

Floods, erosion, tourists and ghosts:

M. R. James' and E. F. Benson's defence of the East Anglian coast in 'Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You My Lad', 'A Warning to the Curious' and E. F. Benson's 'A Tale of an Empty House'.

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Floods, erosion, tourists and ghosts: M. R. James' and E. F. Benson's defence of the East Anglian coast in 'Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You My Lad', 'A Warning to the Curious' and E. F. Benson's 'A Tale of an Empty House'.

Abstract

This article situates Edwardian and inter-war ghost stories by M. R. James and E. F. Benson as oblique responses to early twentieth century debates about rural environments, the impact of tourism and coastal erosion. It adopts a historically and spatially specific approach to the East Anglian locations in these stories by reading them alongside preservationist polemics, tourist guides, reports on coastal geography and speculative geological theories. Reflecting the coastal settings of the stories, flooding and erosion are depicted as environmental processes and transformed into metaphors to articulate the impact of tourism and the instability of national borders. The article argues that ghosts function as a form of coastal defence against threats posed by human visitors and the environment. By using ghosts to explore these environmental anxieties the stories suggest that what might seem a tranquil rural coastline is haunted by environmental and cultural conflicts.

Clough Williams-Ellis' *England and the Octopus* tells the story of an 'archfiend' who attempts to build a new holiday resort on an undeveloped section of the British coast (1928, 64). Despite advertisements that promised 'dancing waves sparkling in the limpid sunlight' (65) the scheme fails leaving 'gimcrack bungalows, unfinished roads and weather-beaten advertisements' (66). The tale ends with a warning: the increasing demand for seaside holidays means there will be 'some fresh outrage' as coastal resorts become 'a byword for all that is short sighted, wasteful and predatory in capitalistic speculation' (66). Readers of this tale would, Williams-Ellis hoped, feel their 'hair on end, flesh creeping and blood curdling or even boiling' (70). *England and the Octopus* was part of a widespread public campaign during the Edwardian and inter-war period that argued for the preservation of the British countryside from unregulated development. Williams-Ellis, alongside high-profile figures such as philosopher and radio personality C.E.M. Joad and town planner Patrick Abercrombie, was instrumental in campaigning for National Parks, and open access to the countryside for the urban working classes (see Matless 1998). What is especially striking here is the use of language more readily associated with Gothic to describe the exploitation of the coast and readers' reactions to it. Even the title itself, while metaphorically referring to the spreading tentacles of suburban development, evokes images of an aquatic monster, an image literalised on the cover of the first edition that depicts a giant octopus smothering a stereotypical English village. There is, such images imply, a dark side to seaside tourism, yet despite the alarmist nature of the Gothic rhetoric, Williams-Ellis resists a straightforwardly nostalgic or idyllic view. Although the shoreline appears as the victim of a Gothic fiend, it is also a hostile environment that 'consisted of a slimy ooze [and] a dangerous current sweep[ing] over a treacherous quicksand' (65). The coast is both a victim of environmental exploitation and an antagonist that can inflict destruction on human attempts to colonise it.

This article develops this brief connection between Gothic, seaside tourism and the coastal environment by tracing the ways in which Edwardian and inter-war ghost stories set on the East Anglian coast of Britain offer an oblique response to these ideas, focusing on M. R. James' well known 'Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You My Lad' (1904) and 'A Warning to the Curious' (1925) alongside E. F. Benson's little discussed 'A Tale of an Empty House' (1928). The stories are linked by plot, location and biography. Benson was a friend of James and was present at the reading of his ghost stories at Cambridge in 1893. Each features an urban holidaymaker's encounter with a threatening supernatural presence on the shores of Norfolk and Suffolk. The North Sea, sand dunes, shingle beaches, saltmarshes and fishing villages that characterise this coastline feature prominently in these stories. The article approaches this landscape as a haunting rather than a haunted space: the ghosts that inhabit it are symptoms of conflicts submerged beneath the surface of an outwardly tranquil rural landscape that confront the protagonists in spectral form. As cultural geographer David Matless has noted, 'too often images of the country are lumped together under a single simple category - "the rural idyll" - as if there were no difference there' (1994, 8). Far from a rural idyll, in James and Benson's stories the East Anglian coastline becomes a contested space through the presence of ghosts. Literary representations of beaches have frequently depicted 'encounters [that] more often than not, are conflicted and dangerous' (Kluwick and Richter, 2015, 2). In situating their ghosts on the shore Benson and James reflect this wider trend while condensing historically and spatially specific anxieties about the East Anglian coastal environment.

