The History of Quy Fen



By Peggy Watts

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Author's note, 2006:
The Quy Fen Trust asked me to write the History of Quy Fen. The views expressed herein are my own, and not necessarily those of the Trust. I am primarily a Quy historian and know little about the history of Fen Ditton and Horningsea, so I may rightly be accused of bias! I am now over 80 and have loved and visited Quy Fen all my life.

Peggy Watts (1923-2007)

FOREWORD

I was very proud to be asked to write a foreword to this booklet. A couple of years ago Quy Fen Trustees decided to get out a publication about Quy Fen, and my late sister, Peggy, was asked to write a piece about its history. The "piece" grew to 63 pages. The Trustees liked it and have included just about all of it.

Peggy was born in Quy and lived there all her life (apart from a stint in the WRNS during the war) She was well educated and loved delving into old documents etc: she also loved the village, in which she has played such an active part all her life. She started as secretary to the WI when she was 16 and, over the years, was then involved in the running of most other village organisations, including several years as Parish Council Chairman. Probably 30 years ago she decided to combine her love of local history with her love of Quy by making a very detailed study of this very small area of England. She attended many courses on Local History in Cambridge, and was respected by many of the well-known local historians there. Peggy wrote many booklets about Quy and the Staine Hundred (The collection of villages around Quy which formed an ancient "Hundred" in early England). Many people with Quy roots from around the world were guided to her door for information about their ancestors, and some of these became her friends. I still get emails or letters to try to answer, but I am afraid that my local knowledge is not up to it.

Peggy died in 2007 leaving a whole office full of Quy documents, maps, photographs old and new etc. Some of these documents have been passed on to the local records office, but many are now stored in Quy Village Hall as a record of Quy's history.

As a trustee of Quy Fen I was always of the opinion that it was our job to maintain the Fen and pass it on to the next generation in at least as good a condition as we found it. I feel that the Fen has had far too little "maintenance" over the last 50 years and the Trustees were controlled and guided by "experts" from the environment organisations. Most of these experts were young and inexperienced, often with a recently acquired college degree, which meant they felt they were qualified to tell Trustees, many with years of country life experience, what to do. Unfortunately, their advice seemed be that nothing should be done:- an absolute ban on chemicals; cut down very little; and keep reducing the stocking density. Consequently the open grass areas of Fen became infested with noxious

weeds, mainly ragwort and thistle, and the area around the Cut became so overgrown with bushes and brambles that the ground beneath it, which once grew an abundance of rare plant life, became almost sterile. A few years ago English Nature (now called Natural England) appeared to employ more experienced experts, and the problems started to be engaged with. We are currently in a three year programme where grants are paid to try to control ragwort, thistle, pollard large willow trees, clear scrub around the Cut and dig out the ponds.

Of course it would be very easy for us to eradicate the weeds completely by spraying, but this would also kill most of the small plants we are trying to save. We are therefore asked to use chemicals very sparsely i.e only allow the chemical to go onto the weed (weed wiping and spot spraying) or pull the weeds out by hand.

Since Peg's chapter "Quy Fen today", which is now two years old, we have put in another fence, so that work can continue on these weeds while the cattle are on another part of the Fen (Ragwort, when pulled, cut or sprayed is dangerous to animals, although it will not hurt them while it is growing). I doubt we will ever be completely successful in eradicating these noxious weeds, but they are being kept in check.

Willow trees continue to be pollarded All the ponds have now been slubbed out,except the Cut, and I hope we can persuade Natural England to let us slub out the Cut in stages over the next three year programme. The proposed new pond is scheduled for next January.

Massive inroads into the dense scrub around the Cut have resulted in glades where the sun can now get through. Grass and other delicate plant life is returning to these areas, which will from now on be kept open.

As a consequence of all this work, which is only part-funded, there has been little money left to put into the village funds, but we expect to address this in the future when we can expect that the grants will continue but the work will get less. I do hope that the next generation of Quy Fen trustees will carry out their duties as caringly as we have.

Bill Watts (Quy)
Secretary, Quy Fen Trust
June 2009

1

INTRODUCTION

Quy, Horningsea and Fen Ditton are three adjoining fen edge villages. From Saxon times onwards, the Open fields tended to be near the centre of the settlement and the outlying parts of the parish, which were often unsuitable as arable land, were used as common land. Where one or more villages met, it was customary to share this land for grazing of animals, cutting hay, gathering wood or, in the fens, digging turf. Thus there were some 400 acres of fenland used for intercommoning. (Ref 1) There were no natural features to define boundaries between the parishes, and the boundaries were not finalised until the 19C. (Ref 1) The villages were small, the total population being only about 70 when Domesday Book was compiled in 1086. Horningsea and Fen Ditton were one parish until 1412 when they were separated by the Bishop of Ely and were given a strange interlocking border. By that time they had a population of around 330, while Quy's population had risen to around 150. (Ref 2)



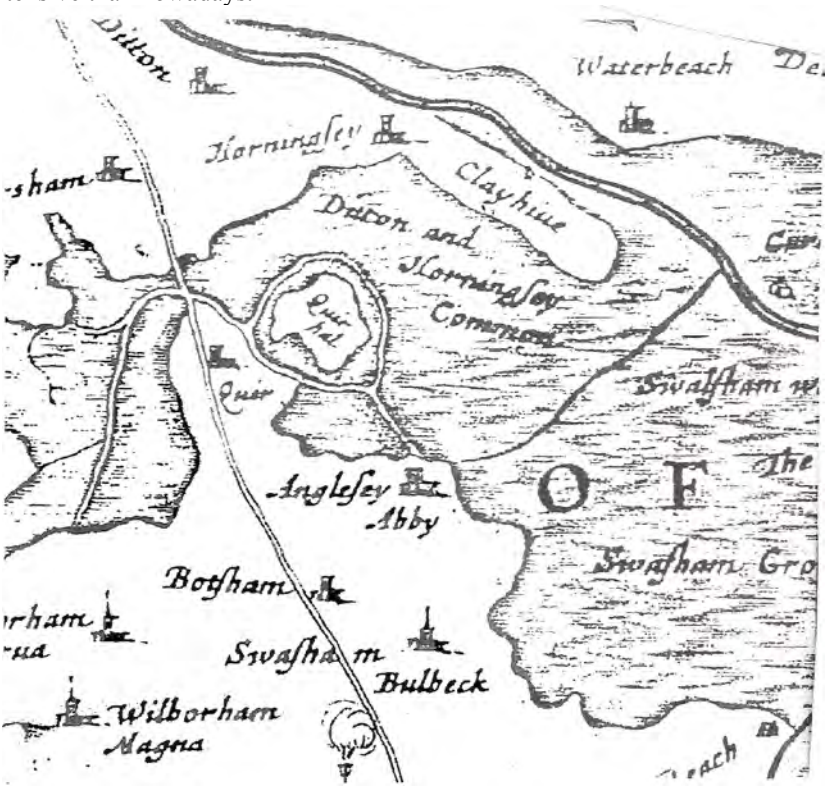
Map 2. The Parish Boundaries

Quy Fen is all that now remains of this much larger area of common land. Fen Ditton, Horningsea and Quy still have equal rights in Quy Fen though its 73 acres lie completely within Quy, and the other villages have at least one field between them and Quy Fen.

2

DRAINAGE OF THE FENS BEGINS IN THE 17TH CENTURY

The earliest map of the area., made in 1648 by Blaeu, shows the **"**Regiones Inundatae" and that the areas liable to flood were much more extensive than nowadays.



Map 3 Part of the 1648 Map "Regiones Inundatae"

Ditton and Horningsey Common extends from near Horningsea church to the Bottisham Lode with a tongue of higher land marked "Clayhive", whereas "Quir Hal" is shown as a fen island with a road going all round it. A further complication is that some roads, such as that leading to Anglesey

Abbey, have only been marked where they pass through the marshy land There is fen on both sides of this latter road but it is difficult to reconcile the map with what we know of the area today. The map was not probably drawn to any exact scale; for instance, the distance between Quy Church and those of Fen Ditton and Horningsea is slightly greater than in current maps.

There is no indication that any large-scale drainage work was carried out before the mid-17C. By then the fen area generally was in a very bad condition with water unable to get away because of lack of waterways and blocked ditches. Vermuyden, who had experience of drainage in the Netherlands, was called in by the Earl of Bedford to draw up a scheme whereby the fens could be reclaimed. Capital for the scheme was advanced by the Adventurers in exchange for plots of land. (Altogether, they were allotted a total of 95,000 acres.) In this area, 400 acres of fens common to Fen Ditton, Horningsea and Quy were included in the scheme. The fen was then considerably higher than it is at present, perhaps by as much as 10 feet and was completely covered with peat. The Adventurers received a rectangular plot of 100 acres that lay to the west of the present Quy Fen and adjoined a similar block of 300 acres in Lode Fen. The Adventurers Lands were usually positioned where it was easiest to drain! Although this allotment was made to the Adventurers in 1635, the drainage was not achieved until 1655-6, owing to various difficulties and delays caused by the Civil War.

A Terrier of the Manor of Fen Ditton dated 1672, in the keeping of the County Archivist, is quoted as being the earliest reference to the common in which the three parishes have equal rights, and it seems to have been assumed that this included Quy Fen (Ref. 3). An extract from this terrier, with the spelling modernised, is given below:

> "*We also find that there was until seven years past a certain common called the High Fen always common to all the free and lawful commoners of Fen Ditton, Horningsea or Stow cum Quy as an intercommon between them the said three townships but the same was for (guist or gest?) cattle only used and the commoners of Stow cum Quy were to put no other cattle than such as were plunged over the lake called Plunge Lake. We find that the said High Fen over and besides the drainers ground and the turf pits part thereof did and doth yet according to a survey also of the said George Skinner contain the number of the ----------, and we find that the same is since*

> *the drainers took away those bounded to the east on the drainers' ground and the Turf Pits, south and west on Low Fen and north on Clayhithe Field and Common or horn called "The Ruffe".*

The reference to "*until seven years past"* probably refers to the time before the Adventurers were awarded land in the area, which is called in the Terrier "drainers' ground". Since this Terrier is of the Manor of Fen Ditton, it is clear that the Commoners of Quy had rights of intercommon within Fen Ditton along with the Commoners of Fen Ditton and Horningsea, although they later lost these rights. It neither proves, or disproves that the people of Fen Ditton and Horningsea had equal rights in Quy Fen, which I would not consider to be part of "High Fen". "Low Fen", "Rough Fen *(The Ruffe*)" and High Fen all appear on Map 5 of Fen Ditton circa 1790.

The information about the rights to graze cattle are not clear to me. I do not know what is meant by "guist, or gest cattle" but it could mean that that Quy did not have equal grazing rights there unless they were "*plunged over Plunge Lake".* Where was Plunge Lake? Was it a lower part of the Fen that had not been drained at that time? Although the Planning Department Report suggests "*the narrow 'neck' of land without a ditch dividing it from the southern part of the common is a likely place for the former 'Plunge Lake'*, this does seem to help me much.

During the rest of the 17C, land that had been improved, began to be enclosed, either by the Lords of the Manors or by individuals, though a large area was still left as common land. Vancouver who made a general survey of Cambridgeshire in 1794 (Ref 4) made no reference to commonland in Quy but in his report for Horningsea he mentioned that "… *there are about 150 acres of common, appropriated to the Poor of Horningsea, Quy and Ditton, which have been much injured, by the digging of turf, and owes its present deplorable condition, as do the other low lands, to the height of the bed of the River Cam, and the shameful neglect of the banks…."* Some of this 150 acres might have been along the bank of the Cam where both Horningsea and Fen Ditton had common land which was not shared by Quy.

By the 17C, all three villages had grown. Fen Ditton and Horningsea both had about 60 households whereas Quy had 45. (Ref 2)

3

THE LOCAL FENS IN THE 18TH CENTURY

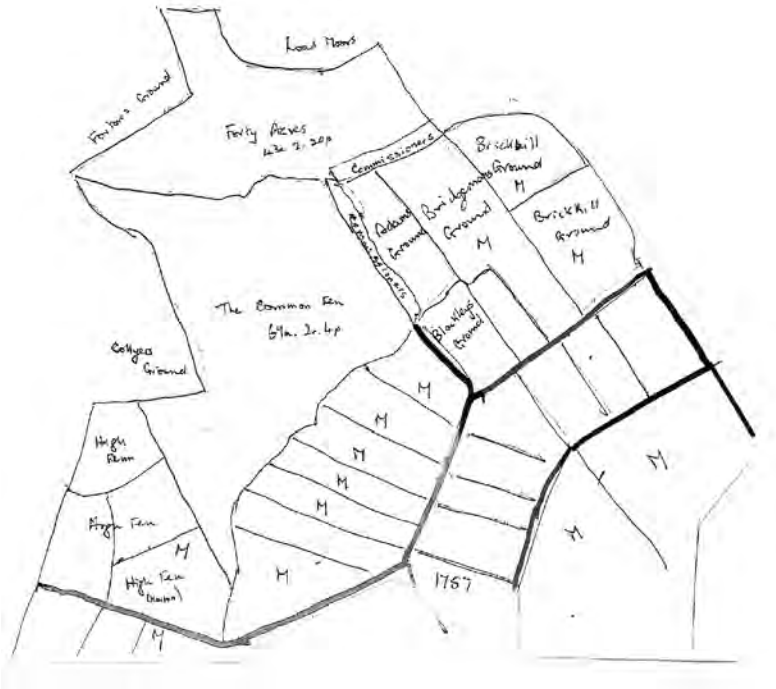
In the Manor of Fen Ditton Court Rolls, which still regarded Horningsea and Ditton as one entity, Wallace Badcock, (Ref. 5), found that in the early 18C "*Villagers were not allowed to milk a cow on the Common, or let their geese stray.*" Both villages had fen reeves to oversee the use of the fen.

In the Quy Overseers' Book (now in CRO) there is a damaged document dated 18th April 1720, which reads as follows:

> Memorandum. Its agreed by & between__.
> Stow cum Quy that No Poor Man or W___.
> keep or lend any Cows in the Com(m)on Fen__..
> Meadows nor Shall any Farmer or owner__..
> or stake more than three horses or Mares to one,,,
> one time: And further it is also agreed that the Coinin
> Platt & Common Fen Shall be Fed by no Farmers Catte[l?]
> the Same Shall be Wholly & Solly to the use of the Poor
> and to no other person or persons whatsoever Witness our hands
> Witness hereunto
>
> John Muggleton sen.
> E Pratt
> Henry Muggleton
> Richard Foote
> John W Hovell his Marke
> Robert Curtis
> Robert + Howlett his marke
> Will(iam) Hovell his + mark
> Thomas Carter his X mark
> John Taylor his O mark
> Richard Adams his (sideways R) mark
> Wm Wybrow
> Richard Piper his X mark
> Robert Prick his Marke

Thus of the 14 who witnessed this agreement, six could sign their name and eight could not, suggesting that it represented both farmers and the ordinary villagers of Quy. The Overseers Accounts show that between 1714 and 1730 eight of them served as Overseers of the Poor, including four who couldn't sign their name! (Did their wives keep the accounts?) Of the others, Henry Muggleton was one of the richest farmers, E. Pratt was presumably a doctor as he was paid for "bleeding the Widow Newman", Richard Piper was the

gravedigger, and the others can be found in the Parish Registers. It is not entirely clear what this agreement means. It would seem that no cattle, neither of Poor Men or Women nor farmers were to be allowed to feed on Quy Fen and that no-one could have more than three horses there at any time. Presumably this meant, as it did in the 20C, that anyone taking a cart in the Fen could tether his horse or allow it to feed until that person had finished his work, perhaps cutting hay or digging peat, when the horse would be put back in the cart and taken home. What then was "the Same" which shall be wholly and solely to the use of the Poor? If this Fen was common to Horningsea and Fen Ditton as well as to Quy, did they have a similar agreement? Probably the villagers tended to use the common that was nearest to their home when putting animals on the common land but apart from small amounts by ditch boundaries there were no other Rights of Common in Quy. Perhaps at that time they had not lost their rights of common in Horningsea and Ditton.



Map 4 Quy Estate Map in 1757

By the time the Quy Estate map (Map4) was drawn in 1757, High Fen was divided into allotments. On what was once the southern edge of the Fen, there were seven rectangular allotments of about 6 acres each, none of which belonged to Martins of Quy Hall. By their shape, it suggests they may have been allotted to some of the Adventurers or others involved in drainage work. However on the other side of the droveway and nearer to the present Quy Fen were 7 more rectangular enclosures of around 7 acres, six of which were owned by Martin which might mean that he was responsible for enclosing them. Unfortunately there is no terrier with the map and so though we know that those marked with 'M' belonged to Martin it is known who the other landowners were. There are some names given in the 1757 Land Tax Assessments, which I do not recognize but by 1825, the only landowners in Quy were Martin, Ambrose and three of the Cambridge Colleges. This suggests that the Adventurers soon sold off their allotments.

