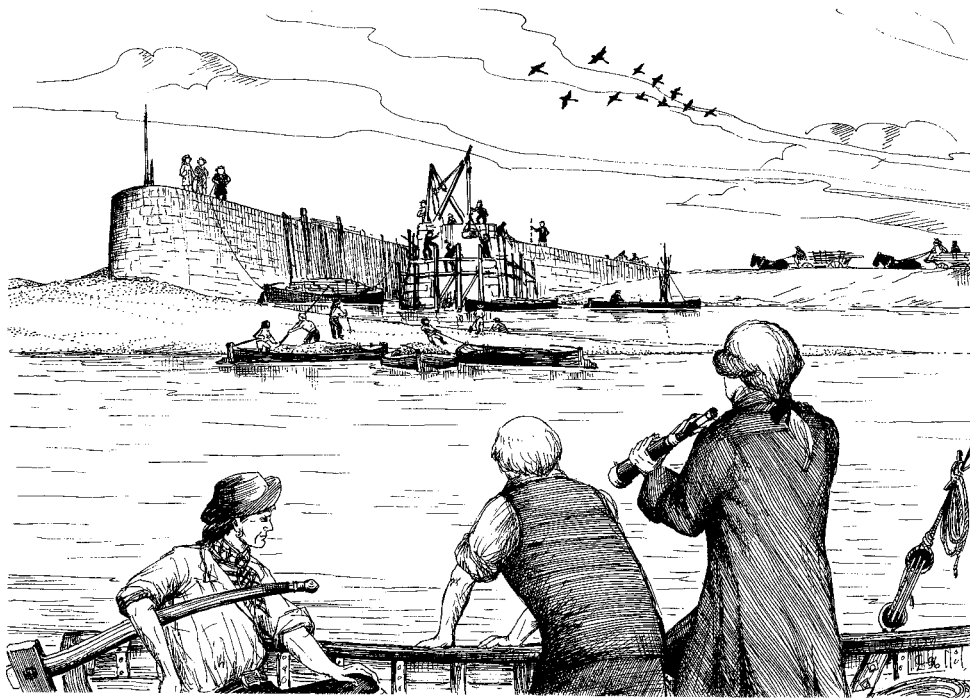

AN ACCOUNT OF THE ORIGIN AND FORMATION OF THE HARBOUR
OF THE

ANCIENT TOWN OF RYE

(FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1841)

OF THE CAUSES OF ITS PRESENT DECAY AND OF THE MEANS
WHEREBY IT MAY BE RESTORED TO ITS PRISTINE DEPTH AND CAPACITY
SO AS TO BECOME A
**CONSIDERABLE TIDE-HARBOUR AND A USEFUL
HARBOUR OF REFUGE**



SECTION III

OF THE NEW HARBOUR;
OF THE ACTS OF PARLIAMENT PASSED FOR MAKING THE SAME;
AND OF THE TOTAL FAILURE THEREOF

BY

JOHN MERYON

FORMERLY A COMMISSIONER OF THE SAID HARBOUR

NATURE WILL ASSERT HER RIGHTS OVER HER WORKS, AND) SHE AVENGES, BY THE PRODUCTION OF DEFORMITY, ALL ATTEMPTS TO FORCE OR SHACKLE HER OPERATIONS. WE OUGHT LONG AGO TO HAVE BEEN CONVINCED THAT THE ONLY POWER ALLOWED TO US IS THE POWER OF DIRECTION.

Chapter 1

The Port of Rye

We have no account of the state of the port of *Rye*, for many years preceding the commencement of the eighteenth century; but, from the actual appearance of the lines or *fulls* of beach (as they are locally called) on both sides of the present harbour, coupled with an entry in the corporation books of *Rye*, there are great grounds for the supposition that, as the point of beach advanced eastward beyond *Camber Castle*, it continued to force the entrance to the port onwards with it towards *Guildford*, until it was very considerably more to the eastward than it now is.

For all the lines of beach on the east side of the harbour, where the light-houses now stand, curve from south-west round to north, exactly as those on the west side of the harbour do; showing that they were formed from the westward, and that, when formed, they were on the west side of the entrance to the harbour.

The guide for vessels entering the harbour in the night-time was at first a light in the south-east angle of a castellated building, called *Ypres Tower*, (now the gaol of *Rye*;) and, as there was only one light, and that so far from the sea side, it may be presumed the entrance to the port was very wide, and that vessels coming in from the sea had only to bring the light to a certain bearing by compass, (say north-west,) so that, by sailing in with it in that direction, they would be kept clear of the shore on the west side of the entrance.

But, as the beach advanced to the eastward, and the entrance became narrowed, greater precision was required in going in or out. Two lights then became necessary instead of one; and we find by an entry in the corporation books of *Rye*, an order that another light should be “hung out o’ nights on the south-west corner of the church, for a guide to vessels entering the port.”

Now a light on the southwest corner of the church being brought in a line with the gaol light points nearly out to the east side of the beach on the east side of the harbour, which confirms our supposition as above stated; and a farther corroboration of it also is that, in the memory of people now living, there were extensive flats near *Camber Farm*, where the sand-hills now are, which were generally covered with water, and bore every appearance of having been the bed of an old river.

If then we are correct in the supposition that the entrance was forcing itself into the east shore, the land owners were no doubt alarmed for the safety of the marsh lands on the east side of the harbour; and, as a removal of the entrance farther from them would ensure their safety for some time, this was most likely the cause of a determination to make a new mouth or opening through a narrow part of the beach more to the westward, and to stop up the old entrance, leaving all that beach where it still remains on the east side; and, by turning all the waters, in and out, through the new opening, to remove the danger of letting the sea break through into the marshes.

There are no records in the harbour or corporation books to show when it was done; but, as the beach was then, as it now is, always accumulating on the west side, and forcing the mouth of the harbour eastward, the threatened danger was only set back for a time, to return again as formidable as ever.

Circumstances and appearances, however, would lead us to suppose that the attempt was made either late in the seventeenth or early in the eighteenth century.

