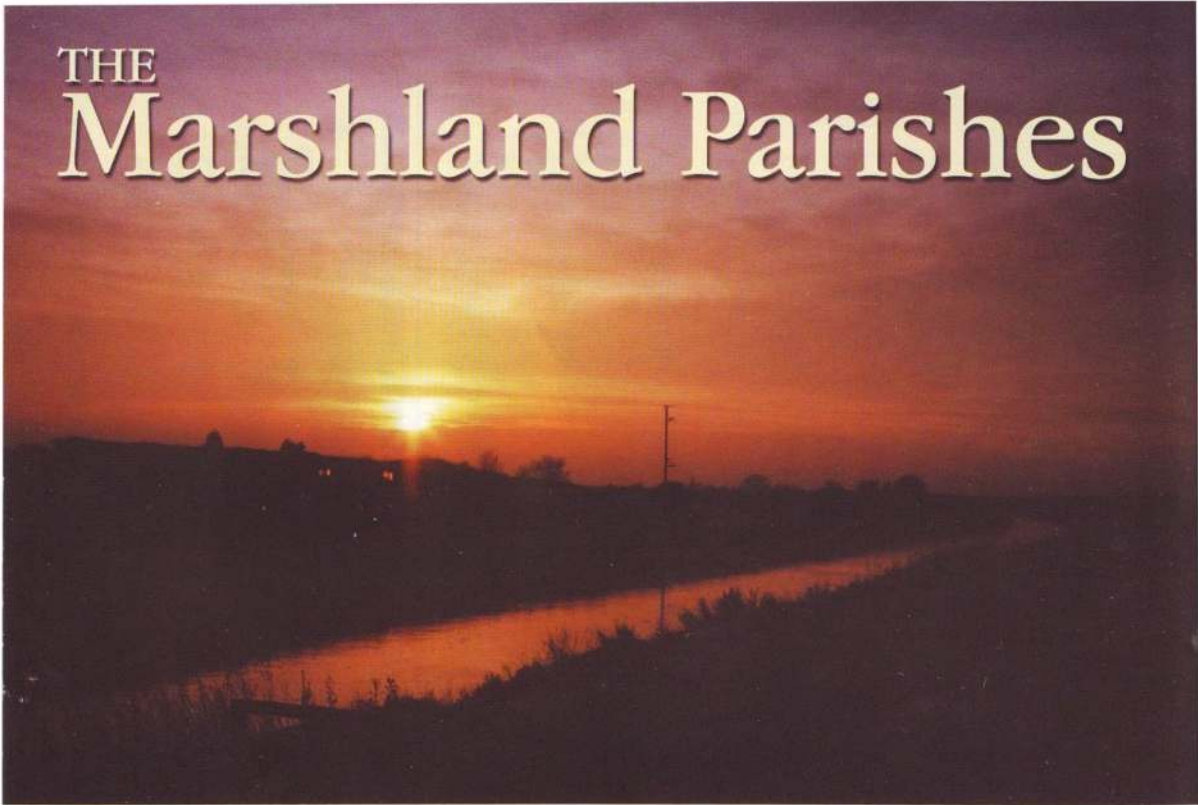


# THE Marshland Parishes



'The Yorkshire Weekly', circa 1891, in an article by Tom Bradley, described the Marshlands of East Yorkshire thus: 'Apart from the river itself, there is little of interest below Goole'.

I can only assume that Mr. Bradley had his eyes closed at the time, or was in dire need of a pair of spectacles. Even so, it could be that his words stuck in the minds of his readers, and were then passed on from generation to generation, because it is still a place where few will ever go. There are no road signs to guide you, no agency to promote its uniqueness, and it is far, far away from any recognised tourist trail.

From Goole you cross the Dutch River into Old Goole, turn left and follow the road. This is where, a few miles to the south, East Yorkshire slips away into the mists of North Lincolnshire.

