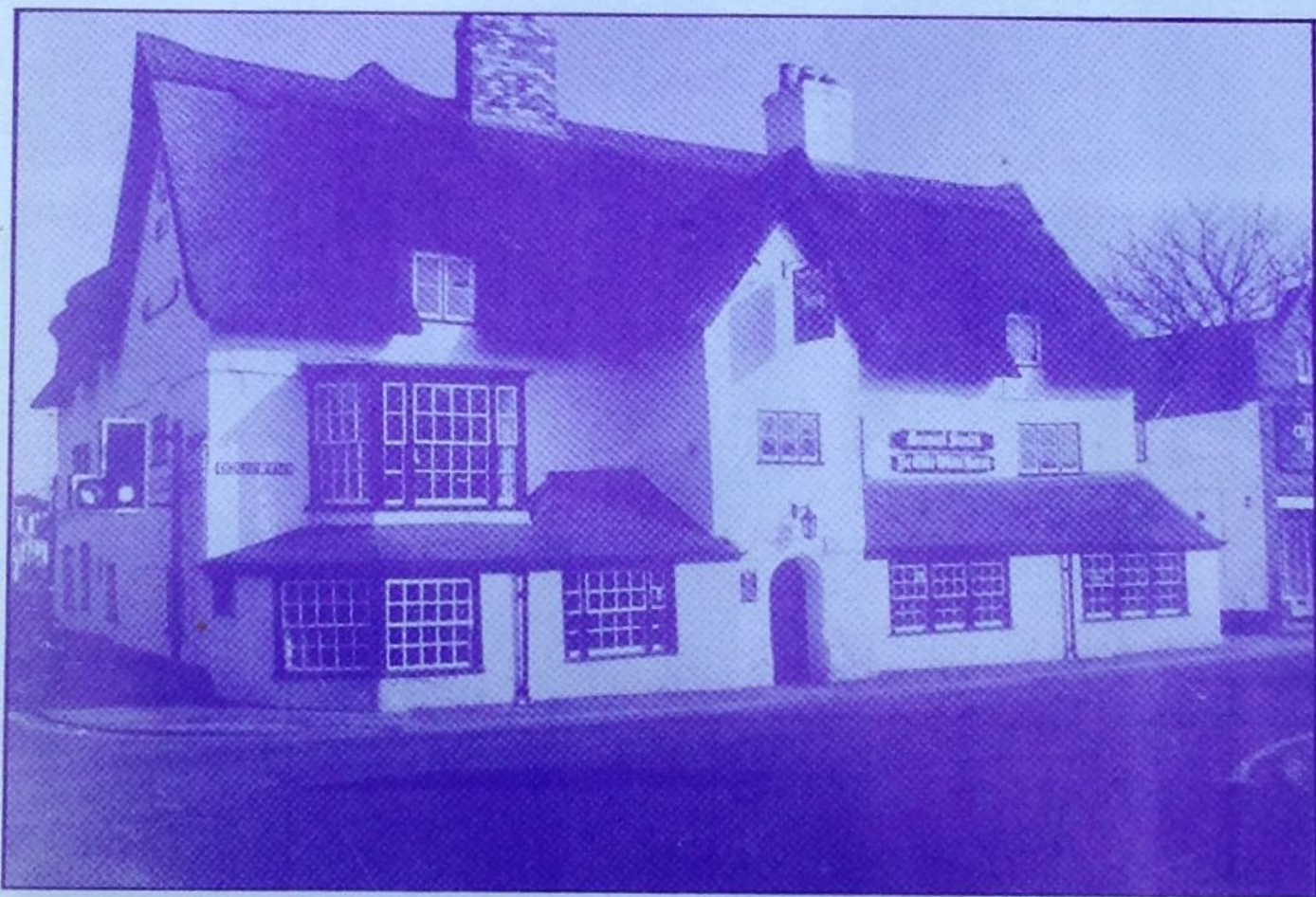


*Snippets from old*  
**SPALDING TOWN**

**HISTORICAL ITEMS FROM SPALDING  
AND DISTRICT**



*The Old White Horse - picturesque and inviting*

**TREVOR BEVIS**

ILLUSTRATED BY THE AUTHOR



# SNIPPETS FROM OLD SPALDING TOWN

Historical items from Spalding and District



Trevor Bevis



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## SNIPPETS FROM OLD SPALDING TOWN

# Lord of the Festival

**S**PALDING (the Saxons called it Spaldingas), famous for bulb culture, particularly tulips, is a thriving little market town pleasantly situated along the banks of the tidal River Welland. Apart from the church worth more than a single visit, and several old dwellings resting in the shadow of its steeple, the other building of especial note is Ayscoughfee Hall, a fifteenth century, heavily restored mansion set in the midst of lovely gardens encompassed by a red rustic brick wall.

It would not surprise me if Spalding, which means "members of the Spalde tribe," be considered to be the most prosperous country town in Britain, bearing in mind the virile land which surrounds it, arguably the best in the British Isles. It is dearbought land. At its reclamation it extracted a fearsome price, for here in ancient times the sea reigned supreme, devastating men, beast and property entirely on its own terms. In an area as low and flat as the Fens it is surprising that so many pre-drainage houses exist at all. In the marshlands of Lincolnshire there are no islands which form part of the geographical pattern of the Fens near March and Ely. Yet near Spalding and Holbeach people of consequence deemed it worth the risk to settle and raise their families all those centuries ago. The soil is Spalding's richest inheritance and almost everything here is influenced by it.

If anything grown hereabouts can be termed as being Spalding's emblem it has to be the tulip. For more than a hundred years bulbs and flowers for markets and festivals have been grown here, at first on a small scale. The people that really had the vision and injected energy and capital into the bulb trade were those entrepreneurs, the Dutch, bringing their colourful skills to South Lincolnshire - a home-from-home environment - then turning it in a geographical sense and literally by name, into Holland. Only the Dutch could have foreseen the merits of patiently coaxing the best from this type of soil.



Spalding is a good yardstick as to how events dictate the way people change in the way they do, a way of life, engendered by geographical design. Generations ago, long before the Dutch came, hardly anyone of Saxon descent paid much attention to buying flowers on the scale they do nowadays. The rise in the standard of living amid the bulb fields of south Lincolnshire worked wonders here, but then and understandably so, good fortune has always been land-based be it in cattle, fleece and cheese, wheat, vegetables and sugar beet. And the least bureaucratic meddling the better! Economical expansion in these flatlands has been nothing short of phenomenal. It has matured to such extent as to bestow upon Spalding a much coveted byword and well earned at that: excellence. Excellence in the development and supply of bulbs and flowers. I would not be surprised if the phrase "demand and supply" were not invented at Spalding. Here will be found a greater acreage in the culture of flowers than in any other area in Britain, acknowledging at the same time that Wisbech district has a creditable, if inferior, success story too.

It all comes down to the Dutch. The Fen people of England have only one difference with them - the language. Before World War I enterprising salesmen from beyond the North Sea came to realise that South Lincolnshire and Holland had much in common. They built exploratory paths through the Lincolnshire siltland and injected considerable influence in local merchandising circles. Some with even deeper insight and exploitative tendencies caught the ship of destiny and became merchants while others deliberately sank roots in the siltlands and pursued business as producers.

Dutch influence is evident in every village in the Holland of Lincolnshire, families staying on and, like their virile bulbs, producing. The skills, ability and traditions that the Dutch had developed over the centuries in the fields surrounding Amsterdam worked equally as well in the bulbfields around Spalding. They made an Empire of Spalding and it is largely due to them that the town owes its acknowledged success in the culture of flowers.

I occasionally reminisce of the days before the Second World War as a young lad living at my birthplace, a railway cottage in Rotten Row, Pinchbeck. The village school seemed to have more foreign than English names on its registers, a phenomenon then shared by several other village schools in the suburbs of Spalding. Radiating from Pinchbeck were fields as far as the eye could see abundantly filled with spectrum of colour which could outshine any Walt Disney cartoon. In the springtime the village awoke from winter slumber and braced itself for the annual



invasion of hundreds of motor cars and motorbikes which would make the mouth of a collector of vintage two-wheelers water. They descended on South Lincolnshire from Leicester and Northampton, Norwich, Derby and York and the Home Counties in Austins and Morris cars, Morgans and Standards, Enfield and BSA motor bikes and the like, not forgetting mi lord's chauffeured Rolls Royce, accompanied by a bevy of ladies wearing summer hats as gay as the fields they had come to see. What a turnout it was. A veritable miracle to the little lad standing outside the cottage watching the slowly moving, seemingly never-ending convoy of vehicles parading along the Row and the little lanes around so that their occupants could see the sight - a rhapsody of colour - that only South Lincolnshire gives.

In those days motor vehicles were comparatively few and life was lived at a less hectic pace. It was indeed like another world and the bulb growers rubbed their hands with glee. Cars would stop near the entrances of fields and passengers be allowed to take a closer look and purchase flowers from tents as was the practice at Baxter's Field along Rotten Row, aglow with tulips, daffodils and heavily scented by hyacinth. The visitors loved it, the bulb growers relished it, the inhabitants of the siltland were a bit bemused by it all. No-one could have guessed in those halcyon times - the 'thirties - that it was the start of something very big for this part of the country. They were witnessing the blossoming of international fame for old Spalding town, a natural spectacle which would burst gloriously into the much vaunted sights, sounds and aromas of the annual tulip parade; millions of tulip heads wondrously woven into themes and paraded with pretty Lincolnshire lassies and their queen through the town, watched by half-a-million entranced visitors. A reflection equal to the carnival spirit of Brazil.

Thank you, those Dutch!



Spalding boasts a long and eventful history, a concoction of monks, castilians, floods and fire. Hereabouts the intrepid Romans constructed embankments and the town was named in the Crowland foundation charter long ago when Spalding comprised of a few wooden huts and a little wooden church together with renowned Welland fisheries, all covetously acquired by the abbot of that famous Fen monastery. The castle, long vanished, occupied a site on the east side of Pinchbeck Road.



Monks seemed to have an insatiable nose for isolated sites on which to build their churches. They might choose a site of outstanding natural beauty like that surrounding the ruin of Fountains abbey in Yorkshire. Very understandable, too. Or, more surprisingly, they set up magnificent monasteries in the most inhospitable places, like that at Crowland which was surrounded by mud and water. In Saxon times monasteries sprang up in the Fens ten a penny. The fact that the monks made good capital of their sites says much for them when many a good layman would have turned away in despair. Monks in these parts were skilled in the arts of fishing and wild fowling, in land reclamation (a dreadful, dangerous business) and like all their contemporaries in various holy orders they knew a thing or two in the exploitation of relics.

I can only assume that Spalding's monks were motivated by their faith and put great store in the natural provisions which such desperate sites in the marsh proffered. Of course, God's mysterious ways could be seen at work in the acres of oozing mud and watery creeks with no less meaning than seen in the charming and colourful dales of Yorkshire. Spalding's priory was founded in the eleventh century by Thorold of Buckenhale (Godiva's brother and thereby related to the famous Fen patriot, Hereward the Wake). It was a cell of the older foundation, Crowland abbey. The Norman Conquest introduced profound changes to the Saxon way of life and, indeed, to our own way of life. The priory at Spalding was plucked from Crowland's custody and transferred by Ivo Taillebois to Angiers abbey in France, a common policy in those tumultuous times, many a Norman abbey the other side of the channel growing fat on the possessions wrested from their vanquished counterparts in England.

This not unnaturally introduced discord between Crowland and Spalding and conflict of opinions went on until the fourteenth century. It was then that Spalding Priory became independent, a most beneficial decision as it prospered to such extent that, until the Dissolution it was said to be, after Crowland, the richest monastery in England. It was a sizeable complex of buildings seen in a ground plan given in the Monasticon of 1718 as occupying a position on the west side of the Welland and south of the market place.

A distinguished host, it gusted many eminent dignitaries including Edward the Second, John of Gaunt and Geoffrey Chaucer. Sadly, precious little of the priory remains, this evident in a stone turret attached to an old brick building in the Hole-in-the-Wall passage near the market place. There is a block of fine brick buildings with stone



buttresses where it is thought the monks had their dormitory. Near the Sheep Market stands a small stone building said to have been the Priory prison, but known locally as the Prior's Oven. Nowadays it serves as a shop and restaurant but still retains the original vaulted ceiling and a semi-circular stairway.

Well graced with Georgian elegance, especially along the riverside which reminds one of the splendid Georgian facades seen along Wisbech's Brinks, Spalding boasts several old buildings on scattered sites in the town. On the outskirts, the Monks' House on the road to Bourne was probably a grange to the Priory. Elsewhere another ancient building erected in the fourteenth century formed part of the Wykeham Chapel built by Prior Hatfield.



