

# Spalding Priory

The Priory once held an important place within the town of Spalding for nearly five hundred years, its influence being felt upon many levels of society. However there are virtually no tangible remains of what was once a substantial and important complex of buildings that are visible today.

Yet evidence of the Priory can be found in many places around Spalding, including this Forge...

A Priory is a house of men or women under religious vows headed by a Prior or Prioress. They are generally considered to be 'satellites' of the mother abbey, in Spalding's case this was Crowland, whose Abbot holds overall responsibility. The day to day running of the Priory is left under the control of the Prior and his subordinate monks and lay-brothers.

Such an establishment was founded in Spalding around AD 1052 by six Benedictine monks from Crowland Abbey (founded in AD 699 as an offshoot from Peterborough Abbey). Benedictines followed the teachings of St Benedict, with the emphasis firmly being on a tradition of self sufficiency and obedience. The monks lived, worked and died within the walls of the Monastery, which often saw a town grow up around them, as indeed Spalding did.

The first written record of Spalding can be found in a charter given to the monks of Crowland by King Ethelbald in AD 716, referring to the boundaries of the land of Crowland as extending 'as far as the buildings of Spalding'. It can be assumed that the site of Spalding had been settled by the eighth century, with wooden buildings being erected on the highest available land.

The origins of the Priory's true founding lay with Thorold of Buckenhale, a sheriff of Lincoln and benefactor to Crowland Abbey, to whom he 'granted the manor of Spalding... for the relief of its necessities'.

It has been suggested that Crowland Abbey was beginning to outgrow itself and needed room for expansion. The departure of six monks thus 'lessened for a while the expenses of the refectory'.

The monks were taken from Crowland by Thoraldus, brother of Godiva, Countess of Leicester, who assigned them sufficient lands from his manor for their support.

In AD 1059 the Priory of Spalding was growing in importance and Wulfkeytl, Abbot of Crowland, at the instigation of Earl Algar, granted his brothers at Spalding a wooden chapel dedicated to St Mary, that would enable them to show proper hospitality and an enrichment from certain rents.

By AD 1060 Spalding Priory was becoming as important as its parent institution and in time would become nearly as powerful...

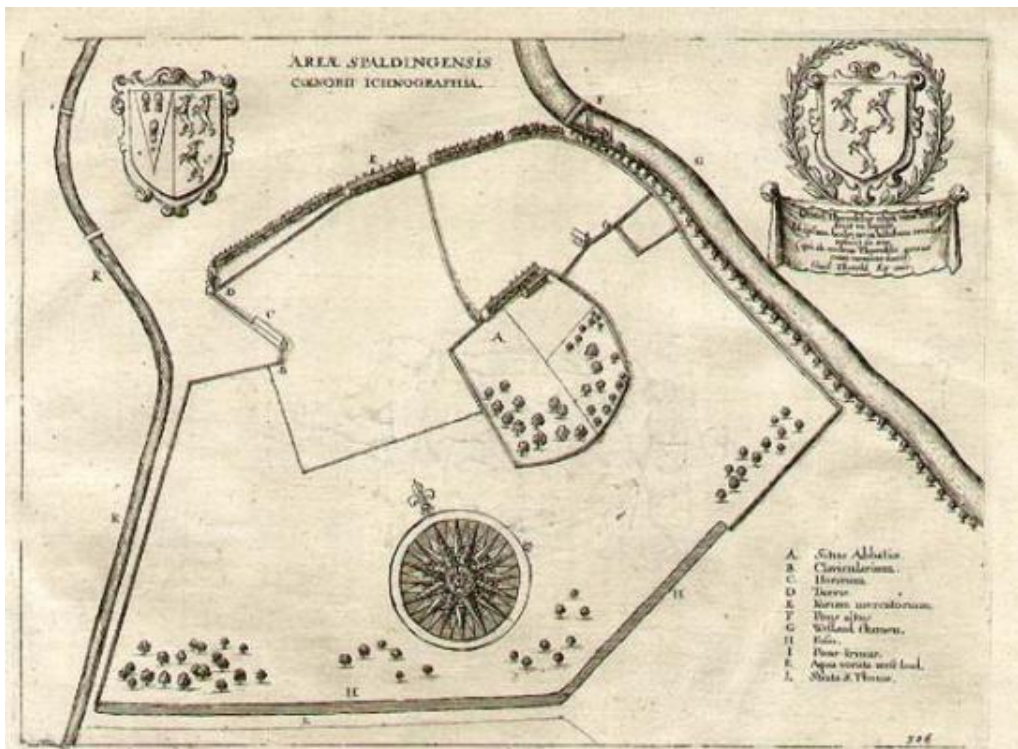
The Norman Conquest of AD 1066 heralded the golden age of Spalding Priory when Ivo Tailbois (reputed standard bearer at Hastings and nephew of William the Conqueror) married an heiress of Spalding, which became his seat of power. Ivo had no regard for the Saxons and after driving the monks of Spalding back to Crowland, he quickly introduced monks from the Benedictine Priory of St Nicholas at Angiers, France, to replace them...