A rental of the Estate of Thomas Panton Jun. Esq at Ditton and Hornsea circa 1760 mentions the following

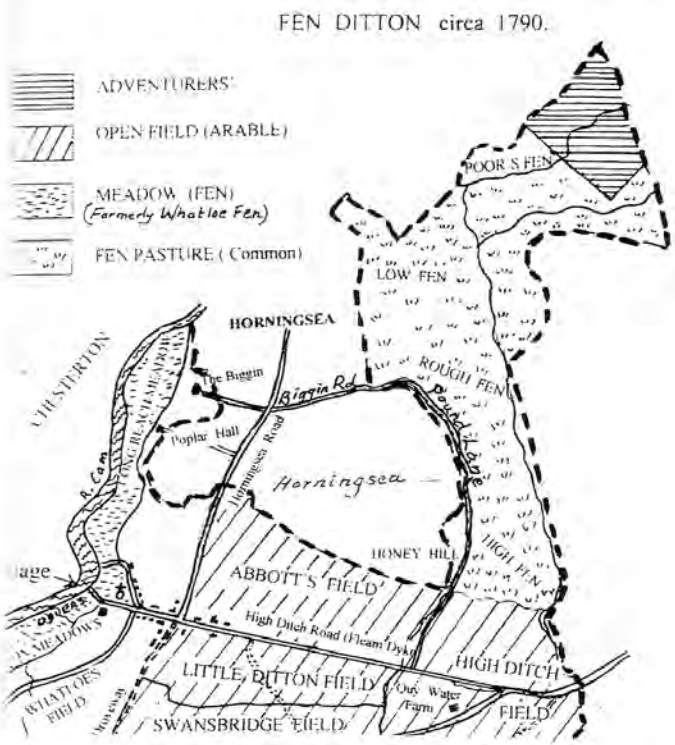
"A Messuage Orchard and Common for 8 cows at 8d each common	£6. 10s. 0d
A cottage & 1 Common	£2. 2s. 0d
A cottage and 2 commons	£2. 5s. 0d"

Badcock's map of 1790 shows a considerable amount of common fen pasture on the west of Black Ditch, though that on the Quy side had been enclosed before an estate map drawn in 1757.

Rights of turbary

Peat was being dug and the turf used for domestic heating. There are two or three entries each year in the Quy Overseers Accounts for turves being given to the poor of Quy but there is no indication where it was coming from, except in 1724 when they paid 2 shillings for 2 loads out of the common fen. The ordinary villagers would have been allowed to go and cut enough peat for their own requirements, and perhaps for their neighbours but they were not allowed to sell it to people outside the village. This was a valuable asset and would also have applied to the villagers of Horningsea and Fen Ditton, but again they may have dug nearer to their own homes than in the present Quy Fen area. Vancouver (Ref 4) wrote of the commons being "much injured by the digging of turf" by the end of the century. There are two fields called Brickill (later Brick Kiln) Ground just to the east of Quy Fen on which wasters of early 19C bricks were found (Ref 1) but as the

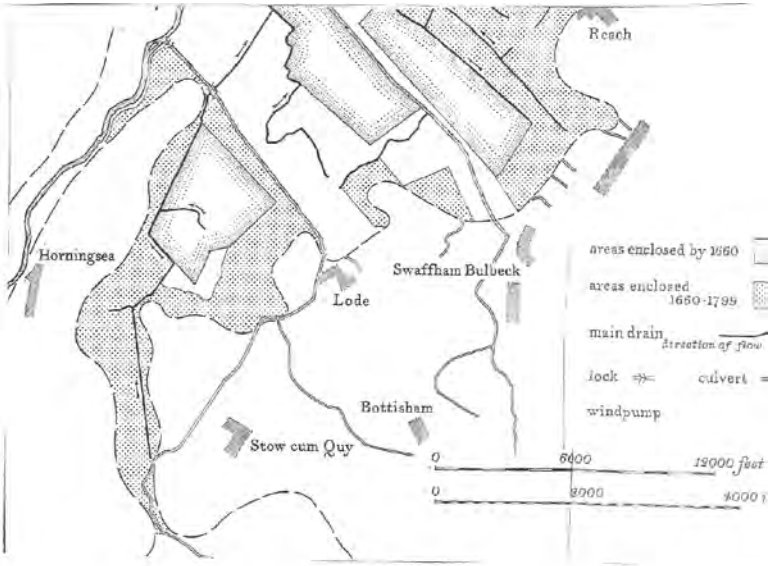
name appears on the 1757 map brick-making must have been ongoing during the 18C.



Map 5 Fen Ditton circa 1790 (Ref 5)

By the second half of the late 18C, the condition on the fenland had again deteriorated. There were many holes in the flood-banks of the lodes and River Cam. The Swaffham and Bottisham Drainage Commission was established in 1767 to become responsible for the drainage in the local villages including our three villages. At that time Swaffham Common was said to be 4 feet deep in water in its lowest places. The Reach Lode was improved and a pumping station was put up at Upware. A watermill beside the Lode drew water from two drains, one from Bottisham Fen and the other from the fens of Quy, Ditton and Horningsea by means of a culvert under the Bottisham Lode. These improvements were in place by 1779, and the Commissioners spent considerable sums on cutting minor drains and cleaning out old ones. However, as the peat began to dry out, the land

shrank and drainage became less efficient. t can be seen from a map (Ref 1) that most of the fen area in Horningsea and Fen Ditton was enclosed between 1660 and 1799,



Map 6 Land enclosed between 1660 and 1799

4

THE 19TH CENTURY AND INCLOSURE ACTS

Inclosure took place by Act of Parliament in our three villages in the first half of the 19C, though by then much of the fen area had already been enclosed. Fen Ditton, which once had five Open fields, was the first to be enclosed in 1807. Before maps could be made and the awards made, the boundaries would have had to be fixed. Comparison of the 1790 map and the Inclosure Map show that the boundary along Black Ditch was extended so that part of Fen Ditton became part of Quy though I do not know the origin of the 1790 map which does not appear to have been drawn to scale.



Map 7. Fen Ditton Inclosure 1807 (Northern part)

At Horningsea, "The common fields of the parish were finally enclosed in 1810, together with the meadowland along the River Cam, and the fenland on the NW of the parish." (Ref 1.)

The unanswered question in my mind is “How and when did Fen Ditton and Horningsea come to have equal common rights with Quy in Quy Fen? I have consulted the Inclosure Awards of these two villages which contain no mention of Quy (not even as the adjoining village). The Archivist could make no suggestions as to how to ascertain how these rights came about. Why did Inclosure Awards not give them common rights within their own village? As the fens were enclosed, did they just use the only part which was not enclosed regardless of the fact that it was not in their own village? It may be that as they were not impeded, they just carried on so that by the time Quy was enclosed in 1840, they could claim the rights as having existed “from time out of mind”.

The Martin family had owned Quy Hall since 1722 but had been largely absentee landlords and took little interest in the estate.. At the time that the enclosures were taking place in Fen Ditton and Horningsea, Thomas Martin was Lord of the Manor, having inherited the estate from his uncle who died in 1794. He was the black sheep of the family, living mainly in Paris where he kept both a wife and a mistress, Miss Mauleverer, who. according to his mother writing in 1798, was ”low, ignorant and plain, but amiable in disposition” He lived like a nobleman , keeping a coach and six horses, spent over £2,000 a year for three consecutive years and gambled away some £3,000, much reducing his father’s fortune. He had had an illegitimate son by Arabella Hannan and, though he later married her, this son could not inherit, but became a Captain of the 14th Regiment of the Native Infantry to the East Indian Company of Bengal until he lost his sight in a battle in the East Indies. Thomas and Arabella had two daughters, Eleanor and Judith, who spent most of the time moving between relations and lodgings as Thomas was unable to support them. After Arabella died he married Ann Payne who was younger than either of his daughters. In 1811, he inherited another estate near Bristol, Sneed Park, and it seems that the family, being no longer willing to help him financially, gave him the option of living at Sneed or Quy and he chose the latter. He died in Quy in 1821 aged 73, having lived here for a few years (Refs. 6 & 7).

Did this influence the outcome of Quy Fen? Would Ditton and Horningsea villagers have had such easy access to Quy Fen if there had been a Lord of the Manor who had the interests of his villagers at heart at the beginning of the century? Or was there some other reason? There are those in Quy today who do not think that the equal division between the three villages is justified and it does not seem to me to make historical

sense. Hopefully someone may do further research which might throw up the answer.

The "Report of the Commissioners for Charities concerning Charities – AD 1837" for the Parish of Quy mentions Childe's Charity which consisted of 14 acres in the open fields which was let in small allotments, varying fron 1 – 3 acres for six years to poor persons at a fair rent of £1. 1s. per acre, which was received by the churchwardens and overseers. This was used chiefly in defraying the taxes on the Poor's Fen, with the remainder being distributed to 43 poor persons who each received 7s. those in receipt of parish relief being excluded. Of the Poor's Fen it stated "Besides 40 acres in Bottisham, there are about 63 acres in Quy bounds, liable to Eaubrink tax of 6d or 9d per acre, enjoyed by the parishes of Quy and Horningsea, who contribute equally to the taxes. They are used by the poor indiscriminately for digging fuel and cutting stover."

When Thomas Martin died, his son James, by Ann Payne, inherited the estate at the age of 15. Ann's brother moved into the Home Farm which then stood by Quy Hall in 1820 and was James guardian. James' mother moved away from Quy Hall and James may not have spent much time in Quy as a young man. James was a keen sportsman, keeping a pack of harriers, holding a game certificate from the age of 15, but again he appears to have taken little interest in the village though his wife did start a village school in 1846. The couple were childless. They entertained lavishly; he was more likely to pat a child on the head and give him a penny than to keep the cottages in good repair!

In the Quy Inclosure Act 1839/40, under Old Inclosures Common Fen belonging to Quy, Ditton and Horningsea, Common Fen is listed as containing 69 a. 0r. 35p. The Act gave power to extinguish common rights except that they should not "extinguish suspend or otherwise interfere with the right of common turbary at present existing and enjoyed over and upon the enclosed Fen in the said Parish of Stow cum Quy called Quy Fen but all and every persons and person who at present lawfully exercise such right of common turbary should and might continue to exercise and enjoy the same right in as ample and beneficiary manner as if the new recited Act had not been passed."

Thus from then on, it was established that all three villages had equal common rights in Quy Fen.

Many of you will have seen the memorial stone in Quy Fen to William Ison who was killed during a thunderstorm while exercising his right to cut hay.

William Ison, who was aged 29, was cutting hay in Quy Fen on Monday 25th August 1873. He was caught out in the open by a violent storm and with no shelter available, he reverted to an old trick of putting his pitchfork into a pile of hay and holding it above his head to serve as an umbrella. Tragically, he didn't realize that the tines of the fork sticking through the hay were now acting as a lightning conductor for the storm.

He received a direct strike of lightning, so powerful, that when he was found he was completely black from head to toe. The studs and nails of his boots were found to have been shot out into the ground.

This account of what happened was told to Arnold by his grandfather Morley many years ago. He was a market gardener at Fen Ditton and so, like the people of Quy, had the right to cut hay for his horse in Quy Fen.



Memorial Stone in Quy Fen

Shooting Rights in Quy Fen

At the time of the Enclosure in 1839, the Lord of the Manor was granted "Right of Soil". When Martin was squire, he would often shoot over the Fen but he also allowed anyone who had a game licence to shoot there and this had included undergraduates and farmers from adjoining villages. It was said to be a snipe fen and that one of the Quy men, Langham, had made a

living from it. When the legal minded Clement Francis bought the Quy estate and the Manor of Ditton and Horningsea around 1854, he had other ideas of his rights. Soon after he came, he put up a board at the Quy entrance to the Fen stating that shooting was not allowed and the notice stood for five years before someone shot it down. In 1861, Clement Francis laid charges of trespass against two of the Lode Cornwells in March 1861 when the case was dismissed and again in January 1862 when they were fined. Holmes Cornwell claimed he had been shooting over the Fen since 1813, had shot thousands of snipe, sometimes with Mr Martin, or his gamekeeper or with Mr Jenyns of Bottisham Hall and had never been stopped until Francis came. Samuel Fison, son of the Horningsea farmer who farmed land adjoining the fen was seen by George Dean, Francis's gamekeeper, on the Fen with a gun and a dog and he reported to Francis that Fison shot a hare on the fen side of the ditch. Clement Francis brought a case against him which was reported in detail in the local newspaper.(CC 28.9.1861; 12.10.1861) He said the charge was not laid in a vindictive spirit, but merely to establish his right to game on Quy Fen as Lord of the Manor and to prevent repetition of similar trespass. Having obtained the conviction, Francis put in a plea for a mitigation of the sentence and Fison was fined 5s. and costs. In a letter to the newspaper the following week Fison claimed there was no notice forbidding shooting at the Horningsea entrance to the Fen

During this case, Mr J. Ellis, then living in Swaffham Bulbeck, but formerly of Park Farm, said he had known the Fen since he was 10 years old. He described taking part in two Court Baron and Court Leetes in which the boundaries of the Manor were walked. One was in 1818 and one in 1829. He spoke of 40 Acres which it was decided was in Bottisham Manor though Quy and Bottisham people had right to dig turf there (now administered as Bottisham United Charities), and the 100 Acres in which Ditton, Horningsea and Quy had equal rights. He said he knew the ditch which separated Quy and Horningsea and it was then a Boat Ditch. No cattle were allowed on the Common Land, except perhaps a donkey when in a cart for turf. Mr Ellis had hunted over the Hundred Acres many times. "*It used to pay the Eau Brink Tax; it was paid by the Overseers of Quy, Ditton and Horningsea . The tax got into arrears, and the land was about being sold, and to prevent this the arrears were paid by Mr Banyard (of Horningsea) on behalf of the three parishes, For many years up to 1854, when the tax ceased, it was paid annually from the three parishes. The tax was paid from the poors, church or highway rates."*

In July 1838, there was a suggestion by the Swaffham Drainage Board that small parts of the Fen should be sold in lieu of taxes, but this was thought to be beyond their powers and a further suggestion was made that the Fen should be let for 8 years, by auction at Knave of Clubs, Lode. The 3 acres of Commissioners Land in Quy Fen were to be offered to Martin for £35 and if he did not want it, then it was to be offered to Ambrose. At the same time 8½ acres in Bottisham Fen were to be offered for £35 and if not accepted to be sold by auction.

The Cambridge to Mildenhall Railway opened in 1884 and a cottage was built for the gatekeeper whose job it was to open and shut the crossing gates over the droveway that led to Quy Fen. This was not only for those going to the fen but also for the farmers who had land on both sides of the railway line.

The coprolite industry will be dealt with in the next two chapters.

5

THE COPROLITE INDUSTRY IN THE AREA

Much of my information comes from the writings of Bernard O'Connor, an expert, who has written various books about the coprolite industry in Cambridgeshire (Ref. 8). "*The Cambridgeshire Coprolite Mining Rush*" by Richard Grove (Ref 9), and James Watts' Account Books have also been invaluable. (Ref. 10) The Cambridgeshire Record Office have the original Francis' Notebooks and Papers from which O'Connor obtained much of his information.

The following article appeared in the Cambridge Independent Press on 18th January 1851:

In the greensand formation which crosses out in the neighbourhood of Cambridge, situated between the clay and the gault, are found nodules of various sizes and forms which have hitherto been considered by the brickmakers as troublesome annoyances from the additional labour required in separating them before they can form their bricks from the mass of clay, on the top of which they are thickly embedded. But what are in many similar instances been supposed to be detrimental, have by the process of science, been productive of much good. These nodules termed by the geologists Coprolites or Fossil dung are found upon analysis to contain organic matter varying from 35 to 60 per cent rich in earthy phosphate so valuable as manure and in this instance sought after as a considerable matter of commercial speculation. About three years since a practical chemist in this town turned his attention towards their analysis and undertook to give £2 per ton for all that could be collected. At that period the supply was very limited, the stratum of green sand which varies from 6 inches to 12 inches thick at Chesterton being the only source of supply. Attention has however been called, to these valuable products for making the new and much used artificial manures and the geographical knowledge of the strata led to investigation that have opened new and extensive fields of production - brickfields of Barnwell now yield a large supply and contracts have been entered into at £20 per ton, £80 being given for the privilege of digging over a field adjoining to collect these exuviae of former life. An apparatus has been constructed for washing them on the spot and from the proximity of the field to the railway they are deposited in trucks and hundreds of tons conveyed to the manufacturers near London where

after calcination they are ground and formed into a valuable artificial manure, equally rich as the costly guano."

Coprolites were first worked in Burwell in 1846 when, after 11 acres of submerged fen were drained, 500 tons were raised by 1847. Digging at Chesterton began the following year, and many more sites soon followed. Clement Francis must have been well aware of the potential of the land when he became Lord of the Manor of Quy and Fen Ditton in 1854. Indeed, the same year he was in correspondence with the Archbishop of York about the possibility of raising coprolites from property in Fen Ditton, stating that he knew a contractor who would be willing to dig them at a royalty and who would make the necessary arrangements with the tenant Mr Smith.