One of Spalding's endearing features, the brinks overlook the tidal River Welland busy flowing one way or another in a swirl of sandy-coloured silt. Someone in days long past thoughtfully planted trees on one side of the river which is straddled by a few bridges, the High Bridge rebuilt in 1838, being exactly in the town centre. The main shopping area and market place lay on the western side within a stone's throw of the priory site. The east side of the High Bridge comprises of ancient, picturesque areas: Church Street, Church Gate and Love Lane, incorporating an harmonious assortment of old houses with a fine backdrop of the church's tapering spire. The whole forms a combination of ecclesiastical finesse and Georgian and Victorian opulence which invests Spalding with not inconsiderable degrees of charm.

Almost opposite the bridge stands the olde world White Horse Inn with the church in the background. The inn probably dates from the fifteenth century and is well placed to visibly greet visitors walking the short distance beside the river to Ayscoughfee Hall. This rambling old building of mellowed brick was originally built in 1420. Inevitably the restorers' hands descended upon it and imposed several alterations. It still keeps a long, galleried porch. Bay windows are appropriately capped with Dutch gables to remind beholders of Spalding's indebtedness to the adroitness of the Dutch people.

The Hall has known halcyon days. In the eighteenth century it was the home of the renowned lawyer, Maurice Johnson, founder in 1710 of the distinguished Gentlemen's Society of Spalding, one of the oldest in existence and which possesses a list of famous names of past members,



including Sir Isaac Newton, Joseph Addison, Alexander Pope, Richard Bentley and Sir Hans Sloane. The Society was established to promote correspondence on scientific and literary subjects. Maurice Johnson also participated in the founding of the Society of Antiquaries in 1717 and served as its first librarian. He was keenly interested in coins, seals, armour, prints, stained glass and medals and introduced a learned influence at Spalding. Happily this renowned Society still exists and cherishes its library of rare books and documents and a museum of antiquaries in another part of the town.

As will be expected of a building as fine as Ayscoughfee Hall the gardens, tended with meticulous care over the centuries, introduce a riot of colour to this attractive part of Spalding when the warmth of the spring and summer prevails. Neat lawns and flower beds and shaded walks never fail to delight a relaxed soul. The yew tunnel was a source of interest to me as a young lad and it still stirs those memories deep in the recesses of my mind. And what better on a balmy summer day to indulge in those very English pastimes of tennis and bowls, or simply wander at will and admire the aviaries in this idyllic place. The colonnaded stone shelter overlooks the lily-pool and carries scores of names of the men of Spalding who gave their lives in two World Wars.

In the background, not to be outdone, stands Spalding's elegant sentinel - the town's crowning glory - a prayer of harmony and stone. One is able to visit the ancient church via a gateway set in the grounds of Ayscoughfee; or it may allow a little more time for reflective thought to walk the short distance to Church Gate. Near the church nestles the inevitable old house with mellow walls, complimented by mullioned windows, oriels and stone doorways embodied in Sir John Gamlyn's almshouses. Here in this tranquil spot one can sense the peace of the centuries.

No other building in the town gives a greater sense of architectural grandeur than is seen in the old church dedicated to St. Mary and St. Nicholas. Its external proportions never fail to impress any that approach, no less than the dimensions within. The church is built to an exceptional plan giving it double aisles which make the building as wide as it is long. The original plan was cruciform and dates from 1284, but additions of a later south aisle, a chapel and a porch in the succeeding century dramatically altered the older profile and, at the same time, gave the church an internal appearance of majestic space and a forest of pillars which is almost unique. The tower and crocketed spire, a landmark for miles around in the marshland, is adorned with flying buttresses added



it is thought in the fifteenth century. The nave is protected by an arrestingly beautiful hammerbeam roof, twenty-eight wooden angels supported by corbels shaped into stone heads. If this great church had been built for a small village in the surrounding level it would certainly deserve the title "Queen of the Marsh."



## The Prior's Oven

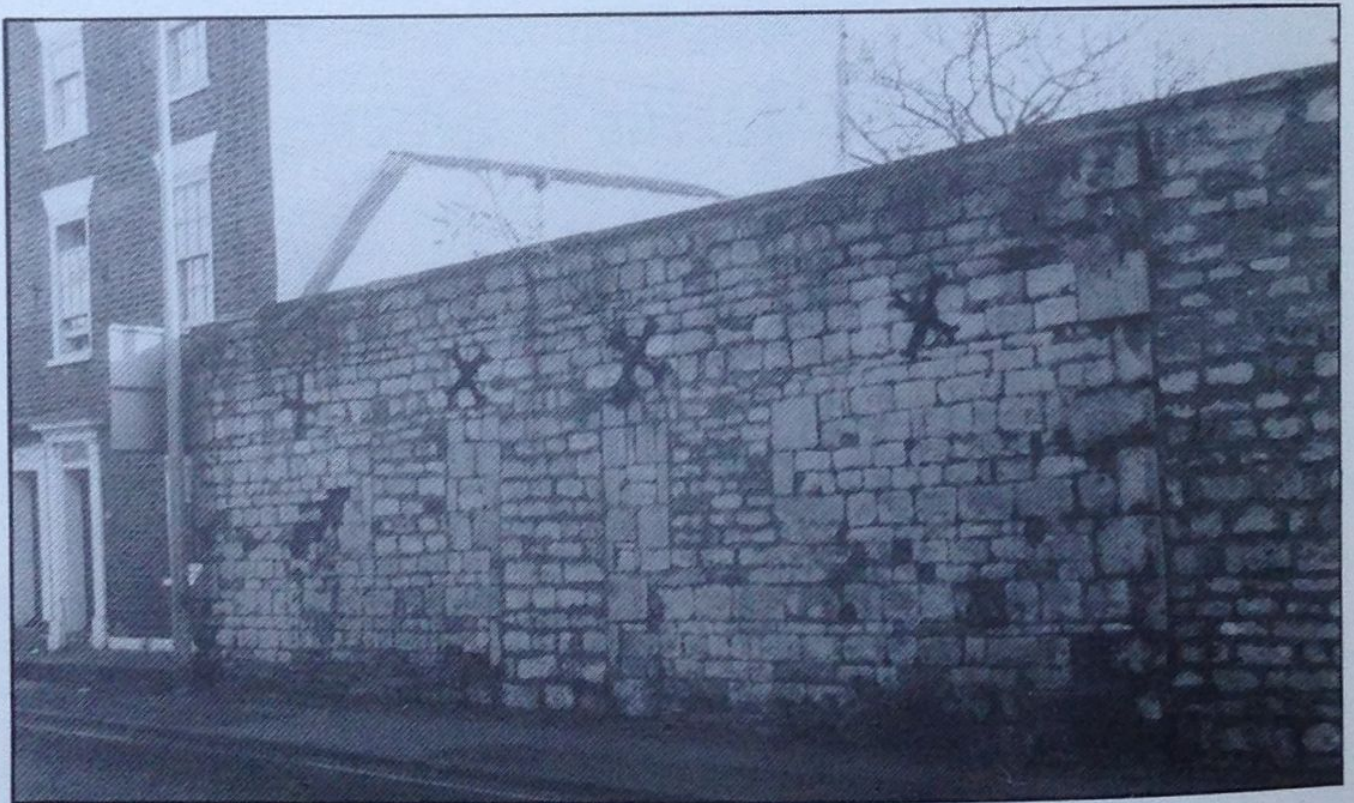
Erected about the year 1230 A.D. this building was a part of Spalding Priory. Its shape resembles an oven and it is known as The Oven or The Prior's Oven. It was originally used as the monastic prison, refractory monks and laymen kept there and stories of torture and death within these walls still survive. A few years after the building of the vaulted chamber, a lofty tower was added by Clement Hatfield, Lord Prior from 1292 to 1318. There is a record of a bell in this tower being tolled at the execution of some eighty felons. The last time an execution took place was in 1502.

Of the original structure only the immensely strong tower vault now remains. The building was used in the last and previous centuries as a blacksmith's shop, a square room (the present Tea Room) being added a century or so ago. A legend exists that an underground passage leads from The Prior's Oven to Monks House, an historic building a mile away. In the cellar there are signs of an entrance to such a passage, although it may have led to a dungeon where the worst enemies of the Prior were incarcerated.





*Sir John Gamlyn's almshouses (rebuilt in 1844) with mullioned windows and oriels.*



*Stones of Spalding Priory serve as walls. Little remains of the Priory, after Crowland, said to have been the richest ecclesiastical house in the country*



# SNIPPETS FROM OLD SPALDING TOWN

## Historical items from Spalding and District

### A MEETING OF THE LINCOLNSHIRE NATURALISTS' UNION HELD AT SPALDING

*(Reported by the Spalding Guardian, September 14th, 1901)*

In 1666 the Earl of Cromarty went to a plain (near Spalding) and "he could not see so much as a tree, but in the place thereof the whole bounds where the wood had stood was covered with green moss. They said one could not pass over because the turf of the bog would not support them. I must needs try it and fell into it up to the armpits but was immediately pulled out."

Peat mosses were known to make the skins of animals tough and, in a manner, to tan them. In June 1747 in a peat bog in Lincolnshire the body of a woman was found six feet deep. Her hair and nails were unaltered and her skin was tanned and remained soft, strong and pliable. From the antique sandals on her feet she appeared to be a Roman lady or one of their era in Britain. After the lecture Dr. Perry showed a sandal from the Isle of Axholme, in the Spalding Gentlemen's Society collection.

In conclusion, Mr. Peacock referred to the richness of the Fen soils which were good enough for sheep in summer, whether peat or silt, but poor water ground. One turnip grown on chalk or limestone had more food in it than two grown on peat. He advised that chalk or Lincolnshire limestone should be broken up about the size of road metal and applied as heavily as the pocket would allow. One benefit from such a dressing was that it lasted a lifetime.

### DISASTROUS FIRE AT SPALDING IN 1715

A terrible conflagration occurred at Spalding in the early 18th century and wreaked very considerable damage upon shops and residences. The fire on April 2nd, 1715 (the year has been given in some reference as being 1714) concentrated on buildings and goods in the Market Place and adjacent streets. It evoked much sympathy from



neighbouring towns and villages. It was evident that the fire was occasioned by a thatched workhouse or shop in the abbey yard through the negligence of a young blacksmith, William Reeve, engaged in the casting of brass or copper artifacts. The uncontrollable flames were carried by the force of a violent high wind across the gardens behind them upon the roofs of several houses in the Market Place and, in a like manner, to those nearby and those behind the Town Hall. Some parts of the building were several times on fire and the cupola which accommodated the town bell was burnt and in the space of three or four hours, eighty-four houses containing "806 square of building" with almost all household goods, wares and merchandise were consumed. The fire spread in so terrible a manner on all sides as to burn the goods carried out so as to render it impracticable to save them.

All this despite the services of a large water engine continually worked with the aid of a large number of buckets and other vessels, and long iron crows by which some of the roofs were pulled down. One of the houses opposite the old White Hart was blown up with gunpowder. The engineer, an ex-sailor, who arranged the explosives, himself died (the only human life lost in the calamity). His action stopped the fire from consuming the next house that had been the George Inn and was the grocers, thus probably saving all the houses around the Cross and in other parts of the town. The man who had accidentally occasioned that dreadful calamity no doubt suffered abject misery that he had brought upon his native town and neighbours (such suffering), and he immediately left Spalding and was never seen again in the district. Many names appeared in the subscription lists, headed:

#### SPALDING, SUNDAY YE 3rd OF APRIL 1715

"The Astounding Calamity with which it hath pleased Almighty God to Visit ye town of Spalding with a Dreadfull Fire which in a few hours destroyed near four score houses and thereby entirely ruined more than three score families haveing moved us voluntarily to contribute somewhat towards ye present relief of ye said poor sufferers . . .": Mr. Maurice Johnson, founder of the Spalding Gentlemen's Society, contributed £30 and his son £10. Subscribers lived at villages and towns in Lincolnshire for instance Pinchbeck which contributed £20 out of the public stock, Stamford £84, Bicker £5 16s., Whaplode £21 9s., Gosberton £24, Moulton £46 15s., Quadring £6 12s., Holbeach £33 17s., and Long Sutton £30 13s. In all there were two-hundred-and-twenty-



four subscribers (towns, villages, individuals and organisations) contributing approximately £1,624 which added up to a not inconsiderable sum two-hundred-and-eighty years ago.

### SPECTACULAR FIREWORK DISPLAY AT SPALDING IN 1749

The Treaty of Peace after the war with France in the reign of George the Third was signed at Aix la Chapelle on October 2nd, 1748. This was celebrated by firework displays throughout the length of England. The Gentlemen's Society of Spalding deemed it appropriate that the town should play a part in these celebrations and undertook the arrangements to mark the conclusion of war. One of the highlights was the erection of a triumphal arch bedecked with elaborate ornaments. The arch was in the form of a canopy or tabernacle of a square plan with heavy pillars at the four corners. It was erected on the steps of the Stone Cross in Spalding Market Place and illuminated with fixed fireworks on the day of Thanksgiving. Attached to it were four firewheels as well as fire pumps and balloons some placed within the decorative urns and vases. The display evoked much interest among the residents, many thronging the Market Place as well as various inns and taverns.

