

# Next the Sea: Eccles and the Anthroposcenic

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## Abstract

This paper considers the Anthroposcenic, whereby landscape becomes emblematic of processes marking the Anthropocene, through a specific site, Eccles on the northeast coast of Norfolk, England. The coast has become a key landscape for reflections on the Anthropocene, not least through processes of erosion and sea level change; the title phrase 'next the sea' here carries both spatial and temporal meaning. Through Eccles the paper investigates cultural-historical Anthropocene signatures over the past two centuries. Between 1862 and 1895 a church tower stood on Eccles beach; in preceding decades the tower was half-buried in sand dunes, but emerged after these were eroded by the sea. In 1895 the tower fell in a storm, although fragments remained intermittently visible over the following century, depending on the state of the beach. The paper takes Eccles tower as a focus for the exploration of themes indicative and/or anticipatory of the Anthropocene, including sea defence and geological speculation on land and sea levels, Eccles featuring in Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology*. The tower became a visitor attraction, and discussions around the 1895 fall are examined, in relation to the spectacle of ruin, claims over the site, and anxieties over defence. The periodic beach exposure of bones from the former churchyard prompted reflections on mortality, also present in literary engagements with Eccles by figures such as Henry Rider Haggard. The paper traces the persistence of fragmentary ruin memory through twentieth-century sea defence initiatives, and the ways in which late twentieth-century concerns for climate change and sea level rise generated a rediscovery of the site, yet also led to its effective disappearance as the beach built up following new sea defence construction. Eccles beach speaks to twenty-first-century preoccupations, aspects of its history over two hundred years making it emblematically Anthroposcenic.

**Keywords:** Anthroposcenic, Anthropocene, coast, landscape, Eccles

If, on a calm summer's day, a visitor came to Eccles, on the coast of northeast Norfolk, in eastern England, knowing nothing of the place's past, and walked through the dunes at North Gap, they would find a beach of soft sand, and the North Sea. Due east, northern Holland. Immediately south, offshore defensive rock reefs shield the village of Sea Palling. North, soft cliffs rise to Happisburgh, with scant protection and rapid erosion. At Eccles, sand dunes top, and sometimes bury, a concrete wall. The narrow, doglegging lanes to the gap lend remoteness; a few houses and shacks behind the marrams, minimal designated parking, and no facilities. A decent stretch of beach; all you see is sand.

On 23 January 1895 a church tower fell here. Circular, with octagonal upper section, and around seventy-five feet high, the tower of St Mary's, a relic of the former Eccles village, stood in isolation on Eccles beach.<sup>1</sup> If such a tower fell today, it would likely be taken as a sign of coastal and climatic instability, an anxious portent. Dunes had covered the lower parts for preceding decades, until late in 1862 a storm cut sand and marrams away. After thirty-three years' beach standing, a January gale toppled the tower. Today's casual visitor would never know; no trace remains, no signs alert.

## ECCLES AND THE ANTHROPOSCENIC

The title of this essay, 'Next the Sea', has on occasion formed part of Eccles' given name, as in W.H. Cooke's 1908 study, *Eccles next the Sea*, and in Ronald Pestell and David Stannard's local histories of *Eccles-Juxta-Mare*.<sup>2</sup> Today Ordnance Survey maps show a plainer 'Eccles on Sea'. 'Next the Sea' works here as a title however for its combination of spatial and temporal meaning; position and destination, adjacency and fate. Erosion makes the place grow smaller. Eccles dwindles from medieval village to scattered dwellings, in the main no longer next to but below sea waters.

In a time when shorelines register climate change, and sea levels signal geologically epochal re-designation, Eccles beach becomes 'Anthroposcenic'.<sup>3</sup> The term Anthroposcenic denotes landscape emblematic of processes marking the Anthropocene, indicating ways in which cultural and historical geographic approaches to landscape might inform Anthropocene debate, harnessing landscape's capacity to shuttle between solid ground and imaginative subject, different registers and modes of value. Anthroposcenic landscape activates plural voices, cohabiting sites through time; this Eccles essay shows voices scientific, artistic, literary, religious, antiquarian, touristic, residential, proprietorial, archaeological, all preoccupied with the beach. The Anthroposcenic works emblematically not only as reflective or symbolic of processes

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<sup>1</sup> The commonly attributed date for the destruction of Eccles village in a storm is 1604, but in 2014 local historian David Stannard posited 1570 as more likely; D. Stannard, The timing of the destruction of Eccles juxta Mare, *Norfolk Archaeology* 47 (2014) 45-54.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase 'next the sea' survives locally in common usage for the north Norfolk seaside town of Wells-next-the-Sea, itself now a mile from the sea following salt marsh accretion and defensive pine plantation.

<sup>3</sup> D. Matless, The Anthroposcenic, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 42 (2017) 363-376; D. Matless, Climate change stories and the Anthroposcenic, *Nature Climate Change* 6 (2016) 118-119; D. Matless, Seaview: the Anthroposcenic in T. Dee (Ed.), *Ground Work*, London, 2018, 185-188.

such as sea level rise and coastal erosion, but as generative, landscape articulating the Anthropocene in terms of both narrative voice and the connective meaning of 'articulation'. Through the Anthroposcenic, diverse and ostensibly independent themes may connect, landscape gaining prismatic quality. A site where human structures have been eroded by the sea, where defensive measures have claimed success or failed, and where geologists, policy makers, property owners and pleasure seekers have pondered why a tower might have been on a beach, seems apt for Anthroposcenic study.

A group of geologists led by Jan Zalasiewicz have recently explored 'the stratigraphical signature of the Anthropocene in England', tracing deposits carrying signals including pesticide residues, microplastics and artificial radionuclides, in 'an initial sketch of how the Anthropocene might be recognized in England'.<sup>4</sup> This essay pursues complementary cultural-historical landscape 'signatures' of the Anthropocene, indicating a potential seam of science-humanities exchange. From the geologists' stratigraphical signatures, future cultural-historical studies might emerge of, say, upland farms affected by Chernobyl fallout, seashores marked by microplastics, or coastal landfill sites where marine action exposes an archaeology of late twentieth-century consumption. Landfill erosion might thus give us the plastic human figure, from a precisely-dateable Christmas toy craze, tumbling to the beach. Here might be a twenty-first century extension of a longstanding cultural trope of coastal erosion, encountered at Eccles and elsewhere and discussed below, of human bones exposed from coastal graves.

This essay gathers Anthroposcenic material across two hundred years, in part concerned with how Eccles beach, faraway in time or recently past, becomes resonant for today. The Anthropocene, unique in being epochally prospective as well as retrospective, raises complex temporalities, with past, present and future entangled, notwithstanding the stratigraphic imperative for an inaugural 'golden spike' in the sediment record, with the current favourite being from post-1950 atmospheric nuclear weapons tests.<sup>5</sup> Whatever the precise dating required by the International Commission on Stratigraphy, the processes making the Anthropocene were evidently set in train long before 1950, and the Anthropocene is also prefigured by a genealogy of commentary on the human geological presence. Cultural-historical

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<sup>4</sup> J. Zalasiewicz, C. Waters, M. Williams, D. Aldridge and I. Wilkinson, The stratigraphical signature of the Anthropocene in England, *Proceedings of the Geologists' Association* (2017) (in press, published online), citation p.2 of online text.

<sup>5</sup> C. Waters et al, The Anthropocene is functionally and stratigraphically different from the Holocene, *Science* 351, 6269 (2016) 137-147. J. Zalasiewicz et al, The Working Group on the Anthropocene: summary of evidence and interim recommendations, *Anthropocene* 19 (2017) 55-60.

Anthropocene signatures should thereby acknowledge but not be confined by formal periodisation, indeed they may register what Caitlin DeSilvey terms ‘anticipatory history’, landscape now and landscape then conversing.<sup>6</sup> Emblematic landscapes of environmental change carry complex histories to the present, and this essay therefore crosses prospective chronological epochal borders in taking a story from the mid-nineteenth century to now. One prediction for the Anthropocene, should it be formally designated, might be that the scientific requirement for precise stratigraphic temporal demarcation will jostle with Anthropocene stories migrating across such lines. This essay thereby anticipates a question for future histories, given that the Anthropocene may, in geological terms, have a peculiarly precise dating, even down to a calendar year. Should Anthropocene histories stop at the beginning, with, say, 1950 becoming a checkpoint, beyond which lies Holocene territory? This would seem unduly restrictive, and this essay therefore follows a permissive path over two centuries. In doing so it encounters past figures making distinctly anticipatory statements, as when Charles Lyell discusses in *Principles of Geology* (considered below for its account of Eccles) the geology of humankind: ‘The earth’s crust must be remodelled more than once before all the memorials of man which are continually becoming entombed in the rocks now forming will be destroyed’.<sup>7</sup>

In examining Eccles as anticipatory site, this paper echoes other landscape research seeking to activate the past. Thus, in work on ‘sustainable flood memory’, Lindsey McEwan, Owain Jones and others examine, in the context of 2007 and 2014 river flooding in southwest England, the ways in which history and memory may foster resilience in traumatic times, sometimes confounding prevailing expectations by including elements of joy alongside grief.<sup>8</sup> Attention to Eccles beach echoes DeSilvey’s comment that:

We live in a world dense with things left behind by those who came before us, but we only single out some of these things for our attention and care. We ask certain buildings, objects, and landscapes to function as mnemonic devices, to remember the pasts that produced them, and to make those pasts available for our contemplation and concern.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> C. DeSilvey, Making sense of transience: an anticipatory history, *Cultural Geographies* 19 (2012) 31-54.

<sup>7</sup> C. Lyell, *Principles of Geology*, volume II, London, 1866, 563.

<sup>8</sup> L. McEwan, O. Jones and I. Robertson, ‘A glorious time?’ Some reflections on flooding in the Somerset Levels, *Geographical Journal* 180 (2014) 326-337; J. Garde-Hansen, L. McEwan, A. Holmes and O. Jones, Sustainable flood memory: remembering as resilience, *Memory Studies* 10 (2017) 384-405; L. McEwan, J. Garde-Hansen, A. Holmes, O. Jones and F. Krause, Sustainable flood memories, lay knowledges and the development of community resilience to future flood risk, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 42 (2017) 14-28.

<sup>9</sup> C. DeSilvey, *Curating Decay: Heritage Beyond Saving*, Minneapolis, 2017, 3.

