Beyond the Sea Bank: Sheep on the Huttoft Outmarsh in the Early Thirteenth Century

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Already in the twelfth century Lincolnshire was, in Stenton's words, 'a county of great sheep runs'. Not surprisingly, the chief flockmasters seem to have been the monasteries, and writers on the medieval wool trade have tended to emphasize the pre-eminent of the Cistercians as large-scale sheep farmers, especially in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. They were, says Donkin, 'probably more deeply committed to wool growing, and certainly to supplying the overseas trade, than any of the other monastic orders'. Yet the records suggest that in Lincolnshire there can hardly have been a single religious house, of whatever order, without a substantial interest in sheep farming in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Two examples from monasteries in Lindsey may serve to show the size of flocks belonging to other orders. The Gilbertine priory of Alvingham was granted by Thomas de Arci, temp. Henry II, pasture in Coningsby near Flixborough not only for twenty-seven beasts (animalia), two mares, and sixteen pigs, but also for 1,000 sheep 'by the great hundred', i.e. 1,200 reckoned by the long hundred of six score. The Premonstratensian abbey of Newhouse acquired from various sources c.1150-60 grants of pasture for 700 sheep with their lambs at Cauborne, 300 in the marsh of Habrough, 300 at Barnevby, and 200 at Binbrook, besides 300 at Norton Disney in Kesteven; later in the century it was agreed that at Killingholme the canons 'should not have more than 200 sheep in the middle field in right of the village church or of the lands which they held by the gift of Nicholas de Arci'.

The better survival of monastic records may, however, give a misleading impression, for lay owners of flocks were by no means lacking, though we tend to hear of them when they were parties to transactions with religious houses. Simon of Kyme, for example, had acquired from William Berner pasture for 100 sheep together with a sheepfold in the marsh of Habrough before granting it in the early thirteenth century to Nun Cotham priory. Since the pasture there for 300 sheep acquired by Newhouse, mentioned above, had been obtained from an earlier William Berner, we may assume the Berner family, like that of de Arci, to have pastured flocks of similar size on their properties before assigning their rights to the respective monasteries. On the coastal marsh of Huttoft, with which the present article is mainly concerned, flocks belonging to both lay and monastic owners are known, as will be seen, from early thirteenth-century charters of the Gilbertine priory of Bullington which had sheep there of its own. These charters reveal a complex, not to say confused, situation in which pasture rights in a single parish were disputed between three religious houses and two lay lords—an indication of their value to the parties concerned.

A substantial part of this marsh, here as in neighbouring villages, was situated extra le Haudike, i.e. outside the sea bank (the meaning of the Old Danish word haufik from which Haudike derives) which had been constructed piccemeal between the Humber and the Wash, at some period before about the middle of the twelfth century, for protection against the sea wherever natural sand dunes were lacking (and perhaps even where they existed). The extent of this outmarsh is now hard to appreciate since in succeeding centuries it has almost everywhere been progressively swallowed by the sea, together with much of the bank itself (Fig. 1). But the numbers of sheep pastured there are, as it happens, some of the best evidence we have for its former extent; and an attempt to measure this—it can be no more than the roughest of estimates—is made later on the basis of this evidence.

It seems probable that the three monasteries—Bullington itself, the Cistercian abbey of Louth Park, and the Augustinian priory of Markby—all derived their pasture rights at Huttoft from grants by members of the powerful local Kyme family; and in seeking to explain how the disputes arose we may note that, as Dr Wades has observed, in many of the early grants to Bullington, itself a Kyme foundation of c.1150, 'the exact amount of land was not specified. Woodland and pasture were rarely given in precise terms, although occasionally specific acreages of meadow were granted, or pasture for a definite number of sheep on the common land of one or both villae'. There were, of course, practical problems of exact definition if land newly brought into use lacked either natural or man-made points of reference, as may be seen from one of the charters considered below, where a
boundary had to be defined by nothing better than 'the divisions made by a plough furrow and by stones and stakes interposed'. We may suppose such a situation to be reflected in the grant by Philip I of Kyme temp. Henry II to Bullington of properties which included 'the whole moiety of my pasture and meadow of Huttoft and Sutton with all their appurtenances'. This pasture can probably be equated with what is mentioned in a grant to the priory by his grandson, Philip II of Kyme, before 1224 (over before) 'pasture for its 600 sheep in my common pasture of Huttoft' and a subsequent grant of 'all the land and pasture I had in Huttoft outside the Hauedik and the common pasture within the Hauedik in my meadows everywhere after the hay harvest'.