### KNIGHTLY FAMILIES OF SPALDING DISTRICT

Soon after the Commonwealth all the old knightly families that had lived for generations in the Lincolnshire Fens, drawn together by the learned society of the monasteries, had either become extinct or had removed to the high country. Soon no trace of them was left save the sites of their moated houses, their tombs in the churches, and their coats of arms in stained and painted windows.

The ancient family of **De Multon** of Moulton, of whom Thomas de Multon was one of the barons attesting Magna Carta, had become extinct. "Their castle in the fenne," wrote Leland, "half a mile from Quapelode, whereof some parts yet standeth, the Lord Fitzwalter hath it now."

The **Welos** of Moulton and Gedney who settled in these parts on the marriage of Sir William Welby with Maud, the co-heir of Sir John de Moulton in the twelfth century, and were resident at Moulton in knightly honour for fifteen generations after, "of great note and power in Holland," the Gedney family became extinct, while the Moulton family



removed to Denton. The **Irbys** of Whaplode, ancestor of the Lord Boston, passed to Northamptonshire.

The **Custs** of Pinchbeck who were resident in that place before 1338 (when Sir Peter Cust died and was buried there) transferred themselves to Belton.

The **Wimberleys** of Spalding, of whom Dr. Gilbert Wimberley was one of the chaplains of King Charles (and as a consequence of the Rebellion was deprived of his most valuable library), disappeared from the country.

The **Hérons** of Cressy Hall in Surfleet, an ancient seat successively of the Creasys, the Markhams, the Herons, then later the Smiths, and where the Lady Margaret, mother of Henry VII was entertained, became extinct in 1736.

The **Ogles** of Pinchbeck and the **Gamlins** and **Oldfields** of Spalding became extinct. The **Walpoles** of Pinchbeck went to Dunston.

The name of **Beridge** of landed descent remained in Elloe c. 1900.

Sometimes the bearers of these names occupied very high positions, viz: Sir Anthony Irby in the Holland region in 1643; John Irby of Sutterton is called "Gent" in 1640; John Oldfield of Spalding was fined as a delinquent in 1646, £1,390, which says he was certainly a man of substance. Thomas Welby was sequestrator for the Parts of Holland in 1643 and Samuel and Richard Cust are found among the magistrates of Holland for 1650. This information applies only to those families whose estates were in the neighbourhood of Spalding.

### RICHARD PARKER, SPALDING SPEED SKATER

In the Grammar School at Spalding, about 1840, there was a tradition that Mr. Richard Parker, ironmonger, with premises in Hall Street, then still in the flesh (c. 1900) could skate a mile in one minute! This man was apparently well known in the Fens, "a light jemy little man, muscular and full of fire and go." Well through the eighteen-forties he was as fast as anyone on the ice, though he was never known to race. *The Stamford Mercury* of February 2nd, 1838, published this little account of him:

"On Saturday last a match was made for Mr. Parker, ironmonger of Spalding, to skate against time for two sovereigns a mile in three minutes. He completed his task in two minutes and fifty-seven seconds, against a north-east wind, over a winding and difficult course from post to post. No flying start was allowed. This is in fact unparalleled by



anything of the kind yet noticed. Hundreds of people collected and the general opinion was that Parker's style of skating would have completed the task in two minutes had the wind been in his favour. There were several other races and the numerous lovers of this exercise were highly delighted with the day's sport. There was a match at Cowbit on the previous Thursday between Barton of Thorney and Riddington of Cowbit, for £10 a side. This was won in gallant style by the latter."

### NATHANIEL KINDERLEY, LAND DRAINAGE ENGINEER

This gentleman was an expert in land drainage and was credited as the originator of the scheme to provide a new, straight course for the River Ouse, totally bypassing the torturous old course near King's Lynn. It had a bad reputation for silting and was hazardous to ships. The Eau Brink as it was known, also improved the scour of the river and the tidal flow was in consequence more rapid. The engineer was also responsible for straightening a stretch of the River Nene near Wisbech for similar reasons. Kinderley was born of Lincolnshire parents, his father Geoffrey Kinderley, settling at Spalding where he died in 1714. His tomb is in Spalding churchyard and on it was inscribed:

*"He was a charitable and merciful man;  
The pleasure from which virtuous deeds we have  
Affords the sweetest slumber in the grave."*

Geoffrey Kinderley is reputed to have had six wives but had only two sons.

### FLOGGING AT THE CART'S TAIL

*The Spalding Guardian* for February 27th, 1904, gave several interesting reminiscences of life in Spalding many years ago. Among these recorded incidents it states that in about 1837 a man was whipped at the cart's tail around Spalding market place. He apparently had the reputation amongst other things of being a wizard and his misfortune is an example of the intolerance of society in comparatively modern times. The man was brought to the town from The Pigeon one afternoon and then he was fastened to the cart which had been supplied by a local farmer. This was pulled by a horse. The victim was repeatedly whipped as the vehicle moved on. Similar whippings took place at Wisbech and on one occasion the victim was tied to the animal's tail and whipped as it dragged him around the market place. Some victims died as a result of



this punishment, usually the festerous wounds turning to gangrene. Women, too, were subjected to flogging in a similar manner and for them the practice was abolished in 1820.

### A SPALDING MAN LORD MAYOR OF LONDON

It is no mean honour to be appointed mayor of a town or city. To be thus promoted to that auspicious seat of the Capital itself says a great deal for the person and his achievements. This signal honour was accorded to a Spalding man in 1499. He was Sir Nicholas Alwin.

### A FORGOTTEN BENEFACTOR

Many persons looking at the numerous features of Spalding's old church may have noticed the huge mural tablet on the south side of the west entrance. Inscribed with a lengthy inscription it commemorates the resting place, in a vault, of one of the great drainage engineers of the eighteenth century. To Captain John Derry the landowners of the Deepings and the whole of the surrounding district are probably more indebted than any other person. No mention is made of the fact but it was he who carried out the chief work of reclaiming the Fens.

*To the memory of  
JOHN PERRY, ESQ., in 1693  
Commander of His Majesty King William's  
Ship the Cignet; second son of Saml. Perry  
of Robborough in Gloucestershire Gent. and of  
Sarah his wife, Daughter of Sir. Thos. Nott. KE.  
He was several years Comptroller of the  
Maritime works of Czar Peter in Russia, and  
on his return home was employed by ye  
Parliament to stop Dagenham Breach, which  
he effected; and thereby preserved the  
Navigation of the River Thames  
and rescued many private families from ruin;  
he after departed this life in this Town, and  
was here interred February 13th 1732,  
aged 63 years.*



*This stone was placed over him by the  
Order of William Perry of Penthurst in  
Kent, Esq., his Kinsman and Heir Male*

History dictates that much of the acclaim to draining the greater part of the Fen country goes, quite rightly, to Sir Cornelius Vermuyden, a Dutch engineer and his fellow Adventurers, admirably supported by the Earl of Bedford between 1631 and 1651. Vermuyden was involved with major works on the Thames banks at Dagenham, the success of which led to his appointment as designer and supervisor to draining a smaller strip of fen near Hatfield Chase, Yorkshire. While being successful the scheme was beset by problems mainly the hostility of the natives to the "foreigners" (Huguenots and Walloons) who were employed to dig dykes and erect sluices. Vermuyden designed a scheme shortly before 1631 to drain the southern Fens including the Isle of Ely and a second scheme completed about 1651 to improve the drainage of that area. The struggle to reclaim the land continued well after his death and several engineers, including John Perry, contributed to the work.

#### A FEW DATES RELATING TO SPALDING PRIORY

The following notes respecting Spalding Priory are taken from the *Chronicon Angliae Petriburgense*:

- 1052-Priory of Spalding took its beginning from six monks taken from Crowland by Thoraldus. He assigned to them sufficient lands for their support. The establishment was a cell of Crowland.
- 1059-Wulfketyl, abbot of Crowland, granted a wooden chapel to his cell at Spalding, with certain rents.
- 1074-William the Conqueror and his two sons confirmed to the monks of Spalding all their property and the manor of Spalding with all its appurtenances. The connection with Crowland lasted only about five years. Ivo Tailbois drove the Crowland monks back to their own abbey and introduced to Spalding some monks from the Benedictine priory of St. Angiers in France.
- 1232-First agreement made between Constantius, abbot of Angiers and Simon, prior of Spalding.
- 1252-Death of Prior Simon. It had been his undertaking to pay an annual tribute of £40 to the abbey of Angiers and to maintain four monks, this agreement confirmed at Lyons. The Bishop of Lincoln



disliked the high position Simon had obtained and strove unsuccessfully to have him removed. He was a good and dutiful prior and ruled for twenty-three years dying in old age, and buried in the church he had built.

- 1253-Abbot John succeeded and died in 1274. While almoner at Spalding he had purchased lands, built houses and also a chapel, created a garden, planted a vineyard and orchards, and supplied food to the poor. John established his claim for certain services and customs from his tenants in Pinchbeck, Weston and Moreton which they had refused. He served as Prior twenty-one years and went to France but on returning died at St. Denys.
- 1293-Death of William of Littleport, Prior. This cleric supervised a suit between Crowland and Spalding concerning 110 acres of wood and 1,700 acres of marsh within the precincts of Crowland. With the money he gloriously adorned the conventual church. The tithes of wood and flax at Spalding he re-assigned from previous priors to the sacrist. At his own expense William erected noble buildings in the court of the priory. He was buried in the middle of the choir before the steps of the high altar.
- 1383-Prior Clement died. He was known for improving various manors, built barns and also introduced a solatium (half-holiday?) for the monks.
- 1322-Death of Prior Walter de Halton. He was old when appointed as leader of Spalding Priory. However he managed to free the house of debts of £1,100 sterling. At great cost he built a hall and another building which adjoined for rest and recreation. He successfully resisted the encroachments by Thomas de Wake who had sent an armed force into the marsh and elsewhere, injuring men and cattle. Prior for fourteen years Walter de Halton was succeeded by Thomas de Nassington.
- 1353-Prior Thomas died. He had been chosen to lead the priory because of his excellent character. The election was not without dispute and contested by James de Hagem who asserted that he had already been elected by four of the monks. The dispute was settled in favour of Prior Thomas.

Among the many pastimes practised by monks was that of weather observation and how it coincided with certain holy days. The monks of Spalding marked their own calendar in accordance with the weather pattern and events:



## SPALDING WEATHER LORE

Recorded in the Spalding Priory register, sold at the Ashburnham Sale in 1899, and accommodated in the British Museum, Add. MSS No. 35,296.

### *January 25th:*

If St. Paul's Day be clear, it marks a gladsome year;  
If snow or rain appear, look for possessions dear;  
If winds do blow, they surely war foreshow;  
If clouds do come, much cattle will succumb.

### *February 2nd:*

Should showers hold sway on Purification Day,  
Then all may say that winter is passed away;  
If we see the sun's ray, the cold will long stay.

### *July 2nd:*

If Processus and Martinianus bring rain,  
There will be a severe winter and much dearth of grain.

### *July 4th+:*

On Martin's Translation if rain comes at all,  
For forty long days it continues to fall.

### *August 6th:*

If Sixtus's Feast bring the wind from the east,  
And it blows without stop, it will strengthen the crop.

(+A similar saying exists in lore concerning St. Swithin).

## PECULIARITIES OF LOCAL CHURCHES IN RHYME

Gosberton church is very high; Surfleet church is all awry.  
Pinchbeck church is in a hole; and Spalding church is big with foal.



## THE CIVIL WAR AND SPALDING

An ancient account entitled "*A Certain Relation of the Taking of Croyland*" tells of the involvement of Spalding men and their unseemly treatment.

"Upon Saturday, 25th of March, being Lady Day, early in the morning Captain Stiles and Captain Cromwell, Master Will. Stiles the minister of Croyland with about eighty or ninety men, came to our towne of Spalding which at that time was utterly unfurnished of men and armes, whereof they had intelligence the evening before by some of our malignant and treacherous neighbours. Near break of day they beset the house of Mr. Ram, the minister of the towne (Spalding), where they tooke John Harrington, esqr. and the said Mr. Ram and in a violent and uncivil manner carried them away to Croyland, at the entering whereof the people of the towne generally were gathered together and see and triumph over their prisoners . . . some others of our towne (Spalding) they tooke at the same time, but released all save Edward Horne, one of Captain Escort's servants, so we three were kept together under strong guards, and about ten dayes after, one Mr. William Slater of Spalding, a man of about sixty-six years of age, was taken by some of their scouts and made prisoner with us. Our usage for dyet and lodging was indifferent good at the time of our imprisonment which was five weekes, but some insolences we were inforced now and then to endure."

These "insolences" were, in fact, quite serious. On several occasions the Spalding men were taken out of their prison and escorted to the defensive earthworks. There they were staked out before the besieging Parliamentarian force which was not able to shoot at the defenders for fear of hitting the prisoners. The captain in charge of the Crowland garrison was known to be a rebel, as indeed was the whole of his command, and not fit for either side. Eventually the garrison succumbed to an attack by night and the Spalding men set free.

