

# THE CHURCH BRIEF FOR THE INUNDATION OF THE LANCASHIRE COAST IN 1720

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"June 20, 1722. Parson Acton, Mr Syer and Mr Byron the Church-Wardens etc were here abeging upon Account of the Great Losses sustained in Lancashire in Dec: An: Do: 1720 by the violent overflowing of the Sea; the Sea had overflowed 6600 Aikers of Land, had washed down 157 Houses, and damnified 200 more, the whole loss was computed to be more than £10,227."<sup>(1)</sup>

"1722. Given upon Account of the Breef for those that suffered in Lancashire by the Overflowing of the Sea . . . 5s."<sup>(2)</sup>

These matter-of-fact entries of Nicholas Blundell relate in a few words the essentials of the story of storm and flood in Lancashire in 1720. The documentary evidence of the "Great Losses sustained in Lancashire" in December 1720 can be found among the Lancashire Quarter Sessions Rolls for Epiphany and Easter 1721, and the sequel to the disaster can be traced throughout petitions for the succeeding two or three years.

## I

From the sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries it was customary when some unforeseen calamity occurred to send a petition to the king or queen and request royal letters patent authorising the recipient or recipients to collect money in places of worship, and especially in Anglican churches.<sup>(3)</sup> This method of recouping disastrous losses dated back to the reign of Henry VIII, although collections authorised by the pope had been made by a similar process since the time of Thomas Aquinas. Papal briefs had often been letters from the pope requesting financial help either for unfortunate individuals or for groups of distressed people such as Christians in the hands of the Turks. Once Henry VIII had been declared "the Supreme Head of the Church and clergy in England", the crown had automatically assumed the right to issue authorizations for similar collections; indeed succeeding popes for a long time before 1534 had accepted royal supervision of papal briefs. Under the Tudors letters patent were granted by the monarch himself on the merits of each individual petition, but in 1625 Charles I delegated the responsibility to the keeper of the

<sup>(1)</sup> *Diary of Nicholas Blundell*, ed. Rev. T. E. Gibson (1895), p. 188.

<sup>(2)</sup> Nicholas Blundell's Disbursement Book.

<sup>(3)</sup> See W. A. Bewes, *Church Briefs* (1894) and C. Walford, *King's Briefs*, Royal Historical Society Transactions, Vol. X (1882).

privy seal. During the Commonwealth briefs were issued by Parliament or the Protector, and at the Restoration Charles II reverted to the practice of his father. Dozens of collections were made both for individuals who had lost wealth in war, by fire or by storm, for national purposes such as the herring fishery, and for rebuilding churches, some of which were alleged to have been damaged by the Cromwellians. Many seventeenth century parish registers show the amounts and purposes of such collections. By 1720 when the Lancashire inundation petitions were presented, the usual procedure for obtaining a brief was to present a petition to the local justices of the peace, who, if satisfied with the evidence of witnesses, sent the petition, or a copy, with a covering letter to the lord chancellor. An act of 1705<sup>(4)</sup> had attempted to improve the administration of briefs and speed up collections by giving the monopoly of brief printing to the queen's printer, who, to prevent forgery, was to print only on the instruction of the registrar of the court of Chancery who would register the briefs, decide how many were to be printed, stamp them with a special Chancery stamp, and deliver them to an undertaker of briefs. The undertaker was to receive sevenpence for each copy when the endorsed briefs and collected money were returned to the Chancery. The distribution of briefs was usually done by undertakers, who had their own staffs of collectors to take the copies to Anglican churches and chapels, and bring them away with the money subscribed. All this was an expensive business. More and more complaints were heard about wasteful administration and fraud during the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, until the House of Commons heeded the clamour. The system was virtually abolished in 1828. The firm of Stevenson and Salt of Stafford and London was the chief undertaker from 1755 onwards. It had an almost complete monopoly until 1828, and the methods by which the monopoly was obtained and kept can be studied in the William Salt Library, Stafford, by consulting the papers connected with this aspect of the firm's business. *The Chancery Brief Books* to be found in the Public Record Office augment the evidence, so that it is possible to piece together what did happen, and to assess the truth of the numerous criticisms levelled against the system.

## II

Nevertheless it is clear that briefs were an accepted means of helping people faced with temporary difficulties. Nicholas Blundell was a Catholic, and, although a broad-minded, cultured man, could not be expected to support charities which were mainly Anglican. Yet at various times the squire gave money to the

<sup>(4)</sup> 4 Anne c. 14. *The Statutes at Large*, Vol. IV (1769). The act was based on proposals made to the House of Commons by Margaret Mortimer who had exposed a fraud connected with a supposed fire at Derby Court, Westminster, in April 1697.

