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# PARADISE LOST?

## THE SEARCH FOR DOGGERLAND

*Deep beneath the North Sea lies a place we call Doggerland: the drowned land that once connected Britain to the Continent. Drawing on the latest cutting-edge research BRIAN FAGAN tells its shape-shifting story.*

*View across the North Sea, taken  
from the east English coast at Norfolk.  
Doggerland lies beneath the waves.*





Britain as part of the Continent? A century ago, the very thought would have turned elderly British gentlemen in London clubs mauve in the frontispiece, as the immortal P G Wodehouse once put it. With all the talk about Brexit, many of us tend to forget that the British Isles were firmly linked to Northwest Europe until about 8,000 years ago. This is the story of the submerged plains, estuaries, and extensive wetlands that now lie beneath the North Sea, a place known to geologists and archaeologists as Doggerland.

### Fiction meets facts

A convenient starting point is with the 17th century diarist Samuel Pepys, who remarked on ancient hazel fragments found in the filthy mud of the London docks. When blackened oak stumps and other tree fragments washed ashore at low tide on eastern English beaches, the devout proclaimed them to be victims of the Biblical flood. Inevitably, they became known as Noah's Woods. The novelist H G Wells described this sunken land in his novel, *A Story of the Stone Age*, in 1897.

Yet even after Charles Darwin's theories of evolution and natural selection, Victorian geologists dismissed the submerged forests as 'too modern' for serious attention. The exception was the geologist Clement Reid, who worked for the Geological Survey. Reid became fascinated by the stunted tree stumps from long-vanished woodlands. He wrote of an extensive alluvial plain that had once covered the entire North Sea, about 36m below modern sea level. Judging from the plant remains, he suggested that much of the submerged land had been marsh and fen, crossed by major rivers, and protected by sand dunes. Reid published his findings in a short essay entitled



*Left. Samuel Pepys, 17th century author, politician and chronicler.*



## A STORY OF THE STONE AGE

*H. G. Wells*



*Right. A Story of the Stone Age. H G Wells' novella set in prehistoric Doggerland.*