Spalding was now free from the influences of Crowland, allowing it to grow and develop into one of the most powerful institutions in the area...



The illustration to the left shows the earliest contemporary illustrated record of Spalding Priory from the Fifteenth Century Pinchbeck Fen Map.

The land allocated to the Priory was bordered by the River Welland, the Market Place and St Thomas' Road, covering some 33 acres in all.



The illustration to the left shows the precincts of Spalding Priory as envisaged by Sir William Dugdale in 1655.

The Priory extended its influence beyond the confines of Spalding and secured land in nearby manors. These were principally Pinchbeck, Moulton, Sutton and Weston. It was in such manors that the grange farms were established, run by one or two monks and worked by conventional labourers.

An example of this can be seen at Wykeham Grange a mile east of Spalding, which is still worked as a private farm today.

Under successive Priors there was a general increase in prosperity in the area and Spalding became the distributing centre for produce. It appears from the Domesday survey of 1087 that Spalding was the only town in the proximity with a market that was worth 'forty shillings yearly'.

There is also evidence that the monks from Spalding Priory improved the arable lands by reclamation and drainage projects during the medieval period.



Subsequently the area became richer as a result and Spalding was able to utilise the advantages of its location and become the leading market centre within the area. There was communication by water to Crowland along the River Welland and possibly with Bourne via the Rivers Westlode or Glen, and by sea with Boston and the North Sea Coast, as well as with London to the south. Primitive roads connected Spalding to Gosberton and Donnington and also Weston, Whaplode, Holbeach and Wisbech, although it is possible that they would not have been passable during the Winter months.

The Priory was flourishing... Nineteenth Century Spalding historian Canon Moore describes it as a place of 'magnificence and grandeur' and 'perfect in it's structural and architectural features, bold and picturesque'.

So why did this magnificent building disappear from Spalding during the height of its powers?

The answer lies with King Henry VIII and his desire to divorce Queen Katherine of Aragon. England at this time was a Catholic country, answerable to Rome and the Pope. The Pope declined Henry's request for a divorce... so Henry divorced himself from the Catholic Church, appointing himself Head of the Church of England. He also noticed that the secular houses had grown rich and powerful over the years, and Henry felt that this wealth would be better off in his own coffers...

So by 1536 the period of dissolution began with the once great abbeys, monasterys and priorys succumbing to the crown.

Spalding was to succumb in 1539. It is said that the Prior and his monks left without quarrel and Henry's agents began the process of dissolving the building stone by stone.



The land was given to the King's best friend Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk. He later employed an agent to sell off the stone, which was taken away at five shillings a barrow load.

This Barnack rag limestone became the building material for many fine houses in Spalding and in later years saw many uses... There is a piece of worked limestone in the forge itself which could only have come from the Priory and outside the banks of the Welland have been built up using the very same stones...

Today nothing remains of the Priory itself, although if you look carefully there is still some evidence of it's existence..

