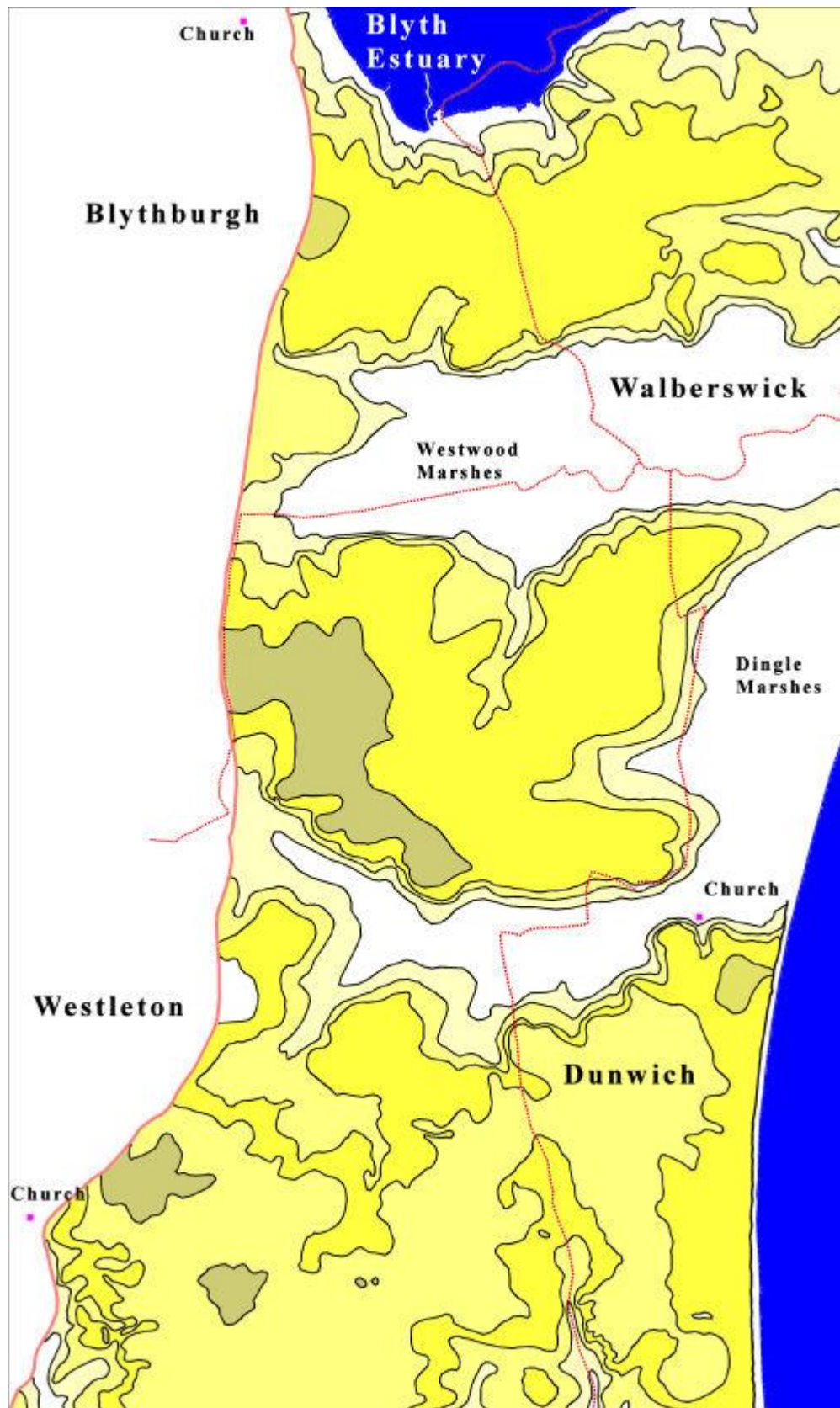


Blything Quays

Blything quays (also known as hithes) is the name given to three coastal parishes of Blything (Covehithe, Southwold and Dunwich), which were ancient points of access to the Hundred from the sea. On the following map the thick blue lines are where parish boundaries follow the inland courses of two rivers. The one to the north of Dunwich is the old course of the Blyth, the mouth of which was the site of Dunwich harbour below its eroding cliff. After the town was washed into the sea, a new opening for the Blyth was driven through the shingle bar at Southwold. Other important quays on the Blyth were at Walberswick, Wolsey's Quay (Southwold, or Wangford) and Blythburgh. The latter was the early administrative centre of the hundred and since Domesday has been held as a manor jointly with Walberswick. The medieval records of all three communities are riddled with accounts of litigation over their respective rights to land and sea because, until the sea devastated Dunwich in the 15th century, all of them traded through the same mouth of the River Blyth, which was controlled by the men of Dunwich. Covehithe, the northern quay of Blything was named after the inlet and landing place, which in early times gave sea access to the communities of Cove and Frostenden.

The river to the south of Dunwich is the Minsmere or Yox, which now flows to the sea through a sluice under the shingle bar. This was part of a 18th century drainage scheme to reclaim the marshes of Westleton and Leiston. In the 18th century the coast at this point was known as Minsmere Haven, and there was a large broad indicating that it was formerly a substantial inlet. Records of the 14th century indicate that there was a small community there but most of the hamlet had been washed away two hundred years later. It is said that the church of Minsmere stood about half a mile from the southern gate of Dunwich. An abbey was founded at Minsmere in 1182 by Ranulf de Glanville, Lord Chief Justice to Henry II. It was situated on a small hill on the southern bank of the inlet where there is now the remains of a chapel. In 1344, the abbey was suffering from coastal erosion and with the help of substantial re-endowments, the monastic community moved inland to the present site of Leiston Abbey.

