broomhill. When he died in c.1319 four of his sons leased their share of the inheritance to Richard, their brother. Richard Thomas purchased and sold land in the newly reclaimed marsh of Whitefleet, establishing a manor there before 1331.<sup>25</sup> It is clear that the costs of reinclosing the marshes around Winchelsea were considerable for other tenants resisted the payment of scots for the repairs of the walls and dykes by removing their animals so that they could not be distrained (*Cal. Pat. Rolls 1301–07*, 324).

The progress of the reclamation of other drowned marshland is not easy to follow. A deed of 1332 mentions a 'new marsh' at *Pipenesell* near Rye, which had been reinclosed.<sup>26</sup> A commission *de walliis et fossatis* was appointed in 1331 to examine *Laddesmersh*, *Bodyhammersmersh*, Whitefleet Marsh and Cadborough Marsh between New Winchelsea and Rye, but it is not clear whether this was to reclaim these or ensure their continuing defence from the sea (*Cal. Pat. Rolls 1330–34*, 202). Twenty-eight acres were granted in the same year to Stephen Padiham at *Laddesmersh*, near Padiham Marsh in Icklesham and this was described as 'new marsh' in 1337 when the tithes from it and 86 acres of other marshland were given to Battle Abbey (*Cal. Fine Rolls 4*, 244).<sup>27</sup>

The major sea defence of the lower Brede valley was the wall called *Damme*, a straight embankment about 1000 metres long built across the valley. It is unfortunate that, unlike the Knelle Dam constructed across the Rother valley, there are no references to its construction (cf. Eddison 1985, 100–103). Its construction should almost certainly be connected with the problem of the raised water levels caused by sea water being driven into the Rother estuary (Gardiner 1988, 115). It does not seem to have been in place in 1247 when the bounds of the liberty of Fécamp Abbey imply that the valley was an open estuary as far west as Guestling, and the earliest direct reference found to the wall is 1309, when the accounts of the Icklesham Rectory record the payment of a scot for its maintenance (*Cal. Ch. Rolls 1*, 321).<sup>28</sup> Two tenants near Lidham (Guestling) in 1278 had the surname 'de *Damme*', which suggests that it or another wall had already been constructed (Salzman 1945, 77). The *Damme* protected a

total of 1036 acres, mainly in the lordships of Udimore and Icklesham, and a smaller area in Brede.<sup>29</sup> This information allows the area which contributed scots to be identified with some certainty. It must have included all the land in the river valley as far west as a ditch which ran across the valley near Lower Snailham and formed a 'level' or an area of drainage administration similar to those along the Rother.<sup>30</sup>

*Damme* was not only a flood defence for the land to the west, but also served as a convenient crossing point over the valley. The *Damme* served as a causeway and the river was spanned by a bridge with hurdle sides. Tolls totalling about £5 a year were recorded in the Udimore accounts in the 1360s for passing over the *Damme*. Water passing beneath it was controlled by a sluice operated by pulleys.<sup>31</sup> On the seaward side of the wall there was a dock or *flota*, memory of which is preserved in the name of Float Farm nearby. This was a minor quay and lastage (port dues) in 1363 was worth only 11s.<sup>32</sup> The dock served as a point for loading firewood; the woods in the eastern Weald were coppiced for firewood, much of which was shipped to London and the Continent (*Cal. Pat. Rolls 1350–54*, 192). As firewood was a low value, bulky commodity and transport overland greatly increased its cost, even carrying wood from Udimore to New Winchelsea nearly doubled its price.<sup>33</sup> The only economic way to transport wood was to load it on to boats near the point at which it was cut. Hurdles purchased for Dover Castle in 1326 were brought overland from their place of manufacture in Brede, Udimore and Beckley and put on board ships at *Damme* to be taken along the coast (Pelham 1931, 173). This quay was one of a series at the edge of the Weald used for loading firewood and timber. Similar quays are mentioned in 1357 at Reading Street, Maytham, Newenden and Bodiam on the Rother. The Knelle Dam, constructed across that river to prevent flooding in that valley, had an adjoining quay (*Cal. Pat. Rolls 1354–58*, 579; Colvin 1963, 435; see also Eddison 1995, 158).

A survey of 1597 allows the dock at Float Farm to be located fairly accurately. The site was examined in 1993 and traces of a slight causeway leading from the side of the valley were found in unploughed land. No sign could be seen of the continuation of the causeway in the field beyond, but all traces may have been removed by ploughing. The causeway reached as far as a ditch at the edge of the floodplain. Large flint cobbles and some pieces of sandstone were visible in the near-vertical side of the ditch. Some pieces of roof tile and a single piece of medieval pottery were found among the stones. The stones may have been laid down to form the core of *Damme*, or alternatively might have been the facing of the edge of quay against which boats were drawn up. It is notable that very few stones were found in the opposite side of the ditch bank, so the latter suggestion seems more likely.

