INTRODUCTION

In 1662 the antiquarian William Dugdale published his monumental history of the drainage of the English fens. While describing reclamation schemes around Norfolk a half-century earlier, he reports that, despite the king’s support, the project ground to halt for five years by “reason of the opposition which diverse perverse-spirited people made thereto, by bringing of turbulent suits in law … and making of libellous songs to disparage the work; of which kind I have here thought fit to insert one called ‘The Powtes Complaint.’”¹ This anonymous poem thus represents a very rare species in the literary archive: an oral composition voicing popular resistance to one of the most audacious land-grabs in early modern English history. The ballad is particularly remarkable in that it not only bewails the disruption of the fen-dwellers’ economy but also imagines the consequences of environmental degradation from a non-human point of view. Perhaps even more shockingly it advocates violent resistance to the undertakers’ schemes. Riots and acts of sabotage against the drainage did in fact occur throughout the fenlands in the seventeenth century; “The Powtes Complaint” sounds like a defiant battle-cry of this movement to preserve the last great bastion of wilderness in England.

Given the historical and literary significance of “The Powtes Complaint,” the lack of scholarship on the song is surprising. Dugdale’s version has on occasion been reprinted

in anthologies devoted to the British ballad. The composer Patrick Hadley—a friend of Ralph Vaughan Williams—set the song to music in his 1955 cantata *Fen and Flood*. H. C. Darby reprinted a portion of it in his classic 1956 study on the draining of the fens. More recently, the ecocritic Ken Hiltner quotes an excerpt from it in passing in his *What Else is Pastoral?* Ian Rotherham includes Dugdale’s transcription in his book *The Lost Fens* from 2013, but mistakenly interpolates stanzas from a different anti-drainage drinking song.

None of these texts offer much in the way of sustained analysis. Nor has there been any attempt to locate and collate the manuscripts of the poem.

As ecocriticism begins to re-shape the canon, neglected works such as the “Powtes Complaint” are bound to claim a larger share of the limelight. This paper angles for new information on the provenance, authorship, and readership of this extraordinary text. It examines four different manuscripts of the ballad in the British Library, none of which have been previously transcribed. The paper will highlight some of the numerous variants among the four manuscripts plus the version printed by Dugdale and comment on their significance. It will also fish for answers to some pressing questions: When was the song written and where? What did it sound like? What historical and environmental circumstances prompted its composition? How does the author portray the fenland ecology? What exactly is a pout? And who was the person behind the ballad? In addition to unmasking the author and vetting the manuscripts, this paper will contrast it with mathematician Jonas Moore’s epic poem celebrating the drainage. In brief, this paper aims

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to uphold the “Powtes Complaint” as one of the earliest and greatest environmental protest poems in English literature.

Before attempting to interpret the “Powtes Complaint” it is vital to anchor it in the context of the English fens. Encompassing roughly 1,300 square miles in and around the Wash estuary, and spanning the counties of Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire, Huntingdonshire, Norfolk, and small patches in Suffolk and Yorkshire, these low-lying wetlands were the largest patch of genuine wilderness left in early modern England. Though outsiders viewed them as a putrid, disease-infested quagmire, they provided a precious habitat for large numbers of birds, fish, and insects. The surrounded isles or “holmes” also supported a modest human population, who lived off of fishing, fowling, and the harvesting of sedge, reeds, and peat. As agricultural prices soared in the early seventeenth-century, so-called “improvers” sought to drain and enclose these boggy commons to create more farmland. Following the passage of the Drainage Act in 1601, investors (known as undertakers) were permitted to make contracts with locals to receive a percentage of profits from any land they “reclaimed.” Early efforts met with decidedly mixed success. Outraged bands of locals protested and sabotaged dikes and pumps. Given the already exorbitant cost of these drainage projects, such expensive setbacks threatened to bankrupt investors and derail the enterprise. Some undertakers managed to drain wetlands but only by diverting the water onto land that was previously dry; others were able to temporarily reclaim some land but winter rains often transformed it back to fen within a year or two. In the 1630s, a team of wealthy investors spearheaded by Francis Russell, the Fourth Earl of Bedford, devised somewhat more effective methods thanks to the assistance of experienced Dutch engineers such as Cornelius Vermuyden.

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Considering that food shortages rocked England throughout the Little Ice Age, the desire to create more arable land to feed the country’s exploding population is completely understandable. Yet the developers who financed and executed the scheme were all too often spurred not by humanitarian motives but by thirst for profit. In the process, they not only privatized the commons on which many rural cottagers depended for grazing and summer farming but also obliterated the wetlands ecology. By the mid-nineteenth century, the original fens were almost completely destroyed with the exception of a few small pockets such as Wicken Fen north of Cambridge. The fens were transformed into lucrative farmland but at the price of reducing one of the nation’s most bio-diverse regions into a monoculture. In hindsight, the draining of the fens is arguably the greatest environmental disaster perpetrated in English history. As I have argued elsewhere, the controversy over the fen drainage is a live debate in Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus* and *Tempest*. Ben Jonson also satirizes the avaricious and arrogant projectors in *The Devil is an Ass* (1616). “The Powtes Complaint” thus resonates with some major works of Renaissance drama. Answering the questions this peculiar text throws up, then, should be of considerable interest to early modernists and ecocritics.

The first question that detains the reader has to do with the title. Who or what exactly is the speaker? In his *Ballad History of England*, Roy Palmer glosses “Powtes” as “fowlers,” or bird-hunters. There is no philological evidence whatsoever to defend such a reading. He also omits an apostrophe so it looks plural when it should be either possessive or plural possessive. In modernized spelling the title should read “The Pout’s Complaint” or The Pouts’ Complaint.” From an ecocritical perspective, this has the unfortunate effect of completely skewing the ballad’s attempt to speak on behalf of the non-human biotic

community. H. C. Darby may be closer to the mark when he asserts that pout was an old English word for sea-lamprey. The claim is not implausible, but is stated with too much confidence and no supporting evidence. In his 1601 translation of Pliny, Philemon Holland mentions “eel-pouts” and says they are “like to sea-lampreys” not that they are sea-lampreys. Moreover, adult sea lampreys live in the ocean and only migrate into rivers to spawn. It could possibly be an eel, a keystone species in the fenland ecology that was even used as a form of currency in the Middle Ages. If this is the animal in question, though, one wonders why the author did not simply write eel instead. A 1661 text mentions eel-pout as a species related but not identical to eel. The OED reports that “powte” was widely used as a generic name for a variety of fish in the family gadidae, which includes cod and haddock. The only freshwater variety, however, is the burbot—a species also referred to in early modern usage as a “powte” or “eel-powte.” A seventeenth-century text speaks of the “eel-powte (or a powte proper)” and gives the following description:

It is a long muddy fish, that is headed, skinned, and fined like an Eele, with a smooth skin like a Snake, or Adder, of a milke colour; (that is a whitish blew) not spotted, but dashed here and there all over the skin with a dusky colour; It hath two large round fins at the Gill; with a jagged fin, above them towards the Mouth; all the fins are coloured as the skin. It hath a lob or beards, sharp pointed under the lower