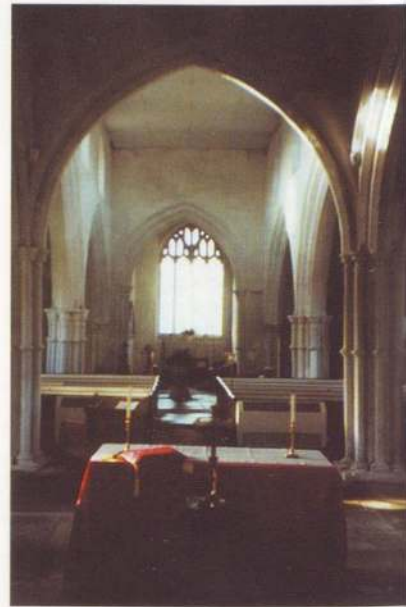


## JACQUELINE GILL is enchanted by the open spaces linking Yorkshire and Lincolnshire

However, before this happens you are in the moody and mysterious land of the Marshland Parishes, where the passing of time takes no longer because the landscape is so vast and flat, and sky so huge, the sun appears to rise earlier and set later.

Swinefleet, Reedness, Whitgift, Ousefleet, Adlingfleet and Eastoft, Marshland villages straddling the forlorn shores of the lower River Ouse, as it widens and flows into the Humber.

Perhaps the first hint of something special is the presence of a windmill, situated on the right, as you drive towards Swinefleet. There is also a farm, and a picturesque but derelict blacksmith's shop. In fact, there are derelict barns and workshops all along this stretch of road, from Goole Fields to Adlingfleet and beyond, ruins too, which add atmosphere to an area so steeped in history; where real and vibrant communities flourish, and



**Above (main picture):  
sunset of Vermuyden's  
Dutch River.**

**Above: the ancient  
interior of All Saints,  
Adlingfleet.**

**Left: disused blacksmith's  
— Edmund Wressell —  
Goole Fields.**



# THE Marshland Parishes



RE-PRODUCED FROM  
"The YORKSHIRE WEEKLY POST."

*Continued -*

Highlighted in the setting sun it becomes a wondrous expanse, capturing, absolutely, the mood of these isolated marshlands.

There is also a lighthouse at Ousefleet, to warn ships of a sandbank. Stand beside the river any day and you are likely to see cargo and container vessels on their way to and from Goole Docks; ships from distant shores, bringing with them the romance of far off places.

Beyond Ousefleet is the RSPB's reserve at Blacktoft Sands. The largest tidal reed-bed in England it supports a wide variety of birds, reed-bed and wetland species such as marsh harrier, avocet, bearded tit, shoveler and redshank.

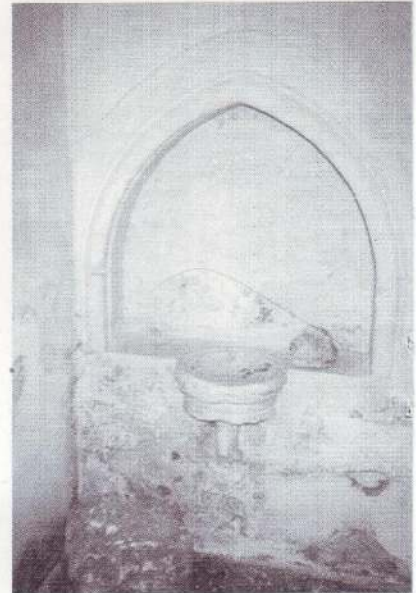
There are 54 breeding bird species in all, attracting more than 25,000 visitors. Blacktoft Sands are situated just above the confluence of the rivers Ouse, Trent and Humber, a vast and shifting stretch of water.

Our next stop is Adlingfleet — Prince Aethling's Stream. But who our fair-named prince was and where he came from we shall never know. There are no records of his existence as far as I know, but there may have been Norse connections.

At one time a great and prosperous port, situated on the River Don as it flowed towards the Trent, which then poured into the Humber, Adlingfleet was a deep-water harbour.

In the early 14th century, Edward I rallied his troops there — huge fleets transporting men, weapons, horses and supplies — prior to confronting the Scots, whom he sorely desired to conquer.

