An aerial photograph showing a winding river with reddish-brown banks, likely the River Stour in South Holland. The surrounding landscape is a mix of green fields and brown, possibly drained, land. The river flows from the top left towards the bottom right, with several smaller tributaries joining it.

Strangely, in what most people regard as low land, Holland meant 'high land'; higher, that is, than the adjacent sea and fen. Within this high lowland South Holland's story is a curious and exciting one. It is a story of clever and resourceful pioneers moving onto land newly emerging from the sea, fighting the elements to stay there and working together to make a living. They made defensive banks to keep themselves and their land dry. They then pushed out onto the wet fens and marshes literally making their land as they went along. This land they made proved to be rich and fertile. Always attuned to the landscape the people exploited many different resources. It was their newly won land that was eventually to propel them to the forefront of arable farming in Britain. It was a land that since its earliest times has needed people to keep it dry and drained, to harvest its rich resources and, in general, to maintain it. It is a story of incomers, migrants moving here from the time before the Romans through to the present day. This then is a taste of the remarkable district that is South Holland.

A solid white square graphic located on the dark green background of the bottom section of the page.

## WIDE HORIZONS: A HISTORY OF SOUTH HOLLAND'S LANDSCAPE AND PEOPLE





# WIDE HORIZONS:

## A HISTORY OF SOUTH HOLLAND'S LANDSCAPE AND PEOPLE

Paul Cope-Faulkner, Hilary Healey and Tom Lane  
with contributions from John Honnor and Liam Robinson



*Aerial view of salt marshes off the Wash coast.*



South Holland District Council  
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*'This Country which the ocean has laied to the land, as the inhabitants beleeeve, by sands heaped and cast together, they term it Silt, is assailed on the one side with the said Ocean sea, and in the other by the mighty confluence of waters from out of the higher countries...'*

**W. Camden Britannia 1586**

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**Glossary.** By necessity some words are used which are either old, out of common use, or in other ways obscure. Such words are explained in a Glossary at the end of the book. Words in the Glossary are shown in the text thus:- **osiers**

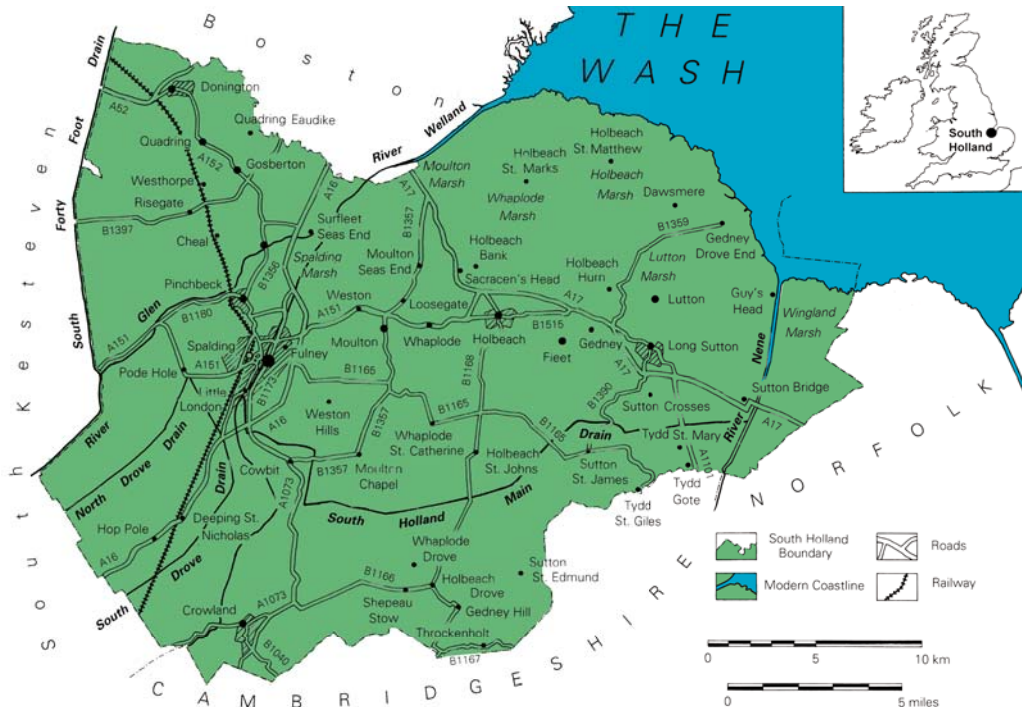


## INTRODUCTION

This book is about a special place and the people who have fashioned it and made it their home through time. It is about a landscape that has been sometime water and sometime land and sometime neither one nor the other, but just wet land. It is about pioneers fighting for a foothold. It is about tenacity, communities who are prepared to battle for a place of their own, working together for the common good. These are people attuned to the landscape, understanding it and harvesting its resources respectfully.

The prehistory and earliest history of the area reflected a time when the natural environment dictated what could be achieved. It was a time when humans exploited the resources but could not take control of the landscape. But gradually the balance tipped with the people taking charge, taming the waters and managing the land by means of banks and dykes, drains and ditches.

This then is the story of South Holland and those who have shaped it by their skills and endeavours and those who have lived in it and reaped the benefits. It is about the land of the big skies, from the golden silts on the northern and eastern side to the black brooding peats in the south and west, from seabank to fenbank and beyond. Most importantly it is for and about the people who made South Holland what it is today, the opportunists, the adventurers and their ancestors and their successors – you.



*South Holland c.2000*





## GUY'S HEAD - A PERSONAL VIEW

"It is noon on the sea bank at Guy's Head, north of Sutton Bridge, where the waters of the river Nene and the Wash meet. The outbound freshwaters from middle England blend and harmonise with the incoming salt waters of the North Sea. It is low tide and, while I gaze landward across South Holland, behind me are noisy seabirds - migrant birds, wintering birds, birds of passage, European birds and native birds, together exploiting hungrily the resources of the newly exposed muddy marshes. Somehow, it recalls the way that countless pioneering people of all origins have, like the birds, used their skills and initiative to adapt and live off this extraordinary landscape. These are fen people – fishers, fowlers and, finally, farmers. Below me a lone worker, a solitary tractor driver, stirs a ploughed field ahead of potato planting, the dust and smell of disturbed fertile soil spiralling around on the constant breeze. It is a smell that changes suddenly to sea-side, then back again, the true essence of South Holland. Beyond the potatoes is a field tinged green with the spring growth of an infant cereal crop. Winding through the centre of the field, a band of the crop is a darker green where it grows above a former creek, a reminder of the origins of this land.

The bank I'm standing on is just one of a series which keeps apart the land and water like a stern referee. To my right is a sluice in the bank controlling the watery flows of the Lutton Leam. Look left and the twin 'lighthouses', built to create a grand entrance to the Nene channel and opened in 1831 but never lit, reflect the patchy sunlight. That on the

*Nene outfall at  
Guy's Head.  
Wash reservoir  
is the mound  
in the distance  
(2009)*



east bank was, famously, the home of Sir Peter Scott in the 1930s and the place where he was inspired to pursue his wildlife studies, paintings and collections. Where to look next? Behind again where, beyond the marshes, looms a curious, unnatural 'island', all that remains of an early scheme to create giant freshwater reservoirs in the Wash and one of many schemes to transform the Wash into something or other new. But looking inland again the rich farmland is a reminder that not all the schemes to infill the Wash have failed. South Holland was once the Wash. But now arable farmland stretches to the horizon, the light silts fertile from millions of aquatic remains in the soil. There are trees, more than might be expected, unnatural, but all planted protectively as shelter around farms, guarding against the whipping wind.

But this scene is not timeless. Here, some 12,000 years ago, I would have been standing many metres lower down, on an ancient land surface gouged out by ice-sheets. Behind me what is now the North Sea was then part of the European mainland where I could have walked across to what is now Denmark and Germany. Move on 7,000 years and, while others built Stonehenge, here I would have been standing in the North Sea; another 4,000 years and the Norman Conquest would have found me in the wide multi-channelled estuary of the river Nene. Today I stand on the sea bank, on made ground, firmly between wet and dry, land and sea yet central to this astonishing landscape. This is the place that articulates the soul and spirit of South Holland."

*Lighthouses on the Nene outfall at Guy's Head. The lighthouse on the right is where Sir Peter Scott gained his love of painting wildfowl (1985)*

*Tom Lane 6<sup>th</sup> April 2009*





## A VARIETY OF FENS

The Fenland of South Holland is not all the same. The silt soils (above) were deposited when the land was flooded by the sea while the peat fens (below) were created by the remains of waterlogged prehistoric plants and are the result of later freshwater flooding. Sometimes near-complete prehistoric trees, usually called '**bog-oaks**', are dug up from the peat.

*Brooding Fenland  
sky on the silts at  
Spalding Common  
(1985)*



*Draining of the  
peats. Crowland  
Common was  
formerly known  
as '**Goggushland**'.  
Even the name has  
a watery sound  
(1983)*



*A 'Fen Blow' at Crowland Common. Drained and dried peaty topsoil is blown away in a spring gale (1983)*

## MADE GROUND

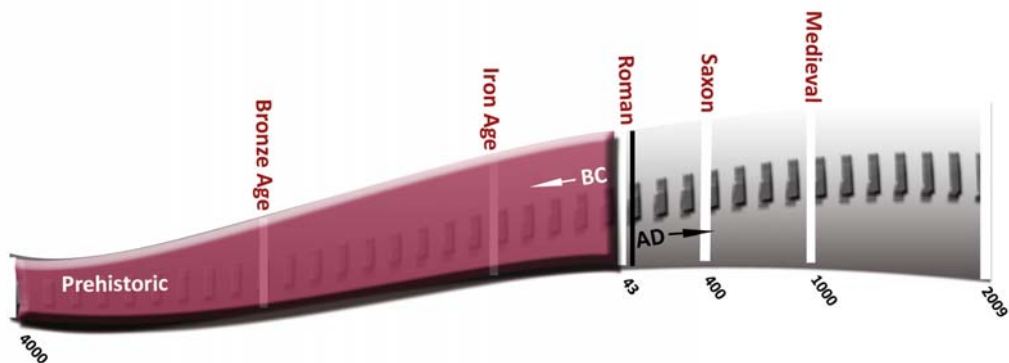
South Holland's early history is complex. Once part of the great fen basin, the original landsurface lies many metres lower than it is today. Warming of the earth from about 12,000 years ago released water held in ice caps, causing the gradual increase in sea-level until it flooded the land connecting Britain to Europe and created the North Sea. The water also flooded the Fenland, depositing silts and clays and raising the land level considerably. By about 1,500 BC this sea flooding extended inland nearly to Bourne and Peterborough.