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8 Robert Lovell, *Panzooryktologia* (1661), 200. Thomas Muffet classifies the eel-pout as a sea-fish and calls it a mustela, a species now known as Fivebeard rockling. *Health’s Improvement* (1655), 152.
9 A sixteenth-century bestiary describes “Borbotha” as “fishes very slepery, somewhat like an ele hauing wyde mouthes and great hedes.” Laurence Andrews, *Noble Lyfe and Natures of Man, Of Bestes, Serpentys, Fowles, and Fisshes* (1527), Q3v. Robert Plot reports that burbot was a corruption of bird-bolt, “perhaps from that sort of arrow rounded at [the] head, somewhat like this fishes.” *Natural History of Staffordshire* (1686), 7.241.
Lip; in the higher side of the Mouth hath a double row, or two orders of Teeth; and in the Jaws below, but one.\textsuperscript{10}

This depiction and others in the text match up closely with the burbot (see Figure 1). If this were the creature the author had in mind, it would make the fish’s “Complaint” even more poignant in retrospect. Though the species was once common in the fens, it is now thought to be extinct in the UK. There has not been a confirmed sighting since 1969.\textsuperscript{11} The burbot likely died out in Britain as a result of the draining of the fens.

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\caption{The Burbot}
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Whatever species the author imagined as the persona, one might contend that the song’s primary concern is with the impact of the drainage on the human economy. It laments that destroying wetlands will cripple the water-dependent trades of boat-makers, stilt-makers, fishermen, and tanners; the last of these, it should be noted, were notorious polluters. So it would be rash to attribute firm environmentalist motives to the author of the song. In \textit{Environmental Degradation in Jacobean Drama}, Bruce Boehrer similarly cavils with dubbing the fenland riots “environmental protests.”\textsuperscript{12} It would be anachronistic to go

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\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Randle Holme, Academy of Armoury} (1688), 349.
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\textsuperscript{12} Bruce Boehrer, \textit{Environmental Degradation in Jacobean Drama} (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013), 166.
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looking for eco-terrorists in the seventeenth-century fens. While Boehrer’s note of caution is well sounded, the distinction between economy and what we now call ecology was not entirely discrete in the early modern period. The fact that the song blends concern for nature with concern for natural resources attests to the intimacy between the fenland community and its environment. Choosing a burbot as a spokes-animal for the fen folk points to an affinity or shared vulnerability between the native fauna and the rural poor. In the process, “The Powtes Complaint” swerves from the default anthropocentric viewpoint in most early modern writing about the natural world. Adopting the perspective of a fish, it extends moral consideration to non-humans. Deprived of their habitat, they are left to asphyxiate and be devoured by scavengers. Conjuring “Captain Flood” to sabotage the drainage works, the song envisions nature rising against human attempts to control or alter it through technology. In emphasizing the vicissitudes of the flood-prone lowlands, it subscribes to what eco-theorists now call post-equilibrium ecology. Though it perceives change as endemic in nature, the ballad does not view anthropogenic change as kindly. It sneeringly depicts the “Essex calves” as a kind of invasive species driving out the native fauna. Instead it calls for the recognition of a cross-species kinship among the “brethren of the water,” in which the elements, the aquatic wildlife, and the local human residents join forces to protect the embattled wilderness. “The Powte’s Complaint” thus stands as a work of major historical importance for early modern eco-critics.

It is also a surprisingly accomplished literary performance. The prosody resembles ballad meter, but with a slight variation. Whereas most ballads consist of quatrains with alternating eight- and six-syllable lines, “The Powtes Complaint” is comprised, in

13 Though still a common practice in the fishing industry today, air asphyxiation is, incidentally, an inhumane method of slaughter, as many species of can take over an hour to die.
Dugdale’s version at least, of fourteeners and sixteeners. Three of the four extant manuscripts at the British Library, however, indicate the song should be split into octaves. The first four lines of each are all written in iambic trimeter, with the standard ABAB rhyme scheme. The final four alternate between tetrameter and trimeter in accordance with the 8/6 pattern. Lines six and eight rhyme while the tetrameter lines (five and seven) feature internal or leonine rhyme like that latter deployed to great effect by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in “Rime of the Ancient Mariner”: rue/true; frogs/bogs; make/lake, etc. Though the ballad meter may seem crude in comparison to the iambic pentameter of Marlowe and Shakespeare, it does give the “Complaint” a driving, incantatory quality. The rhyme and meter would also have a mnemonic function, making the song easier to remember if it were to be sung during an actual protest.

The spell-like cadences are also significant considering that one of the most salient features of this text is its high number of speech-acts in the form of prayers and curses.

But Ceres, thou look towards it now,
Let wilde oates be theirre venture,
& let the frogs and myrye bogsge
Destroy where they doe enter.15

Since Ceres was the Roman goddess of agriculture, one might expect her to side with the projectors, who were transforming the boggy wetlands into arable land. But the song instead allies her with the amphibious ecology of the fens: the “frogs and miry bogs.” It concludes with a trio of similar invocations to Aelous, Neptune, and the Moon. Only the last of these is not hailed by a classical appellation, such as Luna, Diana, or Cynthia. While the moon looms large in fen folklore, these allusions to Roman gods suggest the author was probably not an illiterate fisherman, reed-cutter, or cunning woman. Even in an isolated

15 BL Add MS 23723, fol. 19v.
microculture like the fens, it is hard to believe that crypto-pagan cults to Ceres, Aeolus, and Neptune still persisted in Britain a millennium after the departure of the Romans. The personified deities command no more belief than the inhuman persona of the talking fish.

In a study of Anglo-Saxon speech-acts, Danet and Bogatch propose a useful distinction between “serious” curses—which the speaker believes to have magical efficacy—and “ludic” curses—which are “uttered in jest or as an expression of anger.” The pout’s curses probably belong in the latter category. A point of comparison might be Michael Drayton’s appeal to the dryads to punish those guilty of deforesting England. Though the gods may be poetic fictions, the anger is real. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that the early modern fens were widely regarded as a hotbed of witchcraft. So these curses might have aroused more trepidation in the witch-crazed Jacobean era than they do today. In a 1637 trial, a woman charged with inciting a riot against the drainage was also accused of having performed maleficium to curse the undertakers. This incident took place in Wisbech, which is, as this essay will unfurl, the place where “The Powtes Complaint” may have likely originated.

The curses and magical thinking in “Powtes Complaint” make it in a fascinating inter-text for Shakespeare’s Tempest. Over the years, scholars have unmasked dozens of possible progenitors for the monster Caliban. Though it is undeniable that Shakespeare modelled aspects of the characters on European perceptions of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, Caliban may also reflect the plight of the dispossessed fen-dwellers. Like Caliban, the fen folk were viewed as illiterate, superstitious, deformed (with web feet),

18 Lindley, Fenland Riots and the English Revolution, 92.
prone to drunkenness, and surly towards outsiders. In his first appearance in the play,
Caliban enters cursing:

As wicked dew as e’er my mother brushed
With raven’s feather from unwholesome fen
Drop on you both! A southwest blow on ye,
And blister ye all o’er!

