Lady Margaret Beaufort, the Royal Council and an Early Fenland Drainage Scheme.

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At the beginning of the seventeenth century the map-maker and surveyor Jodocus Hondius, in a description of the ‘drowned lands called the Fens’, related: ‘Many conclusions have been tried for the draining of the Fens, and have not been undertaken only by mean men, but also by the greatest of the Court...’, one of the principal was the Lady Margaret, Countess of Richmond’. The apparent lack of evidence for this, both physical and documentary, has left historians sceptical. Wells, in his account of the Bedford Level, remarked: ‘History has left no trace of any design of draining by Margaret, Countess of Richmond. Hondius must therefore have been in error in asserting that such an attempt was made by her’. A more recent rebuttal of Hondius’s description occurs in H. C. Darby’s Medieval Fenland. However, by assembling a wide body of manuscript sources it is possible to trace the details of such a scheme. Although the project was far less ambitious than that of the Dutch engineer Cornelius Vermuyden in the early seventeenth century, it throws a fascinating light upon the interworking of local affairs and national government at the end of the middle ages.

Lady Margaret Beaufort, Henry VII’s mother, was a power to be reckoned with at the turn of the fifteenth century. Her possession of the trust and confidence of her son led to an influence in council and decision making noted by an astute foreign observer. Indeed the personal of her own and the royal council frequently overruled; she had her own court of equity and the king often delegated cases to her. Her influence in the localities was no less marked, for she had licence to retain servants on the crown’s behalf and possessed a substantial landed estate, valued at her death at over £3,000 a year. Her power was centred around Lincolnshire, where her officials were in regular attendance at the county assizes and her council-law acted as arbitrator in local disputes. She had close links with the towns of Stamford and Boston, and was a member of their respective guilds, St Katherine and Corpus Christi. Margaret’s principal residence, a magnificent palace at Colyweston, lay just across the Welland in neighbouring Northamptonshire from where her agents regularly travelled to the surrounding counties. The strength of her affinity in the area was symbolised by the measures taken shortly before her death. A massive gathering of servants and retainers in Lincolnshire and the Fen country was assembled at Horncastle, to hear the provisions of her last will and instructions for the future.

Two concentrations of lands gave Lady Margaret a particular interest in the Fens. The first were the manors that she had inherited from her parents around Deeping and Maxey. These properties lay on the edge of the Fens on the border of Northamptonshire and Lincolnshire and had been owned by the Beaufort family for nearly a century. Margaret’s mother, the duchess of Somerset, had moved to Maxey castle in 1444 after the death of her husband; Margaret had visited her many times and for a number of years had retained her own household at nearby Bourne (Lincs). Margaret herself was to undertake a new extension to the castle and used it intermittently as a residence. She also made a number of improvements to the site. Ditches were scoured and a flow of fresh water in the moat was achieved through erecting a small dam by the water-mill on the nearby Welland and building a small aqueduct to carry the river water to Maxey. The castle was used as an administrative centre for her Lincolnshire properties and her receiver’s accounts were regularly audited there. The second body of estates formed the honour of Richmond lands around Boston that had been vested in her by Henry VII in 1487. These Lincolnshire holdings represented the most valuable part of the whole honour, with the majority of manors forming a compact block between the Witham and the Welland, including rents and commercial revenues from Boston itself. It was this area that posed a particular problem in terms of drainage. The lands suffered frequent flooding in the previous two decades and the situation was steadily worsening. Although part of the damage was due to the inadequacy of coastal defences, the problem was exacerbated by the silting up of the Witham and the spillage when the river water met the incoming tide. The Crowland chronicle gloomily related the details of a particularly severe flood in 1467:

‘There was scarcely a house or building but what the streams of water made their way and flooded through... Nor on this occasion did the embankments offer an effectual resistance, but on the contrary, though materials had been brought from other quarters for the purpose of strengthening them, they proved of very little service for that purpose.’