This sea-level rise caused erosion of the coastlines further north and the resulting silts and sands drifted down the coast to create the sandbanks that were to become South Holland.



*The yellow gravel of the island on which stands Crowland shows in stark contrast to the surrounding black peat (1983)*





## EARLY DAYS (STONE TO BRONZE TO IRON) (4,000 BC – AD 43)



*Excavation of the Bronze Age (c.2,000 BC) barrow at Deeping St Nicholas in 1991. Dark soil lines indicate ditches encircling the burial. The canes near the centre are placed in holes where stakes had been driven in as part of an ancient ceremony (1991)*

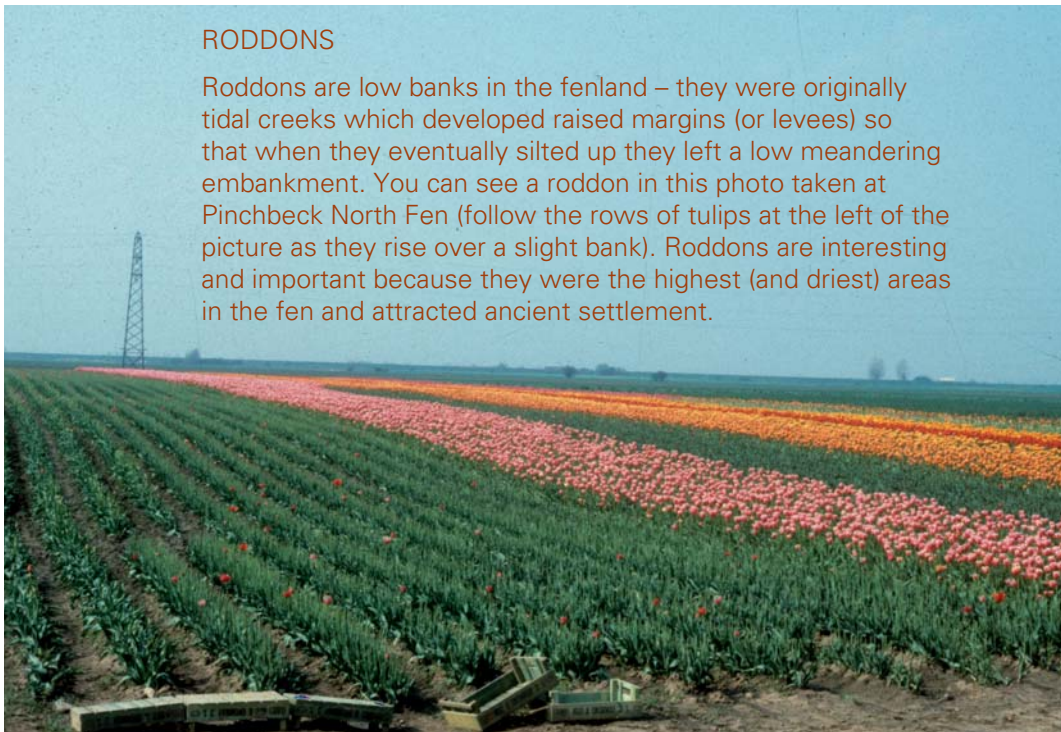


*This beautifully made flint knife, dating to about 2,000 BC, was found near the head of the child burial at Deeping St Nicholas (1992)*

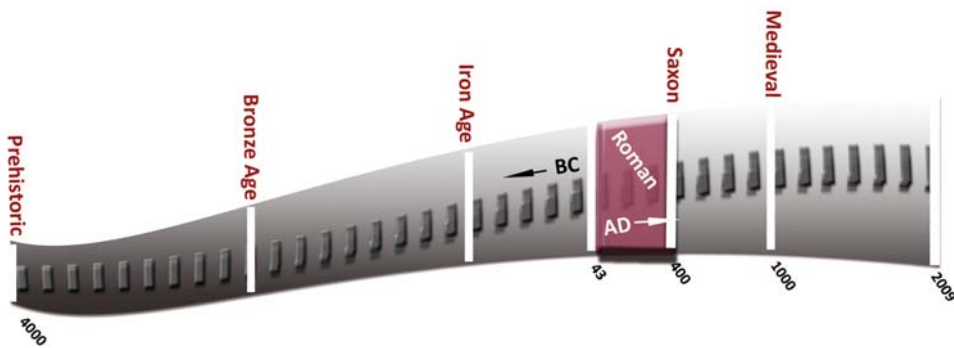
The earliest evidence of people in South Holland is found in the west of the district in the form of stone (flint) tools which were made and used around 3,000 BC. Examples have been found at Crowland and Pinchbeck, while at Deeping St Nicholas a prehistoric burial mound or barrow was excavated in 1991 – at its centre were found the bones of a five-year-old child along with an unused flint knife dating to 2,000 BC. There are also prehistoric burial mounds at Crowland, which was virtually an island at that time.

### RODDONS

Roddons are low banks in the fenland – they were originally tidal creeks which developed raised margins (or levees) so that when they eventually silted up they left a low meandering embankment. You can see a roddon in this photo taken at Pinchbeck North Fen (follow the rows of tulips at the left of the picture as they rise over a slight bank). Roddons are interesting and important because they were the highest (and driest) areas in the fen and attracted ancient settlement.

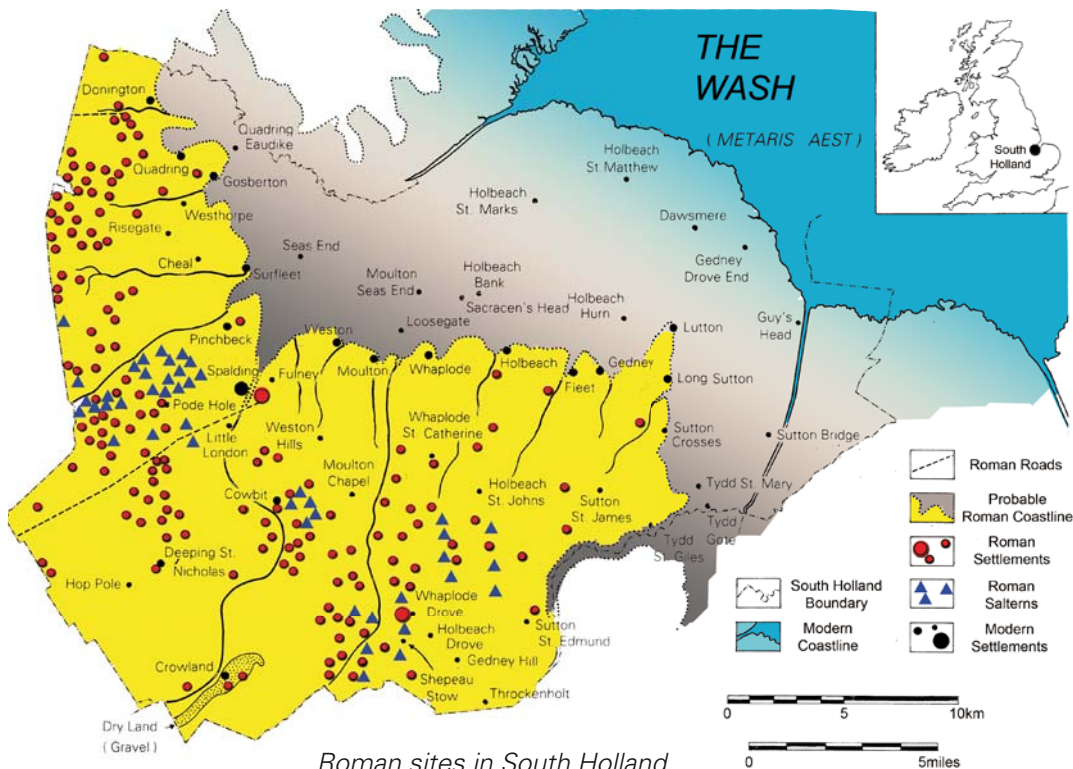






## FENS, ROMANS AND COUNTRYMEN (AD 43 – AD 400)

In Roman times, 2,000 years ago, the sea was gradually retreating from the land and South Holland experienced its first population explosion. People settled on the drying silts and on the naturally silted creek banks (now known as roddons). They were not Romans in terms of their national origins – they were opportunistic Britons living under Roman rule, who recognised that the coastal siltlands offered a chance to make a reasonable living by making salt from sea-water. This industry prospered until about AD 250 and there are many Roman settlements and salt-making sites (salterns) known in the area. They were farmers too, with herds and flocks grazing on the open fen, or in ditched paddocks around their villages.





*Excavations of  
a Roman salt-  
making complex  
and settlement  
at Wygate Park,  
Spalding 2005*

Around the western fen edge freshwater trapped behind the drying banks of silt caused flooding and peat formation. While that landscape was impossible to live in, it was a great source of fish, wildfowl, **osiers**, rushes, reeds and, of course, peat. The peat land cut South Holland off from the uplands of Market Deeping and beyond, making it virtually an island.

As the land of South Holland dried more people came to settle in the area. They were mostly from other parts of Britain but probably also included seafarers from abroad who had travelled here. It is believed that there was a major Roman port situated where Spalding is now, as tantalising evidence appears here in the form of Roman pottery and coins. Archaeological excavations at Wygate Park, Spalding in 2005 revealed two sites where sea-salt was made together with a Roman settlement, all buried beneath flood silts. The main Roman road across the Lincolnshire Fens, called the Baston Outgang, heads towards Spalding.

The late Roman period was a time when many European communities migrated to Britain from North Germany and Denmark. The many creeks in South Holland would have made good landing spots for their boats.

