

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON LOCATIONS of INTEREST WITHIN AND WITHOUT THE QUEEN'S CHAIN

The Royal Borough of Copesmere

The first and possibly the saddest sight to be laid upon the attention of any visitor who arrives in the royal city by water from the North is the blighted, yet mysterious and captivating picture play that is the Royal Borough of Copesmere.

The Copesmere borough retains the administrative status of the Copes Water River, though it sits on dry land, being without right of the chancery and solely governed by Royal Prerogation and subject to the Court of Manners. The borough was originally instituted as a Royal pleasure garden and water park, at the city's accession to the Queen's Chain, in EP 88, but the great clouds of aqueatic hoverflies and ticks which breed upon and swarm over its many stagnant courses and marginal ponds proved insuperable to all attempts at control and rendered Copesmere a byword for undesirability and medical danger, a reputation it holds to this day. Over time, less discerning persons found this district a convenient place to make their business and a cheap place to build abodes without the oversight of chancery law. With five decades of the accession, Copesmere had indeed become the city's most populous tenement yard and the site of the Queen's Aldwick Gaol, the largest of Her Majesty's prisons of private discretion. The great, grey brick mass of the Aldwick hovers like a bleached ghost among the gaily painted tenements that crowd to its outer barricades, a monument to the academic and highly mathematick style of Benning and Dechlin, who co-operated on its design and construction. It sits full four stories above any other edifice of the borough and can be seen as a chilling landmark for the lost traveller as far away as Danfree or Lays Walk.

Whatever its density and impression, Aldwick's stony expanse is no exemplar of the local style. The characteristic tenement towers of the borough, which rise to six or seven storeys of uncomfortable and precipitous wood, commonly meeting above the course of the water in drunken arches of bridgework and counter-

bracing, are collectively known at The Rickets. These flea-thick dwellings spread over perhaps eight ninths of the borough's doglegged area, and contain an uncountable mass of teeming humanity, salted with divers chickens, pretty-birds, wild cats and working dogs. The spaces between them are principally taken up with areas of common and allotted cultivation, while a lesser portion of the borough's dryland expanse is given over to business and industry.

The principal businesses of the Copesmere, such as they are, consist of tanning, ginboiling and the manufacture of paints and paper-glues, all of which produce huge quantities of noisome waste which necessitate a river's quiet strength to disperse. The dubious moral consequences attendant on the conduct of destructive and poisoning industry within a highly populated area are obvious to any thinking reader, but seem to cut little cheese with the various magnates who have made it their pleasure to conduct their operations in the Borough. It requires little imagination to think out the principal causes of this dubious habit; principally that the separation of the borough's business from the regulation and taxation of the chancery means that only Royal Prerogatives of taxation, excluding the common-calls which apply elsewhere, are applicable to the proceeds of business conducted in the confines of Copesmere.

Secondly but perhaps nearly as cogently, the abrogation of chancel oversight means that no publicly-elected force of beadlerie exist in the borough to enforce the regulation of improper or criminal business and employment. Contrariwise, the Royal status of the borough means that it has a dedicated house of the Royal Deaconry assigned it, who are seen by the common folk of the borough as merest brigands, being much given over to intimidation, strikebreaking and smuggling, all on behalf of the divers mill owners and other rich offices of the borough.

The especial status of the borough of Copesmere also signifies further neglects of the public consideration which are elsewhere taken for granted within the cities of the Queen's Chain. There exist no common infirmaries,

poorschools, counting houses or granaries in Copesmere, though it holds a teeming population full fourfold the number of many a district which boasts several of each such office of the common grace. Further, the Abbey of Caeswick, which holds an ancient and subordinated dual suzerainty over the borough, in common with the Court of Manners, has not in living memory bestirred itself from its singing and researches to extend to the borough's denizens any of the almoning graces to which they might feel entitled in respect of the seasonal coin tithes that the august house of spiritual learning, and notional temporal kindness, levies upon the smallfolk.