DeSilvey notes that while such requests are often made in connection with efforts of preservation or restoration, they might also apply where intervention is resisted, and change embraced. Eccles, with the church as fallen structure, where only minor efforts were ever made to preserve the tower, here offers a pertinent story. The fallen tower also points to the particular form of change classified as ruination, on which work has proliferated in recent years, with some, as in Hayden Lorimer and Simon Murray's study of a crumbling modernist seminary, taking a 'site-specific' approach, with 'the ruin as an operating site of experiment, as a forum for open investigation'.<sup>10</sup>

An open, site-specific investigation of Eccles over two hundred years variously raises principles of geology, schemes of defence, changing climates, land and sea levels, geographic authority, ruin pleasures, souvenirs of loss, and death and memorial. Thus Eccles tower might act as a signpost for parallel cultural-historical landscape studies, with themes which might characterise any Anthroposcenic work: the different ways of knowing a landscape; the relationship between experience, representation, inhabitation and analysis; the transmission of landscape presentations across space and time; the depositions of memory and the sediments of past speculations; the geographies of authority exercised, with sea defence variously a local, national and global matter; the senses of loss, grief and sometimes joy invoked by incremental and catastrophic change. All of these feature in this Eccles story.

The remainder of this essay begins on the nineteenth-century beach, tracking defence debate and geological theory, before considering the standing tower as landmark and visitor attraction. The 1895 fall brings response signalling emotional and scientific loss, concern for coastal security, and commemorative opportunity. Mortality gathers at the ruins, in exposed human bones following beach scour, and in narratives of death. In the twentieth century fragmentary memory lingers below new sea walls, before anxiety returns and history is rediscovered in a time of climate change. At the end of the twentieth century renewed defence re-covers the site, and the essay ends at a sandy present.

## **STANDING BY THE GERMAN OCEAN**

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<sup>10</sup> H. Lorimer and S. Murray, The ruin in question, *Performance Research* 20 (2015) 58-66. For a review of ruin work see C. DeSilvey and T. Edensor, Reckoning with ruins, *Progress in Human Geography* 37 (2012) 465-485. For an incisive piece of ruin writing see F. MacDonald, The ruins of Erskine Beveridge, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 39 (2014) 477-489.

Two miles from Hasbro' Town Gap we arrive at Eccles, and view the churchless steeple, standing alone on the beach, and wonder how it came there.<sup>11</sup>

The first edition one-inch Ordnance Survey map, published in 1838, records 'Eccles *in Ruins*', the church cross symbol placed in 'marram hills' (Fig. 1). The nineteenth-century tower was an enigmatic marker, not least for those charged with coastal maintenance, a sign of past change and present vulnerability. Sea defence was the responsibility of the Commissioners of Sewers for the Eastern Hundreds of Norfolk, commonly known as the Sea Breach Commissioners (SBC), established in 1802 to protect newly enclosed marshes inland, breaches having 'of late years increased to an alarming degree so as to have done considerable damage to the Country adjoining'.<sup>12</sup> Land values on extensive inland flatlands made the coast worth defending. The SBC was a locally constituted body whereby landowners maintained their patch, raising rates from those whose property might be threatened by flood. Several SBC field meetings were held at Eccles: 'this point has long been considered the most dangerous of any on the coast'.<sup>13</sup>

Eccles as danger point framed William Hewitt's 1844 *An Essay on the Encroachments of the German Ocean Along the Norfolk Coast with a Design to Arrest its Further Depredations*. Hewitt, from nearby Stalham, reviewed past losses, 170 yards gone at 'Hasborough' in sixty years, and at Eccles the dunes 'fast encroached upon since 1839, laying bare the foundations of dwellings, the chancel end of the church'.<sup>14</sup> Hewitt proposed groynes to encourage a wide, gently shelving beach. A frontispiece lithograph by David Hodgson showed 'the present state of the beach', Eccles tower peeping over undercut dunes, beachcombers and driftwood signalling depredations. A further lithograph showed the tower peeping yet secured (Fig. 2): 'The Breakwater, shewing the supposed elevation of the beach from the deposit of sand'.<sup>15</sup> Figures relax on fuller sands: 'the question – Whether art can arrest the progress of the German Ocean along the Norfolk coast? may be answered in the affirmative'.<sup>16</sup>

Among subscribers to Hewitt's volume, alongside local dignitaries, were nationally eminent geologists including Adam Sedgwick, Roderick Murchison and Charles Lyell. Lyell's *Principles of*

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<sup>11</sup> E. Suffling, *The Land of the Broads*, Stratford, Essex, 1885, 174.

<sup>12</sup> Resolutions of the Sea Breach Committee, 29 April 1803, Norfolk Record Office (hereafter NRO), EAW 2/39. On earlier commissions see B. Cornford, The Sea Breach Commission in East Norfolk 1609-1743, *Norfolk Archaeology* 37 (1979) 137-145.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Pratt (SBC surveyor), Report, 26 September 1840, NRO, EAW 2/135.

<sup>14</sup> W. Hewitt, *An Essay on the Encroachments of the German Ocean Along the Norfolk Coast with a Design to Arrest its Further Depredations*, Norwich, 1844, 34.

<sup>15</sup> Hewitt, facing 71.

<sup>16</sup> Hewitt, 68.

*Geology or the Modern Changes of the Earth and its Inhabitants* had indeed presented Eccles to a scientific audience, Lyell knowing east Norfolk geology from seeing ‘every foot of the coast from Walton in Essex to Hunstanton’ in June-July 1829.<sup>17</sup> Lyell visited again with his geologist wife Mary in summer 1838 and 1839, Mary writing from Happisburgh on 18 June 1839: ‘We ... went to Eccles where there is a line of sand hills & the tower of an old church which was buried time out of mind. ... We sauntered about nearly an hour making sketches & Charles examining the cliffs’.<sup>18</sup> Jim Secord notes the importance of careful scenic descriptions in creating ‘the imaginative depth of past time which was at the heart of Lyell’s message’.<sup>19</sup> Eccles provided a clear example, the 1866 tenth edition of *Principles* updating the Eccles story within a chapter on the ‘Destroying and Transporting Effects of Tides and Currents’. Noting that ‘The decay of the cliffs of Norfolk and Suffolk is incessant’, Lyell commented:

When I visited the spot in 1839, I found the tower of the church half buried in the dunes of sand, as represented in the drawing ..., and twenty-three years afterwards my friend the Rev. S. W. King made a sketch from nearly the same spot... (Fig. 3) In the interval the sand dunes, which are always moving inland, had considerably altered their position in reference to the tower, which after the storm of 1862 was seen ... on the sea-side, the waves having washed the foundations of the edifice.<sup>20</sup>

If Hewitt’s images took a shore viewpoint to convey threat, Lyell’s elevated prospects meditate on levels:

As the tide rises eight feet at Lowestoft, and sixteen at Cromer, it becomes a question whether in the course of four or five centuries its mean level at any given point on this eastern coast may vary sufficiently to explain the present position of the ruined church at Eccles relatively to high-water mark, but I am not aware that we have any recorded data for confirming or invalidating such an hypothesis.<sup>21</sup>

Lyell instead sought explanation in shifts of land, asserting the ‘Permanence of the ocean’s level’.<sup>22</sup> The frontispiece of *Principles* used another architectural structure to register sea

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<sup>17</sup> Charles Lyell to Roderick Murchison, 11 August 1829, quoted in L. Wilson, *Charles Lyell: The Years to 1841*, New Haven, 1972, 266.

<sup>18</sup> Letter, Mary Lyell to Anna Hornor (mother), 18 June 1839, quoted in Wilson, *Charles Lyell*, 487.

<sup>19</sup> J. Secord, *Visions of Science*, Oxford, 2014, 159.

<sup>20</sup> C. Lyell, *Principles of Geology*, volume I, London, 1866, 516 and 519.

<sup>21</sup> Lyell, *Principles of Geology* vol. I, 520.

<sup>22</sup> Lyell, *Principles of Geology* vol. II, 178-9. Lyell found evidence for movements in land surface on his 1834 Swedish tour (Wilson, *Lyell*, 392-407), and mapped ‘the extent of surface in Europe which has been covered by the sea since the commencement of the Eocene period’, with the German Ocean extending across northern Europe and eastern England; *Principles of Geology* vol. I, facing 254.

stability, the ruined coastal Temple of Serapis at Puzzuoli in southern Italy, columns standing in water, twice subject to subsidence and elevation, yet with ‘no sensible variation of level in that sea during the last two thousand years’.<sup>23</sup> Lyell noted ‘memorials of physical changes inscribed on the three standing columns in most legible characters by the hand of Nature’, Serapis ‘a series of natural archives self-registered during the dark ages’.<sup>24</sup> Eccles stands in *Principles* alongside Serapis, archiving process.

Lyell also prompted local geological, historical and archaeological narrative. In 1842 Charles Green, rector of Bacton, a few miles north of Eccles, produced *The History, Antiquities and Geology of Bacton in Norfolk* as a supplement to *Principles*: ‘The Geology of this district has been glanced at but partially by Mr. Lyell’. Green sketched coastal sections and fossil finds, and noted sea encroachment, with the ‘greater part of Eccles ... swallowed up’ and Happisburgh church likely to fall ‘before the close of the present century’.<sup>25</sup> Standing by the German Ocean, Eccles tower focused thoughts on sea defence, loss, and the archiving of things past.

## ATTRACTION

Presently we saw the top of an old weather-beaten tower peeping over a sand-hill, and became aware of a deep roar. ... What a lonely relic, and melancholy withal; telling mutely of destruction in days long past ... the desolate church-tower, standing there in the waste, is an impressive memorial of ocean’s havoc.<sup>26</sup>

The duned tower was a visitor attraction, as Hewitt noted: ‘On either side of the old steeple are capacious banks ... Here the weary may rest; the contemplative picture to himself scenes that are past, present, and to come. Here pic-nic parties, merry meetings, the young and old, may partake of a delightful recreation’.<sup>27</sup> In 1908 W.H. Cooke commented: ‘For ninety-five years in succession (1813-1908) the teachers and children of the Baptist Sunday School at Stalham, formerly at Ingham, have visited Eccles on Trinity Monday, the original motive being the removal of the children from the evil influence of Ingham Fair’. Eccles offered quiet, select enjoyment:

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<sup>23</sup> Lyell, *Principles of Geology* vol. II, 168.

<sup>24</sup> Lyell, *Principles of Geology* vol. II, 170 and 172.

<sup>25</sup> C. Green, *The History, Antiquities and Geology of Bacton in Norfolk*, Norwich, 1842, preface and 17.

<sup>26</sup> W. White, *Eastern England from the Thames to the Humber*, London, 1865, 180.