Chapter 2

The Right to Toll

Neither is there any thing in the harbour or corporation books to enable us to form an opinion as to what led to the plan of making a second new mouth to the port, or as it was always afterwards called, the "*New Harbour*," in 1724; a work, on which vast sums of money were for a length of time so uselessly expended, and which then was suddenly abandoned.

Whether it originated with the government, as a matter of national importance, with a view to have a good harbour of refuge on this part of the coast for the mercantile trade of the country, or whether the inhabitants of *Rye* were roused to a sense of the injuries inflicted on themselves by the deterioration of the port, and were in hopes of reviving the prosperity of the town by the proposed plan, it is now difficult to discover; but we fear from neither cause; for the constitution of the commission by the Act, and the manner in which the works were carried on the whole time it was in progress, show but too clearly that the principal motive originated in the schemes of the proprietors of the adjoining marsh lands, who were planning how to secure their marshes from the encroachments of the sea, without being at any expense themselves; and so contrived to lay it on shipping.

Perhaps too the leading members of the *corporation of Rye* were not without some expectation of pecuniary emolument to be reaped from the works that were projected; at all events, their proceedings during more than half a century, (as appears by the harbour books,) show very clearly they were not in the least backward in taking every advantage of such gains as offered themselves.

But, having no better grounds to go on, a very reasonable conjecture presents itself.

The *Rother* had now become completely identified with the *port of Rye*, without a probability of its ever being again separated; the body of land-owners, who were dependent on it for the sewage of their lands, was very much increased; and, as the harbour's mouth was no doubt still pressing eastward toward the sea-walls of *Guildford*, the desire of putting as effectual a stop to it as possible most likely led to the idea of making another entrance to the port, three miles more to the westward.

It was resolved, therefore, to cut a channel from the sea to a bend in the *Brede River*, one of the branches of *Rye Harbour*, which passed within three quarters of a mile of the shore; to stop up the old mouth; and then, by connecting the *Rother* with the *Brede* and *Tillingham* rivers, to turn all the waters out that way.

Accordingly, as the shipping interest of the port, or even of the kingdom, bore no comparison to its present importance, and as the landed interest was locally all powerful, an *Act of Parliament* was asked for and obtained, without the least opposition, for a *Passing Toll* on all vessels sailing up channel.

Chapter 3

Harbour Commissioners

The *Act of Parliament* was the 9th of George I, and was entitled “An Act for completing the Harbour of Dover in the County of Kent, and for Restoring the Harbour of Rye, in the County of Sussex, to its ancient goodness.”

So far as relates to the *Harbour of Rye*, it levied a passing toll of three pence on all vessels of twenty tons and upwards to three hundred tons; two-thirds of which were to be appropriated for the benefit of *Rye Harbour*, and the other third for the benefit of *Dover Harbour*.

The commissioners appointed by the Act were, the *Mayor of Rye* for the time being, and five persons therein named, (they were five jurats of the *corporation of Rye*,) on behalf of *Rye*: also twelve proprietors and owners of lands lying in the upper levels, in the county of Sussex, and twelve owners and proprietors of lands in the five waterings of *Walland Marsh*, all now sewing and draining into the *Harbour of Rye*.

The Act was to be in force twenty-one years: and it is to be observed, that from this time the name of the *Camber*, as relates to the port or harbour, is entirely dropped, and neither in the harbour or corporation books does it afterwards occur.

The main features of the harbour, in 1724, were in a great measure similar to what they are at present; except that the principal channel from the *Rother* passed, after reaching the spot called *Pollard's Wharf*, in a S.S.E., and then in a southern direction, through what are now called the *Corporation North Salts*, to the *Holmbush Point*; and from thence out to the sea in nearly the same line as it now goes.

The *Tillingham channel* had about the same direction which it now has, as had also the *Winchelsea or Brede River*; except that it was much more serpentine for nearly two miles from the *town of Rye*, to where it suddenly turns westward toward *Winchelsea*, than it is at present. And it was from this bend in the channel that the intended new cut was to be made, which was to be the new *Harbour of Rye*.

The channel connecting the *Brede* and *Tillingham* rivers with the *Rother* was at that time also much more serpentine. Beginning a little below the *Strand Wharf*, at the place now called the *Edward's Dock*, it went straight to where *Harvey's Shipyard* now is: from thence through the *Factory Field* to the *Gun Garden Cliff*; from thence to the *Fish Market*; from the *Fish Market* one channel took nearly the same direction (downwards) which the channel does at present, and fell into the *Rother* at the *Holmbush Point*; another channel, or rather a creek, went north from the *Fish Market* through what is now called the *Corporation Field*, close in to the *Landgate*, and from thence on to the *Rother* at *Pollard's Wharf*.

Chapter 4

Gilt-Edged Progress

The Act of Parliament having passed, the first commission, by virtue of it, was held at the *Court Hall*, at *Rye*, the 10th of May 1724, and nearly all the persons that were appointed commissioners by the Act attended.

From this time all the subsequent proceedings to be narrated are taken from the harbour books, except some few circumstances which passed during the last thirty years within the memory of the author, and during the period that he himself was a commissioner of the harbour.

At the first commission the Act of Parliament was read; and, the projected works having all been previously arranged and determined on, the commissioners went the next day to view the land through which the new channel was to be cut to the sea, as also the land that would be required for straitening the *Brede channel* from the intended new cut up to *Rye*.

They also appointed a committee to treat for the purchase of the land, and to negotiate with the *Governor and Directors of the Bank of England* for a loan of money to carry on the intended works of the harbour. One of the jurats, who was named in the Act to be one of the commissioners on behalf of the town, “quitted all claim to act as a commissioner, and withdrew;” and, at another commission, held May 16th, he was appointed treasurer to the commissioners, with a salary.

Other commissions were held in that year, at one of which Captain Perry (or sometimes spelt Parry) was appointed engineer to carry on the works. And at one held in August, the jurat resigns his office of treasurer, and is succeeded by a freeman of the corporation.

The jurat afterwards becomes a contractor, and, in conjunction with another jurat of the corporation, supplies the harbour works with stone, timber, &c.