## THE CELEBRATED ROUSSEAU AT SPALDING

This eminent man had given offence to influential people of all parties through the publication of a literary work on education. It was condemned by Parliament, by an archbishop and by the Council of Geneva. The senate of Berne, Switzerland, expelled Rousseau from their territory. Upon this he accepted the invitation of David Hume who



offered him asylum in England. For a time he lived in Derbyshire but after a quarrel with his host, a Mr. Davenport, left the house where he had been entertained. The following account is taken from *Reports and Papers*, i, 336:

"It may serve to show the secluded character of the town of Spalding so lately as in the middle of the last century, if I mention the fact that in 1767, when the celebrated Jacques Rousseau, making a hasty flight from the residence of his friend, Mr. Davenport, near Ashbourne, wished to discover a place where no-one would think of looking for him, he fixed upon Spalding. After a while, disappointed in finding that nobody cared whither he went he wrote from the White Hart a letter to the Lord Chancellor . . . complaining that he had been ill-used by the nation, and that it was necessary for him to evacuate the kingdom . . . (and) that he might have a guard at his own expense to escort him to Dover. From the White Hart at Spalding Rousseau went straight to Dover, took ship and never again returned to this country." (It was acknowledged by Rousseau that he suffered from the affects of insanity while in England).

#### A GLIMPSE OF SPALDING AND CROWLAND IN 1772

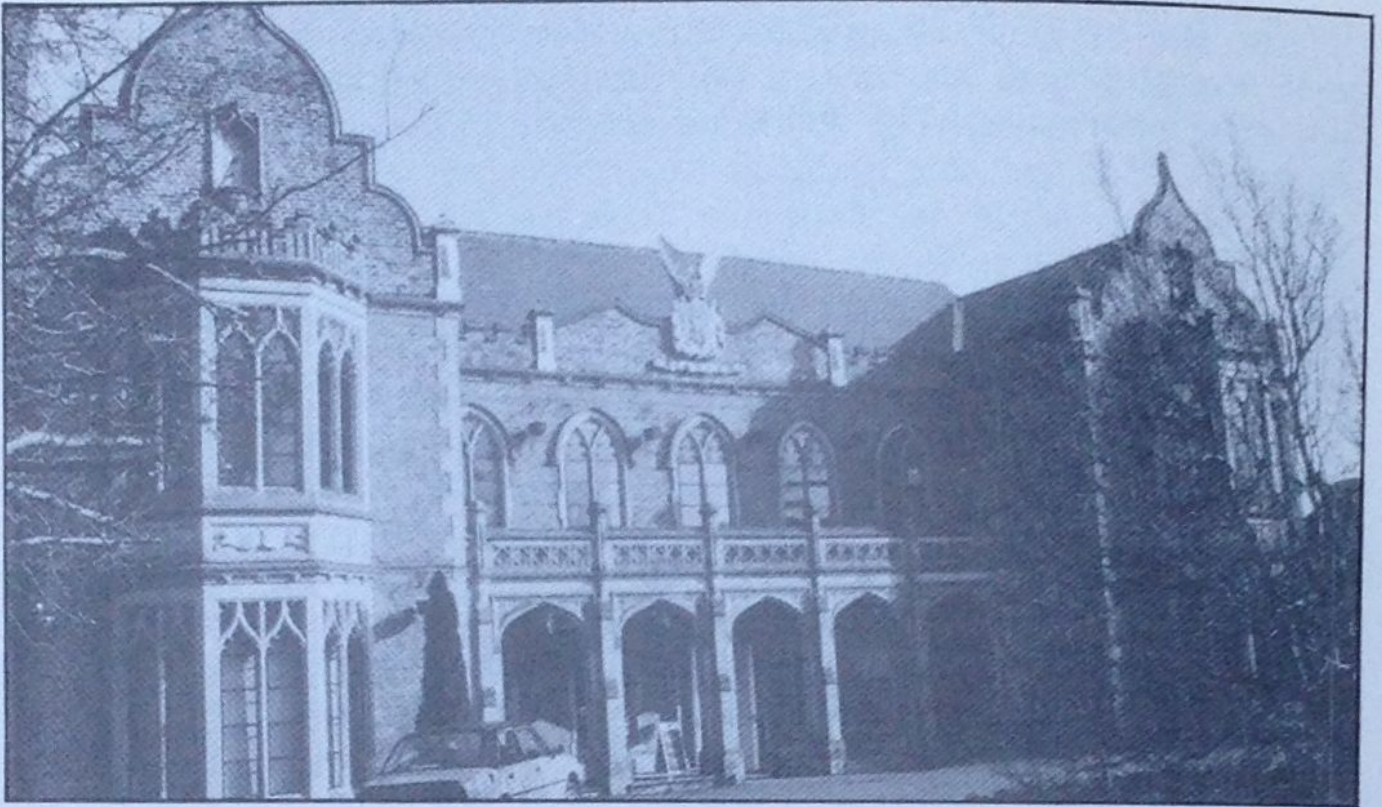
The following description is an extract from *A Dictionary of the World* published in that year:

"SPALDING has a market on Tuesdays and five fairs - on April 27th for hemp and flax, on June 24th for horses and cattle, on August 30th for horses, and on September 25th and December 17th for hemp and flax. It is an ancient and well built town and is a mile in length upon the road; but it is in a low situation and enclosed with rivulets, drains, and a navigable river which causes it to be a place of good trade, having several vessels and barges belonging to it.

"CROWLAND has a market on Saturdays. The town is seated very low in deep fens, almost in the manner of Venice. It consists of three streets separated from each other by water courses, and planted with willows and the banks are secured by piles. They (the streams) communicate with each other by a triangular bridge. The lowness of the situation admits of no carriage, and yet it is well inhabited on account of the great quantity of fish and wild ducks taken in the adjacent pools and marshes."

The triangular bridge at Crowland is of great antiquity and curiosity. It probably dates from the fourteenth century.





*18th century Ayscoughfee Hall, at one time the home of Maurice Johnson, who, in 1710 founded the Gentlemen's Society of Spalding*



*Elegant houses overlook the churchyard*



## A FEW EXTRACTS FROM SURFLEET PARISH ACCOUNTS

The churchwardens' accounts extend from 1669 to 1715, then there is a gap 'till 1753. Some entries allude to drainage and others to miscellaneous items concerning that parish.

1696-One day's work carting, 3s.

Opening Surfleet Gowt outfall, 4s.

Stopping holes in Wargate Drove, 2s.

1755-To Jacob Hutchman for ale, bread and cheese when the sheep were counted.

1753-For securing the jetty that was blown up by the tide, 16s. 6d.

To one hundred of reed, 5s.

1759-For killing a fox, 1s.

For carrying the Commandments to Donington (for repair?) 4s.

For the Commandments coming home, 4s.

1762-Spent upon Jno. Perkins for helping me to set a boy in ye stocks, 6d.

1766-Paid for a foxe's foot, 1s.

1773-Letting the water off the salt marsh, 4s. 6d.

1774-To catching moles (a great plague), £3 17s.

Bank heightening from old sluice to Mr Greetham's, £10 17s. 6d.

1794-Ale for washing the church when cleaned.

1798-A waggon and four horses to Boston, £1 1s. 0d.

1801-At this meeting (7 April) the question was put whether the ringing days shall be continued, the Ringers (who received 10s. 6d. to 12s. 6d. a day) not doing their duty. Ayes 6, noes 13.

1828-(Ordered) That the constables be allowed one guinea for putting a stop to the nuisances on a Sunday by boys and men playing at marbles and chuck, and people getting drunk on the Sabbath.

1836-Every industrious poor family shall be provided with one rood of garden ground to grow vegetables and potatoes to feed a pig, the rent to be the same as that paid for the adjoining land.

1840-A vestry meeting empowered the Surveyor of the Highway to purchase sparrows at the rate of 1d. per dozen eggs, 2d. each for young birds and 4d. for old birds.

Further reading of these interesting accounts reveal that in about 1833-35 the labouring men of Surfleet were observed as being in a "pitiabile condition." The ratepayers agreed to give them work in proportion to their own holdings rather than "send them to the roads."



After 1829 the cost and maintenance of the poor were let at 2s. 6d. a head in the Poor House, five chaldrons of coal being allowed to the contractors.

Down to 1840 the roads at Surfleet were repaired with silt. This is true of the custom in those times at other marshland parishes. Usually if roads had become intolerably rutted it was the practice to employ local farmers to plough and roll them.

## THE PLAGUE IN THE LINCOLNSHIRE FENS

*Fenland Notes and Queries* published a paper belonging to the Spalding Gentlemen's Society in 1897. Plague during the seventeenth century decimated a great many places in the Marshland and Fens. Indeed in parts of the country villages were so severely affected, the survivors moved away and began new communities. On occasions the writer has seen the odd ruined church peeping above crops and not another building in sight. These were abandoned villages. Parishes were subjected to strict observation of rules in the event of plague. The following are extracts as affecting the inhabitants of Kirton, Skirbeck and Elloe in 1636:

"THAT all such persons who are visited and infected with the plague (being not able to live of themselves) be speedily conveyed into some outpart of the town where least recourse of people is used. And them of ability to be kept at their own houses at their own charge, and a collection to be gathered as well for the relieving of the said poor visited and infected . . .

"ITEM that there be (during the time of the visitation) a sufficient and careful watch kept over those that shall be infected, to restrain them from going abroad (leaving their homes) and keeping company with others that be sound . . . And if any person infected be obstinate and not abide with this order therein that he or she to be apprehended by the watch and imprisoned.

"ITEM that all victuallers and ale housekeepers shall make such provision as the poor and all persons within the said town visited, may have such victuals for their monies as they shall stand need of . . .

"ITEM if any die in and part of the town where any doubt or suspicion may arise to be the plague, the body of that person not to be buried until it be viewed to the end that if it be the plague order may be taken to restrain the rest of the family from going abroad, and a cross to be set upon the door.



"ITEM that no person which is known to die of the plague shall be buried in the daytime, but either in the morning before "sonriseinge" or in the evening after "sunsettinge" when most people are in their houses and at rest. And if none will carry them to the church, then a horse and sledge to be provided for that purpose, and the same to remain where the infected was buried last.

"ITEM that all persons within the said towns upon open warning given in the church, shall keep their dogs, cats and swine surely chained or tied up, or else hang them, that they go not abroad out of his master's house, to be killed and buried by some appointed for that purpose, and they to have of the owner of such dog, two pence.

"ITEM that there be some careful women appointed to keep and look to the poor and sick visited persons, and when they shall die they to wind them and bring them out of the houses, that they may be viewed. And then the men appointed to carry them to the place of burial.

"ITEM if any market town be visited (with the plague) then we do order that bakers, butchers and other tradesmen of other places not infected, for provision of victuals, medicines and other necessaries for the livelihood of men, shall repair to some place near the said market town to be by us appointed for that purpose . . .

"ITEM that the bedding and other clothes worn or used by the deceased so soon as all the parties deceased be recovered, or dead, be either burnt or aired as is prescribed by physicians set down in His Majesty's Book of Orders, and if the value of those goods be of that worth as the owner is not well able to bear the loss, that then out of the collections to be made the Justices shall allow such monies as in their discretions shall be thought reasonable in recompense of the said loss of such goods.

"ITEM that persons infected or recovered shall be kept six weeks from conversing with any, or from coming abroad, unless their houses be far from other houses and they occasioned to manage their ground or order their cattle. And howsoever the infected to carry a white rod in their hands.

"ITEM that all signs of innes and alehouses be pulled down for the time of the visitation, and to lodge no wayfaring men or women without the consent of the Minister, Churchwardens and Constables, or some of them.

"ITEM that all Marriages, Christenings, Burials and other meetings for men and women be accompanied with no more persons than



need shall require.

"ITEM we do order that the Mercers in every town shall provide and have in readiness London treacle and Methridate of the best, and such other materials for medicines . . . (Methridate is a very old preparation, said to be 'astringent, narcotic, but less so than Venice treacle.' It was supposed to be a concoction that is a special preservative against poison).

"ITEM we entreat the Minister of every town and parish every Sunday to make some Godly exhortation to move the parishioners to extend their charitable benevolence towards the relief of such places as are visited.

"ITEM it is thought fit that there shall be eight wardsmen every day in the town of Spalding, that is to say at Mr. Johnson's bridge, two at the High bridge, two at Pinchbeck Lane, and two at Windsover End, and that two men be appointed to see their service duly performed."

NOTE - Appointing wardsmen to supervise roads, entrances and other places was a common practice at towns in time of plague. The object was to prevent unnecessary movement, only those with essential duties being allowed to go about their business. Wisbech in Cambridgeshire suffered disastrous losses in life from plague despite having posted wardsmen as far away as Guyhirn, for instance (five miles) to bar any traveller from entering the town and from leaving the area. Men were also appointed to disinfect the streets and buildings with little benefit. Yet still Wisbech was visited with the plague and the churchyard filled to overflowing with unfortunate victims. Almost certainly this, too, was the practice at Spalding.