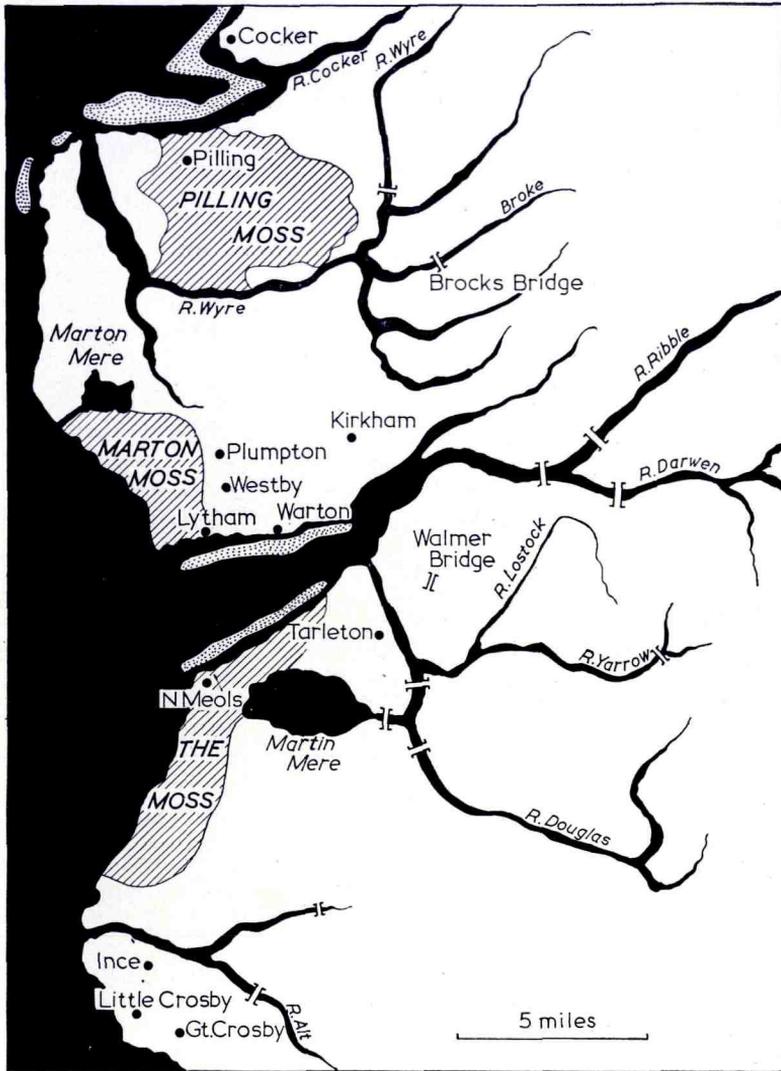


FIG. 5. INUNDATION AREAS  
Based upon Speed's Map of Lancashire, 1610

parson and churchwardens when they were collecting for a "house-to-house" brief. On 3 May 1720 he noted, "Parson Acton Mr Bayron and young Rob: Bootle were here a beging towards the rebuilding of St Johns Church in Chester, I gave them something".<sup>(5)</sup> If Blundell were willing to subscribe towards the rebuilding or renovation of an Anglican church in Chester, he might have been expected to be more generous towards an appeal which was non-denominational, and which must have interested him greatly since the scene of the disaster was his own county of Lancashire, and some of the damaged land was near his own estate in Little Crosby. That the damage was as heavy as recorded in his diary can be verified from a reading of the petitions concerned. It will be noted that these petitioners pointed out that the loss was not "occasioned by negligence", and that they knew that public relief could not be expected when the damage was the fault of the petitioner.

The inhabitants of Cockerham presented the first petition<sup>(6)</sup> to Quarter Sessions. It was accepted on 10 January 1721 by the justices, who on the following day sealed a certificate<sup>(7)</sup> addressed to the "Right Hon. Ld. Parker Baron of Macclesfield, Ld. High Chancellor of Great Britain", in which they informed the lord chancellor that the "inundation of the sea into the Townships within the Parish of Cockerham" had ruined thirty reasonably well-to-do families who could never claim for parish or county relief in the normal way, and had damaged the houses and outhouses of one hundred other families. On 12 January 1721, the inhabitants of Pilling in the parish of Garstang presented to the justices a similar petition.<sup>(8)</sup> The Quarter Sessions had, as usual, adjourned from Lancaster to Preston. This second petition stated that the "dreadful tempest" had lasted for two days, Sunday and Monday, 18 and 19 December. The reasons given for the flood were the change of the moon and the high tides coinciding with the unusual storm. The ten petitioners and "above one hundred and thirty other inhabitants" had suffered; forty houses and outhouses had been demolished and "Corne hay turfe household goods wearing apparrell money and every [ ] with great quantities of salt and numbers of Catle and sheep" had been swept away; 15,000 acres of arable land had been flooded and people had escaped "by hanging by the timber". Unfortunately the petition is damaged and the figures giving the amount of the damage have been torn off, or, more likely, have mouldered away.

A third area to suffer damage was the parish of Lytham. Eleven inhabitants<sup>(9)</sup> of the townships of Lytham, Warton and Westby-

<sup>(5)</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>(6)</sup> Lancashire Record Office, QSP 1169/1.

<sup>(7)</sup> *Ibid.*, QSP 1169/3. The certificate follows the usual form of such justicial certificates, though this particular document is probably a draft.

<sup>(8)</sup> *Ibid.*, 1170/17.