One of the results of the construction of sea walls across the Brede valley was to restrict the ebb and flow

of the tide up the river. This, however, reduced the scouring action of the tide in the lower part of the valley and in 1357 it was recorded that the port of New Winchelsea on the river Brede was becoming increasingly clogged with sediment. The king, who had visited Winchelsea, issued an instruction to repair or construct walls along the Brede valley and remove the 'obstruction' at *Sloughdam* so that the sea could again ebb and flow as formerly (*Cal. Close Rolls 1354–60*, 315). *Sloughdam*, literally the 'sluice dam', may have been an alternative name for *Damme* or, more probably, a second embankment. If it was another wall, then it was perhaps the embankment which carried a road across the Brede valley to the north of New Winchelsea (*Cal. Pat. Rolls 1374–77*, 58) (Fig. 10.2b). It is uncertain whether any action was taken to observe the king's order. Certainly, not all the sea walls were removed as the royal instruction required, for only a few years later repairs were made to *Damme*. A list of scots payable for *Damme* drawn up in the late 14th century confirms that it remained in place as before.<sup>34</sup>

The long-term problem of silting remained, because reduced tidal scouring was unable to clear the sediment deposited by the sea, and possibly also by the river. This is likely to have created a problem both in the river course above *Damme*, which would have become choked by sediment, as well as downstream around the harbour of Winchelsea. The solution chosen involved an enormous engineering project. At a date between 1419 and 1442 a new embanked cutting was made for the river to the north of and parallel with the old course of the river *Ee* (Figs. 10.2a, 10.2b). The construction of this artificial ditch called 'the Channel' is not recorded in any document examined, but may be dated from the bounds of early 15th-century charters.<sup>35</sup> It was a major undertaking measuring about 150 m wide and at least 7.5 km long and flanked by walls. Its intention was clear, to allow an increased quantity of sea water to ebb and flow in the Brede valley in a new broad course, and so scour the bed of the river, enable access to the port at Winchelsea and the free drainage of water from the marshes either side.

The cutting for the Channel began a short distance below the confluence with the Doleham Ditch, at the point where the River Brede now takes a right-angle turn to the north. The earlier course of the river, the *Ee*, lay about one field to the south of the Channel and its probable line can be traced as a small drainage channel continuing eastwards for some distance. The *Ee* had formed the boundary between the parishes and the manors of Udimore and Icklesham, but after its construction, the Channel became the natural boundary along the centre of the valley. Fields lying between the former and the new river course were sold by farms on the north of the valley to those on the south and the Channel was also adopted as the parish boundary. A comparable change had been made in the Rother valley after an alteration of the line of the river in 1386, when the Rother was diverted by a mill dam near to Udiam Farm (Ewhurst) to a more northerly

course, and this new line adopted as the boundary (Whittick 1993).

A commission *de wallis et fossatis* was appointed in 1456 to examine the marshes between Sedlescombe Bridge on the west and *Pyke*, at the boundary of the lordships of Brede and Udimore, on the east, perhaps as a consequence of the improved drainage made possible by the Channel (*Cal. Pat. Rolls 1459–61*, 300). The length of valley examined by the commission included Lidham Marsh at the junction of the Brede valley and the Doleham Ditch, an area which had flooded in the past (*Nonarum Inquisitiones*, 373). Another consequence of the effects of the construction of the Channel was the disuse of the wharf beside *Damme*. After the improvements to the river it was possible for boats to ascend further up the valley and by the early 16th century a new quay had been established upstream at Brede Bridge (Searle and Ross 1967, 22).

Little survives on the ground at the present day of these river engineering works, though the Channel can, for the most part, still be identified as a broad band edged by ditches, within which the present river runs. These ditches originally lay behind the embankments containing the waters of the Channel. The banks of the Channel are not very apparent, though there is a clear change in the level of the land. Silting within the Channel, together with the possible lowering of the marshland surface due to the wastage of peat bed beneath the surface (Waller *et al.* 1988), has raised its level above that of the surrounding marshland.

### *Farming in the Brede Valley*

The most highly valued land in the Weald lay in the river valleys, which was worth up to ten times the value of the fields on the acidic clay and sandy soils of the uplands.<sup>36</sup> The usage of the valley land may be traced in the account rolls of the manors of Udimore and Icklesham Rectory, while the accounts of Brede manor give some evidence of the state of the Brede valley during the 14th century. The medieval accounting year ran from Michaelmas, 29th September to the following 28th September. In the discussion that follows the date used is that of the closing year, the year of harvest.