Some idea of the escalation of these difficulties can be gauged from a study of one of the honour of Richmond manors at Frampton. Frampton lay on the marshy coastal plain between the estuaries of the Witham and the Welland. It was vulnerable to encroachments from the sea but more particularly from the Haven, the long narrow mouth of the Witham. As a result the lands were protected by a line of embankments on the south side of the Haven, as well as the usual system of sea defences. In the year 1461-2 slightly under £2 of rents were disallowed because the lands had become inundated. In 1483-4 the sum had risen to nearly £198 out of a total receipt of just over £2182: an enormous growth in respect of the regular payments for the maintenance and improvement of ditches and embankments. Lady Margaret’s council were forced to acknowledge the loss of many rents through the ‘great overflowing of the water’.

Details from Margaret Beaufort’s household and estate accounts show that she was a conscientious landlord as far as the everyday problems of fenland drainage were concerned. She was interested in making reclamation from the fens and succeeded in converting parts of Deeping Fen to agricultural use. Her workmen were regularly engaged in clearing the passage of the waterways and repairing banks and causeways: important activities that the counties and towns of sewers were designed to enforce over the whole area. New drains and sewers were constructed and fines collected from those communities that failed to observe their traditional obligations towards the upkeep of the dykes. Yet clearly the problems being faced extended far beyond the scope of these measures. One of the chief difficulties, the regular flooding of the Witham, originated in features common to river outfalls in many low-lying areas. The natural gradient of the river’s fall, together with the volume of water it contained, was responsible for its power in scouring out the river-bed. In the case of the Witham, with many fenland rivers, the gradient was very slight: the fall of water between Lincoln and Boston being only sixteen feet. The
Fig. 1 Portrait of Lady Margaret Beaufort by Wolf — By courtesy of the Master and Fellows of St. John's College, Cambridge.
result was a heavy deposit of silt on the shallow lower reaches of the river. This in turn meant that the downward force of the fresh water was no match for the strong tidal flow; the river water was forced back through the partially blocked outfall causing it to overflow into the surrounding area. These floods were much more damaging than the occasional incursions from the sea. They were more frequent, lay longer upon the land and caused greater disruption to agriculture.

The siting of the lower Witham directly affected Lady Margaret's own interests. It threatened to hasten the decline of Boston harbour and thus to reduce the commercial revenues and rents she received from the town. Moreover, the flooding of the river caused considerable damage to her properties in the region. To seek a more far-reaching solution she used her influence with her son to try and initiate a new and more positive national policy towards this area of the Fens. Significantly, there was an interest in drainage and harbour engineering among a number of Henry VII's councilors. John Morton, when bishop of Ely, had constructed a twelve mile long cut to divert the river Nene, with a sluice erected at Stanground. At Guyhirne the bishop built a tower so that he might survey the progress of the work. This ambitious scheme, which carried the waters of the Nene in a direct line to Wisbech, had been completed around 1490.16 Morton's interest in drainage may have been acquired during his exile in Flanders during Richard III's reign. He is known to have commissioned in 1488 men of New Romney consulted with him over plans for a new drainage cut to try and prevent the siting up of their harbour, and Morton despatched his surveyor to the town.17 John Morton was to recommend a specialist adviser for Lady Margaret's project. Another councillor, Sir Richard Guildford, the royal master of ordnance, had begun extensive reclamation of large tracts of Romney marsh in 1478. He had been prominent in measures taken late in the reign of Edward IV to improve sea defences in the marsh. By the turn of the century his work had made considerable progress, for in 1499 he was given licence to build a church at Guylforde Innynghe, "submerged for three hundred years and lately recovered by him at his own expense".18 Guildford had a clear flair for engineering design and construction and was to be heavily involved in Lady Margaret's scheme.

However, perhaps most interesting was the active involvement in the proceedings of Richard Fox, keeper of the Privy Seal. Fox, a native of Lincolnshire, was a notable builder with a particular skill in the use and diversion of water. At Norham castle he designed an aqueduct with doors and openings enabling the most to be flooded with water from the mill burn.19 His ability was recognized by Henry VII, who in 1492 had delegated to him the task of improving the haven at Calais by the construction of a new sluice.20 As bishop of Bath and Wells (1492-4) he had had some experience of drainage problems in the Somerset levels, arbitrating in a dispute over the blockage of the river Tone, as bishop of Winchester (from 1501), he was associated with harbour improvements at Portsmouth.21 Like Lady Margaret, Fox had strong local connections, also being a member of the important Corpus Christi guild of Boston.22