<sup>(9)</sup> *Ibid.*, 1170/15.

cum-Plumpton<sup>(10)</sup> testified to the "dreadful inundacion of the Sea" which took place on the 18 and 19 of December. Forty houses and other outbuildings had been washed away and the winter corn had been destroyed. Since the parish of Lytham was a poor farming area with a total population in 1676 of no more than 206<sup>(11)</sup> and since the damage done to the Lytham petitioners was estimated to be at least £2,055, this was a tremendous loss for such a small number of families to bear. It is quite obvious that they could not find the money themselves and were in desperate need of outside help.<sup>(12)</sup>

The coastal areas of North Meols could not be expected to escape damage. This was an area of moss and bog which until recent times was inadequately drained, and still has little natural protection from the inroads of the sea. The gradually accumulating sand on the coast stopped up the river mouths even more, and this 1720 flood must have been very abnormal to induce the inhabitants to seek a brief. The petitioners,<sup>(13)</sup> Edmund Ball, Oliver Rymer and Lawrence Abram, have typical south-west Lancashire names, and these three are mentioned in the brief which was later granted. They came from the coastal areas of North Meols with the "townships of Hesketh-cum-Becconsall, Tarleton and Martin Mear",<sup>(14)</sup> and petitioned on behalf of themselves and "above one hundred and thirty five more other Inhabitant[s] Rack tenants Sufferers by a Dreadful Inundation of the Sea within the parish of North Meols and the Townships of Hesketh-cum-Becconsal Tarleton and Martin Mear". They stated that the inundation happened on the same two days, 18 and 19 December, and they stressed the suddenness and violence of the storm. Five thousand acres of wheat-sown land had been flooded by water and forty-seven houses had been washed down. As in the other areas "Corn hay fuell Catell Sheep wearing apparell" had been carried away and nine people had been drowned because of the speed of the inundation, and others had had to sit upon the rafters. One hundred families were "almost

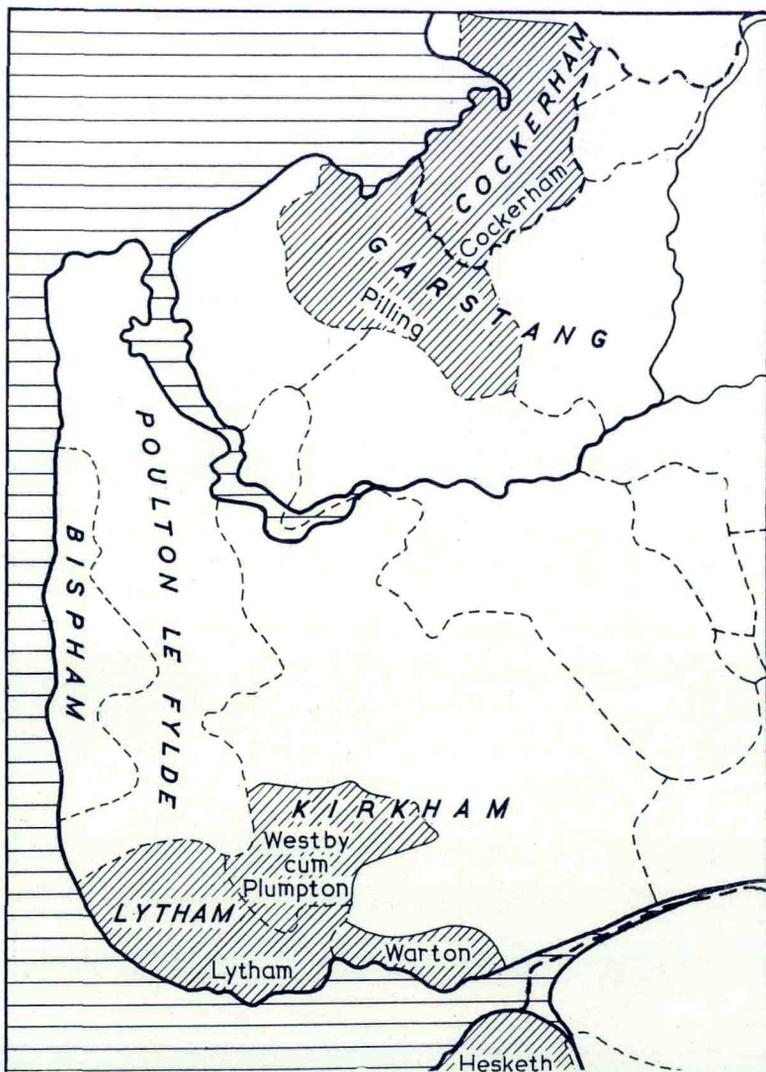
<sup>(10)</sup> The parishes and townships cited in the petitions are not identical with those in the brief. F. Smith, in *The Atlas for Genealogists*, p. 33 shows Lytham to be a single township parish, and Warton and Westby-cum-Plumpton to be in the parish of Kirkham. Similarly (p. 54) the parish of North Meols was composed of two townships, North Meols and Birkdale, while Hesketh-with-Becconsal and Tarleton were independent parishes. Martin Mere (p. 47) was partly in the parish of North Meols and partly in the large parish of Ormskirk, but it never was ecclesiastically nor administratively a township, although, as it was and is regarded as a unit, it was probably regarded locally as a township.