To trace the spatial and environmental origins of these ghosts the argument draws on cultural geography and Gothic studies. Discussions of Ecogothic have drawn attention to the relationship between landscape, environment and the supernatural (Smith and Punter 2013).

We have become familiar with reading Gothic monsters as representations of a culture's unconscious fears, and this can be extended to the environment. But landscape can be 'the generating *locus* of action' as well as a reflection of cultural anxieties (Leffler 2016, 144). However, as Emily Alder (2017) has noted, 'landward contexts' (3) have dominated readings of Gothic texts but the typically Gothic focus on 'the threshold and breaches of it [...] speak analogously to oceanic thinking' (8). In the tales under discussion the coast becomes a threshold subject to landward and nautical threats in the form of metaphorical submergence by an influx of tourists and literal submergence through erosion and flooding. Judith Halberstam has argued that monsters are 'meaning machines' that can 'condense as many fear-producing traits as possible into one body' (1995, 21) and in a similar vein David Matless suggests that the ghost in the landscape 'becomes a creature of precise if not necessarily linear geographies, histories, temporalities, spatialities, all contributing to its make up' (2008, 338). Drawing on these arguments what follows reads the tales in the context of preservationist polemics, tourist guides, reports on coastal geography and speculative geological theories to trace the ways in which environmental fears are given spectral form. Rather than producing fear, however, the ghosts in these stories reverse this logic: it is the human and the natural rather than monstrous or supernatural that is the most threatening presence.

The protagonist of Benson's 'A Tale of an Empty House' is a visitor from London whose car breaks down and is forced to spend the night at Riddington, a fictional village on the North Norfolk coast. Stranded while his car is repaired, he begins to explore the coastline and claims 'I had found the most amazing place in the world' (373). His belief that he has found an authentically wild space free from human intrusion is shattered when he encounters a deserted house on the shoreline. Going inside, he is disconcerted to hear the footsteps of an invisible presence, and on returning a second time is attacked before the presence abruptly vanishes and the story ends. At first sight this might seem a typical haunted house situated in a desolate location, but through its location and the history of it that is revealed the story confronts anxieties about tourism and its impact on the landscape in spectral form.

As Ellis' fiendish tale suggested, the environmental costs of seaside tourism were of prime concern in preservationist writings during the early twentieth century. While the development of seaside resorts can be traced back to eighteenth century spa towns, the 'seaside holiday town, as such, was and remains an essentially Victorian and Edwardian phenomenon' (Walton 1983, 71). Histories of seaside tourism have traced geographical and cultural shifts from bathing for health towards sports and leisure entailing the expansion of already existing resorts alongside new developments. The populations of popular resorts such as Blackpool or Brighton grew, and numbers swelled to a greater degree by visitors and temporary workers during the summer season (Walvin 1978, 92). As part of this growth East Anglian seaside resorts were frequently publicised in terms of modernity which was 'used to paint a picture of new, healthy seaside towns in contrast to the grime and disease of industrial areas' (Chase 1997, 149). By the 1920s the seaside holiday had become associated with 'heady opulence and excess' for working class holidaymakers (Feigel 2009, 15).

A consequence of this popularity was that those who sought to distinguish themselves from the holidaying masses turned to the remoter coasts of Wales, the South West and East Anglia to seek 'simplicity, peace and communion with nature' (Walton 1983, 39). It is this type of tourist that Benson depicts, and it was this expansion of tourism into undeveloped rural locations that preservationist writers found troubling. The spread of private car ownership and public motor buses was instrumental in this process: Walvin notes that in 1901 there were

32,000 cars in Britain and by 1919 the figure had increased to 109,000 and to 1 million by 1930 (1978, 110). Patrick Abercrombie, town planner and architect of the Greater London Plan, highlighted the environmental impact of this, arguing:

The wild parts of England, Mountain, Moor, Fen, Forest, and Coastal Strip, should be preserved as far as possible in their primitive state. A new road which may plausibly open up a sequestered area to a greater number of people should always be regarded with suspicion unless it is a traffic necessity and no alternative can be found (1926, 15).

