THE ROMNEY MARSH IRREGULAR

The Newsletter of the Romney Marsh Research Trust

No. 28

Autumn 2006
Statement of Aims

The Romney Marsh Research Trust exists to promote, co-ordinate and disseminate research into the historical, social and physical development of Romney and Walland Marshes and their immediate hinterlands.

The Trust invites individuals to become, on payment of a subscription, a Friend of the Romney Marsh Research Trust and to participate in lectures, conferences, field visits and research projects.

The Friends receive a biannual publication, The Irregular, which publishes research notes and provides a forum for debate.

The Trust receives, raises and holds funds to meet grant applications from academic and other researchers, in order to support credible academic research into the Marsh, of a high standard, which can subsequently form the basis for a wider publication to the local communities.

The Trust produces monographs containing the most recent high quality research papers. To date, four such monographs have been published, to high academic acclaim.

Adopted by the Trustees of the Romney Marsh Research Trust 31st October 2005
The Editor’s bit

First of all I must apologise for the delays in getting the last copy of the *Irregular* to you. The printer that has been used for some years let us down badly and my thanks must go to David Williams who found a new one at very short notice and undertook the necessary organisation.

In this *Irregular* we deal mainly with the fringes of Romney Marsh, first with a synopsis of the Spring Lecture that was given this year by Dr Stuart Brookes and then for something a little different we move, in the company of Oliver Harris, to Dover to look at the way that marshmen constructed the 16th century harbour there.

The term ‘volunteer’ is much maligned in some quarters but in this issue Gill Draper reports on the excellent work being undertaken by them as part of the Rye project and finally we learn of some of the problems that a short walk in the Pett Levels with Hon. Sec. can raise.

Gill Draper has pointed that more information on the Calendar of Patent Rolls entries referred to in the shipwrecks file in the RMRT
Gazetteer may be found by logging on to:

http://www.uiowa.edu/~acadtech/patentrolls

The plan of the Mermaid Hotel, Rye, on the cover of the *Irregular* is kindly supplied by David and Barbara Martin. Two photographs of the inside of the building are reproduced below.

Alan Tyler
Hon. Sec. writes.....

So far this year the Friends of the Romney Marsh Research Trust have been able to luxuriate in the glamour of Lympne Castle for the Spring Lecture and make a rain soaked visit to the submerged forest at Cliff End, Pett Level, as part of the Small Port Project. Both of these events, in quite different ways, have turned our attention to the mariners’ perspectives of our ports and hythes.

This perspective will prove useful in helping the Rye Project team tease out some plausible stories concerning Rye’s foundation and its place in the Cinque Ports. The Rye Project, which is heavily supported by Trust funds, brings together work by geomorphologists, archaeologists, building historians (David and Barbara Martin) and a medieval historian (Gillian Draper), in a three year re-assessment of Rye’s history.

Volunteers, many of whom have taken University of Kent courses with Gill, have been helping by devilling for documentary evidence to throw light on the ownership and use of buildings in Rye from 1400 to the mid 17th century. They have also heroically been combing the Royal Records from the 13th century onwards for references to Rye and its local hinterland.

But it has not all been about the sea and the Cinque Ports. Members enjoyed a visit to the Rye Nature Reserve and Camber Castle, arranged by Dr Barry Yates, Rye Nature Reserve Manager, who this year joins our Trustees.

We have also worked with the Romney Marsh Inland Drainage Board, which is based at Dymchurch. This year it was their turn to host the national Drainage Authority’s Demonstration of equipment held at Snargate. Not only did we have a stand, but we also provided a tour guide for delegates wishing to see round the marsh.

Terry Burke
Visit to Rye Nature Reserve and Camber Castle July 2006

The Mayor and Deputy Mayor of New Romney visiting our stand at Snargate

Whoops!

In *Irregular* 26 p.26 the number 37 was omitted from the south point of the wind rose in Clive Chizlett’s article entitled ‘Dungeness Wind Directions’.

4
Towns and Trade on an Unkind Coast: Rewriting the history and maritime archaeology of the Cinque Ports

Defining the Cinque Ports Project

During the medieval period the confederation of towns lying on the Kent and Sussex coast, known as the Cinque Ports, formed an important element in the defence of the realm. The ports and ‘ancient towns’ of Sandwich, Dover, Hythe, Romney, Hastings, Rye and Winchelsea, once provided the Crown with a navy of 57 ships in return for sundry trading privileges and exemption from duties and tolls, but the origins of those settlements before they were awarded those obligations and rewards are obscure. Recent years has seen much valuable work on some of these individual ports, including New Winchelsea (Martin & Martin 2004), in addition to ongoing projects at Rye, Romney (Draper & Meddens forthcoming), Sandwich (Clarke 2005) and hopefully Dover. This work bodes well for the future, and suggests the time is now ripe for beginning a new, wider study, looking at all these towns as a group, set in their full coastal, economic, social, political and topographic context. Unlike previous work on English medieval urbanism that has focused on themes such as urban origins or particular categories of town (e.g. planned towns, small towns, burhs, wics), this project proposes, therefore, a wholly novel approach emphasising the historical development of a regional group of towns and their maritime context.