Given the absence of granaries and the neglect of offices of regulation and corn support which elsewhere protect the labouring poor, the purchase of any baking grain by the lower orders of this borough is infrequent, given its stiff price and consequent limited availability. Instead, the majority of Copesmere folk depend greatly on their smallholdings for sustenance. These are organised by allotment, according to ancient protocols, whenever new territory in the borough is opened up by fire or collapse, and do sprawl across all the sunward faces and roofs of The Rickets, looking on a bright day for all the world as if the foul stacks of poverty stricken humanity were treehouses in some fairy forest. Though it might be argued that whatever open space which periodic ruin and fire lays upon the fabric of the borough might better be turned over to modern and clean dwellings for its teeming denizenry, such commonsensical action is sadly impossible, rendered so by the lunatic historical surcease on new buildings in the borough, which was instituted to prevent overpopulation of the area in ER 122 and never repealed, despite its present, extraordinarily pernicious and contrary effects.

Sadly, the voices most prominent at court for its abolition belong not to those in The Rickets whose health and commonweal might benefit handsomely through fresh dwellings, but those of the greed-blind masters of industry who pollute the borough with their foul commerce and traffick, and seek still more spaces for their unblessed factories and mills.

Wheresoever as rack and ruin sadly leaves an echoing space among the tenement houses, great chasms of light soon fall to the sodden brown floor of the borough. The wounded and dead are pulled from the broken wood and all valuables stripped from the rubble. This broken skeleton of building which therein remains becomes the fresh bodystuff upon which the clever gardening art of the Copesmere folk is played, almost in some metaphoric image of the circular transport of death and new life that exists through all our growing world. Within days of the mourning time and burial rites being conducted, and pyres overtopped with herbage, the wrecksite is itself overtopped with soils and made a living garden. A great profusion of raised foodbeds and planted walls are rapidly cast up and excrement trucked in from all about to supplement the canal dredgings which are invariably scraped up and dragged by the barrel to cover the carcass of smashed building. Soon enough sheep and goats may be seen hopping among eggcoops and rabbit houses, where once pawnshops and taverns held sway. Then, in turning a corner, great boxes of tulips and marigolds suddenly arrest the eye, bracketing narrow vistas of apple and plum trees which overtop small parcels of corn grass and barley wheat.

The borough is politically a veritable oven pit of discontent, for the many reasons which the above descriptions of its status might have implicated. The common cause of all the small people of the district is that the borough's especial status under the Crown be superseded and abolished, along with the scandalously indifferent tenantry rights held by Caeswick over its people. In service of that hope, all the taverns, wine shops, gin boileries and coffee houses of Copesmere are made warrens of political disputation and agitation. Within them, corresponding societies, nonconformist sects, syndicates, political lodges and secret societies all interbreed in the muggy, foul air with the mutant rapidity of diseases, shucking off names, slogans and secret signs at a dizzying rate. Though the great majority of these divers bodies hold to a common front in favour of Copesmere's constitution as a Lay Borough of the Division of Chanchette, under proper supervision of its own duly elected chancel, a

few radicals hold to wilder paths, advocating the absolute suppression of monastic scholasticism and the final destruction of the Crown as an instrument of law and property. The interest which the Royal Deaconry of the borough take in these views and those who hold them can scarcely be overestimated, and not a day does dawn without the newssheets outside the eateries, and the prints sold by piemen, telling of another fresh outrage of political decency undertaken by the 'Hanging Thieves', as the Deaconry are commonly reputed in the borough. It is perhaps not so well known as it ought be that the much celebrated political jest of Gherlain's party in the last States General, to whit that: "The beadlerie make it their honest business to trouble those as make murder, whereas the deaconry prefer honestly to murder those as make trouble", was in fact a famous slogan printed in a wallpaper called *The Lamplighter*, one of many such radical publications printed and pasted up surreptitiously in Copesmere.