The committee report they have agreed with the several proprietors of the lands that would be required, and have borrowed £4000 of the *Bank of England*.

Besides the channel to be cut, it was intended to erect two pier-heads to form the entrance to the new harbour; to erect a large stone sluice and draw-bridge, with gates, across the new channel, about a quarter of a mile within the pier-heads; to wharf the two sides of the new channel with timber from the pier-heads up to the sluice; to straiten the *Brede channel* from the intended new cut to *Rye*; and afterward to connect the *Rother* with the *Brede* and *Tillingham* rivers, and to turn all their waters out of the new harbour.

It was resolved to begin with the new channel, pier-heads, and stone sluice.

For these it was requisite that a large quantity of timber, stone, and other materials, should be brought into the old harbour, to be transported by land carriage from the town to the works: and as the straitening and widening the *Brede Channel* from the north end of the intended new channel to the town would require all that part of the castle land (then salt marshes) that lay on the west side of the tide-wall, between the north end of the intended new channel and *Rye*, and the purchase of which had been agreed for by the committee, the commissioners ordered a draw-bridge to be built over the channel at the spot called *Edward's Dock*.

It is to be observed that, previously, there had been no road that way, the road to *Winchelsea* being then by *Udimore*.

A ditch also was ordered to be dug on the east side of the serpentine tide-wall of the castle land, to separate the slice of land purchased for the harbour from the land out of which it had been purchased, that the wall might be widened and beached to form a carriage road from the town for the purpose of conveying the materials to the different places required. The earth dug out of the ditch served to make the wall ten feet wider for the road; and it soon became the best as well as the nearest road from *Rye* to *Winchelsea*.

Chapter 5

Nice Little Earner

It appears very clearly, by the harbour books, that the erecting of the bridge near the town, and completing of the ditch and road, occupied them about four years; and that at a commission, held the 28th of July, 1728, the Committee report that preparations are made for getting on with the principal works.

At the same meeting *the mayor and jurats of the corporation of Rye* are appointed a committee to carry on the works "as they may think proper."

We learn also from the same documents that as nearly all the commissioners, except the *mayor and jurats of Rye*, lived at great distances from the town, very few of them attended the commissions after the first meetings. The commissions likewise were now much less frequently held - seldom more than one in twelve months, at which the Committee made their reports; but the books shew that very few resolutions were entered.

A Mr. Thomas Manley, who filled some official situation at the *Custom House* in *London*, discovered that the passing toll of three-pence per ton was very irregularly collected and transmitted from the different custom-houses of the outports; and offered to see it properly done if the commissioners of the harbour would defray the expenses he might be put to for that purpose.

This was assented to: and the commissioners were afterwards so well pleased at his having, by his attention to it, raised the income from £ 1,500 to £ 2,000 per annum, that, after a short correspondence on the subject, it was agreed he should be paid five shillings in the pound for every pound by which the income should be raised above £ 2,000; and for the year 1729 he was paid £ 145 7s. 4d. for his poundage.

In 1742 Mr. Manley died; and a jurat of *Rye* was appointed agent in his stead. How he, living at *Rye*, could know whether the dues were properly collected, does not appear: however, he had the place and the poundage for the thirty following years.

It appears, by the harbour books, that the works were continued under the direction of the committee until 1743, in which time the two pier heads were built, the stone sluice and wharfing were finished, and the channel (or canal, as it is always called in the harbour books,) was partly dug out; when, "in consequence (they say) of the war with *Spain* and *France*, the income is much reduced, and, the harbour being £ 11,000 in debt, the commissioners suspend all the works, reduce the salaries of all their officers, and, as the harbour Act expires in 1745, they resolve that the debt shall be paid off as fast as money comes in."

From this date, as money comes to hand, the committee continue to diminish the debt until 1749, when the agent reports the income to be considerably improved.

Chapter 6

Licence To Print Money

There is nothing more mentioned in the books about the Act being renewed; but that it was done so, for twenty-one years longer, appears from subsequent notices.”

In 1752 the income had continued to improve; and an order is entered, that “all the officers shall have their salaries advanced to their original sums and be paid the deficiencies they had been subjected to.”

Mr. Crittenden (tenant of the *Castle land*) made several complaints to the commissioners of their not keeping their fences good between his and the harbour land; but the commissioners refuse to do it, doubting whether they are liable.

In 1752 Mr. Charles Martin (one of the commissioners) protests against the agent’s being paid so much poundage this year, (£ 266 11s. 3d.) he, the agent, being *mayor of Rye*; but the next year it amounted to £ 350.

In 1753 the construction of the works still remains suspended. “The freemen of the corporation and principal inhabitants of *Rye* petition the commissioners to go on with the harbour works as money comes in, and request permission to repair the draw-bridge near the tower, to be repaid when the works are resumed, which was granted.”

In 1754 the agent’s poundage is reduced to three shillings in the pound instead of five.

The works appear to have been suspended till 1756, when orders for payments for labour and carpenters’ work begin to be made again; but no resolutions are hitherto entered to shew what particular works they were for.

In 1757 the committee report that “all the debt is paid off;” and, by the orders for various payments, (but no mention is made what for) it would appear they had begun, or were about to go on, again in earnest.

The treasurer is ordered to pay nearly £ 300 for the expenses of persons attending the *House of Commons*, £ 137 for surveying the harbour, besides £ 800 for materials, labour, &c.

And then follows a number of resolutions for works to be undertaken, and an order for works to be executed; then an order for the committee to proceed with them as they (the committee) shall, from time to time, think proper.

In 1758 the committee report they have made preparation for works, which is confirmed by bills that are ordered to be paid for timber, fagots, barrows, labour, &c amounting to £ 1,466.