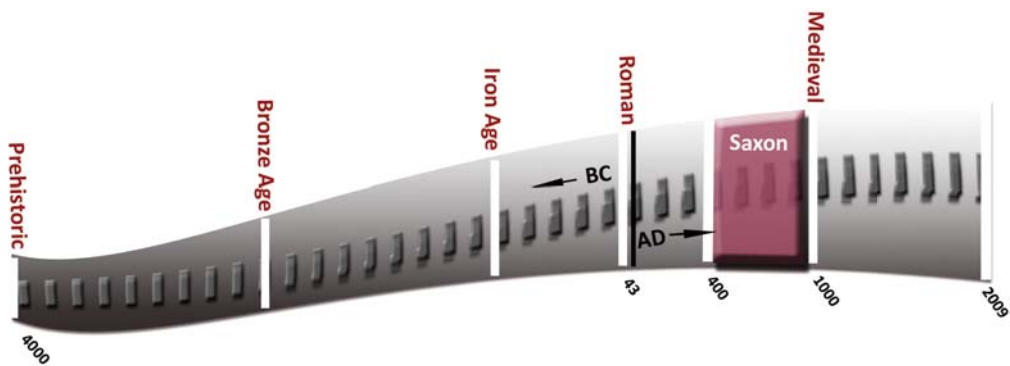
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## SALT – A FLAVOUR OF SOUTH HOLLAND

Salt is and has been an important commodity to human society through the ages. Much of South Holland's earliest settlement history is linked to the making of salt by the evaporation of sea-water. Salt making sites (salterns) from Roman and pre-Roman times have been excavated in Cowbit, Spalding and Holbeach St Johns and a medieval one in Quadring. Salt has many uses, and was particularly important for preserving meat and fish. It also had a magical quality and was used in rituals and ceremonies for cleansing and bringing luck. Some people still throw spilt salt over their left shoulder to ward off evil.

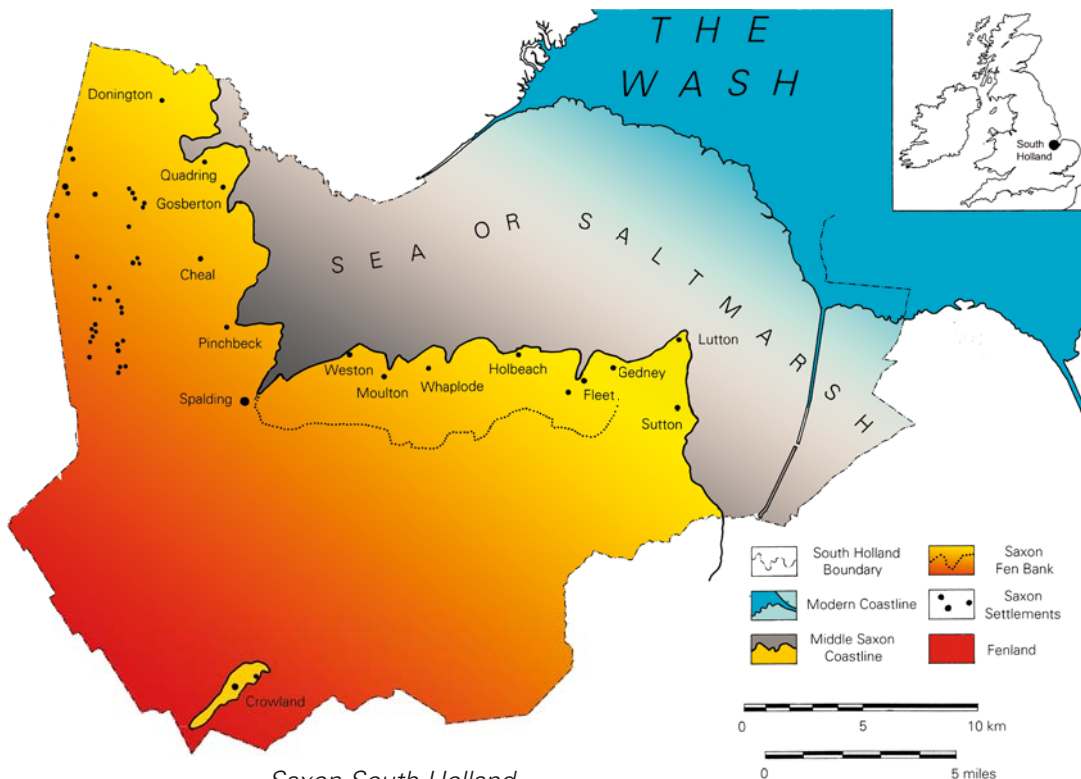
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## PUTTING DOWN ROOTS (SAXONS) (AD 400 – AD 1000)

A lot of the evidence for the Romans in South Holland was covered over by silt washed in by the sea, which flooded the area around AD 400 to 500. But despite these floods there were still people living here. In Gosberton traces of farms and buildings dating from the seventh or eighth century have been found. Although salty water flowed in the ditches and streams round these settlements, the people who lived here managed to grow barley (the most salt-tolerant cereal), beans, peas and flax. Many small farms of this date are known including sites at Pinchbeck, Gosberton and Fleet. In fact, most of South Holland's main settlements were already in existence by the seventh century, spread evenly along a high silt ridge.



*Saxon South Holland.*

*Yellow is area of settlement. Red is unoccupied peatland*



*The outline of a Middle Saxon (seventh - eighth century) building at Gosberton shows as a faint rectangle of darker soil (1992)*

The next new influence on the district was the Scandinavians - the Vikings of popular history. It is believed that the Danish Army passed through the Fens in AD 870, on their way to East Anglia. There is some evidence for their presence in local place-names such as Westhorpe, which has Viking origins, as do street names ending in 'gate'. The Vikings are usually thought of as aggressive and warlike but they seem to have integrated peacefully with the Anglo-Saxon settlers in eastern England. Around this time, village communities built sea and fen banks to extend their farmland and to protect themselves from flooding.




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### WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Holland (or 'High' land - basically the band of silts round the Wash) was called that by the mid-900s when the name appeared in a charter. Some of the place-names in South Holland are derived from natural features of the landscape, many to do with water. Crowland and Cowbit take their names from bends in the river, Fleet from a creek or inlet from the sea, Gedney from an 'island', Holbeach meaning a stream by a ridge, Lutton, the village by the pool, Whaplode, eel stream and Pinchbeck, a minnow stream. Quadring has elements meaning mud and Surfleet means the sour creek.

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# INVESTING IN BANKS

## **Sea Banks**

Banks and dykes, words which meant the same thing until relatively recently, serve two purposes. They protect settlements and farmland against floods and are the first stage in reclaiming wet land. The main sea bank in South Holland may well be pre-eleventh century in date. The Domesday Book recorded areas of saltmaking in places such as Fleet and Holbeach and prominent mounds, the waste material from the process, can still be seen outside the sea bank there, suggesting the bank came before the saltmaking and before the Domesday survey. Farther north, sea banks surrounded Bicker Haven, then a wide estuary. The Domesday Book listed 76 salterns around the haven.

In this landscape, where silt was still being deposited by the sea, reclamation from the saltmarshes and river estuaries continued for the next two centuries and was undertaken by both monastic and private landlords. At least some of the bank-building was undertaken



*The A1073 at Barrier Bank, Cowbit, the eastern bank of Cowbit Wash, built in the mid seventeenth century as part of a system to store the floodwaters of the river Welland. The Washes flooded most years, frequently for up to eight months of the year, attracting large numbers of wildfowl. When frozen, the Washes were popular for skating. When dry they provided excellent grazing. Construction of the Welland Improvement Scheme, in the 1950s, prevented the flooding and the Washland is now intensively farmed (1992)*



*Mounds of silt waste from medieval salt making in the distance near Rushy Drove, Quadring Eaudyke (1985)*

by and for local communities, as in 1218 in Whaplode and Holbeach. While the banks provided protection there were still times when they were overtopped or breached. One of many examples occurred on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1287, when *'through the vehemency of the wind and the violence of the sea the monastery at Spalding and many churches were overthrown.... in the parts of Holland, Lincolnshire, all the whole country there turned into a standing pool, so that an intolerable multitude of men, women and children were overwhelmed with water...'*. For the people of South Holland there was nothing to do but repair the breaches and start again.

The Dutch drainage engineer Cornelius Vermuyden, drained 450 acres of saltmarsh at Tydd St Mary but the largest reclamation scheme (around 7,000 hectares) took place in 1660 between Gedney and Moulton. In the following century a further 1,900 hectares was reclaimed seaward of Gedney to Fosdyke. As recently as 1978, around 610 hectares of land north of Holbeach Hurn was won from the sea.

In total the siltland is now in the region of three times the size it was when the villagers first started embanking.

### **Fen Banks**

While those in the villages were ever watchful of the sea they also needed to look after their interests to landward. South and west of

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## **SOME LOST VILLAGES**

### **ANGARHALA**

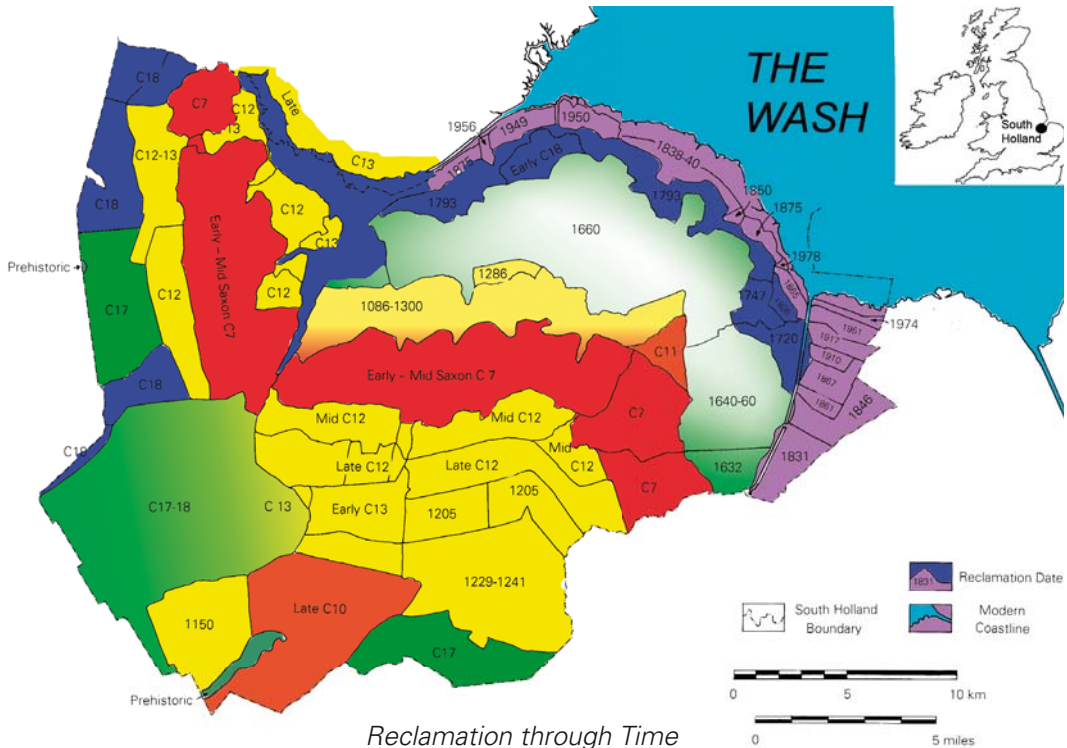
One of the earliest documents from the area is a charter of Thorney Abbey dating before AD 975. It mentions several places in *Holande* including a place called *Angarhala*. Rather than a lost village still waiting to be found, this is probably a very early name for Fleet.