The benefits of adopting such an approach are manifold. A study of a regional group of towns facilitates not just the assessment of the comparative origins of urbanization, but also the complexities of developmental dynamics and settlement interaction. The Cinque Ports provide an ideal grouping for such research: they share a geographic location and a unique constitutional identity. However, it is well known that their individual origins, development and fate differ dramatically. Another distinct benefit is that their immediate 'hinterland' is readily identifiable, stretching from Seaford in Sussex to Brightlingsea in Essex, since 31
settlements in the economic shadow of the principal ports had joined the federation as 'limbs' by 1668. Although the influence of the Cinque Ports spread further than that zone (as trade with London, Great Yarmouth and Gascony clearly shows), the identification of the 'federation hinterland' provides a well-defined geographic region within which the relative development of the Head Ports can be sensibly evaluated.

The methodology proposed for this project involves the creation of an historical atlas of the ports, comprising period-based maps of individual ports, their associated harbour plans and coastal charts. These maps will provide a 'snapshot' of the settlements during different key phases of their morphology: the Middle Saxon period of c.AD 650-850 (i.e. before the Cinque Ports federation); the period of the late ninth century to Domesday when many of the ports originated; the period of unprecedented economic and urban growth from 1086 to the Great storms of the 13th century; the aftermath of the storms through to the end of the Hundred Years’ War in 1453; and the later life of the ports during the latter 15th and 16th centuries. This set of up to 35 port plans will provide a hugely informative database for comparative study, not just for the Cinque Ports Project itself, but for the wider study of English medieval urbanization.

Our study will do more than merely compare changing town plans, however, as it will enable those topographical developments to be discussed within a tightly-interlinked consideration of the coastal, economic, social and political context. Punitive French raids during the Hundred Years’ War were damaging to the long-term future of several ports, while coastal changes could destroy a harbour overnight: a series of exceptional storms in the late 13th century had a profound impact on the shape of the coast, the shingle bars, the configuration of tidal estuaries, and the viability of harbours. The plan of a port is therefore not a one-off design based on a medieval surveyor's concept of urban aesthetics and ability to measure perches accurately. It is a basic, functional
layout, directly related to the specific lie of the land, to prevailing winds, to the contemporary tides, extent of useable foreshore and navigable channels to accommodate the largest ships of the day, sand bars, marshes and so forth.

As the size and nature of medieval shipping changed, so the preferred form and location of the associated harbours changed. We therefore propose to identify these crucial changes to the maritime topography of the ports by compiling a complementary set of 35 period harbour plans, showing significant factors such as geomorphological change, the development of navigable waterways, and the location and extent of the inter-tidal zone.

Our final mapping project would be to provide seven period-based charts of the Cinque Ports coast itself, in effect, re-creating a set of medieval 'Rutters' (coastal route maps) showing the whole coast in relation to sandbanks, contemporary high and low tide, creeks, islands, marshes, navigable estuaries, landmarks (seamarks) including contemporary church towers, headlands, landing places related to a maritime place-names study. The surveys will incorporate the coast, tidal inlets and lagoons from Seaford around the coast to Fordwich.

In sum, the proposed Cinque Ports Project would map out the data upon which a new generation of research could be established, enabling us to weigh up the comparative importance of the many factors which influenced the fate of a port. It would provide the geomorphological background of the changing coastline, the changing location of the principal harbours, and of the fishing settlements (e.g. Dover), and even the shipyards (e.g. Smallhythe). This is the essential foundation for understanding changes in the port's location and viability and how the ports reacted to the elements (Environmental factors).

Of course location on the exposed coast left the Cinque Ports vulnerable not just to the ravages of nature but also to attack by the King's Enemies: the French raided over ten times between 1216
and 1457. These attacks destroyed lives, trade and the urban fabric, and in their turn demanded urban defences and bloody reprisals (*Political Factors*). Not for nothing have the Cinque Ports been described as lying on an unkind coast.

But these ports also prospered on their maritime location. This was a period when all of Christendom ate fish on Fridays and fast days. Fish, sometimes fresh but usually smoked or salted, was a major staple for which there was a ready market and a steady profit. England's first medieval towns were ports, and the first ports were first and foremost fishing settlements (*Economic Factors*). These fishermen could build and operate ships and could navigate the Channel and the North Sea from Rye Bay to Yarmouth: if required they could turn their hand and their vessels to military use (as the Cinque Ports Charter shows) or for mercantile or piratical purposes. Thus a fishing settlement did more than catch and process herring, for onto that core were grafted shipbuilders, sailmakers, corders, coopers, mariners and merchants, as well as traders, travellers, innkeepers, brewers and prostitutes. The role of the crown, church and commercial enterprise has often been discussed in the development of medieval urbanization: our proposed project focus on the role of mariners and the fishing industry in the development of ports and the origins of towns. A London study (Milne 1999) suggests that the fishing community, fish market and the shipbuilders played a significant role in the topographical development of urban centres. Might similar, or radically-different developments, be plotted in the Cinque Ports?