In 1759, July 10 (for it would appear that the commissioners only met once a year) at this meeting £ 2,374 19s. 6d. was ordered to be paid for carpenters’ and blacksmiths’ work, labour, &c.; and orders are given for the following works to be proceeded with, viz., “to repair the sluice gates; to have the whole length of the canal (channel) dug to its proper depth and breadth;’ to heighten and strengthen the walls on each side of it, and to strengthen the wall between the canal and the *Brede Channel*; to build the present west pier head eight feet higher with wood; to make a groin at the back of the west pier head from the top of the beach to the sand, about two hundred feet, for the purpose of stopping the beach and facilitating the building the pier farther out; ‘to remove the beach and earth’ from between the pier heads for the opening of the harbour.”

Thus, then, thirty-four years after passing the Act, whilst all vessels (passing it) had paid toll to it from that time, we have the first intimation, given of preparations for opening it for their admission.

In July 1760 the works appear to have progressed considerably faster than usual; and the committee report that the works ordered to be done at the last meeting are finished.

It does not appear by the books that any commission was held in 1761; but in July, 1762, the committee report that, “they have contracted for a large quantity of rock, square oak timber, fagots,” &c. They report, also, “that the foundation of the west pier head, two hundred feet beyond the stone pier out to sea, is finished; that the timber groin from the west pier head, one hundred feet down upon the sands, is fixed; and that the beach to let in the sea is cleared away; also that the banks, (walls) at several places where it was necessary to be done, had been heightened.

Immediately after which is the following entry: “Whereas a doubt has arisen whether this commission has power to remove the beach and earth from between the pier heads to open the harbour, as ordered at the last commission, it is now ordered that the members be desired to apply to *Parliament* for a bill to empower the *Commissioners* to let the sea and tides in so far as is now perfected.”

Chapter 7

John Smeaton FRS

Thirty-five years had now elapsed since the works were first begun, in which time the stone sluice and two pier heads had been constructed; a channel (the 'canal) about three quarters of a mile in length had been dug out, the lower part of the channel wharfed, 'and some other work 'had been done at the pier head.

Thus, for example, very soon after the west pier head was finished (in 1780) an order was given to build a groin (as proposed by Captain Perry) from the inner end of the west pier head to high-water mark, for £ 417 5s. 0d. by which it appears that the pier heads were built on the sands at the foot of the beach, and "that the groin was intended to stop the beach from travelling to the eastward, and by that means to connect the pier head with the beach on the west side of the intended entrance to the harbour.

July 14th, 1762, is the following entry: "Whereas by an Act passed this last session of Parliament the commissioners and trustees for this harbour are authorized and empowered to let the sea into the new cutt, or canal, so far as the said *Winchelsea Wall*: and whereas the works of the harbour are so far compleat as to permit the same now being done: 'it is therefore hereby ordered that the sea be forthwith let into the said new cutt, or canal, so far as the said *Winchelsea Wall*."

There were two more commissions held this year, (Aug. 16 and Nov. 4). At the latter a petition is ordered to be presented to the *House of Commons*, praying to prolong the duties for repairing the *harbour of Rye*.

A new Act was obtained, but there is no farther mention of it in the harbour books.

In July, 1762, the committee report that "they have contracted for more timber, fir balks, deals, plank, &c., and that the west pier head is nearly completed; that the wharfing on each side of the canal is put in good repair;" and the treasurer is ordered to write to Mr. Smeaton for his estimate of the harbour for which he has charged in his bill. There is nothing mentioned before of Mr. Smeaton.

The meeting was adjourned to August, but there is no entry of any meeting held.

June 4, 1764, the treasurer is ordered "to pay Mr. Smeaton £ 10 10s. for preparing clauses for the new Act of Parliament lately passed; also to pay several bills; and to give notice in the *London Gazette* and provincial papers for the first meeting of the commissioners named in the new Act lately passed."

Whether the new Act only included the *Mayor of Rye* on the part of the town I have not been able to ascertain, but no mere jurats make their appearance at the commissions.

It appears by the harbour books that when the preparations were complete for letting the tide into the new canal as far as the *Winchelsea Wall*, (that is, the embankment or earth that had been left between the upper end of the canal and the *Brede Channel*, where it was intended to connect them by letting the tide go beyond the wall) a doubt was raised whether the existing Act empowered them to let the tide go beyond the wall.

The objection was started by the proprietors and occupiers of the adjacent marsh lands, who feared that by opening the new harbour the mouth of it would be brought so much nearer to their lands than it had previously been, that the tides would rise to a greater height near them, and might overflow the tide walls or embankments.

Accordingly there was a clause inserted in the new Act compelling the commissioners to invest £ 5,000 in *Old South Sea Annuities* or other government securities, to be a fund for making good such damages as should accrue to the owners of certain marsh lands near or adjoining to the *harbour of Rye*.

The Act was renewed for twenty-one years longer, and it authorized the commissioners to erect another sluice (called the *Brick Sluice*.) It was denominated a navigable sluice, but it stopped the tide from flowing up the *Brede Channel* beyond it, and, being a still farther protection to the marshlands in the *Pett and Brede Levels*, was only an impediment to navigation and to the flow of the tidal waters.

Chapter 8

Best Behaviour

Although there is no resolution entered in the harbour books to shew for what purpose Mr. Smeaton, the engineer, had been called in, yet from former orders and subsequent entries it appears that it was to view and make a report upon the harbour, as he recommends certain works deviating in a few particulars from the original plan proposed.

The first meeting of the commissioners by virtue of the new Act was held at the *Red Lon Inn, Rye*, the 18th June, 1764, at which the several principal land owners named in the Act were present, but neither the mayor nor any of the *jurats of Rye* are mentioned as being there.

A Mr. Cooper is ordered to proceed with the works, under the direction of a committee of seven of the commissioners. The former agent, doorkeeper, and engineer were reappointed, (a freeman of the *corporation of Rye* had been previously appointed doorkeeper, with a salary of three pounds per annum,) and the orders of the former commissioners were confirmed.

Although every thing had been reported ready, and the Act for opening the mouth of the new harbour and letting in the tides as far as the *Winchelsea Wall* had been obtained, yet no positive order appears in the harbour book directing it to be done.

But an order at the next meeting, Jan 4, 1766, "that the wall between the canal and the *Brede Channel* should be cut, to turn the waters out that way," shews pretty clearly that it had been done; and subsequent orders will shew that for the want of a sufficient scour of back water it closed completely up again.