<sup>27</sup> Hewitt, *Encroachments*, 97.



in the summer-time those in search of health and perfect rest will find few places to excel Eccles – so ‘far from the madding crowd,’ without a fear of the intrusion of cheap trippers.

As a place where the sound of the locomotive has not been heard, no week-end tickets are available for

SILENT ECCLES JUXTA MARE.<sup>28</sup>

The tower emerged onto the beach in late 1862. The precise date is uncertain, but storms of 18-20 December are a likely cause, with severe erosion reported at Mundesley a few miles north: ‘Houses and buildings may be seen hanging over the cliffs’ / ‘Massive bones of the mammoth species have been picked up beneath the ruins’.<sup>29</sup> Storm shifted Eccles sands, and the tower stood out, a curio picnic site, Cooke recalling: ‘The black-faced flints of the tower, as far as they could be reached, were covered with visitors’ names’.<sup>30</sup> Eccles echoed other coastal church sites, such as the cliff-top ruins at Dunwich in Suffolk, and Sidestrand near Cromer, a few miles north, as attractions fostering melancholy. From 1883 journalist Clement Scott, promoting the Cromer area as ‘Poppyland’, labelled Sidestrand’s churchyard the ‘Garden of Sleep’.<sup>31</sup> Poet Charles Algernon Swinburne and his friend Theodore Watts-Dunton, prompted by Scott’s writing, holidayed at Sidestrand, finding inspirational loss. Watts-Dunton’s novel *Aylwin* (1898) featured cliff falls by a ruined church, while Swinburne’s 1884 ‘A Sea-Mark’ contemplates ‘One sole rock’ remaining, Eccles-tower-like, after erosion: ‘Stands a sea-mark in the tides of time’.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> W.H. Cooke, *Eccles next the Sea, Norfolk and the Erosion of the East Coast*, Stalham, 1908, 23-24 and 26-27.

<sup>29</sup> *Norwich Mercury*, 27 December 1862, 6. Dates for beach emergence vary. White’s *Norfolk Directory* of 1864 has the structure covered by sandhills ‘till the great storm of November, 1862, swept the greater portion of them away’ (431). Local historians Ronald Pestell and David Stannard (*Eccles-Juxta-Mare: a Lost Village Rediscovered*, Eccles, 1995, 50) however suggest emergence after a gale of 26 December 1862, taking their lead from Danby Palmer’s 1895 paper citing coastguard Captain King’s diary entry of 27 December 1862: ‘The old tower now stands clear of the sandhill in which it was imbedded’; F. Danby Palmer, Eccles by the Sea, *Norfolk Archaeology* 12 (1895) 304-310, quotation 305. The citation does not though specify when the exposure occurred, only when King saw it. Local press coverage through November and December does not cite the tower’s appearance, though major gales are reported on 23 November (*Norwich Mercury*, 29 November 1862), and between 18-20 December, with the weekly *Norwich Mercury* reporting of Mundesley: ‘Hundreds of visitors have been attracted to witness the devastations’, 27 December 1862, 6.

<sup>30</sup> Cooke, *Eccles next the Sea*, 22.

<sup>31</sup> C. Scott, *Poppy-Land: Papers Descriptive of Scenery on the East Coast*, London, 1886.

<sup>32</sup> T. Watts-Dunton, *Aylwin*, London, 1898; William Sharp’s *Literary Geography*, London, 1904. devoted a chapter to ‘Aylwin-Land (Wales and East Anglia)’. A.C. Swinburne, ‘A Sea-Mark’, in *The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne*, vol.5, London, 1925, 308. ‘A Sea-Mark’ was first published within the sequence ‘A Midsummer Holiday’ (1884), and was followed by ‘The Cliffside Path’, carrying the erosive refrain: ‘Wind is lord and change is sovereign of the strand’.

While never so touristic as Sidestrand, Eccles attracted Norwich photographers producing souvenir images. J.R. Sawyer, likely before 1871, showed the tower close to dunes, wall remains four feet high, while Ernest Kent's images, taken on 21 June 1887, show the tower alone.<sup>33</sup> (Fig. 4) An uncredited postcard image from around 1890 shows three dark-clothed figures perched on diminished walls, tower and breakwaters behind.<sup>34</sup> Painters also depicted the tower, as in Norwich School artist John Berney Ladbroke's 1823 lithograph 'Eccles Church', Reverend James Bulwer's mid-nineteenth century watercolour 'Eccles Tower', and Yarmouth painter Charles Harmony Harrison's 1875 watercolour of a moonlit tower, wall traces stretching to the waves.<sup>35</sup> In November 1877 Ernest Suffling, resident at Happisburgh, depicted 'Eccles Steeple', the watercolour reproduced in his *History and Legends of the Broads District* (1891), the tower and walls, sailboats and a steam launch, gulls and crows circling, a fisherman hauling nets.<sup>36</sup> Suffling's 1895 'Boy's Book of Adventure', *Afloat in a Gypsy Van*, told of boys visiting Eccles 'to see the great novelty of a church steeple standing on the sea-shore', gale scour revealing village foundations: 'He walked amid the ruins just as if he were a tourist viewing the unearthed remains of an English Pompeii'.<sup>37</sup>

Eccles was also a sea-mark, as the *Illustrated London News* noted in 1884:

A pleasure steamer plies in the summer season three times a week between Yarmouth and Cromer. ... Half-way ... is an object which attracts the attention of all on board. A tall slender tower is seen, standing on the beach, outside the cliffs forming the line of the coast. It rises, apparently, out of the sea. In fact, at a high tide, breakers are seen dashing

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<sup>33</sup> Norfolk and Norwich Photographic Survey Archive (hereafter NNPSA), Box E-ECC, Norfolk Heritage Centre (hereafter NHC), Norwich. On Sawyer see the website 'Early Photographers', [www.early-photographers.org.uk](http://www.early-photographers.org.uk), accessed December 2017.

<sup>34</sup> NNPSA, Box E-ECC. That this image was reproduced for sale is shown from its presence in two unconnected private photographic albums held in the Norfolk Heritage Centre, catalogued as 'Fitt Album' (1885) and 'Photo Album' (1890).

<sup>35</sup> The Ladbroke and Bulwer images are held in the Norwich Castle Museum archive, and searchable on the Norfolk Museums Collections website: [norfolk-museums-collections.org/collections/objects](http://norfolk-museums-collections.org/collections/objects) (accessed December 2017). A photograph of the Harrison watercolour is held in NNPSA, Box E-ECC, where the catalogued date is 1875. On the cover of Pestell and Stannard, *Eccles*, the painting is reproduced as 'Eccles Steeple by Moonlight', 1894. The last number in the date on the picture is however 5, and the tower is standing close to the dunes, so 1875 seems likely to be correct.

<sup>36</sup> NNPSA, Box E-ECC. E. Suffling, *The History and Legends of the Broads District*, London, 1891, 199.

<sup>37</sup> E. Suffling, *Afloat in a Gypsy Van*, London, 1895, 55; elsewhere Suffling terms Eccles 'the Norfolk Pompeii', *The Story Hunter*, London, 1896, 146.

against the tower. This is Eccles steeple, the ruin of an old church once standing miles inland.<sup>38</sup>

On 9 August 1888, however, having spotted Eccles, passengers would be undone by another ecclesiastical relic. The 'Victoria' steamer, with one hundred aboard, was wrecked beginning its return journey, running into the 'Old Church Rock' near Cromer Pier, the supposed remains of the steeple of the drowned village of Shipden.<sup>39</sup> All were rescued. In 1895 F. Danby Palmer would evoke Shipden when reflecting on Eccles' fall: 'perhaps some day a "Church Rock" will alone mark, at low tides, the spot where Eccles Church once stood'.<sup>40</sup> Eccles as attraction, for picnickers and sailors, might not last.

## FALLING

Eccles tower appeared a vulnerable vertical. The 1884 *Illustrated London News* story had indeed illustrated 'Eccles Steeple, Norfolk, since the sand cliffs were washed away' in exaggeratedly precarious balance, as if the middle section had slipped, with indentation one side and protrusion the other.<sup>41</sup> On 28 November 1893 the Norwich-based *Eastern Daily Press* reported:

The effects of the late disastrous gale have left their mark here. The beach during the last week has been as bare as a highway, the foundations of the church and the surrounding buildings being visible at low tide. At high water the waves break on the old tower, standing as it does in the midst of the waters. ... From the position of the tower it is certain the sea is gaining considerably at this spot, and it seems probable a few more big storms will certainly render Eccles steeple a thing of the past.<sup>42</sup>

A stabilisation attempt followed. Eccles formed part of the Evans Lombe estates, fifteen thousand acres across Norfolk, overseen by Edward Evans Lombe from Melton Hall, south east of Norwich, with Francis Hornor, also surveyor to the SBC, as land agent. On 29 November 1893 Evans Lombe sent the previous day's *Eastern Daily Press* article to Hornor, asking 'how much would be required to make the Old Tower safe': 'It is a thousand pities such an interesting old relic should be allowed to disappear'. The base was cemented, and Evans Lombe sought to keep

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<sup>38</sup> Eccles Steeple, Norfolk, *Illustrated London News*, 2 February 1884; copy held in NNPSA, Box E-ECC.

<sup>39</sup> Excursion steamer sunk off Cromer, *Eastern Daily Press*, 10 August 1888, 3. The incident is also noted on the 'Coasting' section of Nick Stone's Norfolk landscape website 'Invisible Works', which also gives a rich account of Eccles; [www.invisibleworks.co.uk](http://www.invisibleworks.co.uk), accessed December 2017.

<sup>40</sup> Palmer, *Eccles by the Sea*, 310. Palmer's essay was published by *Norfolk Archaeology* in 1895, from a February 1894 talk, and included a photograph and painting by former coastguard officer Captain H King from 1869. By the time of publication, the images were memorial: 'The dreaded catastrophe had taken place' (309).

<sup>41</sup> Eccles Steeple, *Illustrated London News*, 2 February 1884.