Minsmere Haven

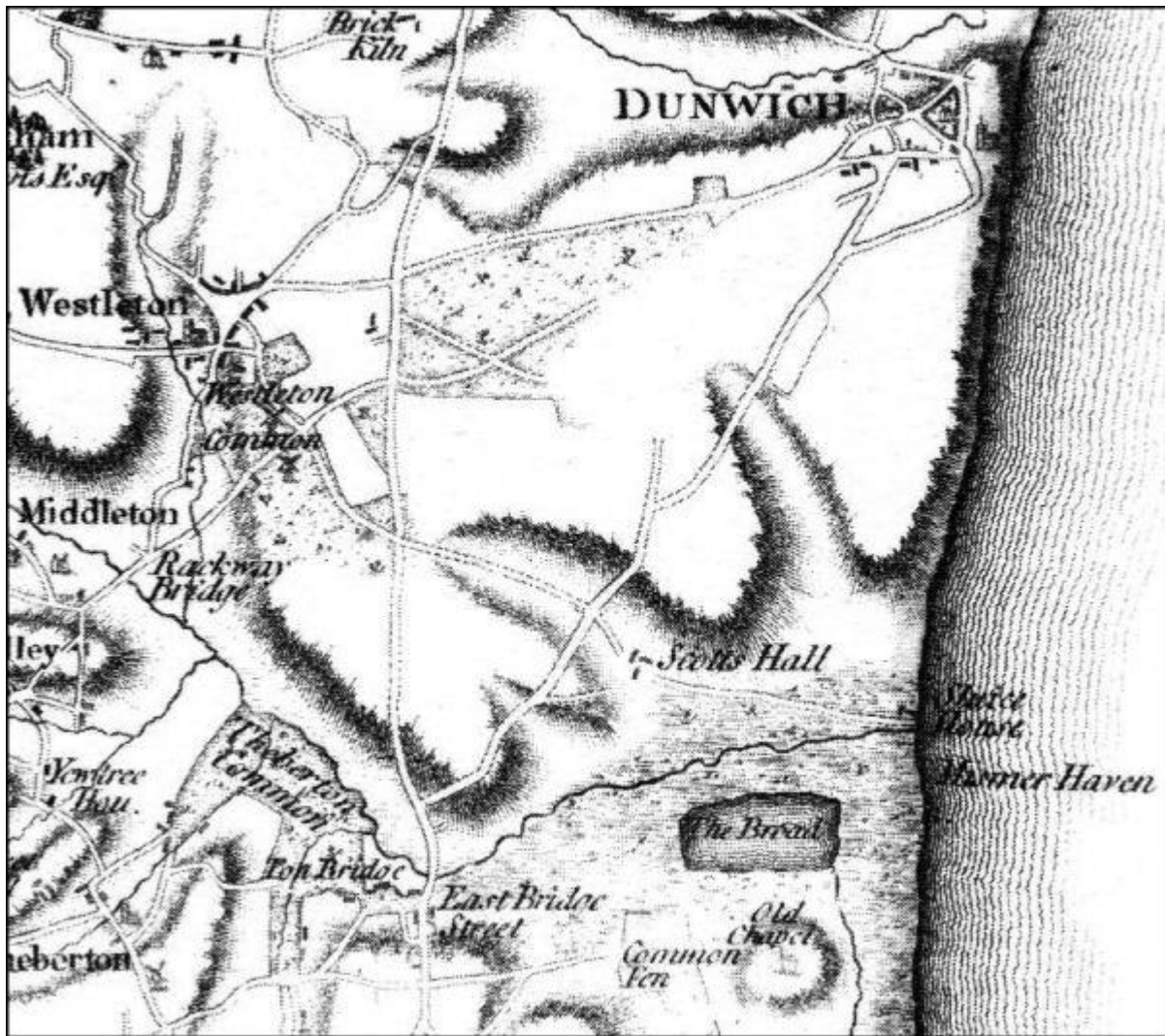


red dotted lines= parish boundaries; first contour 5 m, then every 5 m;

western boundary= road from Blythburgh to Westleton.

The following maps are taken from Hodkinson's map of the above area, which was surveyed in the 1780s.





The following account by Doreen Wallace gives a good description of the character of this stretch of coast.

South of Lowestoft we come to that part of the coast which is disappearing bit by bit into the sea. It is a region of cliffs, and every winter some of the cliffs collapse. The villages of Pakefield and Kessingland are diminishing. Apart from the peculiarities of the sea's behaviour, it is not an interesting coast just here ; it has been pretty bleak ever since we left Cromer, with sand, cliffs or sandhills, poor grass and few trees, and ample evidence of the biting east wind. Covehithe has the ruins of what must have been a very fine church. The next place southwards is Southwold, above the melancholy marshes at the mouth of the river Blyth.

It is not, in itself, a melancholy place—though it seems to be more bitterly cold, or more often bitterly cold, than the other resorts. It stands on high ground, islanded between the marshes and the sea, and so has, like Happisburgh, the rather unusual advantage of land-views as well as a sea-view. Among the holiday towns, it is an aristocrat ; it has fewer trippers and less litter than any except Aldeburgh, which is the aristocrat. Southwold has few really ancient buildings ; there was apparently a great fire there about two hundred and eighty years ago, so, as East Anglian towns go, it is new : the great

church, however, escaped the fire ; its date is early fifteenth century, and it has some decorative flint-work outside.

