



12 : DRAINS & DYKES

Draining the Fens & Carrs

The previous two chapters explored the history of embanking for the reclamation of tidal marshland and fenland in Lincolnshire, focusing on the activities of the Medieval settlements around the Wash. This chapter turns to the other main linear feature employed in the drainage and reclamation of Lincolnshire's wetlands – the drain.

In essence, drains are artificial watercourses that collect and carry water from (or across) low-lying areas to the main rivers or sea, operating in conjunction with pumping stations and sluices to ensure that the land is kept dry enough for agriculture throughout the year. Together with river embankments, washlands and sea defences, drains are integral to an artificial drainage system that has developed over two millennia to prevent flooding and reclaim wetland for farming and settlement.

Despite their apparent mundaneness, drains vary widely in their origins and form. They include both straightened or 'canalised' sections of what were originally natural watercourses, as well as artificial channels on wholly new courses. The nomenclature of drains often reflects this history, as

well as their size and purpose. The elements 'ea' (or 'eau'), 'beck' and 'river' are usually indicative of a natural origin. 'Drain' occurs throughout Lincolnshire, while the Fens in particular show a variety of names for drains including 'cut', 'delph', 'grove', 'syke' and 'lode', the latter usually denoting a waterway that gave access by boat. Small field drains are known as 'dykes'.

This chapter explores drains, covering their history and role in the wider landscape development of Lincolnshire's wetlands. The main focus is on

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FACING PAGE: **Metheringham Delph, Witham Fens**

RIGHT: **River Torne and side drain near Tunnel Pits, Isle of Axholme**

