



4 : Perceptions

Ah Lincolnshire, all fens, flats and fogs! (George III)

...if the scenery be resolutely level, insisting on the declaration of its flatness in all the detail of it, as in...Lincolnshire...it appears to me like a prison, and I cannot long endure it. (from Mountain Glory, John Ruskin, 1860)

I come from haunt of coot and hern, I make a sudden sally, And sparkle out among the fern, To bicker down a valley (from The Brook, Alfred Lord Tennyson, 1860s)

Opinions about the Lincolnshire landscape are often divided. Shortly after work started on this book the county was voted the third least attractive in Britain in a national poll, rating lower even than some heavily industrialised areas. This caused mild outrage in the local press but it does suggest that Lincolnshire still suffers from an image problem nationally. Even today its countryside is frequently referred to in pejorative terms as flat, dull, bleak or nothing but arable fields, especially when compared to other parts of the country.

Some of this negative imagery is lodged in the national consciousness where it appears to have accumulated historically based on the comments of

FACING PAGE: **Nettleton Beck, Lincolnshire Wolds**

RIGHT: **dawn over Wingland Marsh, Fens**

various writers and even monarchs. On hearing of the Lincolnshire Rising in 1536, Henry VIII famously labelled the county as “one of the most brute and beastly of the whole realm”, though it is uncertain whether the insult was topographic as well as social. The exclamation attributed to George III appears almost sympathetic by comparison, but nevertheless reflects an outsider’s view of Lincolnshire that is essentially focused on the inner Fens – still only partially drained at the time – and the lurid descriptions of that area by contemporary writers who portrayed it as a dangerous wilderness of malarial swamps and restive natives. Such accounts made little or no reference to the advanced and prosperous