In short, the Royal Borough manages to combine grand crime, in the persons of its magnates and burghers, with petty revolution, in the persons of its propagandists and educators, making it a beehive of interest to all those with a quick eye for the turbulent and maniac creativity of this grand city.

Though most traffick moves on the water, which is more easily navigated than the borough's thousand flooded and winding lanes, the land traffick has one curious distinction little seen in the grander, and drier parts of the city. Herein the huge and shaggy Greater Rankehounds in used by many small traders to draw carts in teams of as many as eight beasts. Broad shouldered, stocky and placid, these dogs are fed by the refuse of the tanneries and butchers yards, which is considered an economy by the denizenry of Copesmere, wherein horsecorn is a dear luxury.

THE EMMSLEE FENS

Principal Points of Interest

Brieste, a major trading town in Du Tropic
The Foundation of Seersoir, in Du Tropic
The Mallos Gorges, on the border of Brieste and Chanchette
The Copes Water river

Geology and Botany

Rain-soaked and eroded soft loam over limestone, with veins of chalk. Acid soil with low growths of thick weedy trees, high winds on the tops. Fern in the damper places, bracken toward the tops. Thick peat fens and wide shallow bogs on the flats to the South, nearer Copes Water. The whole country has chalked roads and walls of chalk bricks. The soil is generally poor, being underlain with lime, but the richest areas have been much cultivated since immemorial time, with careful use of manures and burnt lime being made for generations to enrich these prized glens which are the lifeblood of the fen peoples.

People and Ways

In the section of High Daven, the common folk are tenants of High Morton and owe tithes to the abbey of that name, which they pay in rice, vegetables and charcoal. Whereas in Low Daven geese are kept for meat and eggs, in High Daven, the drier land prefers the keeping of swans, which are much sold as pets to wealthy ladies in the towns of the Copes Water. The people of High Daven are happy to eat the less pretty specimens. The common folk of the section of Low Daven are under the nominal authority of the Margrave of Daven-Denning, whose familial seat is Clearwede House. The inheritance of that title is currently the subject of a dispute between two branches of the Enwood family, from whom the last Margrave, Dawes Enwood, died thirty-seven years ago and childless. This lapse in the occupation and close supervision of the lands, while the legal case is fought in Lemons Hill, has allowed the naturally lawless fen folk of Low Daven to go without tithing or harvest work these long decades, and

many now profess themselves freed landholders, and the Enwood family's claim over them extinct, holding the example of the aborted Greenhae succession, and the resulting freedom of the people of Tayswood as their model. These wise bush-lawyers live by goose herding, hunting, and the cultivation of rice.

Being a region whose primary industries are difficult and unpleasant to many persons, namely peasantry and mining, there are a great number of young Emms folk who prefer to seek their fortune on the rivers which connect the upwater Seedle with the Copes Water Delta and Lemons Hill, the great city of Her Majesty which is another magnet for young Emms people in search of fortune. There is a fair friendship between the people of the Emmslee Fens and the river-going folk of the Cope's Water, with considerable traffic, trade and intermarriage occurring between them. The freedom with which the river people conduct their lives is also a strong pull towards the river life, as they owe no tithes or rents as do the people of Emmslee, who suffer to pay their dues to the church or the few desperate and often violent steadsmen who still attempt to collect rents on behalf of the disputed Daven-Denning estate. The ability to travel, to live beyond the yoke of noble duties and earn good money in the traffic of strong goods is attractive, but the river life is not easy, though the familiarity and family ties between the Emmslee and Copes Water people mean those who work on the river trade fare better than any city born who may find themselves in such a situation, thrust upon the patience of the river workers who are so frequently the butt of educated humour.