### *Farming at Udimore*

The manor of Udimore straddled the ridge separating the Brede valley from the valley of the River Tillingham to the north. Account rolls are extant for the years 1362–71 and 1380–82, and the grange exits on the dorso record the acreage sown each year, sometimes describing the type of land – marsh, brookland or upland – and occasionally mentioning the names of fields.<sup>37</sup> There are incidental references in the court rolls to the cultivation of the land of the tenants. A detailed survey of 1597 describes the fields of the Udimore demesne and gives sufficient detail to allow most of these to be located.<sup>38</sup> It may be compared with an extent of 1389 which also lists field names.<sup>39</sup>

The demense of Udimore was divided into two major parts. The larger lay around the manor house called Court Lodge and extended down into the marshland in the Brede and Tillingham valleys. The second area lay to the east in the Brede valley below Cadborough. The main crop on the upland fields (*terra susana*) at Udimore, as elsewhere in the High Weald, was oats, a crop tolerant of poor soils. In the years 1362–64 the total sown acreage remained steady at about 55 acres, of which 40 acres were oats (Fig. 10.4). The other crops grown were beans, rye, wheat and barley. From 1365 the area of cultivation rose steadily each year until 1370 when it fell slightly, but increased further the following year. Much of the expansion was due to the greater acreage of wheat and winter barley sown particularly on the brookland and in the marsh. These two crops increased from 10 per cent of the total acreage in the early 1360s to about one third in 1371.

The stimulus behind this steady expansion in arable was the high and rising price of grain (Farmer 1990, 502–3). This period has been described as the ‘Indian summer’ of demesne farming preceding the end of direct cultivation and the leasing of seigneurial lands (Dyer

1980, 113). Considerable sums were invested in the demesne at Udimore in the second half of the 1360s. A new plough was made for the marsh in 1366, a new barn was constructed in 1367 at *le Conyer* near Cadborough to accommodate the growing quantities of grain from the harvest, and a further new building made there the following year. Costs were incurred in establishing and maintaining drainage for the arable fields in the marsh: sums for making gates and pulleys for sluices are noted in the accounts. Money was also spent in ensuring high yields from the marshland fields: 21s. was expended in weeding the marsh corn compared to only 6s. 7d. for the greater acreage on the upland. Boys were employed to chase crows from the marsh crops and a man was paid to watch over the crops there, presumably for a similar purpose.

The land newly brought into cultivation lay mainly on the marsh. In 1365 most of the arable fields were on the upland, but by 1371 about 100 acres were on the marsh, 29 acres were in the brookland and 26 acres were on the upland. The location of a further 24 acres is not stated. No unusual sums were spent on inning during this period and it seems that the expansion of land under crop was achieved