<sup>(11)</sup> Recusancy lists in Lytham register. A rough checking by the well-known method of totalling the baptisms of ten years and multiplying the average by thirty for the years 1715 to 1724 gives a total population of 360. Dr. Brownlee's method (see W. Tate, *The Parish Chest*, pp. 80-81) of estimating the average death rate in the eighteenth century at one in thirty-one gives an average population of 465. The population probably was not more than 400 in 1720.

<sup>(12)</sup> The inhabitants of Lytham appealed for national help again in 1764 when the church was stated to be in a ruinous condition. A brief was granted.

<sup>(13)</sup> L.R.O., QSP 1171/9.

<sup>(14)</sup> See Note 10.



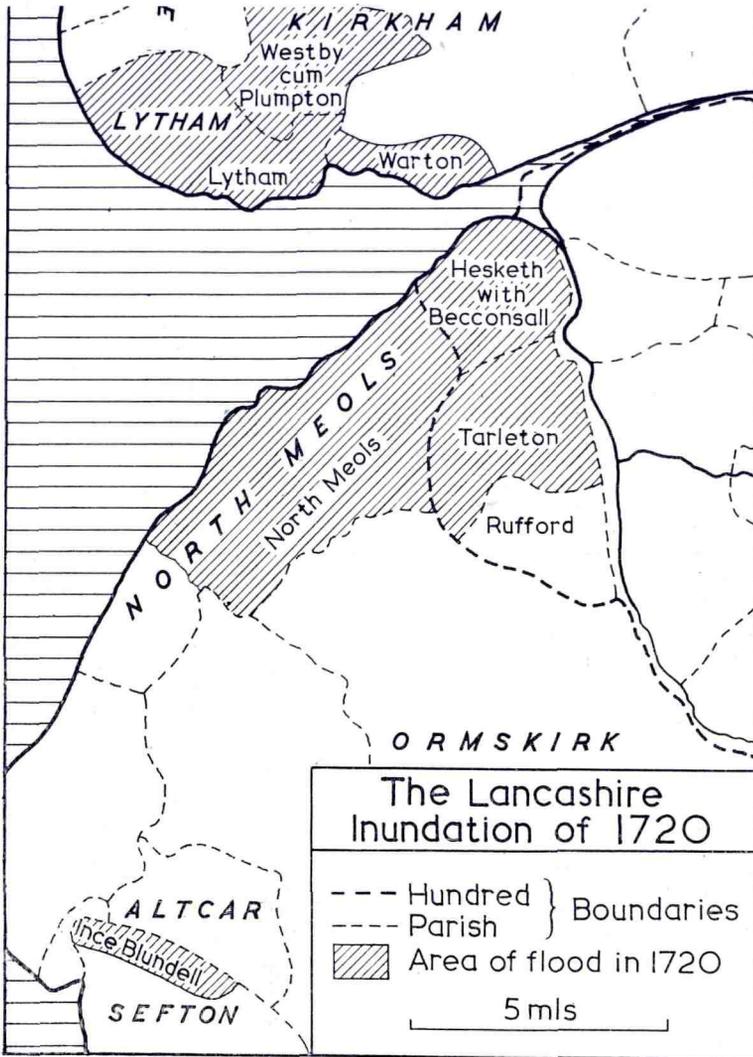


FIG. 6.

ruined" and were without homes. The material damage was estimated at £4,205.<sup>(15)</sup>

If the various losses and estimates of damage are totalled, the general picture of devastation becomes clear.

Losses as given in the petitions.

	Houses	Acres	Persons drowned	Value
Cockerham	30	vast quantity	many	£1,736.6s.0d.
Pilling	40	1,500 great quantities	—	?
Lytham	40	greatest part	—	£2,055.0s.0d.
North Meols	47	5,000	9	£4,205.0s.0d.
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	157			£7,996.6s.0d.

A brief was granted in 1721,<sup>(16)</sup> and if the above figures are correct, it grossly underestimated the extent of the damage in presenting the number of houses destroyed as 157 and the acreage as 6,600. The total loss was given as £10,227 which fixed Pilling's loss at about £2,230, so that the estimate of damage seems reasonable.<sup>(17)</sup> The brief was typical of the period. The places which had sent petitions to Quarter Sessions are all mentioned in the brief with the addition of Ince Blundell. No petition has been found among the Quarter Sessions Rolls, but this is not unusual as the original may have been sent to the lord chancellor or a petition may have been accepted at a private sessions of the justices or at an

<sup>(15)</sup> A brief was granted in March 1733/4 for the repair of North Meols church which must have been damaged during the floods. This brief has been accepted by some writers as the Lancashire Inundation brief.

<sup>(16)</sup> Royal Historical Society Transactions, Vol. X, p. 44.