All kinds of things were designed to help persons to remain free of the deadly virus. Carrying a pocketful of flower leaves was one, it being believed that the aroma would serve to cleanse contagious air. Hence the little rhyme recited by children:

*"Ring a ring of roses, a pocket full of posies.  
Atishoo, atishoo, we all fall down."*

The ring of roses was seen as an aromatic barrier to the disease, likewise it was considered helpful to carry petals in one's pocket and occasionally sniff them. Sneezing was an early symptom of the disease which usually rapidly developed and in so many instances gave rise to death. There were various strains of pestilence but none more serious than the bubonic plague in London in 1665.



## A LINCOLNSHIRE PATRIARCH

In an account relating to the above heading, the following is of local interest: "At Whaplode Drove Feast three days in last week, Mr. John Goodger, aged one-hundred-and-four years, danced a hornpipe, sung a song, and played at the game of four corners in high glee. Of nearly as remarkable vigour and longevity is Susanna Langley, wife of Edward Langley of Bolingbroke who has for upwards of seventy years regularly attended Spilsby market; and it is supposed that in the course of that time she has walked into and from Spilsby upwards of 30,120 miles; and she still attends the market with the greatest activity and enjoys her market cheer." *The Stamford Mercury*, June 28th 1816.

## CHURCH TABLET AT COWBIT

In Cowbit church can be seen two tablets; one dates to 1827 and has the Lord's Prayer and the Creed. The other is inscribed thus: "Upon the neglect of God's Service on the Sunday, is not life more than meat and the Body than Raiment?"

*There are a sort of men who deign to pray,  
When nothing worldly calls another way;  
This obstacle, I ween, they dare to raise,  
At times appointed for their Maker's praise.  
Dear reader, shun, oh shun that thoughtless race  
Who seek their God but in the second place.*

## A WANDERING LINCOLNSHIRE TERRIER

A little dog with a remarkable homing instinct was illustrated in the following account printed in *The Standard*, December 23rd 1898: "About a month ago a Bourne tradesman received by rail a terrier from Frieston, in the Wash. The animal was taken to a village three miles distant where it remained three weeks. On Saturday night it was missing. On Tuesday a letter was received stating that the terrier had safely reached its old home at Frieston early on Monday morning. The animal had traversed the entire breadth of the Lincolnshire Fens, a distance of forty miles, over an intricate maze of dyke and fen.





*Below: Sunlight illuminates pillars within the church of St. Mary and St. Nicholas. Above: "Spalding church is big with foal . . ."  
The unique design of Spalding's old church with its chapels, transepts, turrets and wealth of pillars and windows.  
The earliest part dates from 1284.*





## "THE FAYRE VILLAGE" OF MOULTON

This was the place "the fayre vill" of Spalding priory in which dwelt powerful head tenants, the Molton family, who lived at the castle sited in the park. The site of this castle was marked in the form of a mound surrounded by a moat called Hall Hills. Cole, when a young antiquarian, frequently visited Moulton, the main reason it seems to see his half-sister who was married to the master of the "well endowed schools." Cole tells of a deed about Spalding church.

"This is a very curious document and shows the generosity and zeal of the convent (at Spalding) for so small a sum of £80 (£20 being for the two bells) who were to build the parish of Spalding a new church equal to that at Moulton, which is extremely beautiful and elegant one all of free stone, with a fine spire on the tower. I have often been in Moulton church where my younger brother John Cole and my half-sister lie in the middle aisle before the pulpit."

Cole also mentions that a custom existed at Moulton of ringing the midnight peal, on "the Blessed Lord's Nativity" at twelve o'clock at night, exactly as the clock strikes.

The Domesday Book of 1086 gives reference to the lands and tenements which Ivo Taillebois who came with William the Conqueror held in Spalding, Pinchbeck, Moulton and Weston. "In Spalding Earl Algar holds nine ploughlands by tribute and land for a like number of ploughs. Yvo holds there four ploughlands in desmesne, and forty villeins and thirty-three bordars holding thirteen ploughs. There is a market forty shillings and six piscaries 30s., and by tribute of salt, 20s. and of alder wood 8s." (Through the proximity of the sea people benefited by trade in salt as well as from alders which were prolific in fen regions. Eels, too, were vital to the mediaeval Fen economy).

"In Pyncebek (Pinchbeck) Yvo holds two ploughlands in desmesne and a church. There are also ten ploughlands and land for ten ploughs. There are twenty-two socmen and sixteen villeins, and twelve bordars holding nine ploughs, four piscaries and five hundred eels."

## CRUSADERS OF SPALDING AND DISTRICT

Among the documents held by the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury is one with a list of Crusaders from Lincolnshire relating to the latter half of the twelfth century (c. 1197). They came from Sutterton, William Swift; Gosberton, Andreas; Surfleet, Hubert Wid(onis); Spalding,



Alexander, William Cuping; Moulton, Roger Stoile; Holbeach, William Fossator; Gedney, William Pistor. Names from other Lincolnshire regions were recorded in the list. To be a Crusader was considered an honourable discharge in the services of Christ, but there were other aspects to it. Some yearned for the adventurous role it entailed in an arid land quite different to England's green and pleasant countryside, a chance to come to grips in combatant terms with the renowned army of Saladin. Others saw it as a means of escape from domestic drudgery and to some it was the ideal way of combining adventure and sight-seeing away from wives and families and all the responsibilities that went with marriage. It is known that some certainly tried to escape fulfilment of their wedding vows. Some of the Lincolnshire Crusaders seem to have abandoned the expedition while others tried to elevate themselves to heights of popularity in claiming falsely to have been to the Holy Land.

Many that volunteered for the Crusades were in very poor circumstances and had not the means to defray expenses. Some retired without completing the entire and difficult journey and one even came home after being robbed in Lombardy. One, a married cleric from Gosberton (with two children) was prevented from reaching the Holy Land because it had been utterly desolated through the ravages of war, a circumstance by which the passage by sea was abandoned. This "Crusader" was advised by the Pope to turn back and return to his wife. It seems he could not wait to get away and was successful a second time!

### A FEW NOTES CONCERNING 16th CENTURY SURFLEET

Several papers among Lincoln Corporation Records make reference to Surfleet in the mid sixteenth century, the country undergoing what was undoubtedly the greatest change ecclesiastically the State had ever experienced.

September 29th 1547 - Possession was taken of the church and parsonage of Surfleet to the use of the corporation, according to the King's Letters patent, Robert Margesson, parish priest of the same and others being pressed. (History defines this period as the Dissolution of the Monasteries and Guilds).

February 15th 1549 - Presentation of Robert Margesson to the vicarage of Surfleet. (This can be interpreted that the priest, who had surrendered all possessions of the church was reinstated as vicar under the terms of the newly Reformed Church).



November 17th 1549 - Enquiry to be made of the burgesses of the city (Lincoln) whether a pension of four shillings yearly claimed out of the parsonage of Surfleet as payable to the monastery of Spalding be discharged or not.

March 10th 1550 - The following seven articles are demanded in a bill subscribed by the curate and inhabitants of Surfleet . . . (1) For a deacon yearly to help to minister and do other things that belongeth to that office; (2) For two lights to be found in quere (quire) in service times; (3) For 10s. yearly in alms to poor people; (4) For bread and ale to the value of six shillings and eight pence to be given to the parishioners upon Maundy Thursday yearly; (5) For the gift of a dinner or twopence in silver upon every offering day to all such persons as do help in the quere to maintain God's service; (6) For finding of strewing (with reed or straw) in the church four times a year; (7) For finding of a common bull and boar to serve the whole town.

June 3rd 1550 - A mansion house to be built for the vicar at Surfleet with all speed, and part of the timber taken from defaced churches to go towards it. (Almost certainly the "defaced church" in this case was Spalding Priory. Abbeys were ransacked after the Dissolution, squared stone, floor slabs, lead and timber from roofs sold cheaply to corporations, builders of colleges and individuals. Many old buildings erected at the time and still in existence incorporate in their walls and roofs stone and wood taken from that period of ruination of some of the noblest ecclesiastical buildings in the land).

August 2nd 1550 - A person to go to Boston about the purchase of a house for the vicarage of Surfleet.

April 28th 1552 - The lease of the parsonage of Surfleet to John Harrison, clerk, forfeited by his felling of trees.

### WOAD - A POPULAR 19th CENTURY FEN CROP

The following is an extract from *The Peterborough Advertiser* of July 30th 1892: "WOAD GROWING - Mr. Blenkinsopp, factory inspector for Peterborough, notes that there are now only four woad farms and factories in the entire kingdom, and these happen to be all within the district of Lincolnshire. The deep blue dye known as woad is obtained from a plant something like the lettuce, which is grown in Lincolnshire fields and has a long, thin root. The leaves, which are the only part used, are taken to sheds and mashed by huge broad wheels driven by power (early by circling horses, later by steam) resembling



those used in glass and cement works and oilcake mills. They are thus reduced to pulp which is made into balls about the size of ordinary turnips. These are placed in layers in open sheds till dry and hard, when they are broken up with hammers and put in barrels and sent to the woollen factories in Yorkshire and elsewhere. One of those woad mills exists at Algarkirk, between Spalding and Boston." (NOTE: A woad mill existed late last century at Parson Drove, near Wisbech. Woad was a very ancient crop. It is said by scholars that its dye was used to colour the skin of tribesmen of this country before the Roman invasion).

### THE STATE OF COWBIT BEFORE THE SOUTH HOLLAND DRAINAGE

*Poor Cowbit next uplifts her head,  
Dozing from her watery bed;  
And little else one sees indeed,  
Except a chapel thatched with reed,  
And Welland's stream with sedges crowned,  
Where surging waves so much abound,  
That oft the farmer's hopes are drowned,  
That all around one nothing sees,  
But miry bogs and willow trees;  
These scenes which were a sight forlorn  
Are now improved by fields of corn.*

(From the *Supplement to the Volume of the Lincolnshire Magazine, etc.* (circa 1801))

The magazine, Vol. II, included Topographical History; An Account of Spalding; The Free Grammar School; The Petit Schools; The Blue-Coat Charity School; The Charities of Spalding; The Gentlemen's Society; The Modern State of Spalding; Antiquities; Places of Worship; Public Amusement; Literature; The Reservoir; Wykeham Chapel; Cowbit and Pyke Hall, etc, etc.

### KESTEVEN'S BOAST TO HOLLAND - BUT NO TULIPS!

In Drayton's *Polyolbion* published in 1612 appears the twenty-fifth song, KESTEVEN'S ORATION, in which she boasts of her climatical superiority over her southern neighbour, Holland.

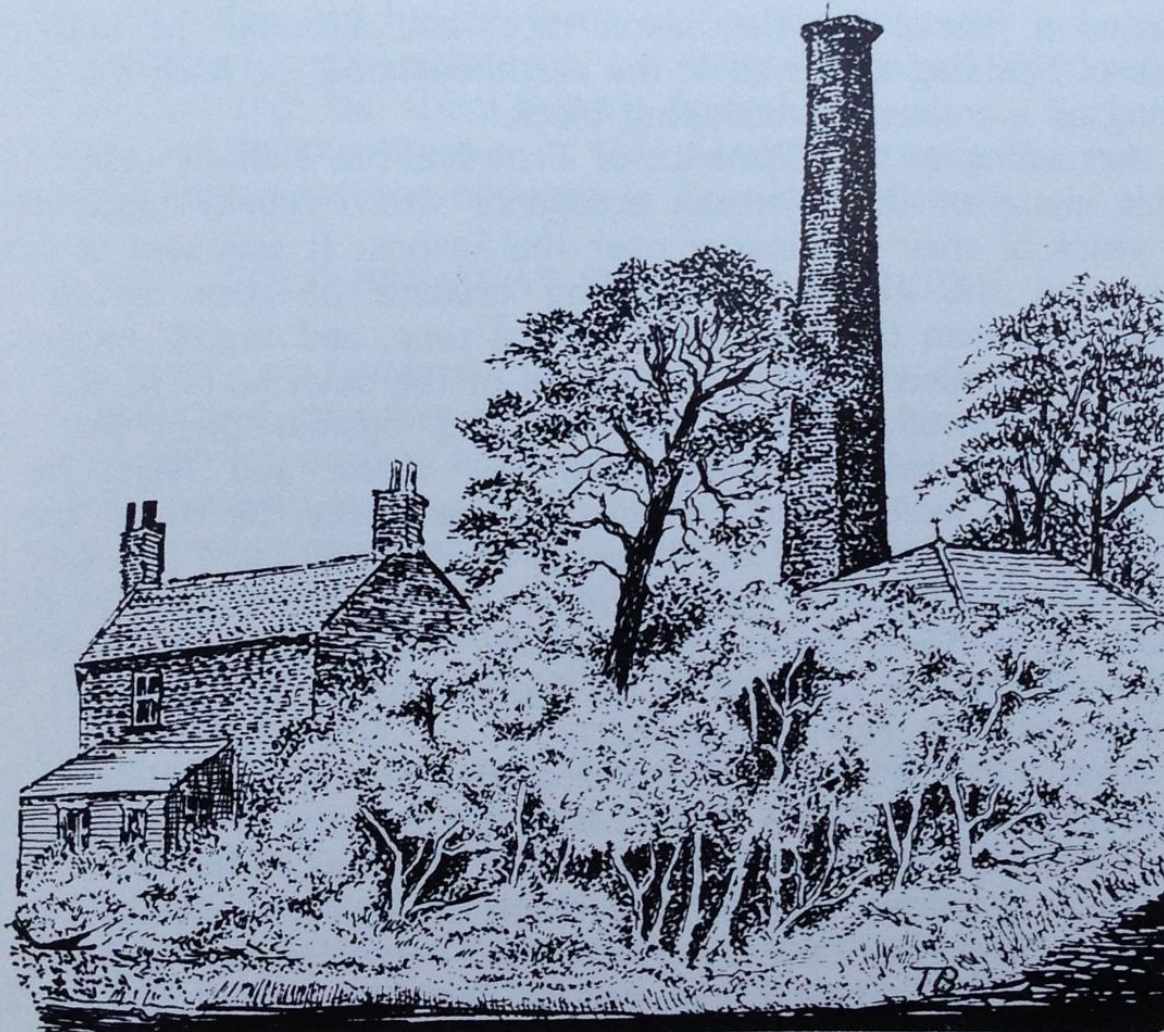


. . . "quoth shee, O how I hate  
Thus of her foggy Fennes, to heare rude Holland prate,  
That with her Fish and Fowle, here keepeth such a coyle,  
As her unwholesome ayre, and more unwholesome soyle."