Unhappily Adlingfleet's prosperity was,



'Piscina' — All Saints' Church, Adlingfleet.

for various reasons, to be eroded over the ensuing two centuries. Its fate sealed absolutely in the early 17th century when, at the behest of King Charles I, Cornelius Vermuyden re-routed the River Don to flow into the Ouse at Goole.

Consequently, Adlingfleet was left high and dry which, I imagine, in these modern times, is counted as a blessing.

Today it is a quiet village, with yet another remarkable church, All Saints. I cannot begin to describe it here, you must go and see for yourself. Enough to say that within its walls there are bright blue box pews, several tombs, an impressive memorial statue, a curious, portable organ, painted green, and a 'Piscina', once used to wash Holy vessels.

Opposite the church is a tithe barn, sadly in ruins, which, it is thought, was



The ruins of the medieval tithe barn at Adlingfleet.





**A glimpse of the River Trent.**

constructed from stone taken from an early Whitgift church, built around 1130, later to be replaced by the church of St. Mary Magdalene.

Finally, after passing through Garthorpe and Luddington, we come to Eastoft, the last of our Marshland Parish villages.

It seems that once again Vermuyden has a lot to answer for, as Eastoft was also affected by the altered course of the River Don.

At one time it flowed through the village, dividing it into two, which to some extent is the case today. Part of the village lies within Yorkshire, and part in North Lincolnshire.

A sign, 'Isle of Axholme' is the 'frontier' where, according to those on the Yorkshire side of the village, the south of England begins . . .

Eastoft church, St. Bartholemew's, built in the 1850s, sits proudly on the Yorkshire side and, like the other three I have mentioned, is worth a visit. Unfortunately the doors to all four churches are usually closed and locked. So I can only advise you to find out before hand when they may be open for viewing.

Apart from the short drive back to Swinefleet, we are now at journey's end. Which leaves only the footnote: If you have never, before now, heard of the Marshland Parish Villages of East Yorkshire, let alone thought of going there for a day out, a weekend, or a few days' holiday, then allow me to advise you.

The area promises peace and solitude in an inspiring landscape, with a mighty river flowing through, and small communities of friendly people who will happily pass the time of day telling you about this lovely place.

Between Blacktoft Sands and Garthorpe, by making a short detour, you can gaze upon the River Trent. From almost anywhere you will catch glimpses of the Ouse, and if you are very lucky you will see a ship going by, on its way to or from some other world.

In fact, a day is hardly enough time to take all this in. If you wish to stay longer, and I am sure there will be those who do,

then comfortable lodgings are what you require, and I know just the place.

**Whitgift Guest House**, Main Street, Whitgift, has ten light and airy bedrooms — single, double and family rooms — all centrally heated and presented to a high standard.

There is a comfortable lounge, and a pleasant dining room, where, in addition to breakfast, lunches and teas are served to residents and non-residents. The guesthouse owner, Linda Harvey, also provides a free pick-up service to and from Goole railway station, for guests arriving without their own transport

Whitgift Guest House is a delightful place offering comfortable accommodation with that extra little 'nice' touch. Such as fresh, free-range eggs for breakfast — you will see the hens pecking outside — lovely bathrooms with a range of toiletries available should you forget to pack your own, and for longer stay visitors a free laundry service.

An 'Over 60s Afternoon', held each Thursday between one o'clock and four, offers afternoon tea, bingo, raffles and cards, etc., for a small charge of £3.75 per person. Visitors and locals welcome. For bookings, and all other enquiries, telephone 01405 704701. □

**Acknowledgements:** With great appreciation to the Right Reverend David Lunn, Bishop of Sheffield (retired), whose book, *'Rivers, Rectors and Abbots'*, was of immense value when researching this article. Many thanks also to Reverend Jon Whalley for his assistance. You may telephone the Revd. Whalley (01405 704643) for church opening times.