Henry VII's response to the problem was to delegate it to a body of his council, who were to work specifically on the topic. The record of what was probably the initial meeting survives among the muniments of Margaret Beaufort at Westminster Abbey. It occurred on 17 February 1495, when it was noted that the council had gathered to decide on the measures for 'the safety of the parts of Holland in the county of Lincoln'.23 The council's first reaction was not a particularly surprising one. A commission of sewers was to be appointed, including royal councilors, justices and local landowners, to meet in Boston to consider the problem. But the measures anticipated were far-reaching. A survey of all lands in danger of the sea was to be undertaken and a scale of charges for new works and repairs was to be drawn up according to the custom of Romney march. The guilds principle was mutual aid against the sea in an emergency, and the presence in the meeting of Guildford and Sir John Fyneux was significant. Both had personal links with Romney marsh and Fyneux, chief justice of the King's Bench, had served on at least three commissions of sewers in the region. In particular both men had been involved in measures taken in the 1470s to protect reclaimed areas adjoining Romney marsh from new threats of flooding. To meet this a semi-permanent body on the Romney marsh had been set up of commissioners, authors and expenditures, to assemble twice a year at Lydd. They were to tax property on an acreage basis, hire labourers and set their tasks.24

The commissioners were also to make inquiries concerning a possible remedy for the overflooding of the Witham. One suggestion was the stopping up of two of the arches of the old Boston bridge, built in the twelfth century and now in a considerable state of decay. Maintenance of the bridge was largely the responsibility of Margaret Beaufort, as part of the honour of Richmond holdings along the quayside. However a more radical proposal was also drafted, 'yet may be seen and proved whether a skulce shall be a continuell help for the safety of this place'.25 The proposal was incorporated under the original bridge to help scour the harbour, but had ceased to be effective long ago. The possibility of a new design touched on one of the most crucial aspects of drainage: the machinery used to control the movement of water.

Sluices had been in use in the Netherlands and Flanders from the eleventh century. Originally simple wooden liftlocks, their most basic purpose was to regulate the flow of water from river to drainage cut. One well-documented late medieval example occurs near Yattton on the north Somerset levels. A sluice had been constructed at Wemberham on the tidal stretch of the Yeo to prevent flooding across the lowlying coastal plain, with a drain and new cut running off from the river course.26 They were also used in ports to allow the build-up of a head of fresh water in order to scour the harbour and prevent silting. Such was the case at Wainfleet on the Lindsey coastline, where the river Lymn was diverted by means of two sluices from its normal outfall at Croft to clear the harbour.27 By the fifteenth century technology was becoming more advanced. Sluices on the Reie in Flanders had been rebuilt with stone recesses for separate fresh and sea-water gates, counterbalanced with lead weights. A large sluice built between 1406 and 1411 along the channel between Snargate and Romney had a Dutchman, John Onderdeel, as custodian and it was he who repaired and modified one of the gates.28

Thus a large sluice across a tidal outfall could be beneficial both in terms of preventing a sudden inrush of sea water and of allowing a sufficient head of river water to collect to prevent silting. Tidal sluices were coming into more frequent use by the end of the middle ages, one example being the construction of a sluice on the Brue at Highbridge in the Somerset levels in around 1485.29 Yet they still represented a complex and difficult feat of engineering. While it was not surprising that Henry VII's council had considered the possibility of a new sluice at Boston, the design was at this stage only tentative. The minutes of the meeting noted that it would be necessary to investigate how such a plan would affect the return of river water into the sea and the condition of Boston haven. Also the project would involve substantial expertise, for the movement of water in the Witham at the turn of the tide was consider-
able. At present it was merely recorded that inquiries should be made over who might be competent to carry out such a scheme.