At this meeting, (January, 1765,) Mr. Green, who had been recommended to superintend the works, is ordered to survey the walls, and give notice to the landowners of the Pett and *Brede Levels*.

At the same meeting Mr. Green gives in a plan and estimate (£ 3,415 4s. 9d.) for the new brick sluice.

At a meeting held September 3rd, 1766, the engineer is ordered *not* to cut the wall at the upper end of the canal until further orders, and the December following he is ordered to do it as soon as he thinks proper.

At the next meeting, 27th June, 1767, the canal is reported to be swarved; the commissioners complain of their waters not getting away, and more openings are ordered to be made in the stone sluice.

June 7th, 1768. It is ordered "that before the wall at the head of the new harbour is cut through, the road from the said wall to the draw-bridge (at the stone sluice) shall be put in good repair."

Also ordered, that a notice be published in the *London* and provincial papers of a meeting of the commissioners to be held at the pier head on the 25th of July, to take into consideration the works necessary to be performed before the new harbour can be completed; and whether the fund granted by *Parliament* be adequate to the expense of those works.

And in case the commissioners shall be of opinion that the fund is not adequate to the expense, then to deliberate what steps will be necessary to be taken by them. All persons interested in any of the levels are requested to attend at the same time.

Chapter 9

Business As Usual

July 25th, 1768. Present the Bishop of Chichester and eighteen other commissioners, resolved *nem. con.* "That it is the opinion of this commission that the fund granted by *Parliament* is more than adequate to the expense (as calculated by Mr. Smeaton) of making the works that are necessary for completing the *harbour of Rye* upon the present plan."

Resolved, "That the navigable sluice cross the *Winchelsea Channel* be put in good working order before it be delivered up to the commissioners of the *Brede, Udimore, Westfield, Guestling, Rye, and Winchelsea Levels.*"

An estimate was taken in 1724 of the land that would be required to make the channel from the canal to *Rye strait*, and the engineer is now ordered to procure such timber as he thinks necessary for carrying on the works. And it is resolved that "Whereas it appeared to the commissioners, from a due consideration of several circumstances attending the carrying Mr. Smeaton's plan into execution, and from *accidence* apprehended, that there is a great and evident necessity to deviate from the said plan: it is, therefore, ordered that notice for a meeting of the commissioners for that purpose be forthwith given in the *London Gazette* and provincial papers to meet at the *Court Hall, Rye*, the 22nd of May, 1769."

There is no mention in the harbour books of a meeting having been held that day; perhaps it was altered, for on the first of June following a meeting was held, at which twenty-five commissioners were present; and it was resolved "to widen, deepen, and straiten the channel from the upper end of the canal to *Rye*, so as to be thirty feet wide at the bottom, each side to batter at the rate of three feet horizontal to one foot in depth; the bottom to make a part of a plane regularly inclined from the lower end of *Scot's Float Sluice*, upon the *Rother*, to the sill of the great sluice; the banks of the canal to be at least twenty feet from the brink; to be six feet o'top; to batter three to one towards the canal, and one to one landward.

Also to widen, deepen, and straiten the old channel of the *Rother*, to the east or southward of the *town of Rye*, (this was to make the *Rock Channel*.) in a proper manner, so that the bottom be between twenty and thirty feet wide, and agree with the inclined plane aforesaid; its sides to have the same batter as the former; and its banks to have the same dimensions o'top, and the same batter and distance as before described."

This last resolution was for the making what is now called the *Rock Channel*, to straiten it for the purpose of passing the *Rother* waters with less curve into the *Brede Channel*. It was begun to be cut from the bridge point, instead of following the old serpentine channel, from the *Edwards' Dock*. And by cutting it from the bridge point, it took in two bends of the old channel, and joined the *Rother* at *Pollard's Wharf*.

The next resolution was to put in a dam across the *Rother*, at such place as should hereafter be found necessary. The commissioners also, this day, entered into an agreement with certain persons to have the new channel dug out, from the end of the canal to the bridge point, for £ 7,200.

The above-contemplated dam was demolished about twenty years afterwards. It was called *Pinkerton's Dam*. There was also demolished at the same time the wall extending from the said dam (eastward) to *Guildford old tide wall*.

Aug. 1, 1769. The commissioners' contract for digging out the channel from the bridge point to *Pollard's Wharf*, for £ 12 per rod. The length is not mentioned. A drawbridge was also ordered to be built across the *Rock Channel*, near to where it joins the *Brede Channel*. This was the bridge that gave its name to the piece of ground, - a part of that which was purchased of the Earl of Egremont's *Castle Land* estate, - and which was separated from the other part by the making of the *Rock Channel*.

Chapter 10

Secret Dealings

Dec. 21, 1770. An order was this day given, "to remove the beach from between the pier heads." This order corroborates what was before surmised, that the mouth of the harbour had been opened; but, *for the want of back water*, had become choked up with beach again.

Dec. 31, 1771. It appears by this day's proceedings, that, whilst the *Rock Channel* was digging, the tide broke twice into it, through what had been the channel from the *Holmbush point*: and it was ordered, "that to prevent the canal (this was the canal from the pier heads) from silting, and for keeping open the mouth of the harbour, a sluice is to be put in, across the east end, and another across the west end of the *Rock Channel*, thereby to make the *Rock Channel* a basin, in which to pen up the tides in dry times, to scour out the canal and mouth of the harbour: and in wet times, the scuttles to be left open, for the passage of the *Tillingham* waters out that way to the old harbour."

As a scour for the canal, it could not have been of much service; for the small quantity of water it would contain must have been almost imperceptible at the time it was passing through the canal and out of the harbour. The two sluices cost £ 1,350.

Aug 17, 1772. At this commission some bills were ordered to be paid; but no other resolutions were entered.

July 6, 1773. Another notice is ordered to be given in the *London Gazette*, &c., for a meeting to be held on the 29th instant, "to take into consideration the debts and fund of the harbour;" but no mention is made in the harbour books of such meeting having taken place.

