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THIS WAS FORMERLY A PORT CALLED BLAKENEY AND CLEY

Important Dates in the Maritime History of the Glaven Ports

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Plate 17: Sir Cloudesley Shovell by Michael Dahl c1702.



Plate 18: Sir Christopher Myngs attr. Peter Lely (Royal Museums Greenwich).

Poppyland Publishing is pleased to announce *This Was Formerly a Port Called Blakeney and Cley: Important Dates in the Maritime History of the Glaven Ports* by Jonathan Hooton.

In 1904, Kelly's Directory for Norfolk described the area around the Glaven estuary as, "This was formerly a port called Blakeney and Cley". Hidden behind this statement is the fascinating history of two north Norfolk medieval maritime powerhouses. This book looks at the key events that shaped the estuary's rise to medieval trading prominence, its subsequent commercial decline and adaptation to tourist destination by the early 20th century.

For those that enjoy looking for physical remains of the past, the author provides a guide to locating the existing evidence in the area. Explorers of local history can discover stories of war, piracy, wrecks, dramatic rescues, enterprise and disaster hidden within the buildings, mounds and graveyards of this small stretch of north Norfolk coast.

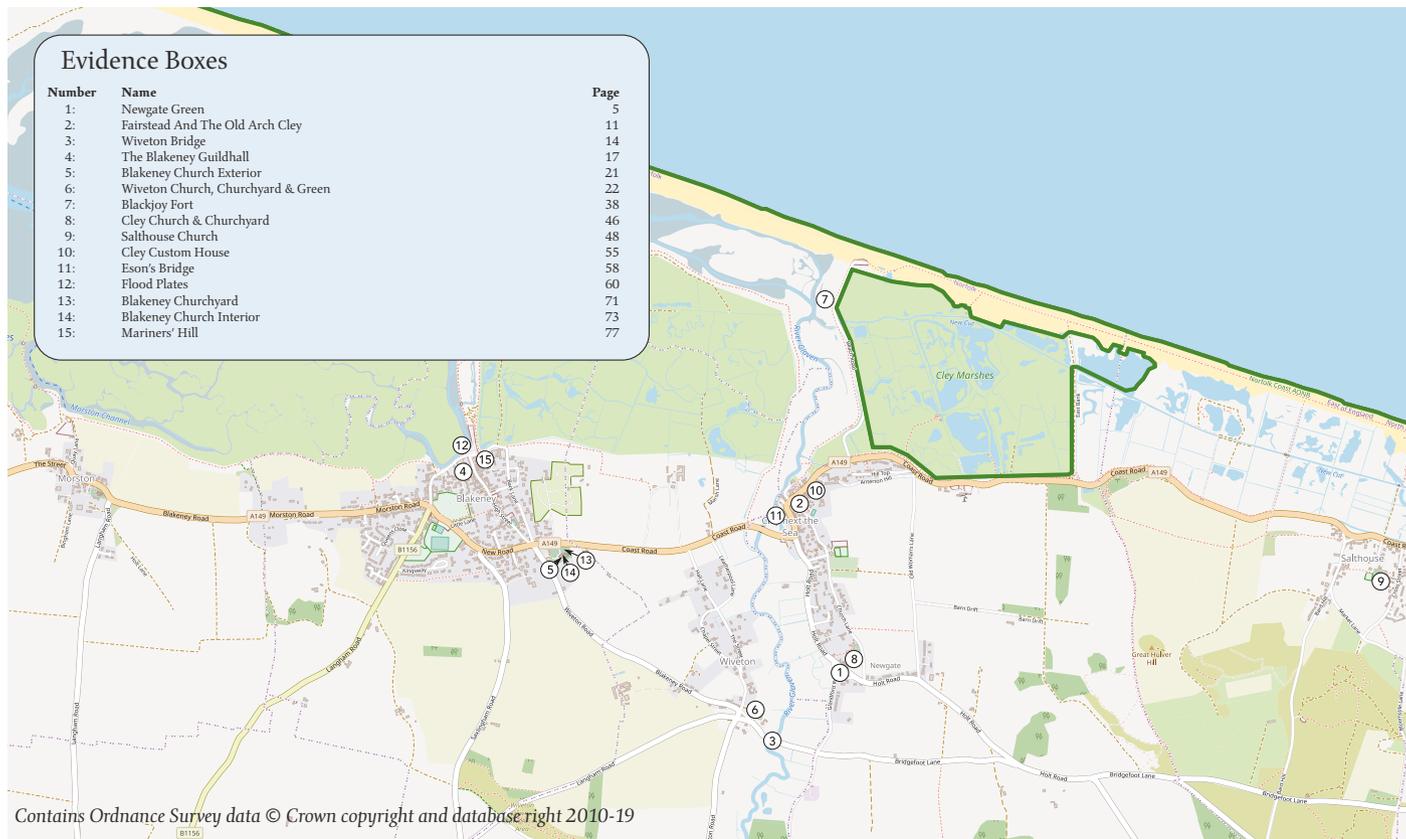
About the author

Jonathan Hooton taught geography and environmental science for much of his career leading many fieldtrips to the north Norfolk Coast. Active in the Norwich Society, being Chairman of the Society from 2015-17, he is also a fully qualified City of Norwich Tour Guide where he leads tours and gives talks. Among Jonathan's other interests are folk music, Morris dancing, cricket and landscape history. He is married with two children and lives in Norwich.



