

# Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and Natural History.

---

THE SEA PORT OF FROSTENDEN.

PART I.—ITS PLACE IN HISTORY.

BY CLAUDE MORLEY, F.E.S., F.Z.S., Etc.

Writing of the seventh and eighth centuries, the German doctor J. M. Lappenberg considered that none of the other English Kingdoms "excites the curiosity of the historical enquirer so much as that of East Anglia which, inhabited by Germans probably before the time (449-88) of (the purely eponymous) Hengest and Horsa, entirely surrounded by German neighbours, in no contact with the Britons, must necessarily have presented a most faithful picture of Teutonic antiquity. Even at the present day in no other part of England do so many well preserved German names of places declare who were their ancient lords and founders. Many remarkable traditions, though hitherto not sufficiently investigated and sifted for use as materials of history, are preserved relative to this district. Its position is particularly favourable to an intercourse with the Old-Saxons; and we may regard not only London in those remote times, but

also the East Anglian ports Lynn, Yarmouth, and Dunwich, as resorts for Frisic, Saxon and Gallic mariners and members of the several commercial guilds or hansen " (1845, pp. 241-3).

Though the above legendary heroes are now known to represent nothing beyond the warlike prowess of the early Saxons of England, the many remarkable facts of their period still remain to a large extent unexplored by Suffolk historical inquirers. Among the most fascinating of these is the Domesday assertion that so late as the year 1065 "one sea port" existed within the limits of Frostenden village. An elementary knowledge of Suffolk economic conditions during the previous six hundred years from "the time of Hengest" and of the coast geology is sufficient to convince one that any such seaport must have been upon the decline of its utility at the end of the Danish régime in England. As the estuaries silted up and the water-level gradually dropped such a seaport, navigable in 450 would doubtless be left high and dry in 1065, when it must be utterly abandoned or replaced by another nearer the coast. After a somewhat spasmodic investigation, through five years, this line of reasoning has at length proved to be correct and has borne ample fruit.

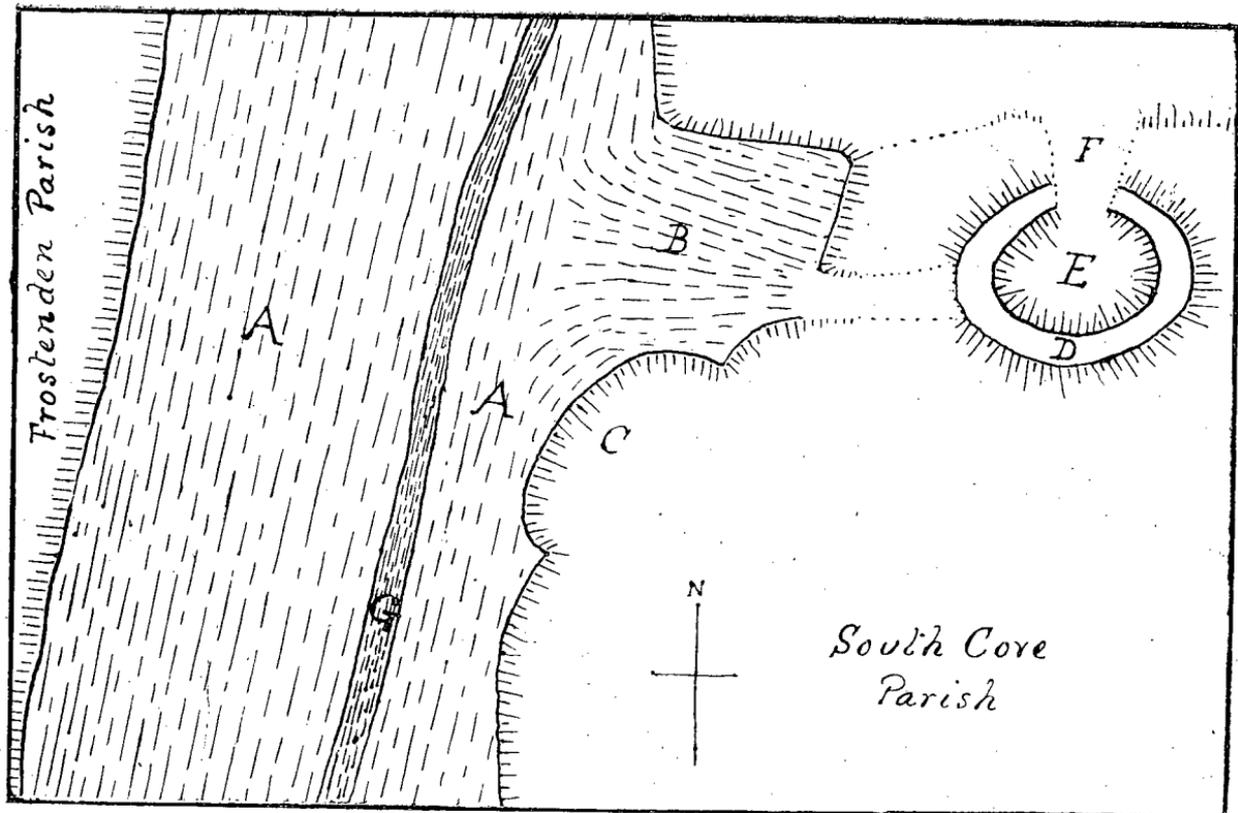
Frostenden does not, and so far as our annals show, never did, touch the coast. Hence this seaport was not by the sea, but upon the banks of the river running there at Easton Broad from Frostenden Hall or the valley just east of it. The first question to be solved was as to the height at which this river was navigable in, say, the year 700. Reydon Smear is a southern arm, which seems to have formerly expanded into a small Broad; Major Cooper tells me that a deed of about 1200 refers to Reydon Church as solely "Rismere St. Margaret." This is obviously the *AS risc*, and gives