<sup>42</sup> Eccles-Next-the-Sea, *Eastern Daily Press*, 28 November 1893, 6.

the matter local, against a suggestion 'that it should be taken over by the National Society for Preserving Archaeological Relics [sic] – for my part, I think we ourselves ought to do it, and not allow any Society to have any claim on it. / But whatever is to be done ought to be at once, before another gale comes, and perhaps sweep everything away'.<sup>43</sup>

On 2 January 1895 the *Eastern Daily Press* again reported 'The Church in Danger': 'The old steeple has had a rough time of it during the late gales. The sea has washed away large portions of sand, leaving the tower yet more isolated. At high tide the base has been submerged in 10 ft. of water, the waves reaching at times half way to the summit'.<sup>44</sup> Three weeks later, on 23 January, the tower fell: 'At Eccles-next-Sea during the terrific hurricane on Wednesday afternoon, the old steeple on the sands near Happisburgh fell through the force of the waves. ... Eccles steeple has been a landmark for generations'.<sup>45</sup> The fall was part of 'great havoc all along the coast', not an isolated event, with dunes breached at Palling, Yarmouth and Lowestoft flooded, and 'phenomenal weather' across the country.<sup>46</sup> The fall itself though was a spectacle nobody saw. Something predicted, even anticipated, was missed. The *Eastern Daily Press* quoted John Clements of Manor Farm, in his 'look out' until six o'clock:

when the sea was breaking furiously against the tower, at times the spray of the breakers going over its summit. At seven o'clock when he returned the tower had disappeared. The Manor House is not more than a hundred yards distant, but, owing to the roar of the hurricane and the noise of the breakers, no sound was heard when it fell. One four foot piece of wall remained, 'that part which has recently been cemented by the order of Mr. F. Hornor'. The fall also produced strange effect: 'On Thursday afternoon at five o'clock the belfry portions were being covered by the incoming tide. The foaming swirling waters amongst the huge portions of masonry had a strangely weird aspect, the fragments churning the waters into a snow-white foam, which looked almost phosphorescent in the gathering darkness'.<sup>47</sup> On 29 January Suffling claimed in a letter to the newspaper to have been 'the last person to enter the old steeple', finding shelter to light his pipe:

At 5.30 p.m., the grand old steeple, in the crepuscular light, looked like some gigantic viking bathing to his knees in the foamy brown sea, and laughing at the efforts of Father Neptune to bring him upon the broad of his back. When I last looked, the waves were

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<sup>43</sup> Edward Evans Lombe to Francis Hornor, 29 November 1893, NRO, HNR 92/1/1.

<sup>44</sup> Eccles-Next-The-Sea, *Eastern Daily Press*, 2 January 1895, 6. The article claimed that the cementing of the tower base had been carried out by Mr Wilkinson of Castle Farm, Eccles. Francis Hornor wrote a letter in correction the next day, stating that he had supervised the work on behalf of Evans Lombe; *Eastern Daily Press*, 3 January 1895, 3.

<sup>45</sup> The Recent Gale, *Eastern Daily Press*, 25 January 1895, 5.

<sup>46</sup> The Storm, *Eastern Daily Press*, 24 January 1895, 5.

<sup>47</sup> Destruction of the Old Tower at Eccles, *Eastern Daily Press*, 26 January 1895, 5.

flying in foaming showers around the waist of the old beacon, which appeared as safe and as solid as it has done in past years.

Suffling heard of the fall the next day: 'It may seem strange, but I felt an equal sympathy for the old tower's downfall as I should if I had been informed of the death of an old friend'.<sup>48</sup>

The fall prompted not only lament, but critique, the *Eastern Daily Press* commenting: 'Within the last few years a breakwater has been erected from the base of the tower to the banks. This, in the opinion of some, has been one cause of its destruction. Eccles has by this calamity been shorn of its chief attraction'.<sup>49</sup> On 26 January W.H. Cooke noted that he had 'been laughed at' for his accounts of the tower's 'perilous condition': 'The cementing of the base of the tower by Mr. F. Hornor's orders did nothing to strengthen the foundations'. Cooke concluded: 'from the nature of the drifting sand I fancy next summer time, a huge ridge of sand like some monstrous grave will cover its lamented remains. Eccles has lost its great attraction'.<sup>50</sup> On 29 January 'M.K.' wrote: 'When a building that has stood for hundreds of years as a witness to the inroads of the ocean is overthrown and swept away we are awakened to the fact that subjects which are often treated academically may have for many of our neighbours an intensely deep and anxious interest'.<sup>51</sup> The SBC met at Eccles on 7 February to inspect damage, recommending breakwater repairs, marram planting and 'judicious faggotting'.<sup>52</sup> For Cooke this appeared complacent, and on 20 February he evoked Hewitt's 1844 essay in critique. Eccles was 'the most critical point on this portion of our coast': 'Many thought "Eccles old steeple" would last for ages, but it has disappeared. A like fate must happen to the beautiful edifice at Happisburgh'. Cooke concluded:

At present nothing of any importance has been done to avert the fearful dangers to which the inhabitants of these districts are exposed to at every high tide or gale.

Doubtless, some of our Sea Breach Commissioners possess Mr. Hewitt's essay. It might do them good to re-peruse it. It will be of little use crying out after the mischief has occurred.<sup>53</sup>

Eccles would continue to be a reference point for sea defence, as when in May 1907 the church ruins were visited by the Royal Commission on Coast Erosion, escorted by the SBC, as part of their assessment of east coastal policies: 'To people who are interested in the subject of coast

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<sup>48</sup> *Eastern Daily Press*, 29 January 1895, 6.

<sup>49</sup> Destruction of the Old Tower at Eccles, *Eastern Daily Press*, 26 January 1895, 5.

<sup>50</sup> *Eastern Daily Press*, 26 January 1895, 5. In 1908 Cooke would reflect: 'In less than a month most of the ruins were covered up by sand'; *Eccles next the Sea*, 22.

<sup>51</sup> M.K., 'The High Tides and the Norfolk Coast', *Eastern Daily Press*, 29 January 1895, 6.

<sup>52</sup> Sea Breach Commission minutes, 30 November 1895, NRO, EAW 2/27.

<sup>53</sup> W.H.C., 'Encroachments of the North Sea', *Eastern Daily Press*, 20 February 1895, 3.

erosion, Eccles is quite one of the famous instances'.<sup>54</sup> Geologist Clement Reid, who gave evidence to the royal commission about Eccles, would write in 1913 of the tower, 'described and figured by Lyell in his *Principles of Geology*': 'For a series of years, from 1877 onward, I watched the advance of the sea, and as the church tower was more and more often reached by the tides, its foundations were laid bare and attacked by the waves, till at last the tower fell'.<sup>55</sup>

For Lombe and Hornor the tower's fall was estate business, and emotional loss. F.G. Clements of Manor Farm had informed Hornor immediately, and Hornor replied: 'Many thanks for your letter, and I am deeply grieved to hear that the old steeple has gone. / Would you send me a further letter stating how much remains above the level of the Beach, and also the damage to the Banks and breakwaters, and if the Commissioners are doing anything by way of repairs'.<sup>56</sup> Hornor had repair costs and ruin value in mind, suggesting to commissioner Thomas Blofeld that the SBC should meet the former, and that: 'I immediately wrote Clements to prevent anyone from removing any portion of the ruins from off the Beach, and also telling him that if I got a clear case, I should certainly prosecute anyone for so doing'.<sup>57</sup> Hornor also informed Edward's father, the aged Reverend Henry Evans Lombe: 'You will be deeply grieved to hear that Eccles Steeple went down yesterday evening (Wednesday) between 6 and 7 o'clock. / The Sea broke over the gap and actually flowed up to Clements' turnip house doors, and had not the wind gone down the situation would have been alarming'.<sup>58</sup> In a scrapbook in the family papers a handwritten note, probably by Henry, next to a cutting on the fall, states: 'I can remember this tower standing in the middle of sand-hills – the tower quite filled with sand, and the sand very often nearly up to the battlements. It was then far away from the sea. This would be somewhere about the year 1825'.<sup>59</sup>

The fall variously signals the futility of combatting storm, the attribution of blame, trust in marrams, and emotional loss. And though no one saw the fall, acts of commemoration followed.

## COMMEMORATIVE

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<sup>54</sup> *Eastern Daily Press*, 31 May 1907, 5. Sea Breach Commission executive committee minutes, NRO, EAW 2/34. On the royal commission and coastal erosion see J. Winter, *Secure from Rash Assault: Sustaining the Victorian Environment*, Berkeley, 1999, chapter 12.

<sup>55</sup> C. Reid, *Submerged Forests*, London, 1913, 27-8.

<sup>56</sup> Francis Hornor to F.G. Clements, 24 January 1895, NRO, HNR 128/1. Edward Evans Lombe had himself become a sea breach commissioner in 1891.

<sup>57</sup> Francis Hornor to Thomas Blofeld, 9 February 1895, NRO, HNR 128/1.

<sup>58</sup> Francis Hornor to Henry Evans Lombe, 24 January 1895, NRO, HNR 128/1.

<sup>59</sup> NRO, HNR 565/1/1.

The weekend after the fall, the ruin became an attraction: 'On Sunday large numbers visited the ruins. The belfry portions are already being washed away by the tide'.<sup>60</sup> On 26 January Cooke had commented: 'happy are they who possess a good photograph of the old tower at Eccles!'.<sup>61</sup> Souvenir images soon appeared. The first newspaper advertisement on 28 January from Elizabeth Miller, 'E. Miller, Photographer' of King Street, Great Yarmouth, sold SBC-commissioned images, prices up to two shillings: 'Eccles Old Tower. Very fine photographs of the above, taken by order of the Commissioners, January, 1894, can be had'.<sup>62</sup> The next day, and for the following two weeks, a cheaper rival appeared (Fig. 5): 'Eccles Old Tower. The best whole plate photograph ever taken (Registered), 1s. each Mounted, by Post 1s. 3d. – Jarrold & Sons, Norwich, or S. W. Fitt, 67, Ber Street, Norwich'.<sup>63</sup> An accompanying report stated: 'Mr. S.W. Fitt of Norwich, when on a recent visit to Eccles with a party of friends took advantage of the opportunity to obtain an admirable photograph of the old tower. It is a capital representation of the famous landmark, and will form a handsome and useful memorial of this ancient structure'.<sup>64</sup> Fitt's image showed a mixed party, women and children mainly to the right, men to the left, and two perched in a window hole. Fitt is listed in the 1896 *Kelly's Directory* of Norfolk as Stephen William Fitt, 'corn dealer'; Miller's professional photography seemingly had amateur competition.<sup>65</sup> From 2-5 February painting rivalled photography, a Norwich picture framer advertising: 'Eccles Church. Mr. Aldous of Rampant Horse Street has now on View in the Window of his New Establishment, for a Few Days Only, a fine Old Oil Painting of the Church Steeple before it was swallowed up by the ocean'.<sup>66</sup>

Miller's photographs and Aldous's painting are untraceable, but Fitt's image has lasted, in local reproduction and unlikely late twentieth-century international dissemination. W.G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn* reproduced Fitt's photograph in an account of Dunwich in Suffolk, forty miles south: 'Until about 1890 what was known as Eccles Church Tower still stood on Dunwich beach, and no one had any idea how it had arrived at sea level, from the considerable height at which it

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<sup>60</sup> Eccles-Next-The-Sea, *Eastern Daily Press*, 30 January 1895, 6.