Our study opens in the age of the beach market, when shallow draft, undecked vessels could simply be hauled onto the foreshore as the tide permitted. But with the introduction of deep-draught multi-decked, multi-masted merchantmen the location of harbours changed, as did the infrastructure required to accommodate them. Again, these major changes should be observable through our period plans (*Nautical Factors*).
Exploring themes

Several common themes are known to underlie the development of the Cinque Ports. Coastal change is a constant feature, not just of the Romney Marsh area, but throughout south-east England generally. The effect of generally rising sea-levels is not uniform and we have an unenviable task not only to understand the dynamics of large-scale coastal erosion but also more localised patterns of sediment deposition, salt marsh and mudflat development, and hydrological change. Following on from the important work carried out in Romney Marsh we now need to invest similar effort into understanding coastal change along the North Kent coast and Wantsum Channel.

There is evidence to suggest that the Wantsum afforded the principal route for maritime traffic during the early medieval period into the Thames estuary and up the eastern seaboard, avoiding the dangerous waters of the North Foreland headland. There are a number of 8th century royal charters describing the remission of tolls on boats travelling to Minster, Sarre, and Fordwich (Kelly 1992). And there are instances of the Old English place-name element *ora* at either end of the Wantsum at *Oar Farm and Stonar* (Brookes forthcoming). Possibly derived from either the Latin ‘shore’ or ‘land ahoy’, *ora* refers to a flat-topped hill with a shoulder at one or both ends. Perhaps these hills were codified as easily recognisable sea-marks by early medieval mariners?

If the Wantsum was important, what did the coast look like and when and how did it close up? As in Romney Marsh there are a combination of processes: human agency, the development of shingle barriers (in this case a spit developing north from Kingsdown past Deal and across Pegwell Bay), and the deposition of sediments from the eroding Kent coast. Whilst these broader geomorphological dynamics are reasonably well understood the effect these had on the development of individual harbours, channels, tidal creek systems, and marshland needs a lot more
research, including palaeoenvironmental work, landscape characterisation, and the analysis of written sources.

Another important theme is the Mid-Saxon context of the Cinque Ports and the early origins of coastal settlements in Kent and Sussex. Various authors have suggested that given Kent’s close geographical and social proximity to the more developed kingdom of Frankia in modern Northern France that perhaps it is here that the earliest trading emporia should be sought. Again, there is much evidence to support this view. The densities of imported goods in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries of the 5th-7th century show a marked tendency to cluster in Kent, where nearly 90% of some imports are found (Huggett 1988), and recent work has done much to elucidate the regional pattern of these goods (Brookes 2003). Significantly, there is also the earliest evidence so far known from this country for Nordic-style clinker boats, in the form of a number of burials of the late 6th and early 7th century buried with parts of boats (Brookes 2007). Archaeologically, the important characteristic of these burials is the presence of clench-nails used to fasten together the overlapping planks that form the shells of these vessels. In East Kent the presence of both used and unused clench-nails in burials suggests that not only boat breaking, but also boat building may be represented by these finds; a full century before the more famous finds from Sutton Hoo.

In addition to this we are also starting to have a better idea about the location and form of many of the Middle Angle-Saxon wic sites, with fieldwork having recently taken place at the sites of Fordwich, Sarre, Dover and Sandwich. This work suggests that several different forms of wic-site existed in East Kent, providing a corollary to the more commonly discussed sites of Saxon Southampton, London, Ipswich and York. Much like these better known examples, the sites of Fordwich and Dover can be viewed as one element in a network of settlements displaying dispersed urban functions. Fordwich, to the north-east of Canterbury may have operated as the seaport for a number of settlements strung out
along the Stour valley, including the ecclesiastical centres of St Martin’s, St Augustine’s, and Christ Church, as well as the manors of Northgate, Longport, Caldecote, and Sturry. Similarly at Dover specialised trading and marketing appears to have been focussed at the mouth of the River Dour adjacent to further settlements within the Roman Saxon-shore fort to the west and Dover Castle to the east. This pattern contrasts with other sites such as Sarre, Sandwich and Sandtun, where evidence for continental trade and maritime activities cannot be seen as part of a heterarchy of settlements, but rather coastal communities periodically engaging in inter-regional trade (Brookes 1998; Gardiner et al. 2001).

This evidence emphasises the important role maritime activities took for communities along the Kent-Sussex coast from earliest times. But the safe environment required for mercantile activity also needed protecting. The ships used for fishing and trading could also be used to ferry troops, defend the Channel, and patrol the coastline. In exploring how these roles were formalised, first independently, and then as a system, we aim to elucidate the early origins of the Cinque Ports federation.

**Conclusions**

These are just some of the issues and examples of research already being carried out. What they all demonstrate is that over the course of the Medieval period the Cinque Ports were subject to considerable change as they responded to dynamic economic, political, social, technological and environmental circumstances. Thus the Cinque Ports coast in the 7th century would look very different from the late-medieval coastscape, as would the range of settlements it could support. As for the ports themselves, the form and function of those in the 10th and 11th centuries would be very different from those in the 13th and 14th.