us another Rushmere place-name in Suffolk : " Smeer, a contraction of le Rissmere," says Gardner at p. 254, who nowhere suggests a quay upon this estuary. Another arm of the river ran down a valley nearly from The Elm Farm in Reydon, and pretty surely gave rise to the original site of the farm. There is an elevated artificial causeway from the road to Reydon Grove Farm, across a pasture which was once the bed of another affluent, coming from the west. The hamlet known as Cove Bottom on the east bank is remarkable only for the acute angle the river made round the foot of the bold bluff, locally known as Yarn Hill ; no quay could have been here, because the gravel rises quite gradually upon both sides. A slight valley from Kiln Farm carries an often dry brook, crossed by a narrow causeway in the brick field. Cove Run is another causeway, seventy paces broad, and still liable to winter floods as a hand-bridge shows ; over it passed the Long Row seu Brampton Street from Covehithe which has been suggested by Dutt in 1909 at p. 105 to be a Roman Road to Stone Street. Frostenden Bottom is a similar causeway of the same breadth, though with no emergency bridge since the stream's volume is considerably reduced by the emission of the arm running down from Wrentham. The site of Frostenden Church at the rise of the southern arm leads one to expect that the earliest quay would have been nearer it than to Frostenden Corner ; and, immediately south of the road thence to Wrentham and north of the remaining wood, is still a somewhat abrupt and hummocky acclivity from the stream, which has here been diverted to the west of its original course, yet traceable through the marshy pasture by depression. This acclivity I considered in 1921, and still consider, the only possible site of an *early* Saxon quay ; quite possibly excavation would show it to have served such a purpose. Further up the banks rise so closely that, even given volume which this

very fact forbids, insufficient space would exist, either from the Hall or from the brook north of it, for boats to pass in 700. However, it is perfectly clear that this Quay, well inside Frostenden village and in view of its Church, must from its very physiographical position have been silted up long before 1065; and there yet remained to fix the site to which it had then been removed. Domesday definitely relates this to be still in active use and a going concern not only before but after the Conquest in 1086: "Then as now one seaport." By that time it must have been a good deal nearer the coast; and the peculiarly numerous ramifications of now well-nigh deserted bye-lanes on the stream's west bank, combined with the natural set of the tide round the promontory of Yarn Hill\* (whereon such maritime plants as *Erodium cicutarium*, and such maritime insects as *Hypera Fasciculata*, still freely occur and illustrate the saline conditions formerly prevalent here), induced me to search close to the existing west bank brickworks for the quay. And, though not here, it is perfectly within view hence across the stream; and I believe that all portorage to and from the quay was carried on from this *west* bank, since the east rises abruptly, was likely timber to a late date, and has no road within a quarter-mile, nor does there appear ever to have been such, eastward over the brow of the hill or north and south alongside the stream.

Nothing of the now discovered Quay or its protecting Fort is noticed upon the 25-inch Ordnance Map of 1904, E. Suffolk, sheet xxix., 5; and Suckling's remarks plainly indicate that, though he made an acute guess at the site, he knew nothing of it from tradition or from personal observation.