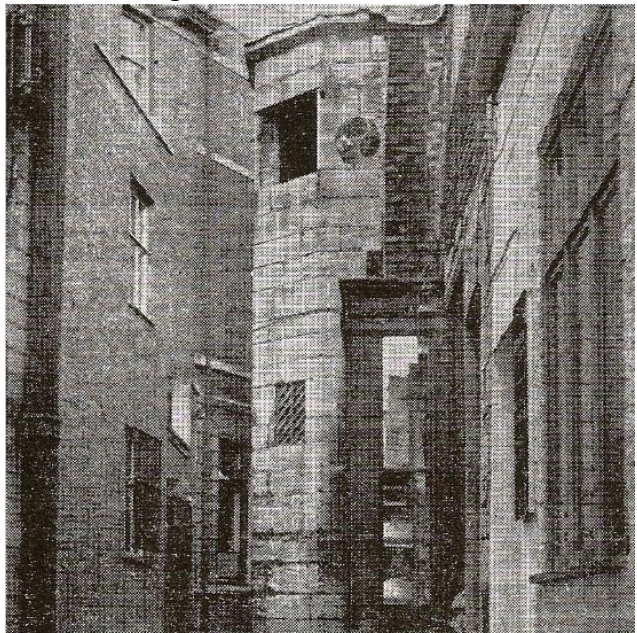
The picture above shows 'The Prior's Oven' (once also a Blacksmiths shop) which still stands on the corner of the High Street and is reputed to be part of the Priory. This is a Watercolour by Burgess c.1825.

The row of cottages in Priory Road are also reputed to be a Priory remnant...

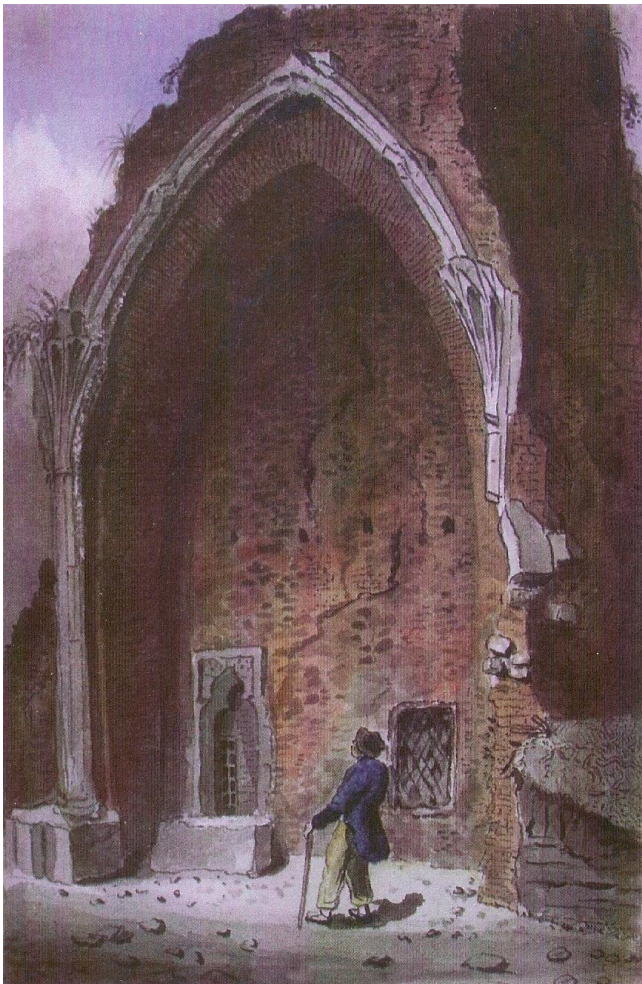




A rather strange tower once stood in The Hole in the Wall Passage...



This is all that remains today... It is thought that it was once part of the Church of St Mary that once stood within the Priory precinct...



Spalding Priory has had a long standing relationship with the town and continues to fascinate historians today...

Keep your eyes open... you might spot a piece of that once great building...

But not the above... This was part of the entrance that stood in the Crescent in the early part of the Nineteenth Century before it was demolished... Watercolour by Burgess c.1825.