At that period, South Lincolnshire had the unenviable reputation of being insalubrious. *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain* provides the following notes on "the Air" of each county with the Fenland:

LINCOLNSHIRE - "The Air upon the East and South part is both thick and foggy by reason of the Fens and unsolute grounds, but therewithal very moderate and pleasing. Her graduation being removed from the equator to the degree of 53, and the winds that are sent off her still working seas do disperse those vapours from all power of hurt."

So Kesteven, put that in your pipe and smoke it. And remember the tulip fields!



*Old Engine House, Pinchbeck Marsh*



# Spalding Priory

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF A WEALTHY BENEDICTINE HOUSE

**I**N 1051 the manor of Spalding was granted to Crowland abbey for the relief of its necessities by Thorold of Buckenhale, Sheriff of Lincoln, a notable benefactor of Crowland. In this way sustenance was provided for six monks who moved from the parent abbey to Spalding. It was really an economic arrangement which temporarily lessened the expenses incurred by Crowland. A "little wooden chapel" was granted to the monks at Spalding with certain land to support them by Ivo Tailbos, a Norman, who had enjoyed the honour of being William the Conqueror's standard bearer at the Battle of Hastings. Ivo later developed a hatred for the Saxon race, and although he married the heiress of Spalding and lived in the neighbourhood, he used the priory at Spalding as a convenient whipping block.

According to the *Chronicle of Crowland* Ivo Tailbois seems to have had his share of that Norman arrogance which cruelly underlined the early years of their dominance over the Saxons. It was said of him that he despised the monks of Spalding because of their Saxon blood. Through this man the monks had a hard time, and Ingulf, chronicler at Crowland, recorded: "By the instigation of the devil he (Ivo) was roused to such an extremity of hatred and fury against them that he did everything he could to annoy and vex them; and being his near neighbour they were indeed very much at his mercy. He would lame their cattle, kill their swine and browbeat all their tenants and servants in his manorial courts until at length, worn out by the hardships of their position, after vain efforts to propitiate his servants with gifts, the brethren of Spalding returned to the mother house (at Crowland), taking with them all their moveable property."

After a time a single monk was sent to Spalding to celebrate Divine mass at the wooden chapel of St. Mary for the sake of the people living there. This monk had the misfortune to be drowned in the fen one day, a great flood spreading around as a result of a severe storm. No other would volunteer to take his place and services at Spalding were discontinued. This man's demise was to dramatically alter the course of the development of Spalding Priory.



Ivo Tailbois saw this as a sign and was well pleased, he "being overjoyed because (it seemed to him) that the Lord Himself seemed to be fighting with him against Crowland." The Norman sent to the abbot of St. Nicholas, Angers, and offered him the manor of Spalding for the support of a prior and five monks, and promised that they would have a suitably sufficient place or cell prepared for them. The abbot accepted the offer and Spalding became a cell of St. Nicholas, Angers, this confirmed by William the First. The gift was renewed in 1129 by Countess Lucy the widow of the founder. In so doing she displayed sympathy with her Norman husband and scant regard for her Saxon ancestry. The charter was later confirmed by William de Romara, her son.

Throughout the twelfth century the abbots of Crowland endeavoured to recover their former possessions at Spalding without success. The Norman priors at the latter place were seen and acted openly as rivals and enemies of Crowland. It was recorded that at the end of the reign of Henry the Second the most powerful men of the wapentake of Elloe, led by the Prior of Spalding himself, marched into the Abbot of Crowland's enclosures, cut down woods and alder beds, dug up turf and set free the abbot's cattle from his meadows. Such actions led to long and tedious suits over the marshes between the two places and in 1193 judgement was obtained in Crowland's favour.

### **SOLD BREAD AT SPALDING MARKET**

The priory at Spalding expanded very rapidly during the twelfth century, lands and churches being added to it and lawsuits between the monks and former owners were many. Disputes continued between the priory and Crowland abbey usually involving ownership of marsh where both establishments were engaged in rearing cattle. Eventually the Prior of Spalding agreed that he would refrain from offending in that respect. However, no sooner had this been agreed a baker of Crowland under the employ of the abbot was caught selling bread in Spalding market. He was promptly put on a tumbrel!

It was much the same story throughout the thirteenth century, and it seemed that any excuse was used to stir up the rivalry between both houses. For instance, they could not or would not agree as to who should maintain the bridges, gutters, dykes and ditches of Spalding. In 1329 the Abbot of Crowland accused the prior of having cut in pieces the timber beams used to strengthen the dikes which barred water from flooding Crowland abbey.



## WAXED IN WEALTH AND IMPORTANCE

It was not until 1332 that the two houses formerly entered a league of brotherhood which enabled each to share the spiritual goods of the other, meditations, masses, vigils, etc. When a monk died in either house his absolutions and requiem would be celebrated in both. Spalding priory occupied important and influential positions and with its possessions including lands and several villages became very wealthy. In the thirteenth century the prior claimed lordship over Weston, Spalding, Pinchbeck and Moulton and other places and all shipwrecks for three leagues along the coast were seized by him. He held free warrens and numerous fisheries, the income in 1294 amounting to £515 0s. 7d.

Not unnaturally the monks, having procured good terms with Crowland, turned their attentions to the parent abbey at Angers and started negotiations to free their house from its influence. Angers had originally supplied priors to Spalding and those heads were placed there entirely at the abbot's pleasure. Periodically they were called to France taking with them all the money they could carry. Eventually the Bishop of Lincoln, Hugh of Wells, and Ralph, Earl of Chester as patron of Spalding priory invited the French abbot to a conference. As a result in 1232 it was agreed that future priors should be elected in England and instituted by the diocese with full rights temporal and spiritual. The abbot of Angers, however, would retain the right to visit Spalding as long as those occasions were not excessively expensive and burdensome to the Lincolnshire house.

The abbot continued the right of the professions of novices at Angers unless he chose to allow them to make their professions at Spalding, and four monks from Angers were to be maintained at the priory but would fall under the obedience of the prior although they were liable to be recalled to France from time to time. This arrangement did not give full satisfaction to either party and before 1241 two bulls were published against the prior of Spalding for apparently disregarding this arrangement and failing to send novices to Angers.

Another agreement transpired in 1242 and this was confirmed three years later by Pope Innocent. By this it was expected that the abbot of Angers was to visit Spalding priory every three years and receive the professions of novices there rather than require them to travel the considerable distance to Angers. Furthermore the French abbot's stay at Spalding was not to exceed one month and his usual attendants which amounted to a great number not to exceed fifteen.



## LOSSES THROUGH INUNDATION

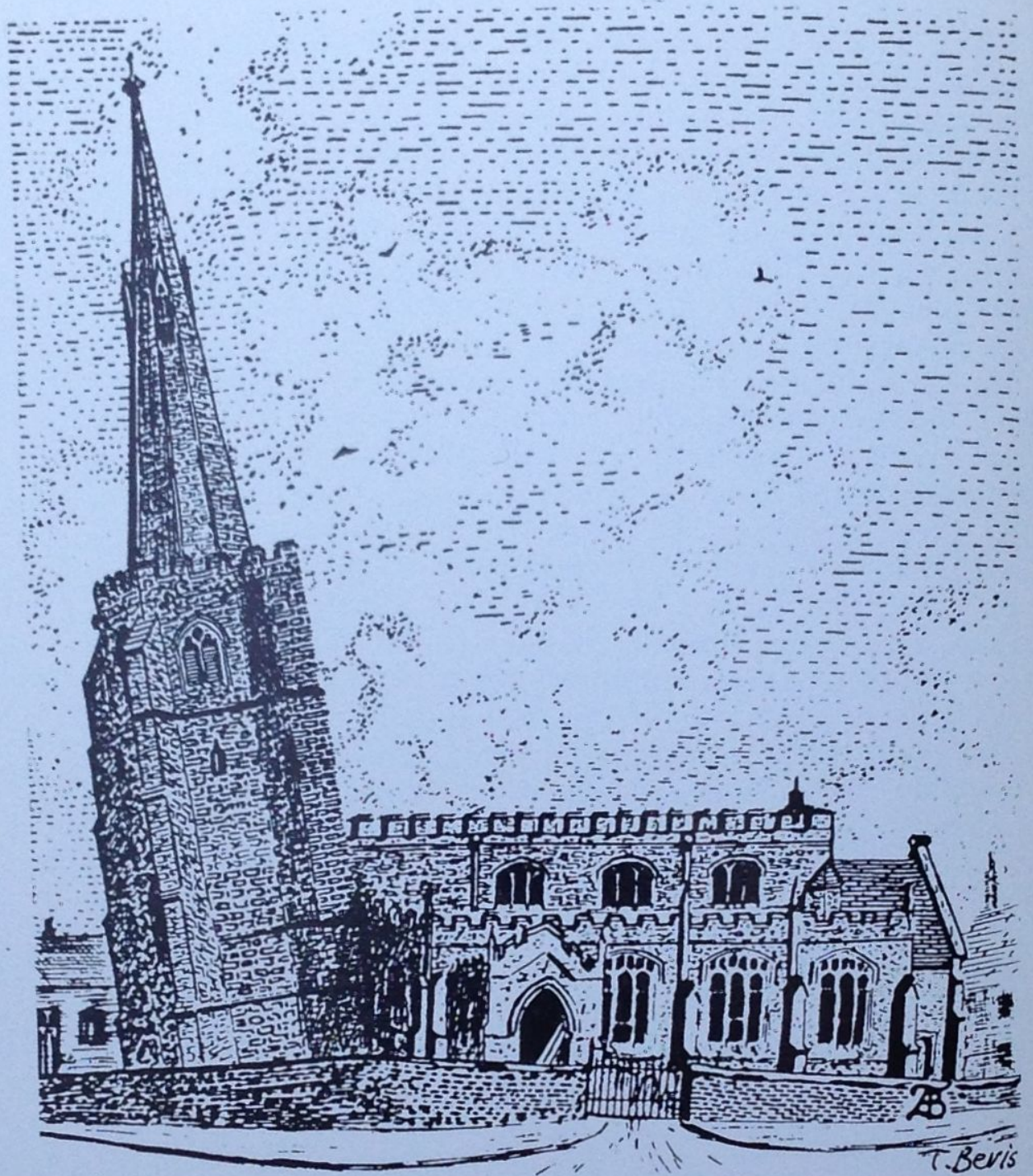
The Lincolnshire coast and adjacent marsh were frequently inundated. Spalding priory held considerable property much of which lay in the marsh and it suffered loss due to flooding at the close of the thirteenth century. Monks experienced trouble in other aspects, too, i.e. for usurping the possession of Deeping Manor, and on a political point in 1316 the prior was charged with carrying corn and victuals to the Scots. In 1316 and 1318 the monks had difficulties in obtaining their rents and market tolls and in 1324 they were accused of harbouring and selling the goods of a traitor. During the wars in France a great deal of anxiety and loss attended English monasteries, several being dependent on foreign abbeys. At that time Spalding was not yet entirely independent from the mother house at Angers. In 1275 the King confiscated forty marks due to Angers and the Prior of Spalding viewed this as the appropriate time to cut off all remaining links with that French house.