(1.2.323-26)

The outburst not only locates the fish-like Caliban in the fens but also features the same
vituperative cursing heard in the “Complaint.” Just as the song conjures Aelous, the god of
winds, to “blast” the projectors, Caliban commands a “southwest” to blister Prospero. The
‘Powtes Complaint’ may be the closest thing we have to a song by an English Caliban.
This is not to imply that Shakespeare knew the ballad; as this essay will unfold, it was
probably composed about eight years after his play. But the resemblances suggest that
Shakespeare had a keen understanding of the rhetoric and grievances of the fen folk.

The invocation of the Roman deities in “The Powtes Complaint,” meanwhile,
presents an intriguing counter-point to the wedding masque in Shakespeare’s play. In this
scene performed before the Jacobean court in 1612, Ceres bestows her “blessing” not only
on the couple but also on agricultural enterprises that promise to fill the nation’s barns and
granaries. The numerous supporters of the drainage at the court, including the King
himself, may have taken the masque as divine approbation of their land reclamation
schemes. In “The Powtes Complaint,” however, Ceres sides with the wilderness. The song
thus reflects the local cottagers’ view of the fens as a fecund environment, already teeming
with life. Whereas The Tempest summons the naiads or river spirits to dance with the
sicklemen, the ballad calls on “ancient water nurses” or rivers to flood the reclaimed lands.
Whereas the magus Prospero commands the “ebbing Neptune” (5.1.35) the author of the
song beseeches Neptune to silt up the drains and ditches.

An even sharper contrast with “The “Powtes Complaint” can be found in Jonas Moore’s triumphant anthem to the drainage:

I sing floods muzzled and the ocean tamed,
Luxurious rivers governed and reclaimed,
Waters with banks confined, as in a jail,
Till kinder sluices let them go on bail.19

Whereas the “Powte” gives a voice to the non-human and deifies the oceans Moore’s epic praises the gagging and domination of the wilderness. Moore goes on to say that no one could possibly begrudge this project, “But the poor fish, who now wants room to play, / Hassocks, and men with heads more rough than they.” The reference to the “poor fish” as the primary victims raises an eyebrow, particularly since the subsequent stanza encourages the undertakers to ignore the “brutish clamors” of those who “curse your generous labors.” It does not seem inconceivable that Moore himself may have known of “The Powtes Complaint”—either from Dugdale or from his own adventures in the fens—and perhaps composed his “True and Natural Description” as a rebuttal. The banal adjectives sound as if this text is attempting to set the record straight about the drainage and disarm the fanciful or poetic slanders spread about it. This is not to say that Moore is himself above slander: at one point he derides the people of Wisbech—the town one manuscript identifies with “the Powte”—as uneducated and “sordid clowns.”

While the resonances with The Tempest and Moore’s epic are richly suggestive, the text that most closely resembles “Powtes Complaint” is a boisterous drinking/protest song entitled “The Draining of the Fens.” This is, so far as we know, the only other extant example of those many “libellous songs” against the drainage begrudged by Dugdale. It

19 Jonas Moore, History or Narrative of the Great Level of the Fens (1685) 71-72.
first appeared in print in the 1661 collection *Wit and Drollery*.

The up-land people are full of thoughts,
And do despair of after-rain;
Now the sun is robbed of his mornings draughts
They're afraid they shall never have shower again.

Then apace, apace drink, drink deep, drink deep,
Whilst 'tis to be had lets the liquor ply;
The drainers are up, and a coil they keep,
And threaten to drain the Kingdom dry.

Our smaller rivers are now dry land,
The Eeles are turn'd to serpents there;
And if old father Thames play not the man
Then farewel to all good English Beer.

Then apace, apace drink, &c.

The Dutchman hath a thirsty soul,
Our Cellars are subject to his call:
Let every man then lay hold on his boul
'Tis pity the German-Sea should have all.
Then apace, apace drink, &c.

Our new Philosophers rob us of fire,
And by reason do strive do maintaine that theft;
And now that the water begins to retire
We shall shortly have never an Element left.
Then apace, apace drink, &c.

Why should we stay here then and perish with thirst?
To th' new world in the moon away let us goe;
For if the Dutch colony get thither first,
'Tis a thousand to one but they'l drain that too.
Then apace, apace drink, &c. 20

Whereas “The Powtes Complaint” vents anger against undertakers from Essex, this song targets the Dutch. It playfully satirizes their reputation for tippling, equating their stereotypical fondness for binge drinking with their eagerness to drain the fens. In the refrain, however, the fen dwellers match them at their cups. Considering that alcohol was and remains a common accelerant for public disorder, the invitation to the fen-dwellers to “drink apace” in the song’s chorus is not politically innocent. Though it does not advocate driving the undertakers out “by battle” as the “Complaint” does, the two songs have some notable similarities. Both texts focus on the plight of the wildlife bereft of their habitat; instead of burbots being devoured by crows here the eels are metamorphosed into serpents. The plea to “old father Thames” to deluge the reclaimed land echoes the Pout’s appeal to “ancient water nurses” and a personified “Captain Flood.” Both songs credit nature with subjectivity. Both voice discomfort with the presumption that humans have the right to drastically reshape the ecology of the earth. Both instead recognize the environment as a site of incredible complexity and unpredictability that exceeds mankind’s capacity to

20 *Wit and Drollery* (London, 1661), 231-33.
control or subdue it. The first stanza of the latter song even worries that fen drainage will trigger climate change: banishing the water reduces the amount of moisture evaporating into the atmosphere and “showers” may no longer fall. In our era of global warming and rising sea levels, these songs impart ecological lessons worth learning.

THE MANUSCRIPTS

While the “Powtes Complaint” has attracted the occasional notice of historians and folklorists, little inquiry has been made into its origin and transmission. Who composed the ballad? Who sang it? And who thought it worth transcribing or reading? Currently, Dugdale’s transcription is the only one known to scholars. Our archival research, however, suggests the ballad was far more widely than known than this single witness might imply. We have uncovered four extant versions of it at the British Library.

- BL Harley MS 837, f. 75v-77v
- BL Lansdowne MS 740, f. 45r-v
- BL Bleinhem MS 61683 f. 71r-71v
- BL Add MS 23723, 19v-20v

A survey of these manuscripts reveals a number of fascinating variants and details not found in Dugdale’s transcription.