### **DALPROON**

A village of this name is said to have stood near Tydd St Mary until it was washed away in a flood of 1236. No evidence for this village can be found apart from a few lines:

When Dalproon stood  
Long Sutton was a wood  
When Dalproon was washed down  
Long Sutton became a town



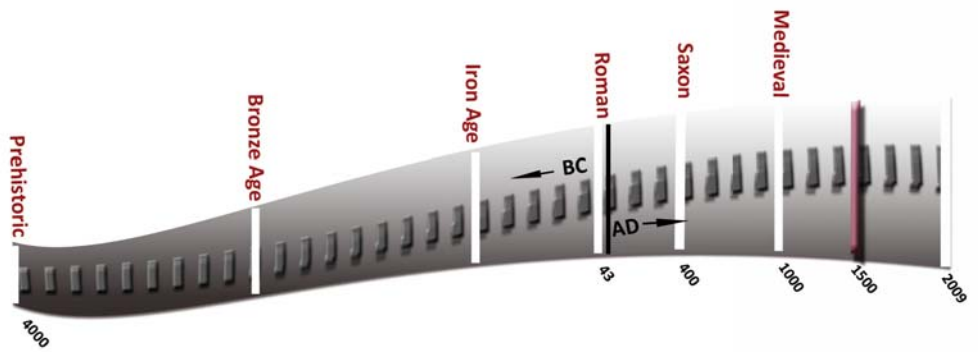


Spalding the waters of the low lying lands of Deeping Fen, Crowland, Gosberton and Quadring were always a threat, particularly after heavy storms or severe snows and a series of banks were built on the south and west to protect from freshwater flooding.

All this embanking proved successful, perhaps too much so, for the land taken soon made prime arable land and, by as early as 1189, the *'men of Holland strongly desired to have common on the marsh of Crowland. For since their own marshes have dried up (each village has its own), they have converted them to good and fertile ploughland [and]... they lack common of pasture more than most people, indeed, they have very little'*. Crowland, still chiefly peatland, rather than silt, would have offered that much needed pasture for the livestock.

Village communities continued to build fen banks at various times but in 1205 all the villages joined together for construction of Goldyke/ Asgar Dyke/ Lord's Dyke/New Fen Dyke. North of Spalding was a similar pattern of embanking and reclamation. Dates are not certain for the two main fen banks, the Old Fendyke and the New Fendyke, but a pre-eleventh century origin is again likely.

As with sea defences the fen banks were expected to hold back sometimes impossible volumes of water. In 1467, there was *'so great an inundation of the waters by reasons of the snows and continuous rains that, throughout the whole of South Holland, there was scarcely a house or building but where the waters made their way and flowed through it – and this remained continuously during a whole month'*.



Despite setbacks, by the end of the sixteenth century South Holland was being utilised as best it could by arable farmers and by a population fully exploiting the fenland. An early set of by-laws for Pinchbeck and Spalding Fens shows skilled management and a keen understanding of the land. The downfall of this ancient communal

system had started by the end of the sixteenth century when plague and then civil war put pressure on the population. This resulted in inadequate maintenance of sea and fen defences. Furthermore, the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s, resulted in their lands being sold off, sometimes to inefficient or non-local owners with little experience of the fens.

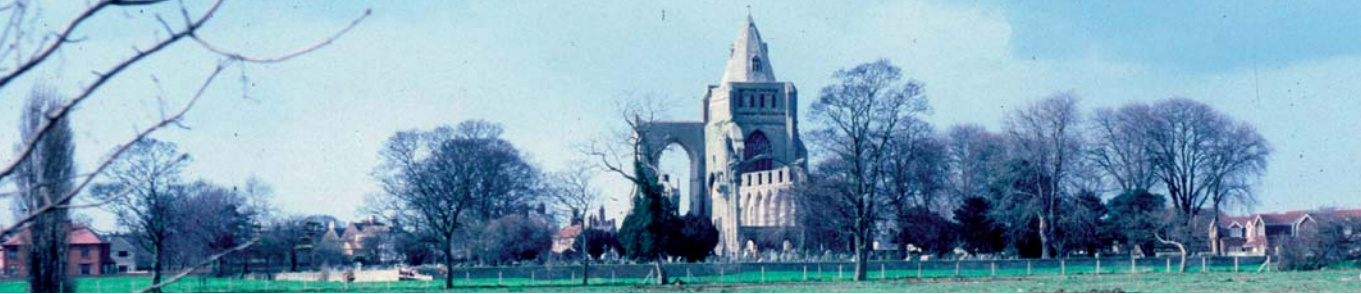
#### ||||| DID YOU KNOW

Roman Bank was not built by the Romans. It was most probably created in the ninth and tenth centuries.



*Tanks in the Banks - The people of South Holland proved resourceful when there was a rapid thaw after the 1947 winter. On 21st March that year the banks of the river Welland broke near Crowland. The army brought redundant Churchill tanks, minus their turrets, to plug the hole before the bank could be rebuilt (1947)*





*Crowland Abbey Church (1983)*

## CROWLAND ABBEY AND SPALDING PRIORY

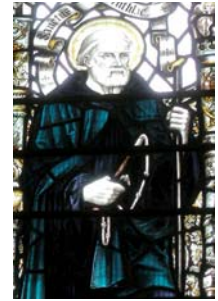
Crowland and Spalding monasteries were the two most important institutions of medieval South Holland. Crowland developed from the **hermitage** of St Guthlac, a minor noble of Mercia who gave up his warring nature for a life of **piety** and solitude. He died around AD 715 and a small religious community tended his shrine until the ninth century. A monastery was founded at his shrine in the tenth century, the only Saxon monastery in Lincolnshire recorded in the Domesday Survey.

Crowland Abbey held land at Spalding, but following the Norman Conquest, Ivo Taillebois, Spalding's new lord, pushed out the Crowland monks and established Spalding Priory, dependent on the monastery of St Nicolas of Angers in France.

The monasteries must have been very imposing buildings. Crowland still sits high within the fens and is visible for miles around, yet the original buildings including a large central tower would have been much taller. Spalding Priory dominated the town, occupying most of the area west of the market place (see p37).

The monasteries at Crowland and Spalding were leaders in reclamation of land from the sea and fen and as a result grew wealthy on agriculture. Spalding produced some of the highest quantities of wool and Crowland had a complicated network of dairy and sheep farms around its abbey and across South Holland. Between them, they owned or had rights over nearly all the villages and their churches in South Holland. They were not the only monasteries that held land in South Holland, but they were the most important.

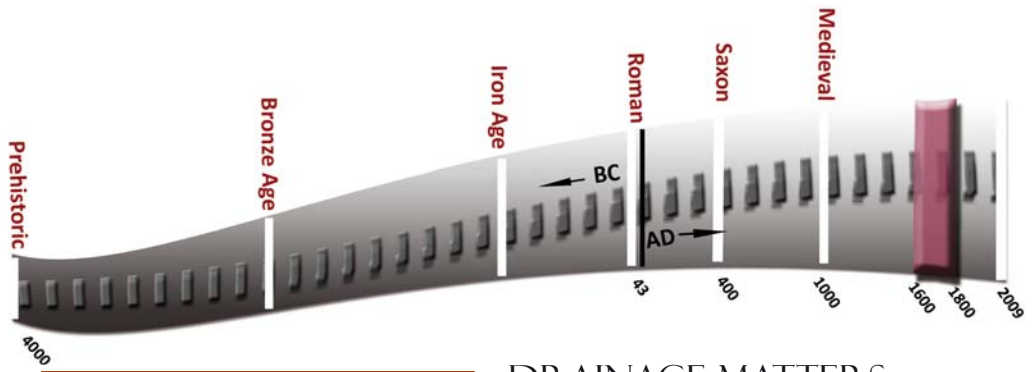
Spalding and Crowland monasteries were closed down by King Henry VIII. The north aisle of Crowland Abbey continued in use as the parish church and the ruins of the nave and west end survive. Although the main buildings were pulled down at the dissolution, most damage occurred during the Civil War. Little now remains of Spalding Priory, apart from the Abbey Buildings and the *Prior's Oven*, overlooking the Sheepmarket. The monastery's cemetery lies beneath Bridge Street where occasional bodies still come to light and much of the former walled precinct and part of a moat is traceable in the modern street pattern (see p37).