The problem here was that, inevitably, the very qualities that made a 'sequestered area' so appealing were precisely those which would lead to its destruction, as philosopher, BBC radio personality and outspoken advocate of rural preservation C. E. M. Joad complained:

The contemporary motorist on pleasure bent devotes all his energies to escaping from other motorists. Nothing pleases him so much as to penetrate by little-known ways into the heart of England and there to come upon an unspoilt town or village mellow and sleepy in the afternoon sunlight. Elated with his discovery, he communicates it inevitably to his friends. Other motorists appear, first in twos and threes, then in a stream. Insensibly the village changes its character (1934, 131).

There are two metaphors at work here. The first implicitly genders the countryside as a defenceless female victim as the male motorist 'penetrates' the undiscovered countryside on a hedonistic escape from the city. The second is aquatic, as the visitors increase in a 'stream' which, as Joad comments in a later work, 'will swell to a flood' (1945, 19). For Joad the inter-war era was 'the last generation who knew England as it was before the flood gates were opened and the waters of change poured through' (1945, 218). Whereas Abercrombie draws attention to the destruction of the physical environment, Joad translates physical erosion into a metaphorical tide of visitors that will submerge rural communities. This might be viewed as a nostalgic retreat into stereotypical images of the countryside, however these writers often combined an idealised view of the rural past with a modern and progressive arguments that development should be planned, not simply left piecemeal to individual investors and developers (Matless 1998, 14).

In 'A Tale of an Empty House' the first-person narrator's words characterise him in ways that would be immediately familiar from preservationist campaigns. Driving to a golfing holiday he complains that 'it was impossible anywhere to travel at even a moderate speed' on the poor roads until the car breaks down (Benson 371). After an enforced night at a hotel (which, incidentally, has a garage, already a sign that the area is beginning to cater for the motor tourist) he is struck by 'so exhilarating a solitude' (374) and is 'strung to the extreme pitch of physical well-being' after swimming in the sea (375). The effects of the coast on the urban narrator directly reflects that which Joad identified as the impulse behind rural tourism: 'one's personality, drained and colourless from contact with many men, renewing itself at Nature's fount is restored to fullness and vitality of being' (1934, 90-1). Here the Norfolk coast allows the visitor to escape from both the city and the mass pleasures of the commercial seaside resort for a more primal encounter with the natural world. That this is a region geographically and temporally distant from urban modernity is also found in other non-fiction writings of the period: novelist Doreen Wallace's guide to East Anglia, part of the best-selling Batsford series, claimed that 'the Eastern counties are particularly deeply stuck in the mud;

we have so few industrial towns, so few contacts with outsiders. Our railway line is not on the way to anywhere; it finishes on the East Anglian coast. We are a backwater' (1939, 20). In a step that mirrors exactly the fears that Joad expressed, it seems that the area will not remain a backwater for long as Benson's narrator writes to a London friend and tells his chauffeur to 'take the car [...] to meet the train [...] and bring him here' (373).

It is at the point that the narrator believes that he has escaped the furthest from civilisation that he encounters the ghost. Walking on the peninsula of Riddington Point, he is pleased that 'as far as eye could see, there was no sign of human presence' before experiencing a 'pang of disappointment [when] I saw the first evidence of the intrusion of man into this paradise of solitude': an abandoned brick building, the empty house of the title, standing isolated at the edge of the marshes (374). However, it is not as empty as it seems, as although apparently deserted the narrator hears sounds of somebody limping, while on a second visit with his newly arrived London friend the presence becomes more tangible and attacks them. It is at this point that the story abruptly ends, and the identity of the ghost is revealed in an epilogue when the narrator has returned to London and discovers a newspaper report of a murder. The ghost was a violent farm labourer who, after being dismissed for having an affair with his employer's daughter, murdered her father, with the result that the daughter went insane and the man was hung. There is a history of family conflict and precarious rural employment implied here, and as Pamela Horn has noted, nineteenth and early twentieth century rural life was marked by the 'disruption of many of the traditional aspects of rural life [...] indicative of powerful underlying stresses and tensions' (1984, 3).