First and foremost, the manuscripts present slightly different variations of the title: In Harley 837 the song is described as follows: “The Powtes Complaint upon draining of the fens in Cambridgeshire, Ely and Wisbeck.” As this essay will unfold, such details are of vital importance when seeking to illumine the specific political and environmental circumstances that generated the ballad. The title supplied in two other manuscripts may allow us to recreate how the ballad would have sounded. Bleinhem MS 61683 reports that
the lyrics were set to the “tune of the Boatman,” while MS 23723 states that the song was entitled “The Bonny Boatman.” The latter manuscript even records the musical notation for this once popular song (see Figure 2). On the basis of the title, one might presume it expressed the joy the boat-loving fen-dwellers took in their watery environment. However, an examination of the lyrics suggests the choice was probably an ironic one. While the musical notation in MS 23723 only records where the refrain would fall, a complete version of the ballad was printed in 1739 in *Calliope or English Harmony*. The original verses express a lover’s yearning for the arrival of her beloved Scotsman—which apparently rhymed with Boatman. The first stanza is printed below:

Ye gales that gently wave the sea
And please the jolly boat-man
Bear me from hence or bring to me
My brave and bonny Scotsman.
In holy bands, we joyn’d our hands,
Yet may not this discover,
While parents rate a large estate
Before a faithful lover.21

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21 *Calliope or English Harmony* (1739): 1:25.
The genre is pastoral, as the speaker prefers to live in rural contentment amid the Highlands with her beloved Scotsman rather than marry for wealth and status. In the early Stuart era many of the undertakers who obtained royal patents to drain the fens, such as Robert Carr (the cousin of James’ favourite) were in fact Scottish. So the choice of melody perhaps plays on anti-Scottish resentment among the fen folk; those who opposed the drainage were not in fact yearning for the arrival of the outsiders who were coming to enclose their
commons. Alternatively, the melody could be an appeal to the Scottish King to come intervene and set things right in the fens.\textsuperscript{22}

In addition to revealing the melody of the ballad, the manuscripts also contain several substantive differences in wording from Dugdale’s version, and from one another. Line 7 is perhaps the best example. In Dugdale’s \textit{History}, it reads: “And where we feed in fen and reed they’ll feed both beef and bacon.” In all of the manuscripts except Harley 837 the first verb is “breed,” emphasizing the importance of the fens as a nursery for fish and fowl. While MS 23723 then agrees with Dugdale in naming the locale as “ffen & reeds,” Bleinhem situates the pout in “segg” (sedge) and reed” while Lansdowne has them spawning in “rush and reeds.” Harley, meanwhile, focuses on the plants themselves rather than their function as food or shelter: “where there grew both sedge and reedes.” This reading, though, may be regarded as doubtful since the verb “grew” disrupts the pattern of internal rhyme. Harley 837 is also unique in identifying the crops to be sown on the drained fens as “peas and oats” rather than “beans and oats.” Other anomalies in this manuscript include its description of the song as “chanting” rather than “canting,” and its summoning of Aelous to punish the undertakers “with purpose of delusion” rather than branding them as those who “purpose our confusion.” Readers interested in the variants are invited to make a close study of the textual notes in the appendix.

Besides uncovering textual cruxes, trawling for the “Powte” in the archives may enable us to infer something about the poem’s popularity and readership on the basis of the various manuscript collections in which it appears. The Harley 837 version of the “Powte Complaint” is particularly valuable for the additional explicit titular link it makes with

\textsuperscript{22} Another ballad that could have provided a template for the “Powte” is entitled “The Wanton Wife of Castle-Gate: Or, the Boatman’s Delight,” first printed in 1693. The first stanza reads “Farewell both Hauk and Hound/ Farewell both Shaft and Bow: / Farewell all merry pastimes / And pleasures on a row.” The “Powte” features a similar passage: “Away with boate and rudder / Farewell both bootes and scatches.” Such elegiac refrains are fairly common in early modern poetry, however.
Cambridgeshire—thus corroborating the ballad’s connection with this region of the fens noted (as we shall see) in another of the manuscripts. *The Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts 1450-1700* describes Harley 837 as a folio “composite volume of miscellaneous tracts and verse, in several hands,” but it is noteworthy that the “Powte’s Complaint” features in an independent verse miscellany within this larger volume. This section, set off by its title-page ‘A: Booke:, Off, verses &c.,” is, according to the catalogue, written “in the hand of the ‘Feathery Scribe.”23 An anonymous copyist so named recently for the “light, wispy style of his script,” the Feathery Scribe is thought to be one of the most prolific and prominent copyists in London during the 1620s and 30s.24 Beale describes the scribe as “evidently a trained professional…who worked at least on occasions as a legal clerk.”25 The scribe most often wrote in very formal style and is noted for his attention to poetic or literary detail, especially as represented in layout, which is said on many occasions to be “an intelligent response to the rhetorical structures of the works copied.”26

So it is striking that Harley 837 clearly recognizes the stanza breaks whereas the other manuscripts run them together. If the scribe’s reproduction of the “Powte” ballad in stanzaic form signals some value placed on its technical skill, its presence in the volume may also give some indication of the legal significance and the nationally central reach of this environmentally sensitive verse.

The other verses surrounding the “Complaint” in this volume are telling in this respect; they comprise a version of “Cooper’s Hill” by Sir John Denham, “The Common-

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23 http://www.celm-ms.org.uk/repositories/british-library-harley-1.html
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
wealth of Birds” by James Shirley, and “Of Jack and Tom”. The last of these was written by none other than King James himself. It was composed on the occasion of Prince Charles’ 1623 journey to Spain with Buckingham, painting a grim picture of England in their absence:

What suddayne change hath dark’t of late,
The glory of th’ Arcadian state?
The fleecy flockes refuse to feede;
The lambes to play, the ewes to breede.
The Altars smoake, the offringes burne,
Till Jack & Tom doe safe returne.

Curtis Perry has outlined how this poem manipulates the pastoral form for political ends and the introductory material in Early Stuart Libels notes that it became prominent in the manuscript culture of the period contributing to debates surrounding the Spanish match. 27

Written by a playwright and poet of Royalist persuasion, Shirley’s “The Common-wealth of Birds” (dated around 1640) describes the ruined political, religious and economic state of the country. It laments the corrupt nature of men in power, imagining them as various breeds of birds and naming their faults. Denham’s “Cooper’s Hill” (c. 1640) is a particularly famous early instance of the topographical reflective genre which uses the view of the Thames at Egham as an occasion for “historical and moral reflections on kingship at a critical juncture in English history.” 28 This collection of verses including the “Powte,” then, seems to gather political poetry, especially that which engages with issues of kingship and moral governance. The collection may reflect an underlying Royalist perspective, or at least an anxiety about political turmoil in the era preceding the Civil War. But it also

27 http://www.earlystuartlibels.net/htdocs/spanish_match_section/Nv1.html
suggests a particular interest in how such turmoil manifests itself in the environment, be it in topography, in pastoral elegy, in quarrels among avian species or, with the “Powte,” in the outcry of the fenland species at the loss of their habitat to political schemes for individual gain.

In contrast to the serious tenor of the Harley collection, the portion of Lansdowne 740/3 in which the “Powte” appears contains “poems of a ludicrous nature.” All written in the same handwriting on each side of a single folio, these four poems are separate to the rest of the quarto verse miscellany, which ranges in content from around fifty poems by John Donne to extracts relating to Roman history from the early seventeenth century. The four “ludicrous” poems included in the miscellany include a song beginning “There was a fayr falcon broke out of a mews” with alternating Latin refrains every other line which describes in jest the escape of the falcon and the attempts of the falconer to recapture her. The “Powtes Complaint” comes next and is followed by a fully Latin verse with the repeated refrain of “tara tan tara tan tino,” and a poem which begins “Twelve sorts of cakes my wife allows” and proceeds to recount the contents of a meal of four courses each of flesh, fruit, and fish. This context paints the “Powte” in an altogether less earnest light, situating it with humorous, bawdy verses. Nevertheless, the use of Latin still suggests an educated writer or compiler, whilst the description of the first poem as a “song” along with the refrains of the other verses could indicate their musical or oral context.