<sup>(17)</sup> Bewes and later writers who based their theories on Bewes's work seem to have been mistaken in their information about collections for this brief. The error has arisen quite simply because in 1724 collections were being made for a flood at Ripponden near Halifax. Bewes accepted the entry in *Extracts from Registers of Ormskirk* edited by James Dixon in 1882 (TRANSACTIONS, Vol. XXIX) which reads "October 24, 1724 Collected on Rippendale Inundation brief 2-9" as an example of a collection for the Lancashire coastal inundation. "Rippendale" may have been a mis-transcription for Ripponden, but unfortunately it is at present impossible to check this entry which does not occur among other published or unpublished parts of the registers and must therefore be among the missing account books. On the other hand Ripponden may have been known as Ripppingdale because on 5 July 1714 Nicholas Blundell had a meal at the Black Lion in Rippondale when he was between Dewsbury and Bolton on his return journey from York (*Diary*, p. 126). Further evidence from registers shows that the parish of Middleton (Lancashire Parish Register Society, Vol. 18) collected eleven shillings or more on 19 August 1722 for "Inundation in Lancashire", and fourteen shillings and ninepence halfpenny on 4 October 1724 for the "Rippindon Brief". Aughton (MS.) in Lancashire collected seven shillings and sixpence for the "Inundation in Lancashire" in 1722.

Several non-Lancashire registers record collections for both inundations, including Croxall in Derbyshire (now in Staffordshire) which gave nine shillings on 9 January 1723 for the "Lancashire Inundation" and three shillings and twopence on 3 August 1724 for "inundation at Halifax". Richard Ussher, *Historical Sketch of the Parish of Croxall*, pp. 122-129.

informal meeting. But a certificate<sup>(18)</sup> addressed to the justices has been found and it contains information about damage done to land at Alt Grange which was farmed by Richard Jump of Northend.<sup>(19)</sup> Alt Grange was scheduled among the properties of William, Viscount Molyneux,<sup>(20)</sup> in 1717, and at the time of the floods John Molyneux was Richard Jump's landlord. The certificate seems to have been produced as explanation why Jump had not paid his rent, probably on the preceding Lady Day, for the certificate was not presented to Quarter Sessions at Ormskirk until 24 April 1721. Apparently great damage had been done by the "great inundation of water which happened the eighteenth and nineteenth days of December last past". No less than £65 had been spent in repairing the "Copps";<sup>(21)</sup> eight acres of wheat valued at £80 had been covered with sand<sup>(22)</sup> and ruined; twenty-seven acres of ploughed land valued at ten guineas had been flooded and made useless for a year. Thus the total damage at Alt Grange was £185 10s. 0d. The same certificate also included the information that the flood-gates in the Alt, recently repaired for £15, had been broken again, and that a further £25 would be needed to repair them; and that three named farmers with "other rackers" unnamed had lost fifteen acres and three roods of wheat worth £5 an acre, and seventy-eight acres of ploughed land worth £1 an acre had been made useless. Several yeomen of the neighbourhood had viewed and estimated the amount of damage which should have been added to the figures in the brief.

### III

More information about damage done by flood has been obtained from the records of the Quarter Sessions. There are twenty-four petitions concerned with the repair of bridges and seven petitions or presentments about roads in the inundation area; but it is not always possible, especially in the case of roads, to determine which repairs were necessary because of normal neglect and which because of the disaster

<sup>(18)</sup> L.R.O., QSP 1175/5.

<sup>(19)</sup> Northend is about a mile nearer to the coast than Ince Blundell. Alt Grange lies within the bend of the River Alt as it turns south before entering the Mersey Estuary.

<sup>(20)</sup> Alt Grange was one of the two holdings let to Richard Molyneux for the lives of John and Edward Molyneux; in 1720 it must have been let to John, since he was described as Richard Jump's landlord (L.R.O., QSP 1175/5). On 27 April 1722 Blundell noted in his Diary (p. 185) that Jump had "a Terme of 4 years at the Grange".

<sup>(21)</sup> Copps are raised banks, usually at the side of a road to keep out flood water. The word is still used locally. If the copps had been washed away, the water and loose soil would cover the roads and neighbouring fields. The copps along the River Alt were flood banks to keep the swollen river within bounds.

<sup>(22)</sup> F. Walker, — *Historical Geography of South-West Lancashire*, Chetham Society, N.S., Vol. 103, pp. 11–12, states that the belt of coastal sand-dunes is a relatively modern phenomenon because maps of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries show moss reaching to the shore-line.

On 21 April 1721 Nicholas Blundell noted that "Mr. Taylor the Mayor of Lev: and Mr Rich: Norris came to vew Formoss-poole Plat. [Tho: Syer I &c were there with them. Mr. Peters] swore foure witnesses in Order to get a better Bridg there".<sup>(23)</sup> The following day Messrs Taylor and Norris petitioned the Quarter Sessions at Ormskirk, "That at the Request of the Inhabitants of Crosby Formby and others that use to travell to, and from Liverpoole into the Fyld that way we have view'd the Common, and publick Bridge call'd Foremast Pool Bridge which being lately Dashed down by the late Great Inundation is in great decay and very dangerous for Travellers, and doe find that it is a great Road, and that the Same when repaired will be of publick Advantage and that we haveing had it view'd by Workmen of Skill doe find and further Certify that the summe of Fifteen pounds would Repair and make the same more Commodious than it now is".<sup>(24)</sup> This petition is endorsed with a note that Mr. Roby was "to view", but that presumably nothing more than £15 was to be allowed. The next petition<sup>(25)</sup> is really an order to Mr. Christopher Roby,<sup>(26)</sup> the surveyor, to survey the "publick bridge in Crosby magna and Crosby parva called Foremost poole bridge being betwixt the Market Townes of Liverpoole and Poulton . . .", and to certify to the next sessions to be held what had been done and what money would be needed. Unfortunately we are not told how much the repairs actually cost, but at the Midsummer sessions an account<sup>(27)</sup> for £1 18s. was presented for the expenses of the witnesses and of the justices when they viewed the bridge.