Situating Benson's fictional landscape alongside the actual locations that were the models for the story offers further insight into this argument. The descriptions of the village, peninsula and geology indicate that this is modelled on the village of Blakeney and the distinctive feature of Blakeney Point. Today a prosperous village with an influx of holidaymakers during the summer holiday season, in the early twentieth century Blakeney was still a working fishing village with a nascent tourist industry, several miles distant from the nearest resort towns. Throughout his narrative it is the tranquil and apparently timeless qualities of the area that the narrator dwells on: there is little sense of a working landscape that has a political or economic history. These ideas reflect John Urry's 'tourist gaze' which sees that 'the countryside is there to be gazed upon, and ideally one should not be gazing upon other people, whether workers or other tourists' (1990, 111). While Urry focuses primarily on more contemporary tourism, the narrator's attitudes provide an earlier example of this, and Urry notes that the growth in seaside resorts during the nineteenth century was one of contributing factors to the emergence of the tourist gaze (32).

The narrator's gaze that emphasises solitude and wildness is reflected in discussions of Blakeney Point during the early twentieth century. In 1910 the old lifeboat house which stood at the tip of the peninsula was purchased by Francis Oliver, Professor of Botany at University College London as a base to study the unique ecology, and in 1912 the whole area was donated to the National Trust, who retain ownership today (Martins 2015, 64-5). This was viewed as an exemplary achievement by the preservation movement: an article in *Country Life* in 1913 claimed that the Point offered 'the best example of wild Nature absolutely free from human interference' and was now saved from being 'seized by some speculative builder' (quoted in Sheail 2002, 124). The empty house is revealed not to have been a domestic dwelling but a place of employment. This building – in Benson's fiction and reality – is an old Coast Guard Watch house which has been replaced by the newer lifeboat house at the end of the Point. Standing isolated amid shingle beach and salt marsh, accessible only by

boat or foot, its appeal as a haunted house is clear, but what is significant here are not its eerie qualities but its history: in contrast to claims that the landscape was untouched by man, the building and the fiction that Benson creates around it is a reminder that this was once a working landscape.

Yet while the claims of some preservationist writing might seem to celebrate the area's lack of human impact, other contemporary accounts highlight what is missing from the narrator's gaze. W. A. Dutt's tourist guide describes the

quaint, narrow main street of Blakeney [that] winds down the hillside to the picturesque quay, where some ancient warehouses and granaries, and a fourteenth -century Guildhall remain to testify to the former importance of a place that, in the reign of Edward III., sent two ships and thirty-eight mariners to the siege of Calais, in 1588 helped to defeat the Spanish Armada, and that was for a long time a market town to which German merchants brought their wares. (1909, 231)

While the village may have appeared an insignificant backwater in the early twentieth century, Dutt's narrative suggests that it once played an important role in the history and defence of the British coast. This flourishing past has now decayed symbolised in the prosaic attention drawn to 'old hulks, lying rotting on the ooze' in contrast to the narrator's rapturous gaze. (1909, 231) These decaying traces of the human past are slowly sinking from view to be eventually swallowed by the coastal landscape, and this is reflected in the erosion of traditional forms of local employment:

A little more than ten years ago nearly a hundred persons, chiefly women and girls, gained a livelihood by gathering cockles here; but of late years, owing to the silting-up of the cockle-bed, there has been a gradual decrease in the number of the regular cocklers. (1909, 238)

It seems that, like Ellis' tale of the fiend, the relationship between land and sea is one that is marked by conflict and hostility to human endeavour. Dutt's narrative is one of decline, from a nationally significant location to a forgotten place occupied by the rural poor who, it is implied, will themselves soon reach a ghostly status. This is embodied in the ghost, who after losing his job as a labourer, turned to cockle picking. At the same time by characterising the labourer as 'a black tempered fellow ready to pick a quarrel with anyone' (380) the story resists idealising the landscape and those who lived within it, undermining the narrator's rapturous delight in what he perceived as a pristine wild landscape.