*St Guthlac.  
Stained glass in  
Crowland Abbey  
Church (2009)*



*St Mary and St  
Nicolas Church,  
Spalding (bottom)  
and Spalding Priory  
Church shown either  
side of the river  
Welland on a map  
of 1450 (National  
Archives Ref.  
MPCC1/7)*

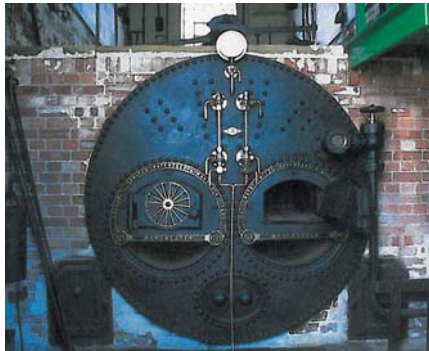


## DRAINAGE MATTERS

By the seventeenth century much of the land of South Holland had been drained and enclosed (made into fields). South of the Wash, only the very southern ends of the parishes remained undrained. North of Spalding the fenland at the west end was largely enclosed in the eighteenth century. It was only Deeping Fen with parts of Spalding and Pinchbeck Fens that caused major problems from the 1600s onwards.

Major fen drainage proposals were financed by prosperous 'Adventurers', or speculators, who ventured money on the schemes. However, the ordinary people who had common rights over the land feared that, instead of helping the poor, drainage '*... would undoe them and make those that are rich far more rich*'. Protest and rioting by the poor was widespread. In 1699, over 1,000 rioters from Pinchbeck, Spalding, Crowland and Cowbit assembled and, in a forerunner of football hooliganism, '*under colour and pretence of foot ball playing*' caused serious damage to buildings and fen banks.

In spite of this disorder the schemes continued. One leading Adventurer was a Dutchman, Sir Philiberti Vernatti, after whom Vernatt's Drain was named. Later, engineer Sir John Grundy Snr was involved with Deeping Fen, bringing in 'Dutch



## DRAINAGE ENGINES

The first mechanical means of draining the district used windpumps to raise the water from the land into the higher canalised courses of rivers and drains. These were replaced by steam engines, the first at Pode Hole in 1826 and the one at Pinchbeck Engine Museum in 1833 (above and below).

Many pumping engines and tidal sluices still drain the district. These are maintained by the Welland and Deepings Internal Drainage Board and the South Holland Internal Drainage Board.





Engines', or wind powered pumps. Where peat fen had shrunk from drainage, the land surface became lower and water had to be lifted up into drains that were at a higher level. By 1798, fifty wind-powered engines operated in Deeping Fen.

Steam eventually replaced wind as a source of power, diesel replaced steam and electricity replaced diesel. The main pumping station for the Welland and Deepings Drainage Board is at Pode Hole, west of Spalding. Pinchbeck Engine in Pinchbeck Marsh still has its steam engine at a drainage museum open to the public.

## THE LAND AT WORK

Siltland in South Holland now forms some of the most fertile and high quality arable land in Britain. It is suitable for field vegetable crops, **brassicas** and flower bulbs in addition to potatoes, sugar beet and cereals. It is a cropping pattern that has changed dramatically over time.

### **Crops**

Earlier it was shown how the Saxons relied on barley, flax and beans. As the sea moved away and the land became more productive arable farming continued to be an important part of the local economy during the Middle Ages. In fact, at this time the *'silt zone between sea and fen seems to have been amongst the most prosperous parts of England'*. Another writer concluded that the Wash silts were *'the richest area in England in 1334'*. This arable land lay close to the early villages, on the drier siltlands. During this time it has been estimated that 60-70% of the land was arable, the remainder permanent pasture and meadow for fodder and grazing. Since the drainage schemes of the seventeenth century onwards the farmland of South Holland has become increasingly arable-dominated. Records for 1913 show 73% arable and 26% pasture but by 1973 that gap had widened to 92% arable. Over 80% of the land in South Holland is classified as Grade 1, the best grade.

Following the drainage of Deeping Fen *'very great crops of oats and also large quantities of *Rapum Sylvatica* (called Coleseed or Rape) whereof they make oil'* were growing. In 1801, 7,000 acres of Deeping Fen was under oats. **Woad** was also cultivated on the newly drained fen, along with flax and hemp. In the Donington and Holbeach area, so-called 'white'

*Glasshouses and polythene for 'forcing' plants near Gosberton Clough. Symbols of intensive horticulture on the siltland (2009)*



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## ‘TRY TO CATCH THE WIND’

Wind power has been used in South Holland since the Middle Ages. However, the distinctive windmills that survive today, for example those at Lutton (the oldest surviving tower mill in Lincolnshire built in 1779) and Moulton (the tallest windmill in the county), date mostly from the 19th century. Many windmills can be found throughout the district, though often in a poor state of preservation. Wind was also used to drive drainage engines in the 18th and 19th centuries



*Sneath's Mill, Lutton (Pre-1930s)*

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opium poppies were grown until the mid nineteenth century. Market gardening has been known in South Holland since the eighteenth century. An apple known as the Spalding Rennet is recorded from this time, though it no longer survives.

By the late nineteenth century, varied crops were grown in South Holland, including mustard, turnips and **mangolds**, bush and fruit trees, early cabbages, carrots, celery and even asparagus. It was the time also when flower bulb growing took off and when smallholdings were being created. Potatoes became the stock produce of the fens, and nearly a quarter of all arable land in the district was given over to potato growing. This increased following the First World War and potatoes still account for a sizable amount of fenland produce today, together with brassicas and salad crops. To enable potato harvests to reach the market, narrow gauge railways were built across the

landscape after the First World War using ex-army equipment. The longest network was in Fleet (over 20km) but they have now all gone.

Sugar was also in short supply during the First World War and efforts were made in 1925 to become



*Food production is now highly mechanised (2003)*



more self-sufficient in this crop. Eventual success resulted in the first sugar beet factory in the county being built at Spalding, though this closed in 1989 as investment was concentrated in other factories.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the introduction of farm machinery made life easier for land workers, although many lost their jobs as a result of mechanisation. The vegetable crops, however, still require a large workforce, much of it provided by migrant labour. Some farms are now producing 'organic' foods and these tend to use a higher number of workers.

Unusual crops formerly grown in the fens of South Holland include peppermint. Two peppermint distilleries existed at Holbeach, which provided peppermint oil for medicinal use, one of which also grew and distilled coriander and dill. Distillery Farm still exists west of Holbeach. The area also provided the raw ingredients for sauces and ketchup and in 1872 ketchup was made at Clay Lake, Spalding. Large numbers of pumpkins are now grown in the area and this has given rise to an annual pumpkin festival. The growing of large quantities of food locally has necessitated the building of food processing and canning plants of which Smedley and Lockwood were pioneers. The district is home to the National Centre for Food Manufacturing based at the University of Lincoln, Holbeach campus. Degree courses in Food Manufacture, Agriculture and Environment and Commercial Horticulture are offered.



*Enjoying Spalding's Pumpkin Festival (2004)*

## DID YOU KNOW

Twenty percent of all Britain's foodstuff passes through South Holland (Source: National Centre for Food Manufacturing)



*Farming in South Holland remains labour intensive with migrant labour providing much of the workforce (2006)*



## **Livestock**

Details of the earliest stock farming, from Roman to medieval times, can only be known by analysing the bones recovered during archaeological investigation. Sheep dominate with lesser numbers of cattle and few pigs or horses. Bones of domestic fowl and geese are also known, along with duck and coot. Fish remains are not extensive but include haddock, cod, flatfish, herring, smelt and eel.

During the medieval period monasteries at Spalding and Crowland kept huge flocks of sheep and were among the principal exporters in the county of wool to the continent. A system called **intercommoning** allowed flocks and herds to be let loose on the fen pastures such as Pinchbeck Fen. Later, before enclosure of the fens, many 'Scotch Cattle' were brought down to feed on the very same pastures before they were taken for further fattening to Norfolk by means of the ferry across the river Welland at Cowhirne, near Spalding. In summer large areas south and west of the silts were dry and heavily grazed by cattle, horses, sheep, pigs and geese. Once a source of eggs and meat for the farm labourers, geese also supplied feathers for quills and bedding and gave rise to the saying '*the Fenman's dowry is threescore geese and a pelt.*' Formerly kept in large numbers geese flocks were greatly reduced in the nineteenth century.

## **Farming the Fish and Fowl**

Fishing and fowling provided a valuable supply of food to the local villagers, particularly during the winter. Eels, mentioned in the Domesday Book, were a regular part of the medieval and later diets. They were caught in baskets, nets or with special forks. Fishing is now a popular recreation and the river Welland, relatively clean and with little industrial pollution, has been a major match fishing river for decades. Wildfowl was said to be one of nature's gifts in Lincolnshire. Crowland Abbey may have been the first to trap ducks on a large scale, driving the birds into large nets. Decoys, from the Dutch 'ende koi' meaning duck trap, were netted tunnels leading from a pond. By enticing or driving the ducks down the tunnels or pipes they were caught, killed and sent to markets, principally in London, in huge numbers. Decoys are known in South Holland from Cowbit, Fleet, Pinchbeck and Deeping Fen, where five were recorded but none survive. The punt-gunners

*Setting nets to catch plovers on Cowbit Wash (c.1900)*





of places like Cowbit Wash also took large numbers of birds with up to 50 being killed with a single shot. Punt guns, mounted on boats, are an enduring image of the Fenland in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sporting shooting is now an important part of the rural economy.

### **Gangs, Gangmasters and Migrant Labour**

Gang working started in the fens in the 1800s as a response to the lack of labour for the new arable farms created following enclosure of the newly drained fens. Whole families, including young children, laboured in the fields for many hours a day, often with a long walk to the fields and back home. Work went ahead in all weathers without shelter and without any facilities. One account tells of women and children from Crowland walking the 8km northeast to Aswick in the snow to work on the siltland there. The only ones to escape the labour were the babies and infants. Because so few women were left behind to look after them these youngsters were given the drug laudanum to keep them sedated. Finally, in 1867, the Gangs Act was introduced prohibiting the employment of children under eight years old and regulating the distances which children were allowed to walk to work. It also ordered the first licensing of the Gang Masters.

Given the nature of farm work and the small population locally, seasonal workers have remained a necessity in South Holland. These are often migrant workers with a multitude of nationalities represented, but with Portugal, Poland, Russia, Lithuania and Latvia prominent. Use of foreign labour, however, is nothing new. Irish potato pickers were regularly employed on the land during the nineteenth century and travelled from farm to farm. Accommodation provided for these workers was mostly very basic in barns known locally as 'Paddy Huts or Houses'.