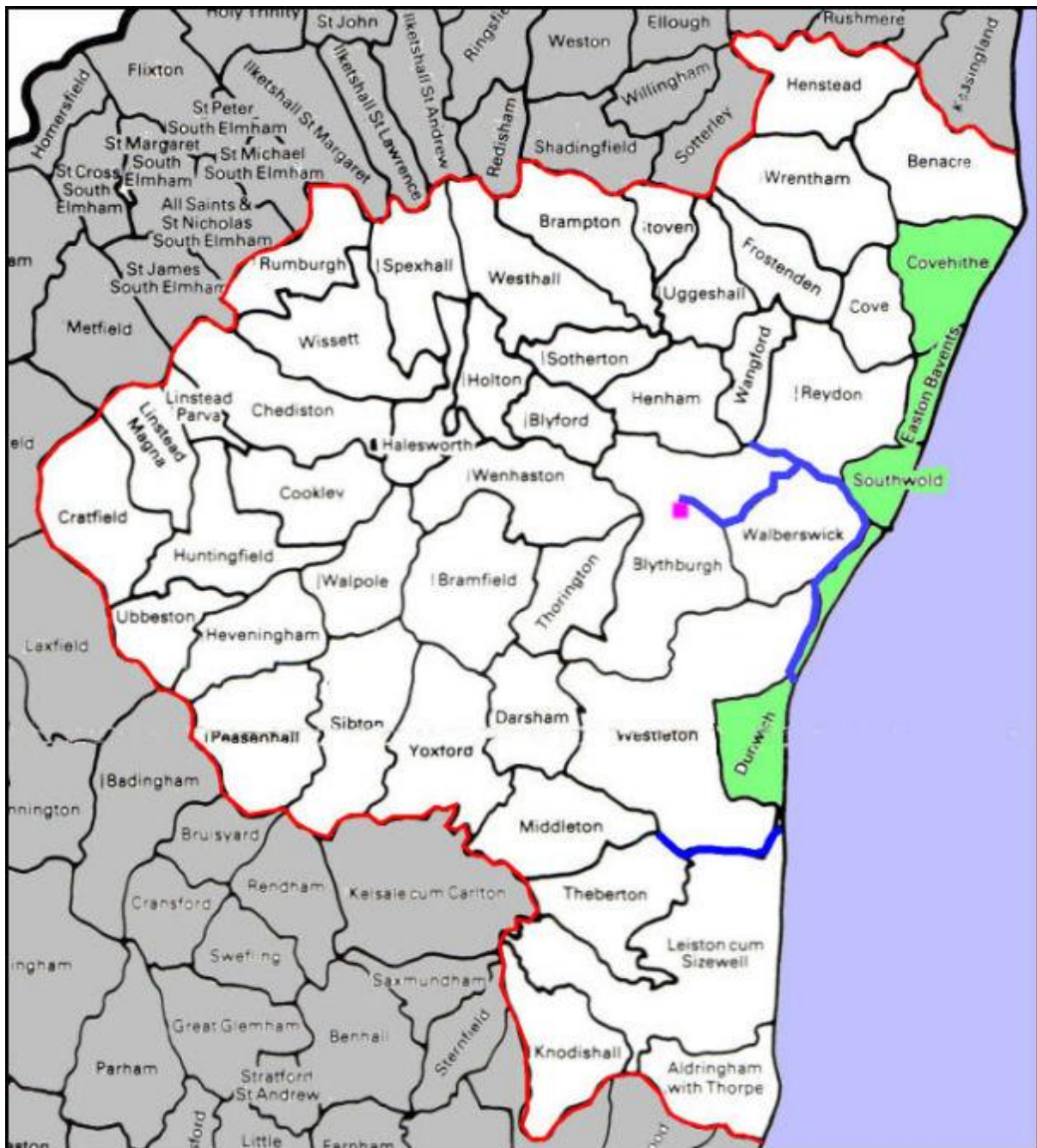
One of the attractions of Southwold is its supply of small but pleasant open spaces, which makes the town much less cramped and more dignified than most seaside places : another attraction is its proximity to pretty country. The ground rises inland, on either side of the river flats, to fine woods and heath. Walberswick, on the sea at the mouth of the Blyth, is almost too well-known to artists.

Dunwich, farther south, is in lovely surroundings ; vast woods and heathery tracts stretch behind it. But there is little of Dunwich left, sandwiched between woods and sea. It used to be a place of importance : it was the headquarters of the bishop's see before the Norman Conquest, after which the bishops removed themselves first to Thetford and then to Norwich. The worst depredations of the ocean seem to have been in the fourteenth century, when four hundred houses disappeared at once ; before 1600, four churches had gone ; in 1702, the attack began on St. Peter's Church and churchyard ; in 1754, the last church, All Saints, was dismantled for fear of destruction, and after standing in a ruined state on the very edge of the cliff until the present century, has now vanished. There is nothing of old Dunwich to be seen but the ivied ruins of the Franciscan priory, founded in the reign of Henry III., and part of a Norman apse built into the new church (that is to say, only a hundred years old) of St. James.