Shelley Trower has suggested that Benson's ghost stories set in rural Cornwall 'work with the idea that just off the beaten track, beyond the end of the line, the familiar tourist trail, lie places with a difference' (2015, 144). 'A Tale of an Empty House' reflects this view in the narrator's initial view of the landscape, but then goes a step further by exposing this as erroneous. The ghostly history that is revealed suggests that the preservation and nostalgic valuation of the landscape for its wild and untouched qualities is in danger of eroding the human history of those who lived and worked there, reflecting William Cronon's view that 'wilderness hides its unnaturalness behind a mask that is all the more beguiling because it seems so natural' (1995, 69). The ghost becomes a form of coastal defence, protecting the area not from threats posed by the sea, but from those emerging inland in the shape of urban visitors whose attitudes, as much as their actions, are viewed as dangerous. At the same time

the ghost, as the figure of a violent and dispossessed rural labourer, undermines the construction of the landscape as an idyllic retreat from the conflicts of modernity. That this is a story where things are not as they seem is reflected in the narrator's words on encountering the coast at low tide: 'the sea which I had expected to fill the whole circle of the visible world till it met the sky on the horizon, had totally disappeared' (373). It is the ghost that, paradoxically, humanises the landscape, revealing the submerged history of what might otherwise appear to be an empty and untamed stretch of coastline.

Like Benson's story, James' coastal ghost stories place significant emphasis on the coastal landscape, but while flooding is metaphorical in Benson's tale, James confronts the threat of rising sea levels in a more direct sense. In 'Oh Whistle and I'll Come To You My Lad' a Cambridge Don, Professor Parkins, goes on a golfing holiday to the Suffolk coast and while there engages in a spot of amateur archaeology, uncovering a mysterious whistle buried on the beach which he blows. He is then pursued along the shore by a threatening spectral presence and is ultimately saved by a fellow guest, the bullish colonel. In 'A Warning to the Curious' the narrator is also on holiday in Suffolk where he encounters Paxton, an amateur archaeologist who has found a buried Anglo-Saxon crown and is now convinced he is pursued by a vengeful spirit. The narrator attempts to help Paxton re-bury the crown on the shore, but the following day Paxton is discovered on the beach having met a violent end. These stories are two of James' most well-known and have been discussed from a number of perspectives, but there has been less focus on the wider historical significance of the coastal setting. An exception to this is Lucie Armitt's recent essay that argues James translates fear of erosion into ghosts that 'give shape to an otherwise faceless but *known* predator: the monstrously avenging, unstoppable advancing North Sea' (2016, 107). However, the reverse of this argument is also the case: rather than a threat, ghosts are also a form of coastal defence that appear in response to the potentially damaging actions of the protagonists. In doing so James' tales combine anxieties about metaphorical floods of tourists seen in Benson's story with more direct anxieties about the destructive power of the sea, while in turn translating these environmental threats to address questions of national borders.

East Anglian coastal erosion was certainly on the public agenda during the early years of the twentieth century. Like the coastline described by Ellis, the sea is portrayed as a hostile antagonist to human settlement: 'there are miles of the coast where you can never be sure that the cliff-top footpath or the sand-hill slope you are treading will not in a day, a month, or a year be undermined or washed away' (Dutt 1909, 13). The impact of coastal erosion also drew the interest of specialists: a committee of the British Association for the Advancement of Science was set up to investigate coastal erosion in 1892, and in 1906 the Royal Commission on Coast Erosion and Afforestation was set up to investigate the problem, which included novelist Rider Haggard (see Williams, Giardino and Pranzini 2016). The Commission's reports extended across three volumes that collected statements of hundreds of witnesses. It was unknown how much land had been lost to the sea: no official record had been kept and by comparing earlier maps to the current coastline it was established that that 339 acres had been lost in Norfolk between 1883 and 1905 and 518 acres in Suffolk between 1879-1904 (RCCEA 1911, 44-5). The report noted that sand dunes on the East Anglian coast 'form a natural defence for wide areas of low lying land behind them. [...] It is essential that they should be most carefully fostered and maintained' (16). The report's recommendation was that 'the removal of any material, including rock in situ, and minerals on and under the surface, from the foreshore and even from the adjacent land from above the high-water mark' should be prevented (160-1).