**Right: St. Mary's, Whitgift. Notice the door in the tower; now only half of it is above the ground due to settlement over the centuries. Inset (above): three minutes past 13 o'clock!**





family names go back to the days of yore.

Swinefleet is the first Marshland village you will come across, in the past known as Swyneflet and Swinflete; origins unclear, but they would appear to be a mixture of Norse and Dutch and have nothing whatsoever to do with pigs.

The church at Swinefleet, St. Mary's, is dedicated to St. Margaret of Antioch, the saint of childbirth. It is a delightful place, not usually open but the keys are available from the Vicarage, situated across the road.

It was from the Vicarage, after I had explored Swinefleet's narrow streets, its squat and crooked houses with a charm all their own, and climbed up onto the flood bank to glimpse the river, that I commenced my journey. My guide was the vicar himself, the Revd. Jon Whalley, who has been the Marshlands Parishes vicar for just over one year.

The Marshland villages of East Yorkshire run in a loop, culminating in a drive along the 'King's Causeway', a stretch of road linking Eastoft with Swinefleet, journey's beginning and end.

In between you will stumble on a way of life, in many aspects little changed through the years. Of course, there are four-wheel drive vehicles — this is farming country! — and the predominantly older type dwellings have been refurbished and restored, but the way is quiet, the landscape inspiring and always there is the river, its moods and relentless tides.

The villages of Reedness, Whitgift and Ousefleet follow Swinefleet. While old Norse words, 'ness' meaning a headland, and 'fleet', an inlet or stretch of river, give some clue to the origins of the names Reedness and Ousefleet, the origins of Whitgift are a mystery, to me at least. All I know is, John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1583-1604, had ancient family ties with the place.

In medieval times two great families flourished, the de Redenesses at Reedness and the de Usfleets at Ousefleet, giving further clues as to how these place names may have come about. It was a time when 'grete inundations' occurred, as the river flooded constantly.

Only then there were two rivers, the Ouse and the River Don. Its course diverted by the Dutch engineer, Cornelius Vermuyden, the loss of the Don, particularly to Adlingfleet, which I will come to later, was to rob it of its function as a significant port.

The church of St. Mary Magdalene, completed in 1304 and situated in Whitgift, will delight anyone; most notably, perhaps,

**Right: the River Ouse at Whitgift.**  
**Below: the Revd. Jon Whalley, vicar of Marshland Parishes, presiding over his first wedding at Swinefleet in July, 2001, of John and Rachel Johnson.**



because of its clock. It registers XIII o'clock, instead of XII, a mistake made when it was commissioned in 1919.

Sadly, this beautiful place is in urgent need of restoration and repair, the cost being in the region of \$500,000 or more.

If the money cannot be raised the building will be rendered structurally unsafe and lose its status as a church. If this were to happen it would be a tragedy, not just to the community but to the wider world, as this building, and others like it are part of our heritage. I can almost hear myself pleading with you to go there and see for yourself, this ancient place of worship. I know you will be impressed.

A chancel, added in Victorian times, seems to be the cause of the problem. It is sinking at a faster rate than the rest of the church, a process which is undermining the whole structure.

Huge cracks are forming, many of them very alarming. In addition (though, as I understand it, this is not a problem) the church tower, which over the centuries has settled deeper and deeper into its soft peat foundations, is now a leaning tower. A side doorway, only half of it visible above

the ground gives some indications as to how far the tower has sunk, a problem exacerbated by continuous flooding.

Inside St. Mary's, where the cracks are even more apparent, one can only wonder at this curious place, where the benign presence of all those who have ever worshipped within its walls is all round.

Across from the church the now high flood banks obscure the Ouse, which flows by the village. Please take the time to climb the steps to the top, the view is wonderful.

Moving on to Ousefleet, which I am told has a very dubious honour indeed; having an area known as the country's most featureless and boring field. And, indeed, it probably is, to some, especially those media people who took the trouble to highlight its existence.

Not to me, however. Its size is immense, there are no features whatsoever, save a pylon or two, and it appears to go on forever; but that is its virtue, its melancholy nothingness.

— Continued

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