At first contractors were paying a royalty to landowners of between seven and fifteen shillings a ton for all the coprolites raised. This entailed having a weighbridge set up at the site and for accurate weights to be recorded, sometimes requiring an Inspector to be present. A system of royalties was devised which cut out the weighing: the land to be dug over was surveyed at Lady Day and Michaelmas, and from the surveyors' figures the amount per acre to be paid in royalties was determined, depending on the depth of the seam and the difficulty of extracting it. Royalties averaged around £100 per acre, but they were known to be as high as £400 and as low as £30. The £100 was about 40 or 50 times the revenue the landowner could get from agricultural tenants, and even when labour and other costs were deducted, the contractors would make a good profit. The surveying also bought in good returns for local firms such as Francis, Carter Jonas and Bidwell..

As the coprolite industry grew, other manufacturing firms sprung up in the area. One of these was the Cambridge Manure Company set up in Histon Road, Cambridge in 1855 by John Rolph Mann, the Cambridge auctioneer; A. P. Chaplin, a Fulbourn merchant; and two Bottisham agriculturists including Charles Newman and Richard Ambrose. Clement Francis acted as their "undisclosed agent" and over the years brought them considerable business.

The Workings

It is difficult to know how many men worked at the various diggings as the description of "coprolite worker" was rarely used by the Census enumerators.

The one exception seems to have been in Horningsea in 1871 when 96 men were recorded as Coprolite workers. They were mostly young, unmarried men and were classed as lodgers, some coming from as far away

as Norfolk. This was a large number to assimilate into a village as small as Horningsea. Their wages would have been almost double that of the agricultural workers - about £1 per week as compared with 11 shillings. With little else to do after work, no doubt the public houses did a roaring trade! Ten years later there were no coprolite diggers in the Horningsea Census return though there were 3 people registered as coprolite engine drivers and one man as a foreman coprolite worker so work must have been going on in the area. Probably many were registered as general labourers. It has been said that Clement Francis told the people living in his houses in Fen Ditton that if they were coprolite workers they would have to get out of his houses. (Ref. 11) The only instance of a coprolite digger in the Quy censuses was in 1881 when John Manning was so described and he would have been living in one of Ambrose's cottages.

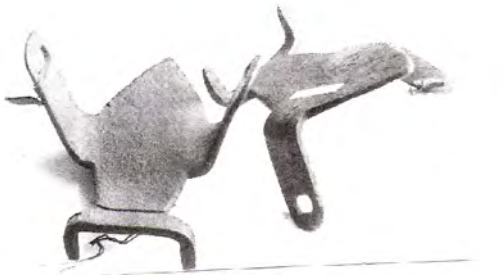
If the property was relatively small, the farmer could employ his own labourers on the farms in the busy summer months and at the diggings during the rest of the year. This would keep down the labour costs. On larger properties, an advertisement might be placed in the weekly paper and tenders invited for a contractor to do the work.

One of the conditions was that the land must be restored to its original state. First the topsoil and subsoil were shovelled into wheelbarrows and piled on one side of the field to be replaced later. If the depth of the coprolite was more than 8 or 9 feet, the trench was stepped for safety and easier access. In deeper workings, a system of plank walks and barrow runs might be needed. Once the seam of coprolites had been dug out, the trench behind was backfilled and the workings gradually continued across the area to be mined. Thus, if the procedure was carried out properly, the subsoil was replaced first with the topsoil above and only a small part of the field was being worked at any one time. Indeed when fenland was turned over in this way it often grew better crops than before once the soil had settled down as the top layers of peat were less likely to blow away. Troubles arose when contractors or workers were in a hurry and did not carry out the backfilling properly and the gault was left on the surface.

Coprolite digging was not without its dangers. The practice was for six of the men to go into the pit and the other six take off the top and second soil. Once the coprolites had been extracted, two of the gang, were posted as watchers to report any earth movements and undermining of the gault to a depth of 12 to 18 inches began. Another two men then joined them in watching, leaving just two men in the trench.. The clunch would be undermined for a length of about 12 feet and then it would be crowbarred down from the top. In 1870, when George Asplen, a coprolite digger from

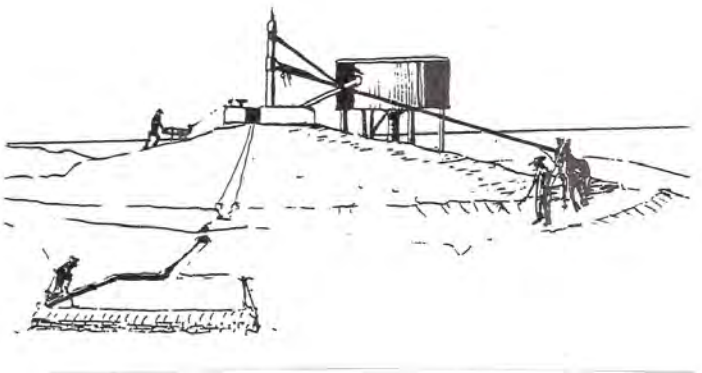
Horningsea, was working at Lode, he and Charles Littlechild of Teversham had just started undermining when the earth moved and Asplen (unlike Littlechild) had no room to step back. The men on watch for earth movement were Isaac Brown of Quy and Freeman Stanton of Waterbeach. Asplen was not buried but was trapped by his legs when about 6 feet of earth fell. Mr Johnson of Chesterton was in charge of the works and conveyed Asplen home to Horningsea in one of his carts as Asplen did not want to go to Addenbrooke's Hospital. The Waterbeach doctor could do nothing for him and so Professor Humphry attended him and advised his removal to the Hospital He was sent home again to die and he blamed the watchers for the accident but this was not borne out by the other witnesses. Charles Littlechild who had been a coprolite digger for 17 years said that the cause of the fall was what they called a "back" which is a joint in the clunch which cannot be seen until undermining begins. It would appear from the above that men from neighbouring villages would follow round where they could obtain work. In this instance all have local surnames though in some places gangs from other areas would be employed.

In 1875, the Secretary of Addenbrookes Hospital wrote to the Secretary of State about the number of accidents but received a reply that coprolite digging was not governed by Coalmine Regulation Acts. Enid Porter, when local historian at the Folk Museum, was told, "*the diggers wore thick union flannel shirts, fustian trousers tied with 'lalleygags'. A fustian jacket with an inevitable red handkerchief round their neck. To keep the rain off their heads and the sun out of their eyes they wore a black cap with patent leather peak. On their feet they wore fen-type boots with two or three tongues that reached four inches above the ankle. To give them a better grip in the bottom of the pit they fastened iron creepers to their boots. Iron insteps helped to prevent the boot from wearing away with the regular spade work.*"



Creeping Irons used by coprolite diggers

When the coprolite nodules were dug up, they were covered with a layer of sticky gault clay. (This is thought to be the origin of the so-called Ditton Treacle Mines). This had to be washed off before the coprolites were transported to the factory, otherwise transport costs would have been at least double. At first this was done by digging a large hole in the ground and agitating it with poles, and then would come the long process of shoveling them out again. It is not known when the first washing mills were devised. A description was given by Lucas in *Fenland World,* which is however somewhat obscure. *"A hill would be thrown up about 30 ft in diameter with a central pole 10-12 feet high. On it would be surmounted an iron tray 6 — 8 feet wide, paved with brick. There was a tank on one side with a pump 18ft long. A pipe from the tank would go from the ring and opposite the tank was a trapped outlet and on the other side of the hill a square about 40 yards would be earthed up a little to form a sort of pan. From the central post a wooden arm would be attached 12 to 14 ft long. To this was attached a wimpole tree to which a horse would be yoked. Connected to the centre of the post would be a light rail which was fixed to the horse bridle top keep the horse on the track. From the iron would be suspended two iron harrows which ran well in the bottom of the ring. When the soil containing the fossils was wheeled up to the ring, a sufficient quantity of water would be let in. As the horse went round a creamy fluid would be produced and fossils would drop on the floor. Then the trapped outlet would be opened and the fluid would pour into the pans. This was repeated several times to ensure that all adhering clay was washed off."* (Ref. 12)

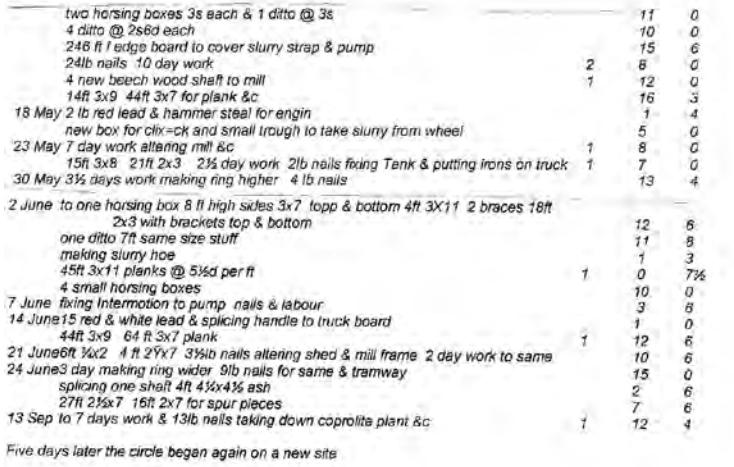


Horse-powered washing mill

Richard Grove suggests that all the land in Quy north of the railway, and much of Horningsea and Ditton was dug over for coprolites. How much of the work was done by contractors on behalf of Clement Francis is not known but he seems to have been actively engaged in 1878, work on one site lasting for about six months before moving the plant and sheds to another site. The bills presented to Clement Francis by Watts are given on the following page in detail as they show how much work was generated for just one local carpentering firm and doubtless work was also given to the blacksmiths. Mention is made of the troughs pumps, shurry troughs, fossil barrows, mills, sluices and tramways, which not only had to be made but continually modified as work processed (see over). Watts records similar accounts for work done for Mr Sammons, who worked on the coprolite beds at Horningsea.

James Watts Account to Clement Francis in 1878 for work connected with the Coprolite diggings

1878		£	s	d
27 Mch	20 new fossel barrows at 16 shillings each	16	0	0
	3 water troughs 20ft long 19s & 1 water trough 10½ ft long	2	3	5
	40ft 3 x 11 deal planks	1	0	0
	new pump box 224ft 1x11 16ft 3x11 3lb nails 1 day work	2	16	0
	pump frame 23ft 4x11 deal & labour making		19	0
	1½ day work at Swaffham after Mill & 1 day fixing pump		10	0
	4½lb red lead for pump		1	6
	145 ft 3x11 for planks 93 ft 3x9	5	7	1
	large frame for mill 50ft 6x7 & 5 days work making	3	2	6
	well box 406ft 1x11 79ft 2½x7 22lb nails	5	18	0
	box to lay in bottom of drain 52ft 1½x11 3½lb nails 1 day work		19	0
	11days work fixing ill and shifting pump	2	4	0
	new trough & spindle 23ft 1½x7		4	6
11 Apl	17lb nails & 21 ft old slabs		9	8
	1½lb paint – A. Howlett		1	0
	98ft 3x11 108ft 3x7 48ft 2x7 for planks	4	1	6
	standard frame slurry wheel 18ft 3x7 1ft 3x5 1 day work 1lb nails		12	6
	40ft 3x11 39ft 3x7 6ft 1½x7 1 day work putting bolts in	1	16	0
	6 Horsing Boxes 22 high top & B 2ft labour & nails		18	0
	6 Do. 2ft9 high top 2ft6 4s. each	1	4	0
20 Apl	A day work making covers & fixing to straps 1lb nails		2	4
	2 water troughs 22ft each & pump top 19ft with head & fixing same	2	10	0
	2 tanks 6½ft long 2ft10in deep Stuf(?) 62ft 1½x11 54ft1½x9 62ft 1½x7 7ft 2x7 5lb nails 2lb paint 3 days work each	6	0	0
	66ft3x11 sdeal & 2lb red lead	1	16	8
	8ft 1x7 22ft 3x9 3lb nails		10	10
	12 days work removing Mill making Box & fixing sluice	2	8	0
	36ft 1½x11 6ft 3x7 4ft 1x11 2ft 6x4 oak 13lb nails		14	0
30 Apl	Stuf for shed 20ft 1½x9 26ft 3x7 The shed 20ft long 12ft6 wide 7ft on stud 8ft rafter with door & lock complete 2 days work	14	0	0
	6lb nails to covers for straps 66ft 2½x7 42ft 3½x7 655ft Feather edge boards 20lb nails 12 days work moving ring & making sluice & Box &c	5	10	0
	2 says work sawing sleepers etc		8	0
6 May	105ft 3x7 for frame to slurry wheel 10lb Nails for tram rails	1	9	7
	153 ft ¾x11 for Wheel Pit 210 ft feather edge board		18	5
	12lb nails & 9½ay work		2	0
	22ft 3x7 and 80ft 1x11 for Crown Wheel cover		8	10
	2 day work & 3lb nails		9	0
	2 21ft and 2 – 18ft slurry troughs	2	5	6
	one 19 ft long with double end for delivery from wheel		13	0
	circular frame for well 30ft 11x¼ nails & labour		7	0
	30ft 1X11 & 28ft 1X9 for stage &c		9	6
	14ft 1½x11 for slurry pan		3	6
	trough from same to pit 17ft long		10	0
	trough 14ft long from pump to ring		6	0
	72ft 3x7 4ft 3x11 for plank	1	18	2



	two horsing boxes 3s each & 1 ditto @ 3s		11	0
	4 ditto @ 2s6d each		10	0
	246 ft l edge board to cover slurry strap & pump		15	6
	24lb nails 10 day work	2	6	0
	4 new beech wood shaft to mill	1	12	0
	14ft 3x9 44ft 3x7 for plank &c		16	3
18 May	2 lb red lead & hammer steal for engin		1	4
	new box for clix=ck and small trough to take slurry from wheel		5	0
23 May	7 day work altering mill &c	1	8	0
	15ft 3x8 21ft 2x3 2½ day work 2lb nails fixing Tank & putting irons on truck	1	7	0
30 May	3½ days work making ring higher 4 lb nails		13	4
2 June	to one horsing box 8 ft high sides 3x7 topp & bottom 4ft 3X11 2 braces 18ft 2x3 with brackets top & bottom		12	6
	one ditto 7ft same size stuff		11	8
	making slurry hoe		1	3
	45ft 3x11 planks @ 5½d per ft	1	0	7½
	4 small horsing boxes		10	0
7 June	fixing Intermotion to pump nails & labour		3	6
14 June	15 red & white lead & splicing handle to truck board		1	0
	44ft 3x9 64 ft 3x7 plank	1	12	6
21 June	6ft ¼x2 4 ft 2½x7 3½lb nails altering shed & mill frame 2 day work to same		10	6
24 June	3 day making ring wider 9lb nails for same & tramway		15	0
	splicing one shaft 4ft 4½x4½ ash		2	6
	27ft 2½x7 16ft 2x7 for spur pieces		7	6
13 Sep	to 7 days work & 13lb nails taking down coprolite plant &c	1	12	4

Five days later the circle began again on a new site

The tramways were temporary affairs that were moved from one site to another and the term is perhaps misleading as a tramway suggests flanged wheels for bullhead rail and are difficult and expensive to construct. Richard Grove suggests the tramways must have been plateways made of simple L-shaped girders along which the horses drew wooden-wheeled trucks. (Watts used nails for the tramways.) Some of these tramways were up to 3 miles long. Because of their temporary nature, it is difficult to get much evidence from maps but the 1888 OS map shows a tramway running from Quy Fen towards Horningsea where the coprolites could be loaded onto barges. Grove quotes from an estate map of Horningsea which gives 67 acres dug from 1872 to Michaelmas 1874 and at a minimum yield of 200 tons of nodules per acre 13-15,000 tons of coprolite had to be shifted. The old fenland lodes were at first in too bad a state to take large industrial lighters. In 1872 the Swaffham and Lode Commissioners Books "*Ordered that the clerk apply to the South Level Board for permission to scour out the Bottisham Lode fit for navigation as the navigation is so bad up the Lode that parties in charge of barges throw off the lock doors to enable them to get up the Lode*." The coprolites raisers threatened to convey the coprolites by traction engine to Fulbourn station unless the navigation was improved and this would have meant the tolls of 8d per ton would be lost. A new staunch lock was put in the following year at a cost of £750.

Generally, the biggest boom years were in the mid 1870s. Imported guano cost farmers £15.10s per ton but manure made from coprolites fetched £5.10 in 1867 and 1871; £4.10s in 1875; £3.10s in 1979; and £2.10s by 1881.

Thus the price more than halved in about 15 years, as massive outcrops of both phosphate and nitrates were discovered in Chile, Argentina and South Africa. and though at first this affected only the export trade to places such as Australia, it rapidly brought down the price of artificial manure for the home market.