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4: Tudor Heyday

From Iceland to Crete

THE 16th century was probably the pinnacle of the maritime trade of the Glaven Ports. By the end of this century, they were sending vessels as far as Iceland in the north east and to Marseilles and Crete in the south. There was a steady trade to northern Europe and the Baltic states and the Port Books, introduced in 1565, show some years where the overseas trade was greater than the coastal trade. There was a steady number of ships engaged in trade along the coast—exporting grain, malt and other agricultural produce and importing coal, wood and building materials—visiting most of the ports from the north east down to those on the southern coast. The pattern of trade was similar to rival ports. Although in centuries to come there were more vessels using the ports, the number did not increase as much as other ports like Bristol and Liverpool. Unlike these ports, the Glaven was not able to take advantage of the trade across the Atlantic or the southern hemisphere that developed in the following centuries. The Glaven was not deep enough to accommodate the larger deep-sea vessels nor did it have a hinterland accessible from an extensive inland river system. In addition, it was not large enough to supply the capital needed to finance the growing colonial ventures. So the end of the Tudor period marked a relative decline in its maritime importance.

According to legend, a Cromer fisherman, Robert Bacon, discovered Iceland, although it is nonsense to assume that he discovered an unknown isle.¹ For some reason trade with Iceland had ceased during the previous century, which may have been due to a stranglehold placed upon it by Norway. However, by the beginning of the 15th century, possibly due to a relaxation in political control and the migration of fish from the North Sea, the east coast ports once again started to trade with Iceland. It is likely that the Glaven Ports were involved from the start, although the first documentary proof comes from 1438, when Roger Foulter of Cromer freighted a ship for Iceland owned by Adam Horn of Cley.² By the beginning of the 16th century it was a major part of the trade.

The importation of coal from the north east was also well established by the start of the 16th century. This was to remain the backbone of the Glaven's trade until its eventual demise, long after fish had ceased to be important. The Newcastle-upon-Tyne Chamberlain's accounts have survived for the period 1508–11 and provide a wealth of detail that illustrates the importance of coal to all the east coast ports.³ Yarmouth dominated the trade with 305 coal ships leaving Newcastle during this period. The total for all ports in north Norfolk amounted to 264—51 belonging to Blakeney, Cley and Wiveton. Although the majority of these vessels entered Newcastle in ballast, a number arrived with barley and malt, and smaller quantities of wheat, rye and herrings were also exported.⁴ Map 6 compares the relative importance of the Glaven Ports with other north Norfolk ports visiting Newcastle in this period.

1508–11

into the sees agayne.⁷⁷ They were granted permission and the channel from Stiffkey appears to have been dammed and diverted eastwards through a new cut, known as Bower Creek, into the main Glaven channel.⁵

The year 1565 saw a major change in the way that English ports were organised, with a view to increasing customs' revenue. The result was stricter control, the introduction of the Port Books and the port officials responsible for compiling them. Blakeney Haven was one of the creeks under the jurisdiction of Yarmouth, and described in the Survey of Ports and Creeks that year as consisting of three parts: "the first is Clay, the second is Wiveton and the third is Snitterly which being served with several crakes onto the same haven...all in the syhte of the Customer of Clay within the port of half a myle."⁹ Later, in the same document, it is recorded that Barnard Base was the Deputy Customer and had held the post for the last seven years.

The same year provides the first detailed survey of the ports, allowing a comparison to be made with others in Norfolk. The survey distinguishes between the larger ships, termed "Shippes for Island" and the smaller "Crayers and boats of burthen" which were described as carrying herring, coal, corn and merchandise. The following table shows that, although Yarmouth had the largest fleet, Blakeney Haven had more Iceland ships and a larger fleet than either Lynn or Wells.¹⁰

Table 2: Survey of Ports 1565

Port	Iceland ships	Boats of Burthen	Total
Cley	9	14	23
Wiveton	1	5	6
Blakeney	4	8	12
<i>Glaven total</i>	14	27	41
Yarmouth	7	104	111
Wells	7	7	14
Lynn	5	12	17

Seven years later there was another survey of merchant ships completed by Thomas Colshill, the Surveyor of the port of London, headed: "The number of shippes and vessels....being in all the portes and crekes within the realme of Englande" taken from the customs' accounts. This survey did not discriminate between Iceland ships and boats of burden but instead recorded all ships of over 6 tons in size.¹¹

1565

1572

Table 3: Port Survey 1572

Port	No. of ships over 6 tons	Tonnage of largest ship
Cley	13	60 tons
Wiveton	5	40 tons
Blakeney	16	60 tons
<i>Glaven total</i>	34	60 tons
Yarmouth	67	100 tons
Wells	11	50 tons
Lynn	24	100 tons

Table 3 shows a similar pattern to seven years earlier. However, these figures were not based on local knowledge, but taken from secondary customs' documents and compiled in London, so their accuracy might be questioned. Research, published on the accuracy of the Port Books, suggests that they under recorded the true extent of trade.