Udimore

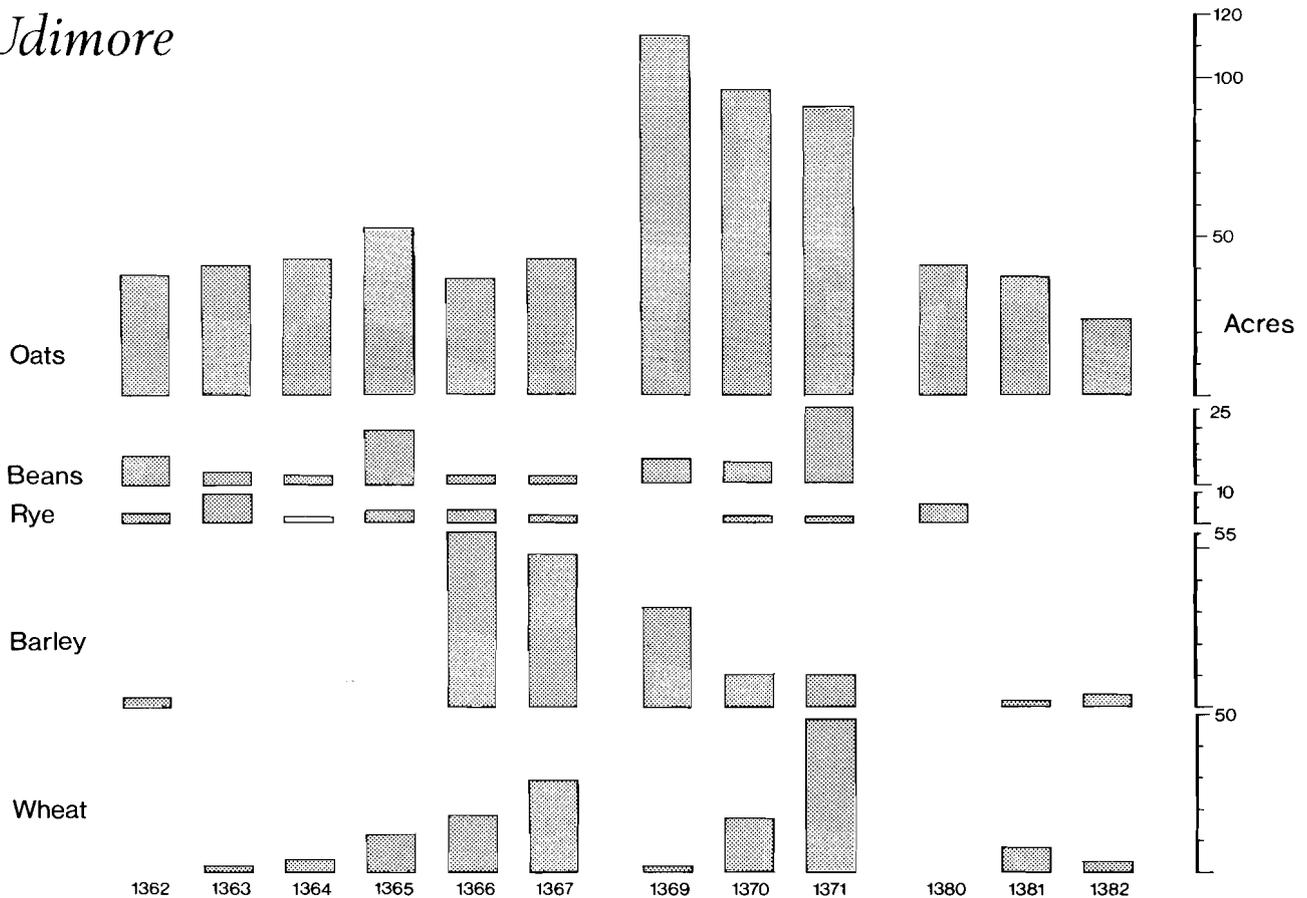


Fig. 10.4. Crops grown on the Udimore demesne in the later 14th century.

by converting pasture to arable. The same may have happened to a lesser degree on the upland. The field called *Regges* was pasture in 1368, but the following year was fallowed and in 1370 and 1371 was sown with wheat.

A substantial proportion of the demesne remained as pasture land, which Saul (1986, 136–8) has shown might be profitably let for grazing to tenants. Few animals were kept by the lord. In 1362 there were a single horse, two stots (work horses), some cattle, eight oxen for ploughing and a breeding herd of two boars and three sows with their progeny, together with 18 geese. Saul has drawn attention to the decline in receipts from the sale of pasture in the five years after 1367, though a re-examination of the accounts suggests that the decline was more apparent than real. Fields were often accounted for under the heading 'Farm', instead of under 'Sale of Pasture'. A more significant change to the pasture land occurred in the 1370s when the sea broke into the Brede valley. *Damme* was breached and fields on the valley floor inundated. No rolls survive for the period 1372 to 1379, but by 1380 the land under arable cultivation had been reduced to an area smaller than it had been before, and the proportion under wheat and barley had declined to its previous level.

### *Farming at Icklesham Rectory Manor*

The Battle Abbey manor of Icklesham rectory probably originated in the lands given by Ralph de Icklesham in c.1190. Later the land was exchanged for 60 acres at *Hotherknok* and confirmed by Nicholas Harengod and his wife, Sibyl de Icklesham, the daughter and heir of Ralph.<sup>40</sup> Nicholas Harengod also gave the advowson of Icklesham church, which was subsequently appropriated by Battle Abbey (*V.C.H. Sussex* 9, 189). The lands here were extended by various purchases, including a ¼ acre in Reingers Marsh and a tenement at *Grafherst*.<sup>41</sup>

The abbey's manor was not extensive, comprising only eight tenements and a demesne of about 50 or 60 acres. It had, however, a greater economic significance as it also received the tithes of Icklesham parish. These were either sold in the market or 'sold' internally, that is, assigned to other parts of the abbey estate. Most of the land held in demesne was on the upland around Broad Street (Fig. 10.1), but there were some fields in the marsh to the north in the Brede valley at *Mor*, and 6¾ acres to the west of New Winchelsea in Padiham Marsh. The abbey also received the tithes from a further 113 acres in Padiham Marsh, probably in the parish of Rye Foreign.<sup>42</sup> There were two acres of hay meadow and a wood at *Nolleslond* in Guestling. The wood produced broom and gorse for the oven of the manor house kitchen and was coppiced for firewood.<sup>43</sup>

Accounts survive for the years ending 1309, 1324, 1337, 1344, 1354, 1356, 1358–63, 1368–9, 1371–4, 1376–82, 1384–86 and 1400.<sup>44</sup> These suggest that the management of the Icklesham demesne was similar to Udimore. The abbey kept only sufficient animals to plough the demesne fields and to maintain a breeding herd of

pigs. The monks practised a flexible regime of cultivation, letting fields for pasture for annual or half-yearly periods, which allowed them to be resumed for arable in occasional years. In 1361 the land at *Mor*, though usually sold for pasture, was sown with crops. The following year it was grazed by the lord's animals.<sup>45</sup> This practice of convertible husbandry, once thought to be a post-medieval innovation, has also been noted on the other Battle Abbey manors of Barnhorne and Marley (Brandon 1971a, 74; Searle 1974, 272–86). Having so few animals on the demesne, it was possible to over-winter the stock of others, either on the pasture, or by feeding them in stalls in the barns.<sup>46</sup>