<sup>61</sup> *Eastern Daily Press*, 26 January 1895, 5.

<sup>62</sup> *Eastern Daily Press*, 28 January 1895, 4. *Kelly's Directory* of Norfolk for 1896 lists in its Yarmouth section 'Miller Elizabeth (Mrs.), photographer, 14 King Street'; see also the website 'Early Photographers', [www.early-photographers.org.uk](http://www.early-photographers.org.uk), accessed December 2017.

<sup>63</sup> *Eastern Daily Press*, 29 January 1895, 4. Fitt's advertisement re-appeared over the next two weeks, with, from Monday 4 February, an additional statement: 'Guaranteed direct productions. No duplicates. See Press Opinions'. Miller also advertised twice more, on 30 January and 1 February.

<sup>64</sup> *Eastern Daily Press*, 29 January 1895, 6.

<sup>65</sup> *Kelly's Directory* of Norfolk, 1896, 272.

<sup>66</sup> *Eastern Daily Press*, 2 February 1895, 4. An identical advertisement appeared on 2, 4 and 5 February on page 4.

must once have stood, without tipping out of the perpendicular'.<sup>67</sup> An amateur image achieves global circulation, through a geographic puzzle. Given Sebald's enigmatic writing, this may be a deliberate error, a compelling image for an implausible tale. Conversely, Jean and Stuart Bacon's 1988 guide to Dunwich reproduces Fitt's image, without explanation, at the end of a chapter on legendary undersea church bells, with the caption: 'Eccles Church Tower on the beach, circa 1893'.<sup>68</sup> Sebald's reproduction, like that in the Bacons' book, cuts off Fitt's name at the bottom of the image. Perhaps Sebald bought the Bacons' guide in Dunwich, took it for inspiration, and enquired no further.

Geological science also noted the fall, the March 1895 *Geological Magazine* reporting: 'An ancient landmark on the coast of Norfolk, one well known to readers of Lyell's "Principles of Geology," has been destroyed by the breakers during a severe storm, on January 23<sup>rd</sup> of this year. The old tower of Eccles church has for many years remained as a witness to the destruction of our shores'.<sup>69</sup> Reverend E. Hill, fellow of the Geological Society, furthered commemoration in May: 'The church-tower of Eccles-by-the-Sea, on the coast of Norfolk, once buried in the moving sand-dunes, has been rendered classical by Lyell through his description of it in his "Principles." Such a monument should surely not be allowed to pass away without an obituary notice'.<sup>70</sup> Lyell was also cited locally, in a letter to the *Norfolk Chronicle* by Meadows White of Horning vicarage:

So, Eccles Tower has fallen! the well-known landmark of the slow and sure denudation taking place on our east coast. The event, though interesting, has somewhat of a tragic aspect, and I have accordingly cut out your brief notice of the catastrophe and inserted it between pages 518 and 519 of my copy of Lyell's 'Principles of Geology'.

White ends: 'Eccles tower, therefore, has been a landmark in more senses than one, in time as well as in space, and the fall of this interesting monument of geological change is worth more

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<sup>67</sup> W.G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, London, 1998, 156.

<sup>68</sup> J. and S. Bacon, *Dunwich*, Marks Tey, 1988, 50.

<sup>69</sup> Destruction of Eccles Church, on the Norfolk Coast, *Geological Magazine* 2 (Decade 4) (1895), 143-144.

<sup>70</sup> Reverend E. Hill, The Tower of Eccles-by-the-Sea, *Geological Magazine* 2 (Decade 4) (1895) 229-30. Hill used the *Eastern Daily Press* account of 26 January 1895 to describe the fall, and calculated dune retreat: 'Lyell alludes to the possibility of a subsidence in the coast, but this is not required to explain the march of the sand-dunes' (230). Eccles is also noted at the conclusion of F.W. Harmer, A Sketch of the Later Tertiary History of East Anglia, *Proceedings of the Geologists' Association* 17 (1902) 416-479. Hill would write again in the *Geological Magazine* correspondence section in October 1915 (volume 2, decade 6), on coast erosion in Norfolk, noting that on 1 September 1915 he had seen cracks in the cliff-top church tower of Sidestrand, whereas in 1905 he had measured seven feet between tower and cliff. Hill referred back to his 1895 Eccles calculations: 'I record this as a contribution towards estimates of cliff-waste on this coast' (476).



than a passing notice. This must be my apology for troubling you with this letter'.<sup>71</sup> The fall of Eccles tower prompts the commemoration of a monument, the remembrance of science, and reflection on time.

## MORTAL SCENES

Eccles also presented mortality, with human relics revealed by erosion, and death narratives woven around the tower. Death was then not unusual on English shores, through shipwreck; thus in November 1897, Cooke noted: 'Just opposite the ruined tower, in the morning, the body of a sailor, fearfully mutilated, was seen entangled in the rigging', while in November 1917 the *Waxham Rural Deanery Magazine* recorded, under 'Burials at Hempstead': 'August 7<sup>th</sup>, a mariner, name unknown, washed ashore at Eccles'.<sup>72</sup> Beach scour however brought other human remains to light, bones of old Eccles.

Suffling noted that in 1880-1881: 'Close to the church walls several graves were washed open, and the bones floated about the beach by the tide. It was a curious sight for anyone of a contemplative turn of mind'.<sup>73</sup> Human bones were not the only kind exposed along the coast; on 4 December 1912 the *Eastern Daily Press* reported 'Fossil Remains at Bacton', the fishermen finders pictured with an elephant's skull, available for £5.<sup>74</sup> If however animal fossils invited trade, human bone collecting appeared macabre beachcombing. On 28 December 1912 the *Eastern Daily Press* described 'A Gruesome Scene':

The appearance of the churchyard has been particularly horrible. Every particle of sand has disappeared; the action of the waves has so worn away the earth that the bottoms of the graves are now level with the surface. Their shapes are plainly discernible in the solid clay. On Tuesday week 36 skeletons were exposed. The sand is now returning, so much so that when a Stalham gentleman visited the place more recently only 16 could be seen. One of them had the arms crossed on the breast. The scene is very suggestive of

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<sup>71</sup> Meadows White to *Norfolk Chronicle*, 28 January 1895, copy in NRO, HNR 565/1/1.

<sup>72</sup> Cooke, *Eccles*, 24; W.M.C. McAllister, Hempstead and Lessingham, *Waxham Rural Deanery Magazine*, November 1917, 3 (copy held in NHC).

<sup>73</sup> Suffling, *Land of the Broads*, 175; see also Suffling, *History and Legends*, 202; Suffling, *Afloat in a Gypsy Van*, 56-57. In *Principles of Geology*, 1866, 525 and 529, Lyell had noted human ruin in the tumbling of churchyard bones from eroding cliffs at Dunwich in Suffolk and Reculver in Kent: 'I visited the spot in June 1851, and saw human bones and part of a wooden coffin projecting from the cliff, near the top'.

<sup>74</sup> Fossil Remains at Bacton, *Eastern Daily Press*, 4 December 1912, 4. A subsequent letter from 'Interested' of the Union Society, Cambridge University, offered to buy the skull (*Eastern Daily Press*, 6 December 1912, 6), while 'M.A.' noted other finds at Mundesley 'available for purchase' (*Eastern Daily Press*, 9 December 1912, 8).

the prophet Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones. The gloom and silence is simply appalling – a region of the dead.<sup>75</sup>

Publicity may have attracted as much as repelled, and on 2 January 1913 the *Eastern Daily Press* published a letter on the 'desecration of graves' from W.M.C. McAllister, 'Rector of Hempstead and Lessingham, and Curate-in-charge of Eccles-next-the-Sea'. McAllister decried 'some proceedings in this neighbourhood which have become a scandal and disgrace', the 'spoliation' of ground that 'is sacred still', with 'this ancient burial ground ... a happy hunting ground for gruesome relics. ... I hope that those who have done us the honour to visit in their motor cars our quiet shore to glean a ghoulish harvest will desist from their practice'.<sup>76</sup> McAllister threatened prosecution, the car reference indicating wealthy visitors. The next day the paper highlighted 'Freakishness of the Curio-Hunters' at a tomb within the former chancel:

On Tuesday last a motorist arrived on the scene, calmly borrowed a shovel from a man working near by, and grubbed about in the tomb till he had unearthed an armful of what presumably was once an Ecclesian of substance and importance. For some obscure purpose he carried these pitiable relics away with him in his car. If they had suddenly clothed themselves with flesh and horror and seized his steering wheel awry he would have got his just deserts. Dozens of persons have been to Eccles on an errand of like morbidity. They cannot plead a motive of scientific interest. These relics of an ancient churchyard do not come in the same category with the bones of the primeval elephant recovered from the cliffs of Bacton a few weeks earlier. The dead Ecclesiastics were people like unto ourselves.

A Sea Breach Commission worker had testified to thirty skeletons within the church ruins and thirty-eight in the churchyard:

Many of them were almost perfect in outline. ... All the bones, black and sodden from the action of the sea, were embedded stiffly in the clay, so stiffly that it required careful grubbing to release them. ... Here and there was a sort of matrix in the clay, from which someone had taken a skull, and done it clumsily, for portions of the broken bone still protruded. ... But the story is too ghastly to be continued in this spirit of detail.

McAllister was interviewed, having explored possible exhumation and reburial, but hoping for 'an ample covering of sand'.<sup>77</sup> Norfolk antiquarian Walter Rye supported him, listing names

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<sup>75</sup> The Recent Scour at Eccles, *Eastern Daily Press*, 28 December 1912; bones are also noted in the text for a pictorial feature on 'The Passing of Eccles Church Tower', *Eastern Daily Press*, 12 December 1912, 8.

<sup>76</sup> Desecration of Graves at Eccles-Next-The-Sea, *Eastern Daily Press*, 2 January 1913, 6. McAllister was Rector from the early 1890s to the late 1930s, and served as Rural Dean from December 1929.