The Dispute over Coprolites in Quy Fen

The inhabitants of Quy, Horningsea and Fen Ditton, had equal common rights in Quy Fen, and in the late 1860s some of them started raising the coprolites in the Fen and selling them themselves. They felt they had common rights included mineral rights. This naturally infuriated Clement Francis, who as the Lord of the Manor had been given "Rights of Soil" in the 1839 Enclosure act. This had happened in other villages where Clement Francis's legal knowledge had been sought. In 1855 the villagers of Lode had started digging the coprolites for themselves in Bottisham Poor Fen. His advice was to issue a notice of trespass and a notice duly appeared in the Cambridge Chronicle on 20 January 1855. He also advised that the parish authorities got the common land enclosed, but it would have entailed much time and expense to implement this by the necessary Act of Parliament.

At Quy Fen, Clement Francis immediately arranged to mine the coprolites for himself. Mrs Eve Francis told me that a group of men from Horningsea came to Quy Hall and threatened to burn it down if he went ahead with his plan. But not deterred, he contacted Edward Packer, a manure manufacturer in Ipswich and Packard arranged for Nathaniel Johnson, his agent in the area, to start preparations for the washmills and tramways to be set up without delay. A gang of outside workers was brought in, which naturally angered the natives of Quy, Horningsea and Fen Ditton. They arranged to assemble at Horningsea on May 2 1867 and to march to Quy Fen to demonstrate against their loss of common rights. Clement Francis got to hear of this the evening before and called the local police superintendent from Bottisham who waited on him at 8 pm. The following details are from Stretton's report to the County Chief Constable, George Davies. Stretton confirmed that the poor people of Quy and Fen Ditton also proposed to meet on the Fen at 2 pm, so he arranged for Inspector Greig and the local policeman to be on the ground and went himself accompanied with Pc Arch

About 9am, nearly 200 men, women and children, assembled in Horningsea, the men carrying shovels and they marched to the Fen, proceeded by a flag and flute. Mr Johnson, the contractor had, the previous day, made a reservoir for the washing of the coprolites and levelled the ground for about ¼ mile ready for the tramway. The demonstrators cut grips

across it and threw the soil up on to an embankment so that it was completely unfit for use. Mr Johnson's gang of workmen gave up working on the approach of the local group of men and offered no opposition. Superintendent reported "*The whole of those assembled were very peaceful and civil in all they said and did towards the Police. They said they had a right to the ground for certain purposes that they came to do what they had for the purpose of questioning Mr Francis' right to dig the coprolites*." All but the odd straggler had left the fen by 4 pm.

Clement Francis immediately took legal action stopping the men from raising the coprolites themselves with an injunction of £1,000 per head – the equivalent of 40 years wages! Although he sought legal advice to strengthen his case, he did not get much support. He was told that the balance of evidence was in favour of the residents. Potentially, tens of thousands of pounds were at stake here. Over the next three months, Francis paid for detailed searches to me made into the History of the Fen and the villager's claims but by August his lawyer, John Rigby, virtually told him he was wasting his time as the three parishes were the absolute owners of the Fen.

The coprolite boom of the mid 1870s was followed by three or four wet harvests that badly affected the farmers. At the same time "Free Trade" was introduced which allowed Canadian and other imports of meat and cereal to flood the English market with cheaper prices. This in turn led to a decrease in the amount of artificial manure that the farmers were willing to buy, as they had no sure market for their produce. Thus there was less call for labour in the villages. The agricultural depression had taken hold.

In 1880, Clement Francis died at the comparatively young age of 64 and his widow, Mrs Sarah Francis, continued to run the estate for the next 17 years.

6

COPROLITE WORKINGS IN QUY FEN

Map surveyed in 1886 showing old coprolite Works

Mrs Francis was concerned about the lack of employment in the village and took steps to see whether coprolites could be legally dug in Quy Fen if she gave up her right of soil. According to Colonel Francis's wife, a gang from Horningsea descended on Quy Hall, and made threats as to what would happen if anyone interfered with their common rights!

Mrs Francis's Proposals.

An undated printed leaflet in Watts' Account Book is entitled *"Is it possible to make Quy Fen of greater use to the people of the three Parishes of Quy, Ditton and Horningsea?"* This begins" *The Fen is not of much use at present. There is no turf to cut, and very little stover to gather. It would be a great boon to all if the fen could be made more available now, and more valuable in the future.*

The Coprolites belong to Mrs Francis as Lady of the Manor. Mrs Francis is willing to give up her rights in them for the benefit of the three parishes, but she is anxious by doing so not only to provide present work, but also to produce some permanent good. "The leaflet goes on to discuss what arrangements could be made for accepting her gift. If it were to benefit all, allowing people to dig the coprolites for themselves would not work fairly, and there would have to be some organization. Capital of £500 to £600 would be needed for a steam engine, pump, machinery etc. There would be a time lag between getting out the coprolites and receiving any money from them, which would mean no money coming for several months. Provision would have to be made for putting aside surplus profits to pay for future draining and fencing and a fund established to pay for the benefit of each Parish generally, yet to be decided, though a Reading Room or a Coal Fund were suggested. (To the present day, any income from letting the Fen is held by Trustees who hold the money until it is needed for something such as improvements to the Village Hall or a new bus shelter or other worthy cause which should benefit the village as a whole.)

No scheme could be adopted unless two-thirds of each Parish consented. It was believed that the Land Commissioners who were appointed by Parliament to look after Commons had the power to frame rules suitable to the case, and that they would send an Assistant Commissioner to look into the matter, draw up a Scheme for the Regulation of the Fen which would in due time become law. About £100 was needed for the Assistant Commissioners expenses in advertising and holding meetings, preparing maps and his official fee. This cost would be divided equally between the three parishes.

Election of a Committee

A second circular was issued as after several visits and much correspondence with the Land Commissioners, a letter was received on November 26 1887 to say they could not do what was required. This came as a complete shock as it went against what everyone had been led to believe. As the Fen was virtually useless in its present state, it was decided to press ahead to take advantage of Mrs Francis's offer, but the Commoners did not wish to let the coprolites to a contractor. They wanted the working done under the management of a Committee selected from the three Parishes and were willing to sign a contract pledging themselves to submit to the Committee's decisions on working, wages etc., even though this might mean accepting low wages at first. The Commoners were invited to put forward a proposal. which they duly did. (This was 6 years before Parish Councils came into being)

The Committee was elected but unfortunately the names are not appended on Watts' copy. Each parish elected five people – the Clergyman, one Gentleman or Farmer, and three working men, though in fact this seems to have been increased to six, as at Horningsea, four working men were elected, namely Uriah Sargent, Isaac Hayles, Robert Bugg and Ernest Sargent. From this Committee the officers were chosen to legally carry out the work, viz. a Director, Treasurer, Secretary, Auditors and the Committee had the power to appoint a solicitor. Rev. F. Watson of Quy was one of the auditors. The Committee was set up on January 3 1888.

The Commoners had agreed to put their right of Quy Fen into the hands of the Committee for a term of ten years which could be extended if necessary. At Horningsea, 60 residents had common rights, but more than half of them made a mark as they could not sign their name. The Foreman or Manager, acting on the power of the Committee had full power of hiring and dismissing workers and if there were not enough men coming forward from the three villages they could employ men from outside. It was thought

that £400 would be needed to start the coprolite work and this was to be raised by selling 400 £1 shares. The shareholders would receive interest on their money yearly Any surplus profits were to be invested and the interest on the investment was to be divided equally between the Commoners of Quy, Ditton and Horningsea. If the business failed and there were debts after the Plant was sold, it was proposed that the Fen (or a portion of it) should be let in allotments at a fair rent until the debts were discharged.

Work in Quy Fen

Work officially began on February 2 1888, but some labour bills were paid from January 14 and Watts had opened an account with the Quy Fen Committee immediately after Christmas 1887, when he supplied them with a new pump bucket, 24ft pole, slabs and planks and repaired some barrows On January 20 1888 he claimed carriage to Soham and back from Ely plus a day's work, and on January 23¾ day work at Mr Griffins work, and four days later he went to Cambridge railway, presumably to fetch something, and on January 30 went to collect the engine for which he charged one day's work and 3s. expenses. It would seem that some equipment was being bought secondhand from a works that was closing down. On February 6, Watts charged £4. 10s for "a new well bore 4½ft square, 504ft 1x9 board, 84 ft 3x7, 12lb nails and 2½ days work." George Dean was paid 2s for carting it to the Fen. A 2s. padlock was provided for the engine and on March 1 a new short ladder with 9 rungs was purchased for the engine, At beginning of March 2 tons of coal were bought to work the engine. 45 men were employed, including 14 men from Quy. These included my grandfather, Harry Noble, and Arnold Morley's grandfather, John Nicholls, who was paired with William "Dumps" Ison. I do not know how many people came from Ditton and Horningsea but presumably not enough to make up the required number of diggers as I have been told that some of the men came from Cherryhinton. They walked along the footpath that comes from Teversham to Island Bungalow and they were given permission to continue along the river bank by Quy Mill to the Stone Bridge in Station Road – quite a walk at each end of the day for men who worked from 6.30am to 4.30pm. Before starting work, each man had to sign a copy of the following rules, a copy of which is in the CRO: (CCRO R89/40)

QUY FEN COPROLITE WORKS

Rules to be observed by the workers and to be signed by each one on his entering upon his engagement with the Committee named in the Licence from Mrs Francis

1 Each worker shall be engaged from week to week – the week commencing on Monday morning.

2 The workers shall be engaged on behalf of the Committee by their foreman or manager

3 Each worker shall work diligently, and under the direction and to the satisfaction of the foreman.

4 Except on Saturdays the working hours shall be from 6.30am to 4.30pm from the 1st March to end of September, and from 7 am to 4.30 pm from 1st October to end of February. On Saturday the work shall start as above but end at 1 pm

5 The work shall be paid for by the yard, pitmen to receive 2¾d per yd and second soilers 3d per yd

6 The pitmen shall carry their work down 4 ft wide, and shall not throw stones before or after the regular working hours, unless expressly authorised by the foreman so to do. Any pitman transgressing this rule shall forfeit his bag.

7 The second soilers shall keep their work well back. Any second soiler transgressing this rule shall for the first offence forfeit his bag, and for the second offence shall be likely to be reported to the Committee

8 No worker shall enter the engine shed, unless expressly authorised by the foreman, or unless he has some special reason

9 The foreman is authorised by the Committee summarily to dismiss any worker, introducing dog or gun upon the works, or found in pursuit of game upon the land in the neighbourhood of the works.

10 The foreman is authorszed also to dismiss summarily any worker who shall maliciously damage barrows, or other plant, and such worker shall be liable to prosecution by the Committee.

11 The foreman is authorised to suspend for any period not exceeding one week any worker who shall neglect his work, or who shall disobey these rules or the directions of the foreman or who shall be drunk upon the works, or who shall be quarrelsome or riotous, or who shall use oaths or bad language to the annoyance of others, or who shall illtreat a horse, or who shall otherwise misconduct himself. Any worker who shall be suspended by the foreman, shall

be liable to be reported to the Committee and, if suspended for a second time, shall in any case be reported to the Committee.

12 Any worker who shall be reported to the Committee shall be liable to instant dismissal, and shall be entitled only to the wages which he shall have earned up to the time of his suspension by the foreman.

I hereby engage with the Committee upon these terms and I undertake to observe the rules above set forth.

A shed was put up for the use of the workmen. 36 chairs were procured for 2d each from Mrs Sammons, widow of the Horningsea coprolite raiser for whom Watts had done work in 1885. A new stove with pipes and elbow was purchased for 14s. plus 8d carriage.

Food for the horses were one of the main charges made by Watts from early March onwards – usually 2 coombs of oats (just over £1) once a fortnight, with the occasional cwt of bran. From May onwards, hay from the Fen was used. In May the Committee paid £1.15s. for ½ ton of hay and 5s. for "60 bottles of Fen Stover" – "bottle" being the old name for a bundle. The horses were stabled behind Watts' premises and in November 1888, new stables with loft were put up there at a total cost of £30.4s.3¼d

The Accounts were audited on November 15 1888. During the first ten months, coprolites had been sold for £1012.0s.0d. £125 capital to set up the project had been provided without profit, and a further £166 with profit but there was none forthcoming as the balance against the undertaking was £35.1s.11d.

Expenses had been as follows:	£	s	d
Labour from Jan 14 to Aug 18	909.	6	1
Coal	80	15	6
Horses	27	0	0
Plant	229	17	2
Carting	15	14	11
Bankers' Charges	1	1	7
Miscellaneous Expenses	34	1	10
	1338	**2**	**1**

The Vicar was optimistic: he wrote in the Parish Magazine in January 1889:

"*Quy Fen has by the kindness of Mrs Francis, been opened for the benefit of the three parishes of Quy, Ditton and Horningsea. Work at good wages has been provided for many men who would otherwise have had none.*

There is reason to hope that some day, though not very soon, a coal fund will be raised out of the profits."

A year later the coal fund looked even further away. In rhe April 1890 Parish Magazine, the vicar began with grateful thanks to Mrs Francis for her gift of the coprolites worth many thousands of pounds and for providing work for those who would otherwise not have any. *"It will be remembered that Mrs Francis' gift was to all the poor not merely to the coproliters. A coal fund was to be formed out of the profits. No advance has been made towards this yet. Indeed, chiefly by the purchase of a second engine, we are £100 more in debt now than at the beginning of the year. It will be years before we can pay our debts and accumulate a coal fund. We must do both these things. We cannot listen to any requests for an advance in the rate of wages. We pay as good wages as our neighbours. If we paid more we might never get out of debt and should certainly never have a coal fund."*

The accounting year ended around September, when work started again after the harvest break of 6 weeks.. I have no copy of the accounts ending in September 1889 but the balance against the undertaking for that year was £136. This included the purchase of *"A horse with halter*" for £15.15s.

The relevant (rounded) figures for the other three years are as follows:			
	1890	**1891**	**1892**
Tons of coprolites dug	1336	1162	834
Sale of coprolites	£3126	£2629	£1778
Expenses			
Wages	£2007	£1946	£1395
Plant	£239	£145	£30
Horses		£27	
Coal, coke, oil	£270	£202	£176
Carting	£100	£24	
Balance against	£208	£115	£231 +£145 unpaid bills

In addition to the expenses listed above, there were the running expenses for keeping the horses, insurance, bank charges, interest payments, charges made by the Swaffham and Bottisham Drainage Commissioners. and various other miscellaneous amounts which had to be paid. In 1890, the Drainage Commissioners charged the Committee £26 for discharging water from the works into their drains, and then a set charge of £17 for the next two years.

It is clear that the project was not paying from the outset. Over these three years, the difference between the price realized from the sale of coprolites dropped dramatically but the drop in the amount paid out in wages was relatively less pronounced.

In 1890, the Great Eastern Railway were paid £410 for putting in a new siding opposite the gatehouse on the droveway leading to the Fen, known as Francis Siding parts of which are still visible.. A tramway was laid from the works to the siding. On 4 May 1889, Watts had provided a quantity of tram iron for £3.10s. (perhaps purchased secondhand from some other works?). At the final sale there were said to be about 120 tons of tramway rails. The shortened route to the siding appears to have produced a drop of 75% in the cost of carting., but it is strange there is no amount given in 1892 – unless it was part of the £145 unpaid bills.

The reduced price per ton for coprolites was no doubt the main reason for the losses, but the amount being extracted from the ground also fell.

Uriah Sergant of Horningsea, the manager, in his report to the committee in 1892 gave some statistics on weekly costs.

Average expenditure for 46 weeks	*£6. 0. 0*
Coals	*£6. 0. 0*
Engineers	*£1. 16. 0*
Horsekeeper	*16. 0*
Raising 25 tons at 28s	*£35. 0. 0*
Total	*£49.12.0*
Price of 25 tons at 40s	*£50. 0. 0*

This left a balance of only 8 shillings per week.

It appears for the works to pay at all with present prices and at the proposed rate of wages, 25 tons must be raised every week. Then there is the present indebtness to be met.

In 1890-91, 1162 tons were sold or an average for 46 weeks of 25 tons. The average price was £2.5s.3d. In that year the expenses were very much in excess of the above estimate but with these quantities and price the profit was under £100, or, in other words, the balance against the undertaking at the bank was only reduced by £93."