Our contention is that all these profound changes can be mapped out, and the resulting plans and charts will provide illuminating insights into the life and livelihood of the Cinque Ports. To
compile these maps we need a comprehensive database for each port together with relevant surveys of geoarchaeological and place-name evidence, archaeological and historical data, microtopography and buildings studies. Much of this is already happening in piecemeal fashion. It is our hope that these various data – in addition to new surveys – can all be brought together in an historical atlas of the Cinque Ports: allowing us for the first time to see these sites, their historical development, and the wider themes of urban development and medieval economy with respect to the physical setting of the unkind coast.

References
Kelly, SE. 1992. 'Trading Privileges from Eighth-Century England', Early Medieval Europe 1, 3-28
Marshmen at Work: Dover Harbour, 1583

Despite its long history and status as a channel port, Dover has never possessed an effective natural harbour.\(^1\) Artificial harbour works began to be constructed from about 1500, but a limited understanding of tidal currents meant that these early efforts tended only to exacerbate problems of silting. Work of the 1530s, in particular, gave rise to a large sandbar across much of Dover Bay, which by the 1570s was threatening to close the port. The concept emerged, however, of stabilising the sandbar as a permanent seawall, and creating an enlarged and remodelled harbour in the lagoon behind it. The key to the operation would be to establish part of the lagoon as a backwater ‘pent’, or reservoir, fed by the River Dour, by means of which the harbour could be periodically scoured. The principal technical challenge therefore became to construct watertight walls for the pent, partly on the unstable foundations of the sandbar, and partly across the lagoon.

A number of alternative schemes were projected, and in 1582 some preliminary work undertaken, but with limited success. The treasurer of works in this first year was Sir Thomas Scott of Scott’s Hall, a substantial landholder on Romney Marsh, and in March 1583, on the strength of twenty-five years experience overseeing seawall-building there, he proposed a new approach using the tried and tested practices of the marshmen.\(^2\) He brought ‘foure of the principall officers, and foure of the most expert
workmen of Romney Mersh’ to inspect the site, and concluded that ‘the same workmanship which they use in Romney Mersh, will be very Serviceable, and of Sufficient assurance to bring to pas that which is required at the harborogh of Dover’. Several weeks of lobbying and debate ensued, but Scott, supported by his cousin, Reginald Scott, a surveyor of the Marsh for four years, and by Reginald Smith, common clerk there for thirty, clearly had a strong case. When workmen from the Erith and Plumstead marshes, representing one of the rival schemes, were questioned on their techniques, their most pertinent responses came from one of their number named Marshall drawing on his earlier experiences at Broomhill on Romney Marsh.

Edward Boys, one of the commissioners for the harbour, declared that if ‘the probabylitie of reason, the demonstration of the lyke for walles in Romney Marsh, with the warrantie of those honest skilfull marsh artyzans be of any accompt, than suerly ... this work which for charge semed importable, and for danger very doubtfull, will prove far otherways & very fayzible’.

On 9 and 10 April, therefore, it was agreed by the commissioners that ‘the Romneyshmarshemen shall undertake that parte of the woorke whiche we fynde of greatest Difficultie’, namely the pent walls. 6A start-date was set at 13 May, in the relatively slack period between barley and hay harvests, and calls for labourers were despatched to local market towns. Reginald Scott subsequently wrote a detailed narrative of the project, published four years later in the second edition of Holinshead’s Chronicles. The Romney method, he emphasised, comprised not merely the technical practices of wall-building, but also the organisational techniques of managing, co-ordinating and supplying an army of workmen. The undertaking ‘would have amazed anie man unacquainted with Romeneie marsh works, from whensene the patterne hereof was fetcht, and the officers and chiefe workemen thereof brought by sir Thomas Scot to Dover. These works were digested and ordered by them, even as a battell is marshalled by officers of the feeld’.
The three ‘cheefe directors’ of the project were marshmen: John Smith, the expenditor, responsible for day-to-day finances, ‘an expert man trained up in Romneie Marsh in those affaires, trustie, diligent, and everie waie sufficient’; Richard Coast; and William Norris, later bailiff of Romney Marsh. But Scott also pays tribute to the ordinary workmen who risked their lives, often up to their waists or shoulders in water. He highlights the contribution of ‘a poore man named John Bowle, borne and brought up in Romneie marsh, whose dexteritie of hand, fine and excellent inventions in executing difficult works, and whose willing mind and painfulnesse for his owne part, with furthering and incoraging of others, ought in some calling to have beene honored, and in his poore estate should not be forgotten’.  

Despite early concerns, suitable wall-building materials were readily found at Dover. The three principal components were earth, ‘a haselie mould … whereof the greatest part of the wall consisted’; chalk, ‘which mingled and beaten togither with the earth, did make the same more firm, and was placed in the midst of the wall’; and ‘sleech’, or sludge, which, ‘being beaten with beetles [mallets] to the sides of the wall, would by and by cleave so fast and close thereunto, as thereby the wals were strengthened’. The final stage was to ‘arm’ the wall with faggots and thorn. ‘First beginning at the foot of the wall, they laid downe a row of fagot, through everie one of the which they drive a needle or stake about foure foot long, having an eie or hole at the great end. Then doo they edder it with thorne and other provision for that purpose, and lastlie drive a keie or woodden wedge (being one foot and a halfe long) through the eie of the needle to keepe downe the edder, which staith downe the fagot.’ An early estimate was that 60,000 faggots, needles and keys, 5,000 lighter ‘baven’ faggots, and 400 beetles would be required; and a mounted ‘purveior’ was employed solely to maintain supplies of arming materials. The unfinished ends of the walls were temporarily armed overnight and even over the mid-day break, to minimise erosion by the tides.
The key piece of equipment was the ‘court’, a narrow cart for moving earth or stones. The standard court at Dover was drawn by a single horse, and measured 5’ by 2’ by 16” deep (1.5m x 0.6m x 0.4m); but two-horse ‘double’ courts were used for the heavier work of carrying sleech. This reliance on horsepower made a change from customary Romney practice, where ox-drawn courts were the norm: ‘in Romneie marsh there are everie yeare commonlie imploied at one time about making or mending of some one wall 200 courts at the least, in each court for the most part being two oxen’.15

