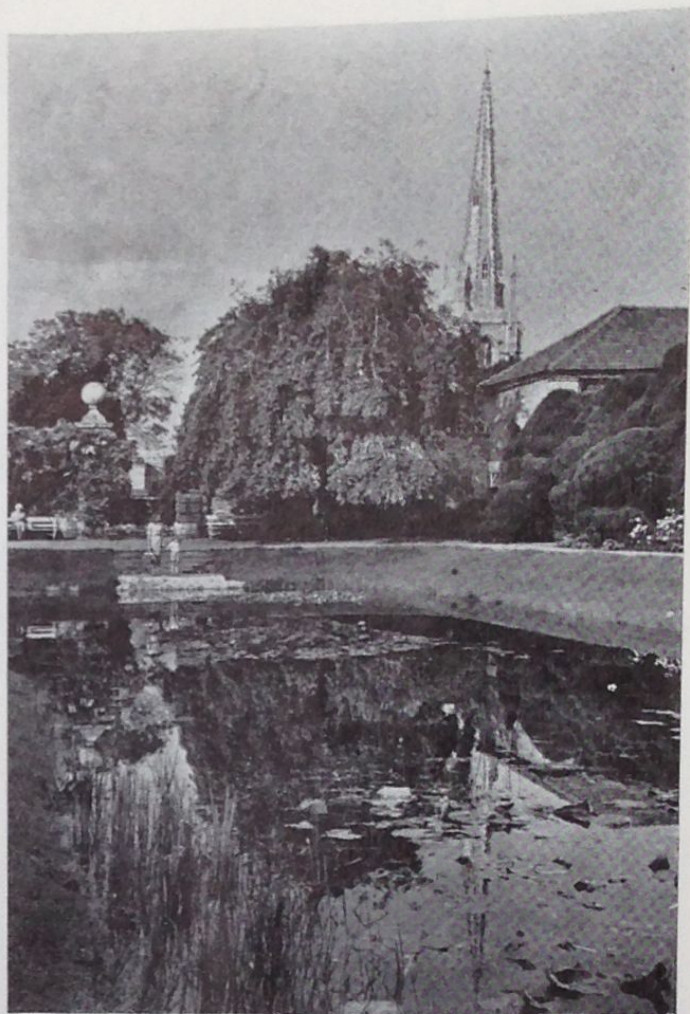




A CAMEO of  
**SPALDING**



*... whose  
bulbfields have  
made Lincolnshire  
famous the  
country over*



The people of Spalding have done much to beautify their attractive town by the Welland. The gardens of Ayscoughfee Hall are an asset, containing the War Memorial Gardens seen here, with its lilypond reflecting the spire of the 13th Century church.

by HUGH D. MARTINEAU

Out of the swamp it rose, and 'out of the swamp' is probably the original meaning of the name Spalding. For in the distant past, the sea coast was but a mile away and frequently the waters overran the surrounding area, converting it into a vast morass, where fishing and fowling were the means of livelihood and where mud and reeds were the materials for building; the reeds served not only for thatching but as fuel also.

The Romans stayed in this country for 400 years and, although at first they avoided this uninviting region, they then built many sea walls in an attempt to keep out the invading Wash, and dug dykes to drain the places they chose for habitation. Spalding, near the mouth of the Welland, was one such place which they raised 'ex palude', building up high river banks and carrying away much of the surplus water from above, by cutting the ancient Westlode. The water of this Westlode was always pure and provided excellent fish, whereas the Welland was often salt and muddy from the sea's incursions. This dyke was filled in 150 years ago, and Westlode Street now passes over a part of its original course.

Though a few Roman remains, and even Greek coins, have been found here, there is little evidence of the Romans having occupied the site of the town, and little more is heard of Spalding until we find it mentioned in 716 A.D., spelt Spaldelyng. In Saxon times the Earls of Mercia held supreme Courts of Law here, and Spalding Priory was founded in 1051 by Thorold de Bokenhale, brother of Lady Godiva.

When William the Conqueror invaded England 15 years later, he made his nephew Ivo Tailbois Lord of Holland, who presided in much splendour at Spalding Castle, where a recreation ground has now been made, to the north of Westlode Street. He made the Priory very rich, but sent Benedictine monks to occupy it, from his native town of Angiers in France. It covered a large area south of the Market Place, and its church was rebuilt in the early 13th century.