In 1892-3 production actually fell to just over 11 tons a week, which with rates paid by the manufacturers dropping still further, meant the coprolite workings could not continue. A new system of digging had been introduced which successfully increased yields but had led to dissension among the workers. The Manager, Uriah Sargent, was criticized and duly resigned. In his letter of explanation to Mr T. M. Francis he said the men wanted a

farthing a yard increase in their wages, while this would not cripple the organization, he thought it should be firmly resisted. The new system had produced, on average, another ¾ ton more coprolites per cut which if 20 cuts had been got out since harvest, would make up the £90 deficiency incurred. He went on to say: "I*t's an understood thing with the men that when they are raising by the ton the men that work at the bottom cut are supposed to be the contractors as a rule and therefore take all the responsibilities and these men I understand have already given notice to those who work at the top (or as it's called seconds) that they will be taken off as well as the men that fill and wash the coprolites. This would be very unfair on their part because they have everything allowed them that was paid under the old system and really more than the work comes to at the old rate of wage under the old system. I think the Committee should be firm in this respect and not allow these men to screw down the rest of the workmen and they reap the benefit. There is also another lesson I think that the Committee might, if they felt so disposed, take advantage of because the men one and all have ever been trying to get more money for their labour but just as soon as some of them get the power into their own hands they try to cut down the wages of their fellow workers to benefit themselves and I for one should protest against it under the present circumstances." (CCRO R89/40)*

The Manager's resignation let to further problems and in March 1893, the Vicar wrote in the Parish Magazine *"The annual account of the Quy Fen Coprolite Works had been issued. It does not make pleasant reading. The balance against the undertaking has increased by £116. The account is made up to last harvest, and since then things have got still worse. It is said large sums of money have been thrown away by the men neglecting to get all the stone out of the pit. It will be a terrible punishment if, as there is great fear, the works have to be closed."*

It may be true that the biggest cause of the failure of the Quy Fen Coprolite Works was due to the fact that it was started too late when the price of coprolites was already falling, yet one wonders if the Management was partly at fault. Was a committee of 15 or 18 members (some of whom may have been friends or acquaintances of the diggers) the best way of running such an organization? Did they have the know-how to deal with labour problems? Was there rivalry between men from different villages? Would the project have been more efficiently run by an experienced contractor? The Committee went bankrupt in 1893 and the works closed. Maybe the Works would have closed in any case, but the losses, with more efficient management, might have been less.

The horses were still being fed throughout 1893 at a total cost of £35.9s.9d. In December 1890 one horse had died and had been sold to Mr Scat for £1.1s. It was replaced by one bought from Mr Levitt for £28. 17s.6d. A black mare was sold to Mr Levitt in August 1893 for £12.10s, but it may not have been the same horse.

The Plant was left on Quy Fen until 30 October 1894 when it was auctioned. James Watts charged 2s.6d for showing Mr Reynolds the plant on 6 September, He then spent 19 days getting out the engine and pump and shed and all the plant and putting them into Lots for the auction

POOR'S FEN, QUY

CATALOGUE OF ALL THE VALUABLE COPROLITE PLANT

COMPRISING

About 20 tons of Tramway Rails, 40 Barrows, 10 Trucks, 70 Planks, 60 long Slurry Troughs, 40 Hoisting Frames, 25 Crowbars, 10 large Tubs and Tanks, Washing Mill and Slurry Wheel, complete

2 WELL-BUILT ENGINE HOUSES

2 TIMBER BUILT STABLES

LARGE MESS ROOM

5in. and 7in. Centrifugal Pumps

CAPITAL 10-H.P. PORTABLE ENGINE

Quantity of Cast-Iron Piping, 6 Driving Straps and numerous other Effects

Watts also employed R. Wright for 19 days, R. Handcock for 5 days and G. Eaden for 4 days. I had been told to me that the engine was left at the bottom of the Cut because it could not be got out. Jim Watts thinks there were two engines, one of which was sold and the other abandoned.

The sale took place on the coprolite works site (said to be close to Quy Station) on Tuesday, 30th October 1894 at 11 am by the Auctioneers, Wright and Scruby. Details as above:

The Plant itself raised only £216, 18s. There was likely to have been little demand as most works finished around 1894, when the Quarries Act stipulated all pits over 25ft had to comply with strict health and safety regulations. There was a considerable quantity of coprolites remaining on the site of which 333 tons were purchased by Luke Griffin, the agent for Lawes Chemical Manure Company in London for only £1.16s 4d per ton. The rest went to the Auctioneers at £1.14s per ton. With these sales, the sale of the engine and a small rebate from Great Eastern Railway, their balance was £1,147.15s.8d, of which almost £1,000 was owing to the bank. Debts to local traders were almost £400. The largest was the coal merchant, F. Warren who was owed £292. Among the many smaller bills money was owed to the blacksmith Mr Gotoring, the carpenter Mr Sargent,, C. Luck for mechanical repairs, Tuddenham of Quy Mill who had supplied much of the horse fodder, the printers, and, of course, James Watts. The large mess shed was moved to the Prince Albert, where it was used as a café until the 1960s..

Thus a project, which was started with such high hopes came to an ignominious end. The final cut was left to fill with water (pumping it out had always been one of the problems). To this day, it keeps its name of The Cut, and it had much popularity as a bathing place, particularly in the middle of the last century. Various bumps and hollows can be discerned in the land to the east of the Cut. Close to the ditch along the Lode Boundary was a long heap of spoil which as children we called "The Chalk Hills" and hopefully looked for snakes sunbathing there, but this was flattened after WWII.

Overall Quy Fen was not of much benefit to the Commoners of the three parishes after the coprolite digging finished.. Smallholders used to go there to cut hay and labourers would sometimes cut peasticks to sell round the village during the winter months (no canes in those days!). So it is not surprising that some of them thought it would be better let for cultivation. The following is an extract from the Minutes of Quy Parish Council:

" The following letter from the Clerk to the Horningsea Parish Council, dated October 29 1895 was read.

"To the Chairman and members of the Parish Council of Stow cum Quy
Gentlemen

I am directed by the above Council to ask if your Council think it advisable and if so to assist in getting out a scheme for the better management of the Quy Poor's Fen.

Many of the Commoners in the Parish are in favour of letting it out for cultivation and the Council think if the three Parish Councils concerned in the Fen would bring it into use their influence towards this end some arrangement might be come to for the benefit of all whereas in its present state only a few receive anything at all from it".

Proposed by the Chairman (Frank Ellis)

Seconded by Councillor Matthew Peters

"That the Clerk be directed to write in reply that the Council did not think it desirable to take any steps in the matter."

Ironic that when the Fen was ploughed up following WWII, it was parishioners from Horningsea who insisted that it must be put back as it was, but that is a later story!

The part of Quy Fen to the west of the Cut was not excavated for coprolites. There was a proposal for a research project for a limited and temporary excavation to expose the Cambridge Greensand in the late 1990s but this was not proceeded with.

Many of the coprolite workers would pocket any particularly interesting fossil. The photographs are from Arnold Morley's collection from his grandfather, Jack Nicholls.

7

THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY UP TO WWII

After the coprolite workings finished, Quy Fen went back to what it had been for centuries. The following account, written by my mother, Kitty b. 1901, gives an idea of what it meant to her and what the common rights meant to my grandfather, Harry Noble, who had a smallholding.

"*As a girl some of my happiest evenings were spent in Quy Fen. About twice a week, after an early tea, my cousin and I would help my father harness the old horse to the tumbril cart and off we would go down the wide leafy droves to Quy Fen to cut grass or hay for our cows and horses. Oak, ash and elm trees had been planted alternately on each side of the drove and were already full grown, and willow, whitethorn, wild rose and blackbrerry bushes grew in profusion along the sides of the cart tracks. The gatehouse keeper, Mrs Gawthroup, would be out at the railway gates, where the drove crosses the railway, to let us through by the time we got there and to share a few minutes chat about any village news as she had few visitors to her lonely cottage.*

Once we reached the Fen we helped unrein the horse so it could wander round and feed. While Dad sharpened up his scythe and got busy mowing swathes of the grass, some patches thick with white clover, trefoil and wild tares, my cousin and I would wander off for half an hour or more collecting an armful of meadowsweet, purple loosestrife and other wild flowers which grew in the marshy places and round the "Cut". With larks singing overhead and all kinds of warblers and tits among the bushes and a startled snipe or plover joining in with their cries and many different kinds of butterflies, moths, dragonflies and other interesting interests, or occasionally a glimpse of a grass snake or lizard sunning themselves along the "Chalk Hills" [a long heap of chalky spoil about 2 feet high left along the Lode boundary by the coprolite diggers} the time passed very quickly. By the time we returned Dad had long swathes of cut hay all around and we got busy with forks and rakes making it up into heaps and filling the cart with it. Once we had loaded a good load, we all climbed on top and set off for home again. As we rode back Dad would tell us tales of his boyhood spent down Rabbit Hall in a little cottage with his grandparents, or going to London in his twenties to seek his fortune and of the old cushion-tyred bicycle on which he occasionally rode home to Quy at weekends, or we

would get him to sing us some of the old music hall songs he heard there and we would join in the choruses.

Just before harvest time, Dad would often have a weekday down the Fen, cutting the long grass and leaving it for a few days to dry into hay before making it into small hayricks. Several other men would be busy there too, and although they cut loads in various places, they always remembered which they had cut themselves and no one would think of taking any that was cut by someone else.

On frosty days in the winter when it was too hard to go on the land my brother and I would go with Dad to the Fen to cut peasticks from the willow bushes or thatching stakes. The low land where the best bushes grew was mostly flooded and frozen over so as Dad cut the peasticks, my brother and I tied them in bunches and then had fun carrying them on our backs across the ice to the higher ground where they were laid ready to be collected by horse and cart next day and taken home to be trimmed up and sold to any gardeners who wanted them of for our own use.

Another time for visiting the fen was when "Chammys", a kind of mushroom, were in season. They grew in rings of darker green grass and were very enjoyable fried for breakfast.

Although the Fen was far from the village one very rarely visited it without seeing someone else enjoying its beauties."

I count myself lucky that I too had the joy of going with granddad to the Fen to fetch a load of hay on more then one occasion in the 1930s.

The only mention of Quy Fen in the Quy Parish Council Minutes before 1940 is far less idyllic! The question of unburnable rubbish had been raised by the Chesterton Rural District Council in 1932. Quy's solution was to pay Wilfred Flack 5 shillings a load to collect it and dump it in Quy Fen Cut. In 1933, he collected 25 loads and took them to Quy Fen. There was an annual collection for the next few years. Evidently he did not make a very satisfactory job of it as in 1936, one of the Parish Councillors interviewed him and asked him to tidy up the tins etc in the Fen. In October 1936, Wilfred Flack was asked to give an estimate to dig a hole and cover up the tins when finished. A pit was dug on the left boundary about 100 yards from Quy gate. Unburnable rubbish continued to be collected and dumped in a pit up to 1940 when the Fen was let. Jim Watts told me he found several interesting old bottles in Quy Fen!

During the 20s and 30s, the Cut became well known as a bathing place, particularly among the younger university people. By then Mrs Day was in charge of the gatehouse crossing. Her daughter tells me that her father was not too pleased when he had to get up in the night to let a car load of

undergraduates go down to Quy Fen! I remember seeing a group of about 12 young men from Bottisham cycling by on the way for their evening swim in the Cut in the hot weather. The sides of the Cut then went straight down into the water, allowing people to dive in. The Cut was also a popular place for fishermen. I believe that it was originally stocked by local fisherman and that the smaller cut to the east of the main Cut used to be known as Perch Pit,

8

WARTIME MEASURES LED TO PLOUGHING

The Quy Parish Council received a directive from the War Agricultural Executive Meeting, in early April 1940, asking them to arrange for the letting of the Fen for grazing purposes as a wartime measure. It was decided to call a parish meeting for the following week which was attended by about 20 parishioners. After discussion it was proposed "That we agree to let the Fen for a short period (2 years) with the necessary safeguards (right to walk in the Fen, the right to cut peasticks, no dangerous cattle to be put there)". The Resolution was carried by 18 votes to 1 against. Two days later, representatives of the Parish Council attended a meeting of the United Charities at Bottisham where it was decided that Quy Fen did not come under the control of the United Trustees and that it came under the Quy, Ditton, and Horningsea Parish Councils. The Bottisham Vicar took the meeting for these three Councils and letters were read from these to say they were willing to let the Fen. It was agreed to let the Fen by public Tender under the conditions agreed at Quy. Mr Gingell of Horningsea, thought that the tenant for the first two years should have the option to renew his tenancy if the war was still on. The Parish Clerk was instructed to insert an advertisement in the Cambs Weekly News of April 26th 1940.

To Let

Quy Fen. To Let by Tender, about 56 acres of Rough Grazing Land, known as Quy Fen, for a period of two years, as directed by the War Agricultural Committee, Tenant to fence and the public to retain their right of way and cut peasticks as before. No dangerous cattle to be placed in the Fen. Tenders to be sent to G.T.Watts, Clerk to Quy Parish Council, "Woodside" Quy on or before Tuesday April 30th.

A special meeting was held on 1 May 1940 to discuss the tenders. Colonel Francis and Mr H. Noble represented Quy, Mr E. B. Wright for Fen Ditton and Messrs H. A. Coote and S. H. Ashman for Horningsea. The Clerk opened the four tenders he had received, which were as follows:

Mr Lewin, Horningsea	£30 per year for 2 years
Mr Gingell, Horningsea	£25 for 1st year and £30 for 2nd year
Lt Col. Francis, Quy	£20 per year
Mr C. Bendall, Quy	£15 per year.

After Lt Col. Francis had left the meeting, the two Horningsea representatives voted for Mr Gingell's offer, the other two representatives voted for Mr Lewin's offer. The Chairman, Mr Jim Brown of Quy, gave his casting vote in favour of the highest tender, Mr E. Lewin. The Clerk was asked to write and accept his offer, to be paid in advance, and the cheque was received the next day. (Would present day Councils be able to settle the matter within three weeks, I wonder.)

Lt. Colonel Francis was Chairman of the Trustees and Gilbert Watts was the Clerk. No doubt they met on various occasions but if they reported back to Quy Parish Council, it is not recorded in the Minutes.

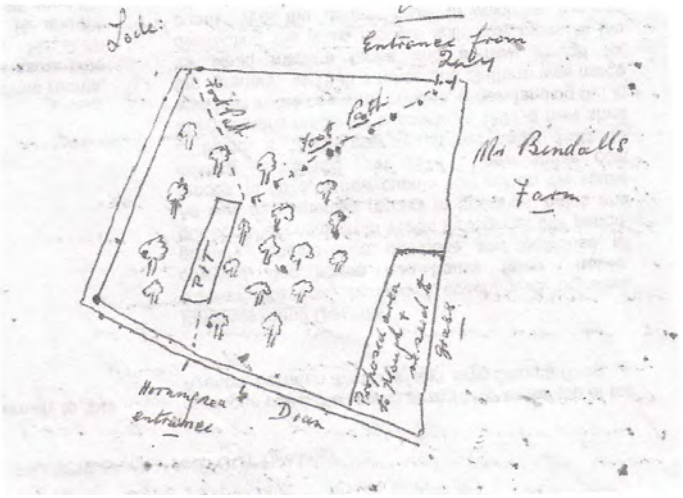
In March 1949, the Quy Fen Trustees announced that £100 would be paid to each of the three villages. Quy Parish Council then made two different attempts to find out about the origins of the equal shares of the three villages in Quy Fen and the only evidence seemed to be that it was declared so in the Quy Inclosure Award and therefore could not be changed. Thus began protracted correspondence with the Charity Commissioners which culminated ten years later in the Fen becoming a registered Charity. It was established that the money could be used for projects like recreation grounds and village halls which benefited the whole village. Quy voted to use 2/3rds of the money towards the extension of the recreation ground and the other third went to the Village Hall.

Quy Fen became infested with rabbits in the late 40s. Between January and March 1949, the Cambs Agricultural Executive Committee spent 30 hours on catching rabbits for which they charged 4 shillings an hour. They caught 60 rabbits which weighed 154½lb which they sold at 11d per lb. Thus the Fen Trustees benefited by £1. 1s. 8d. The year before the profit had mounted to 4s 5d.

Quy Fen had been exempt from paying drainage charges under the Swaffham Drainage Act 1853, was notified in February 1950 that a new scheme had come into effect. The River Ouse Catchment Board (Swaffham Internal Drainage District) abolished these provisions. The 70.57 acres of Quy Fen were given a rateable value of £10 on which the occupier had to pay drainage rates of 6 shillings in the £, and to owners 5s. 3d.

In January 1952 Mr Lewin wrote to the Clerk of the Trustees requesting permission to plough up and re-seed to a good permanent grass mixture *"certain parts of the Fen. As you are aware much of the Fen is covered with Ragwort which is rapidly spreading and owing to the unlevel state of the ground it is impossible to mow it or check it in anyway. This could be controlled if ploughed and re-seeded. I only wish to plough about ten acres near to Mr Bendall's Farm where it is dry and practically clear of bushes."*

Neither the Trustees nor the tenant realised that the Fen should not be ploughed without the Minister of Agriculture's consent. All might have been well if the ploughing had been restricted to the relatively small area for which permission had been given but Mr Lewin went ahead and ploughed most of the Fen, except for about 5 acres round the Cut which was left in its natural state.



Rough Plan of area Mr Lewin asked permission to plough in 1952.

In October 1955, Mr Lewin asked the Trustees for permission to set crops in the 50 acres he had ploughed and offered to pay an increased rent. Letters were sent to Fen Ditton and Horningsea Parish Councils asking for their views. Quy called a Parish Meeting which was attended by only 10 people. As the land had already been ploughed, they passed a resolution "The tenant be allowed to farm the Fen at an increased rent for 4 years and must re-seed in the last year. A roadway of 20 ft must be left from the Quy entrance to the Cut and about 10 acres round the Cut must be left as it unemployed."

The Trustees met in January 1956 and endorsed the above resolution and set the rent at £120 per annum. The meeting was reported in the Cambridge Daily News on 20 January 1956.