Lansdowne 740/3 is also the only manuscript copy of “The Powte” not to break it into seven- and eight-syllable lines. Instead, as in Dugdale’s transcription, it bunches the verse together in a pattern of three fourteeners capped by a sixteener. Perhaps the version Dugdale knew was derived from the same line of transmission. Alternatively, both the Lansdowne scribe and Dugdale may have thought the longer lines sounded more literary.

29 http://www.celm-ms.org.uk/repositories/british-library-lansdowne.html
Whether or not the compression of the verses was deliberate, it arguably diminishes some of their complex syncopation. Worse, giving the song a more literary varnish—either through stanza breaks or lineation—whilst omitting information about the tune and the site of the conflict (as is the case in Lansdowne) might inadvertently obscure its origins as a protest ballad that was in all likelihood chanted by activists rather than read by antiquarians or urbane wits.

The Bleinheim Papers MS 61683 is described in the catalogue entry as “a collection of papers mostly in one handwriting, consisting of poems Latin and English – essays, sermons, letters to the king and important personages—law papers, & parliamentary documents of very various kinds. 1600-1630.” The particular section of the Bleinheim Papers in which the poem appears are, according to J. P. Hudson, partly derived from the family of Sir William Boetler, the Sheriff of Bedfordshire in 1637, and John Hampden, a member of Parliament. Unfortunately, this particular transcription is badly damaged. Much of the final third of the poem is illegible. Nevertheless, it could be significant that the “Powtes Complaint” here appears alongside autograph sermon notes by Hampden.

Interestingly, Hampden was a radical parliamentarian, numbered among the notorious “Five Members,” who attempted to arrest King Charles when he burst into the House of Commons on 4 January 1642. This was one of the key events that ignited the Civil War. The presence of “The Powte’s Complaint” among his papers could suggest that the ballad appealed to his fiercely republican convictions.

Our copy-text comes from MS 23723, a literary miscellany, neatly bound in a small quarto-sized book. The contents are eclectic: a knockabout farce starring Bande, Cuffe and

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Ruffe; a Latin satire on puritans; a “grave poem” performed “in way of an interlude” before King James in Cambridge; another Cambridge interlude satirizing lawyers; and a ballad that would make Falstaff proud entitled ‘Wit’s Commendation of a pot of good ale.” The performance satirizing lawyers is an extract from *Ignoramus, the Academical Lawyer*, a 1615 play by George Ruggle performed at Trinity College by students from Clare College. Though the identity of the miscellany’s compiler is unknown, the repeated mentions of Cambridge alongside the learned satires might point to a student or fellow at the university. Cambridge sits at the edge of fen country and the town of Wisbech is only forty miles north. Hence the compiler would be well-positioned to hear something about the poem’s provenance and author. On the basis of its inclusion in this miscellany, one might propose the “Powte” also appealed to readers fond of trenchant satire. Whilst the various manuscript versions of “The Powtes Complaint” hint, then, at the broader, perhaps secondary audience of compilers of topical controversial verse from the higher levels of society in legal, parliamentary or university circles, Add MS 23723 has been chosen as a copy-text on the virtue of it containing unique information about the ballad. The identity of the “Complaint’s” author has, until now, remained a mystery. MS 23723 dispels some of this darkness with the following post-script:

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This was made by one Peny of wisbich 1619
about the time of the coming of some Essex
knights & gentleme[n] to the undertaking of
the ffenes to be drayned.
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32 This post-script itself is no guarantee that the transcription is somehow more accurate. But it does suggest the transcriber may have ferreted out or was privy to information about the song which other compilers were either ignorant or did not care. The careful notation of the ballad’s melody as well indicates a painstaking temperament.
Regrettably, there are no contemporary parish records for anyone with the surname Penny at the Wisbech and Fenland Museum. However, parish records from Sutton-in-the-Isle (about twenty miles south of Wisbech) reveal that a Penny family resided there in the early seventeenth century. The circumstantial nature of the evidence and the tendency of English families in this era to recycle Christian names preclude any confident assertions as to the identity of the author. Yet a survey of these baptism, marriage, and burial records points to a few Pennys whose lifespan overlaps with the ballad’s composition:

1) Mark Penny (son of John), born 1578, and who married an Alice Munsey in 1600. He died in 1625.

2) John Penny (son of Gregory), born 1589. He would be thirty in 1619.

3) Another John Penny who married an Agnes Jarvis in 1590. Burial entries for a John Penny can be found in 1639, 1656, and 1667, so this John and/or the preceding John (entry 2), were presumably still alive when the “Powte” is now believed to have been written.


5) Mark (son of Mark in entry 1), born 1602, who married Mary Beeton in 1627.

We do not want to dismiss offhand the slim possibility the author could have been a woman; unfortunately, the Penny daughters had a habit of dying in infancy. Apart from the wives, the only female Pennys on record still alive in 1619 were Susanna and Alice, but they would have been only fifteen and eleven respectively. That the Penny who composed the “Complaint” is one of the individuals listed above is of course a long-shot. Yet since this village of Sutton stands only three miles from Haddenham, an epicentre of unrest against the fen drainage in 1619 (of which more later), it is plausible that the Penny credited with composing the “Powtes Complaint” was from or connected to this family.
Another promising lead comes from an unattributed letter written from Peterborough in 1622. Comprising almost twelve manuscript pages, the “scribbled paper” explains in great depth the problems with and objections to projected drainage schemes in the area. The opening of this apparently anonymous letter, frustratingly addressed only to “your worship,” is worth quoting at length here because it outlines the author’s recent troubles on having written some verses against the Undertakers:

I doe perceive that the untimely fruit of an idle brain hath proved more sour of taste, and hard of digestion then I meant it: Neither in deed did I purpose that it should have been so publicke as nowe it is, Nor could I once thinke that soe sleight a Toy could have soe tasted [in] the minides and affec[i]ons of people in this designe I knowe it is not scandalous to any man livinge, for soe I might have ben guiltie of my owne bane, but every thinge is as it is taken And how soever the Undertakers take it (and I knowe they are not better then their fore fathers) lett them thinke that if noe greater rubbes crosse their Way they shall not bee much hindred in their proceedings. But I desire yo[u]r fauourable Censure, both in this, and in what
els I shall Write from [...] a true plainemeaneinge hart Having vowed to myself
never to giue Life anie more to anie one verse in that kinde while I haue a Life.33

The connection between this letter and the ballad has been raised before. In a book on
the mathematician-poet Jonas Moore, Frances Wilmoth refers briefly to the “Powte” and
speculates it was “possibly composed by [this] anonymous letter writer who expressed
surprise at the popularity of his verse.”34 The suspicion is a reasonable one and merits more
sustained consideration in light of the information uncovered in the manuscripts.