This record of the council's meeting gives a clear indication that the problem was being treated at the highest possible level. The immediate result seems to have been substantial repairs and improvements to Boston bridge, supervised by Lady Margaret's receiver in the town.\(^9\) No further material on the council's discussions survives for the next few years, but a subsequent reference indicates that a number of members had been meeting regularly to consider the matter. For in February 1500, in a further meeting over the issue, it was noted that the body, 'by the King's commandment hath commen together several times with long delibration.'\(^9\) The group contained some of the king's most important councillors. Prominent were Richard Fox (keeper of the privy seal), Sir Reginald Bray (chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster), Sir Thomas Lovell (treasurer of the chamber and chancellor of the exchequer), Sir John Fyneux and Sir Richard Guildford. Moreover they represented men that Lady Margaret both knew and trusted. Fox was a former protege of Margaret's, and had on a number of occasions assisted her over problems in the administration of her lands.\(^1\) Bray was a longstanding servant and remained receiver-general of her estates until his death in 1503. Guildford also moved within the circle of Margaret's own household.\(^2\) With serious flooding occurring in Lincolnshire in the winter of 1499-1500, the final stages of a more far-reaching drainage plan were now being put into operation.

A Flemish engineer, Matthew Hake, was to be contracted, to build a large sluice on the Witham at Boston. Hake was from Gravelines, where a major programme of harbour reconstruction had been initiated in the mid-fifteenth century.\(^3\) The port's proximity to Calais suggests that the engineer might have come to the notice of Fox during the making of the sluice there in 1492. Hake had already submitted a bill to the council concerning the materials that would be needed for the work. These included large quantities of bricks, stone and lime and the more specific items necessary for construction. Large wooden doors were to be made in specially measured sections to form the sluice gates, together with fans, scoops, troughs, bolts and chains and other pieces of iron work. Both, scaffolding, oxen and carts were also required. The council noted that Hake's bill had been approved and that an indenture was to be sealed between him and appointed royal officials.\(^4\) Also, on the advice of Cardinal Morton, a Kentish expert, the master of the Domus Dei of Dover, was to assist members of the council over arrangements for the sluice. The man recommended by Morton, John Clark, had been involved in a major piece of harbour engineering at Dover in the 1490s. With the old area of the harbour sitting up he had built a completely new pier, the 'Wyke', which had been finished around 1495.\(^5\)

The council also decided that a new commission of sewers was to be put into operation, 'to meet at Boston to survey repairs and defences within the level'. The commissioners were to be assisted by jurats and surveyors from Romney marsh in devising a new scale of assessment for the works, based on the acreage and value of property of those towns and parishes threatened by the flooding.\(^6\) The personnel of the commission was significant, for it contained many of the councilors who had been meeting to discuss the problem, including Fox, Lovell, Guildford and Fyneux.

It was clear that a major initiative was underway, both to improve existing sea defences and to prevent further inland flooding. The indenture with the engineer Hake was sealed on 19 February 1500.\(^7\) The two men representing the crown both had strong Lincolnshire interests and long standing connections with Lady Margaret Beaufort. Sir John Hussey, son of the chief justice Sir William Hussey, was an esquire of the body who had risen rapidly to prominence as a royal servant in Lincolnshire. A landowner at Sleaford and Boston, a former sheriff of Lincoln, he and Sir Reginald Bray were stewards of a number of duchy of Lancaster properties in the county. A key role official in the area, he sat regularly on commissions of the peace and de wallitis et fossatis.\(^8\) Interestingly he had begun his career as a steward of Margaret Beaufort's manors of Maxey and Deeping and held an annuity from her charged on those lands.\(^9\) John Robinson was a wealthy and important Boston merchant and also a member of the Calais staple. His choice reflected the need to carry bulky materials from Calais to Boston for the construction of the sluice. He too was a former agent of Lady Margaret, having acted as her receiver for the various lands she held in Boston and supervised repairs made to the bridge in 1495.\(^10\) The indenture provided for Hake and a Flemish work-force of masons and labourers, to be paid up to the completion of a sluice and dam in the port of Boston. Hake was to make provision for iron work and certain other materials at Calais, the rest was to be supplied locally.

The financing of the sluice raised a particular problem, for there was no clear precedent for such a major work of construction. It was originally intended that the whole of the catchment area of the Witham should contribute towards the cost of the Boston sluice. However, until such time as the commission of sewers devised a scale of rating for the whole town, the single councilors, and immediate cash sum be raised by the crown and the chief landowners within the threatened region. A total of £1,000 was thought to be necessary. Royal letters were despatched to Boston concerning the loan on 21 February.\(^11\) The practical details concerning the collection of the levy were left to Lady Margaret. She was to appoint officials to assess and gather the payments for the sluice. In the interim her household officers were to receive the cash sums advanced by way of loan for the project.\(^12\) It is not clear how much was actually raised at this stage, but most of the immediate money payments were made either by Margaret herself or Henry VII.