Over the next few months the "Storm Over Ploughed-Up Quy Fen Land" hit the headlines in the press beginning with letters from Derrick Illsley of Horningsea. He claimed that Lewin had no legal document to plough the Fen and that the Trustees should have taken action against him. He said that it was claimed that the Fen was little used but that he had seen 30 to 40

people there on a Sunday afternoon (though why no-one seemed concerned earlier about the ploughing which occurred two or three years earlier is not clear!)

A Public Meeting was held in Horningsea on February 28th 1956 , during which "mud" was thrown at the Quy Fen Trustees and the Horningsea Parish Council. It was claimed that an employee of Mr Lewin had illegally taken part at a meeting of the Trustees. Mr Gingell said that he did not deny that the Fen had been ploughed without permission, it was impossible to put it back into its original state so in the short term it was better to get a good return in rent for the benefit of the three parishes. The meeting agreed that the ploughed land should be re-seeded at once. By a small majority (after a recount) the meeting agreed that it had confidence in the Quy Fen Trustees.) Mr Bigland Wood, Chairman of the Trustees, said that nothing had ever been put in black and white and this was bound to lead to misunderstandings. A former Chairman of Horningsea Parish Council said "A great deal of the trouble was the fault of the villagers. They did not ask the Council to do anything and the Parish Council did not represent the people because the villagers did not care.

In Fen Ditton in April 1956, 50 people crowded into a small room for a 2½ hr stormy meeting. At one point the Chairman warned he would call in the local police constable who was standing outside to evict trouble-makers. Derrick Illsley pointed out that it was only since the war that a six-man committee had been appointed to look after the interests of the Fen and before that it was administered by the three parish councils. He claimed that the Trustees (who he called "little dictators" and "little Caesars) wanted to take control of the Fen and to leave the councils with no say. But he added a "petition is going round to scotch their little plans." The resignation of the Chairman of the Trustees and one other Parish Councillors was called for. It was claimed that 140 people living in Fen Ditton and 100 in Horningsea were opposed to the ploughing of the Fen. There were claims that Fen Ditton Parish Council had been against a public meeting being held and that notices about the meeting had been torn down. It was demanded that Quy Fen be immediately re-seeded.

A Quy Fen Enquiry Committee was founded with Derrick Illsley as Chairman and his wife, Joan, as Clerk, which was still meeting two years later.. They took their grievance to the Houses of Parliament where they put their case to Mr Chuter Ede. The Charity Commissioners had drawn up a scheme which required two representatives to be elected from each Parish Council, so in effect, the Trustees did not change. The Ministry of Local Government and the County Council refused to take any action when the

Enquiry Committee wanted an investigation into the running of Horningsea Parish Council. Below is the Enquiry Committee's history of the Fen:

"It would appear, after much investigation that in 1220 the greater part of the land surrounding the three villages was fen, under water. After the clearing of the land it was divided into arable and pasture and held in common by the whole community of families or households, no-one of them having any fixed property in the soil where every species of quadruped was allowed to graze and feed for the individual advantage of its owner who had the same kind of right in, that boundary land, as was enjoyed by the commoners of recent times in their commons before the inclosure of parishes. A late 18th century map in the Committee's possession shows quite clearly the nature of the land then and it would appear that some of the land, possibly through the Bishop of Ely, was allotted to the poor of the parish as copyholders. In the last 200 years residents of the three parishes have continued to use the land in one way or another and at the present day it is mainly used for grazing cattle and the recreation of the residents, also being open to the general public.

The ancient rights of the people are as follows: grazing cattle, cutting hay, digging turf, lopping trees (for peasticks etc.) fishing, shooting, mineral, recreation ant use of the landing stage.

As much of the Fen was flooded, hay used to be cut and taken by boat to the landing stage at Horningsea and unloaded there on to horse-drawn carts. Many residents served their village well and earned their living by selling hay and supplying fuel to the villagers, taking their stock on the land to be fed and many men were employed in digging for coprolites."

Some of these rights may have applied to the common land in Horningsea which were extinguished by the Inclosure Act of 1810, but several of them never applied to Quy Fen.

The Fen was re-seeded but there is a letter from Lewin explaining the delay as the advice of the Agricultural Committee was to leave it until the roots of trees and brambles had died off or else they would immediately grow again.

As my mother wrote *"Without getting permission, a farmer from Horningsea sent tractors down there and cut down trees, uprooted bushes and old favourite landmarks, levelled out the chalk hills and ploughed much of the land. A protest was made by different people and he has now reset the land with grass, but it will never be quite the same old Quy Fen."*

In the summer of 1952, a schoolmaster from Bottisham Village College went swimming in Quy Cut during his lunch break and was sadly drowned. Some years later, Bill Osbourn of Bottisham was also drowned while

swimming there alone. It was thought he might have got caught in the weeds.

In 1957, British Rail wanted to make the level crossing that led to the Fen private, which would have meant that the gates were kept locked, and they no longer had to employ a crossing keeper. The Trustees objected as it was the only way to Quy Fen and the residents had the right to go there. I believe it was resolved a couple of years later by leaving the gates unlocked and people crossing at their own risk.



My mother looking at the devastation
c 1960

Quy Fen Cut



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THE 1960'S AND 1970'S

The present Quy Fen Trust came into being under the scheme drawn up by the Charity Commissioners sealed on 13 November 1959. The main change was the appointment of a Trustee from the Cambridgeshire and Isle of Ely Trust(Cambient), in addition of the two representative Trustees appointed by Quy, Horningsea and Fen Ditton.

Dr F. H. Perring, the Trustee from the Cambient, was appointed Chairman at the meeting held on 5 January 1960 at the offices of the University Botanic Garden. All subsequent indoor meetings were held in these offices until the end of 1978, with one exception: In May 1975, as the Chairman was unable to be present and the offices were locked, the Trustees "took the unusual step of holding the Meeting in Mr Maurice Crisp's automobile, parked along Brookside"! The Trustees held 2 or 3 meetings a year, normally visiting Quy Fen on one or two occasions, either for inspections or working parties. Dr Perring continued as Chairman until his resignation in 1973, when he was replaced by Cambient by Mr B. Routledge who served six years as Chairman. He was replaced as a Trustee by Mr Ivan Perry of Lode in 1979.

Dr F.C.Powell of Horningsea acted as Secretary and Treasurer from 1960 to 1969, when Mr S. G. Buttress then living in Waterbeach undertook these duties, giving up as Secretary in 1979 but continuing as Treasurer for a time. Mr Morris Hatley of King's Farm became a Trustee in 1970 and was soon involved with tree planting and other work in the Fen.

Throughout this period, the Quy Trustees were two brothers, Mr Maurice and Mr Ralph Crisp, who were builders by trade and took a great interest in the village.

At Fen Ditton there were more changes of Trustees: Gordon B. Wood,, a corn merchant, was appointed Trustee in 1960 and served until 1971 when he was disqualified for missing three meetings. He was re-appointed as a Trustee in 1976, and became Chairman in 1979. Mr D. Roger was Trustee from 1960-67, Mr G. C. Mallion from 1967-1979, Mr C.H.G. Ayres who was appointed in 1971 died the following year and his place was taken by Mr W. F. Medlock 1973-76. Mr N. D. Slater became a Trustee in 1979.

When Mr Buttress resigned as Secretary, it was decided to appoint a Clerk who was not one of the Trustees, as had been the case prior to 1959. Colonel Bill Bendall of Fen Ditton had just come out of the army and he agreed to

undertake the Clerk's duties. Until he went into the army during WWII, he had lived at Allicky Farm in Quy which adjoins Quy Fen so he was well acquainted with the area.

The tenants throughout this period were the Lewins of Horningsea, who kept a fattening stock of between 50 and 100 bullocks in the Fen for the greater part of the year. Mr B. Lewin died in 1970, but his widow asked to be allowed to continue the tenancy. The Fen was let on a three-year tenancy with the rent being negotiated by Bidwells. Notice of any increase in rent had to be notified well in advance. The occupiers, share of the drainage rate was deducted from the rent. Mr Lewin was responsible for fencing but he retained the right to take it down when he gave up his tenancy.

Rents were set as follows:

1961 £55 per annum

In 1966 it was proposed to raise the rent to £75 from April 1969 but Mr Lewin made a counter-proposal of £65 from April 1968 but this was not accepted. As agreement was not reached, he was given notice to quit but died before this came into force.

1969 £75 per annum

1971 £100 per annum

In 1974 the Rent was set at £250 per annum but as the provisions of the Counter-Inflation Act permitted only a limited increase, the rent had to be set at £175 per annum. This restriction was lifted in 1975 and the rent then went up to £250 per annum.

1977 £250 per annum

For drainage rate purposes, the rateable value of the Fen went up from £10 to £26 in 1974, which was 50% below the standard assessment of agricultural land "because the Fen was not capable of arable cultivation at present."

The surplus from the rent after expenses had been paid was allocated equally between the three villages each May. This money was held by the Trustees until the money was required for some village improvement, such as improvements to a village hall, bus shelter or recreation ground. The Treasurer looked after the money well and always ensured that it was invested at the best rate of interest.

Ten years after the Fen had been ploughed an article appeared in the Cambridge News under "Nature Notes", under the heading "*The Naturalists Suffered When They Ploughed at Quy Fen". "Quietly worded notices have been erected which ask people visiting the Fen to obey certain rules: motor*

vehicles, dogs off the leash, and firearms are not welcomed, but those who wish to spend a quiet hour in the countryside are."

They will find harmony and no hint of past dissension. The three main interests of the Fen exist side by side. The grazing cattle are bringing in an income for the benefit of the parishioners, the old coprolite pit, the Cut, is a playground for swimmers and anglers, and the surrounding grassland is still a rich source of plants and animals for the naturalist.

It is perhaps the naturalist who has lost most in the last decade. The ploughing itself eradicated the best of the wet fen, and cotton-grass has never re-established itself.

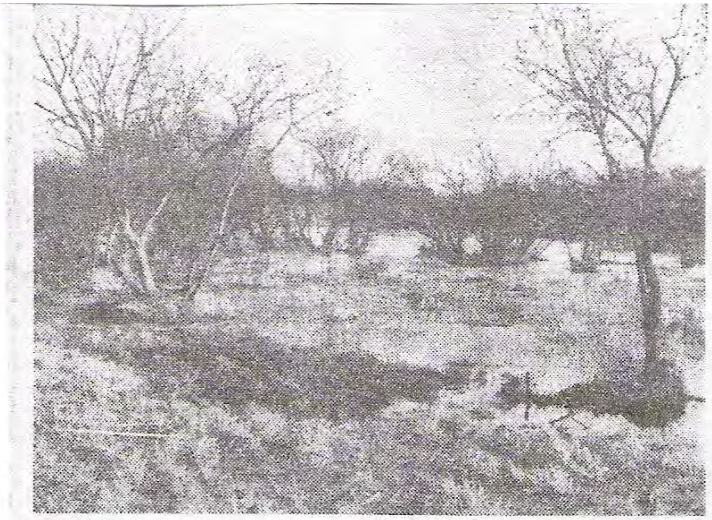
A recent visit suggested that the water-table has dropped too, and that fen species in the unploughed parts have suffered. The bog rush schoenus nigricans, once a common plant, could not be found, and there were no signs of bog pimpernel, anagallis tenella. The water plants have not suffered so much and the commonest underwater species is the bladderwort., utricularia vulgaris.

The term "fen" is now, and probably always has been, a misnomer for the greater part of the area: it is really a dry chalk grassland reminiscent of Newmarket or Therfield Heath. Although this part was ploughed, the native plants have made a remarkable recovery, the most common grass is the brome, bromus erectus, and in June the turf was studded with the bright blue flowers of the milkwort.

The Fen is surrounded by ditches and numerous ponds which produce suitable habitats for a rich variety of water life. The reeds at the ponds' edges are alive with the busy chatter of the warblers.

For many visitors this peace may provide a fourth and all-important reason for valuing the continued life of Quy Fen as Common Land.

As this article is signed with the initials F.H.P. it was presumable written by the Chairman of the Quy Trustees.



After heavy rains flooding occurs in this low-lying area of Quy Fen.

In May 1972, the Chairman asked about of having the Cut cleaned and deepened with a dragline, and the Secretary offered to keep an eye open for one working in the area that might be hired at a reasonable figure. A year later, Mr Maurice Hatley met the foreman of the Swaffham Internal Drainage Board at the Cut The latter said that their equipment would not be suitable for the cleaning and deepening and that a dragline would be needed. He estimated that the cost would be not less than £60. This suggestion was then dropped.

For several years in the early 1970s, Quy Sunday School had an annual picnic in Quy Fen, everybody bringing their own food to eat near the Cut and parents and children enjoying a game of rounders. Great excitement when the ball went into a swampy part and the child rescuing it lost her shoe!

In 1961, on Colonel Francis's instructions, a deep ditch had been made across the southern tip of the Fen, following the lines of the small ditch previously existing. Mr Lewin complained of danger to his cattle and damage to his fences and pasture. The Trustees required Colonel Francis to back-fill the ditch, replace the bridge, repair damage to fence and where necessary to reseed the pasture. They also agreed that they would not consent, if asked to a drain pipe across the Fen. The matter was put in the

hands of Mr Smart, a Newmarket solicitor, and the ditch was refilled to the satisfaction of the tenant and Mr Smart generously made no charge for his services. It was decided to set a copse in this corner of approximately ¼ acre. In 1972, the Trustees set 4 ash, 5 hornbeams, 5 oak and 1 lombardy poplar "so that in years to come, they would form a small distinct copse, which would much improve the visual aspect at that part of the Fen." This area was fenced off, with an additional stile being put in. The bridge over the ditch had been repaired and a handrail added by Crisp builders, and the Trustees had cut steps in the bank of the ditch to make it more accessible. A working party from the Conservation Corps helped out by annually cutting the weeds round the trees at a very nominal charge.

Further tree-planting took place along the Commissioner Drain which is the northern boundary of the Fen, these included 12 Cornish elms donated by the Cambient in 1971 to commemorate European Conservancy Year. Several new willows were planted in other parts of the Fen. Throughout, Mr Huddlestone, tree officer for the County Council offered advice and provided many of the trees. Inevitably the trees did not all grow and some had to be replaced. Equally importantly, the trees and shrubs in the area surrounding the Cut were thinned in 1963 by a party of undergraduates organized by Dr Perring. In fact, the replanting and cutting back are all part of the management of the Fen, and the Trustees must be thanked for giving their free time throughout this period.

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THE TROUBLED 1980S

Quy Fen became too popular with visitors from outside the three villages, and this led to problems. Notice boards were put up at the Horningsea and Quy entrances which stated:

Quy Fen

The Fen is maintained as an open space for the benefit of the Inhabitants of the Parishes of Stow-cum-Quy, Fen Ditton and Horningsea
The Fen may be visited so long as litter is not left, cattle are not disturbed and dogs are kept under control.
Motor vehicles are not allowed: shooting or camping by unauthorised persons is forbidden.
Nudism can cause offence and is therefore prohibited.
The Trustees of Quy Fen.

As the Fen is remote from the villages, it was inevitable that these notices were soon vandalised – probably by those who wished to do some of the things which were forbidden so that they could say there was no notice prohibiting it. One regular visitor from Cambridge wrote to the Trustees to say he was distressed by the litter, damaged trees and shrubs, lighting fires, shooting birds, and fishing out of season, and suggested more strongly worded notices should be put up. Replacing notices and notice boards was expensive and several different kind of materials were tried but with little success.

In 1982, Mrs Lewin said the vandalism was getting worse and that she always took a plastic bag with her on her twice weekly visit to inspect her cattle and picked up bottles, tins and other material which might be injurious to her stock. A year later, Mr Perry said that he had collected 15½ dustbin liners of rubbish on one of his visits. The local police were asked to keep an eye on the situation with a view towards possible prosecution but, if they did, it had little effect.

Another main problem was nudism, the first recorded complaint being in 1976 when "two females had been accosted by men in a state of nakedness." Again the police were informed and made a few periodic checks but concluded it was an isolated incidence. Nude bathing had

probably been going throughout the century but it had been done discretely and had not given offence to other people. Local mothers felt that they could no longer take their children to the Fen for picnics. One of the Trustees estimated that on one occasion he had seen some 200 visitors in the Fen or whom 50 were nude. The cars parked near the Fen were not local ones, many of them coming from as far away as London, and then camping either in the Fen or sleeping in their cars during the hot weather, and inevitably lighting the odd fire and leaving litter. The matter was taken up by the Press, but this probably did more harm than good. It was reported that in one publication Quy Fen had been mentioned "as a place where naturism could be practised", though this was immediately refuted. It was suggested that the Trustees should visit the Fen and talk to the visitors, but as the majority of the nudists were male and could be aggressive, this was probably not a popular suggestion!