After the tantalizing reference to verses critiquing the drainage, the letter goes on to
describe each particular type of fen, giving it its Latin name and detailing its soil
composition, wetness through the seasons, inhabitant species, and dominant produce and
trade. So this person clearly is local to the Wisbech area and is heavily invested in the
fenland environment, ecology, and economy. Moreover, the author draws on this
knowledge here—and (based on the letter’s opening) has done elsewhere in verse—to
oppose what he or she regards as the absurd plans of the “Undertakers.” Many fen-dwellers
deemed the drainage projects impractical because the outsiders were simply ignorant of
local topography. The letter writer asserts the brazen schemes could not succeed because
the undertakers announced they would drain “fresh and salt fens,” the latter of which the
letter-writer points out do not exist, but if they meant salt marshes then they are “drowned,
and drayned every day, accordinge to the ebbinge and flowinge of the Sea” (f. 149). These
projectors were further derided for nearly agreeing to have no land:

It was then replyed and wished that it might bee restrayned to the salt grownds
surrounded, at the Low Water Marke: Whereof they Were like to haue accepted,

33 “—— to ——.” March ? 1622. MS Secretaries of State: State Papers Domestic, James I,
1603-1640. SP 14/128 f.149. The National Archives of the UK. State Papers Online. Web.
11 Mar. 2016. (f. 149)
34 Frances Wiltmoth. Sir Jonas Moore: Practical Mathematics and Restoration Science
(Woodbridge: Boydell, 1993), 93.
had not one given them light to perceau their error: W[hi]ch therevpon they found to bee iust nothinge: for that the Water beinge at the lowe ebb, nothinge is surrounded but the Channell of the Sea. And theis are arguments of their Weaknes in the Science of those things W[hi]ch they vndertake (f. 149v).

The letter’s close observations of fresh water inundations and the sea’s courses remind one of the lines in “The Powte” which run:

Great Neptune god of seas
This worke must needes provoke the[e]
They meane the[e] to disease
& with fenne water choke the[e]

But with thy mace thou canst deface
& quite confound this matter
& send thy sand to make firme lande
when they doe wante freshe water. 35

These lines indicate a subtle understanding of the specific local balance of fresh and seawater, about which both the verse and letter accuse the “Undertakers” of being ignorant.

Another suggestive account from the letter as to its author’s link with “The Powtes Complaint” is its description of the impossibility of the Undertaker’s plans to maintain the outfall and navigation of the river Nene whilst also keeping the fenland dry throughout the year. The letter states:

Hereby men of vnderstaundinge and Knowledge in the state of the ffennes doe finde in the Vndertakers proposic[i]ons [...] a repugnancie vizt. to maintaine Nauigac[i]on and good Outfall requireth [...] to bringe store of fresh Water, of necessitie a ffludd, the comeinge of a fluidd doth drowne the surface of the grounde, W[hi]ch till

35 Add MS 23723, f. 20v.
Sommers heate in those *profundis Paludibus* cannot bee avoyed: Soe as to maintayne Outfall, and Nauigac[i]on and yet keepe the ffennes dry Winter, and Sommer, cannot hold togetheer, seeinge that to p[re]sent ffludds is impossible. And indeede I thinke my Lo[rd] B[isho]p of Peeterb[orough] found this, When as hee tould them, that sure they Would doe it by Conjurac[i]on And at Wisbich it is generally spoken, that their River shalbe suncke all in one night, and that all men shall haue Warninge that might to keepe their doores fast shutt: I thinke Least the Spirit by Whose power the River is suncke shoulde enter their Houses, and sincke them alsoe. Although I beleue none of all this, yet I doe note hereby, that men not findinge anie reason howe they should performe their large promises, doe attribute to the divell, What they thinke man cannot doe (f. 152v).

This observation of general talk of happenings at Wisbech, of conjurations, creating floods, and mysterious and malignant spirits causing catastrophic natural disasters such as sinking rivers or houses in reaction to drainage plans is, indeed, strikingly similar to the battling floods and natural-world protests more creatively envisaged in “*The Powtes Complaint*.” The passage above recalls “The Powte’s” references to “ancient water nurses,” the “2 penny jack with scales on his back” and the more lofty invocations of Ceres, Neptune and Aeolus. If the letter-writer sounds a fairly flippant note of disbelief, the shrewd observation that things which seem impossible to men will always be attributed to the devil does also seem fitting of someone for whom the “untimely fruit of an idle brain” could have manifested itself in the ventriloquizing of the local’s superstitious fears in the mouth of an eel-pout calling up spirits to obstruct the Undertakers’ flawed projects with natural disasters.

Whether the letter and “The Powtes Complaint” were written by the same person and whether that person was named “Penny of Wisbech” is most probably something which
can never be categorically affirmed. Nevertheless, the two pieces of writing can be said to be reacting to the same kinds of fen drainage projects between 1618-1622, and are tied to the same local area of Wisbech and the surrounding Cambridgeshire environment. Therefore, aside from authorship, the letter’s contents can shed additional light on the attitudes of local inhabitants towards the fenlands, their native animals, and their economy. The letter is thus an invaluable resource for contextualising “The Powtes Complaint” as an early specimen of “environmental protest” literature.

One remarkable feature of the letter is its description of the fens as an interconnected, balanced, and productive ecosystem. As noted previously, an element of caution is required when approaching these sources as environmentally sensitive due to the blurring of human economic concerns with what we would now separate as ecological ones. However, whilst the anonymous letter-writer is deeply concerned with the financial impacts of drainage, an anxiety about human tampering with nature is clearly audible. The letter addresses land use and function alongside the flora and fauna that the fen regions support:

To finde a time when they Were not ffennes I thinke cannot bee found w[it]hin the compasse of time: And for my owne part I doe thinke, that they Were even soe ordayned by God; to bee a receptacle of the fresh Waters, vntill they might by Leasure find Way to the Sea, and sure that not in vayne, or vnprofitably, for by th[is] Way they doe breede fowle abundauntly, they doe multiplie fish exceedingly and doe produce Turfe, reede, Sedge, fodder, Wood, redd deere, and other Comodities both for the vse of man, and Beast (f. 150).

36 At one point, the letter-writer speaks of his “good dealeinge, and of the great care of the Commissioners least the Countrey should bee overtaken in contracting” (153v). This more conciliatory tone towards the Commissioners raises doubts as to whether the same person wrote the incendiary verses advocating “battle.” Of course three years had passed since 1619, so the writer—who vows never to compose satiric verses again—may have mellowed or the Commissioners may have begun to act with greater rectitude.
Here the natural environment is understood through the lens of mankind’s historical inhabitancy, the Christian religion and, certainly, the commodification of its produce for human purposes. The beasts’ right to these resources, however, is given almost equal consideration. The letter then goes on to defend wilderness and the principle of diversity on both aesthetic and ethical grounds:

Besides [that] [,] the beautifull order of Nature (as some Authors describe it) in disposeinge of Rivers, Meeres, plaines &c. soe as every thinge helpeth other in his Kinde: Wh[i]ch by theis Vndertakers (if they can) is like to bee destroyed, Who Would haue all to proue pasture in generall as beinge more profitable to the com[m]on Wealth and for the benefitt of every private man therein. If this litle World of o[u]r Boddies Were all Armes, or all Leggs it Would proue very vnfit for vse, and the same I doe conclude to betyde in this bigger World I meane this ffennye Region (for soe by Authors it is called) (f. 150).