After some miles of unpeopled coast with no roads to it, one comes to Sizewell, a tiny place where the population of the small industrial town of Leiston can disport themselves, and Thorpeness, a very much developed resort with a shallow " broad " where children can row and sail in perfect safety. This mere is much more of an attraction than the sea. The very new little town is pre-eminently designed for the holidays en famille of people with money.

Doreen Wallace, East Anglia, Batsford, (1939)

Map of Blything quays



The purple square indicates the position of Blythburgh village, an ancient crossing point of the river Blyth and the probable early Saxon administrative centre of the hundred.

The Old Creek

The old creek

.... Southwold, Walberswick and Dunwich

We had sailed northward past Corton to Gorleston in a light breeze, which flattened out completely, leaving us becalmed. Within sight of Yarmouth we lay motionless in the sunlight upon calm blue water; every rag of muslin had been set, but we did not move. Only the tide moved, slowly setting us northward still. The helm was handled, with a conscientious effort to keep her on some kind of course, but never a breath stirred, and not a touch of life was in her. Then, at the turn of the tide, an air sprang from northward; we decided to accept it, and run quietly down and make Southwold before dark.

The breeze freshened, and we were dropping the few miles comfortably astern.

"Look out for the nets." I said it too late, for we were among the "bowls," or little barrels used as floats for the warps of the nets. "We shall go over all right without fouling," I added, "we always do; but I'd rather keep clear when I can." One sometimes also sees a "dan," a small buoy with a flag, to show where fishing-lines have been shot. They toss lonely on the waves just now; but later on, a small boat will be headed this way. Talking broad Suffolk, the honest fellows who are descendants of Suffolk pirates and smugglers will be hauling at these warps, while their light boat rocks under them, lively enough if the wind is "abroad."

There is something intimately nautical about the movements of a man bred from boyhood to the sea. The instinct of him as he yields to the swing and tumble of the boat, his deft hand that makes fast a rope in one instant, immovably fast on a cleat, without even looking at it, the very glance which he bends aloft at his canvas or abroad to windward-every turn and touch betokens him. And the old lore of the sea is in him. The traditions of unlettered generations survive.

"Ay, that's a fair wind for you," that fisherman might say, if he were to-day aboard with us. "Weather-shore all the way. Hark." A rugged finger might be lifted for silence, and we would strain our ears to attention as the yacht sailed steadfastly on. Every sound on board would be audible in the tense pause, the wash of the seas from her, and the creaking and strain of ropes. "Hark, there it is" (he would murmur); "the sea calls to the wind." Heard above the long washwash-wash of the seas about us, the voice of the surf along the distant beach would be blown, distinct and rhythmic. The wind is off-shore, and we are sheltered, in lee of the land. "The sea calls to the wind."

Evening was approaching: the sun was low in the sky. The time was one when "the gentleness of heaven is on the Sea." The seascape was suffused with last light, settling for the evenfall. Its blueness was less confident, becoming silvery and luminous. "Gentleness," Wordsworth's own description, was the only word.

For our light draught there would be ample water now. Wind and tide were comfortably balanced and the entrance would be easy. Pointed straight in from seaward at the north pier, the yacht would follow the line of the best water; with just sufficient wind in her sails to prevent the tide from setting her foul of the piles. So she carried on. She was in. The swift tide was sweeping her up the river. Into a recess, sheltered from run of the stream, she settled, and was comfortably warped up beside the stone wall.

We were moored. The long sea-line was visible over the sandhills on the Walberswick side, and the waves could be heard on the shore. The beach and harbour-piers were deserted, a few gulls in the distance were the sole life that stirred in the evening twilight. We brought our supper out to the cabin-top, and fed in the open.

This unfortunate harbour of Southwold has been a failure. The present harbour-piers were first erected in 1747. Two docks were then built, and the herring fishery was in full prosperity. But continual silt was the harbour's undoing. Even in the nineteenth century, thirteen times over it had to be cleared, again and yet again. And again and again the sand poured in and choked it. One last heroic effort was made to re-establish the old prosperity, but gradually the place again relapsed. The silted sand had won.