Oct. 1, 1778. There is nothing mentioned on this day of the debts or fund; but the commissioners receive a report from Mr. Green, in which he recommends, that "as the season is so far advanced, the mouth of the new harbour should be suffered to stop entirely up;" and he advises to begin in the spring, by lengthening the *East Pier Head*, instead of taking down the *West Pier Head*; (which, from the report may be presumed to have been intended;) also, to erect a groin, sixty feet long, from the *West Pier Head*. Besides this, a considerable deal of planking was ordered to be done at the pier heads and at the wharfs.

The Commissioners, having taken Mr. Green's report into consideration, are of~ opinion, that his second proposition is the most eligible.

They appoint a committee to see it carried into execution.

Adjourned meetings were held October 14th, 16th, and November 1st, at which nothing is recorded to have been done.

Chapter 11

A Great Man's Fury

April 5th, 1774. The commissioners confirm the proceedings of the committee of the 3rd and 14th of February, but do not say what they were.

It appears, by the adjournments entered in the book, that the proceedings were not followed up properly; or, if they were ever entered in the book, some leaves must have been since torn out. There are some places which bear strong appearance of this having been done.

And here a very sudden change, without any previous hint, takes place at the next resolution.

Ordered, that notice be given in the *London Gazette, &c.*, that a meeting of the "*commissioners of Rye Harbour* will be held at the *Court Hall, at Rye*, the 20th of June next, to take into consideration the debt and fund of the *New Harbour*; and whether it shall be further proceeded in or not: or, whether the whole money arising from the fund should be applied to the payment of the creditors, *and the preservation of the lands*.

At this meeting, too, a petition was presented from the inhabitants of Rye, stating, that the mouth of the *New Harbour* was so filled up with beach, that no vessel of nine feet of water draught can go in or out, without great danger, and praying they would permit the dam opposite the *Gun Garden* to be cut asunder; which was consented to.

June 20, 1774. Sir John Norris, and forty other commissioners present, resolved that the harbour is £20,205 10s. 6d., in debt for moneys borrowed; and that, as the Harbour Act will expire the 12th of May, 1776, the moneys as they come in shall in future be applied to the payment of the creditors *and preservation of the land*.

Mr. Green is ordered to give in separate estimates of the expense to repair the dam, and to make good the wharfing. This is the dam which was allowed to be cut through in April last, by petition from the inhabitants.

Mr. Green, at his own request, is allowed to retire.

Aug. 31, 1774. The Hon. James Murray and eighteen other commissioners present. A special committee of six commissioners was appointed, to consider and inspect the harbour, and deliver in their report at the next meeting.

A committee of five was also appointed to consult Mr. Smeaton and obtain his opinion on the state of the harbour, as to what sum will be required to complete it and render it useful; to make him acquainted with the present state of the funds; and to ascertain upon what scale they can 'proceed on the works, and what additional sums may be required for any plan he may recommend.

Resolved, "That in consideration of the present state of the funds every reduction possible is become necessary." And the present salaries of the agent and treasurer being deemed too high, they were both removed from their employments: another person having agreed to perform them both for £30 per annum.

Adjourned to October 24th, at the *George Inn, Battle*.

October 24th, 1774. At the George Inn, Battle, fifteen commissioners present. At this meeting the agent is reinstated in his office, till the 12th of May next: some orders are given about working the sluices; and a large turnwater is ordered to be made to direct the scours at the mouth of the harbour. No mention is made of Mr. Smeaton. .

Chapter 12

Parliamentary Dealings

Jan. 9th, 1775. The large turnwater is ordered to be made 200 feet in length; and then comes the following resolution: "That, for the better information of the commissioners, in future, every proposition or question be moved, seconded, and left with the clerk, at the meeting previous to that on which it is to be confirmed or rejected. By this means, they will be fully apprised of the business that is to be laid before them, and have opportunities of preparing themselves for it. Cases of extreme necessity, malfeasance of servants or any other trust, and the day of adjournment excepted." Passed unanimously.

Some more resolutions, appointing a committee to correspond with Mr. Read, who had proposed the turnwater: and £30 is ordered to be paid Mr. John Jenkins, for constructing a frame to bring stones from *Fairlight*.

April 19th, 1775. A committee is appointed to open the mouth of the harbour; and a Mr. Thomas Lane, of London, is appointed agent to the commissioners with a salary of £30 a-year.

From this time, till October 24th, 1777, there were nineteen commissions held, but no entry made at any of them, to show that any work was carried on of any consequence. None of them were attended by more than seven or eight commissioners; and sometimes there were only two or three.

October 20th, 1777. It is resolved, that it is the sense of this commission, that the present fund is inadequate to the building of an Eastern Pier Head - the diverting the river *Rother* through the present canal to the sea - and repairing the wharfing; all being necessary to the completing the harbour.

Resolved, that a petition be presented to *Parliament* next sessions, praying a prolongation of the term; and that a petition be prepared to lay before the next meeting, at which (November 17) Mr. Green is requested to make an estimate for extending the East Pier Head to the same length as the *West Pier Head*: he is also desired to attend *Parliament*, to be examined on the petition intended to be presented to *Parliament* next sessions to prolong the term of the Bill.

Chapter 13

Twenty One More Years

The petition was presented, and a new bill was obtained for twenty-one years more.

And the first meeting, by virtue of it, was held the 21st of April, 1778; when the new act was read, and a statement of the harbour finances was laid before the commission. From this it appeared, that, after paying the interest of the debt, officers' salaries, &c., they might calculate on a clear income of £ 1,158 13s. 6d.

They then resolve not to take more than £ 400 yearly, to pay interest for any money they may borrow, and that the remainder shall be applied to the paying off the debt.

May 11th, 1778. - Mr. Myers, an engineer, offers to repair the breach in the wall opposite the *Gun Garden* rocks for £160.

June 22nd, 1778. -It is ordered that the mouth of the harbour be opened with all possible speed. And, on the 3rd of August following, Mr. James Jenkins is ordered to make and hang the great gates (at the *Stone Sluice*) with all possible speed.

