The following account of the River Lark was published in four successive issues of the Newmarket Journal, commencing on Friday 2nd November 1928 under the title "Random Notes: The Lark Navigation"

I. THE RIVER.

> "This Burne ariseth nott far from Burne Bradfield, from which, going by Whelthам, Noughton, St. Edmund's Bury, the 3 ffornhams, Hengrave, Flempton, Lackford, Iclingham, and Mildenhall, beneath the which it entertaineth the Dale with whom united it falleth into the Great Ouze as hath been sayd."-Reyce, "Suffolk Breviary," 1618.

The Lark, one of our smaller Suffolk rivers (about 30 miles in length), rises as a multitude of small streams in Whepstead and neighbouring parishes. These streams unite near Sicklesmere, whence the river meanders through Rushbrooke Canal into Bury St. Edmunds; here, next St. Botolph's Bridge, it is joined by the Linnet. Below the town the Lark, widening slowly, flows N.E. by the Fornhams, Hengrave, Flempton, West Stow, Lackford, Icklingham, Barton Mills, Mildenhall, Isleham, Baskey Bay, and into Cambridgeshire at the Fish and Duck. About two miles further down the waters empty into Sandys Cut (Great Ouse River) between Black Bank, Queen Adelaide, Prickwillow and Littleport. In these notes we shall be concerned with the 12 or 14 miles stretch of river between Mildenhall and Eastgate Bridge, Bury St. Edmund's.

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ORIGIN OF NAME.

Several writers offer reasonable theories as to the origin of the name Lark. Gage, in his "History of Thingoe" (1838), says: "The river which divides Thingoe from the Hundred of Thedwastre is not distinguished in the ancient chartularies of St. Edmund's [Abbey] under any other designation than Flumen' or 'Aqua.' In Saxton's maps it is named Burn; and in the Act of Parliament for making the river navigable, is called Lark or Burn. The name by which it is now generally known is Lark, and it is not wholly improbable that this may be a corruption of the Saxon lac, which seems to be still preserved in the names of the town and Hundred of Lackford. Reyce writing in 1618 (see above this column) calls the stream the "Burne." Professor Skeat, describing the etymology of Lackford ("Place-Names of Suffolk," p. 34) states: The modern name of the stream is the Lark; and it is much to be suspected that this singular name arose from the Middle-English lake (from lacu'), in which the a was pronounced as in father and in lark (if the 'r' be suppressed). Another name for the Lark is (or was) the Burn, which means bourn or stream, and merely translates the Anglo-Saxon lacu. I further suspect that the Linnet, which flows into the Lark at Bury, receive d its name from playful association with that of the larger river. Both names are comic."

WATER MILLS.

The Lark may have played an important. part in the settlement of the county. Why should not early explorers have penetrated on its waters or along its banks-the wilds of West Suffolk Setting speculation aside, we know for certain that the river was long ago employed to run the watermills in a 1278 survey of Bury Abbey lands we find that there were water-mills at Mildenhall, Barton Mills,

Icklingham, Flempton, Hengrave, Lackford and Fornham St. Genevieve. In later days, so as not to interfere with the passage of boats, the stream was diverted to the mill a few yards from the river; this arrangement will be noticed at several points, It is interesting to note that there was a bridge at Lackford in 1278, and that toll was taken of passing merchants (on the river?) at Icklingham. The Abbot and Convent of Bury were probably entitled to toils all along the Lark's course from Bury to Mildenhall, and possibly dues were levied on both road and water traffic at the Toll Gate next Babwell Friary. Tenants of the Abbey were frequently allowed fishing rights; in 1458, at a court, it was found that Thomas Colvyle, of Bury had trespassed and caught eels in the "separate waters of Thomas Geddyng in Lackford" (Gage, p. 49).

CONVEYANCE OF STONE

We have all heard that building-stone was conveyed from Northamptonshire by the Fenland waterways and the Lark to our Abbey; I have never seen actual documentary proof of this. Sir James Burrough, however, in his "Collectanea Buriensia" (pp. 423-9), mentions certain grants made to the Monastery, whereby stone was to be brought down the River Nene from the Barnack quarries. Although the charters quoted by Sir James do not refer to the Lark, it may be supposed that the excessive cost and difficulties of road transport would almost have compelled the carriage of heavy materials by water. Maybe the stone was shipped to the edge of the fens and carted to Bury by feudal dependents of the Abbot.