<sup>77</sup> The Rifled Tombs of Eccles, *Eastern Daily Press*, 3 January 1913, 5.

from Eccles churchyard burials between 1408 and 1603: 'and some of their bones were no doubt those recently exposed by the sea'. Rye added: 'May I join with the rector of Hempstead in my abhorrence of the ghouls who come in motor cars and otherwise to collect as trophies the bones of better men than themselves. A pailful of tar over the grey motor if it comes again would serve as a capital identification mark'.<sup>78</sup>

Eccles also fostered a macabre literary geography, ruin and erosion shaping plots of death, murder and haunting. In Suffling's 1896 story 'Eccles Old Tower', a fisherman, finding a giant skeleton in a beach coffin, is offered £5 by a Stalham antiquarian for it intact. The fisherman returns at midnight, where a figure with glowing eyes and fiery mouth tells of being buried three hundred years, shot after murdering his beloved (who sits nearby) and her fiancé. With the fisherman as mortal witness to a forgiving kiss, sin leaves the ghost, 'wizzing away in streaks right over the marrams'.<sup>79</sup> The coffins become boats, the fisherman pushing them to sea. Murder returned in 1928 in G.D.H. and Margaret Cole's collection *Superintendent Wilson's Holiday*; the Coles, prominent in socialist debate, also authored detective fiction. In 'Wilson's Holiday', private detective Wilson is on a coastal walking tour; a sketch map indicates a lane 'To Ruined Church'. Two City brokers have been killed by a third partner, the second body uncovered at the church: 'Wilson strode unhesitatingly towards the ruin, which stood well above the high-water mark'. Probing sticks strike hard masonry, and a softer corpse: 'Together we scraped for a moment and brought to light a human boot. Another followed, and within a few minutes we had exposed to view the entire body of a man, buried a foot deep below the drifting sand'. The killer hangs, betrayed by a scrap of newspaper by the body: 'The *Financial Times* is hardly likely to be on sale at Happisburgh'.<sup>80</sup>

An anonymised Eccles also featured in Henry Rider Haggard's 1904 novel *Stella Fregelius*. Haggard was famous for imperial African adventures such as *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and *She* (1887); he also published agricultural surveys of *Rural England* (1902), owned a south Norfolk estate and a Suffolk coastal house, and from 1906-1911 served on the Royal Commission of Coast Erosion.<sup>81</sup> *Stella Fregelius* mixes coastal process with technology and mysticism, themes not uncommon in Edwardian fiction. Morris Monk, living at Abbey House,

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<sup>78</sup> W. Rye, Sea Swept Eccles from Domesday Up To Date, *Eastern Daily Press*, 16 January 1913, 4.

<sup>79</sup> Suffling, *The Story Hunter*, 156.

<sup>80</sup> G.D.H. Cole and M. Cole, *Superintendent Wilson's Holiday*, London, 1928, 69 and 65-67. See M. Cole, *The Life of G.D.H. Cole*, London, 1971, 134-136; M. Cole, *Growing Up Into Revolution*, London, 1949, 179-181.

<sup>81</sup> M. Cohen, Haggard, Sir (Henry) Rider, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004); M. Cohen, *Rider Haggard*, London, 1960; D.S. Higgins, *Rider Haggard*, London, 1981.

Monksland, his father's ancestral Norfolk coastal home, develops the 'aerophone', allowing conversation via wireless telephony. The device has worked once, Morris talking to fiancée Mary Porson over several miles. In Mary's absence, a storm wrecks a boat bringing the new vicar, Peter Fregelius, and daughter Stella. Morris rescues Stella, stranded on the 'Sunk Rocks'. They come ashore at the 'Dead Church': 'Once a village had stood here, but the sea had taken most of it; indeed, all that remained to-day was this old, deserted fane ... awaiting its destruction by the slow sap of the advancing ocean'. Stella helps perfect the aerophone, conversing between the abbey workshop (Morris) and the Dead Church (Stella). They are 'in tune',<sup>82</sup> but Morris is engaged, and his father financially keen on the marriage: 'the sea-wall here had to be built if the Abbey was to be saved, and half a mile of sea-walling costs something'.<sup>83</sup> Gossip and confusions ensue, and Stella decides on a musical career in London.

Stella and Morris meet to part at the Dead Church on Christmas Eve, and conduct spiritual marriage as a gale roars. Morris departs, and Stella falls asleep, waking with the church marooned. A desperate aerophone call brings a final conversation: 'an awful gale is blowing which shakes the whole church. I went to the door and opened it, and by the light of the moon I saw that between me and the shore lies a raging sea ... Listen!' Help is impossible, 'within five minutes this church must fall and vanish', Morris should not grieve, and Stella sings a Norse death chant: 'Again a crash – a seething hiss – and the instrument was silent, for its twin was shattered'. Christmas dawn finds Morris at the ruins, 'a dishevelled man standing alone upon the lonely shore'.<sup>84</sup>

The Dead Church and Stella are gone, but publicity for her death proves the aerophone's capacity, Morris achieving fame and wealth. Mary returns, and the marriage proceeds, but the vicar shows Morris Stella's devoted diaries. Morris attempts nocturnal aerophonic communication with Stella's cosmic waves, and Mary finds him dead in his chair, 'smiling strangely'.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> H. R. Haggard, *Stella Fregelius*, London, 1904, 127 and 154.

<sup>83</sup> Haggard, *Stella Fregelius*, 13.

<sup>84</sup> Haggard, *Stella Fregelius*, 241-244.

<sup>85</sup> Haggard, *Stella Fregelius*, 360. In 1921 the novel was adapted for a silent film, *Stella*, directed by Edwin Collins. A *Times* review was headed 'Mysticism and Wireless', with *Stella* 'depressing for an hour, and gripping for 15 minutes', the heroine singing Norse chants 'and gazing at the sea for inordinately long intervals'. The reviewer noted scenes in 'a ruined chapel on a headland', with the 'admirable few minutes' when Stella and Morris speak over 'a wireless telephone', 'until the chapel is submerged', see *The Film World*, *The Times*, 18 April 1921, 8. Haggard wrote in reply, noting a shift from book to film due to the 'tyranny of a convention' that films should end happily, in Stella's case with a happy marriage rather than, as in 'the original book', a 'profounder spiritual tragedy', see *The Times*, Thursday 21 April 1921, 8.

## FRAGMENTS AND WALLS

The tower gone, Eccles still appealed as a quiet resort. Around 1910, Albert Peel visited the 'Disappearing Village': 'Eccles proved to be all that is desirable in a holiday resort – that is, if you do not want golf, tennis, bands, promenades, theatres, and dances. If your requirements are air and rest and exercise, Eccles will satisfy you'.<sup>86</sup> Two 1930s examples also indicate quiet relaxation. The Barbara Hepworth Museum in St Ives, Cornwall, displays a postcard of 'Eccles Beach Looking Towards Happisburgh', an empty beach and dunes, souvenir of Hepworth's 'working holidays' at Happisburgh in 1930 and 1931, where ironstone pebbles from the beach would be directly carved, coastal form shaping modernist sculpture.<sup>87</sup> Coastal curiosity of another kind appeared in the *Daily Mail* in August 1936, where a holiday party including parliamentarians and a former Lord Mayor of Norwich were reported as seeing a forty-foot sea-serpent: 'Eccles has found a rival to the Loch Ness monster'.<sup>88</sup> Eccles appears quiet, quirky, a space apart.

Fragments of Eccles tower lingered. Thus Robert Gurney, sea breach commissioner and naturalist, resident at nearby Ingham, photographed the remains between 1911 and 1913, donating pictures to the newly established Norfolk Photographic Survey for inclusion in their geological collections on 'coast erosion'; the Survey also collected past images, its inaugural exhibition at Norwich Library in December 1913 including photographs of 'Eccles Church Tower shortly before it finally succumbed to the assaults of the sea'.<sup>89</sup> Donald Maxwell's 1925 *Unknown Norfolk* included a painting of 'The Last Stones of Eccles' (Fig. 6), groyne posts around, and Happisburgh church and lighthouse behind. Maxwell found, 'for all the accounts of its complete disappearance ... three small fragments, like three rocks upon the sands. / The scene is a wild and lonely one'.<sup>90</sup> Into the 1960s Ordnance Survey maps marked, in archaic font, the ruins

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<sup>86</sup> A. Peel, A Disappearing Village, NRO, MC 1584/1, 815 x 8. Peel's article is extracted from an unknown, undated magazine, but references to Cooke's account of Eccles suggest a likely date around 1910.

<sup>87</sup> B. Hepworth, *A Pictorial Autobiography*, St. Ives, 1978, 19-20, 29; I. Collins, *Water Marks: Art in East Anglia*, Norwich, 2010, 34-39.

<sup>88</sup> Sea Serpent (90 m.p.h.) off East Coast, *Daily Mail*, 8 August 1936, 9.

<sup>89</sup> 'Photographs and History. Local Record Movement', pamphlet from report in *Eastern Daily Press*, 2 December 1913, 3, held in NNPSA, Box E-ECC. Gurney's photographs are in Box E-ECC in that collection. One is reproduced in Elizabeth Edwards' fine account of the photographic survey movement, *The Camera as Historian: Amateur Photographers and the Historical Imagination, 1885-1918*, London, 2012, 208. Gurney's work will be discussed in a further paper on Eccles and the SBC.

<sup>90</sup> D. Maxwell, *Unknown Norfolk*, London, 1925, 174.

of 'St Mary's Church', and in 1962 Nikolaus Pevsner's *North-East Norfolk and Norwich* illustrated 'Coast Erosion' with an Eccles photograph: 'The village has long disappeared in the sea, and of the church whose tower old people still remember there is now no more than two heaps of flint on the beach the size of two beginners' sandcastles'.<sup>91</sup> Specialists too made occasional note, the 1958 Geologists' Association East Anglia summer field meeting finding 'the site of the lost village of Eccles, where the ruins of the church tower were seen between tide-marks on the beach'.<sup>92</sup> W.G. Hoskins' 1978 *One Man's England* included Eccles as erosion illustration: 'This is all that remains of the parish church of Eccles: the stump of the tower. The village itself has completely gone, except for fragments of roofing-tiles which can be picked up on the beach at low tide'.<sup>93</sup> In Anthony Thwaite's 1977 poem 'Eccles', 'The place name mimes the fallen church', where 'Boulders – compacted grout and flint - / Jut from a stranded beach, a land / Adhering thickly to the sea'.<sup>94</sup>

Not all was loneliness. Eccles' few houses were supplemented in the 1930s by a bungalow settlement, the Bush Estate, to the north, developed by Edward Bush for holiday dwellings, the kind of geographically and architecturally marginal 'plotland' place documented by Denis Hardy and Colin Ward, and still surviving today for leisure and permanent residence.<sup>95</sup> The estate's demographic presence highlighted potential human flood impact. After severe dune damage in February 1938, when defences were breached at Horsey to the south, with major flooding inland, a cement-filled sandbag wall was installed.<sup>96</sup> Concrete walls followed at Sea Palling after the major January 1953 floods killed seven there; from 1953 sea defence received national co-ordination.<sup>97</sup> A curved-profile concrete wall was extended to Eccles after the 1938 wall was smashed in February 1978.<sup>98</sup> History informed debate, as in 1959 when engineer K.E. Cotton used an engraving of 'Eccles Church, about 1840' to illustrate formerly 'Soft Shores', in

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<sup>91</sup> N. Pevsner, *North-East Norfolk and Norwich*, Harmondsworth, 1962, 125.

