

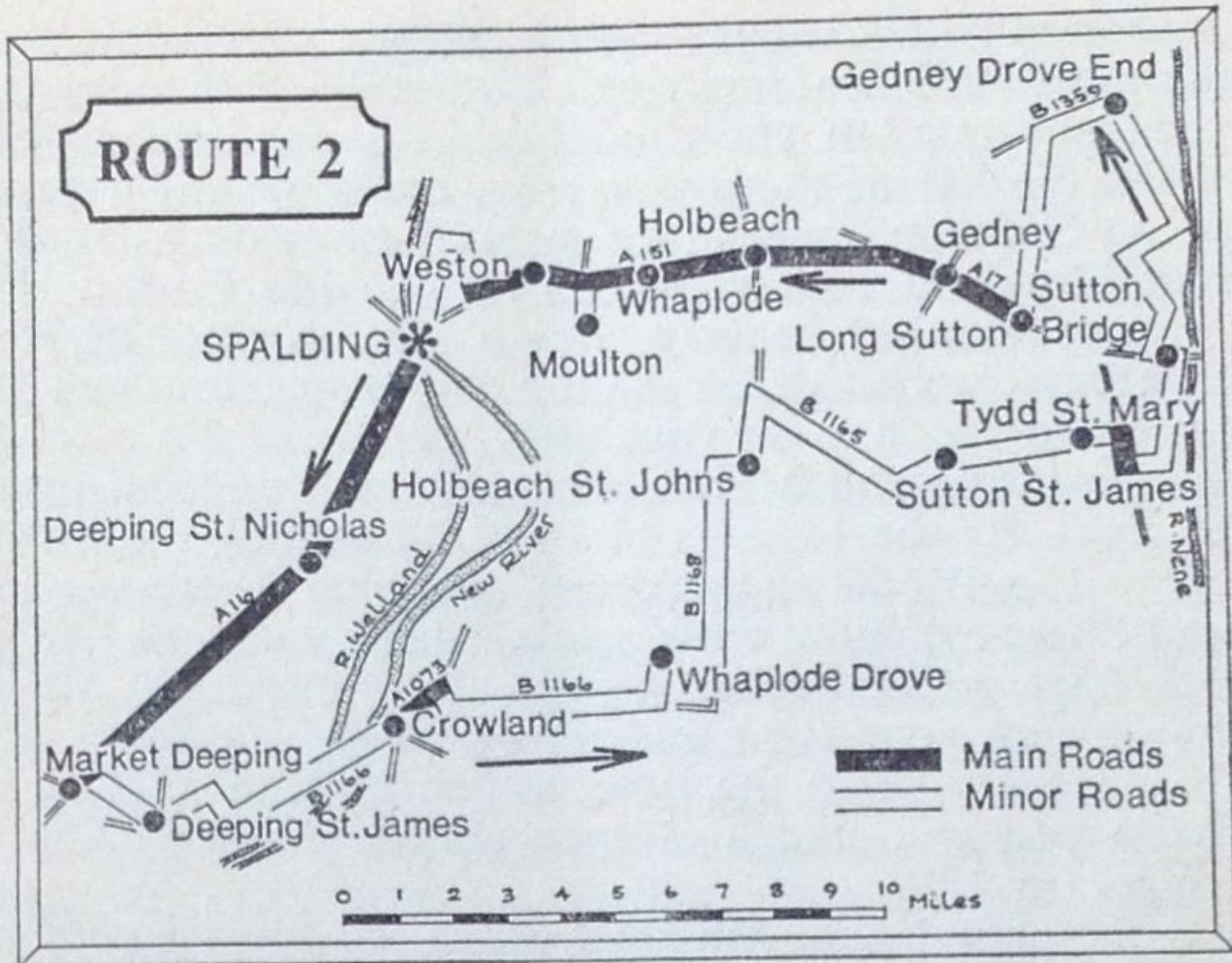
## ROUTE 2

**SPALDING — the Deepings — Crowland — Whaplode Drove — Holbeach St. Johns — Sutton St. James — Tydd St. Mary — Sutton Bridge — Gedney Drove End — Long Sutton — Gedney — Fleet — Holbeach — Whaplode — Moulton — Weston — SPALDING.**