The main arable crop at Icklesham was oats, which rarely occupied less than half the sown acreage and was usually sown on about two-thirds of the land. Demesne cultivation declined in the 1370s as it became more economic to let the land. In 1371 the area under cultivation was reduced, the following year many of the demesne fields were let and in 1373 no fields were sown.<sup>47</sup> The breaching of the sea walls, which may have contributed to the decline of demesne agriculture at Udimore, is also apparent in the Icklesham accounts. In 1376 the sea wall at Winchelsea broke, the marsh of Padiham was overwhelmed and the field called *Mor* was submerged. Though the latter field was recovered by 1400, the date of the last surviving account, the marsh at Padiham had yet to be reclaimed.<sup>48</sup>

### *Marshland in Brede Manor*

The manor of Brede was held by the French abbey of Fécamp from at least the time of the Norman Conquest. Brede was originally part of the estate of *Rameslie*, which included Rye, Winchelsea and part of Hastings. Winchelsea and Rye were taken from the abbey in 1247, but Brede remained a manor of Fécamp Abbey, though it was periodically in the king's hands as the possession of an alien priory. The lands of the manor lay mainly to the west of Udimore, though there was also a detached part of the manor in Cadborough Marsh.

The accounts for the years ending 1336, 1360, 1362, 1363, 1365–6, 1368–9, 1372, 1375–6, 1378–82, 1388, 1404–05, 1407, 1411, 413, 1418–20 and 1428 have been examined. These provide little evidence of the management of the demesne, though the entries under the heading of 'Allowances' do record tenants' lands from which for various reasons no rent was received.<sup>49</sup> The land within the Brede valley and to the east beyond Winchelsea was under water and paid no rent from at least 1362, the date of the earliest detailed Brede account. The largest single area recorded among the allowances lay in Cadborough Marsh.<sup>50</sup> This recurs in all the accounts until 1411, and every year it was disallowed by the auditor. The submerged tenements included *Porthmersh* (otherwise called the land of Henry Hendyman, Brounyng Paulyn and Robert Paulyn), *Wykeleyerd* and *Themeninlond*, none of which can be located. Between 1376 and 1405 many of the pieces of land fell out of the allowances, either due to a

change in accounting practice, or because they were reclaimed and the payments of rent resumed. By 1404, however, Whitefleet Marsh had been added to the list of submerged lands.

## Discussion

The events of reclamation and flooding in the Brede valley and the adjoining marshes which have been outlined can be divided into a number of periods. The earliest recorded activity was the reclamation of very substantial areas of marshland, both in the Brede valley and elsewhere in the vicinity during the late 12th and early 13th centuries.<sup>51</sup> Winchelsea was one of the most important ports on the south coast at this period (Stenton 1940, 218) and it has been tentatively suggested above that the investment for the reclamation of the adjoining marshland might have been provided by merchants in the town. Direct evidence of this is lacking for it is not possible to recognise most of the individuals named in deeds, though it is noteworthy that James son of Alard, a member of the important family of Winchelsea merchants, was amongst those buying and selling land in the marsh (*Cal. Doc. France* 1, 126; Salzmann 1902, nos. 4, 7, 46 and 69; Salzman 1920).<sup>52</sup>

The second phase began in c.1250 as the threat to the marshes at the eastern end of the Brede valley developed. The increasing number of the storms are well documented through their effect on the port of Old Winchelsea, and after the Rother had formed a new estuary to the south of Rye, apparently before 1258 when the river reached the sea in the 'parts of Winchelsea', the area would have been particularly vulnerable (*Cal. Pat. Rolls 1247–58*, 635–6). Sea water was driven up into the Rother estuary impeding drainage and raising the water level, although no serious flooding appears to have taken place in the Brede valley before 1287–8.

During the third phase the land lost to the sea was at least partially recovered. The sea wall called *Damme* may have been built at this time, and a second wall, perhaps that called *Sloughdam*, was constructed further down the valley. Towards the middle of the 14th century, the fourth phase, the incidence of flooding seems to have increased again. Land in Cadborough Marsh and *Sneppesmersh* (probably near Lidham) was under water in 1341 and there was further flooding in 1344 when the quantity of wheat received from tithes in Icklesham parish was reduced (*Nonarum Inquisitiones*, 373).<sup>53</sup> This was a period of frequent storms and flooding along the Kent and Sussex coasts, according to Brandon (1971a, 80–81; 1971b, 5). The land in the Brede valley seems to have been largely immune from the flooding of the 1360s which affected the Battle Abbey manor of Dengemarsh a few miles to the east (Brandon 1971a, 81, n. 3), though some land in

Brede manor was submerged and some pasture at Udimore was lost in 1371 due to 'the ingress of water'.<sup>54</sup> The fifth period from the 1360s until the early 1370s was generally a period of agricultural prosperity in the Brede valley. This phase ended with the cessation of demesne agriculture on Icklesham manor and the floods of 1376.