This offers a suggestive context for the depiction of the coastal landscape in James' stories. In 'Oh Whistle and I'll Come To You My Lad', Parkins' archaeological excavations have a sense of urgency as the site 'must be down quite close to the beach now' (57), while the hotel in which he stays appears to be slipping ever closer to the sea: 'whatever may have been the original distance between the Globe Inn and the sea, not more than sixty yards now separated them' (60). Like the findings of the Royal Commission on Coast Erosion, there are no objective records of the amount of land that has been lost, but the narrator's tone adopts a colloquial assurance that 'whatever' the original shoreline was it 'must' now have decreased. The actions of James' protagonists directly contravene the report's advice, and it is this which provokes the defending spirits. In 'A Warning to the Curious' 'the soil was very light and sandy and easy' (263), while in 'Oh Whistle and I'll Come To You My Lad' the Professor scrapes away the earth with a knife: these actions reflect, on a smaller scale, the eroding action of the tides, and as Armitt notes, this is depicted as being 'dangerously easy' (2016, 97). The buried crown becomes a metaphor for coastal defence and the implication is that visitors to the coast can easily inflict irretrievable environmental damage: as Paxton tells the narrator when trying to return the crown beneath the beach, 'the worst of it is I don't know how to put it back' (263). Armitt has argued that these responses to environmental problems 'emerge from a known topographical and climatological "truth" [...] to give visible fictive shape to an invisible but omnipresent cultural anxiety' (2016, 97). However, in contrast to the implications of Paxton's claim that erosion is irrevocable, there was no clear consensus about the 'truth' of erosion; the report of the Commission concluded that 'we cannot see that there is any ground for the contention that sea defence is a national service; it is true that there is serious erosion in places, but this erosion does not affect the nation at large' (RCCEA 1911, 162). Rather than supernaturalising an established scientific truth, James' tales offer an implicit *challenge* to this verdict through the presence of ghosts who act as a form of coastal defence, lining the smaller scale erosion of the East Anglian coast carried out by the protagonists to a more metaphorical erosion of national borders.

The British coast, as Shelley Trower has observed, is 'a distinctive, but vulnerable border, highlighting the division between Britain and the rest of Europe' (2015, 1). The question of Britain's geological separation from Europe was raised by Clement Reid's *Submerged Forests* (1913) which claimed, based on a study of tree stumps on the East Anglian coast, that Britain had once been connected to the rest of the European mainland via a low floodplain that was submerged around 3,000 BC. Subsequently known as Doggerland, the plain's existence was confirmed by research carried out between 2003-07 (Gaffney et al, 2007). Reid also gave evidence to the Royal Commission on Coastal Erosion which implicitly challenged the idea of a geologically secure national identity: 'Are we now living in a period of exceptional stability, both of sea level and climate; or is it, as geology suggests, a mere interlude which may at any time give place to rapid change?' (RCCEA, 6). While Doggerland or submerged forests are not referred to directly in James' stories, they suggest a framework for the implied disturbance to national borders. In 'Oh Whistle and I'll Come To You My Lad' it is the Colonel who, appropriately as a military figure, highlights these connections. The folklore of whistling for the wind, which Parkins' blow on the whistle invokes, is 'believe[ed] all over Denmark and Norway, as well as on the Yorkshire coast' (69), and he claims that the vicar 'was a concealed Papist, if not a Jesuit' (71), denouncing the Professor's belief he has been haunted as mere superstition. The implication is that, by damaging the coast, the Professor has allowed a cultural invasion, reflecting anxieties about Gladstone's proposal for Irish home rule whose opponents defined 'scientific, industrial and protestant Britain and her empire [in] opposition to what they saw as reactionary, mystical and rural nationalist movements exemplified by Irish nationalism and Catholicism' (Blyth, Lambert

and Rüger 2011, 158). In 'A Warning to the Curious' the protagonist hears about 'the three 'oly crowns what was buried in the ground near by the coast to keep the Germans from landing' (260) and the story of Nathaniel Ager who 'camped out at the place during the whole of the war of 1870. William, his son, did the same, I know, during the South African War' (261). This association of the Suffolk coast with military conflict is bolstered by the presence of Martello Towers in both stories, remnants of eighteenth century fears of invasion. That ghosts appear when buried objects are uncovered suggests that they are a defence against the threat of invasion brought about by the actions of the protagonists, suggesting the geological instability of the Suffolk coast function as a metaphor for national borders.