If you traverse this route at Easter you will see many bands of daffodils growing in the fields you pass. A month later there will be multicoloured stripes of tulips. In September and October you will see the potato harvest in full swing with long 'tatty graves' being constructed by the roadside. Whichever time of year you choose, enjoy the wide open Fens, *but when it is windy drive carefully along the tops of the droves, and do not steer too near the deep dykes at their edge.*

Leave **Spalding** by the main A16 road, signposted Stamford. You pass through the suburb of Little London and then on to **Deeping St. Nicholas**, which until the middle of the nineteenth century was known as Deeping Fen. It was not until 1845 that there were enough houses to warrant the building of a church. White explained its name as 'being the lowest, or deepest, or most watery of all fens in the Great Level of the Wash'. The first attempts to drain Deeping Fen were made in 1595 by Thomas Lovell, who 'was greatly impeded in his work by the riotous opposition of the fen-men'. This vast area is so low lying that it was only in October 1827 with the starting-up of the first steam-driven pump at Pode Hole that its reclamation could be certain. Before then up to fifty windmills were used for pumping purposes.

At **Market Deeping** you are entering the region famous for Barnack ragstone, which was quarried a few miles away. Even in Roman times Market Deeping was of significance since the canal Car Dyke crossed the river Welland at this point. No market is held now in the funnel-shaped market place, but there are plenty of shops which serve the growing commuter population of Peterborough. Drive down to the roundabout, where the A16 crosses the A15, and retrace your steps for half a mile until you continue straight on as the A16 veers off



to the left. You proceed along the B1166 to Deeping St. James. Originally known as East Deeping, **Deeping St. James** church was part of a Benedictine priory, a daughter house of Thorney Abbey. By the turning to the church on your left is a most unusual market cross. In 1819 the shaft was removed and the base was converted into a lock-up.

Continue along the B1166 with a distant view of **Crowland** (or Croyland) Abbey ahead (plate 2). To reach this turn right into North Street as you enter the village. To this island in the Fens in 699 came the young hermit, St. Guthlac, an exile from the Mercian court. He built a crude hut and a chapel. Several refugees came to him, including the future King Ethelbald of Mercia. After the saint's death in 713 Ethelbald founded the first Croyland abbey, which was destroyed by the Danes in 870. The second abbey lasted from 948 until a disastrous fire in 1091. The third one, built in 1112, was also burnt thirty years later. The full extent of the fourth abbey can be seen in the present churchyard by a series of plaques on the ground. Just before you reach the abbey you will pass one of the most curious structures in the county: the medieval triangular bridge. Under its nine-foot-high arches once lapped the confluence of the Welland and the Catchwater Drain, now all culverted. The figure on the cobbled bridge was probably removed from the west front of the abbey about 1720. White and Rawnsley identify the effigy as King Ethelbald, holding in his hand a loaf of bread; Thorold and Yates call it the Virgin Mary; Cox and Mee are sure that it is Christ holding an orb.

The visitor must hazard his own identification!

Take the A1073 Spalding road. Two and a half miles along this road on your left you should come to the ancient Assen Dyke. On the left of the minor cross roads by this waterway stands the Guthlac Stone, which marked the boundaries of the lands of Croyland Abbey. Ahead of you lies Cowbit Wash which, until the last century, was a vast expanse of ice in winter where the British ice skating championships were held.

Turn down the lane on your right, pass over the main line between Spalding and March, and then take the first turning on the right. By the remains of Postland railway station turn left on to the B1166 and proceed as far as Sheppeau (pronounced Sheppey) Stow cross roads, where you fork left past the Red Last public house. A mile along this road take the first turning on your right and pass through a housing estate at **Whaplode Drove** to the little church built in 1821. Inside the porch you will find a Roman shrine, discovered in the churchyard in 1935.