Although there were frequent quarrels between the Priors of Spalding and the Abbots of nearby Crowland, they both became the richest monastic houses in the county. The only important remains



The Spalding Gentlemen's Society was the forerunner of societies of intellectual men of varied interests. Sir Isaac Newton and Dr. Stukeley were members and the poet Gray read his famous *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* to the Society. The building in Broad Street has been extended and has an interesting museum and library.

of Spalding Priory now left are the Prior's Oven, as it is picturesquely called, at the corner of the Sheep Market, which dates from about 1230, and a fine range of buildings off Priory Road, which may have been the monks' dormitory in the 15th century. The attractive Prior's Oven was formerly the Priory Prison, above which rose a high tower with a bell. This was tolled at the time of executions and other matters of gravity. Having later been used as a forge, it is now a most charming little restaurant.

In Henry III's reign, the Prior obtained a charter granting the town a market, to be held on Fridays, this being later altered to Tuesdays. By the 14th century, Spalding was a quite important town. It was visited not only by John of Gaunt from Bolingbroke Castle, but also by King Edward I and Edward II at the time of Prior Hatfield, who in 1293 built himself a luxurious moated Hall three miles away near the river's bank, beside the lovely Wykeham Chapel, whose ruins are still beautiful. At the Dissolution of the Monasteries, Henry VIII gave this to the Harrington family, one of whom restored the Chapel in 1625.

Spalding was a port to which barges and small ships could come, and, in a region where roads were non-existent, water transport was the only means of carrying goods in any quantity. It is only  $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles from the centre of Spalding to places still known as Moulton Seas End and Surfleet Seas End, to which the sea came up, though at the present day the

nearest coast of the Wash is 11 miles distant. The coming of the monks to the great Abbeys and Priors such as Crowland and Spalding, was also the beginning of the draining of the Fens, for it was the churches with their rich resources, which had both the foresight and the wealth for carrying out this work. After the Dissolution of the monasteries, when the church estates were confiscated, other great landowners, such as the Earl of Exeter at Stamford, continued the good work, with the help of some Dutch drainage engineers in the 16th to 18th Centuries, despite fierce opposition from the people of the fens.

In 1286, however, a great gale broke the sea banks and flooded the town and its Priory, with considerable loss and damage. The Abbot paid for the necessary repairs by laying a tax on the wool and flax in the district, for flax was widely grown here in those days. At various other times in history, the reclaimed marshes have been swept by the invading waves. Long ago Abbot Egelrick of Crowland made a 12-mile causeway from Spalding to Deeping for travellers. It passed through the Arundel Forest and miles of marshes, wooden piles being driven into the mud and covered over with layers of gravel. In 1766, the Welland's banks broke again, from the pressure of the water, drowning the crops on all the fens, which remained flooded and frozen through the winter. When the ice thawed, several of the mills along the banks were sawn in half by the splitting ice.

One of Spalding's best known mansions is Ayscoughfee Hall, between the right bank of the Welland and St. Nicholas' Church. This house was built by Sir Richard Aldwyn, one of the rich wool staple merchants, in 1420. Maurice Johnson lived there early in the 18th Century. He was a lawyer of wide interests and knowledge, who in 1710 founded the famous Gentlemen's Society of Spalding, and seven years later was instrumental with Dr. Stukeley in forming the Society of Antiquaries in London. To the Gentlemen's Society came Sir Isaac Newton, as well as Pope, Addison and Gray, the well known writers, and many other distinguished intellectuals. Ayscoughfee Hall and the 16th century Willesby Hall had thatched roofs, like most other houses, until 1777, when they received slated roofs. The Hall and its gardens are now owned by the Town Council and are a great asset. The house, which has been much altered, contains a very full collection of the birds of Britain, as well as stained glass windows of great variety and rarity, from the 14th to the 18th Centuries. The gardens contain bowling-greens, tennis courts and aviaries, as well as the quiet and charming Memorial Garden surrounded by the unusual, tall Yew hedges.

The Gentlemen's Society has a most interesting museum of historical and archaeological objects and a library of rare books. It is housed in Broad Street and is very much worth visiting.