Such is the recent history of Southwold harbour, but the great days of its traffic were ended before those modern harbour-piers were thought of:

*"Swoule and Dunwich, and Walderswicke,
All go in at one lousie creeke."*

That is the old rhyme (ancient no doubt even in 1722) which Defoe attributed to the northern coasting seamen, "a rude verse of their own using, and I suppose of their own making." The entrance was one, but there were three separate branches.

Grenville Collins thus described the harbour in 1692:

"Dunwich, Walter-Swick and Sole, or Southwold, go all in at one small creek, and divides into three Branches. Dunwich on the south Branch, Sole on the north and Walter-Swick in the middle."

Reyce also, in 1618, says of the river Cockell, (now Blyth) that "thus speeding to Blighborrow, it bequeathes it selfe into the bottome of the deep sea northward from Walderswick. So likewise into this haven do two other little brookes flow, the one coming southward from Dunwich, the other northward from Easton and Sowolde"

Defoe derides the notion that the "lousie creek" was once an important harbour. "This 'lousie creek' in short", he says, "is a little river at Swoul, which our late famous atlas-maker calls a good harbour for ships, and rendezvous of the royal navy ; but that by-the-bye; the author, it seems, knew no better."

But, pace Defoe, there seems little doubt that, in former centuries, the haven had been really important, and had once afforded "harbourage for men of war and ships of the largest burden." One must merely think back more deeply into the past. For this little deserted backwater of a place, where the yacht now lay solitary in the twilight, this humble ribbon of silted tide-way, is the sole remnant of the proudest port of Suffolk. The ancient greatness of Dunwich is unquestioned. The three towns Dunwich, Southwold and Walberswick sent their shipping seaward through the one channel.

Evening had come. Only some solitary voice of a bird, far off, invaded the silence ; and this silence brooded the more intimately for the tide beside us that "moving seemed asleep." The grey mystery of twilight was about us.

Half-reluctant to disenchant the stillness even with sound of oars, I at last pushed off in the dinghy, and crossed the few yards of water. On the smooth sand of the Walberswick shore I landed, and loitered afoot, aimless in the " moth-light." Though lamps began to wink from Walberswick windows, distant a short walk landward, there was a strange remoteness here. This solitary twilight was mine.

Walberswick is of great antiquity. In 1151 it had thirteen barques trading to Iceland, and its unrecorded shipping of earlier ages was doubtless equally important. It prospered- a place of business and enterprise.

But Dunwich, its great neighbour, overshadowed it almost to extinction. There Dunwich towered to southward, with monasteries, hospitals and churches, a walled and fortified town. "The strength thereof was terror and fear." In 1279 (in the reign of Edward I) Dunwich possessed "eighty great ships." Its "fayre shipps" were its pride, which few townes in England had the like." When all the Cinque Ports and Yarmouth and Southampton were ordered to send one ship, Dunwich' alone was ordered to send two. It was preminent; its greatness brooked neither question nor denial.

Up past Walberswick sailed its "barkes" and cayeurs," and these wharves teemed with traffic while the barrelled masts and broad sails crowded the fairway.

Within seventy years the town had been ruined by the sea. In the first year of Edward III the old port was rendered entirely useless; twenty years later a great part of the town, with four hundred houses was "drowned by the sea."

Then, through the centuries, ruin succeeded ruin. In 1540 the church of St. John Baptist was taken down, and in the same century three chapels and two gates. In the reign of King Charles I "the foundation of the Temple buildings yielded to the irresistible force of the undermining surges," and- in 1667- on a night of terror for the inhabitants, the sea reached the market-place. In 1920 the tale was complete when, in an autumn storm, the ruin of the last of its six churches went down over the cliff. Dunwich has gone.

"Unlike those ruined cities" (as the old chronicler says) "whose fragments attest their former grandeur, Dunwich is wasted, desolate and void." Dunwich has gone.