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## FEN AGUE AND OPIUM

Before it was drained the Fenland fostered the fen ague, a malarial type disease which affected those living and

visiting the district. Symptoms included severe shiverings, intense pain in the limbs followed by burning fever. The accounts of St Guthlac's terror at the hands of the evil spirits that visited him at Crowland may be the earliest record of the hallucinations that accompany the disease.

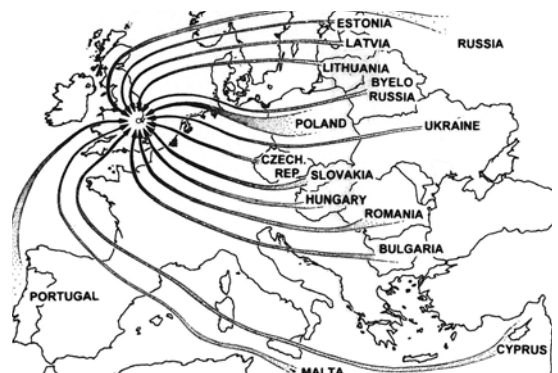


*Papaver Sanniferum, the opium poppy, was widely grown in South Holland to produce laudanum (near Donington 1985)*

One of the ways used to ease the symptoms of ague was opium.

Opium poppies were grown in the fens and the seed heads crushed to make laudanum, widely used as a cure-all and for sedation. It was sold in lumps or liquid versions, including Geoffrey's Cordial (a mixture of opium, molasses for sweetening and sassafras for flavour) and Daffy's Elixir. Unfortunately, opium was very addictive and Skertchly describes the '*ague stricken fen men with lustreless, opium bleared eyes*'.

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Irish workers were also employed as navvies on the road, railway and drainage schemes. Gypsies picked strawberries and snowdrop bulbs and Maltese were once prominent employees in the canning factories.

During World War II, Italian prisoners of war worked on the land. Russians released from German prisoner of war camps after D-Day were also found in Lincolnshire. At this time, camps were set up across Lincolnshire, one at Surfleet, for British volunteers to assist in the harvesting, the 'Lend a hand on the land' scheme continuing after the war.

Until the late nineteenth century some workers were taken on for a year as agricultural labourers or domestic servants at annual Statute Hirings, or Hiring Fairs, usually in early May. Those seeking work stood in rows in the towns' market places while the potential employers selected their staff for the coming year. The healthy and strong looking would be offered work first with the weak or weedy lucky to be chosen at all. Much merrymaking usually accompanied the day. In Spalding in 1856 it was said that *'..a century hence people will be astonished to learn that the daughters of free born Englishmen assembled...in the Market Places of our agricultural towns and stood in rows to be looked over and selected from for our domestic helps.'*

### **Farming the Flowers**

By the late 1800s flower farming was established in South Holland. The valuable bulbs require light, stone-free soil, making the fertile silts ideal.

In 1890 snowdrops were being grown commercially for medicinal purposes but with surpluses sent to London as cut flowers. Soon after, daffodils were added and tulips were introduced in 1905. By 1933, some 100 tons of flowers per day were leaving Spalding. Tulips were often grown both for flowers and bulbs. In any case the tulip



*Modern flower farming under huge glasshouses (2006)*





*Spalding's famous flower parade (2005)*

heads had to be removed to prevent disease. This beheading practice gave rise to the famous Spalding Flower Parade, wherein spectacular decorated floats are paraded round the town. The industry attracted an influx of Dutch growers to South Holland to add their skills; Slooten, van Konynenburg, Moerman and van Geest all became well known names in the region. Tulip production has been greatly scaled-down of late, chiefly because the Dutch growers' mechanised lifting methods, which reduce greatly their costs and suit their sandy soils, are less effective on the soils of South Holland. Daffodils, however, are more resilient to mechanised lifting. They show remarkable endurance and in fields where they were once grown tenacious daffodils keep appearing annually. Bulbs thrown onto verges and ditch sides during the harvesting grow again and again to provide a wonderful free display during March and April for those driving through South Holland. Britain produces between 50 and 60% of the daffodil crop worldwide and of those, more than half are grown in and around South Holland.



*A treat for passers-by. Daffodil bulbs once grew in the field to the right next to the A17 (2009)*



# TRANSPORT AND TRAVEL

## By waters

Rivers and creeks ensured that the earliest inhabitants and visitors of the area had access inland and out to the coast. The earliest known boat in the district, thought to be about 3,000 years old, is a large dug-out canoe, found in Deeping Fen in 1839. Containing a cargo of sling-shots this magnificent vessel was 46 feet (14m) long and five feet eight inches (1.7m) wide, hollowed out from a single tree.

Significant among boat journeys in the South Holland Fenland is that of St Guthlac, ferried in AD 699 to Crowland through '*immense marshes, now a black pool, now foul running stream with manifold windings wide and long*'. From then on improvements in the waterways continued apace and is exemplified during the Middle Ages, when good building stone quarried at Barnack, near Stamford, travelled along the river Welland to Crowland and Spalding and beyond to Norfolk. Furthermore, when Crowland Abbey was to

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## BRIDGES

Bridges feature heavily in the history of South Holland and none is more remarkable than the Trinity Bridge at Crowland dating to the fourteenth century. This replaced an earlier wooden bridge and carried travellers over the confluence of the canalised river Welland and a cut made to join the rivers Welland and Nene.



Spalding Great Bridge is mentioned in 1230 but the present structure dates to 1838. There is a tradition of a Roman bridge at Spalding, but no archaeological evidence for it has been found.

One more remarkable bridge can be found at Sutton Bridge, the last of three bridges across the river Nene at this point. Built by 1897, this was designed to carry both the railway and road into Norfolk. It is a Swing Bridge, allowing ships access upstream to the port of Wisbech.





be fined for not maintaining the road to Spalding, it claimed, unsurprisingly, that everyone travelled by river. The ancient tradition of transport by water is reflected in Spalding's modern, award winning, water taxi, which carries 20,000 passengers a year up and down the river Welland. A scheme is currently underway to open up the fen waterways for tourist use between Lincoln, Peterborough and Ely.

Spalding, dominated by the river Welland, developed into a minor port, taking goods from Stamford to offload on larger ships anchored in the estuary. During the medieval period it was home to the Prior of Spalding's herring fleet. In 1695, an unsuccessful attempt was made to make Spalding a free port, no longer subject to the Port of Boston. Boatyards could also be found in the town during the nineteenth century, along with other related industries such as rope and sail making.

Until the arrival of the railways in the nineteenth century Spalding's prosperity depended on the river. Large houses and former warehouses still crowd the riverside. The Westlode, now culverted over, enabled farmers to transport their produce from the Fens west of the town to the harbour. The river Glen offered access as far inland as Bourne and coal was transported to the town that way.

Spalding's shipping carried cargoes of vast quantities of timber for the construction of bridges and sleepers for the railways which began the slow decline of river transport in the Fens.

At about the same time Sutton Bridge emerged to become what is now South Holland's only port. The Sutton Bridge Dock Company was established by an Act of Parliament in 1875. Its first dock lasted three years before the sides slipped in and the site is now a golf course. The busy modern port, opened in 1987, now stretches along the river Nene north of the bridge.

## Railways

The first railway into Spalding was part of a scheme to connect London with the north, via Peterborough, Spalding and Boston. The stations were completed in 1848 and the railway opened up in the same year. Stations were all designed by the same architect, so Spalding has a similar architectural style to Woodhall Spa, Bardney and Peakirk, all typified by tall towers.

Railways were added to connect with Holbeach (1858), Bourne (1866), King's Lynn (via Holbeach and Long Sutton), March



*Spalding's water taxi - a reminder of the way people once travelled in the fens (2008)*



*Through the 'hideous fen of huge bigness with manifold windings wide and long' Guthlac is rowed to Crowland in AD 699*



(1867) and Sleaford (1882). Spalding lay at the heart of this network, with several platforms and ancillary structures such as turntables evident until the 1960s. Some of the lines through South Holland had closed prior to Dr Beeching's axe on the British rail system in 1961. Others survived it but now there is only a single rail link through the district between Lincoln and Peterborough, stopping at Spalding.



*Remnants of a once thriving railway network, Gedney Station on the Spalding to King's Lynn Line (2009)*

### **Roads**

While many might expect Roman roads to be the first formal means of communicating through the landscape, prehistoric trackways no doubt existed where these were possible. Undated, but of prehistoric type, was the road on the edge of Crowland. Found in the nineteenth century, it was 2m below the peat and described as 'closely packed stakes of sallow...floored with brushwood upon which was laid gravel'. Roman roads extend from just west of Spalding across the fen to Baston and



*Milestone, Holbeach (1997)*

*Holland County Council  
Fingerpost, Holbeach (2009)*



from Donington (nearly following the route of the A52) west to Grantham.

The Saxons were not noted for road-building. However, Hargate in Fleet, derives its name from 'here' which means a military road with the 'gata' hinting at its Viking origins. Most roads through the villages east of Spalding were probably drovers' roads, enabling cattle to reach the markets of King's Lynn and Norwich. In doing so, the estuary of the river Nene had to be negotiated. Locals who knew the channels and the quicksands were employed as guides, taking travellers through the dangerous estuary at low tide. Any mistakes could lead to loss of life. In the thirteenth century King John's jewels are said to have been lost in the estuary. Sensibly, the King, on his journey from King's Lynn to Swineshead, took a safer, inland, route.

There is one account of a medieval road being built, by a Bishop of Durham, who built a road across the fen from Deeping to Spalding - *Elrich rode*. This may well have taken the same route as the current A16. The present A17 carries a high volume of long distance lorry traffic between the east coast industrial areas and the north. The same road is a major tourist route to the coast.

The Barrier Bank, extending from Spalding along the river Welland through Cowbit, was the first **turnpike** road in South Holland (1722), followed by others between Spalding and Tydd, Spalding and Deeping, Spalding and Bourne and the Spalding to Donington road. Tolls were taken along these roads. Few toll-houses survive but Brotherhouse Bar between Spalding and Crowland indicates the position of one. The railways saw the end of the turnpike roads with most having closed by the 1850s.