In addition to the eroding of national borders, James, like Benson, uses erosion and flooding as metaphors for the impact of tourism on the coast. That the hotel where Parkins stays is named the Globe and is located at the edge of a continually eroding coastline suggests that a confluence of anxieties about erosion, tourism and Britain's global status: reduced to the name of a hotel, it suggests that the coast's status as a marker of national identity and global power is now being metaphorically submerged by its status as a holiday destination. Amy Cutler has noted in a discussion of Wendy Mulford's poetry set on the Norfolk coast that 'economic decline is partnered by the literal erosion of the landscape' leaving a community surviving on tourism (2013, 124). This is also suggested in James' tales by conflating environmental threats and tourism with the actions of his protagonists as amateur archaeologists. Roger Luckhurst argues James depicts 'obdurate histories' of objects that 'refuse to become possessions of private collectors or artefacts in public museums' (2012, 175), while Gabriel Moshenska suggests 'the revelation of the material past' is punished (2012, 1197). However, the tales under discussion shift the emphasis from the object to the site of discovery. In doing so they reveal contemporary rather than archaic knowledge: as Alex Warwick has argued, 'the disturbance produced by archaeological objects is not the horror of the past, but of the recognition of the conditions of the present' (2012, 94). Situated in these terms, the present that is revealed by these buried objects extends beyond the environmental debates linked with erosion to encompass the more metaphorical erosion of the coastline in the terms that Benson described. Like the figure of the tourist and the builder from preservationist writings, the amateur archaeologists hope to exploit the coast for their own profit and prestige. The narrator is shocked when Paxton wants to re-bury the crown, telling him, 'if you're thinking about the owner of the land, and treasure-trove, and all that, we can certainly help you through' (263), while the Professor is focused on the 'reward' (61) and 'how successful' (61) he would have been as a professional archaeologist, later telling the Colonel 'I shall submit it to some of the archaeologists [...] and very likely, if they consider it worth having, I may present it to one of the museums' (74). This link with debates about the impact of tourism is suggested by Joad's *Charter For Ramblers* that predicted 'The Last (Or Museum) Stage of the English Country' where it has become 'embalmed and preserved as an exhibit in the form of beauty spots, with the price of admission at so much per head' (1934, 24). That the coast is threatened with being 'embalmed' is suggestive of a haunting presence in which the area's landscape and culture will be neither dead nor alive, displayed in a museum like an archaeological object. James' spectres function as a resistance to this process in their insistence that the archaeological object be returned beneath the surface of the beach. Like Benson's tale it is the human visitors, rather than ghosts, who are shown to be the threatening presence, and it is the ghost that becomes a symbol of the coastal landscape as a living entity rather than reduced to the status of a heritage object.

Indeed, the tales go a step further by implying that erosion is not just a metaphor for anxieties associated with tourism but can become an object of tourism itself when James' fictional

landscape is read alongside the locations that provided the model for it. James acknowledged that the village of Seaburgh in 'A Warning to the Curious' is a fictionalised version of Aldeburgh (James 2009, 335 n.257). Today a popular holiday town famous for its annual classical music festival but described in the early twentieth century by E. M. Forster as 'a bleak little place: [...] here the scenery becomes melancholy and flat' (1972, 3). Slaughden, a nearby fishing village, was under threat of being washed away by the sea at the time that James was writing and was subsequently submerged. This description certainly suggests an ideal setting for a Gothic tale, but as with Benson's empty house what is more significant are the ways in which James' stories draw on geology and history rather than using the landscape as a more general reflection of fear. The rector refers obliquely to the city of Dunwich, located to the north of Aldeburgh, that had been lost to the sea during the 13th century, asking the narrator, 'you don't want me to tell you where there was a Saxon royal palace which is now under the sea, eh?' (261). The answer is never stated, and the phrasing of this question suggests that the protagonist – and by implication the reader – will of course know the place being referred to. Here loss of land becomes 'a form of spectacle' as Alan Powers has suggested with reference early twentieth century postcards of submerged Slaughden (2009, 218). Henry James implied this in his travel book *English Hours*, noting that although 'Dunwich is not even the ghost of its dead self' yet 'there is a presence in what is missing', terms which are certainly suggestive of haunting (2011[1905], 181). In literal terms erosion removes locations from the map, but in metaphorical terms it also puts them on the map, making them visible through their disappearance, the landscape itself a form of spectre.