Five more commissions were held in this year, but nothing particular is mentioned, except paying off £ 600 of the debt.

In 1779 nothing particular is noticed, except an order to lengthen the turnwater ten feet, and heighten it five.

January 27, 1780. - A special commission was held in consequence of a considerable under-run at the great stone sluice, which was ordered to be repaired; and two more commissions were held this year, at which the principal thing noticed is that £ 1,150 of the debt is ordered to be paid off.

In 1781 there were only two commissions held; and the only things noticed is the paying off some bills.

In 1782 three commissions were held, at one of which it was ordered that the opinion of the Attorney-General be taken, whether the commissioners can legally shorten the *West Pier Head*.

In 1783 three commissions were held. At one of them (April 22nd) Messrs. Burford Jenkins, William Bragge, and George Marten, contracted to open the mouth of the harbour for £100: *no purchase no pay*.

In 1784 there were six commissions held. Some more of the debt was paid off, and a resolution is entered to lengthen the *East Pier Head*, so as to range with the *West Pier Head*, and to raise it six feet higher.

In 1785 only one commission, appears to have been held, (December 23rd.) at which it was resolved to erect a navigable sluice near the strand at *Rye*, (this was *Tillingham sluice*,) "in order to scour out and deepen the channel to the new harbour," to prepare it for the reception of the *Rother* waters; and Mr. Myers, Engineer, was ordered to be written to, to request his attendance at *Rye*, to treat for turning the waters that way.

Chapter 14

Return of The Engineers

In 1786 six commissions were held. At the third of them (April 17) the following resolution was passed: “that the new cut (the *Rock Channel*) shall be cleared out preparatory to turning the *Rother* waters that way,” as it was much swarved since it was first made; and Mr. Jessop, at the recommendation of Mr. Smeaton, is appointed engineer to the harbour.

A commission was held June 9th following, when Mr. Jessop, after having viewed the harbour, gives in a report, in which he estimates the cost of re-digging out the whole length of the *Rock Channel* at its original depth and width, putting in a dam across the channel opposite *Pollard's Wharf* (thereby turning the *Rother*, so that, with the *Brede* and *Tillingham* waters, it should empty itself through the new harbour,) at £ 3,331 5s; and it is unanimously agreed to carry the specified works into execution: but, as the harbour fund is not sufficient for the purpose, seven of the commissioners then present agree to advance £ 1,500, at five per cent. interest.

Mr. John Pinkerton offers to do the work for the money, and a committee is appointed to enter into a contract with him to complete the whole for the £ 3,331 5s. The next day the contract is signed by the respective parties at the *Compasses Inn*, at Icklesham.

February 22nd, 1787. - Mr. Jessop informs the commissioners that, in his calculation for digging out the *Rock Channel*, he had made a mistake in the quantity of earth necessary to be taken out, as it would require to be wider and deeper than be calculated for; that the difference, 2,222 floads, would amount to £ 613 more; and that Mr. James Pinkerton (John's brother) would undertake to do it for that money. The commissioners agree to it, and the contract is ordered to be made.

There were three adjourned meetings in March and May following; and, at one held June 7th, Mr. Pinkerton reports the channel to be in great forwardness. The foreman is ordered to see ‘that all the obstructions at the mouth of the harbour are removed as much as possible, so as to facilitate the easy passage of the *Rother* waters when they shall be turned through that way.

Chapter 15

The New Harbour

On the 25th of June the commissioners ordered a notice to be given that no vessels would be able to pass up the old channel, to the lime kiln where the dam (*Pinkerton's dam*) was intended to be put in, after the 14th of July next.

An order was also given to the committee to borrow £4,000; and Mr. Jessop was requested to wait a few days at *Rye* to advise and direct the works for turning the waters of the *Rother* through the new cut into the new harbour.

July 24th. - It appears Mr. Pinkerton was still going on with the works, &c.

There is nothing in the harbour books to shew the precise date when it was intended to remove the earth at each end of the new cut, to let the tide in and the *Rother* waters out by that way; but some of the foregoing orders shew this to have been in immediate contemplation.

However, a day or two previous to the one intended, the earth at the west end of the cut (at the bridge point) gave way at high water, and let the tide into it. The other obstructions were then immediately cleared away; and the flux and reflux of the tide from the sea through the new harbour, as far as *Scot's Float Sluice*, was now for the first time fully established; for the dam across the *Rother* was finished, and all the waters from the *Rother*, *Brede*, and *Tillingham* rivers now went out that way.

Thus this object, about which the commissioners had (with the exception of a few years, when the works were suspended) been sixty three years engaged, was at last effected.

August 24th. - A letter from the Bishop of Chichester (then become the proprietor of the castle land) informs the commissioners that his land on the east side of the entrance to the new harbour is in danger, the sea being likely to break through. To prevent it, the commissioners order a wall of earth to be made at the back of the beach one hundred and twenty rods long.

September 10th. - The commissioners order an oak sill of the same scantling as that of the *East Pier Head*, and ranging therewith; a pier head thereon to be erected afterwards if found necessary.

All ingress from the sea to the town, by the old harbour, was now entirely stopped; and all the trade of the port and town was carried on through the new harbour; and vessels occasionally passed through the *Rock Channel* to take in timber and plank at the *Lime-Kiln Wharf*. Vessels laden with chalk also went that way; but the greatest part of the mercantile business was done at the *Strand Wharf*, in getting to which, vessels had to pass the west end of the *Rock Channel*, across which the old draw-bridge was standing, and over which was then the carriage road to *Winchelsea*.

October 1st. - A commission was held, at which a petition was presented, signed by several masters of vessels, stating that "the situation of the bridge near the strand was very dangerous to vessels coming up to the strand, by reason of the indraught at the bridge, which is now in a very dangerous state."

It was therefore resolved, - that the bridge should be repaired for the present; and, in order that it may be afterwards taken away, it is resolved that "a road be made upon the colt (bank) over the sluice, near the gibbet at *Rye*, and the brick sluice on the *Winchelsea Channel*."