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At Bury St. Edmund's the river is confined entirely to the eastern side of the town. Richard Payne's map of Bury, 1833, shows that the widest portion of the stream was in the Abbey Grounds; it seems, that the monks dammed or widened the Lark for the purpose of making fish-ponds or defences. There were large pools against the South Gate, East Gate and Toll Gate Bridges; at the last two places were fords, the bridges being for foot passengers; the South Gate Bridge was erected by William Steggles, the builder, in 1822 or 1832 (see worn inscription on N. side). Numerous dykes perhaps cut in monastic days intersect: the vicinity of the river in Noman's Meadows, the meadows between Cotton Lane and Eastgate Street and Babwell Fen.

II.1637 AND THE 1700 ACT.

The first recorded attempt-to my knowledge at making the Lark navigable was in 1637. In that year, says Mr. Sydenham Hervey ("West Stow Registers," p. 261) "there were Commissioners appointed to make navigable the river from Worling ton to Bury. They wrote to the king on Aug. 9, saying that in obedience to their commission they had just met at Brandon, and had not found any that opposed the intended work. They also wrote on Aug. 9 to the lord Keeper, and said that the works to be performed by Mr. Lambe upon the river between Mildenhall and Bury might be prejudicial to the mills on the river.

Lark affairs next came into the West Suffolk limelight about 1700. Mr. Henry Ashley of Eaton Socon, Co. Bedford, was a man who spent a good part of his time in endeavouring to fit East Anglian streams for the passage of boats, and from this occupation he derived, by means of tolls, a considerable profit. In the last decade. of the 17th century he directed his attention to the Lark, which had silted up, I suppose, after 1637. Before he could start on his project it was necessary for him to obtain the consent of Parliament; accordingly, a Bill was presented and passed in 1700; an etcetera-ridden version of the Act. is printed in the "Statutes at Large" (London, 1769), vol. iv., p. 60. It runs as follows:-

> "An Act for making the River Larke, alias Burn, navigable. Henry Ashley, Esq., impowered to make the said River navigable, improve the Passage for Boats, etc., make new Cuts through the King's or other Grounds, and build Bridges, Sluices, etc., with free Liberty of Ways for carrying materials, etc., and may alter Bridges, turn Highways, etc., and set out Towing-paths, etc., first giving satisfaction to the Owner. Undertaker to make a Ditch between Towing path and lands of William Gage, etc. In case Undertaker and Owners cannot agree, etc., Commissioners to inquire upon Oath, and determine what Satisfaction Owners shall have for Damages, etc. not exceeding 25 Years Purchase, and proportion every one's Share. Commissioners Orders to be kept amongst the Records of the Sessions, etc. On Payment of Money agreed on, Undertaker may dig, cut etc., the said Lands, erect Bridges, etc., and maintain the same, etc. Owner, etc., refusing to appear, Commissioners may inquire into such respective Owners Damage, and order Satisfaction. Rights of Fishing and Fowling reserved. In case of Death of Commissioners, others to be chosen, having £300 per Annum, or £6,000. If the Water be raised higher than usual, Banks to be raised proportionably, or if the river be deepened at and Fording Place, etc, the Undertaker to make Bridges etc. No Highway or Footpath to be removed without Allowance. If the undertaker pull down any Bridge, he shall erect another as usual. Justices to determine offences concerning Bridges and inflict Penalties. All Banks to be maintained as usual. Undertaker to demand for all Goods, etc., carried up or down the said River, from Mildenhall Mill to Bury St. Edmund's, the Rates following, For every Chaldron of Coals Lynn measure, 38. 2d. For every half-hundred of Deals, 2s. Load of Timber (40 foot to the Load), 2s. Eight Packs of Wooll, ten Tod to the Pack, 2s. 6d. Weigh of Salt, 2s. 6d. Load of Wheat or Barley, ten Combs to the Load, 2s. Last of Oats, 2s. 6d. Load of Beans on Peas, 2s. 6d. Tun of Grocery Wares, 2s. 6d. Tun of Oil or Wine, 3s. 10d. Thousand of Turf, 3s, 2d. Load of Reed, Sedge or Hay, twenty hundred to a Load, 3s. 2d. Load of Hemp, twenty hundred Weight, 35. 2d. Last of Malt, 2s. 6d. Load of Bricks, five hundred to the Load, 28. Thousand of Tiles, 2s. 6d. And for every Tun of other Goods, 2s. Watermen, etc., to give account of all Goods conveyed, etc. In case of Refusal, Goods may be stopt, and weighed. Any Person concealing Goods, etc., may be stopped, etc. Millers may carry Materials, etc., for repairing their Mills, etc., Toll free. Liberty granted to Sir Edward Gage and William Gage, to carry Dung, etc., for their own' Lands and their