The justices at Quarter Sessions at Michaelmas 1721 ordered<sup>(28)</sup> James Corless to survey the bridge in North Meols called James (Janes) Bridge between Ormskirk and Preston, and also the hundred bridge called Gutters Bridge, which was of no use "by reason of diverting the current from marten mere". He was ordered to make a report and present it at the next Quarter Sessions. On 6 October 1721 an estimate<sup>(29)</sup> was made for building Pilling Bridge, another hundred bridge charged to the hundred of Amounderness.<sup>(30)</sup> Four bridges were built here. A temporary wooden bridge had been built in January 1721 immediately after the flood, and had cost £25. Another bridge, called Great Bridge, had cost £57 for wood and £30 for "Workmanship of carpenters and masons"; Brock Bridge £26, and a third bridge £10. The overseers admitted to having only £38 -10 -0. In the parish of Cockerham, Cocker Bridge<sup>(31)</sup> was stated on 10 January 1721 to be in decay and a temporary wooden bridge ought to be built. Considering the extent

<sup>(23)</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 175.

<sup>(24)</sup> L.R.O., QSP 1175/6.

<sup>(25)</sup> *Ibid.*, 1175/7.

<sup>(26)</sup> Christopher Roby's father was one of the first governors of Upholland Grammar School. Both father and son were of Upholland between Wigan and Ormskirk. *TRANSACTIONS*, Vol. 101, pp. 89 and 94.

<sup>(27)</sup> L.R.O., QSP 1195/26.

<sup>(28)</sup> L.R.O., QSP 1183/6.

<sup>(29)</sup> *Ibid.*, 1182/25. This bridge was between Preston and Bilsborough over the River Wyre.

<sup>(30)</sup> By a private act of 1690.

<sup>(31)</sup> L.R.O., QSP 1173/4.

of the damage done in Cockerham it can be assumed that Cocker Bridge had been damaged by the flood of the previous month, and that, as in Pilling, a temporary wooden bridge would be provided until permission and money were available to build a more substantial and permanent bridge. The January statement was endorsed on 10 April 1721 to the effect that workmen had looked at the damaged bridge, and that they had estimated the cost of rebuilding at £500. A more detailed estimate<sup>(32)</sup> showed that "stones and Workmanship" would cost £332 and "Wood and Workmanship" would cost £145.<sup>(32)</sup> A "Little Bridge" was built at the same time for £64. A receipt<sup>(34)</sup> to the chief constable of Lonsdale hundred for £94-17-0 by one of the supervisors of Cocker Bridge states that the money was part of £350 "raised by the Roll of Sessions for rebuilding of Cocker Bridge", and the accounts of how the money was spent show that a stone bridge was being built between 11 September 1721 and 28 March 1722, and that the supervisor's expenses amounted to £12. The repair<sup>(35)</sup> of the Ribble, or Walton,<sup>(36)</sup> Bridge and the copp at Walton-le-dale cost £17-16-0, and by 15 July 1721 £15-17-6 had not been paid: this was the reason for the appeal to Quarter Sessions. Whether the bridge had been repaired after flood damage cannot be decided, but it seems likely that the onrush of sea-water, the high winds and the heavy rains could combine to flood the rivers and damage bridges as far inland as the Ribble Bridge. Three bridges between Preston and Clitheroe were presented on 24 April 1721:<sup>(37)</sup> they were Edisford, Lower Hodder and Higher Hodder Bridges. They had been repaired by the end of the year when accounts and receipts were submitted.<sup>(38)</sup> Other bridges in the flooded area which were presented to Quarter Sessions in 1721 included Cowen Bridge in Lonsdale hundred,<sup>(39)</sup> Lee Bridge between Lancaster and Clitheroe<sup>(40)</sup> in Wyresdale and Hollowforth Bridge in Woodplumpton.<sup>(41)</sup> Whether any of these bridges were damaged by the inundation is questionable, but it is evident that an unusual number of bridges were in need of repair in 1721, and it does not seem unlikely that the storm and floods of the previous December were the chief causes.

The roads presented to Quarter Sessions during this period cannot be accepted as proof of damage caused by floods because roads were continually being presented for disrepair.

<sup>(32)</sup> *Ibid.*, 1173/5.

<sup>(33)</sup> A short account of charges for repairing the same bridge for £9-10-9 does not seem to be part of the two previous estimates, and may have been an account of the temporary wooden bridge, or temporary repair to the damaged bridge. L.R.O., QSP 1173/6.

<sup>(34)</sup> *Ibid.*, 1193/1.

<sup>(35)</sup> *Ibid.*, 1182/23.

<sup>(36)</sup> Walton Bridge was one of the three county bridges whose maintenance was chargeable to the county as a whole. Lancaster Bridge and Crossford Bridge near Manchester were the other two. See William Harrison, "Old Time Travel in Lancashire" in *Memorials of Old Lancashire*, p. 58.

<sup>(37)</sup> L.R.O., QSP 1174/26.