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A GOOD DINNER. A GOOD PARLOUR.  
GOOD ATTENDANCE. WHERE DO  
PEOPLE DINE CHEAPER? *John Byng on  
the Red Cow, Donington 1791*

As travel became commonplace, hotels and coaching inns provided hospitality for those on the road. The White Hart in Spalding dates to the late fifteenth century and may have been a hostelry belonging to Spalding Priory. The Red Cow at Donington dates partly to the seventeenth century.

It was during the eighteenth century when the turnpikes were being created that the number of inns and hotels increased. These include the George and Angel in Crowland, the Crown at Holbeach, the Swan Inn at Moulton, the Bull Hotel in Long Sutton and the New Inn at Sutton Bridge. The Ship and Cross Keys Inn at Sutton Bridge was rebuilt in the nineteenth century and is now the familiar Bridge Hotel.

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*Roman road. The Baston Outgang on Spalding Common. The parallel dark lines are roadside ditches. Note the rare ditched enclosure (straight dark lines, bottom left), a key part of the road layout. (Cambs. Univ. Collection NH70, 1954)*



## SETTLEMENTS AND COMMUNITIES

The Domesday Book of 1086 is the first account that includes most of the villages in South Holland and shows the extent of settlement at that time. The villages clustered around their churches, seeking protection and spiritual well-being in buildings of architectural magnificence. These churches are large and each demonstrates the wealth of the village and its neighbourhood – the parish. The wealth can also be seen in the markets, these being amongst the richest in Lincolnshire.

As the process of reclamation continued and these parishes were 'stretched' seawards and fenwards, new settlements appeared many miles distant from the original village. Some of these hamlets

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### AYSCOUGHTEE HALL

*'my grete place at Spalding'*

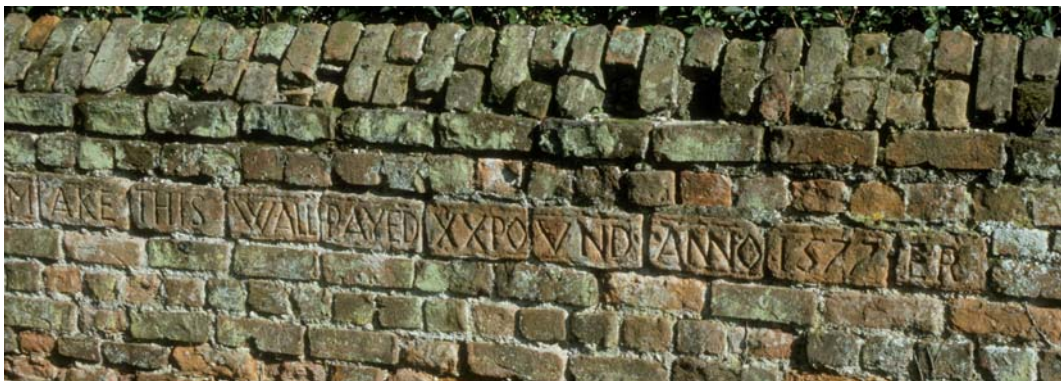
Thought to have been built in the early to mid fifteenth century for a local wool merchant, Ayscoughfee Hall, by the river Welland in Spalding, now serves as a museum dedicated to the history of the building. Although much altered over time the basic design has been retained while incorporating a wealth of architectural styles. Among its many owners was Maurice Johnson who, in 1710, founded the Spalding Gentlemen's Society, one of the oldest learned societies in existence. The walled garden covers some two hectares and includes a seventeenth century ice house, an ornamental lake and on a more contemporary theme, a peace garden. The recently restored gardens are a popular attraction and much used locally.



*View of the Hall from the rear (2009)*

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*Lutton churchyard. Unique sixteenth century brick inscription - 'RICHARD PYTTRELL AND HIS WIF JOHANER TO MAKE THIS WALL PAYED XX POUND ANNO 1577ER' (1995)*







*Decorative brickwork of the mid 1600s showing Dutch influence. Penny Hill, Holbeach (1992)*

received their own chapel or church (Gedney Dawsmere and Moulton Chapel) and a few became parishes in their own right. One example is Sutton Bridge, established over the river Nene estuary, which now includes the 'lost' parish of Wingland, that area of land east of the Nene outfall.

### **House and Home**

From the Middle Ages houses would have been made from *mud and stud*, a method using vertical wooden laths with mud infill. These were thatched with the plentiful reeds from the fen. A few still exist, though may now be hidden under render or brick. Brick was imported initially from the Netherlands from the thirteenth century and was considered upmarket, hence its use in Ayscoughfee Hall and Willesby House in Spalding. **Pantiles** and decorative brickwork, as seen at Penny Hill House in Holbeach and in some gable ends also showed Dutch influence.

South Holland was always a land of independent landholders rather than large Lords of the Manor. Cressy Hall, at Gosberton, is the only rural house with real pretensions. Following eighteenth century enclosures, distant landowners, such as the Brownlows of Belton, near Grantham, acquired land and built farms, but lived elsewhere. Many farms were built from this time onwards, with good brick houses, barns and outbuildings.



*Decayed mud and stud wall in a barn in Gosberton (1983)*



*Early twentieth century view of Cressy Hall, Gosberton*



## DID YOU KNOW

Long Sutton church has the tallest and oldest wooden spire in Europe

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In towns, warehousing increased. Several Spalding warehouses survived into the twentieth century, some still in use today as apartment conversions. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw increased industry, mostly agriculture related.

Town housing improved from the eighteenth century onwards and in the nineteenth century simple terraces for the more industrial workforce were in evidence in all towns and some villages, together

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## MATTHEW FLINDERS

Donington's most famous son was born in 1774. It is said that reading 'Robinson Crusoe' made him want to be an explorer. His ambitions were realised when he became a navigator and famous map maker. It was Flinders who first sailed round Australia surveying and mapping the coastline. He even gave that continent its name. Keeping up the family tradition of exploration his grandson, Sir William Matthew Flinders Petrie, became a famous archaeologist in Egypt.

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with the factories, foundries and similar premises. The twentieth century saw council housing and wartime 'prefabs' amongst other innovations. South Holland District Council has now set up a local housing company which has built council housing in places such as Gosberton.



*Hilkie Burgess painting of warehouses on the river Welland in Double Street, Spalding in the early nineteenth century. Most were demolished in the 1960s*



## CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

The first elements of a judicial system have their origins in the Saxon period. Each of the Wapentakes (Districts) had their meeting places or courts. The meeting place of Elloe Wapentake is said to have been at the Elloe Stone, near Moulton.

Manorial courts replaced the Saxon systems and were established along more local lines. Spalding Priory (see p37) exercised the right to hang wrong-doers outside its main gate in what is now the Sheepmarket. It is said that the Bailiff of Pinchbeck provided the rope, the Bailiff of Spalding led the victim to the gallows, the Bailiff of Weston carried the ladder with the Bailiff of Moulton carrying out the final act. This practice was remembered in the former name of Swan Street, *Deadman's Lane*.

One ancient custom of showing public disapproval of an individual was ran-tanning. Locals assembled outside the wrong-doer's house for three days and nights consecutively, shouting, whistling, banging pots and generally making a loud noise. Usually ran-tanning was aimed at someone who had behaved badly within the community, such as a wife beater. The last known instance of this custom occurring locally was in Quadring Fen in 1928. It was aimed at a woman said to have written false statements about a young girl in the village.

The last man to be hanged in Spalding was William Tyler for murdering Mrs Ives in 1741. He was executed in March 1742 in the Market Place and his body **gibbeted** (hung as a warning to others) on the Vernatt's Bank near the Turnpike Road. In another local case, a stone in Surfleet churchyard commemorates the murder of a Lancashire man, Samuel Stockton, by Philip Hooton of Sutton St Edmunds in 1768. Hooton was hanged at Lincoln and his body gibbeted at Surfleet Marsh near the site of the deed.

There was a prison in Spalding from around 1619 which was rebuilt in 1765 and lasted until 1825. This was located at the junction of Broad Street with New Road. A House of Correction was subsequently built overlooking the Sheepmarket in 1826 and a Sessions House built adjacent to it in 1843. Today this is still the principal place of trial in the district. Sometimes sentences seemed unduly harsh. In 1805, George Reeve of Spalding was sentenced to the House of Correction for wearing his hat in court.



*Pinchbeck Stocks  
(2009)*



*The Elloe Stone,  
meeting place of  
the wapentake  
- the word  
'wapentake'  
comes from  
'shaking a spear'  
because that is  
how the district  
voted (1990)*



*Sessions  
Court,  
Spalding  
(2009)*



Spalding also had a **Pillory**, a device in which someone was placed for public humiliation. It consisted of a wooden frame mounted on four wheels and with holes for the head and hands. Spalding's Pillory was called 'White Willey'. The last person pilloried was Susan Meekes for keeping a 'house of ill-fame' in 1787. In Pinchbeck, the village stocks (p34) still survive.

Parish constables were unpaid positions. An act of 1829 permitted the use of a professional police force, but, in Lincolnshire, it was only Holland with its large open parishes that was keen to adopt the idea. However, it had to wait until 1856 for a regular police force to be established and until 1857 for a police station.



*Spalding's first  
police station  
(2009)*



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## SPALDING AND ITS ANCIENT MARKET

*'Higher yet upon the same river is seated Spalding, enclosed round about with rivulets and draines; a fairer towne, I assure you, than a man would looke to find in this tract among such slabbes and water-plashes...'*

W. Camden Britannia 1586

In a document dated c.AD 600 a tribe called the Spaldas is mentioned, indicating that there has been a settlement here since at least that time.

Spalding is an ancient market one of only a few mentioned in Domesday. There are intermittent records of what was on sale at Spalding Market and these give a flavour of the area at those times.