> Tenants, Toll free. And the like Liberty for carrying the Product thereof. Like Liberty to Occupiers of Lands adjoining to the River, etc. Twenty Chaldron of Coals may be conveyed yearly to Bury, for the Poors Use, Toll free. Boat Master, etc., answerable for Damages. Boats, etc., lying in any Sluice, etc... obstructing the Passage of others, may be removed. Undertaker with Consent of Commissioners may make By-laws, and set Penalties, No common Wharf or Key to be made in Bury without Consent of Magistrates. Liberty to keep Pleasure Boats on the said River, Toll free; but not to carry Goods, etc."

Previous to the passing of the above Act, Ashley had met with some little opposition. A bill of complaint was laid against him in the Court of Exchequer by one Edward Whitaker. At Mildenhall the scheme was not hailed with much enthusiasm, as a document in the Cullum Library ("Papers relating to Navigation of Rivers Lark and Ouse-1841") proves: Thomas Hanmer of Euston, Esq., objected on the grounds that the undertaking was likely to be prejudicial to Mildenhall Mill (whereof he was owner) by the diversion of so much water from the mill "as that there will not be sufficient to grind such corne or grain as there shall be occac'on to grind. Therefore, to "indempnifye" Thomas Hanmer, Ashley agreed (articles of agreement, 6 Feb, 1699) at his own costs and charges provided Hanmer did not oppose the passing of the Bill-to "make alter and convert the gears of the said mill into such gears as are com'only called Counter Gears (in order to improve the said mills and to make them goe with lease water than they now doe)", and if "notwithstanding such Alterac'on the said under taking or any work done in pursuance thereof shall Damnife or hinder the said mill as aforesaid," Ashley was (upon request) to take a lease of the mill for 21 years.

Several years were probably required for the completion of the navigation scheme. By 1716, however, it was working well, goods were being delivered at Bury and Mr. Ashley in that year received £475 10s 7d from the Lark Tolls

III-MILDENHALL BRIDGE AND BURY'S WHARVES.

The Navigation Act obtained in 1700 by Mr. Ashley provided that if, in the course of his undertaking, he took down any bridge over the Lark, he was to re-erect the same. He rebuilt at least one bridge; and this was at Mildenhall, next to the Mill. After the pulling-down, on 25 Oct. 1709, an agreement was made between the inhabitants of Mildenhall (led by Sir Thomas Hanmerr, Bt.) and Henry Ashley, Esq., whereby, before 24 June following, Ashley was "at his own proper costs and charges to build or erect at Mildenhall aforesaid a good and substantial bridge fitt for the passage of coaches carts and waggons in the same place where formerly a cart bridge did stand"; the bridge was to contain one brick arch, to be of specified dimensions, and the inhabitants of the town were to bring all earth for the building and to maintain the structure. Seven years later (1716) the new Mildenhall bridge was swept away by a great flood. Some endeavoured to persuade Ashley to advance money for repairs; in reply he wrote an amusing letter from Eaton Socon stating that "the fall of that bridge ought not to be attributed to the weakness of its structure but to the incapacity of the arch which was not large enough to give passage to such water as came down…nevertheless in regard to your commands I shall not be unwilling to contribute something to wards it."