Chapter 16

Sabotage by Neglect

There is nothing preserved in the archives of the harbour to shew clearly what was the original plan intended at the commencement of their work in 1724, except what can be gathered from their resolutions in the books, as the works proceeded, which have been, with the dates of the commissions, recorded *seriatim* in this narrative; but it does not appear that the original plan was much departed from.

So that, after being in progress from May, 1724, until October, 1787, (sixty-three years,) with nearly a sum of £ 200,000 disbursed, all that was done in all that time, and with all that expense - serviceable at least to navigation - was a canal, short of a mile in length and one hundred and eighty feet wide; two pier heads; a stone sluice and draw-bridge erected; and a channel about three miles in length widened and straitened.

Yet all vessels, from twenty to three hundred tons, that passed the port, paid toll to it all that time, whilst the united amount of the several times it was open falls short of five years; and farther, during the greater part of that period, vessels of only the smallest description could go in or out of it.

The largest vessel noticed in the custom house books that ever passed between the pier heads of the new harbour was one of about two hundred tons, (the *Salisbury cutter*;) which was built at the *port of Rye*, went to sea from it, but never entered it again.

At the early part of the time when the new harbour was open, it has been mentioned that large sums were continually expended in the construction of groins on the west side of the entrance, as well as in lengthening and altering the pier heads; all for the purpose of keeping the beach back, and to prevent its driving into the harbour.

Scours, too, were constantly let off from the stone sluice, to drive out the beach and sand, which still continued, in spite, of the groins, to find a way into the mouth of the harbour: but all their powers, when in full force, and assisted by the great turnwater to direct the scours upon the beach banks, were, as may be seen by the resolutions, insufficient and useless;

And when, afterwards, the stone sluice became undermined by the water, (see January 30, 1780,) and scours could not, with safety to the sluice, be kept back; when Mr. Pinkerton had completed his dam, and turned the united waters of the *Rother* and the two channels out that way; beach banks still accumulated in and about the front of, the entrance, between which it was difficult, and eventually altogether impossible, for vessels to pass in and out.

So, as the mouth of the old harbour still remained open, vessels frequently went into it in preference to the other, which continued every day, to grow worse.

Chapter 17

Landowners Triumphant

About this period the inhabitants of *Rye* were alarmed at the possibility of both harbours being lost to the town; for some of the most influential landowners in the neighbourhood, in their conversations, talked of *hutching* the freshes out, as at *Pevensey* and *Dymchurch*, with a sluice or gut close to the sea shore: and whether or not a little bad feeling between the people of *Rye* and the landowners of the neighbourhood, respecting the management of the harbour affairs, originated about this time is now perhaps uncertain; but it is quite certain that it did considerably prevail from that epoch.

It was the opinion of some of the persons employed upon the harbour works that the channel from the town to the sea was not made either wide or deep enough for the passage of all the waters: and it was soon discovered that the freshes did not run off so quickly as they had done by the old harbour.

Whether that was the cause, or whether the immense shingle banks forming at the entrance to the harbour were the sole obstruction, is not now to be ascertained; but complaints were soon made of the bad sewage of the marsh lands, as well as of the deterioration of the harbour; and, the following autumn being unusually rainy, all the levels became flooded to an alarming extent.

A general opinion soon prevailed that immense sums had been expended to make a new harbour, which might now be considered to have proved a total failure.

The landowners, thinking their lands were never likely to be so well drained as by the old harbour, soon came to a determination to abandon the new harbour: and, the inhabitants of the town, seeing no probability that the new harbour ever would be made so good as the old one, were not displeased at hearing of their intentions.

Accordingly the commissioners of the different levels (who were all commissioners of the harbour likewise) caused their exponditors to petition the commissioners of the harbour (i.e. themselves), for that, “inasmuch as their levels do not drain so well out of the new harbour as they formerly did out of the old harbour, they pray them to re-open the old harbour and to abandon the new harbour.”

The same persons (the landowners) then meet on the 6th of November, 1787, as commissioners of the harbour; receive their own petition; agree at once to abandon the new harbour altogether, as being unfit either for navigation or the sewage of lands; and appoint a committee, at once to carry their resolution into execution. .

Chapter 18

In Memoriam

Ten days afterwards, (November 16th,) another harbour commission is held, when the proceedings of the former meeting were confirmed - and they receive a memorial from the bailiffs and exponditors of the levels, (their own servants) to tell them what proper resolutions they had passed, and hope the committee will carry them into execution as soon as possible.

This the committee did, by cutting open the old creek or channel, from the *fish-market* to the *Holmbush point*, thereby turning all the waters again to empty themselves by the old harbour; and this has been the usual channel ever since.

The next commission was held the 6th of May, 1788, when the resolution to abandon the new harbour was again confirmed. It was also resolved to build a navigable sluice across the *Brede Channel*, near the bridge-point, (as the resolution says,) for the more effectual uniting the waters of all the levels, and turning them out of the old harbour.

April 21, 1789. - The committee report the drawbridge, near the bridge-point, to be in a very decayed state, and a great inconvenience to vessels passing to and from the strand. They recommend that it may be taken away, and the road made over the *Tillingham sluice* and along the west side of the channel, to and over the *Brede sluice*, on to the *old Winchelsea road*, which was also adopted.

Some resolutions were passed respecting the abandonment of the new harbour works, the disposal of the land, houses, materials, &c., belonging to the new harbour.

A memorial is also presented from the inhabitants of *Rye*, expressing their satisfaction at the abandonment of the new, and restoration of the old harbour; and praying the commissioners not to suffer any more *salts* (marshes flooded by the tides) to be embanked off to the detriment of the harbour.

In 1791, the commissioners of sewers complain (through their expendor again) that the channel, having been diverted by *Pinkerton's dam* from its old course, had caused *Wenway creek* to silt up: and they call upon the commissioners of the harbour to build them a sluice at some other place.

They then hold a harbour commission to receive this memorial, and, as commissioners of the harbour, decide upon doing it with the harbour funds.

It was afterwards executed from those funds, and cost £ 1,086 13s. 9d.