Louth Park's claim to pasture for nine score sheep, within the pasture in Huttoft 'next to the sea' which Bullington had from Philip I, is, in the subsequent agreement with Bullington, attributed explicitly to a grant to Louth Park by Philip. Markby's claim, which is particularly well documented, stemmed from 'instruments' received from Philip and his son Simon entitling Markby to keep a specified number of sheep on the outmarsh at an agreed rent. As to the lay lords, the ancestors of Ketelbert of Keal had had, long before Bullington priory was founded, a footing in Huttoft where a forebear of the same name had been a Domesday tenant. The thirteenth-century Ketelbert may thus have had a claim as good as, if not better than, Bullington's to pastures rights there. But he may also have benefited from a Kyme connection, since he held a quarter of a knight's fee from the Kyme barony in the neighbouring village of Sutton in 1242-3. Robert of Well, on the other hand, had no holding in Huttoft; the right of common on its outmarsh said to have been enjoyed by his ancestors and tenants was presumably linked to his holding in Sutton, whose inhabitants may well have intercommunicated with their neighbours on an undivided outmarsh.

A policy decision by Bullington to bring to an end a previously anarchic use of the outmarsh is implied by the enrolment together, on B. L. Harley Roll A29, of the definitive agreements made between 1235 and 1243 with all four of its competitors for pasture, along with two of the earlier documents concerning its dispute with Markby. The Markby dispute seems to go back furthest and is the most fully documented, so was perhaps the spark which caused Bullington to take this initiative. From references in the ultimate agreement of 1239 between the two houses it seems that Philip I of Kyme and his son Simon originally granted to Markby the right to keep a total of (by the long hundred) 600 sheep on the Huttoft outmarsh, 500 at a rent of five shillings and the rest 'in pure alms'. It must therefore have been unwelcome to Markby when c.1230 Simon's son Philip II gave to Bullington all his land and pasture beyond the Hauedik and told the prior of Markby that his rent must now be paid to Bullington. Subsequently, as mentioned above, Philip gave to Bullington, besides all his land and pasture extra le Hauedik, common pasture everywhere in his meadows intra le Hauedik after the hay harvest, as well as his sheepfold and three acres of meadow in Garedale and the Markby rent; he remitted provision of a sheepfold which Markby had been accustomed to find for him at its own expense.

The 1239 agreement with Markby which settled this dispute stated: 1. Markby might continue to keep 500 sheep on the outmarsh for a rent of five shillings and a further hundred 'in pure alms' (to be paid now 17 June) to Bullington as though acting for Philip II, who gave it and his pasture outside the Hauedik of Huttoft to Bullington in alms with the body of his mother Roisa. 2. Markby renounced its right, acquired from Eudo and Roger of Farlesthorpe and Hugh of Tattershall, to fifty perches of pasture in breadth, 'and in length from the Hauedik of Huttoft to the sea' in North Marsh. 3. Bullington granted pasture in South Marsh to Markby for 300 sheep only, for thirty pence rent, Markby to have free passage to and from its sheepfold on Musholmthorpe through South Marsh as far as the water of Scinlmar, over which it might make a bridge for its sheep in South Marsh wherever convenient. 4. If Markby's sheep were suspected of exceeding 300 in South Marsh or 600 in North Marsh, Bullington might, three times a year, impound those in each pasture and keep any in excess of the agreed number until proportionate satisfaction had been received. Bullington was to make the count on three days of its choice other than in lambing time (tempore quo matricis ovium etat), announcing the day to Markby's lay brother or shepherds so that they might count together; if the Markby men would not come, the Bullington lay brother or the prior's representatives should nevertheless impound and count the sheep.

