



The East Fen differed from the other Northern Fens prior to reclamation in draining directly to the Wash via Wainfleet and Friskney. Physically, too, it had a network of permanent pools at its heart called The Deeps which are thought to have originated through the flooding of old peat workings, akin to the Norfolk Broads. There were some sixty pools in Dugdale's account of 1662, though this had reduced to around twenty just prior to Rennie's reclamation. The pools were all individually-named and accessible by boat via a complex of interconnecting channels called 'rows'.

Despite its permanent wetlands, the East Fen provided summer grazing and hay for the settlements of the Northern Fen Edge and those of the Wolds and coastal siltlands along its fringes (Neilson, 1920). Cranberries

were harvested commercially in the fen near Friskney, indicating that acid peat bog existed too. Padley records the fen's birdlife as including ruff, bittern and bustard as well as abundant wildfowl. Tragically, this rich ecology was erased by the reclamation, though a few commercial duck decoys continued to operate until the late 1800s. Banks himself wrote *The Mire Nymph* in 1807, a strange lament regarding the impact of drainage.

FACING PAGE: **sunrise from Silver Pit Drain, East Fen**

ABOVE LEFT: **Hobhole Drain near Toynton All Saints, East Fen**

ABOVE RIGHT: **Fodder Dyke near Midville, East Fen**