The proceedings now moved with great speed. Sir John Hussey was at Boston on 16 March, when he, John Clark, and two other commissioners made rapid plans for Matthew Hake's arrival. Bricks and stones were to be gathered at St Botolph's churchyard, close to the river side. A ship was to be sent to Matthew and his company to Calais. Proclamations concerning the new arrangements were made in the marketplace at Boston. More specific details were left to the deliberations of Lady Margaret's own council, particularly over the actual siting of the new sluice.\(^13\) Large amounts of material were being gathered at Calais, and the royal privy purse expenses record a number of payments to Hake, for 'black tiles' and Flanders slate, in March and April.\(^14\)

By 13 May 1500 Hake and his company were in the Fens, where an indenture was driven up between him and Lady Margaret confirming most of the previous agreement and clarifying some of the stipulations. The total workforce was to be fourteen masons and twenty-four labourers, and it was laid down that Hake should abide by the 'order and rules of the said Princess's and King's Counsels'.\(^15\) Margaret was also responsible for contracting with additional workmen, including those involved in the peace and London.\(^16\) Work on the sluice started almost immediately. Old and broken down housing in Boston was purchased to provide bricks and other raw materials. A large storage area, Spayne's place, was acquired by Lady Margaret for
the scheme and additional pieces of equipment were also purchased by her. In the meantime the full commission of sewers had assembled at Boston and embarked upon a major survey of lands in danger of the sea. This high-powered inquiry, including Sir John Pynne, Sir Richard Guildford, Sir John Kendall and William lord Willoughby, remained at Boston while the reeve brought to the commissioners books containing the acreage of those townships ‘within the level of the sea’. These included not only those communities fronting the sea but also those without embankments but within the floodplain. On 14 July 1500 a scale for the assessment of a large part of the coastal region in Lindsey had been drawn up, replacing a previous survey compiled as long ago as 1345.

Work on the sluice continued steadily over the next two years. The king made further payments to Matthew and received regular reports on the progress of the scheme. In January 1501 £12 was paid to Hake for 6,000 slate tiles from Calais, and on 7 May he received £18 in full payment of his indenture for Calais materials plus £2 for a horse. Lady Margaret also provided money for particular items, including a ‘great ramme of brass’. Hake’s plan was ambitious but well conceived. A stone pier was to be built in the middle of the river, some thirteen feet wide and forty-four feet long. Doors were hung on each side, which closed against piers erected at the side of the river. The piers were connected together at the top by wooden beams, which formed a walkway over the whole construction. The work had been completed by the summer of 1502 and made a noticeable improvement to the easy drainage of this part of the Fens. Margaret’s controller of her household, Hugh Ashton, made a grand tour of Holland in June 1502 to inspect ‘the conveyance of the water’. One contemporary wrote appreciatively of the scheme: ‘If the salt waters should have had their course, they would have drowned the town and county . . . . When the sluice was made . . . all the East Fen waters came into Boston haven, and doth issue by the sluice’.

Although the sluice had been completed successfully the more practical consideration of payment and maintenance proved to be more complex. The council had delegated the organization of the levy to Lady Margaret, who was to appoint the receivers, bailiffs of the sewers, collectors and spenditors. The personnel was common to the court of sewers though here gathered for one particular scheme. The bailiff would be responsible for the assessment, the receivers and collectors for gathering the money and the expenditor for laying the cash out on the work required. The project was to be funded by the men of Holland, but a real problem was caused by the lack of definition of the boundary in a number of areas. Indeed one such disputed region involved Margaret’s own manor of Deeping, whose lands adjacent to Crowland also formed part of Kesteven’s boundary with Holland. As was common with reclaimed areas from the Fenland new rights were often contentious and Crowland and Deeping had been in dispute for over a century over a bank that the Abbot of Crowland had raised in Gogisland Marsh. Margaret’s father, John duke of Somerset, had forcibly evicted the abbey’s tenants from this stretch of marsh and compelled them to rebuild the bank elsewhere. The result was that the inhabitants of the region were in constant strife and the manorial accounts for Deeping record repairs necessary after a succession of incursions from Crowland. Marker crosses and boundary stones were hauled down and turf slabs removed. An embankment was deliberately breached flooding over two acres of meadow. The Crowland chronicler gloomily recounted the effects of a retaliatory raid by the men of Deeping. Margaret’s solution was to obtain from the king powers to empanel a strong commission of local landowners to achieve a clearer delineation of the boundary. The preamble to the commission explained why such a body had been called:

‘the most pious and most noble princess Margaret, Countess of Richmond and Derby, the most dear mother of our sovereign lord King Henry the Seventh, decided to restore the great bridge within the town of Boston and to renew or build a flood-gate or sluice beneath the same, and to construct it for the use of all the fens and marshes between the waters of Welland and Witham and all the country around Kesteven and Holland, and wished the same to be perpetually maintained and kept in repair at the costs and expense of the men of Holland, because they would derive most advantage from it, and especially the township of Boston by reason of the deeper harbour that would be created. And because
through quarrels moved by malice it is not clearly agreed by all where the limits metes bounds and divisions between the parts aforesaid lie or are placed between the waters aforesaid.\textsuperscript{57}

The commissioners, including Robert lord Willoughby, Thomas lord FitzWalter, George lord Hastings, Sir Robert Dymoke and Sir George Tailboys, met a panel of twenty-four jurors assembled by the sheriff of Lincoln on 4 September 1500 and began a several day tour of inspection of the disputed border. They appeared before Margaret Beaufort at her castle of Maxey on 8 September after a perambulation by land and water over some of the more difficult stretches of the Fenland. The results, a comprehensive delineation of the bounds between Holland and Kesteven were authenticated by John Anderson, mayor of Boston, and sent to the chancery as a permanent record.\textsuperscript{58}

The commission had restored a measure of order to an area suffering all the ills of demarcation disputes. As one justice commented appreciatively, the Lady Margaret, for the better drainage of the district ‘had procured an admeasurement and division of all the surrounding grounds, which beforetime lay promiscuously, a great work of excellent use, not for these times only, but the fruit of it hath continued ever since.’\textsuperscript{59}

With the sluice completed arrangements could now be made for collecting the levy from the people of Holland. Fragments that remain show that it was underway in 1502, with the parishes in each hundred charged not only on their extent but the relative benefit they derived from the sluice. Assessment was made at a rate of 2d an acre and was collected by justices of the sewers twice a year. Among Lady Margaret’s own properties Wykes, Frampton, Skirbeck and Kirton were the chief contributors.\textsuperscript{60} Margaret herself continued to oversee the provisions for maintenance and repair work, amounting to some £30 a year. Her accounts record regular payments to the expeditor of the sluice, right up to the time of her death. She also made contributions to those employed in further commissions of sewers in the area.\textsuperscript{61}

In the long term, how effective was the sluice? The records suggest that it was at best a limited success. Wykes, the part of Lady Margaret’s lands worst affected by flooding, continued to decline in value. Valuations of other her properties contributing to the sluice remained stable in the period from her acquisition of the lands in 1487 to her death in 1509.\textsuperscript{62} By the time of Leland’s visit to Boston in the 1530s the tide could be observed flowing as far as Dogdyke Ferry, several miles upstream from the sluice.\textsuperscript{63} Some of the difficulties were undoubtedly caused by inadequate maintenance after Lady Margaret’s death. Deterioration set in, and an ordinance of sewers of 3 August 1543 referred to the decay: ‘for the good of the whole continery the Fludgate, Sluice or Pile under Boston bridge shall be made of newe because it is in decay and be builden again in sort and order as the most Noble Margaret Countesse of Richmond and Derby first made it.’\textsuperscript{64} By this stage it seems clear that the sluice had become counter-productive. Fresh water blocked by the sluice was now overflowing further upstream. An insufficient head of water remained to effectively scour the harbour and further siting was occurring. A commission of sewers at Donington in 1547 recommended major modifications to the sluice, including the widening of pullets and the pulling up of piles, in order to allow the river water to run more freely.\textsuperscript{65} The overall condition of the structure continued to decline. A minute of Boston’s council of 11 January 1557 agreed that the bridge ‘shall go in hand to be repayed and amended’ and that timber be brought up from Tattershall for the new work.\textsuperscript{66} These plans were to be overtaken by events, namely a violent storm. A memorandum in the council minute book some two months later noted gloomily that ‘the old bridge fell down this year the twelfth day of March byng Caryng Sunday or ye Sunday before Palme Sunday between eleven and twelve of ye clock of the same day’.\textsuperscript{67} Thus ended Mayhake’s bridge, which had been something of a local landmark,\textsuperscript{68} although parts of the sluice were recovered and incorporated in a new work undertaken by the corporation, remaining in use until 1642.