Southwold, the other of the three towns, has also cowered under threat of the sea, but it survives. Quite wrongly, Southwold is often deemed late-born and upstart, in contrast with its picturesque fellows. The fact is not so. Southwold figures in the Domesday Book; it was Sudwolda then. Its church was founded in 1202, and the present building is said to date from Queen Mary's time. Later, in 1643, Cromwell's troopers were there, and they "brake down one hundred and thirty superstitious pictures and gave orders to take down 13 cherubims and to take down 20 angels." It has had its own variegated pages of history, both landward and seaward, for a thousand years.

Perhaps it owes its church to Queen Mary, but the fallow queen has another and more intimate memorial in the minds of men along the Suffolk country-side. "Thank God for a good fire and nobody in it!" This is what the old-world peasant will till piously say when, some winter's night, he draws up his elbow-chair before the blazing hearth.

A good fire and nobody in it" -a grim memorial.

Fire on a wider scale has played its part in the history of Southwold-town. Both in 1596 and 1659 Southwold suffered grievously, and on the latter occasion three-parts of the town, with the town hall, market hall, prison, warehouses and 238 dwelling-houses were consumed in four hours.

But I must return to my water-side. Alone in the nightfall, I had lingered by the rising tide-way, and watched the tide brimming continually, one creased and swirling current, direct and single. Landward, past the ruined staithes, it swam. There in the dusk were the boats drawn up on the shore-side, the little open luggers that are the only ships of the haven now.

Along the denes I turned back, seaward, and faced the full moon, just risen. It was red in the dusk. The path of gold on the sea- the "moon-way" as they say in Suffolk- was below it. Only the moon-way of gold betrayed the sea; neutral otherwise, it would have been lost in the haze.

The tide brimmed by, indifferently as when the old Dunwich traders entered, in days of the Plantagenets. The three towns which shared the common estuary were no peaceful compeers. They wrangled and fought each other throughout their history. They were at each other's throats in the matter of harbour dues; they went to law with each other just as Ipswich and Harwich quarrelled on the Orwell. When Southwold was incorporated in the fourth year of Henry VII, the Act of Incorporation referred to "the many great variances and debates which had long time been had and continued" between them. Even until a hundred years ago the strife was at full tide. In 1829 a puncheon of whisky "found in the wash of the sea" or "grounded on shore" was pretext enough.

Dunwich and Southwold, both "notoriously litigious," went to law as to whether it was in the jurisdiction of one or the other, and Dunwich - although successful - had to pay its own costs of more than a thousand pounds.

Nor were these rivalries confined to threats and lawsuits. In days long past, methods were more direct. In the time of Edward III a Walberswick ship at Southwold was plundered by Dunwich men, and sixteen of the crew were murdered.

I had been gazing seaward, absorbed; and, like a ghost from the late twilight, Robinson was there. He had stolen on me unheard. Silent at my elbow he stood ; and, with me, he gazed at the moon-way on the water.

"Well?" My question was hushed to a soft halftone, for speech seemed like an interruption somehow.

"I came between the queer old houses and over the crazy little wooden bridge." He spoke barely above a mysterious whisper, just as one might begin a fairy tale, "and . .

"The moonlight was on the little creeks, and the shore-line deserted," I went on in the same tone, taking the cue from him. "And under the moon, I saw the Dutchmen's topsails."

I could hear his breathing quicken, but he kept his face to moonlight, and was silent.

Then as I watched, I knew them for our own line," I recited. " Smoke had blown from seaward all day.

*'Well might you hear their guns, I guess,
From Sizewell Gap to Easton Ness.'*

But silence had fallen now, and the ships passed like phantoms.. . "

"Sole Bay, 1672. One can almost see them," said Robinson ; and the spell was broken.

We paced along the shore-side, the wave breaking in the moonlight beside us; and we spoke of earlier Dutch wars, when the wounded were perpetually being landed along this coast, or when Blake himself was landed here, after action off the Gabbards in 1653, wounded, and "full of pain both in his head and left side, insomuch that he has no rest night or day, but continues groaning very sadly." And Dutchmen in their broad breeches, 2,000 prisoners from the Lowestoft battle, were landed here at Southwold- in 1665.