This passage expresses that the carefully interconnected order of nature—“everything helpeth other in his Kinde”—is something separate to human economy and which functions with its own agency. This is also seen as precious beyond the profit land-use change can bring to private men. Nearer to its conclusion, the letter sums up this strand of belief in the agency and power of the natural world over and above the actions of mankind. The writer is particularly upset with the undertakers’ refusal to sign contracts obligating them to maintain the costly hydro-engineering works that they proposed to build. With commendable foresight, the letter-writer insists that the undertakers’ heirs must assume responsibility. Even that assurance, though, would be brittle, as the most binding human contracts are nothing in comparison to the longevity of the earth:
It is an old rule *certa pro incertis amittere staltissimum est*, they must dye,\(^\text{37}\) and those which shall succeede them must dye likewise, and nothinge in the World is sure, but the Earth Will remaine soe Lounge as time Lasteth: and therefore noe good Securitie, but to forfeit their partes in case they faile of performaunce (f. 153).

Would it be too much of a stretch to argue that the letter-writer understands the concept of environmental stewardship and wetlands management as an inter-generational obligation? Since the living cannot guarantee that the unborn will fulfil these obligations, the best recourse would seem to be not to meddle so drastically with the natural environment in the first place.

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Though it would be wonderful to pin down the first name of the alleged author Penny, the footnote in the Cambridge miscellany reveals something about “The Powtes Complaint” that is arguably more important from an ecocritical standpoint: a local habitation and a date. The manuscript reports that the ballad was written by a person from Wisbech in 1619. It should be recalled that the full title of the text in Harley manuscript reads “The Powtes Complaynte uppon drayninge of the ffennes, in Cambridgshire, Elye; and Wisbiche.” So the Harley manuscript independently corroborates MS 23723’s report of the ballad’s origin in this county. Dugdale’s account is far less precise. His transcription of “the Powte” occurs in a section recounting Sessions of Sewers in Norfolk around 1612. The preceding section does mention a meeting of the Commissioners at Wisbech in 1611, but Dugdale presents the song only as an example of popular discontent towards the drainage around this time. It does not pinpoint a year or location. Instead of a song potentially

\(^{37}\) Explicitly ‘they’ refers to the Undertakers as the subject of the previous sentence but in a more general sense ‘they’ here seems to refer to humankind.
composed anytime between 1600 and 1662 from anywhere within the sprawling fenlands, MS 23723 enables us to situate it in a specific milieu.\textsuperscript{38} Perhaps unsurprisingly, Wisbech turns out to have been one of the most contested areas targeted by the drainers. Following the passage of the General Drainage Bill in 1601, undertakers introduced a flurry of legislation in support of various land reclamation projects. These drainage bills encountered fierce resistance in the House of Commons. A 1604 Bill failed to pass; two bills foundered two years later, as did similar measures in 1607 and 1610. The only drainage scheme that managed to squeeze through an early Stuart Parliament was a June 1607 Bill to drain 6,000 acres near Wisbech.\textsuperscript{39} Since the land was privately owned, the locals were not worried about the enclosure of their commons, and opposition to the measure would have been feeble.

Tensions escalated dramatically, though, following a meeting of the Commissioner of Sewers in Wisbech in May 1618 when a plan was approved to carve a drain through the fens of Willingham and Cottenham near Ely. During a previous meeting at Whitehall it had been decided that three commissioners from each county of the fen regions, under the lead of Sir Clement Edwards, would survey part of the area and ‘informe themselues of the state of the Country in respecte […] of […] Debat[es] and differences amongst the said Com[m]issioners of Sewars’.\textsuperscript{40} This visitation to the Cambridgeshire fens took place on 30\textsuperscript{th} August 1618 when the party went and viewed the places where the newe drayne and Weare goes were to be cutt and clensed through thes[ai]d mannor of Haddenham Wivelingham and other palces in thesaid

\textsuperscript{38} Dugdale’s account is considerably less precise. His transcription of “the Powte” occurs in a section recounting Sessions of Sewers in Norfolk around 1612. The preceding section mentions a meeting of the Commissioners at Wisbech in 1611 at which Sir Miles Sandys was present. But Dugdale presents the poem only as an example of popular discontent towards the drainage around this time. It does not pinpoint a year or location.

\textsuperscript{39} Lindley,\textit{ Fenland Riots and the English Revolution}, 36.

\textsuperscript{40} STAC 8/27/8 Attorney General vs Castle, m. 2.
recited Lawe of Sewars (beinge p[ar]te in the said County of Cambridge and p[ar]te in the said Isle of Elye) where the said workes menc[i]oned in the said recited Lawe & were appoynted to bee don.41

The specific Commissioners who attended are named in Star Chamber documents and these include an Everard Buckworth from the Isle of Ely and a Henry Kervill representing Norfolk. Undoubtedly these are the same “Mr Buckferth” and “Mr Karvile” who made marginal notes in the Peterborough letter. The presence of these names in the 1622 letter furnishes further evidence that its author was local to and engaged in the same set of fen-drainage disputes as the mysterious Penny of Wisbech.

Apparently, the survey’s report was encouraging and preparations were made to break ground. The venture had the backing of Sir Miles Sandys, a baronet and prominent Cambridgeshire landowner. Not everyone, however, was pleased. One Sunday in April 1619 a gentleman by the name of Thomas Castle climbed into the pulpit of the church in Haddenham and sought to rally parishioners to oppose the project. Funds were raised to organize the campaign, and a decision reached to interrupt future sessions of the Sewers and denounce their proceedings. Word soon spread through the surrounding villages. During the next Commission of Sewers meeting in Ely in June 1619, a huge demonstration took place in which

a great multitude of the com[m]on sorte of people to the number of Twoo Thowsand and more ryottously and rowtously assembled themselues together at Ely in the said Isle not aboue ffower myles from Haddenham aforesaid in the Eveninge and night tyme and then and there made bonefyers and with Drum[m]es gun[n]es and other weapons continued together the greatest p[ar]te of that night with great

41 STAC 8/27/8, m.2).
Was “The Powtes Complaint” part of these “great exclamations”? Was it sung or perhaps even composed for this event? Was its invitation to “assemble” the equivalent of a social media post spreading the word throughout fenland communities to flock to Ely for the protest? The evidence is of course circumstantial and this theory cannot be proven.

Nevertheless, it seems a feasible conjecture that “Penny of Wisbech” could have attended the Haddenham riots. As previously discussed, parish records indicate a Penny family resided in Sutton, a village just under four miles from Haddenham. Perhaps a member of this family had moved to Wisbech, or perhaps MS23723’s identification of the author with this town reflects the fact that a Commissioners’ meeting there in 1618 ignited the riot. In light of the manuscripts dating the song to 1619 and locating it in Ely and Wisbech, it is tempting to imagine the crowds at this gathering belting out raucous renditions of “The Powtes Complaint.” If Dugdale is right that such “libellous songs” helped stall the drainage, early modern protest literature may have impacted environmental policy more forcibly than we might think.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Bl (Bleinheim MS 61683); Ld (Lansdowne MS 740); Hl (Harley MS 837); Dd (Dugdale).