Preparatory work commenced at the beginning of May with just six courts in attendance, but by the start of large-scale operations on 13 May some 200 were available, more than had been anticipated. It was therefore decided to begin work simultaneously on both the ‘long wall’, built on the sandbar, and on the shorter but more challenging ‘cross-wall’ over the lagoon: Richard Barrey, lieutenant of Dover Castle, took charge of the former operation, and Sir Thomas Scott the latter. The pattern of work was established by ‘Romneie marshmen, and such as knew those works’, but volunteers were drawn from as far afield as Sevenoaks and Maidstone, and by 27 June there were 542 courts and almost 1000 men on site. Newcomers eventually had to be turned away because of the limited pasture available.16

To maintain a steady flow of materials, specialist workers were stationed to keep the courts moving: ‘guiders’ to assist them through known trouble-spots; ‘untingers’ to loosen their tackle for unloading; ‘shelvers’ to empty them; and ‘tingers’ to reattach the tackle. ‘The driver never staid, but went forth for a new lode: the tingerneth after and pulleth up the court, and fasteneth the tackle, and goeth presentlie with speed to doo likewise to another. ’There was further division of labour on the wall itself, where the workmen included ordinary labourers to ‘shovell abrode and laie even the earth, chalke, and sleech’; ‘scavelmen’ to apply the coating of sleech; ‘beetlemen’ to beat the sleech to the sides of the
walls, to break up chalk and to level the earth; and ‘armors’ to fix the faggots and thorn. The relative skill-levels of these specialisms can be judged from their wage rates: labourers received 6d or 8d a day; guiders, untingers, tingers and beetlemen 8d; shelvers, picked from the ‘strongest and nimblest men’, 10d; scavelmen 12d; and armors either 12d or 16d. Scavelmen and armors, who needed highly specialised skills, were invariably marshmen. A court with horse and driver received 12d a day: this compared with only 10d a day on Romney Marsh, but there the drivers had the bonus of superior pasture for their oxen. Double courts attracted double payment. Some owners supplied their courts in pairs, with just one driver between them: as one court was being driven, the second would be loaded by a less skilled ‘filler’.  

The day began at 5 a.m., when the available labourers and drivers were entered on the books of the expenditor and clerk-of-works. Work ran from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., with a two-hour mid-day break (11 a.m.-1 p.m.), subject to variations imposed by the tides. The courts were frequently left loaded overnight, ready to move off in the morning: the front driver in the train needed to be ‘a sufficient and a diligent person, and that court to have a good gelding: for as he lead the danse, so must they all follow’. Sunday was a day of rest, when Sir Thomas Scott generally returned home to Scott’s Hall.

The end of both morning and afternoon work was signalled by a ‘flag of libertie’. Half an hour before the due time, the drivers would take up a traditional song, ‘made and set in Romneie marsh’, in a battle-of-wills with their overseers. The refrain ran:

‘O Harrie hold up thy hat, t’is eleven a clocke,
and a little, little, little past:
My bow is broke, I would unyoke,
my foot is sore, I can worke no more.’

Scott tells us that ‘the tune or rather the noise thereof was extraordinarie, and (being delivered with the continuall voice of
such a multitude) was verie strange’. When the flag was seen, ‘there was a generall shout made by all the workers: and wheresoever any court was at that instant either emptie or loden, there was it left, till one of the clocke after noone or six of the clocke in the morning, when they returned to their businesse’. Towards the end of the project, Sir Thomas Scott fell ill, and the workers adapted their song, so that ‘in steed of calling to Harrie for their dinner, they called to God for the good health and returne of their best freend’. Scott recovered, but his wife, who had selflessly nursed him while pregnant with twins, sadly ded.19

Reginald Scott’s narrative lends the wall-building an heroic character. ‘[I]t was a woonder to see how the multitude of carriages (being well plied) prevailed, even over the floud: which though it rose exceeding fast, and was come to the verie brinke or uppermost lane of the wall, a new course of courts came from time to time and supplied the want; which if it should have staied a minut longer, would have turned to great losse; for they could have wrought no longer that tide. ’The Dour was not diverted, as some of the rival engineers had advised, and so ‘they wrought alwaies in the water, which was verie discommodious’. Yet despite the dangers, morale remained high. ‘[W]hen the flood came, the chanell did so suddenlie swell, as manie horsses with their courts and drivers which rode in them were overtaken, or rather overwhelmed with water, and were forced to swim, with great hazard of life, though therat some tooke pleasure. For sometimes the boies would strip themselves naked, and ride in that case in their courts through the chanell, being so high, as they were ducked over head and eares: but they knew their horsses would swim and carrie them through the streame, which ministred to some occasion of laughter and mirth. ’Particularly perilous was the cutting of a sluice in the cross-wall.