We had reached the harbour-pier on this southward side, and we paused. Moonlight glittered on the water between the piles, and the pier was black.

Walberswick . . . I was thinking, it goes back into history, with its barques of the twelfth century trading to Iceland and the North Sea. And the old ships would fit in with this setting to-night.

"Let's go for a sail in the dinghy," said Robinson, and, in that magical moonlight, we went.

Back on board, we lingered long before turning in. The mood of reverie was upon us both. Even after Dunwich had fallen, great ships were built here in Elizabethan and Stuart times. And earlier yet the place was a den of piracy, the whole countryside being in league with the grim sea-robbers. Industry, commerce, crime, battle -all have come this way; the old creek has been full of business, and has seen the vessels of all the long centuries, while the townships have done business in great waters. And nothing now, save the small beach-boats of the fishermen, remains.

"We're away early to-morrow," I yawned, "we must turn in." We went; we left the moonlight and the phantoms of history.

Suffolk Sea-Borders H Alker Tripp (1926) Bodley Head

Classic account of voyaging in a sailing boat from London to Yarmouth and back along the Suffolk coast

Rise in Sea Level

The level of the ocean has fluctuated by more than 100 m over the past 100,000 years as ice stored on land has changed in volume. During the last ice age, sea level was 120 m below where it is today. During the transition out of this period of glaciation, sea level changed at an average rate of 10 mm /yr (some periods, rates were as high as 40 mm / yr). During the interglacial periods, rates of sea level rise have been much slower (0.1-0.2 mm/ yr over the past 3000 years; Church et al. 2001). Changes in sea level have had major impacts on the abundance and particularly the distribution of both marine and terrestrial diversity.

Sea level will rise as climate change pushes planetary temperatures higher. This occurs due to the thermal expansion of ocean water (responsible for about 70 percent of the increase), the melting of glaciers, and changes to the distribution of Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets (responsible for the remainder). The expected increase in sea level is approximately 9-29 cm over the next 40 years, or 28-98 cm by 2090. These changes may sound trivial but are expected to have major impacts on coastal regions and human infrastructure. Vast areas of the world's coastal regions are expected to be inundated. A 25-cm rise, for example, would displace a large number of people from the delta regions of major rivers such as the Nile, Ganges, and Yangtze as well drowning Pacific and Indian Ocean nations such as the Maldives, Kiribati, and Tuvalu.

In concert with the direct effects of coastal inundation are the impacts of storm surge, which could result in a fivefold increase in displaced people by 2080 (Nichols et al. 1999). Impacts on marine ecosystems also vary according to proximity to coastlines; in some cases only minor changes are likely, while in others major impacts are likely. Sea level rise could cause the loss of up to 22 percent of the world's coastal wetlands by 2080. Combined with other human impacts, this number is likely to climb to a loss of 70 percent of the world's coastal wetlands by the end of the twenty-first century.

The East Anglian coast is particularly susceptible to the effects of climate change. The coast is rapidly losing its sand to high energy coastal processes. The removal of this natural coastal defence places the cliffs, dunes and sea walls under even greater pressure. The event of a breach of sea defences, flood water would propagate quickly through the low lying hinterland causing extensive damage.

Changes in global sea level rise today have been attributed largely in response to changes in the world's climate due to global warming. However this is not only attributed to the changing sea levels but also to sinking of land. This problem in East Anglia has arisen in response to events that occurred during and after the last ice age (which ended between 10,000 and 15,000 years ago), where large ice sheets covered much of central and northern Britain. The huge weight of this ice pressed the land downwards as it advanced across the country. Once the ice began to retreat, the weight of the ice was removed causing the land in Scotland and Northern England, once covered in ice, to rise again.

Currently, the combination of a sea level rise of 4.5mm/yr and a sinking adjustment of 1.5mm/yr, amounts to a relative sea level rise of 6mm/yr.