He expelled the four French monks staying at Spalding, but the King, feeling that he had been taken too literally, ordered the prior to reinstate them again. However, thanks to the intercession of the priory's patron, Henry de Lacey, an agreement came about which made Spalding virtually independent and for the first time in its history the priory was granted the privilege of governing itself.

About the middle of the fifteenth century the monastery was considerably in debt due mainly to mismanagement of its revenues. It seemed to have recovered in the last fifty years leading to the Suppression and in 1534 was one of Lincolnshire's richest monasteries. When the Act of Supremacy was passed, there were nineteen monks at the priory besides the prior and sub-prior. At that time many monasteries in the land had depleted in numbers of monks, partly due to disillusionment and through concern at disagreement between the King and the Pope. Spalding priory held its numbers well to the end.

In 1526 the Bishop of Lincoln endeavoured very consistently and unsuccessfully to persuade Prior Thomas of Spalding to resign. Apparently the bishop was under some pressure from Cardinal Wolsey to have the prior resign so that the Cardinal could replace him with someone else to suit his "own honourable pleasure and purpose." Currying favour with this man of high ecclesiastical rank the bishop had informed the Cardinal that the prior, good and gentle though he was, easily fell beneath the influence of others, especially the abbot of Peterborough. The head held on, however, and died still prior of Spalding.





*"Surfleet church is all awry . . ." Many old churches in Fenland display tendencies to lean, but none more noticeable than Surfleet - England's very own Pisa. The steeple houses twelve bells, said to be the lightest ring of that number in the world.*



Strange events surrounded this kindly man in his old age. Rumour had it that he had in fact died and in 1528 the abbot of Bardney attempted to solicit Cardinal Wolsey to appoint a successor from one of his own monks. It made no difference as Thomas of Spalding signed the acknowledgement of Supremacy in 1534 but between that year and 1540 he died. The last prior Richard Elsyn alias Palmer probably realised that his time in office was tenuous and it was not long before his name headed the pension list giving the names of the monks who would leave when the priory surrendered to the Crown.

At the time of the Lincoln Rebellion the prior refused to contribute any men to the Royal forces. He had refused, he said, because he was a spiritual man. The prior seems to have been on good terms with Cromwell, "devourer of the monasteries," as he managed to get away with it and was not brought to trial. But he could not escape the King's commissioners and Spalding priory surrendered its entire property in 1540. Over the following century its stones, timber and lead were removed and sold cheaply and the site was eventually used to build houses and roads. Only a few fragments of this great religious house remain. The prior received a pension of £132 6s. 8d. and the monks received pensions varying between £12 and £1 6s. 8d. Greatest losers one supposes were the desperate poor that thronged the priory gates day after day and received food from the brethren who also tended to their sores and other afflictions. The Dissolution introduced such ponderous changes to society that the ripples were felt for the following two centuries and led to the poor laws to relieve distressed people.

### WOMEN BROUGHT TO THE PRIORY

In many ways the monasteries did good works especially involving medicine and learning. They initiated the first schools and produced brilliant men of science and spiritual understanding. They were also known to practice scandalous things. Some priors at Spalding were unpopular, among them John the Almoner who was the head from 1253 to 1274. It was alleged that he had given shelter in the priory to certain felons and had maliciously detained individuals until they had paid or granted him whatsoever he wanted. He exercised no care and had neglected a bridge to such extent that it fell down with disastrous effects upon the area. Like most other similar establishments Spalding priory had its cupboard skeletons, although generally the order of the house in the fifteenth century was described as "quite good" considering that the



standard of life, secular and religious, was low at that time. The prior, Robert Holland, tended to let life go on at the Priory as best it may and was accused of being away too often. He seems to have been somewhat lax in his administration and he allowed wine to be sold in the cloister with the result that large numbers of secular folk congregated there and the monks were hard pressed to find space to study. It was deemed unworthy to be heard laughing and apparently dignity of the house suffered as there was sometimes laughter at the chapel of faults! All monasteries underwent Visitations from time to time. On such occasions faults and accusations were scrutinised and measures taken to eliminate them. At Spalding the officers discharging these duties heard the usual complaints about food, loss of pittances, insolence of the prior's servants and neglect of prayer and study. It was not, of course, uncommon for some monks to fall to the attractions of the opposite sex. Such was the experience of two of the brethren who were accused of being over familiar with women, of revealing to them the affairs of the priory and indulging in slanderous chat through ignorance of scripture. One of the chaplains was even accused of bringing women into the house.

When Spalding Priory was dissolved a large amount of money was distributed as alms in fulfilment of various bequests. On the five vigils of our Lady 42s. was given to the poor; an annual dole of 5s. 3d. was given in memory of two benefactors, and 23s. 4d. given in memory of former priors. Cloth and "pardon beans" were purchased for peace of the soul of Countess Lucy the foundress.

### PRIORS OF SPALDING

Nigel, occurs temp. Henry II	Walter of Halton, elec. 1318
Herbert, 1149 and 1156	Thomas of Nassington, elec 1333
Geoffrey	John Esterfield, elec. 1353
Warin occurs 1182	John of Moulton, elec. 1404
Jocelyn occurs 1195 and 1198	Robert Holland, elec. 1421
John the Spaniard	William of Pinchbeck
Nicholas occurs 1203-4	Thomas II occurs 1462
Ralf Mansel 1224, died 1229	Thomas III, elec. 1475
Simon of Hautberg, elec. 1229	Robert occurs 1504
John the Almoner, elec. 1253	Robert Boston occurs 1522
William of Littleport, elec. 1274	Thomas Spalding
Clement of Hatfield, elec. 1294	Richard Elsyn (Palmer) occurs 1540



The common seal of Spalding has obverse representing the Virgin with crown seated on a carved throne, the Child on her left knee. In base beneath a pointed arch, slightly trefoiled with gables of church-like structure at the sides, the prior half-length in prayer.

SIGIL . . . ARIE : ET : BEATI . . . HOLAI  
SPAL . . . GIE

### HOLBEACH WORTHIES

Spalding had Maurice Johnson. Holbeach roll of fame points out William Stukeley and Henry Rands. The former-mentioned was an attorney's son born here in 1687. He had an intense love of learning, liberally mixed with old superstitions. A zealous student of the past, he was one of the founders, in 1718, of the Society of Antiquarians. Henry Rands became a monk at Crowland and, in that calling, was known as Henry Holbeach. He became a famous ecclesiastic and put his hand to compiling the Prayer Book. In 1547 he was appointed Bishop of Lincoln, but to his discredit surrendered the See to the Crown at considerable profit to himself. Another Holbeach worthy, Susannah Centlivre, was born in 1667. A dramatist, Susannah wrote her first play at the age of twenty-three, and wrote, on average, a play each year until her death in 1723. She invented the comic plot and excelled in humorous dialogue.

A disturbing event occurred at Holbeach many years ago. Four well-known and respected gamblers vowed that whoever died first would have to play a hand in the last game. Eventually one of the trio died and during the hours of darkness his body was exhumed from the grave by his friends. It was dressed up and carried into the church where a card table had been set up in readiness. A man passing the church, seeing a light through one of the windows decided to investigate. To his horror he found four men sitting round the table, each holding a hand of cards. The dead man was the dummy! A case was heard but the three friends were discharged. Shortly afterwards they disappeared from the area and were never seen again.



## *Finally . . .*

**MANY MOULTONS** - A few villages in the Marshland area of Lincolnshire extend into the Fens proper. Moulton has its Moulton Seas End (about six miles from the Wash) and, at a greater distance, Moulton Common. Lonelier still is Moulton Chapel and beyond that Moulton Fen, a short distance from Crowland which is eighteen miles from the sea.

**THE POLL TAX RETURNS** of 1397 reveal that Spalding district (Holland) was the wealthiest part of England. One imagines what with the incredulous virility of the silt land and the products, i.e. vegetables and, of course, tulips, it is not far removed from a similar status in the modern age.

**THE FEN AGUE**, sometimes described as the "hot and cold shivering sickness" was really malaria, anciently common to the fen and marsh areas. In 1636 someone wrote that the "high and mighty Crowland sack" was the only remedy for the "devilish stinging of their humming gnats." The Crowland sack was a kind of fine mesh which the wealthy used to protect themselves at night from the intentions of the pests that loved nothing more than to descend on a warm body and help themselves to a feast of blood while the unwitting owner slept. The ordinary fen folk smoked opium during the day to ward off the insects. Another Fen alternative was this: Nail three horseshoes to the foot of the bed and tap them with a hammer, saying:

*Feyther, Son and Holy Ghost,  
Naale the divil to this poast;  
Throice I strikes with holy crook,  
Won for God and one for Wod and won for Lok.*

**SPALDING BRINKS** - Arguably the finest riverside Georgian aspect is seen along the famous Wisbech Brinks. Spalding, too, is greatly enhanced by charming Georgian residences overlooking the River Welland. Many of these houses were spoilt with later additions of bay windows and other alterations. The worst transgression upon this area was that of dividing Welland Terrace by erecting a monstrous cinema before 1940, with disharmonious consequences.



**FENREEVES AND THE LAW** - Fenreeves and dykereeves were responsible for maintaining essential services to Fen communities. It was necessary to establish rules governing the use of arable meadows and commons and marsh and to appoint by-law men to ascertain that the rules were not abused. The economy of the Fens greatly depended on these practices and Fenreeves held a high and respected position within local communities. In 1591 by-laws were drawn up for Moulton, Pinchbeck, Spalding and Weston, and each year were read openly in the churches and before the manor court assembly. For instance, inhabitants were consistently reminded that fishermen and swanherdsmen had, if necessary, to place their services and skills at the Fenreeves' disposal. Among several things this involved breaking the ice when dykes had frozen. No fowl must be caught in the breeding season and that any person intending to lie in the fen all night in pursuit of fowl should be there by 8.00 p.m. and depart at 2.00 a.m. The Fenreeves governed the rights of common but this was slowly undermined by restrictive attitudes by which no room could be found in villages and towns for young married couples to build cottages. As a result newly weds began to erect their homes on the commons. Usually the Fenreeves were sympathetic to their plight and would fine them sixpence and forget the transgression.

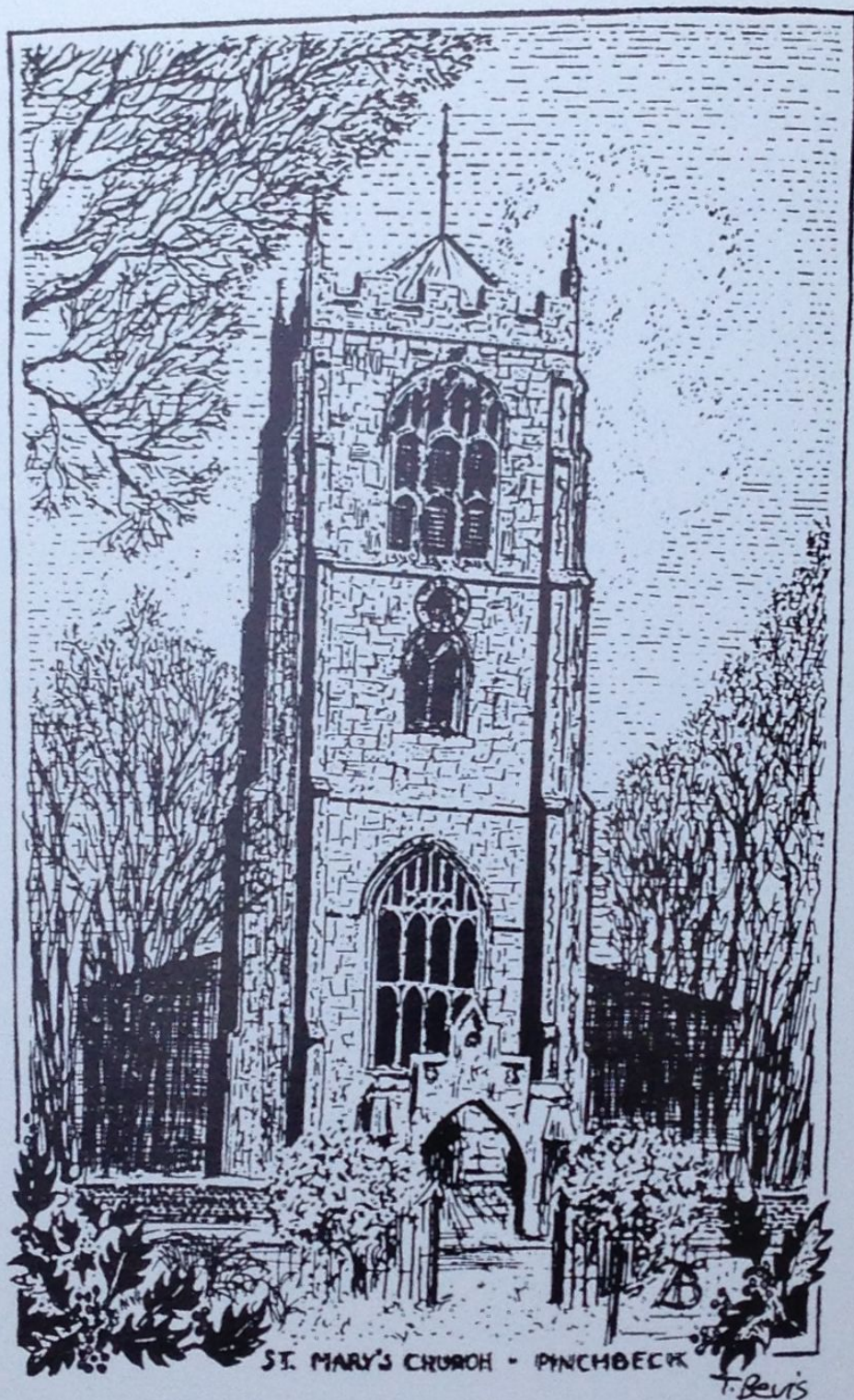
*THE FOLLOWING ITEMS REPORTED IN 1904 ARE REPRODUCED  
WITH KIND PERMISSION OF THE SPALDING GUARDIAN*

**COUNCILLOR A. GREEN** is the latest Spalding motorist. He purchased a small green car when in America recently and it arrived in Spalding some days ago. Up to the present it has not been seen much on the streets, something having "gone wrong with the works." - (Jan 23).