\*NOTE.—I suggest that Yarn Hill was earlier called Gunhildes-hoh, from some long-forgotten Danish Lady Gunhild, which is not a Saxon name; and that from it took title the Manor of "Gunnildshawe" in South Cove, wherein this hill stands.



E.R.C. 1924.

- A. Bed of old River, now Frostenden Bottom.      B. Dock and Waterway leading to Fort.  
 C. Suggested Site of Quay.      D. Ditch round Fort.      E. Danish Earthwork now called the Mound.  
 F. Approach to Mound, probably modern.      G. Present River.

The first recorded owner here was Toret, as Domesday spells the name, leaving one at liberty to suppose him the Danish Thuri or the Saxon Thored; he was very likely the father of Sheriff Northman of Walton, but all his possessions in Reydon and Frostenden, the whole whereof he owned along with much of South Cove, which last fact accounts, I think, for our Seaport being on the South Cove side of the river, passed to the conquering Baignards in 1075. Ralph enfeoffed his nephew William Baignard of this manor; but after their 1110 outlawry the Crown granted it to Robert FitzRichard of Clare, whence it came through his descendant Walter FitzRobert at the end of the thirteenth century to the FitzWalters of Clare. Their local lords here were Gilbert de Frostenden in 1267 (Chart. Rolls, 51 Hen. III.) and Alice de Frostenden, who held two knights' fees of the above FitzRobert about 1240 (Testa Nevill 290). It has been somewhat vaguely said that "although Frostenden was a portus maris at the Domesday epoch, it cannot have continued so for long afterwards" (E. Angl. N. & Q., 1894, p. 230); but I suspect that all these lords to at least 1300 profited by the harbour.

The great and outstanding feature of the discovery is that we here possess the very first Earthwork of pre-Norman times that has ever yet been *definitely dated* in Suffolk.

## PART II.—THE DANISH QUAY DISCOVERED.

BY MAJOR ERNEST R. COOPER.

Suckling states at p. 317 that in the Conqueror's Survey it is recorded that "Froxenden" possessed a seaport for shipping (portus maris), and had a salt-work or salina; save for this brief reference in his

History of Suffolk, Volume II., 1847, I find no mention of Frostenden as a Seaport and it disappears from our County History as a port for some 800 years.

Following previous discussions upon this subject, Mr. Claude Morley and myself set forth on July 24th, 1924, like Gobbett or Defoe, on a rural ramble and soon came upon Potters Bridge, where in early ages the North sea tide swept in fathoms deep and in later times the potter fashioned rude pottery from brick-earth lying on either side of the valley (compare Potter Heigham in Norfolk, where is also a bridge crossing a now sluggish stream, with traditions of pottery works.) Looking to starboard we saw the white edged breakers spending themselves on the narrow shingle belt which protects Easton Broad from the sea while on the Port hand, which terms come naturally for we felt like mariners seeking a harbour, the still fenny and waterlogged valley ran inland towards Frostenden and Wrentham, here concealed from view by a projecting bluff, called the rough or Yarn Hill. We turned at South Cove Church to Cove Run, now dwindled to a trickle and bridged, and thence keeping a starboard helm we turned West till just short of Frostenden brick kiln a drift led us down to the meadows of Frostenden Bottom. Here this appeared to me, as a mariner, to be an unlikely spot, so I cast my eyes seawards, and, a quarter mile down stream, saw a labourer crossing the valley by a foot-path unknown to us, and this we decided to explore. We therefore went ahead until a path appeared running east and, wheeling into this, we crossed some low ground to the diminutive stream here but 8 paces broad now, which we had already traversed at both Potters Bridge to the East and Cove Run to the North. A footbridge carried us over to more marshy land and thence to a small and somewhat abruptly elevated terrace, jutting out into the marsh land and about

87 paces long, garnished with old oaks. In this peculiar terrace, which seemed to have been cut away at its South end we were both satisfied that we beheld the ancient QUAY and this gnarled veteran on the extreme edge of it was perhaps one of the last oak stakes driven in to sustain the Quay; and took root some 600 years ago, after the salt water had ceased to flow so high.

There, too, just 28 paces from the North end of the Quay, we next discovered traces of a DOCK 8 paces broad leading up to the rising ground, where ships would lay up for the winter; nothing similar appeared elsewhere. The width of the river then would be that of the little valley to-day, which proved to be 183 paces; the footpath on both East and West banks would be connected by a Ferry crossed by a dugout, and Eastward was probably the trackway at one time leading from South Cove lane to and from the Quay.