Subsequently Markby granted to Bullington two named pieces of marsh in Huttoft beyond the Hauedik, with another in the north-west corner of le Suthere to 'the bounds and divisions made by a plough furrow (per araram cuissidian carucem) and also by stones and stakes interposed towards the south', and undertook not to enter them at any time for pasturing or communing or driving sheep or other beasts. Bullington in return guaranteed to Markby, everywhere else in the marsh of le Suthere where Markby was accustomed to have common, the agreed pasture for 600 sheep. In a further agreement Markby granted to Bullington free common for all its sheep and beasts in Markby's dalia called Langedall in Huttoft meadows, 'that is, in the whole west enclosure from Midedlick to Earl's Bridge', from St Calixtus' Day (14 October) to St Valentine's Day (14 February), with an entrance twelve feet wide on the south side of the dalia during that period every year to enable Bullington's stock to enter for pasture, failing which, Bullington's men resident at the Hauedik could make the enclosures themselves.

A single document seems to have sufficed to settle each of the other disputes. In 1235 Bullington surrendered to Louth Park all common and right claimed in the pasture in Huttoft next to the sea which John of Maringhe gave to Louth Park, and which extended northwards from the dike between Huttoft and Anderby. In return Louth Park surrendered to Bullington its own claim in the pasture there which Philip I of Kyme gave to Bullington, except for Philip's gift to Louth Park of pasture rights for nine score sheep there on the south side of Butdike.

The agreement with Ketelbert of Keal in 1236 concerned a pasture called Pintelhounerske in Huttoft. Bullington, for eigthepence annual rent payable at Martinmas and Whitsun, granted to Ketelbert, who had relinquished all claim to the pasture, and to his heirs the right to keep fifty sheep there under his own shepherd, with a through passage to it from his own land. Lambs born of those sheep in any one year might follow their mothers until the feast of Trinity; thereafter any found in the pasture might be impounded by the priory and either reckoned by Ketelbert and his men as among the fifty sheep or removed altogether. Any sheep above fifty might lawfully be impounded, released to Ketelbert or his men by relinsh and removed immediately. Distraint might be made on the sheep for unpaid rent.

Under the agreement with Robert son of William of Well in 1243, Bullington granted him the right to keep not more than five score sheep, either from his own demesne or belonging to his tenants in Sutton, on the pasture beyond the Hauedik in his own lordship at Butdike; his tenants were accustomed to have common. The shepherds were never to enter any demesne pasture or to have common where the priory had its severalty. Bullington might impound them at will four times a year and retain any above five score until reasonable satisfaction had been made for the excess, according to the law of the said pasture and of the marsh. They were to be under guard; if for lack of this they went anywhere and caused damage or entered the priory's demesne
pasture, they would be impounded in the priory’s pound until satisfaction had been made.\(^{24}\)

Sheep in Lincolnshire were customarily counted by the long hundred of six score. By converting to standard reckoning the ‘long’ figures already given, we find Bullington’s four competitors were permitted flocks totalling 1,410 sheep; adding to these the 720 belonging to Bullington of which we have knowledge, this gives a nominal maximum of 2,130 sheep on the Huttoft outmarsh. Some reduction in numbers during the winter months might be expected, and is indeed implicit in the provision for Bullington to pasture all its stock in Markby’s meadow between mid-October and mid-February. As against this, the arrangements for counting competitors’ flocks suggest that over-stocking at other seasons was a common practice. Donkin has noted ‘widespread evidence of pressure upon grazing land during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and of [religious] houses being only too ready to overstep their rights if given the slightest opportunity’,\(^{25}\) and the situation at Huttoft looks very much like an example of this. Whatever constituted over-stocking can only be guessed at, since I have failed to discover contemporary stocking rates on any land which might be of comparable quality. It seems improbable that the rate on the Huttoft marsh could have equalled, let alone exceeded, that achieved on the bishop of Winchester’s demesnes, where it has been calculated that the high rate of stock per acre in the mid-thirteenth century was about two per arable acre.\(^{26}\) A possible comparison is with the 300 sheep kept by Rievaulx abbey in 1162-75 on 300 acres of mora, probably marshland on the edge of the Vale of Pickering, though this apparent rate of one sheep per acre would have been exceeded if counted by the long hundred.\(^{27}\) Ryder remarks upon high stocking rates by Kelso abbey in the later thirteenth century with between one and three sheep per Scottish acre (1.3 times the size of an English acre), though he points out the need to allow for the smaller size of the medieval sheep, and he comments that the average stocking rate on moderate land in Scotland today is about one sheep per acre.\(^{28}\)