The hardest industry of the fens is chalk mining, taken up in the Pit Barrens, below the Tee Ehlen range and accessed through cartage or horse trek up the Runnyam Road. The principal settlements taken up with this trade are Sopps Hollow, Deeswick and Leeshigh, where broken and graded chalk and burnt lime is carted to be sold on by brokers and then used in local industry or transported along the Seedle River to the Copes Water proper. The chalk cutting valleys are hateful places, wholly stripped of even the modest charms of the High Daven uplands. The greenery is aggressively

cut back and burned to allow for broad scrapes through the loam to the chalk line. Whole hillsides around the scrapes are draped in white dust, as if in perpetual winter. Every surface of the mean buildings of the mines is also frosted with chalk, and all the small waterways which elsewhere in the region serve careful farming are choked into clags of immovable deathly paste.

The toll of this labour is so hateful upon the bodies and minds of those who perform it that few return for a second season after the winter rains bog out digging and bring an end to work. The dust in particular is a great deleteriant to health; agues of the lungs are rampant and callow eye is seen incessantly in the workers. To reduce their hateful burden of dust, the working people go swaddled in the faces, with their mouths and noses covered and only small holes in the fabric left for sight, looking for all the world as they straggle up from the pit, white to their boots, as if they were a rank of corpses lately returned to life. Only the work buildings lie within the cutting valleys proper, principally shacks for cutting and grading tables and storage barns for scraping tools. All the proper habitations of the mine, such as workers' cottaging and whatsoever infirmaries as may be provided by the proprietors, are situated far down on the opposing faces of the hills, where dust is easier kept out. It is common, especially in the mines situated further to the North and higher upon the Tee Ehlen foothills, for these mean dwellings to be themselves carved into the soft limestone of the range, better allowing protection from the incessant wind and cold, as well as the choking dust.

Most Emms folk cleave to one another with the firm passion common to all isolated peoples who are sore-pressed by tenantry and rackrent. They are firm committed to the local supports of beadleries and chancel, holding them as a brake on the avarice of brigands, steadsmen, overlords and their servants in the deaconry. Attendance to the graces, and singing of the counts is held by many, particularly in the Low Daven, where the numbers are strongly followed by settlers from further down the Copes Water and a great host of immigrants from South Chanchette who are drawn to the larger towns on chancel, court or board business. The fens also hold their own

close traditions, similar to the Didicot ways familiar to all old Chanchierres, and much practiced openly, outside the tenantry of High Morton, where circumspection is thought sensible. It is much the fashion of Didicot people of the fens to use the digging ways in their auguries, to burn beech and char tallow figures, and to also talk water mouthed in the festivals. It is little known, though much supposed at, whether the hateful and abhorred Do Ren supersititions be anywhere practiced by Emms folk.

There are two companies of regular infantry who have historically been levied on the fens, but neither has been raised to active duty since the wars in Doppe between ER 217-219. The first is Her Majesty's Loyal Morton Retainers, a company of shielded crossbowmen and cannonneers, while the second is Her Majesty's Second Emmslee Hunters and Woodbrakes, a company of skirmishing rifles and light horse. Both are still drilled with regularity under the supervision of the Holborne and Bowleweede

chancels, respectively. Most notably, The Second Emmslee served with distinction under the command of Baroness Dixon, then the head of the House of Daven Denning, in her injunction of the attempt by Colonel Brelance to break out of the Beausdiet salient and establish communication with Den Orr's partisan force at Fiehl's Water in 219. Though the fighting was cruel and bloody on both sides, it has been much remembered by the people of Doppe that outrages perpetrated on the Reeswood front by forces from Malditte under General Chatham were not repeated by the armies of Dixon and Tielig at Fiehls Water or Beausdiet. It was, in fact, only the forgiving grace of the Emmslee soldiers and a letter of good-carriage from Baroness Dixon which ensured the safe-passage of Den Orr to Pentman House, where she was to play her part in the remarkable conference which ended the war and created the novel constitutional arrangements by which Doppe is now counted a part of the greater body of the Queen's Chain.