1281 - Sacks of wool; Tuns of wine; Firewood; Turves; Oakbark; Coal

1336 - Corn; Cows; Skins of such cattle, fresh salted or tanned; Fleeces; Pelts of lambs; Kids, hares, rabbits, foxes, cats and squirrels; Bales of cloth; Hay; Tallow and grease; Wood; Herrings, Sand-eels, Sea-fish; Millstones; Turves; Salt; butter; Flax, hemp and oil

1763 - Three stalls only

One selling Worsted and two Gingerbread bakers

2009 - Fruit and Vegetables; Meat and fish; Fast food; Curtains, cloth; Greeting cards; Sweets; Pictures; Pet food; Plants; Clothes; Shoes; Preserves; Jewellery; Books; Mobile phones; Double glazing

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*Spalding Market  
from the South  
Holland Centre  
(2008)*



*Aerial view of Spalding c.1993 showing locations of the castle and Priory. The modern street plan reflects the lay-out of the medieval Priory*



*Early nineteenth century view of the Prior's Oven which still overlooks the Sheepmarket (Hilkiah Burgess)*



## LEISURE

Markets and fairs were, and remain, a feature of many of South Holland's communities. While most dealt with trade in goods, they were also times when people enjoyed themselves watching minstrels, jugglers, acrobats and often the less tasteful cock-fighting and bear baiting. Some of these fairs were established by the Church who were also responsible for plays, usually religious or morality based, acted out from the back of carts.

### **Crowland Rattle Doll Fair**

Also known as Saint Rattle Doll, this fair was held around Shrove Tuesday and had died out by the end of the nineteenth century. The origins are probably related to the sowing season when youngsters and the elderly were employed to protect the newly sown crop by scaring away the birds using a 'Rattle Doll', basically pieces of connected wood that made a loud noise, not unlike a football rattle. An accompanying song was often sung to the rhythm of the rattle dolls and is remembered in Sutton Bridge.

### **Crow Scaring Song**

*Come all you little blacky tops  
Pray don't you eat my father's crops  
For you must fly and I must run*

*Shoo-ar-ara-roo  
Shoo-ar-ara-roo*

*So fly away and don't come back  
For if you do he'll break my back  
For you must fly and I must run  
Shoo-ar-ara-roo  
Shoo-ar-ara-roo*

The rich and powerful entertained themselves by hunting. The fenland west of Spalding was part of the Forest (King's hunting ground, not woodland) of Kesteven, and was subject to harsh laws. Lesser dignitaries established parks; Spalding Priory had one north of the town extending to Pinchbeck and Thomas de Multon's house lay within King's Park.

Later, more genteel pastimes are represented by ornate gardens, the best of which survives at Ayscoughfee Hall in Spalding, which dates at least to the early eighteenth century as it is shown on a map of 1732. Such gardens were introduced from the Low Countries in the seventeenth century and showcased rare plants gathered from around the world.



*Maypole dancing at  
Holbeach (2007)*

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*"To the Washway House we'll go,  
where we will merry be,  
and eat and drink and laugh and sing,  
and dip into the sea"*

Dating from 1783, these opening lines of a song record the origins of Sutton Bridge as a bathing place. Dipping or bathing in the sea was recommended as a cure for various ailments and Washway House provided lodgings and food for the visitors and was one of three inns of which only the New Inn survives.

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Horse racing was introduced to Spalding Common in the eighteenth century by a local man, Mr Richards. He erected stables along London Road and stands for spectators beside the raceground. This was a short lived enterprise, the last race being run in 1788.

The first local cinema was opened in Spalding in 1913 followed by others in Holbeach, Long Sutton and Sutton Bridge. Spalding could boast three cinemas in its heyday. The former Savoy along Westlode Street is now converted to a bingo hall. It is now the impressive South Holland Centre which provides fantastic opportunities for Spalding's film and theatre goers.

Climbing church steeples appears to have been an unusual pastime, with those conquering the climb usually leaving a ribbon for challengers to retrieve. In 1812, labourer Robert Jarvis is said to have taken this recreation to new extremes by climbing Moulton church spire with his small child in his arms and tying the infant to the weathercock with his handkerchief. Leaving the child there he returned to earth and went home to fetch his wife to view the spectacle and admire his skill before ascending once again and safely retrieving the child. His wife's reaction is not recorded!

### ***Bleak Midwinter***

Winter was a time when working the land might have been prevented by frost and snow. It was a time when ice skating on the frozen washes was a competitive Fenland sport. Cowbit and Crowland Washes in particular were renowned for skating and local champions were celebrated. A Minute Book of 1728 in the Spalding Gentlemen's Society records that *'Mr Harrison Baker of this town goes on ice skates with a velocity and grace equal to a Dutch Hollander and can do a mile in three minutes'*. Walter Pridgeon was



*Skating on the flooded washland at Crowland (c.1900)*



Lincolnshire champion for over 30 years from 1900, only losing his title in 1933 to Bert Slater of Crowland. Early skates were made of animal bone but by the seventeenth century had a metal blade and were made by the blacksmiths. Local skaters were known as fen runners.

Other winter activities included rituals related to January 6<sup>th</sup>, Plough Monday, and also Twelfth Night, the traditional end to the Christmas festivities. At Moulton Seas End Morris Dancers performed at Christmas and plough boys visited the big houses on Plough Monday. Often with faces blacked up they performed a short play, usually a combat scene with the wooing of a lady (always played by a man in drag). The plough they carried round was a threat to plough up gardens or lawns if they failed to receive adequate recompense for their performance. Sutton Bridge also had its Morris dancers with the men wearing tall hats. The Churchwardens Accounts from Long Sutton record 'to the Morris dancers of Spalding 2s – to the Morris dancers of Whaplode 6s 8d', the latter clearly a superior team. Long Sutton also had Molly Dancers in 1890. These practised a rough form of dance based on country dance figures. Gangs of men, again with faces blackened for disguise, performed their dances with a man dressed as a woman or 'Molly'.

For one day in May 1967, Spalding became Britain's centre of popular music when a memorable concert featuring the Jimi Hendrix Experience, Cream, Pink Floyd, Geno Washington and the Ram Jam Band and others attracted some 4,000 people from all over the country to the packed Bulb Auction Hall. 'Spalding has never seen anything like it' said the newspapers.



*Lincolnshire champion speed-skater Walter Pridgeon rounding a barrel on Cowbit Wash in 1907*



*Winter in Crowland (1983)*



## SOUTH HOLLAND: A HOME OF CHOICE

A strong sense of mutual assistance between individuals in the communities of South Holland must have been present from the time of the first pioneering settlers onward.

One of the wonderful things about the earliest times of South Holland is that it was not land that was just *there* for people to move into and to exploit. Every centimetre of South Holland has had to be wrested from nature. Throughout history the people here have worked together and *made* the land they live in. The defensive banks they built were more than just protection from flood water, they were statements of defiance against the elements, communal works of civil engineering constructed by the people for their own protection. They enabled people to get a toehold in the area and a chance to develop.

As the landscape changed South Holland people adapted. When the fens were finally drained those who had previously exploited skilfully the freshwater wetlands became arable farmers. They were followed by generations of families attuned to the land, passing on their own knowledge to their successors. With the age of technology South Holland has moved with the times and today is home to the National Centre for Food Manufacturing.



*South Holland now holds a unique position in being both the 'Kitchen Garden of England' and the acknowledged centre of food technology and production in the country (2006)*



South Holland has always welcomed workers, be they Romans, Saxons, Normans or the multinational and multicultural workforce of today. New settlers have brought skills and ideas and helped shape the landscape. The Danes, who lived in a similar lowland environment, may well have brought ideas of tackling sea defence in the way that, later on, the incoming Dutch brought their drainage knowledge and later their flower specialists.

Like migrants from earliest times some will come and go. Others will stay and offer their labour and their knowledge and bring a flavour of their homeland to enrich the area and its culture. It has been that way throughout history and has made South Holland what it is - a special landscape with a unique character.



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## BEYOND ORDINARY VISION

To the stranger these lowland people are courteous and civil, and seldom pass without offering some sort of salutation... Nothing perhaps is more pleasing to these people than to be asked about their own country and they will reply in no uncouth tongue, but often in good sound English; and, if time and opportunity permit, will relate some local tradition, or tell some weird tale, or how the old folk skated for miles over the frozen drains in the cold winters of the past, or how some years since yon bank broke and let in the tidal water, to the detriment of the crops or the discomfort of the cattle, and how they mustered all the men of the neighbourhood and set to work to mend the breach; and then they will point out some distant ruin of an old monastery or similar object, and the visitor has to look and look again before he discerns the object, and he will wonder how these people see so far, and he will be impressed with the fact that the fenners are far-sighted people – which they are (perhaps in more senses than one), for the unobstructed view enables them, by their constant habit, to distinguish not only familiar objects, but also individual people on the highway considerably beyond ordinary vision.

*Samuel H. Miller 1890*

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## PICTURE CREDITS

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## SELECTED PLACES TO VISIT

Ayscoughfee Hall Museum and Gardens, Churchgate, Spalding PE11 2RA  
Crowland Abbey, East Street, Crowland PE6 0EN  
Fenscape, Springfield Shopping Outlet and Gardens, Camelgate, Spalding PE12 6ET  
Flower Bulb Museum, Surfleet Road, Pinchbeck, Spalding PE11 3XY  
Moulton Windmill, High Street, Moulton PE12 6QB  
Parish Church of St Mary, Market Place, Long Sutton PE12 9JJ  
Pinchbeck Engine Museum, West Marsh Road, Pinchbeck PE11 3 UW  
Romany Museum, Clay Lake, Spalding PE12 6BL

Most villages have churches that are open at certain times.

## GLOSSARY

Bog Oaks	Wood preserved in peat bogs, though rarely oak in South Holland
Brassicas	Any plant of the mustard family, includes important vegetables such as cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, turnip, and mustard
Fen Blow	As peat is drained it becomes dry. When a field in peat land is bare and a strong wind is blowing the dry surface peat blows away, resembling a sandstorm
Gibbet	A gibbet is a gallows-type structure from which the dead bodies of executed criminals were hung on public display to deter other existing or potential criminals
<i>Goggushland</i>	Place name of unknown origin. Now called Crowland Common
Hermitage	A place occupied by a religious recluse
Intercommoning	Use of common land shared between parishes
Mangolds	A variety of beet grown for animal foodstuff
Osiers	Used in basket making osiers are the supple stems of the Willow tree
Pantiles	Roof tile with an S-shaped profile, allowing adjacent tiles to interlock
Piety	Devout observance of religious life
Pillory	A device made of wood with holes for the hands and head and used for public humiliation or punishment
Turnpike	A privately built road for which a toll, or fee, is paid for its use
Woad	A plant of the mustard family which was grown for its blue dye