What we do not know is the actual acreage available for the Bullington and other flocks on the Huttoft outmarsh. However, something more than a guess can be attempted. The priory possessed a long of approximately 4,000 yards. If, for argument’s sake, we suppose a stocking rate here of 1.5 sheep per acre, the postulated total of 2,130 sheep would require to occupy 1,420 acres. A calculation based on these figures shows the outmarsh to have extended some 1,700 yards seaward of the medieval sea bank, the Huttoft outmarsh. Undoubtedly as this may appear today, it is by no means impossible, since documentary evidence shows that existing outmarsh has even now the entire length of that bank and a portion of the outmarsh (now in its turn protected by a later bank) varying in width from a narrow strip at the northern (Sutton) end to around 800 yards at the southern (Anderby) end. In contrast, almost everywhere else on this coast the sea has claimed not only all, or almost all, the outmarsh but the medieval bank behind it as well, while the sites of four medieval churches (Mablethorpe St Peter, Trusthorpe, Sutton and Skegness) are now at or below low water mark.\(^{29}\) Assuming a proportionate loss at Huttoft, there must have been ample pasture beyond the sea bank there in the early thirteenth century for the flocks of Bullington and its competitors.

This must have been the case also in neighbouring parishes. In Anderby, adjoining Huttoft on the south, Geoffrey son of Eudo granted to Lincoln cathedral c.1250-30 pasture for forty sheep, two oxen, two cows, and a horse, with right of access through the whole common pasture inra Hauedich et extra, while in the next parish, Mumbery, the Cistercian nunnery of Greenfield had already acquired by c.1175 pasture for 300 sheep ultra Hafdic.\(^{30}\) We are less well-informed elsewhere, but may guess that when pasture, or merely ‘land’, beyond the sea bank was given nominal maximum of 215 sheep for purpose specified, sheep are likely to have been among the beneficiaries, as at Mablethorpe where in the mid-thirteenth century Robert son of William of Well, whom we have met already, granted to Greenfield all his lands, tofts and crofts, meadows and pastures inra Hauedich et extra. We may draw the same conclusion when latter still, though erosion was already taking its toll, Robert’s grandson, another Robert, was able in 1320 to give to his brother John his property in Sutton, Huttoft and Trusthorpe including sheepfolds, meadows, pastures and marshes infra fossatum maris quam extra.\(^{31}\) Nowhere on this coast but in Huttoft, however, has so detailed an account of sheep-keeping on the outmarsh yet been found.

The recorded sea-floods on the east and south coasts of England for a period of seventy-five years between the eve of the Black Death of 1347-50 have recently been tabulated by Bailey in a study of their economic effects. He emphasizes, however, that much of the information available about these floods is unreliable or lacks detail.\(^{32}\) It is clearly difficult to measure with any precision, when we have very little idea what was there in the first place, amounts of land permanently lost to the sea. In filling out the picture it is therefore of no small value to possess an identifiable base line such as the Hauldike, and with it to possess information such as is available at Huttoft concerning what lay beyond that bank before the earliest known floods.

**NOTES**

11. B. L. Add. MS 6118, p.725.
12. B. L. Harl. Ch. 44 H 48.
16. B. L. Harl. Ch. 44 A 35.
17. B. L. Harl. Roll A 29, nos. 1, 2.
18. B. L. Add. MS 6118, p.725.
19. B. L. Harl. Ch. 44 A 35.
20. B. L. Harl. Ch. 44 G 7.
22. B. L. Harl. Ch. 44 H 48.
23. B. L. Harl. Ch. 44 A 51.
24. B. L. Harl. Ch. 44 A 38.
31. Lincolnshire Archives Office, 2 June 1/18/1, 1/12/15.