There is too little evidence to determine the nature of agriculture and the state of the Brede valley at the end of the 14th and early 15th centuries. On the Pevensey marshes and at Barnhorne (Bexhill) there were increasing problems with flooding and drainage, while at the same time demand for land declined as the population fell (Mate 1990, 125–7). Brandon has suggested that the land on the eastern side of Pevensey Marsh was neglected from the 1420s onwards, but though individual landowners may have failed to maintain their land, considerable sums continued to be spent on major drainage works following commissions of 1396, 1402 and 1455 (Brandon 1971a, 83–5; Salzmann 1910, 45–53; Dulley 1966, 32–3). The construction of the Channel in the Brede valley in the first half of the 15th century may be considered in this context. Drainage projects involving major works continued to be undertaken even though the demand for land and the revenue from rents had fallen away.

This preliminary examination of the Brede valley has identified the broad periods of reclamation and flooding up to the middle of the 15th century. More detailed research is necessary to locate precisely the places mentioned in historical sources which have eluded identification, and further work will be required in the field to examine the topographic evidence for the enclosure of the Brede valley and the management of the river. It is clear, however, from the work already undertaken that the history of the drainage of the river valleys is complementary to, and no less complex than, the reclamation of land on Romney Marsh itself.

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Gwen Jones for drawing my attention to the Brook Farm deeds in the Centre for Kentish Studies, to Christopher Whittick for bringing to my notice the Icklesham rectory accounts and similarly to David Martin for information about the Udimore 1597 survey and for showing me his partial reconstruction of the manor. Victoria Williams kindly gave permission for the Udimore accounts to be temporarily transferred from Hastings Museum to the East Sussex Record Office which facilitated their study. Christopher Whittick made available his calendar of Battle Abbey charters at the Huntingdon Library, California. I wish to acknowledge the receipt of a Margery grant from the Sussex Archaeological Society for the purchase of a microfilm of Lincolns Inn Hales MS. 87.

## References

(Superscript numbers in the text refer to unpublished sources, listed below.)

## Published sources

*Calendar of Charter Rolls*

*Calendar of Close Rolls*

*Calendar of Documents Preserved in France, Illustrative of the History of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1

*Calendar of Fine Rolls*

*Calendar of Patent Rolls*

*Curia Regis Rolls*

*Nonarum Inquisitiones in Curia Scaccarii, temp. Edward III* (Record Commissioners, 1807).

Brandon, P.F. 1971a: Agriculture and the Effects of Floods and Weather at Barnhorne, Sussex, during the Late Middle Ages. *Sussex Arch. Collect.* 109, 69–93.

Brandon, P.F. 1971b: Late-Medieval Weather in Sussex and its Agricultural Significance. *Trans. Inst. of British Geogr.* 54, 1–17.

Colvin, H.M. 1963: Calais. In R. Allen Brown, H.M. Colvin and A.J. Taylor, *The History of the King's Works, I: The Middle Ages*, 423–55.

Dulley, A.J.F. 1966: The Level and Port of Pevensey in the Middle Ages. *Sussex Arch. Collect.* 104, 26–45.

Dyer, C.C. 1980: *Lords and Peasants in a Changing Society: The Estates of the Bishopric of Worcester, 680–1540* (Cambridge).

Eddison, J. 1985: Developments in the Lower Rother Valley up to 1600. *Arch. Cant.* 102, 95–110.

Eddison, J. 1988: 'Drowned Lands': Changes in the Course of the Rother and its Estuary and Associated Drainage Problems, 1635–1737. In Eddison, J. and Green, C. (editors), *Romney Marsh: Evolution, Occupation, Reclamation*. OUCA Monograph 24, 142–61.

Eddison, J. 1995: Attempts to clear the Rother Channel, 1613–1624. In Eddison, J. (editor), *Romney Marsh: the Debatable Ground*. OUCA Monograph 41, 148–163.

Farmer, D.L. 1990: Prices and Wages, 1350–1500. In E. Miller (editor), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales* 3 (1348–1500), 431–525 (Cambridge).

Gardiner, M.F. 1988: Medieval Settlement and Society in the Broomhill Area and Excavations at Broomhill Church. In Eddison, J. and Green, C. (editors), *Romney Marsh: Evolution, Occupation, Reclamation*. OUCA Monograph 24, 112–27.