We then proceeded to explore further; and very soon I saw Mr. Morley gesticulating on a hillock at the head of the above Dock and, hurrying up to him, he announced that hillock to be a DANISH FORTRESS. Further examination proved beyond doubt that it was a Danish stronghold, surrounded by a deep ditch formerly wet and supplied from the river by way of the Dock. The hillock was not quite circular, as the following dimensions will shew:—The ditch is 227 paces in circumference at the bottom, and encloses an oval hill of  $10\frac{1}{2}$  feet in height from the bottom of the moat, the extreme length of the hill East and West being 90 paces, and breadth North and South 70 paces; the top is flat, sloping slightly towards the West or river, and measures East and West 34 paces by North and South 23 paces. The whole earth work is cut out of the sloping hill-side of the valley, which overlooks the fort on the North and East and makes

the moat appear deeper landward ; the top of the Fort is stony and arid, while the growth at the bottom of the moat is luxuriant and indicates moisture still close below the surface, and the whole is uncultivated. At its middle on the North side the moat has been broadly filled in, probably for a cartway to the summit and possibly it was approached here by a rude draw-bridge when the water flowed round. This Quay, Dock and Earthwork lie fully two miles direct and by the curving stream just three and a quarter from the present coast, behind the high ground of Yarn Hill rising about 40 to 50 above O.D., they are therefore sheltered from every wind that blows, besides any early forest-cover there may have been, and quite invisible from the sea. A more secret and secure Harbour of Refuge it would be hard to find and it resembles strongly, although on a smaller scale, Warham Camp adjoining the little Stiffkey River on the N. Norfolk coast—Viking Club Saga Book, January, 1909. Possibly also some resemblance may be found in the account of a Danish Campon the Bedford Ouse with a hithe or naust—Saga Book, January, 1904—but I have been unable to refer to this.

Now as to access from the sea, about a quarter mile below the Quay the valley and stream turn round the Yarn Hill bluff for one and a half miles to the South East and thence run another one and a half miles east to the coast at Easton Broad, where the valley widens out to a half mile or more of still very low boggy ground and the stream loses itself in the Broad ; this in summer percolates through the beach, but in flood times a cut is made through the beach and the water flows out and in until the opening beaches up again. It is asserted that in remote ages the sea level was some five feet higher than at present ; and, however this may be, it is quite demonstrable that a thousand years ago the flood tide rose several feet higher on the

North Suffolk coast than at present, for the following reason :—The tidal wave at present rises nearly 15 feet at springs at Cromer, five feet at Yarmouth, 6½ feet at Southwold, 8 feet at Orfordness and 12 feet at Harwich, the differences being caused by the outset of the flood stream from the North coast of Norfolk through the Would and Hasbro Gat out at the back of Yarmouth and Lowestoft Sands, the main stream not impinging on the coast of Suffolk until it reaches Orfordness. The intervening stretch of coast, consequently, lies in an eddy and has only a small range of tide. Hence my theory is that before the N.E. corner of Norfolk was cut away, with Shipden and other towns, the coast extended outwards and included the sites of the Norfolk and Suffolk Sands ; and that the flood tide then ran fair along the coast, so that the rise and fall on the N. Suffolk coast would be some feet above its present range. This would convert all our small creeks into navigable rivers and the marsh levels into estuaries. So no doubt in Danish days of the early eleventh Century there were Harbours at Kirkley, Benacre, Easton, Minsmere and Aldeburgh or Thorpe Haven ; and this accounts for the statement by Gardner (p. 39) that in the ancient days Dunwich Haven ran large and deep. At the same time, Covehithe and Easton Nesses extended further seaward ; and Easton Broad, lying between them, would be a wide and deep tidal area, like Breydon Water ; this, with the tide flowing well up the valley past Frostenden to Cove Bottom, would give ample backwater to keep a navigable entrance for longships at any state of the tide.