‘Manie were astonied to behold the dangerous case of the workemen, and diverse departed from the place as being loth to see the poore mens destruction. Wherein the said Reginald Smith,
and the Romneie marshmen dealt with great dexterisie and courage; when all other almost had given it over, persisting in continuall and extreame travell thereabouts, by the space of two daies and one night without intermission. ’In the event, there were no fatalities and only two minor casualties, sustained at the chalk quarry; and the workforce even remained free from plague in what was elsewhere a virulent plague-year.20

By 21 July, Sir Thomas Scott could report that the pent was effectively complete.21 The final dimensions of the cross-wall were 40 rods (201m) long, 90’ (27m) broad at the bottom and 50’ (15m) at the top; those of the long wall 120 rods (603m) long, 70’ (21m) broad at the bottom and almost 40’ (12m) at the top. 22The marsh officers were acknowledged to be the most ‘experienced in these maryne frontier actions’ to advise on continuing problems of degradation, and they urged the permanent employment of a ten-man maintenance team, but it is not clear that this recommendation was adopted. 23The construction of the harbour proper, in which the marshmen were not involved, proved to be a more protracted affair, and would not be finished for another decade.

The basic footprint of the pent, remodelled in the nineteenth century as Wellington Basin, survives today as part of Dover Marina, a little-acknowledged monument to Romney Marsh expertise. The detailed evidence from Dover Harbour for Romney working practices usefully complements that available from the Marsh itself – notably the early seventeenth-century description of work on Dymchurch Wall which Dorothy Beck has published, in which much of the technical detail, and much of the terminology, is identical. 24 Clearly, Romney methods were adapted to local circumstances; and equally clearly, Reginald Scott’s narrative is celebratory and partisan, and perhaps not to be trusted in every detail. But these cautions aside, the Dover material, and Scott’s eye-witness testimony in particular, provide numerous rich and valuable insights into the technical and social context in which Romney walls of the early modern period were constructed.
NOTES


2. The National Archives (TNA) SP 12/159/11/I: Dover Harbour commissioners, answers to articles, [8 Mar 1582/3]. TNA SP 12/159/17: Scott to Sir Francis Walsingham, 10 Mar 1582/3.

3. TNA SP 12/159/44: Scott to Walsingham, 24 Mar 1582/3.

4. TNA SP 12/159/50: articles of Erith and Plumstead marshmen, [29 Mar 1583].

5. TNA SP 12/159/45: Boys to Walsingham, 25 Mar 1583.

6. TNA SP 12/160/13/I: articles agreed by the commissioners, 9 & 10 April 1583. See also TNA SP 12/160/6: commissioners to the Privy Council, 10 April 1583; and TNA SP 12/160/13: Scott to Walsingham, 18 April 1583.


11. Holinshed, p.1543. The word ‘haselie’ implies a mixture of sand or gravel, clay and earth.


16. Holinshed, pp.1542-3. On 17 July, there were 560 courts: TNA SP 12/161/36: commissioners to Walsingham. Reginald Scott says the total rose to 600, though this may be a rounded-up figure.

17. Holinshed, pp.1542; 1544-5. According to Scott, though his reasoning seems flawed, a master who provided two courts, two
horses, one driver and one filler received a daily payment of 2s 10d (12d for each court, plus 10d for the filler).

23. TNA SP 12/175/40: commissioners to Walsingham, 21 Dec 1584. TNA SP 12/175/41: John Hill to Walsingham, 22 Dec 1584.

Oliver Harris

**The Rye and hinterlands project and the research volunteers**

How do you run a serious research project with volunteers? I have heard this question once or twice over the past few months and here are some answers. This is the way many historical and archaeological research projects work nowadays, for example one which is updating the Victoria County History on the modern maritime history of the South East. Greenwich University recently held a symposium on collaboration between archivists, local historians and professional historians in Sussex, Kent and Nord Pas de Calais. Some pointed to the difficulties of such collaboration, others to its potential. The Trust and its Small Ports and Rye projects were held up as examples of good practice. The Trust has always worked in a multidisciplinary way and with the involvement of people with great local knowledge.

The term volunteer perhaps suggests a lack of skill but this is far from the truth. Several of the people working on this project have a deep knowledge of Rye and marshland history and have been
working, teaching and publishing on it for many years. Other people have also generously co-operated by searching cellars and lofts for notes of research carried out some while ago and making them available. Much material has been published on early-modern and modern Rye but there is always material collected which can be further exploited, and now will be. Their generosity has saved the project many hours of work. Most ‘professionals’ working on the Rye and hinterlands project do not live there and rely on the volunteers knowing the features and changes in the landscape and town which are of interest. Local connections have also been crucial in enabling David and Barbara Martin to have access to many extra houses to carry out historic buildings assessments (105 assessments so far). This has been a notable feature of the project over the spring.