From the church take the road which is almost a continuation of the one along which you entered Whaplode Drove. At the T junction at its end, turn right and almost immediately left, on to the B1168.

**Holbeach St. Johns** is another recent settlement, its church dating from 1840. Continue along the B1168 as far as Saturday Bridge cross roads, where you should turn right on to the B1165, signposted to Wisbech. Two and a half miles along this road look out for St. Ives' (or Ivy) Cross at a road junction on your right-hand side, just past the village sign for **Sutton St. James**. This was probably a butter cross, where local women would sell their dairy products to people en route from Wisbech to Spalding. Along the wide main street of the village is the rump of the parish church. Only the tower was left standing in Cromwellian times, but since then the chancel has been rebuilt.

A mile beyond Sutton St. James take the minor road for **Tydd St. Mary**. The name Tydd is derived from the old word for tide (the Nene is tidal here). Turn down the lane on your right to see the parish church with its open work pulpit, the coat of arms on the font, and the statue of Edward VII in a niche on the exterior of the red brick tower.

Continue past the village sign to the junction with the A1101. Turn right for Tydd Gote and turn left down the lane signposted 'Tydd Station'. This brings you on to the high banks of the Nene with its warning notices 'Please dip headlights as ships approach'. Until 1965 **Sutton Bridge** was still a railway junction; once it had been a port as well. White (1855)

mentions warehouses and wharves coping with corn, coal and timber. In May 1881, new docks were opened, but within a month they had collapsed, due to the unstable nature of the soil at this point. Nevertheless another local engineering feat is still in regular use. This is the two-mile-long embankment, stretching into Norfolk as far as Walpole Cross Keys, which was completed in 1831 after over three years of toil involving 900 men and 260 horses. Sutton Bridge is supposed to be the site where King John lost the crown jewels. As you emerge left on to the A17, note the square flint block parish church of the last century.

Take the third turning on the right (New Road). This leads out past thatched smallholdings to King John's Farm, by a cross roads. Fork right where it is signposted 'Gedney Drove End' and proceed to the banks of the Nene by Guy's Head lighthouses. The one on the Norfolk shore is the site of Peter Scott's first bird sanctuary. Follow the road in its meanderings, taking the right fork for **Gedney Drove End**. Opposite the Ship public house stop and climb the sea bank. This is the nearest you will get to the Wash! You may see a kind of edible green seaweed called samphire growing there. You can collect it, soak it in vinegar, and serve it with green salads. The scaffolding towers are part of an old R.A.F. bombing range. Turn left and continue to Gedney Drove End. Here proceed along the B1359 and continue through another Little London into **Long Sutton** (see page 55).

Leave Long Sutton via the A17, forking off on to the A151 at Fleet Hargate for Holbeach. The first village you pass is **Gedney**, the church of which is sometimes called the 'Cathedral of the Fens'. It is one of the so-called wool churches, built towards the close of the Middle Ages using the profits made by grazing sheep on the lush fens. This church is actually built on a raft which floats on the peat. Look for the brass of Lady Roos with her little dog (c. 1390) on the floor of the south aisle. Richard Hakluyt, the geographer, was once vicar here.

Leaving **Holbeach** (see page 51) along the A151, the next village is **Whaplode** (formerly spelt Quapplelode, meaning 'overflowing water course'). The church has some Saxon carvings. Turn off the main road at **Moulton** to see the village green and another fine wool church with a sail-less windmill next door. It is best to enquire locally as to the easiest route to see the Elloe Stone, where in Saxon times the wapentake court met. It stands beside a narrow lane.

Pass through **Weston**, with its thatched lychgate outside the church, and take the second turning on the right, signposted

'Wykeham, Spalding Marsh'. Pass close by the ruins of Wykeham chapel, built in 1311 as a private chapel of Prior Hatfield of Spalding who had a country seat nearby. Follow the drove round to the banks of the Welland, and then turn left by the road named Roman Bank. This will lead you to **Fulney**. Here is Springfields, the National Farmers Union gardening centre, established in 1968, and open between April and October.

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