<sup>(38)</sup> *Ibid.*, 1186/15-16.

<sup>(39)</sup> *Ibid.*, 1173/7. See also William Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>(40)</sup> *Ibid.*, 1177/5.

<sup>(41)</sup> *Ibid.*, 1178/15.

An interesting scrap of paper<sup>(42)</sup> which was also found among the Quarter Sessions Rolls for Epiphany 1721 shows another and smaller personal loss than that suffered by Richard Jump of Ince Blundell. An "Oliver Rimer"<sup>(43)</sup> of Northmeels" stated that he "upon the late High Tides on the Western parts of this County which happened on or about the 18th of December last did loose Eighty two bushels of Malt for which the Duty to his Matie [Majesty] was pd to the Colls of the Revenue". This may have been the same Oliver Rymer who headed the North Meols petitioners.<sup>(44)</sup>

#### IV

How much money was actually collected for the brief is difficult to ascertain. A survey of all the volumes printed by the Lancashire Parish Register Society, of extracts from five registers and account books printed elsewhere and of six transcripts of registers and account books has revealed little. Apart from the collections of Middleton, Aughton and Croxall,<sup>(45)</sup> only two more collections have so far been found: Hambleton in Rutland<sup>(46)</sup> gave 9s. Od. on 29 April 1722; East Budleigh in Devon gave threepence<sup>(47)</sup> in 1722. No actual receipt of money in the inundation areas has been found, but an eighteenth century account which was accepted by the charity commissioners and published in their Report between 1815 and 1839 reveals that a very inadequate sum was collected. In 1749 a master at the Free School of Lytham had enquired into the endowments of the school, and in his account book he explained that £103 had been Lytham's share of money collected on a brief granted because of an inundation in 1720. This £103 had been considered too small to distribute to any good purpose among the sufferers, and the people of Lytham had agreed to put the £103 to the school stock. In any case the account book stated that the amount of damage done had been "entered in the brief altogether

<sup>(42)</sup> *Ibid.*, 1170/4.

<sup>(43)</sup> Rimmer is still a common surname on the whole coastal plain of Lancashire. Chas. W. Bardeley, *A Dictionary of English and Welsh Surnames* (p. 647) and C. L. Estrange Ewen, *A History of Surnames of the British Isles* (p. 261) give the meaning of the name as a "poet". But in view of the pronunciation and the locality where the name is prevalent, it would seem that the more probable derivation of the name is the same as for place-names of similar origin e.g. Rymington: Eilbert Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names* (pp. 369 and 379 gives the meaning as *border or edge* (O.E. *rīma*)). Thus the surname would mean "one who lives on the edge", in this case the edge of the marsh, and this would be true of many people living on the Lancashire coastal plain before the nineteenth century.

<sup>(44)</sup> See Note 13.

<sup>(45)</sup> See Note 17.

<sup>(46)</sup> *TRANSACTIONS*, Vol. 84, pp. 88-89. This brief was received on 27 April 1722.

<sup>(47)</sup> T. N. Brushfield, "Devonshire Briefs" in *Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature, and Art*, Vol. XXVII (1895), p. 137.

<sup>(48)</sup> Report of the Charity Commissioners to the House of Commons (1815-1839), Vol. XVI Lancashire, p. 301.

in one sum, and every persons' respective damage not being separately valued, the money collected could not be equally distributed to every person in proportion to his damage." Neither Fishwick<sup>(49)</sup> nor Wright,<sup>(50)</sup> the two historians of Lytham School, have found reason to doubt this story, but this is the only evidence which has so far come to light about the way in which the brief money was used.

## APPENDIX

### The "Publick Bridge" and "Great Road" between Liverpool and Poulton at Crosby in 1720

In submitting their report to the Quarter Sessions at Ormskirk at Easter 1721, Henry Taylor, the mayor of Liverpool and Richard Norris who had inspected the bridge over the Farmosspool Gutter at Crosby "at the Request of the Inhabitants of Crosby, Formby and others" described this as a "publick bridge" and "which being lately Dashed down by the late Great Inundation is in great decay and very dangerous for Travellers, and doe find that it is a great Road. . . ."<sup>(51)</sup>

It is obvious from this wording that the local people looked upon this route between Liverpool and the Fylde as one of some importance, and that it was so used is confirmed by the entry in Blundell's Diary which against 18 November 1725 records "Mr Standish and I roade out to the Sea-Side in Expectation of Meeting Mr Clifton and his Lady in their way home to Lithom they being Married upon the 16th"<sup>(52)</sup> We know also from many other entries in the diary that Nicholas Blundell himself made regular use of a way running contiguous to the Mersey Estuary in going between the hall at Little Crosby and Liverpool. There is no question but that such a road, with its extensions via Bootle and Kirkdale to the south and through Formby and the fords over the Ribble at Hesketh Bank or Banks to the north, would mean a shorter journey than travelling by the Liverpool, Ormskirk and Preston Road.