<sup>92</sup> D.F.W. Baden-Powell and R.G. West, Summer Field Meeting in East Anglia, *Proceedings of the Geologists' Association* 71 (1960) 61-80, quotation 72-73. In 1954 C.P. Chatwin's 'British Regional Geology' volume, *East Anglia*, London, 1954, 97, reflected: 'Eccles has been known as a disappearing area since attention was drawn to it by Lyell in his classic *Principles of Geology*... Now scarcely a trace is left'.

<sup>93</sup> W.G. Hoskins, *One Man's England*, London, 1978, 37. The book was based on the 1976 BBC television series 'Landscapes of England', with a Norfolk programme on 'Marsh and Sea', but Eccles did not feature there.

<sup>94</sup> A. Thwaite, *A Portion for Foxes*, Oxford, 1977, 20.

<sup>95</sup> D. Hardy and C. Ward, *Arcadia for All: the Legacy of a Makeshift Landscape*, London, 1984.

<sup>96</sup> On the 1938 flood see D. Matless, *In the Nature of Landscape*, Chichester, 2014; D. Matless, Accents of landscape in GPO country: *The Horsey Mail*, 1938, *Twentieth Century British History* 23 (2012) 57-79.

<sup>97</sup> D. Summers, *The East Coast Floods*, Newton Abbot, 1978.

<sup>98</sup> Pestell and Stannard, *Eccles-Juxta-Mare*, 82.

counterpoint to newly 'interlocking sheet steel toe piling with parabolic section stepped apron with wave return parapet'.<sup>99</sup>

After 1950s defence renewal, sea and land appear in cautious equilibrium. A 1950s postcard shows 'The Beach, Eccles', a good slope of sand, a couple strolling hand-in-hand in slight surf, without a care.<sup>100</sup> Stability registers in local historian Ronald Pestell's 1965 pamphlet, *A Lost Village: Eccles-Juxta-Mare*, the cover showing a painting by Pestell imagining the 1604 destruction, with Fitt's photograph inside:

As Eccles disappears so too do the many tales and legends connected with the village. Little is heard today of the Eccles monster, reputed to rise from seas when the shores are deserted. Old Shuck, the huge black dog that roams the beaches on stormy nights, is almost forgotten and stories of the terrible shipwrecks that so frequently occurred, are only incoherently retold by the aged.<sup>101</sup>

Serious sea defence closes down the imagination of loss: 'The seas still fiercely beat this coastline but now its progress has been halted by a massive concrete wall extending miles along the shore. Occasionally we see on the beach a few pathetic reminders of the past: a gnarled tree stump or crumbling masonry left bare by the tide but soon sand and sea recover them as if jealous of their captured bounty'.<sup>102</sup> A pamphlet might salvage past drama, but the present seemed stable, well walled.

## **ECCLES REDISCOVERED, AND RE-COVERED**

Stability slipped in the 1980s. In February-March 1986 severe scour re-marked Eccles on the map. A 1987 exhibition at Hempstead church presented 'Eccles juxta-mare – A Lost Village Rediscovered', including Pestell's 1965 cover painting and Fitt's 'famous photograph'.<sup>103</sup> On 28 April 1991 Cromer Museum curator Martin Warren photographed further dramatic scour, the beach stripped of sand, the base of tower and walls, the remains of wells, coffins outlined and human bones and teeth set in clay, the grounds of former lives (Fig.7).<sup>104</sup> Eccles appears a

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<sup>99</sup> Sea Defence in East Anglia (Supplement), *Eastern Daily Press*, 19 February 1959, iv.

<sup>100</sup> Cromer Museum Archive, CRRMU: 1989.32.13.

<sup>101</sup> R. Pestell, *A Lost Village: Eccles-Juxta-Mare*, Norwich, 1965.

<sup>102</sup> Pestell, *A Lost Village*, 4.

<sup>103</sup> See the souvenir programme *Eccles-juxta-mare: A Lost Village Discovered*, Hempstead, 1987; copy held in Norfolk Heritage Centre, Norwich.

<sup>104</sup> Around forty of Warren's photographs are held as colour slides in the Cromer Museum Archive: CRRMU: CP2744. Warren was curator of Cromer and Walsingham Museums from 1978 to 1999, and since retirement has run geology walks around Cromer, The Northfolk Project webpage ([www.northfolk.org.uk](http://www.northfolk.org.uk)), the Poppyland Brewery, and Poppyland Publishing, who in

shoreline Deserted Medieval Village, as indeed it had been designated by the Deserted Medieval Village Research Group.<sup>105</sup> In 1995, on the centenary of the tower fall, Pestell and David Stannard produced the substantial *Eccles-Juxta-Mare: A Lost Village Rediscovered*, the archaeological section co-authored by Pestell and son Tim, archaeology curator at Norwich Castle Museum.<sup>106</sup>

If scour prompted rediscovery, it also sparked defence. Anxieties over climate change, and vulnerability to sea flood, with the inland Norfolk Broads of designated international ecological value and National Park status, made the coast worth strengthening. From 1991 new offshore granite reef defences between Eccles and Sea Palling successfully raised the beach.<sup>107</sup> In February 1994 the National Rivers Authority moved twenty tons of the church remains away from boulders being added to the sea wall.<sup>108</sup> Further planned reefs to the north were not however completed, as coastal policy there shifted to one of managed retreat. At Happisburgh, present loss mixed with past exposure; as cliff-top houses fell, scour revealed shoreline traces of ancient human occupation, 800,000 year old footprints in clay.<sup>109</sup> The current Shoreline Management Plan (2012) puts Eccles between ‘managed realignment’ to the north and ‘holding the line’ to the south, Eccles to Winterton defended for ‘the risk of coastal flooding, as well as coastal erosion’.<sup>110</sup>

At Eccles, as at Happisburgh, ancient pasts and present process converse, as they have conversed for two hundred years. The 2012 Plan notes: ‘Eastern England has been gradually sinking since the last ice age and we have now also entered a period of rising sea levels and a

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2016 published David Stannard's *Happisburgh*, and in 2017 Pestell and Stannard's *Palling*, the latter a revision of Pestell's 1986 book of the same name.

<sup>105</sup> K. Allison, The lost villages of Norfolk, *Norfolk Archaeology* 31 (1955) 116-162; M. Beresford and J. Hurst, *Deserted Medieval Villages*, London, 1971.

<sup>106</sup> Pestell and Stannard, *Eccles-Juxta-Mare*; T. Pestell, Archaeological Investigations into the “Lost” Village of Eccles-Next-The-Sea, Norfolk, *Medieval Settlement Research Group Annual Report* 8 (1983) 17-21. See also D. Stannard, *Ruin, Disaster and Triumph – Tales of Eccles Steeple*, Eccles, 2006; S. Wade, *Lost to the Sea: Britain's Vanished Coastal Communities: Norfolk and Suffolk*, Barnsley, 2017. A 2012 exhibition at Waxham Barn, a few miles south of Eccles, on ‘The Raging Sea: Norfolk's Lost Villages’, featured Eccles material.

<sup>107</sup> F. Thomalla and C. E. Vincent, Beach response to shore-parallel breakwaters at Sea Palling, Norfolk, UK, Estuarine, *Coastal and Shelf Science* 56 (2003) 203-212.

<sup>108</sup> Pestell and Stannard, *Eccles-Juxta-Mare*, 84.

<sup>109</sup> N. Ashton et al, Hominin footprints from early Pleistocene deposits at Happisburgh, UK, *PLoS ONE* 9 (2014) e88329; Matless, *The Anthropocene*.

<sup>110</sup> *Kelling to Lowestoft Ness Full Shoreline Management Plan*, 2012, 100; see also *Kelling to Lowestoft Ness Shoreline Management Plan: Non Technical Summary*, 2012, 9-10. The plans are available on the website of the East Anglia Coastal Group, [www.eacg.org.uk](http://www.eacg.org.uk).



changing climate'.<sup>111</sup> If Lyell's *Principles* emphasised changing land levels, sea level change shaped coastal narratives from the early twentieth century. To take one example, on 23 August 1922 naturalist and SBC member Robert Gurney recorded a visit by a Dutch geologist who shared his interests in the North Sea as ancient land: 'Dr Van Der Sleen of Haarlem ... came over here for the day ... He was much interested by the Eccles church on the beach as he is studying losses of land and has the theory that they are due, not to local changes of level but to a raising of sea level by melting of the ice-caps at the poles'.<sup>112</sup> In 1922, as in 2012, Eccles serves as a marker in global sea stories.

Eccles tower is remembered at an annual late August Sunday beach church service, established in 1969, although beach services occurred sporadically in the early twentieth century, as when Reverend McAllister noted in July 1931: 'If the weather permit I am hoping to hold services on the Beach at Eccles on Sunday Evenings, July 19th and 26th and August 2nd'.<sup>113</sup> The 2016 service, conducted by the local vicar and the dean of Norwich cathedral, saw a predominantly local crowd, around eighty-strong, many long-term attenders, the dunes giving sloped seating, a tractor holding speakers broadcasting organ music, and a processional cross stuck in the sand (Fig. 8). An order of service gave the history of Eccles-juxta-Mare, the juxta now sub. At the 1998 service a plaque was unveiled on the sea wall:

The foreshore in front of this length of seawall is the site of the lost fishing village of Eccles which was inundated by the sea during the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Fifteen metres seaward of this sign stood the medieval church of St. Mary, the tower of which survived on the shore above the waves until 25<sup>th</sup> January 1895 [sic].

The seawall and rock reefs offshore are part of a system of sea defences designed to stop the North Sea making deeper inroads into Norfolk.

This plaque was erected by the Environment Agency and dedicated at the annual Eccles beach service on 30<sup>th</sup> August 1998.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> *Kelling to Lowestoft Ness Shoreline Management Plan: Non Technical Summary*, 2012, 5.