Green, C. 1988: Palaeogeography of Marine Inlets in the Romney Marsh Area. In Eddison, J. and Green, C. (editors), *Romney Marsh: Evolution, Occupation, Reclamation*. OUCA Monograph 24, 167–74.

Historical Manuscripts Commission 1925: *Report on the Manuscripts of Lord De L'Isle and Dudley Preserved at Penshurst Place* 1.

Homan, W.M. 1937: The Use of the Flemish Land Measure in the Marshes between Hythe and Pett in the Middle Ages. *Sussex N. and Q.* 6, 228–30.

Homan, W.M. 1949: The Founding of New Winchelsea. *Sussex Arch. Collect.* 88, 22–41.

Mate, M. 1990: The Occupation of Land: Kent and Sussex. In E. Miller (editor), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales* 3 (1348–1500), 119–36 (Cambridge).

Mawer, A. and Stenton, F.M. 1929–30: *The Place-Names of Sussex* (Cambridge, English Place-Name Society 6, 7).

Mayhew, G. 1987: *Tudor Rye* (Falmer, Centre for Continuing Education, University of Sussex, Occasional Paper 27).

Pelham, R.A. 1931: Studies in the Historical Geography of Medieval Sussex. *Sussex Arch. Collect.* 72, 157–84.

Salzmann, L.F. (editor) 1902: *An Abstract of Feet of Fines Relating to the County of Sussex from 2 Richard II to 33 Henry III*. Sussex Record Soc. 2.

Salzmann, L.F. 1910: The Inning of the Pevensey Levels. *Sussex Arch. Collect.* 53, 32–60.

Salzman, L.F. 1920: Some Notes on the Family of Alard. *Sussex Arch. Collect.* 61, 126–41.

Salzman, L.F. 1945: The Hundred Roll for Sussex, Part III. *Sussex Arch. Collect.* 84, 60–81.

Saul, N. 1986: *Scenes from Provincial Life: Knightly Families in Sussex 1280–1400* (Oxford).

Searle, E. 1974: *Lordship and Community: Battle Abbey and its Banlieu 1066–1538* (Toronto).

Searle, E. and Ross, B. (editors) 1967: *Accounts of the Cellarers of Battle Abbey 1275–1513*. Sussex Record Soc. 65.

Smith, A.H. 1956: *English Place-Name Elements* 1 (English Place-Name Society 25). (Cambridge).

Stenton, D.M. (editor) 1940: *The Great Roll of the Pipe for the Sixth Year of the Reign of King John, Michaelmas 1204*. (Pipe Roll Soc. 18 new series).

Stubbs, W. (editor) 1890: *The Historical Works of Gervase of Canterbury* 2 (Rolls Series 73).

Teichman Derville, M. 1936: *The Level and Liberty of Romney Marsh*. Ashford: Headley Brothers.

Waller, M., Burrin, P. and Marlow, A. 1988: Flandrian Sedimentation and Palaeoenvironments in Pett Level, the Brede and Lower Rother Valleys and Walland Marsh. In Eddison, J. and Green, C. (editors), *Romney Marsh: Evolution, Occupation, Reclamation*. OUCA Monograph 24, 3–29.

Whittick, C.H.C. 1993: Dallingridge's Bay and Bodiam Castle Millpond – Elements of a Medieval Landscape. *Sussex Arch. Collect.* 131, 119–123.

## Unpublished sources

Abbreviations used:

BL British Library

CKS Centre for Kentish Studies

ESRO East Sussex Record Office

HEH Henry E. Huntingdon Library, San Marino, California.

HMAG Hastings Museum and Art Gallery

PRO Public Record Office.

1 HMAG JER collection (unlisted), membrane headed 'Roll of the Wall of Damme'; HEH BA 39/826; PRO SC6/1021/5, m. 2; BL Add. Roll 974; CKS Fa/TQ 2/15. The marsh called *Grikes* in the Brede valley should not be confused with the similarly named land near Broomhill.

2 PRO E315/436, m. 8r.

3 Lincolns Inn Hale MS. 87, f. 52v.; BL Add. Rolls 959, 967; ESRO RYE 136/14.

4 PRO E315/436, m. 7r. ff.; BL Add. Ch. 18623, also printed in W.M. Homan: The Marshes between Hythe and Pett. An Attempt at the Reconstruction of the Topography as it was in the Middle Ages. *Sussex Arch. Collect.* 79 (1938), 220–1.

5 BL Cotton MS. Augustus I i, 63.

6 HMAG JER collection (unlisted) Udimore court of Monday in the morrow of St. Edmund rex, 17 Edward II; CKS Fa/TQ 2/7/1; CKS Fa/TQ 2/11/1; HEH BA vol. 30, f. 86r.