Yates Map of 1786<sup>(53)</sup> shows a track which ran alongside the Mersey Estuary a little to the north of the Rimrose Brook outlet at Litherland, and passed across the marshes of Litherland, Great Crosby and Little Crosby as far as Hightown, where it deviated to the east to pass over the Alt Bridge between Ince Blundell and Little Altcar and so to the road leading from Formby to the Ribble fords. We find some evidence that this route was considered to be the "Liverpool road" from the Alt Bridge as early as 1677,

<sup>(49)</sup> H. Fishwick, *History of the Parish of Lytham in the County of Lancashire*, Chapter VII "The Free School and Miscellania", Chetham Society, Vol. 60 N.S., p. 105.

<sup>(50)</sup> Geoffrey Wright, — *The History of the Lytham Charities* (1950), pp. 10–15.

<sup>(51)</sup> L.R.O., QSP 1175/6.

<sup>(52)</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 211.

<sup>(53)</sup> L.R.O., QSP.DP/179/5.

when at the request of the high constable three gentlemen of Sefton parish reported to the Quarter Sessions on the condition of the highways in that parish.<sup>(54)</sup> They found that "in the township of Ince Blundell from the newe bridge lying over the River Alt the highway all along the Copsyde to Hilles lane ende to bee in decay for about 40 roodes in length And from the other ende of Hilles lane through the North ende leadinge towards Liuerpoole for about 80 roodes in many places is in decay the same beinge a soft Carry earth and the Inhabitation wantinge wherewit to repayre the same . . .". There is no mention in the report of the "great Road" in either of the two Crosby townships which one might have expected in view of the statement made by the inhabitants thereabouts forty years later.

The first Ordnance Plan of the district (1846/7) shows a path leading from Hightown across Moorhouses Marsh in the direction of Great Crosby, but this seems to peter out on reaching the sandhills, and today, apart from a short length of rough track, there is no evidence of the former existence of the "great Road" in this area, nor is there any sign of the "publick Bridge", but this is not surprising considering the coastal erosion which has taken place hereabouts since the days of the Diarist.<sup>(55)</sup>

The Farmosspool Gutter, to give this watercourse its modern name, was then an open drain which ran out of Great Crosby Marsh in a northerly direction and prior to 1712 it seems to have flowed into the division ditch which formed the boundary between the two Crosby townships at this point. The first Ordnance Plan shows that to the west of the spot where the gutter met the boundary, the demarcation line is "defined by a hollow in the ground", and this hollow must have represented the original route of the watercourse.

The condition of the Gutter was giving Nicholas Blundell trouble as early as 1710 when in his own words on 18 September "I went to Formoss-Poole Gutter expecting to have found 8 men at work . . .".<sup>(56)</sup> His concern at that time would be to see that the section of the gutter which lay alongside his lands was being cleansed or scoured.

On 21 April 1712 the Diarist found it desirable, in order to mitigate the nuisance, to enter into an agreement with the copyholders of Great Crosby, with the consent of William, Viscount Molyneux.<sup>(57)</sup> After reciting that "there is a certaine antient Watercourse runing from and out of a large Poole called Farmosspole in Great Crosby" and quoting the respective responsibilities of the inhabitants of Great Crosby and of Nicholas Blundell and his predecessors, lords of the manor of Little Crosby, in regard to the cleansing of the

<sup>(54)</sup> *Ibid.*, 472/21.

<sup>(55)</sup> R. Kay Gresswell, *Sandy Shores in South Lancashire*, p. 90.

<sup>(56)</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>(57)</sup> L.R.O. DDB1. 46/30. Molyneux was the lord of the manor of Great Crosby.

same, the preamble continues, *And whereas the said water course hath very often especially of late yeares been Sanded or blown up by the high winds and the breaking of the sandhills neare the same soe that the water could not have a free passage into the sea by reason whereof the grounds adjacent have been Damnified and the high Road between the markt Townes of Leverpoole and Poulton in the Fyld hath sometimes been very dangerous to passe. . . .* The agreement provided for the construction of a new channel through lands in Little Crosby, which are described as "Closses of Sand of the said Nicholas Blundell called the Nicholls hey and the Barnehey patch", and a third known as "the Coppy". The new course of the gutter thus passed into Little Crosby before turning due west to run into the estuary. In cutting the new channel from the old watercourse to the new, the copyholders were enjoined to ensure that the trench "be not in any part or place more than one yard broad nor rendred Impassable for a loaden cart."

It is not until after this agreement had been made that Nicholas Blundell seems to have concerned himself about a "Hundred Bridge" to be made over the "Formosspoole Gutter" as witnessed by his visit to Ormskirk on 6 May 1712<sup>(58)</sup> and it is somewhat problematical whether there was a bridge *in situ* at this time. In any case his efforts to induce the authorities to build the hundred bridge failed. It is also interesting to note that on the 11 August following, Mr. Roby, the surveyor of bridges for the West Derby hundred, breakfasted with him, after which they went together to "Vew Fermosspoole Gutter where he considered about making a Bridg over it".<sup>(59)</sup> Again there is no mention that a bridge was actually there. All that we can be certain of is that by 1720 at least, there was a "plat" in position over the gutter, and that it had been badly damaged in the inundation of that year.

The road across Great Crosby Marsh seems to have become redundant by 1818 as it is not shown on Greenwood's Map of that year, no doubt due to the fact that by that time the present day Liverpool road through Great Crosby village was available.

THOMAS WILLIAMS.

<sup>(58)</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 102.

<sup>(59)</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