While James creates a spectral double of the landscape, the ghosts themselves are not the source of threats but a form of defence against the dual threat of literal flooding by the sea and metaphorical flooding by tourists. That erosion and tourism are conflated as threats to the coast is suggested most directly by the vision that Parkins has of a man being chased along the beach by a supernatural presence. What links this supernatural scene to the material realities of early twentieth century coastal defence is the presence of groynes, wooden structures that extend into the sea at right angles to the shore that dissipate the eroding force of waves. The figure being chased is 'running, jumping, clambering over the groynes' (65) in contrast to the figure that is chasing him that moves 'across the beach to the water edge and back again' (65). By climbing *over* the groynes, the human figure appears to mimic the sea overflowing coastal defences, in contrast to the supernatural figure whose movements imply a more indirect progress analogous to the sea's force being disrupted by groynes. What is significant in this vision is that the implied death of the human figure takes place at a piece of infrastructure designed for coastal defence. It seems as if the coast has enacted its revenge against those who would damage it through the combined efforts of the supernatural and civil engineering.

Read in this context the relationship between the land and the sea is an ambivalent one. On the one hand, the encroach of the sea threatens the British coast, allowing 'superstitious' invasions from abroad, while on the other hand flooding is also responsible for separating Britain from geological connection with mainland Europe. As Anne-Julia Zwierlein has noted, the sea offers a symbolic of England which 'translates into the nature-culture divide - and in more specifically political and ideological discourses, it also becomes synonymous with the boundary of Englishness' (2015, 54). James' ghost stories are located within the middle of this double border, drawing together a network of environmental and cultural anxieties.

If, as John Wylie (2007) has argued, landscape is a way of seeing rather than the thing seen, James and Benson's ghosts make visible the cultural and environmental conflicts hidden beneath the surface of the East Anglian coast. The continuity between these tales and the early twentieth century campaign for rural preservation is suggested most directly by James' foreword to a guidebook, *The Villages of England*: 'How fair it all is to look upon, and how easy to deface! Let this book teach many to see the beauty and inspire them to defend and increase it' (Wickham 1932, v). James' and Benson's tales offer a ghostly counterpoint to this statement by depicting a supernatural form of coastal defence that suggests the East Anglian coast, in the process of being 'discovered' by holidaymakers, is in danger. James has been accused by Clive Bloom of a nostalgic approach to rural settings in which 'the mixture of stability and crisis that characterized the Edwardian period is hardly apparent' (2012, 218-9). Yet as Andrew Smith has noted, views that 'marginalise any troubling Gothic elements' seem at odds with the violent events of these tales (2010, 169). Reading these tales as a response to historically and spatially specific anxieties suggests that the 'troubling Gothic elements' originate in anxieties about rural environments that writers such as Ellis and Joad drew attention to in more direct terms. Such an approach is suggestive of further exploration of the significance of rural environments in late Victorian and early twentieth century Gothic fiction that, in comparison to urban environments has received comparatively little commentary. In their regional specificity they also offer an implicit reversal of Jarlath Killeen's formulation of British nineteenth century regional Gothic in which 'atavistic regional spaces [...] have been repressed and displaced by the modern adult urban subject' (2009, 97). While the supernatural encounters might suggest a confrontation with non-modern occult forces, the ghosts themselves are haunted by twentieth century material anxieties about the coastal landscape. In James and Benson's tales flooding, erosion and submergence provide the central metaphors for this process by which the apparently tranquil and untamed landscape is revealed to be a source of environmental, economic and political fears found upon the shore.

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