Clearly the design of the Boston sluice was not without its faults. Yet its construction stands as a remarkable testament to Lady Margaret Beaufort. An energetic landowner, she used her influence and the leverage of her position to get commissions of sewers summoned.\textsuperscript{69} This, together with her standing in the locality, and connections with a number of Lincolnshire families serving on the commission, meant that the decisions taken were closely allied to her own interests.\textsuperscript{70} Her initiative over the condition of the Fens had been supported and augmented by a number of Henry VII’s council. The construction of the sluice, along with the separate drainage projects of Morton and Guildford, was of considerable importance, although unknown to Dugdale who stated that he had found no mention of any major works between the reigns of Edward IV and Elizabeth.\textsuperscript{71} A difficult and complex piece of engineering, it had drawn its inspiration from a corpus of royal councillors interested in the scheme, including both those associated with the region and others whose main concerns lay outside the Fenland.

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Notes
1. G. Mercator and J. Hondius, Atlas, or a geographie description, (2 vols, Amsterdam, 1638), I, 66. Hondius’s map, A general plot and description of the Fenns’, based on earlier survey work, had been brought out in 1632. It was dedicated to the, the earl of Dorset, who had commenced his major drainage scheme a year earlier: Victoria County History (henceforth VCH) of Huntingdonshire, III, 292.
2. S. Wells, A history of the drainage of the great level of the Fens, called the Bedford level (2 vols, 1830), I, 72. Similar comments are made by C. N. Cole, A historical account of the construction of the Bedford level (1803), xvii-xviii.
5. This estimate is taken from the executors’ accounts of Lady Margaret’s lands in St John’s College Cambridge (henceforth SJC) Archives, D102/7.
6. For awards made by Lady Margaret’s council see SJC Archives, D91/18; M. M. Condon, ‘Ruling elites’, 114.
8. SJC Archives, D91/19, pp. 91-2, 105, 118.
9. One interesting source for the presence of Margaret, duchess of Somerset at Maxey is the Book of Hours of the Beaufort family of nearby Deeping Gate. William Fairfax was a trusted servant of the Beaufort family and the opening of the book record the attendance of the duchess, her sister, steward and servants at the baptism and marriages of a number of the Fairfax children from 1445-70: Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ms. Lat. iturg. e. 10, ff. 7-15, 23-26. Fairfax was left an annuity of 10 marks by the duchess of Somerset (PRO, SC6/Hen VIII/358). Visits of Margaret Beaufort and her husband Sir Henry Stafford to Maxey are recorded in the Stafford household books among the muniments of Westminster Abbey (henceforth WAM), 12181, 12183(5).
10. PRO, SC6/Hen VIII/460.
11. Ingolph’s Chronicle of the Abbey of Croyland, tr. by H. T. Riley (1893), 443-3. On the general background see S. H.
Margaret for new works erected against the incoming water: LJC Archives, D102/10, p. 2.

WAM, 32355; PRO, SC6/Hen VII/1771.


41. For John Still, a servant of Lady Margaret, receiving a loan of £55 from a merchant of Boston, 10 March 1590, see Fenland Antiquaries, 1, p. 121.

Ibid., pp. 1074.

44. PRO, E101/415/5, ff. 13v, 18; P. Thompson, History of Boston, 358.

Fenland Antiquaries, 1, pp. 117.

46. SJC Archives, D102/6, p. 5.


48. A. E. B. Owen, 'The Levee Book of the Sea', 36-47. Contributions by Lady Margaret towards the costs of the commission are recorded in SJC Archives, D102/6, p. 6.