But when the shore began to waste and the beach to travel from N. to S. with the flood tide, I think it likely that the entrance to Easton Broad was turned Southerly like the entrance to the Yare, the Blyth and the Alde. Thus it would run alongshore in front and Eastward of Easton which then probably was.

high ground, sloping down to saltings or denes (Suckling says at p. 107 there were saltworks at Easton in Saxon times, abandoned before Domesday was compiled), until it broke through into the Blyth valley N. of Southwold and formed the present Buss Creek running at the West of Southwold hill into the Blyth, and so into the sea at Dunwich Haven or wherever the outlet was then. Ships would thus enter at Dunwich to go up to Easton and Frostenden. Reyce also states at p. 11 of his Breviary, that a little brook flows into the river Cockell "coming Northward from Easton and Sowolde." I can further quote Gardner who says at p. 258 that Easton was a considerable fishing town, and that in most Easton Wills to temp. Eliz. bequests are made of Schyppes, nets and tackle; and, to shew that the Schyppes were sizable he records that in 1464 Will Ferrier of Easton paid for breaking Walburyswick Key with his Schyppe 12d. Then as the coast erosion progressed and the sandbanks were created, the range of tide decreased while the travel of beach increased until in course of time, during some prolonged Easterly gale, the outlet from Easton to Buss Creek was beached up or cut away finally, and the doom of Frostenden and Easton as seaports was sealed.

The evidence is conclusive that, during the Norse period of the ninth century, the invaders used the East coast ports as their bases and harbours of refuge, and from them issued forth to plunder round the coast. The army that destroyed Wareham in 876 sailed round from East Anglia, and fled back here after its defeat; some evidence exists of a battle between Saxons and "Danes" at Gisleham, on a site still called Bloodmoor Hill, when no doubt the Norsemen landed from Lake Lothing; and another, perhaps merely legendary, battle was fought in Benacre Park, where a place known as the Blood Pit is reputed to be

the burial site of the slain, who might have landed at the Hundred River, now Benacre sluice, or even at Frostenden ; while at Snape by the Alde, Dr. Hele in 1862 unearthed the remains of a boat in a tumulus. These Vikings, like all mariners of those days, went to sea only in the summer and returned home in the autumn with their plunder, leaving many of the smaller ships housed and a small garrison in a fort to protect them. Now Frostenden fulfils all the requirements of a Winter Harbour ; landlocked, protected from all winds, and invisible from the sea ; while the conformation of the ground allowed the easy construction of a moated Earthwork within a few yards of the quay, where the Harbour Guard could entrench themselves and spend the winter in safety in a district still celebrated as the best sporting estate in England, then swarming with fish, fowl and ground game.

In the epic of the Saxon Beowulf occurs the following passage :

He went in his sea boat  
 To move the deep water, he forsook the Danes land,  
 Nor did the wind over the waters hinder  
 The Wavefloater ; the Seagoer went  
 The foamy necked floater, forth over the sea,  
 The curved prow sailed over the ocean currents,  
 Until they could see the cliffs of the Geats,  
 The well known nesses. The vessel pressed up,  
 Urged by the wind it stood on the land.  
 Soon was the harbour-guard ready at the strand,  
 Who long had gazed far over the sea,  
 Eager for the coming of the dear men."

And it might well be said that this curved prow was bound for Frostenden ; as coming there from the "Danes land" the navigators would make the well known nesses, Lowestoft Ness, Covehithe and Easton

Nesses. The dear men surely left a strong strain of their Norse blood in the families of Hurr, Haken (Hákon) Cragie, Sagin (Saegrim) Upcraft, Godbold (Godbeald) Thurtell (Thorkel) and many others still resident in the district, and some of them still "follow the water" as 'tis said.

The same early Godbeald occurs in the name of a piece of ground, called Gorbals Grove, close to the marshes of the Frostenden seaport; the now bare field in which this earthwork is situate is known as Little Wood in South Cove parish, and the adjoining one northward is termed Dove House Hill. It is very remarkable that the conspicuous Fort is not mentioned throughout our local literature, or in any Ordnance Survey. Locally it is called "The Mound," and tradition relates that a house of some sort formerly stood on it; this may well have been long after the Danes' times, and yet the lack of all traces of structure or disturbance of the soil need not surprise us. In my opinion this early Fortress is very much in the same state as when the Danes abandoned it nearly a thousand years ago; and I suggest that it should be most carefully preserved in its present state for all time. It is interesting to note the resemblance, as to siting and structure, between this Earthwork and the "Strong Points" erected along the Suffolk Coast during the latter part of the Great War, several of which were to be garrisoned by my Battalion of Volunteers in case of attack. As regards defence, the Danes were by no means a thousand years behind our modern methods.

Of course, this Mound may be considered by some to be a case of ship burial, similar to Dr. Hele's find at Snape, but this point can only be definitely settled by excavation.