Some of the research volunteers do not have particular local knowledge but already have a background in history, an ability to handle manuscripts and read and transcribe old handwriting, Middle English and Medieval Latin. Some have been learning or brushing up these skills on one or other courses run by the University of Kent. Much can learnt in nine months’ hard work, and many have enjoyed putting these skills to use in archives and on real research. Individuals have helped each other out by working in small groups. Results will begin to be published in the next *Irregular*. Use of computers and the internet has become vital to historical research over the last ten years, with enormous amounts of historical material available online. The volunteer researchers have been surprised by what they and their computers can do. One or two have been recruited without any background in history but with, for example, a professional knowledge of the sea, maps and charts which has now been applied historically and to the project’s great benefit. Courses run by the University of Kent also offer a place where researchers on the project can meet weekly to discuss current work and move it forward. New researchers are always
needed and you can find details of one such forthcoming course at Ashford with this mailing. For others, you are welcome to contact me. Taking a course means volunteer researchers can use the university library to access up-to-date books and journals and attend relevant seminars and conferences. It is important to know what is going on in the wider historical and archaeological world.

Rye Museum, also largely run by volunteers, has generously offered the project a meeting place for planning and reporting on work. Here the various professionals involved in the project have also shared their ongoing research with us and subjected themselves to questioning. One of the Trust’s great strengths is that its work involves different disciplines. It is one of the few arenas I know where work is truly interdisciplinary and there is a real effort to communicate, compare and learn from each other.

Finally, the project has an extremely eminent Steering Group which has promised us ‘eternal scrutiny’, at least as minuted by Terry. Members of the Steering Group have instead offered us support, advice and information and will continue to do so. Terry Burke is the key volunteer in the Rye project, administering it as well as being Secretary to the Trust, the executive and the Trustees. We all owe him a huge debt.

Gill Draper

Pett to Cliff End walk 25 March 2006

The Pett Level end of the great arc of the marshes is so different from the eastern. There you have Roman Stutfall Castle, with a Roman Road to Canterbury, a Saxon strand at Sandtun and the medieval Cinque Port town of Hythe, standing on a great tidal inlet, running to Kenardington, along which the Vikings might once have rowed to take Appledore. This western end in comparison appears quite empty, although this is the heart of the Manor of Ramselie, owned by Fécamp Abbey and home to three Cinque Ports - Rye, new and old Winchelsea, half way between
Romney and Hastings.

It takes imagination to realise that once there were eight Martello Towers standing proud along the beach, with even a pub, The Old Ship, lost to the sea in 1931.

Captain H. Lovegrove R.N. of Winchelsea in 1966 reported a series of probably medieval linear salt pans (20ft x 600ft divided into sections) revealed by sea defence work. Domesday gives Ramselie 100 salt houses. Somewhere off here are the remains of Anne a Royal Naval frigate crippled and then beached by her captain to save her from the French after the naval defeat at Beachy Head, 1690.

About 3 km along the beach is Winchelsea Beach and the site of “Smeaton’s Harbour”. This was an 18th century white elephant, started in 1724, completed and opened in June 1787, but abandoned in November that year. The Rother had been diverted from its present exit and taken by canal to a brand new harbour, which would, it was hoped, bring back maritime prosperity to the town of Rye.

Members in search of a possible small port at Pett Level
From Pett Level the walk went to the top of Tout Rock, which during the war was home to some 200 soldiers and their gun emplacements. From the summit we could look along the line of the Royal Military Canal towards New Winchelsea, here little more than a marshland sewer, but in 1826 was able to drown four or five smugglers at Pett Horse Race, making their way inland. The cliff is renowned for its fossil finds.

From Tout Rock the walk went down into the marsh, across Alehouse Field, to the start of a hollow-way to the top of Chick Hill. This deep track could be a drovers’ road, or a Napoleonic War remain, or a way down to the beach and sea before the steeper Chick Hill road was constructed, perhaps even to a small port.

The walk went along Pett Road past Lunsford Farm to a turning off to the left across fields and down to Old Marsham. From here one gets an impression of the lie of the land. Fairlight rises up to over 500 feet – the church is 533 feet above sea level, compared to Pett’s 198 feet. Fairlight is bounded by the sea cliffs to ‘Nepplisbourne’ or Ecclesbourne (last bourne before Hastings), then inland almost to the Hastings Road (A259), where it wraps round Pett to come down the Pannel Sewer to include Frenchcourt Farm, said by some to be named for the Dauphin’s headquarters in the invasion by invitation of 1216 in the succession chaos following the death of John.

The lands at Marsham Sewer, at the foot of the rise to Fairlight, give a good impression of what the undrained low-lying land would have been like. A short walk along the road across some fields led to an eroding cliff top. Here we paused to take a view across Rye Bay. Somewhere here is a Mesolithic cave found at the turn of the century by the father of S.M. Vidler of Iden and reinvestigated in 1972 by Susann Palmer. This cave, which was enlarged for WW2 defence, suggests that there was a toe of land sloping down to the seashore, but now eroded away.
Holloway at Pett - possible port road, or drovers' trail

We can imagine Cliff End to have run further out to sea, by perhaps quarter of a mile, may be more. 5,000 years ago we would have been looking at a sandy bay, with the sea lapping the cliffs which run along the edge of the arc of the marshes. The Channel was cut around 6,000 BC. Mesolithic is of a similar period.