7 HMAG MA189 consulted from copies ESRO RYE 132/7, 8; HMAG JER collection (unlisted) Udimore account 1366; court of Tuesday after Michaelmas 16 Edward I. For the location of *Pike*, see HMAG JER collection (unlisted) Udimore survey 1597.

- 8 Valentine, the son of Ellis de Rye had an interest in Whitefleet Marsh (BL Add. Ch. 963).
- 9 PRO SC6/1021/5, m. 2 and subsequent accounts refer to land of John de Guestling then submerged by the sea.
- 10 BL Add. Ch. 20093. This land was purchased from William son of Alwin who also held land in Reingers Marsh (*Curia Regis Rolls* 1. 50, 216). I take Walter Niger to be Walter, the son of Doudeman and father of Thomas Niger (Gardiner 1988, Fig. 10.3).
- 11 It is intended to examine the investment in land by the merchants of Rye and Winchelsea in a future article.
- 12 ESRO TD/E8, no. 124.
- 13 BL Add. Ch. 20093.
- 14 E.g. BL Add. Ch. 963; Lincolns Inn Hale MS. 87, f. 52v.; HEH BA 43/1201; ESRO AMS 6139/1, being a copy of an original in the University Library, Keele. For the size of Flanders acres, see PRO SC11/661.
- 15 BL Add. Charters 967, 20092, 20093; ESRO RYE 136/14.
- 16 HEH BA 38/620.
- 17 HEH BA 36/700, 40/1500, 41/1141.
- 18 Lincolns Inn Hale MS. 87, ff. 57r.-58v.
- 19 *Ibid.*, f. 60v.; HEH BA 40/1174. Common meadow land was rare at the eastern end of Sussex, but *Menewysssh*, which probably lay in the Tillingham valley in or near Beckley, may have been common to the tenants of the adjoining virgates (PRO E315/56, f. 5r.).
- 20 PRO SC11/661.
- 21 PRO SC11/660.
- 22 PRO JI 1/929, m. 25v.
- 23 PRO SC11/660; BL Add. Ch. 959.
- 24 BL Add. Ch. 963; PRO JI 1/929, m. 25v.
- 25 For John Thomas's land in Broomhill, see Lincolns Inn Hale MS. 87, ff. 53r. BL Add. Ch. 969.
- 26 ESRO RYE 136/70.
- 27 BL Harl. MS. 3586, f. 54v.; HEH BA 450. The farm of the tithes occur in the Icklesham accounts from BA 437 onwards. The Icklesham accounts were consulted from microfilm (ESRO XA3/21).
- 28 HEH BA 436.
- 29 HMAG JER collection (unlisted), membrane headed 'Roll of the Wall of Damme'. Though this is undated, it may be attributed to c. 1380.
- 30 The ditch across the valley may have been that called *Greke Dike* (BL Add. Roll 974). HMAG JER collection (unlisted) membrane headed 'The Waness, 3d upon each acre'.
- 31 HMAG JER collection (unlisted) Udimore accounts.
- 32 *Ibid.*, see accounts for 1363, 1380.
- 33 E.g. *ibid.*, accounts for 1370.
- 34 HMAG JER collection (unlisted), membrane headed 'Roll of the Wall of Damme'.
- 35 BL Add. Ch. 972; CKS Fa/TQ 2/6. The two watercourses are described in a deed of 1512 as 'the Old Ree' and 'the new water channel flowing from Brede Bridge to Winchelsea' (CKS Fa/TQ/ 2/15).
- 36 E.g. PRO C133/71 (5).
- 37 HMAG JER collection (unlisted) Udimore accounts.
- 38 HMAG JER collection (unlisted) survey of Udimore manor by Ralph Agas, 1597.
- 39 HMAG JER collection (unlisted) 16th-century copy headed 'Extent of the manors of the lord of Etchingham 12 Richard II'.
- 40 HEH BA 42/1172, 35/1004.
- 41 HEH BA 39/198 (recte 798), 38/861.
- 42 BL Harl. MS. 3586, f. 54v.
- 43 HEH BA 436, 453.
- 44 HEH BA 436-46, 448-69
- 45 HEH BA 464, 466.
- 46 E.g. HEH BA 458.
- 47 HEH BA 442, 467, 465.
- 48 HEH BA 463, 449.
- 49 The surviving Brede accounts are divided between the PRO and HMAG: PRO SC6/1021/5, 6; PRO SC6/1033/4; HMAG JER collection (unlisted) bundles A and C.
- 50 PRO SC6/1021/5, m. 2.
- 51 BL Cotton MS. Otho A ii, f. 22r. (no. 61) is a grant of land in a *new* marsh at Icklesham by Ralph de Icklesham.
- 52 I intend to consider the landholdings of the merchants of Rye and Winchelsea in a future article.
- 53 HEH BA 452.
- 54 HMAG JER collection (unlisted) Udimore accounts.