Gates at the Horningsea and Quy ends of the bridleways leading to the Fen were suggested but some thought this was an excessive measure "using a sledge hammer to crack a nut". However, trouble with cars driving right up to Quy Fen via the bridleways from Horningsea and Quy continued to cause problems. In early 1985, permission was obtained from Major Francis as owner of the land, and the County Council Highways Authority to erect a locked gate at the Horningsea and Quy ends of the bridleway, with ample space being left for pedestrians. Keys were given to Major Francis's tenants who had land in the vicinity, the tenants of the Fen and the Trustees. A spare key was kept at Ansells so that anyone obtaining special permission to take a car to the Fen could obtain one there. For instance one of the first applications was from a 75-year old couple living in Cambridge, who needed crutches because of an accident but had found swimming therapeutic and had been in the habit of swimming in the Cut daily in the summer months.

Horningsea

The suggestion that a warden should be appointed was first made in 1982, and the suggested period to be covered was April to September, with special care to be taken during school holidays and at weekends. The Trustees decided that a warden was not needed at that time.

At a Trustees Meeting in May 1983, the following points were made concerning litter:

I Could a local farm employee undertake some litter collection on a weekly basis on repayment? *This would prove costly and unpopular*

II Could Trustees – who already do collect some litter – increase their efforts on a rota basis? *The Meeting was not in favour.*

Iii Could a local volunteer be found in any of the three Parishes who would undertake this task on repayment? *Probably not*

The Trustees held a Meeting on 18th July 1984 in order to consider the increasing incidents in Quy Fen of:

- all-night fishing parties
- unauthorised camping – usually involving camp fires
- harassment of cattle by dogs.

They decided unanimously to:

- appoint a part-time Warden to visit the Fen in order to detect these practices and to establish the identity(ies) of offenders;
- limit this "patrolling" to a 12 week trial perod.

In fact, Mr Stephen Marsh of Fen Ditton had already started visiting the Fen. He was given a letter of authority and of the following guidelines

Dogs must be under control. Should you consider a dog not to be under control, the owner may be requested to use a lead. Cattle must not be harassed either by dogs or their owners.

Fires and Camping Both are forbidden to the general public. The only exception should be an organized Scout Camp which would require the permission of the Trust and you would be informed.

Motor Vehicles (including Motor Cycles) Forbidden. (The tenant and her staff are, of course, exceptions to this)

Shooting Forbidden – this includes air riffles

Litter To be actively discouraged so that dangers to visitors, cattle and wildlife are minimised

Nudism This causes offence to other visitors to the Fen and is prohibited.

Damage to Trees This occasionally happens and should be firmly dealt with when seen.

GENERAL APPROACH AND ATTITUDE

Trustees have found that visitors to the Fen usually act responsibly when:

they are aware of the identity of the Trustee or other person with authority to the Trust:

they are advised that the Fen has been declared to be a "site of Special Scientific Interest due to the outstanding character of its natural

history" and that it is maintained as a public open space for the benefit of visitors

should visitors fail to react responsibly when properly approached, they can and should be asked to leave the Fen.

Stephen Marsh was the warden during 1984 and I think in 1985. It was noted in a letter of thanks that *"the general behaviour of visitors in the Fen improved noticeably during the period of your Wardenship and this was due without doubt to the tact, firmness and level headed approach adopted for you to this sensitive task."*

He was followed by David Roff, who was a gamekeeper on the Quy Hall Estate, and was appointed to act as a temporary Warden of Quy Fen for a 12 week period, starting in May 1986. The salary was £10 per week. He was re-appointed the following year for 18 weeks at the same salary and it was left to his discretion as to when he started this period of wardenship, dependent upon the weather. He continued as Warden in 1988

The early 1980s were a time when agricultural rents were rising. In 1980 the rent went up from £250 to £550, and when the tenancy was renewed in 1983 a rent of £700 was agreed. This meant that the Trustees were able to pay out more to the villages and the allocations to each village rose from £120 in 1980 to £210 in 1983. After this the allocations went down as the cost of dealing with the problems listed at the beginning of the chapter had to be dealt with..

In 1981, Mrs Lewin harrowed the flat areas of the Fen during early spring. The Trustees decided that this was good husbandry and would cause no damage to flowers and none was found in November that year when the Fen was inspected by Mr Perry and the Field Officer of Cambient. They did however notice a marked difference between the area immediately round the Cut and the flat grassland and wondered if the difference had been caused by the use of sprays in past years. The Trustees were unanimous in praising Mrs Lewin as a good tenant, but the Chairman agreed to speak to her informally about the trust's views on the use of sprays, fertilisers and so on. By the 1980s she gave up her tenancy as she found the problems in the Fen too great. Mr Gingell of Horningsea then succeeded her as tenant.

Ragwort was unfortunately spreading and in 1982, Major Francis ,who farmed land adjoining the Fen, complained about the state of the Fen in general and ragwort and thistledown in particular. It was thought that this may have been partly due to a slight over-action by the tenant following the plea about sprays. There were three new Trustees in 1983, Dr J. Cremona, who took on the Treasurership, and Mr M.G. Dennis-Jones of Horningsea who later became Chairman, with his wife as Secretary and one from Fen

Ditton. The Chairman informed them of the need to balance the needs of good husbandry with the need to conserve the flora and fauna. Chemical spraying was not allowed, yet weeds such as ragwort and thistles have to be dealt with under strict guidelines set by the Nature Conservancy.

In May 1986, the Nature Conversancy Council sent a list of operations likely to damage the flora and fauna, and required written notice before any of them were carried out. Of the 28 operations listed, at least ten were in common practice by the tenant, such as harrowing the grassland, use of vehicles (which included tractors), the release into the site of any wild, feral or domestic animal, plant or seed (the cattle), the killing or removal of any wild animal, including pest control. "Animal" includes any mammal, reptile, amphibian, bird, fish or invertebrate. (Did it mean that you weren't allowed to swipe at a wasp that stung you?) Negotiations took place and the NCC gave consent for the owner/occupier to continue to carry out operations as previously. They indicated which areas of thistle could be topped and young invading scrub should be cut, and where herbicide was allowed on dense clumps of thistle.

In early 1986, NCC had said that one beast per acre could be grazed in the Fen by Mr Gingell (70 beasts). In September 1986, the number was cut to a maximum of 50 beasts at any one time, and he was warned that the question of numbers of stock would be reviewed according to the sward conditions. Later that month, NCC insisted that the number of cattle reduced to 30 (roughly one per hectare 70.73 acres=28.7 hectacres). They did start paying grants to the Quy Fen Trust so that no party would be financially disadvantaged by a reduced stocking rate. Mr Gingell insisted that to graze less than 45 beasts would not be viable. He had already invested a substantial amount of capital during the first two years of his tenancy, building a new cattlecrush, repairing fences and going to considerable amount of trouble to improve the sward. Agreement could not be reached and Mr Gingell ended his tenancy in March 1988, saying the NCC must make up their mind if they wanted a tidy fen or a wilderness.

Quy Parish Council wrote a letter of protest about the reduction in the number of cattle: *Quy Parish Council are afraid the condition of the Fen land may well deteriorate and the rent in future years will drop to an unacceptable figure. The fear that those connected with the conservation of the Fen have, regarding the grazing cattle damaging the natural beauty and the usefulness of the land, really does not hold any bearing, as in the past the number of cattle grazed there has at times been as high as 100 and yet the Fen is of more interest to conservationists now that ever before. Surely*

this proves that grazing cattle probably enhances the area rather than damages it."

Mr David Smart from Waterbeach took over the tenancy from the summer of 1988 and was tenant for 12 years. He also offered to be warden in 1988 and 1989, after which the scheme of having a Warden stopped. He undertook to pay for upkeep of fences, all the drainage rates from 1990 as well as £200 per year rent. The balance was made up by a grant from English Nature, who state how many cattle are allowed to be grazed. From 1995 to 1998, this was the equivalent of 35 fully grown steers, but later went down again to 30, with a season from April to October.

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A SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST

In 1959 a large area in the region of Quy Fen was made a Site of Special Scientific Interest. It included some 40 acres of Lode Fen to the east of Quy Fen. A review was carried out in 1970, and the area was reduced to Quy Fen and approximately 15 acres of Lode Fen to the NE of Quy Fen The boundary of the SSSI however ran along the Commissioners Ditch and thus included two fields which were not in Quy Fen. The status of SSSI sites was further amended by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and now just covers Quy Fen and the adjoining ponds.

The reasons given in 1959 were that it was "*An area of chalk grassland with open water where the plant and insect population is varied and valuable for educational purposes. The Bladderwort and Water Violet, both increasingly scarce elsewhere, are found on the site."*

Information found in the Quy Fen Trust papers is rather patchy. For instance, there is nothing about moths and butterflies, or fish or reptiles, or birds. On the other hand, there is a particular interest in dragonflies and damsel flies which have been extensively studied.

The Nature Conservancy Council carried out an investigation and their main findings were as follows:

Invertebrate Survey

Dragonfly Survey

15 species were recorded in total, including the red-eyed damselfly Erythroma najas, and the hairy dragonfly Brachytron pratense, the emperor Anax imperator and the ruddy darter Sympetrum sanguineum. Ten species were confirmed to be breeding within the SSSI and five other species have been seen ovipositing, indicating that breeding is highly likely. Only two previously species were not seen, possibly because of the time of the survey.

Annual surveys of the dragonflies and damsel flies continue.

Beetles

Four nationally rare beetles were recorded from the Cut: a rare metallic leaf beetle Donacia sparganii, a small water beetle Heliplus heydeni, a flightless waterbeetle Ilybuis fenestratus and a water beetle which occurs in slow flowing water Laccobius sinatus,

A number of local aquatic invertebrate species were also recorded.

Investigation of the pollarded willows only produced one nationally rare species, Agnocorii reclairei. The rare musk beetle Aromia moschata was not found, perhaps because the survey was carried out before its main emergence period.

Ivan Perry recorded a list of "The Flies of Quy Fen" which he had recorded over a number of years. These included a number of uncommon species, including several county records and one species new to Britain. There were 25 species of *Platypalpus*, a *Bicellaria* not recorded in Cambridgeshire, a *Parahamphomyia* an uncommon form found in Chippenham Fen and two species of Rhaphium not recorded on Cambridgeshire which are predatory flies with carnivorous larvae which usually develop in mud.

Dragonflies (1999-2008)

Azure Damselfly (May-June)
Black-tailed Skimmer (June-July)
Blue-tailed Damselfly (May-July)
Broad-tailed Chaser (May-June)
Brown Hawker (June-Aug)
Common Blue Damselfly (May-July)
Common Darter (July-Oct)
Emerald Damselfly (July-Aug)
Emperor (June)
Four-spotted Chaser (May-June)
Hairy Dragonfly (May-June)
Large Red Damselfly (May-June)
Migrant Hawker (July-Oct)
Red-eyed Damselfly (May-June)
Ruddy Darter (July-Oct)
Southern Hawker (June-Sept)
Variable Damselfly (June)

Butterflies (1999-2008)

Brimstone
Comma
Common Blue
Essex Skipper
Gatekeeper
Green-veined White
Holly Blue
Large Skipper
Large White
Meadow Brown
Orange Tip
Painted Lady
Peacock
Red Admiral
Ringlet
Small Heath
Small Skipper
Small Tortoiseshell
Small White
Speckled Wood
Wall Brown

FLORA

In 1970 revision it was reported: *Stow-cum-Quy Fen possesses areas of floristically rich calcerous loam pasture. In addition a number of pools formed on Chalk Marl are present and these support a range of aquatic plants including some uncommon species. Both the grassland and open water habitats described above are rare in the British Isles.*

The fragments of floristically rich grassland also occur on Chalk Marl and are characterised by the presence of herbs such as Purging Flax Linum catharticum, Cowslip Primula veris, Salad Burnet Sanguisorba minor and the Quaking Grass Briza media.

The pools have a good range of emergent and aquatic-living plants including Reed Phragmites australis, Unbranched Bur-reed Sparganium emersum, Mare's-tail Hippuris vulgaris, and Bladderwort Utricularia vulgris.

A later report, written for an Information Board in 1990 stated "*The most obvious vegetation in the cuts are the floating leaves of broad-leaved pondweed and water crow-foot and the tall stems of common reed, lesser reedmace, bulrush and bur-reed. There are many smaller plants in and near the water, amongst the most interesting is the bladderwort, whose feathery submerged leaves carry traps which catch and digest minute animals and whose bright yellow flowers are carried several centimetres above the water on slender stalks.*

Round the Cut is an area of flower-rich calcerous pasture which had probably never been treated with pesticides or fertilisers. Several of the plants which grow here are rare in the surrounding countryside. They include cowslip, spiny restharrow and purging flax. The rest of the grassland was re-seeded in the 1950s and although now very poor for flowers, it is becoming colonised by herbs from the richer, unimproved pasture. Other plants to be found include Devil's Bit Scabious, Heath Grass, Tormentil, Burnet Saxifrage, Pepper Saxifrage, Tufted Vetch, Common Birds Foot Trefoil, Sweet Vernal Grass, Bugle, Common Meadow-rue and Adder's Tongue Fern.

I was interested that a list of the flowers recorded in the early 1990s does not mention of the purple loosestrife (mentioned in my mother's account and which I remember vividly up to the 1950s) nor of the glorious golden kingcups which were growing in Black Ditch up to the 1980s.

A large part of the site consists of semi-improved rough pasture which is becoming colonised by herbs from the adjacent species rich grassland. The

former area is characterised by tussocks of TuftedHair-grass Deschampsia cespitosa and contains a wide range of other grass Graminae species

Although the area round the Cut had been heavily trampled and browsed, all the species recorded in 1982 were refound

The most exciting new find was a thriving population of lesser water-plantain Baldellia ranunculoides. This is very local to Cambridgeshire and has declined over recent years.

Bladderwort Utricularia vulgaris and brookweed Samolus valerandi, were noted though they had not been seen on the site for at least ten years.

Hedgerows and scrub, and pools on the periphery of the site, add to the general variety of habitats in the locality.

The site is additionally of importance due to its location within an otherwise intensively cultivated area where semi-natural habitats are rare.

A total of 279 species of flowering plants and ferns have been recorded from Quy Fen. The following is not the complete listing but a list of the two most important habitats on the site, The Cut (aquatics) and the large area of grassland covering most of the site. It does not include tree and shrub species, most of which are very noticeable, and species of disturbed ground.

Grassland flora

Achillea millefolium	Yarrow	Cerastium glomeraturm	Sticky mouse-ear
Achillea ptarmica	Sneezewort	Chaerophyllum temulum	Rough chervil
Agrimonia eupatoria	Agrimony	Cirsium acaule	Stemless thistle
Agrostis capillaries	Common bent	Cirsium arvense	Creeping thistle
Agrostis gigantea	Black bent	Cirsium palustre	Marsh thistle
Agrostis stolonifera	Creeping bent	Cirsium vulgare	Spear thistle
Ajuga reptans	Bugle	Crepis capillaris	Smooth hawksbeard
Alopecurus geniculatus	Marsh foxtail	Crepis vesicaria	Beaked hawksbeard
Alopecurus pratensis	Meadow foxtail	Cynosurus cristatus	Crested dog's-tail
Anisantha sterilis	Barren brome	Dactylis glomerata	Cocksfoot
Anthoxanthum odoratum	Sweet vernal grass	Danthonia decumbens	Heath-grass
Anthriscus sylvestris	Cow parsley	Deschampsia cespitosa	Tufted hair grass
Arenaria serpyllifolia	Thyme-leaved sandwort	Elymus caninus	Bearded couch
Arrhenatherum elatius	False Oatgrass	Elytrigia repens	Couch grass
Bellis perennis	Daisy	Equisetum arvense	Common horsetail
Brachopodium sylvaticum	Wood false-brome	Festuca arundinacea	Tall fescue
Briza media	Quaking grass	Festuca pratensis	Meadow fescue
Bromopsis erecta	Upright brome	Festuca rubra	Red fescue
Bromus hordeaceus	Soft brome	Galium verum	Ladies bedstraw
Calamagrostis epigejos	Wood small-reed	Glechoma hederacea	Ground ivy
Campanula rotundifolia	Harebell	Heracleum sphondylium	Hogweed
Cardamine pratensis	Lady's smock	Holcus lanatus	Yorkshire Fog
Carduus crispus	Welted thistle	Hordeum murinum	Wall barley
Carduus nutans	Musk thistle	Hypochaeris radicata	Catsear
Carex caryophyllea	Spring sedge	Knautia arvensis	Field scabious
Carex flacca	Glaucous sedge	Lathyrus pratensis	Meadow vetchling
Carex hirta	Hairy sedge	Leontodon autumnalis	Autumn hawkbit
Centaurea nigra	Common knapweed	Leontodon saxatilis	Lesser hawkbit
Cerastium fontanum	Common mouse-ear	Linaria vulgaris	Common toadflax