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A lengthy period elapsed prior to the participation of Bury's merchants in the navigation scheme. Before a wharf could be built in the town it was necessary for Ashley to obtain the consent of the magistrates. Accordingly he addressed certain proposals to the Corporation.

He asked that all persons might have liberty to load and unload their goods and lay them on their own grounds as long as they should think fit, and that they might have liberty to build wharves and warehouses and to expose their goods to public sale there without any payment or wharfage whatsoever; that he (Ashley) and his heirs might have liberty to erect wharves and warehouses on their own ground; he desired that all traders of Bury, who thought their business of sufficient importance to warrant erection of wharves, should be allowed to buy ground for the purpose, and that "for all accidental or contingent carriages a publick wharf should be allowed and made where everyone that did not think fitt to have or make a separate wharf might have libertie to load unload and lay their respective goods upon such terms and under such limitations and restrictions (both as the Wharfinger and the owners of goods) as are particularly mentioned."

Over in co. Huntingdon Mr. Ashley had a large barn "now wholly useless" which he wished to demolish and bring to Bury St. Edmund's, where it "would be very capable and usefull for the makeing warehouses and storehouses in it." I wonder if this barn was ever set up at Bury?

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Bury tradesmen–twelve in number in 1716–took advantage of the river traffic and a handful of wharves seems to have been erected between the Toll Gate and a point near the present Northgate Railway Station. A certain amount of jealousy was aroused by a rumour that Ashley "intends to ingross all the grounds lieing near the river or convenient for wharfs and thereby compell all the traders as well as others to lay their goods on his ground upon the terms mentioned as to the publick wharf... Mr. Ashley has reason to be surprised at such a jealousie because the first care he takes in his proposals (in as plain words as he is able to express it) is that every man that thinks fitt should be at libertie to make to himself a private wharf and because he has, not yet made the least step wards the purchasing one foot of ground on this side the Toll Gate."

To remove all such fears, Ashley declares that he intends to make the river navigable at least to the North Gate or higher, "which when effected all the grounds near the river from the North Gate to the lower end of Mr. Cater's meadow and some grounds above the North gate will be convenient for wharfs."

A piece of land, about 4 or 5 rods square, was required for a public wharf; in 1718, at a Court held for the Manor of Fornham All Saints, Mr. Ashley was admitted to a meadow lying in Bury St. Edmunds between a meadow of John Morley N., part of a meadow called Bell Meadow S., one head thereof abutting on the common river E., the other on the Bury-Fornham. St. Martin highway W.

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The following advertisement is from the "Suffolk Mercury or St. Edmundsbury Post" for 21 Nov. 1726:

"To be sold, 5 Lighters, a Horse-Boat, 3 Horses, and some other Things belonging to a Good Accustom'd Gang of Lighters; and half a Year for Payment of the Money, with good Security. Enquire of Mr. Leaver, in the Horse Market [now St. Mary's Square], Bury St. Edmund's, Suffolk; and you'll be fully satisfy'd."

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Mr. Betts, a Bury ironmonger, watched Lark navigation affairs in the town on behalf of Ashley. On 24 Oct., 1743, Mr. Burch writes from Brandon to Betts "As I hear the small pox is so much in your Town, I am obliged to send a Boy to you and as he is a perfect stranger to a Great Town, I desire you will order at the Inn what you think proper and pay for the same."

Bury a "Great Town"!

IV. CONCLUSION.

All through the eighteenth century, Lark Navigation affairs made slow but steady progress; occasional accounts in the Cullum Library MS, give us a glimpse of substantial revenues derived from tolls taken at Icklingham and elsewhere. As before, however, there were minor troubles. In February 1723 one Mr. Ralph threatened to pull up the lower stanch or staunch at Mildenhall: Mr. Ashley was informed of his intentions and he took, I suppose, the necessary precautions. Ralph said he should wait and get the advice of Sir Thomas Hanmer, but what actually happened we are not told.