49. PRO, E101/415/3, ff. 42v, 52.

50. SJC Archives, D102/6, p. 5. The rain would have been used to drive in the plows which would have formed the foundations of the bridge and sluices. Similar references occur in work on Rochester bridge (1457-8), at Calais (1468) and at Westminster (1532): L. P. Salzman, Building in England (Oxford, 1952), 86. James Morice, Lady Margaret's clerk of the works, had made a full list of 'reparations' necessary for the sluices: SJC Archives, D102/9, p. 182.

51. SJC Archives, D119/20, p. 28. For a reward paid by Margaret to the master carpenter of the sluice, see Ibid., p. 32.


53. Fenland Antiquaries, 1, pp. 107, 115.


55. The receiver's account for 1483-4 lists the damage: PRO, SC6/909/16.


57. The existence of this commission is briefly noted by Dugdale, History of Imbering, 198. The full result of its findings, with seals attached, was preserved by the Spalding Court of Sewers and is now kept in the Archives Office (henceforward LACO) Sp. S. 503/101. A full copy and transcript exists in Fenland Notes and Queries, II (1892-4), 143-7, 209-11., 294-6.

58. Ibid. For an appreciative comment on the fairness of Lady Margaret's commission see Ingulph's Chronicle, 507-8.


60. PRO, SC6/Hen VII/369, 1772, 1773, 1905. For a reference to the collection of the subsidy in the duchy of Lancaster manor of Sutton, 'for the rebuilding of the bridge and renewal of the sluice at Boston', see PRO, D129/264/11, P. Thompson, History of Boston, 359, records an assessment levied by Lady Margaret on the hundreds of Kirton and Elloe, headed, 'For the collection for the sluice at Boston and amounting to just over £367.

61. Lady Margaret's accounts for 1507-8 record payment to Robert Crathorne and his fellow expediens of the sluice of £60: SJC Archve, D10/16, p. 23. For the arrangements for repair and maintenance see also P. Thompson History of Boston, 251; Fenland Notes and Queries, III (1895-7), 48-51. Margaret's contribution to the costs of Richarh Lynne, engaged on the commission of sewers in 1504, is noted in SJC Archives, D119/20, p. 165.

62. These comments are based on valuations of Lady Margaret's properties made circa 1487 and after her death in 1509, and the minister's accounts for the honour of Richmond holdings in Lincolnshire: WAM, 32355; SJC Archives, D102/7; PRO, SC6/Hen VII/1771, 368, 369, 1772, 1773, 1905.


64. LAO, Sp. S. 503/1-3.


67. Ibid.

68. For a brief description of the bridge and pile see Leland's Itinerary, V, 36.

69. Some useful comments on Lady Margaret's efficiency as a landowner, in connection with her administration of the estates of the duke of Buckingham, are made by C. Rawcliffe, The Staffords, Earls of Stafford and Dukes of Buckingham, 1394-1702, I, 103, 121. Margaret's involvement with judicial commissions was noted by seventeenth century lawyers: Callis's reading on the Statute of Sewers, cited in C. H. Cooper, Memoir of Margaret, 124.
of Richmond and Derby (Cambridge, 1874), 79.

70. Thomas Welby of Moulton, on the commission of sewers in 1495, was the deputy of Margaret's half-brother John Lord Welles for the stewardship of duchy of Lancaster lands in Lincs. (WAM, 14741; Somerville, *Duchy of Lancaster*, 577). Lady Margaret's connection with the Welby family is also shown in her letter circa 1501, cited in Cooper, *Lady Margaret*, 66. Thomas Kyme of Friskney, also on the commission of 1495, again had an association with Margaret (SIC Archives, D56/5) and was to marry Cecily, widow of John Lord Welles, around 1500: P. Thompson, *History of Boston*, 387; G. E. Cokayne, *Complete Peerage of England* (12 vols, 1910-59), XII, ii, 449-50. An important factor here lies in the role of the Corpus Christi Guild of Boston, of which Margaret, Lord Welles, Welby and Kyme were all members. After Welby's death she took an active interest in ensuring that lands he had purchased for the guild were properly delivered (WAM, 16017; for her interest in Kyme's election see SIC Archives, D56/5).