According to Jill Edison’s model a shingle ridge formed creating a lagoon open to the sea. The lagoon would have been fed by the Rother, the Tillingham and the Brede and the Marsham, Dimsdale and Pannel sewers. We also now know of a large raised bog covering, to at least 1000 AD, what is now Walland Marsh, presumably separating the Pett Level/Brede system from the main eastern course of the Rother.

The most recent thinking about the marine flooding of Pett Level does not support an early inlet from the sea at Pett, although the salt pans on what is now the beach at Pett could point the other way. Part of the problem is that we do not know the exact location of the shingle barrier in the late Saxon era.

The headland of Fairlight would have provided shelter from the prevailing westerlies for Old Winchelsea. We can imagine a
shingle barrier going across the bay. Somewhere in all this were landing places and exits for the local rivers. The Sussex part of the old lost parish of Broomhill on the far side of the bay was once part of the Hundred of Guestling, which included the ancient if misty Manor of Rameslie.

**Rameslie**

Rameslie was taken in 1016 by King Cnut from the Abbey of Eynsham and given to the Abbey of Fécamp in fulfilment of a promise made by the late Æthelred the Unready, at the insistence of Cnut’s new wife Emma, who had previously been married to Æthelred.

There is record of a grant by his son Harthacnut in about 1040 which extended the original grant of Rameslie to Fécamp but now included Brede and two thirds of the toll of Winchelsea, as well as Rameslie and its port. *Does this suggest an earlier port, perhaps a landing place at one of the four bournes, or somewhere off Cliff End?*

Ramselie was a relatively large, if not particularly fertile, manor, which stretched along the coast from parts of Hastings to Winchelsea/Rye and perhaps Broomhill. Inland it was bounded by the Brede Valley, but included some or all of Brede. It was not necessarily contiguous and may have been more of a bundle rights and properties. The precise location of Rameslie is something of a mystery.

After the Conquest Fécamp lost some properties in Hastings, perhaps the West Hill, where Harold had built his castle, or maybe the mouth of the Bourne for a new Norman town and port (now Hastings’ Old Town). William returned Steyning to Fécamp and compensated for the loss of Hastings with a Manor at Bury.

The Manor of Ramselie, unlike the rest of the area, was not laid waste by the conquerors. Ownership of the Hundred of Guestling appears to have been shared between the Count of Eu, responsible
for the Rape of Hastings, and Fécamp.

After lunch, with the tide going out in pouring rain, we visited the mid-tide level where we can find remains of a forest and signs of medieval or possibly earlier peat cutting, extending for 3 km along the shore. There are similar undersea forests at Bognor and Bexhill. Various dates have been offered for the Pett Level forest, but 3,000 bc appears the most likely. It must have been woodland (or at least fen carr, freshwater swamps with trees) or dry land up until 800 ad when much of the area may have turned into a tidal lagoon. There would anyway have from early times been a need for exits for the Dimsdale, Brede and Tillingham.

As has so often been the case, the Small Ports Walk raised more questions than answers.

Terry Burke
Communications

For those Friends with access to the internet, the website of the Trust is www.rmrt.org.uk. Via this it is possible to view information about the Trust, forthcoming events and the archaeological gazetteer of Romney Marsh and the river valleys to the west. There are also links to other relevant sites including that of the Romney Marsh on the Web project that has been developed at the University of Liverpool.

The Executive appreciates that many Friends do not have access to computers and we will, of course, continue to communicate with them through the Irregular and the Annual Report. If however you are online it would be appreciated if you would send details of your email address to org@rmrt.org.uk.

Contact details for administration members of the Executive are on the back cover.
## ADMINISTRATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hon. Secretary</th>
<th>Hon. Treasurer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Terry Burke</td>
<td>David Williams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court Hay</td>
<td>Red Court, Woodland Rise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 Mermaid Street</td>
<td>Seal, Sevenoaks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rye</td>
<td>Kent TN15 0JB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Sussex TN31 7EU</td>
<td>email: <a href="mailto:treasurer@rmrt.org.uk">treasurer@rmrt.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>email: <a href="mailto:secretary@rmrt.org.uk">secretary@rmrt.org.uk</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members’ Representative</th>
<th>Membership Secretary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ray Huson</td>
<td>Roger Nixon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Bodsham Crescent</td>
<td>Wyche House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bearsted</td>
<td>Woodchurch Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maidstone</td>
<td>Tenterden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kent ME15 8NL</td>
<td>Kent TN30 7AE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>email: <a href="mailto:rayhuson@btinternet.com">rayhuson@btinternet.com</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Irregular Editor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alan Tyler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39 Hayfield Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orpington BR5 2DL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>email: <a href="mailto:editor@rmrt.org.uk">editor@rmrt.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## TRUSTEES

Professor Caroline Barron; Dr Helen Clarke; Professor Antony Long;
Gustav Milne; Sarah Pearson; Richard Stogden;
Dr John Williams; Dr Barry Yates