**MR. A. BEALES** has recently had a gas engine and electric dynamo erected in his up-to-date workshop, in order to cope with the increasing demand of motor car and cycle batteries. It is his intention to also light his premises by electricity instead of gas, so that he will be the first tradesman of the town to light up in this manner, though in the little town of Long Sutton one enterprising firm has done so for two or three years. - (Jan 23).

**SPALDING SHIPWRECK SOCIETY** - The supper of this old established society took place as usual in the Ship Albion inn - (Jan 23)





ST. MARY'S CHURCH - PINCHBECK

T. BEVIS

"Pinchbeck church is in a hole . . ." The fine 15th century tower of St. Mary's church, watches over the village. Leaning a little, the tower is attached to a fine nave erected in the 13th century. A heraldic tomb commemorates Sir Thomas Pinchbeck who, it is thought, donated the clerestory and nave roofs.



### **BENEATH THE HEADING "ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO" (1804)**

- Life was held very cheaply one hundred years ago. One poor woman was hanged for stealing thirty yards of material. Here are cases of death sentences for burglary and forgery. Guilty - death: John Atkinson convicted of forgery; at the Lincolnshire Assizes, Marshall, Sawyer and Wakelyn were three men convicted of burglary. The Judge delivered the sentence of death in a manner peculiarly awful and impressive. The unhappy men were deeply affected and when his Lordship had concluded, he himself burst into tears and wept bitterly. The scene was beyond example, distressing. The men left for execution die certainly. Their sentence will be carried into effect at Lincoln this day week. - (Jan. 20).

**FURTHER OUTBREAKS OF SMALLPOX** - We regret to state that further suspected cases of smallpox have occurred in Spalding, and that four cases are now isolated at the Infectious Diseases Hospital. There appears to be very little doubt that all the cases have been introduced from Boston by a young fellow who was lodging with a woman who has been removed to the Fever Hospital at Boston. - (Jan. 20).

**ACCIDENT** - Whilst returning from a preaching appointment on Sunday evening, Mr. Martindale's trap was run into between Weston and Spalding and both shafts broken, the occupant also sustaining injury. The driver of the other trap is not known, he not stopping to render assistance. - (Jan. 20).

**IN THE LION'S MOUTH** - A man describing himself from Sheffield was on Tuesday sentenced to fourteen days hard labour for acting as a pedlar without a certificate. Superintendent Osborn told the magistrates that the prisoner went into Mr. Seymour's tobacconist's shop, Sheep Market, Spalding, whilst he was there. He told Mrs. Seymour that he had been thrown out of work by the failure of a Sheffield cutlery firm, and he tried to induce her to buy a pair of scissors which he himself had made. She refused and he then offered a comb, but without result. Then he asked witness if he could show him anything and he replied, "Yes, your certificate." He had not got one and witness locked him up. - (Jan. 20).



**SALE OF "YE OLDE WHITE HORSE INN"** - The sale of the White Horse Inn on Tuesday afternoon . . . attracted a crowd of interested spectators, though bidders were few. The house which has a splendid corner near the High Bridge is one of the oldest buildings of Spalding, having been erected in 1553 out of the materials of the priory, by William Willesbye, for a residence and its numerous gables, thatched roof and white-washed walls always attract the eyes of visitors. It was formerly known as Brewery House. Attached and belonging thereto is a dwelling house and corn chandler's shop, a blacksmith's shop and smithy, a small brewery, extensive stables, granaries and outhouses and a large yard with two entrances. The property sold for £1,800. - (Jan. 20).

**FLOODS** - The heavy rains of the past few days have flooded areas of land in the district. On Wednesday night most of the water courses were running bank-full and some had overflowed, and early this (Friday) morning another deluge made matters worse. The agricultural outlook gets worse from day to day. The land is in a wretched plight and it is said that in many fields the seed corn has been absolutely ruined by the continuous saturation. In its present state nothing can be done upon the land and many farm hands are consequently out of employment. The water in the Wash rose as much as six inches in two hours, and there is now more than at any time during the past twelve months. - (Feb. 6).

**THE LAST STRAW** - Large and somewhat unsightly telephone poles are now to be seen in nearly every street of the town, and the telephone being such a useful adjunct to business no great objection is raised, but the Urban Council have done quite right in refusing an application to erect one in the Market Place. - (Feb. 6).

**AMOROUS LETTER** - Mr. R. Wallis of Thorney Fen has a queer tale to tell which amorous letter writers and receivers will do well to note. Like most Fen farmers he brought a load of soot for distributing over his land. In patrolling the land afterwards he espied a discoloured letter and, as Fen farmers are not less inquisitive than other individuals, he ventured to read it. It turned out to be an amatory epistle from a well known local gentleman to an equally well known local young lady. Mr. and Mrs. Wallis deemed it best to at once destroy it. The inference is that the letter being of a somewhat compromising character - the young lady put it on the fire and the draught took it up the chimney, and so it came to find its way with the soot to Thorney Fen. - (April 30).



## The Spalding Gentlemen's Society

This famous Fenland Society continues to survive and pursues its original purpose. In a literary and collective sense the Society heaped upon itself abundant fame, and past members included the most distinguished literary, antiquarian and scientific names this country produced. A good inkling of the local gentry's life in 1710 emerges from the Society's rules recorded in the first minute book printed in Professor Piggott's life of William Stukeley. It conjures up the scene, some two-hundred-and-eighty years ago of local, knowledgeable gentlemen seeking sanctuary from the cares of life within the smoked filled rooms of the "Club." Relaxing by the comforting glow of a good, old-fashioned fire, with an ounce of rich tobacco, and squinting in the candlelight while inhaling a pinch of snuff at the cheer of a tankard of ale placed beside them. There they perused the *Spectator* and *Tatler* and enlivened the proceedings with discussions of political nature as well as discoursing the merits of Latin and Greek dictionaries. They listened with coveted interest to someone (preferably with letters) explaining the latest acquisition, perhaps an artifact or literary work, to be added to the growing and famous collection.

Halcyon days they were – for those who could afford the luxury of a society such as that at Spalding. Many similar organisations sprang up and emulated that renowned Lincolnshire institution. Many floundered by the wayside and dissolved. One supposes that the Spalding gentlemen ran the race so well, justifiably earning the accolade of distinguishment in becoming Britain's second oldest antiquarian and literary society. Some defunct societies had strange titles like that of the Brazen Nose Society founded by Stukeley and named after an unusual knocker purloined from the Brazen Nose College, Oxford, in the thirteenth century. Members of a society with a title such as that may have had to bear the brunt of undeserved ridicule and it may be for that reason that the society ran out of steam – and members!

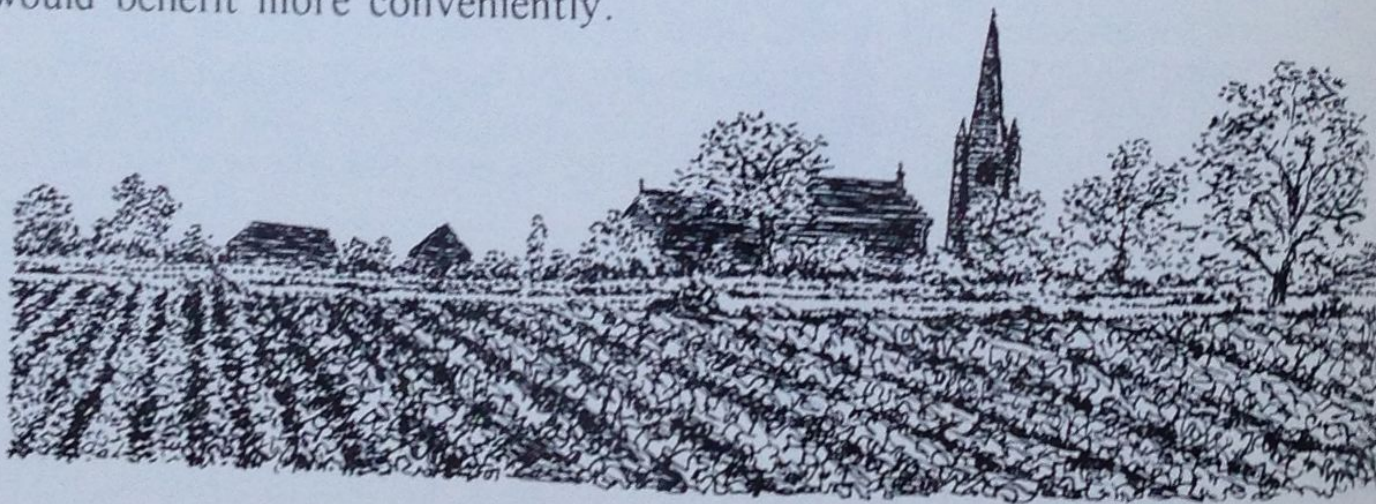
When the much travelled Maurice Johnson returned to Spalding he may have decided that the old town needed a breath of fresh air as well as a good dose of cultural medicine. At any rate he thought fit to give it the benefit of learned discussions and lectures – but sadly this did not follow the pattern of later institutions such as working men's institutes. His society was designed to attract the upper crust yet one ought to bear in mind that at least some of the individual members were generously disposed to the numerous existing charities at the time.



Spalding Gentlemen's Society was founded as a private club based on the laudable merits of extending and sharing knowledge among its members. As with all such institutions privacy of the members is regarded as sacrosanct and the Society's greatest acquisitions remain virtually under lock and key, with only the barest public airing now and then. But there, perhaps that is how Maurice Johnson, Isaac Newton, William Stukely and Beaupré Bell wanted it to be.

### THE PETERBOROUGH GENTLEMEN'S SOCIETY

Not as fortunate, a similar society which one may describe as the offspring of Spalding, and formed at Peterborough was, due to an increasing dearth of interest obliged to dissolve. About the middle of the eighteenth century it formed a "will" which stipulated that in the event of its demise the collection should be left to the Dean and Chapter of Peterborough cathedral and should not be divided among any of its members. The Gentlemen's Society of Peterborough pursued literary correspondence with scholars all over the country and it was in constant communication with members of the parent society at Spalding. Eventually the Peterborough society degenerated into something far different to what was intended. It became a mere circulating library and was soon dissolved. It was seen at the time that the valuable collection of literary works and antiques would best serve the interests of the inhabitants of Peterborough and that scholars could receive the benefit of such a vast collection of cultural and knowledgeable items were they housed not at the Cathedral Library with limited access, but deposited with the Corporation Library where people of intellectual disposition would benefit more conveniently.





# SNIPPETS FROM OLD SPALDING TOWN

## *The Author*

Trevor Bevis was born at Pinchbeck in 1930. He moved to March at the outbreak of the Second World War when his father took up a post at Whitemoor railway marshalling yards. Trevor became a printer for a provincial newspaper at March. Writing has always been a great pastime with him and he has penned more than two hundred articles for newspapers and magazines and written and published in excess of seventy books – hard and softback – mainly about the Fens and East Anglia, plus a historical novel, a mixture of fact and fiction. He has an insatiable nose for the past, and additional hobbies, photography, art, cycling and travel combine ideally with writing and publishing activities. He is frequently seen cycling along Fen roads – "the healthiest way to see the countryside" – armed with camera, notebook and sarnies. A keen campanologist, the art places him advantageously in his study of Fenland's magnificent old churches.

The author has always regarded himself as a Lincolnshire man and entertains happy memories of Pinchbeck and Spalding. Having written on a large number of subjects involving the southern Fen area, he decided it was high time he produced a light literary work centred on the district of his youth, if only for old times sake. He chose several little "snippets" which, with their intrinsic local interest, are unlikely to bore readers with a mass of details and statistics. It is the author's hope that this modest literary offering will be acceptable in the spirit with which it is intended: to impart a little knowledge gleaned from an area so richly associated with the past.

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