1573/4

The Port Books were special parchment books kept by customs officials and returned to the Exchequer each year. While the first of these books to survive for Blakeney were the coastal books for the period Michaelmas to Easter 1567/8, the first complete year for both coastal and overseas records cover the period Michaelmas to Michaelmas 1573/4.¹² These books show that the backbone of the coastal trade was the importation of coal from the north east and the exportation of grain and salted fish (brought in from Iceland). Many other commodities were prominent exports: salt, timber, iron, wine, luxuries, cloth and household goods arrived regularly as well as saffron, flax, animal skins, peas, beeswax and butter.

The foreign trade was also important accounting, on average, for a quarter to a third of all the trade recorded in the Port Books. Ships regularly visited Iceland returning with fish, and occasionally, wool, cloth, whale meat and gyrfalcons. A variety of goods came from Holland and Flanders, including brick, iron, building stone, pitch, rope and soap. Norway and the Baltic provided iron, timber, canvas and rope. Salt (for the fish trade) and wine came from France and Spain. The major export was grain and malt, although large numbers of rabbit skins went to Danzig. Coal acted as serviceable ballast if grain and malt were scarce.¹³

Another detailed survey from 1580 shows Blakeney Haven as second only to Yarmouth and as important as Lynn. Direct comparisons with 1565 are difficult as there was little uniformity in the way that the figures



Plate 15: Tudor ships from the 1586 map.



Figure 1: Ships cleared in and out from the Blakeney Port Books.

were compiled, however, the ships do appear to be larger and the rise in importance of Wiveton is striking. Wiveton also possessed the largest ship, the *Marie Grace* (120 tons), as well as three other vessels of 100 tons. Only three larger vessels are mentioned in the same document, the *Blacke Lion* of Lynn (140 tons), the *Clementes* of Wells (160 tons) and the *Gyfte of God* of Yarmouth (200 tons). The figures in Table 4, taken from this survey show that the Haven was an important and prosperous Norfolk port.¹⁴

Table 4: Certificate of Maritime Resources in Norfolk 1580

Port	No. of Ships
Cley	11
Wiveton	13
Blakeney	11
<i>Glaven Total</i>	35
Yarmouth	61
Wells	19
Lynn	32

1586

1586 is the date of the first detailed map of the area (map 2 p. 6). It was made to accompany a dispute about which manor held the Right of Wreck—the selling of cargo or ships' materials salvaged from a wreck could be a very profitable business. Goods collected from a Scottish ship wrecked at nearby Runton recorded in the Port Books included barrels of prunes and honey, alum, licorice, aniseed, pepper and playing cards, amongst other things. The result of the dispute is not known, but it does indicate that this part of the coast was seen as valuable and worth getting involved in a costly legal case, indicating a prosperous level of trade. Other benefits of the coast are seen in the illustrations shown on the map. There is a shepherd/warreneer (with what looks like a ferret on a lead, maybe after rabbits) tending a flock of sheep grazing on Blakeney Eye and just north of Morston, and others on the marshes, who appear to be cockling, or possibly collecting bait or samphire.¹⁵

1588

Blakeney was included in the plans to defend Britain against the Armada but emerged with little credit from the affair. As the threat of invasion loomed, Blakeney, along with Lynn, was asked to supply two ships of 60 tons minimum and a pinnace to defend their country. The mayor and aldermen of Lynn provided the *Mayeflower* of 150 tons and a 40 ton pinnace, but complained that “we hadd conference with some of the chefest of the saide Towne of Blakeney and with some of the Townes of Claye and Wyveton w'ch be members of the same Towne of Blakeney, and we fynde that they are unwilling to be att any chardge neare the furnyshyng of a Shipp.” There was a similar unhelpful response from Wells and the men of Lynn suggested the council tried writing to Blakeney again.¹⁶

There were fears that the deep water inshore at Weybourne (known as Weybourne Hope) may have been an invasion site and a map “made In hast this fyrst of May 1588” by Edmund York shows plans to build two forts at Weybourne and Blakeney as well as a wall and “intrenchment” along the marshes at Salthouse. The possible remains of the Blakeney fort can be seen east of the river Glaven on Cley Eye. The Weybourne fort would have fallen into the sea long ago but a field name at the coast “Sconce and No Man’s Friend Furlong” on a 1704 estate map of Weybourne, would seem to indicate that it had been built, since a sconce was

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