Grassland continued

Linum catharticum	Purging flax	Ranunculus acris	Meadow buttercup
Lolium perenne	Ryegrass	Ranunculus bulbosus	Bulbous buttercup
Lotus corniculatus	Birds foot trefoil	Ranunculus repens	Creeping buttercup
Lotus pedunculatus	Greater bird's foot trefoil	Rumex acetosa	Common sorrel
Luzula campestris	Field woodrush	Rumex conglomeratus	Clustered dock
Medicago lupulina	Black medick	Rumex crispus	Curled dock
Odontites vernus	Red bartsia	Rumex obtusifolius	Broad-leaved dock
Ononis spinosa	Spiny rest harrow	Sanguisorba minor	Salad Burnet
Ophioglossum vulgatum	Adderstongue fern	Senecio erucifolius	Hoary ragwort
Ophrys apifera	Bee orchid	Senecio jacobaea	Ragwort
Pastinaca sativa	Wild parsnip	Silaum silaus	Pepper saxifrage
Phleum bertolonii	Small timothy	Succisa pratensis	Devil's bit scabious
Phleum pratense	Timothy	Taraxacum officinale	Dandelion
Picris echiodes	Prickly oxtongue	Thalictrum flavum	Common meadow-rue
Pilosella officinarum	Mouse ear hawkweed	Tragopogon pratensis	Goatsbeard
Pimpinella saxifraga	Burnet saxifrage	Trifolium campestre	Hop trefoil
Plantago lanceolata	Ribwort plantain	Trifolium dubium	Lesser trefoil
Plantago major	Greater plantain	Trifolium pratense	Red clover
Plantago media	Hoary plantain	Trifolium repens	White clover
Poa annua	Annual meadow grass	Trisetum flavescens	Yellow oat grass
Poa pratensis	Smooth meadow grass	Tussilago farfara	Coltsfoot
Poa trivialis	Rough meadow grass	Urtica dioicia	Nettle
Polygala vulgaris	Milkwort	Veronica chamaedrys	Speedwell, germander
Potentilla anserine	Silverweed	Veronica serpyllifolia	Thyme-leaved speedwell
Potentilla erecta	Tormentil	Vicia cracca	Tufted vetch
Potentilla reptans	Creeping cinquefoil	Vicia sativa	Common vetch
Primula veris	Cowslip	Viola odorata	Sweet violet
Prunella vulgaris	Self-heal	Viola hirta	Hairy violet
Pulicaria dysenterica	Common fleabane	Viola riviniana	Common dog violet

The Cut

Alisma lanceolata	Narrow-leaved water-plantain	Juncus inflexus	Hard rush
Alisma plantago-aquatica	Water plantain	Juncus subnodulosus	Blunt-flowered rush
Apium graveolens	Wild celery	Lemna minor	Duckweed
Apium nodiflorum	Fools watercress	Lemna minuta	Least duckweed
Berula erecta	Lesser water parsnip	Lemna triscula	Ivy-leaved duckweed
Callitriche stagnalis	Water starwort	Lycopus europaeus	Gipsywort
Callitriche stagnalis	Water starwort	Lysimachia vulgaris	Yellow loosestrife
Caltha palustris	Marsh marigold	Lythrum salicaria	Purple loosestrife
Carex elata	Tufted sedge	Mentha aquatica	Water mint
Carex otrubae	False fox-sedge	Myosotis laxa	Tufted forget-me-not
Carex panicea	Carnation sedge	Myosotis scorpioides	Water forget-me-not
Carex riparia	Greater pond sedge	Myriophyllum spicatum	Spiked water milfoil
Ceratophylum submersum	Soft hornwort	Nymphaea alba	White water-lily
Chara spp	Stoneworts	Nymphoides peltata	Fringed water lily
Eleocharis palustris	Common spike rush	Persicaria amphibia	Amphibious bistort
Elodea canadensis	Canadian waterweed	Phalaris arundinacea	Reed canary grass
Elodea nuttallii	Nuttall's waterweed	Phragmites australis	Common reed
Eupatorium cannabinum	Hemp agrimony	Potamogeton crispus	Curled pondweed
Filipendula ulmaria	Meadowsweet	Potamogeton natans	Broad-leaved pondweed
Galium palustre	Common marsh bedstraw	Ranunculus aquatilis	Common water crowfoot
Hippuris vulgaris	Mare's-tail	Ranunculus flammula	Lesser spearwort
Hottonia palustris	Water violet	Ranunculus sceleratus	Celery-leaved buttercup
Hydrocotyle vulgaris	Marsh pennywort	Ranunculus trichophyllus	Thread-leaved water-crowfoot
Hypericum tetrapterum	Square stalked St John's wort	Rorippa nasturtium-aquaticum	Watercress
Juncus articulatus	Jointed rush	Samolus valerandi	Brookweed
Juncus buffonious	Toad rush	Schoenoplectus lacustris	Common club-rush
Juncus effusus	Soft rush	Scrophularia auriculata	Water figwort

The Cut continued

Sparganium emersum Unbranched bur reed
Sparganium erectum Branched bur reed
Stachys pallustris Marsh woundwort
Symphytum officinale Common comfrey
Utricularia vulgaris Bladderwort
Veronica anagallis-aquatica Blue water-speedwell
Veronica catenata Pink water-speedwell
Zannichellia palustris Horned pondweed

MAMMALS (1999-2008)

Badger
Bank Vole
Brown Hare
Brown rat
Common Shrew
Field Vole
Fox
Grey Squirrel
Hedgehog
Mole
Muntjac Deer
Pygmy Shrew
Rabbit
Roe Deer
Stoat
Weasel
Wood Mouse

AMPHIBIANS & REPTILES(1999-2009)

Common Frog
Common Toad
Grass Snake
Smooth newt

BIRDS(1999-2008)

Barn Owl*
Blackbird*
Blackcap*
Blue Tit*
Bullfinch*
Buzzard
Carrion Crow*
Chaffinch*
Chiffchaff*
Collared Dove
Common Snipe
Coot
Corn Bunting
Cuckoo*
Dunnock*
Fieldfare
Garden Warbler*
Goldcrest
Goldfinch*
Great Spotted Woodpecker*
Great Tit*
Green Woodpecker
Greenfinch*
Grey Heron
Grey Partridge*
Hobby
House Martin
House Sparrow
Jackdaw
Jay
Kestrel
Kingfisher
Lapwing
Lesser Whitethroat*
Linnet*
Little Grebe
Little Owl*
Long Tailed Tit*
Magpie*
Mallard*
Meadow Pipit
Mistle Thrush*
Moorhen*
Mute Swan
Pheasant*
Pied Wagtail
Red-legged Partridge*
Redwing
Reed Bunting*
Reed Warbler*
Robin*
Rook
Sand Martin
Sedge Warbler*
Skylark*
Song Thrush*
Sparrow Hawk
Starling*
Stock Dove*
Swallow
Swift
Tawny Owl
Turtle Dove*
Water Rail
Whitethroat*
Willow Warbler*
Wood Pigeon*
Wren*
Yellow Hammer*
Yellow Wagtail

* denotes Breeding species

12

QUY FEN TODAY

English Nature took over the duties of the Nature Conservancy Council which had previously been responsible for SSSI sites in 1991. In practice it makes little difference to the running of the Fen, which is still run by the Quy Fen Trust, consisting of two members elected by the Parish Councils of Fen Ditton, Horningsea and Quy, together with a representative nominated by the Cambient. This is at present Paul Stebbings, who is Warden of the Fulbourn Nature Reserve. Roger Welham as Chairman and Brenda Matthews as Secretary, both of Fen Ditton retired after more than 10 years sterling work. Brian Thorby of Quy continues as Honorary Treasurer and Bill Watts is the current Secretary. The Trust enters into Management Agreements, lasting for three years, with English Nature who set out what is required to maintain the Fen as a SSSI.

Grazing is the recognized way of maintaining a Nature Reserve. However, as the tenant is not allowed to "improve" the pasture by spraying or fertilizing, the rent that a grazier is willing to pay is not high. English Nature makes a grant to make up for the low rents, and also make grants towards the cost of maintenance. As more grants became available, much of the work of conserving the Fen is undertaken by contractors appointed by the Quy Fen Trust. There is still voluntary work carried out and the Trust members meet two or three times to inspect the Fen and decide what needs to be done to fulfil their contract with English Nature.

Ideally English Nature would like the number of beasts grazing in the Fen to depend on the season, suggesting in one instance that 100 head should be put on at the beginning of the season and then taken off so that the grass could be eaten short, and the ragwort would stand up above it and could be more easily be weedwiped. Owen Cornwell of Chittering is the current tenant, keeping about 30 head of cattle. This is a relatively low number but they still need looking after and visiting almost on a daily basis so probably grazing would not be viable if it were not for farm subsidies. Rabbits are adding to the problems of over-grazing, leaving bare patches where ragwort can grow. The Trust gives permission to certain people to go ferreting for rabbits, or to shoot them, which seems to be the only effective way of controlling them.

One of the main problems continues to be the control of ragwort and thistles. Weed-wiping is expensive and not always effective, but is virtually the only way recommended by English Nature. A fence was put across the Fen dividing the grazing into two parts, which allows the cattle to be shut off in one part while work is in progress on the other.

Hawthorn bushes shoot up everywhere if nature is left to its own devices. This means they need to be thinned out as grass will not grow under them if they are too thick. Young bushes have to be cut down, pulled up or sprayed, and the roots destroyed. These cannot be left lying around the Fen so they have be carted away.

The best-known feature of the Fen is the Cut, which was left when the coprolite industry was abandoned in 1894. Here again a certain amount of management is necessary. English Nature consider that 50% should be open water. Someone unknown introduced some broad-leaved water lilies into the Cut, which looked beautiful, but English Nature were concerned that they might spread too much. The water levels in the Fen have caused some concern over the years. A new ditch was cut in 1993 and water piped into the Cut. The boundary Black Ditch is maintained by Swaffham Internal Drainage Board and stanks and a weir have been put in at various times to try to maintain the water level. Then there happens to be a wet winter and much of the ground the Cut is flooded! The cows used to go into the Cut to drink and of course trampled down the banks. The Horningsea end of the Cut became so trampled that it was hardly possible to walk along the end. In 2005, while working in the area, Swaffham Drainage Board agreed to slub out the end of the Cut, put in piles and back fill so that there is now room to walk safely round the end of the cut. There is still some erosion along the path at the side.

An existing pond has been deepened and another made with the aid of grants. Another one is proposed. The Fen provides a particularly favourable habitat for dragon flies and damsel flies and every encouragement is made to increase their numbers.

The area round the Cut is an area of flower-rich calcerous pasture which has never been sprayed or fertilized and has been left undisturbed since the 1890s. (see next Chapter.) The cowslip is recorded as being rare. It used to be a very common flower on the pastureland in the 1930s, especially in the Common in Lode Road where people would cycle out from Cambridge to pick them. Sprays practically wiped the cowslips out but I do not remember many growing in the Fen, though there were several in the Fen this year. (Last year, I saw one flowering by the roadside and there were quite a few

in the southern end of Quy Park, so hopefully they will make a general come-back.)

Willows which in the olden days were kept pollarded by those wanting peasticks, now need to be pollarded to keep them healthy and from one to three trees are pollarded each year. Some of the sticks which were cut off were planted as a willow grove in 1995 and this grew quite successfully. However a second one planted the following year failed to grow, perhaps as it was in a rather drier place.

The Fen Trust also has responsibility for the hedges on southern border. A large number of hawthorn plants were put in to fill in gaps in the hedge, by Chris Butler and Bill Watts who as well as being Trustees also undertake contract work. Fences were put up to keep the cattle from eating them before they had a chance to grow but unfortunately it did not deter the rabbits! Smaller sections are being replaced, with adequate guards to keep them off.

Thus it can be seen that Quy Fen Trustees cannot sit back and let nature take its course. There is on the one hand, a continuing fight against weeds and scrub which are not wanted, and on the other hand, attempts to improve the environment to encourage flowers and insects, especially those which are becoming rare or extinct.

Quy Fen is an oasis surrounded by highly cultivated fields. One does not have to be a botanist or entomologist to enjoy visiting it at any time of the year. The Cut is still enjoyed by anglers and swimmers, It is a delightful place for a walk and is often used by people dog-walking.

Julia Ball, a local artist who began painting in Quy Fen in the 1970s said in an interview in the Cambridge News "*February is a wonderful month for painting. You get those marvellous frosty days when everything is bright, and other days when the light is fragile. There's always the sense that everything is beginning again. You have to work quickly to catch the mood of the moment, the shifting reflections. If you fail to get a sketch done, you might have to wait until the following year for the same quality of light."*

Inevitably, its original purpose of being a source of income from turf-digging, cutting hay or peasticks has long gone. Income from rents is low and maintenance costs are high, but there should be some income from time to time which can be put towards village projects.

A recent letter from English Nature fills me with dismay for the future! "*There was potential for a good Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement in the SSSI… HLS applications are scored using targets…. I have indicated where HLS options are likely to match the Key Targets (5 points each). In*

this region, application for HLS need to score at least 15 points…". Are points and targets the best way forward?
As long as the three villages continue to appoint Trustees who have a genuine interest in the Fen, including some with practical working knowledge who are willing to challenge the advice of the continually changing experts, when necessary, Quy Fen should be in safe hands for many generations to come.

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Memories of Quy Fen

by Kitty Watts (1903 - 1991)

Mother of Peggy Watts, probably referring to the 1911-1918 era

As a girl some of my happiest evenings were spent in Quy Fen. About twice a week, after an early tea, my cousin and I would help my father harness the old horse to the tumbrel cart and off we would go down the wide leafy droves to Quy Fen to cut grass or hay for our cows and horses. Oak, Ash and Elm trees had been planted alternately on each side of the droves and were now almost full grown. Willow, Whitethorn, Wild rose, and Blackberry bushes grew in profusion along the sides of the cart tracks. The gate house keeper, Mrs Gawthrop, would be out at the railway gates, where the drove crosses the railway, to let us through by the time we got there, and to have a few minutes chat about any village news, as she had few visitors to her lonely cottage. Once we reached the fen we helped unrein the horse so that it could wander around and feed. While Dad sharpened up his scythe and got busy mowing swathes of the grass, some patches thick with white clover, trefoil and wild tares, my cousin

And I would wander off for half an hour or so collecting an armful of meadowsweet, purple loosestrife and other wild flowers which grew in the marshy places among the rushes and round the Cut, a big pool of water where fossils had been dug. With larks singing overhead and all kinds of warblers and tits among the bushes, and a startled snipe or plover joining in with their cries, and many different kinds of butterflies, moths, Dragonflies , or occasionally a glimpse of a grass snake or lizard sunning themselves along the chalk hills, the time passed very quickly. By the time we returned Dad had long swathes of cut hay all around and we got busy with forks and rakes making it into heaps and filling the cart with it. Once we had loaded a good load we all climbed on to the top and set off for home again. As we rode back dad would tell us tales of his boyhood spent down rabbit Hall (near Quy Common) I a little cottage with his grand parents, of going to London , in his twenties, to seek his fortune, and of the old cushion tyred bicycle he had on which he occasionally rode home to Quy at weekends or holidays. We would get him to sing some of the old music hall songs he heard there, and we would all join in the choruses.

Just before Harvest time, dad would often have a week down the Fen, cutting the long grass and leaving it in for a few days to dry into hay, before making it into small hay cocks to be carted home to last the cows through the busy harvest time. Several other men would be busy there too., and although they cut loads in various places, they always remembered which they had cut themselves, and no one would think of taking any that was cut by some one else.

On frosty days in the winter , when it was too hard to go on the land, my brother and I would go with dad to the Fen to cut pea sticks or thatching stakes from the Willow bushes. The lowland , where the best bushes grew , was mostly flooded and frozen over so as dad cut the pea sticks ,my brother and I tied them in bunches and then had fun carrying them on our backs across the ice and snow to the higher ground where they were laid ready to be collected by horse and cart next day to be taken home to be trimmed up to be sold to any gardeners who wanted them, or for our own use. Another time for visiting the Fen was when "Chammys" (a kind of mushroom) were growing. They grew in rings of darker green grass and were very enjoyable fried for breakfast.

In later years Quy Fen Cut became a very popular bathing pool, and in summer people came by cars and bicycles from Cambridge and other villages around to bathe in the Cut and picnic among the bushes. Fishermen would come too , for there were plenty of fish in the Cut and also in the smaller cuts around that were not suitable for bathing. Although Quy Fen was a long way from the village one rarely visited it without seeing someone else enjoying it's beauties. During the last war it was enclosed and let for grazing to a farmer from Horningsea for his cows and horses. Without getting proper permission he sent tractors down there and cut down trees, uprooted bushes and old favourite landmarks, levelled out the chalk hills and ploughed up much of the land. A protest was made by different people and he has now reset the land with grass, but it will never be quite the same old Quy Fen.

Kitty Watts, 1958



Footpath sign to Quy walks



Willows in leaf



Spring



Summer



Autumn



Winter



Cow safely grazing



Common Ragwort



Gate at the entrance to the Fen



Oak trees



Willow trees with nesting boxes



Thicket of hawthorn



White Water Lily (Nymphaea Alba)



Mare's Tail (Hippuris vulgaris)

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All proceeds from sales will go directly towards the work carried out by the Trust in maintaining Quy Fen

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