Symbols: [ ] (MS abbreviation expanded); ^ ^ (caret and text inserted above line in MS); < > (MS text struck through).

THE TEXT

The poults complainte to the tune

of Bonny Boatman which look

three leaves forw.ard

Come brethre[n] of the water

& let us all assemble

To treate of this newe matter

Which makes us quake & tremble

Ffor we shall rue it if t’ be true

That ffenes be undertaken

& where we breede in ffens & reeds

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43 Bl: The Powtes Complaynte To the tune of the boateman; Ld: The powtes complaint; Hl: The Powtes Complaynte uppon drayninge of the ffennes, in Cambridgshire, Elye; and Wisbiche./
44 Bl and Hl divided into 8 line stanzas. Ld lineated as fourteen stress lines instead of the seven stress lines of the other three versions. Hl: Come Brothers.
45 Ld: And lett us nowe assemble.
46 Hl: treate uppon this matter.
47 Bl: Ffor we shall rue, if it be true; Ld: ffor we shall rue if itt be true; Hl: ffor wee shall Rue, yf it bee true.
48 Ld: are undertaken.
They’ll nowe feede fres[h]e bee fe & bacd.\textsuperscript{50}

Theyle sowe both beans & oates\textsuperscript{51}

Where no man ever thought it\textsuperscript{52}

Where men did Rowe with boates

Ere undertakers bought it\textsuperscript{53}

But Ceres thou looke towards it nowe\textsuperscript{54}

Let wilde oates be theire venture

& let the frogs & myrye bogges\textsuperscript{55}

Destroy where they doe enter

Beholde this greate designe

Which they doe nowe determine

Will make our bodies pine

A praye for crowes & vermine

Ffor they do meane all fennes to draine\textsuperscript{56}

& water overmaister\textsuperscript{57}

& they will make each muddie lake\textsuperscript{58}

For Essex calfes a pasture\textsuperscript{59}

Away with boate & rudder\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{49} Bl: And where ^we^ breede in segg and reed; Ld: Whear we did breed in rushe & reed; HI: And where there grewe, both Sedge, and Reedes; Dd: feed.
\textsuperscript{50} Bl: They’le nowe feede ^beefe^ & bacon; Ld: They’le now feed beife & bacon; HI: they’le nowe, ffeede Beeffe; and Bacon.
\textsuperscript{51} HI: both Pease, and Oates.
\textsuperscript{52} HI: never thought.
\textsuperscript{53} Ld: Our undertakers.
\textsuperscript{54} Bl: look towarde us nowe; Ld: looke on us nowe; HI:looke towards nowe.
\textsuperscript{55} Ld: And lett the frog and Water mogge.
\textsuperscript{56} Ld: each fenn.
\textsuperscript{57} Ld: Waters; HI: Waters.
\textsuperscript{58} HI: And they will make, of Bogges, and Lakes.
\textsuperscript{59} Ld: To prove very good pasture.
Farewell both bootes and scatches\textsuperscript{61}
No neede of th’ one nor th’ other\textsuperscript{62}
Men nowe make better matches\textsuperscript{63}

[20r] Stilt-makers all & Tanners shall\textsuperscript{64}
complain of this disaster
All will be drye & we must die\textsuperscript{65}
‘cause Essex califes wante pasture
The ffen bredde fowles have wings\textsuperscript{66}
To fly to other nations
But we have no such things <to help>
To help our transportations.
We must give place oh grievous case\textsuperscript{67}
To horned beastes & cartell
Exepte that we can all agree\textsuperscript{68}
To drive them out by battell\textsuperscript{69}
Then first let us intreate\textsuperscript{70}
Our ancient water nurses
To shewe there power so greate
As helpe to draine their purses\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{60} Bl: boates; Ld: Away with boate & rather; Hl: ffarewell, w[i]th Boates, and Rowers.
\textsuperscript{61} Bl: Away w[i]th bootes and scatches; Hl: awaye, w[i]th Boates, and Sketches.
\textsuperscript{62} Ld: We need nott ^t^ one not to’ther; Hl: Noe neede of one; or others.
\textsuperscript{63} Ld: wiser matches.
\textsuperscript{64} Ld: The stiltmen all.
\textsuperscript{65} Bl: All must be drye; Ld: All must be dry.
\textsuperscript{66} Bl significant damage to MS henceforth; Ld: The fenne breed’s Foule hath wings.
\textsuperscript{67} Ld: (oh heavy case).
\textsuperscript{68} Ld: cann well agree; Hl: Unlesse that wee, can all agree.
\textsuperscript{69} Ld: them away by; Hl: them fforth with.
\textsuperscript{70} Ld: But first.
& send us good ould captaine floude

To leade us forthe to battell

Then 2 penny jacke with scales on’ s backe

Will drive out all their cattell

This noble captaine yet

Was never knowne to faile us

But did the conquest gette <of al>

Of all that did assaile us

His furious rage none could assuage

Unto the worlds greate wonder

He beares downe bankes & breaks all rankes

& whirlygigs in sunder

And Eolus we the[e] pray

That thou wouldst not be wanting

Thou never fayleste us yet

Nowe hearken to our canting

Doe thou deride their hope & pride

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71 Ld: To help.
72 Bl: And send us goodlie capten ffloode; Ld: And send us good ould Capteyne fflud; Hl: And send us good, ould Captayne ffloude.
73 Ld: Then a two-penny jack w[i]th a scale on his back.
74 Ld: Shall drive away all theyr cattell. [finishes here]; Hl: dryve ffforth all
75 Bl: none can.
76 Bl: But to the worldes; Hl: butt to the worldes.
77 Hl: Hee dryves down Banck[es] and Break[es] their Ranck[es].
78 Hl: and hurleth all assunder.
79 Hl: Then Eolus.
80 Hl: will not be.
81 Hl: fayled.
82 Hl: then harcken, to our Chantinge.
That purpose our confusion⁸⁴
& send a blaste that they in haste⁸⁵
May worke no good conclusion
Great Neptune god of seas
This worke must needes provoke the[e]
They meane the[e] to disease
& with fenne water choke the[e]⁸⁶
But with thy mace thou canst deface
& quite confound this matter⁸⁷
& send thy sand to make firme lande⁸⁸
when they doe wante freshe water
And last we pray the[e] Moone
That she would be propitious⁸⁹
To see that nought be done⁹⁰
To prosper the malicious

Though Summers heate doe worke a feate⁹¹
Whereby themselves they flatter
Yet be so good as send a floude
Leaste Essexe calves wante water.⁹²

⁸³ HI: Doe yow, deryde their hope of Pryde.
⁸⁵ HI: send alsoe.
⁸⁶ HI: waters.
⁸⁷ HI: their matter.
⁸⁸ HI: the sand.
⁸⁹ Bl: [damaged]at the[e] will be propitious; HI: that, shee wilbee propitious.
⁹⁰ HI: As see.
⁹¹ Bl: doth work; HI: That Summers heate may Cause a frett.
⁹² Bl: Cause Essex calves want water Finis.
This was made by one Peny of wisbich 1619

about the time of the coming of some Essex

knights & gentleme[n] to the undertaking of

the ffenes to be drayned.