<sup>112</sup> R. Gurney, Diary, 23 August 1922, 79, held at the Castle Museum Archive, Norwich. Gurney had visited Van der Sleen in the Netherlands in 1920; on his work see Matless, *In the Nature of Landscape*.

<sup>113</sup> W.M.C. McAllister, Hempstead with Eccles and Lessingham, *Waxham Deanery Monthly Magazine*, July 1931, 4, copy held in NHC.

<sup>114</sup> The plaque contains a curious error, the date of the tower fall given as 25 January 1895, two days late. Research for this essay shows a possible explanation. 25 January appears in the introduction to Pestell and Stannard's 1995 *Eccles-Juxta-Mare*, though the main account in the book gives 23 January. The reference to 25 January most likely comes from Cooke, *Eccles next the Sea*, 1908, where the error is consistent. But why did Cooke, locally knowledgeable and only a decade after the fall, get it wrong? If Cooke worked from press cuttings, a combination of *Eastern Daily Press* mistakes in the aftermath of the fall offers a possible explanation. On Wednesday 30 January, the paper noted: 'The Old Tower – In the account given of the

In 2016, not only were the ruins buried, but also the plaque. Concerns for climate change and sea level rise, and the defences constructed offshore, have in effect reburied the site. The casual visitor might notice, at the end of the lane near the gap, a house sign depicting a church tower on a beach, but if they didn't know, they could never tell. Information is lacking. All you see is sand.<sup>115</sup>

## SIGNING OFF

While visitor signage may be absent, Eccles carries cultural-historical Anthropocene signatures. Some post-date the currently favoured Anthropocene stratigraphic marker – the post-war sea walls, the buried 1998 commemorative plaque – while others pre-date, signalling anticipatory events and processes – the tower emerging from dunes and falling on the shore, the photographic souvenirs of vulnerability, the scenic descriptions of Lyell's geology. Bones of Eccles people, buried before the seventeenth century, resurface through scour in the nineteenth century, are reburied by beach formation, and resurface again in the late-twentieth century, only to re-disappear. With each surfacing, different messages transmit. In 1912 bones spark curio-hunting, with skeletons as choice souvenirs of erosion, even better than old elephant skulls, yet outrage at desecration follows, these old Ecclesians more-than-elephant in ethical and archaeological value. The beach bones of the 1990s speak of erosion fears under humanly-inflected sea level rise, with even the dead at risk in an anxious future. Will our ancestors in beach clay be allowed the chance to enter a future rock record? At Happisburgh to the north, erosion proceeds, with ancient footprints revealed, only to be erased by the sea. At Eccles, defences rebuilt, the bones resettle for a time, ten feet down under twenty-first-century sand. For how long?

As a piece of geographical writing, this essay finds a reference point in recent works of geographical landscape narration which are marked by their enfolding of historical narrative (whether linear, nonlinear or in reverse chronology) and personal experience, the researcher's

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destruction of the tower on Friday last, an error was unintentionally made. It was stated that it fell in a north-westerly direction. It should have been north-easterly' (6). This correction itself contained an error, as the report cited was from the previous Saturday, not the Friday. However if, on an isolated press cutting seen by Cooke, the phrase 'the destruction of the tower on Friday last' was read as referring to the date of the fall rather than the *Eastern Daily Press* report, then the tower would be held to have fallen on 25 January 1895, as noted by Cooke in 1908, and as memorialised in 1998 on the sea wall plaque.

<sup>115</sup> Stability is as ever relative. In March 2018, as this essay was in revision, easterly gales led to severe scour on the beach at Winterton, a few miles south of Eccles, with the underlying clay exposed. Beach levels along the east Norfolk coast were lowered.

field or archival presence foregrounded in text. Eccles has here however been narrated in linear chronological fashion, with personal experience backgrounded, though images and text manifest beach visits, alongside work on old words and pictures, and days scrolling through microfilmed newspapers. As in the work of DeSilvey and MacDonald, the essay's form reflects attention to the effective and affective consequences of compositional choice. Thus DeSilvey's reverse chronological study of Mullion Cove in Cornwall gives an effective history for a place whose future form is envisaged as a return to a past state.<sup>116</sup> MacDonald's account of rooting around the ruined former home of Erskine Beveridge on the Hebridean island of Vallay suits an enquiry into an enigmatic biographical landscape.<sup>117</sup> Different narrative forms work for different ends. In my *The Regional Book*, on the adjacent region of the Norfolk Broads, other forms of geographic description present regional cultural landscape.<sup>118</sup> For Eccles, though, conventional chronology, laying out incident, image and record, seemed apt and effective, following the tower through dune, beach, fall, ruin and burial. At any point in time, history is renewed as a reference point for present understanding and future projection; linear history, never straightforward, can convey such loopings back.

Eccles tower is little remarked today beyond the rich local histories of Pestell and Stannard, although via Sebald it has circulated widely, incognito. This essay has taken Eccles as an emblematic site, a place for reflection on the Anthropocene, in all its complex temporality. Under the title 'next the sea', the essay aims to catch the distinctive spatio-temporal quality of an eroding coast. Through working on Eccles material between 2015 and 2017, the emerging scientific and cultural configuration of the Anthropocene gained resonance, Eccles beach speaking to twenty-first century preoccupations, aspects of its history over two hundred years making it emblematically Anthropocene. Cultural-historical signatures of the Anthropocene may appear through Eccles beach.

One could imagine site-specific acts, commissioned for the beach, through which a lost tower might speak to the present. Perhaps a tower-shaped column of plastic replica bones, each engraved 'Eccles', to be washed away, with instructions to report the site of retrieval, a resultant map to be displayed at Eccles North Gap?<sup>119</sup> The combination of erosion, marine currents and

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<sup>116</sup> DeSilvey, *Making sense of transience*.

<sup>117</sup> MacDonald, *The ruins of Erskine Beveridge*.

<sup>118</sup> D. Matless, *The Regional Book*, Axminster, 2015; D. Matless, *Writing regional cultural landscape: cultural geography on the Norfolk Broads*, in: J. Riding and M. Jones (Eds), *Reanimating Regions: Culture, Politics and Performance*, London, 2017, 9-25.

<sup>119</sup> Mike Pearson reflects on site-specific projects, landscape and memory in M. Pearson, *'In Comes I': Performance, Memory and Landscape*, Exeter, 2006; M. Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance*, Basingstoke, 2010.

bobbing plastic might catch the tone of the Anthropocene, and spark engagement. On the other hand, if the Eccles story is written and broadcast, and occasional beach services continue, the present sand blanket may, in its way, be eloquent enough.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks to staff in Norwich at the Norfolk Record Office, and the Norfolk Heritage Centre in the Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library, for facilitating access to material. Clare Everitt, 'Picture Norfolk' administrator at the library, gave access to the Norfolk Photographic Survey collections and provided scans of images from Norwich library collections. Alistair Murphy, curator at Cromer Museum, provided access to and scans of slides of the 1991 beach scour. Thanks also to Tim Pestell of Norwich Castle Museum for discussion of Eccles. Joanne Norcup and Edwyn Matless provided field accompaniment. Three anonymous referees for *JHG* offered insightful comment.

## Figure Captions

Fig. 1. Eccles mapped in 1838. Source: Ordnance Survey first edition one-inch map, copy held in School of Geography Map Collection, University of Nottingham.

Fig. 2. Images of sea defence at Eccles beach, 1844, lithographs by David Hodgson. Source: W. Hewitt, *An Essay on the Encroachments of the German Ocean Along the Norfolk Coast with a Design to Arrest its Further Depredations*, Norwich, 1844. Images courtesy of Norfolk County Council Library and Information Service.

**(Note to editor:** figure 2 consists of two images, labelled A and B on the illustrations submitted, to be published alongside one another in the text as one figure)

Fig. 3. Eccles tower in 1839 and 1862. Source: C. Lyell, *Principles of Geology*, volume I, London, 1866.

**(Note to editor:** figure 2 consists of two images, labelled A and B on the illustrations submitted, to be published alongside one another in the text as one figure)

Fig. 4. Photographs of Eccles tower, by Ernest Kent, taken 21 June 1887. Source: NNPSA, Box E-ECC. Images courtesy of Norfolk County Council Library and Information Service.

**(Note to editor:** figure 2 consists of two images, labelled A and B on the illustrations submitted, to be published alongside one another in the text as one figure)

Fig. 5. 'Eccles Old Tower', photograph by S.W. Fitt, taken in the early 1890s. Source: NNPSA, Box E-ECC. Image courtesy of Norfolk County Council Library and Information Service.

Fig. 6. 'The Last Stones of Eccles', painting by Donald Maxwell, 1925. Source: D. Maxwell, *Unknown Norfolk*, London, 1925.

Fig. 7. Human bones revealed by beach scour, Eccles beach, photographer Martin Warren, 28 April 1991. Source: Cromer Museum (Norfolk Museums Service), CRRMU: CP2744, used by permission.

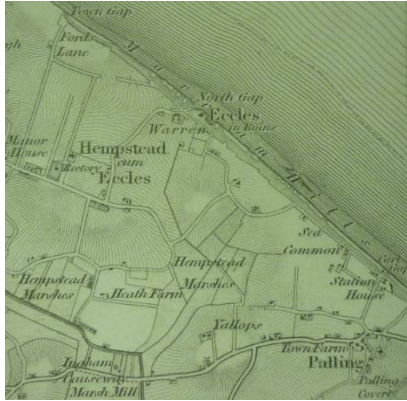
**(Note to editor:** figure 7 consists of two images, labelled A and B on the illustrations submitted, to be published alongside one another in the text as one figure)

Fig. 8. Annual beach service, Eccles, Sunday 28 August 2016. Source: photographs by the author.

**(Note to editor:** figure 8 consists of four images, labelled A, B, C and D on the illustrations submitted, to be published alongside one another in the text as one figure, in a composite postcard-style format, with A at the top left, B top right, C bottom left and D bottom right)

## Figures

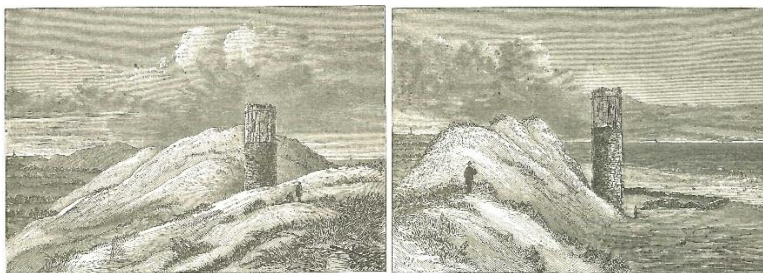
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