Again, the Lark itself was not always favourable to good navigation. About 1750 we find it stated that there is below Mildenhall a "descent or fall which renders the River in a manner unnavigable in times of low waters and almost at all other times except in the summer time when the Weeds are grown up"; this tends to make voyages "long and tedious and uncertain" to Worlington and consequently carriage costs are high. Mr. Cook, who has a gang of lighters on the river, says he can come with his gang from King's Lynn to Worlington in two or three days when the water is high and the weeds grown up: with low water and no weeds it takes six or seven days, and he has to go to the extra expense of a spare boat and lighter to lighten his gang at or near Prickwillow before he can get up to Worlington. It is suggested that the stream would be rendered "perfectly navigable" by the addition of two stanches, one at Simon Jude's at Worlington and the other at Freckenham Gravel.

It is probable that Simon Jude's is the present Jude's Ferry.

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In 1742, according to a valuation of the estates of the late Henry Ashley, Esq., the "Clear yearly produce for the Navigation on the River Lark after deducting all salarys and other outgoings and makeing all reasonable allowances for the annual repair of the several sluices and staunch's banks and ditches from the Coal Yard near Bury to the Lower Staunch at Mildenhall" was £267 10s 0d. Evidently that riverside district to-day called the Coals or Coal Rivers was named after this Coal Yard, which stood, perhaps, near Dewing's (Fornham All Saints) Malting. In early days considerable quantities of coal were brought up to Bury by water: thus, in 1716 Messrs. Moody and Betts, Bury St. Edmund's coal dealers, paid 255 7s. 8d. in tolls. When, by the way, was the branch stream from the Lark to Dewing's Malting cut? I think it was made for the purpose of bringing supplies, and as the Cullums owned both malting and river rights, they may have been responsible; it is marked on the map (in Gage's "History of Thingoe") as early as 1838.

On 1 Nov. 1774, for an annual rent of £12 12s., Sir Thomas Gage of Coldham Hall, Bt., let to Ashley Palmer, Esq., of Bury St. Edmund's, 'a piece of pasture ground in Bury abutting E. on a house heretofore called Babwell Mill and now the "Unicorn's Head" alehouse in the occupation of Titus Manning and W. on the BuryFornham St. Martin highway.' The "Unicorn's Head"-though it stood a little further E.-is now represented by the familiar "Tollgate" Inn.

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In the Cullum Library are detailed accounts of receipts and expenses incurred about the river for 1807-17. In those years the balance stood at sums varying between £389 in 1815 and £839 in 1812. Tolls were collected at Icklingham by the Naylers; in 1801 they amounted to £12 15s. 9d.

In 1817 the 1700 Act of Parliament was amended (57 Geo, III., cap. 71) and new powers were vested in commissioners. In 1838, by virtue of these acts and the will of Susannah Palmer, the Rev. Sir Thomas Gery Cullum, Bt., was owner of the navigation.

The "Bury and Suffolk Herald" for 15 May 1839 contains this notice:

"Lark Navigation.

"Notice is hereby given, that the RIVER LARK will be STOPPED on and after the 6th day of JUNE next, between Bury and Mildenhall, for the purpose of repairing the sluice at Fornham, and doing other necessary repairs,

"George Beeton, Agent.
"Bury, May 13, 1839."

The last occasion on which the Lark was used for commercial purposes at Bury St. Edmund's was in 1890. Work-cleaning and deepening-on the river was commenced in July 1889, and in the Autumn of 1890 it was again navigable at Bury. Contemporary newspaper reports tell us how a barge, carrying a party of those interested in the operations, was drawn from the Old Clough (the point where the Lark is joined by the Fornham Malting branch stream) to the wharf near Bury Railway Station; Mr. W. S. Spanton photographed the barge at its destination, and his picture is still among Mr. H. I. Jarman's fine collection.

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On 29 June of this year the old Mill at Fornham St. Martin was blown over in a gale. It was stated, but wrongly, I think, that the structure itself was two hundred years old; that there was a mill on the site two hundred years ago is proved by this entry in the Cullum Library MS.:

"The Admeasurement of the Millstones belonging to the mills in ffornham St. Martins on 8 May, 1722 when Mrs. King enter'd on those mills"; Windmill; Peak Stones: the Runner, 7 ins. thick on the edge; Bedstone, 3½ ins. thick on the edge. The water-mill, just close by, is also mentioned.

E. R. B.