Spalding's shopping centre is all concentrated in an area close to the Market Place and Sheep Market. When you cross the High Bridge to the right bank of the river, you immediately leave the busy town centre and enter a more dignified and peaceful district. At the corner facing you stands the delightful old White Horse inn, with a picturesque tea-room



There are 800 miles of waterways near Spalding so anglers don't have far to go. The waters of the Welland reflect the attractive old houses and business premises along its banks.

under the same thatched roof. This was built in 1553 as a private house by William Willesby at the same time as Willesby Hall, from materials taken from the old Priory after the Dissolution of the monasteries. This same gentleman also founded the Pettit school.

But this is by no means the oldest of Spalding's ancient inns. For centuries the White Hart, facing on to the Market Place, has been famed. It was built in 1377, and until 1772 it used to have a Market Cross in front of it. It was rebuilt after being burnt down in 1714. A certain Richard Rishton, of Cromwell's army, lived in it, and he issued halfpennies dated 1666, with a Hart couchant on one side. Close to it is the old Red Lion. These inns, and others, have interesting and extensive yards and stabling at the back, which must have presented a scene of great activity in the old coaching days. Here the horses were changed and groomed, the coaches were cleaned and over-hauled, while man and beast alike were stoked and oiled and rested. There was more work for many men and boys on a six horse-power coach than at a modern garage on a 16 horse-power car.

In 1723, however, the yard of the White Hart was the scene of a duel, in which one William Emerson Lee was slain. He was buried in the churchyard, with this inscription on his tombstone:—

A skull and a sword,  
Here lies a man of mickle fame,  
Who lived by the sword and prize  
And died by the same.

The White Hart and a large part of the centre of Spalding were wiped out in 1714 by a disastrous fire, which started in a gunsmith's shop and burnt down eighty four houses and shops round the Market Place. In order to prevent the fire from spreading further west, a brave soldier with gunpowder blew up a house and shop near the Hole in the Wall, but he himself was caught by the blast and blown in the air. The unfortunate man came down roasted in the yard of a Public House called "The Flank of Beef." The fire spread no further. The inhabitants had little time to salvage any belongings and camped out for two days and nights. King George I was so impressed at the losses suffered by the people of Spalding that he appealed to his subjects everywhere to help the sufferers in their distress.

As the sea marshes of Holland were gradually drained and more land became available in the 16th and 17th Centuries, vast numbers of sheep and cattle were brought here, for the pasture land was rich. When Scottish cattle were driven across country to the Marshlands, there were many scenes resembling



Left: The attractive Prior's Oven restaurant dates from about 1230. Originally the Priory prison, it had a high tower with a bell, tolled at times of executions. Centre: Holland House, built about 1768 and considered architecturally the best in the town, now houses the offices of the Ministry of Social Security. It overlooks the Welland from the right bank. Right: Facing on to the market place from the east is the Corn Exchange of 1855, used for meetings and concerts, while on the left is the White Hart, first built in 1377, but rebuilt after the great fire of 1714.

the Wild West of the films, with cowboys to round up and drive the beasts. A ferry was used for the cows to cross the Welland at Cowhirne  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile beyond the Wykeham Chapel, on their way from Surfleet to Holbeach, and a public house there was called "The Cows' Horn."

Gradually, as the fens, as well as these marshes, were also drained, it was possible to make roads across the land, which had earlier been impassable, and to turn the rich fen soil into agricultural land. Races had been held on Spalding Common, which drew the fashionable gentry to Spalding until 1788. This Common or Fen was enclosed in 1803, and in the early 19th century great drainage schemes were carried out, with a number of engines to pump away the water and so bring into use many thousands of acres of the richest land. In the life-time of many of us, Cowbit Fen was under water most of the winter, allowing of excellent ice-skating. It seemed impossible then that it could ever become the prosperous farm land it now is.

Spalding now is recognised as the centre of one of the world's finest farming areas. Almost equidistant from Wisbech, Peterborough, Stamford, Sleaford and Boston, it has five main A roads radiating from it, and six railway lines like the spokes of a wheel. Some of the latter are threatened with closure, and I suggest the development of an airport in the near future, as the transport by air of such perishable freight as flowers and fruit can be made profitable. For heavy, slow-moving transport, the river can be and still is used, but perhaps less than it might be. The Welland has served the town well in the past, and now, more than ever, it is the stream which has given it two of its main roads along its banks and is without a doubt its most beautiful artery. Shaded by trees along much of its length, and lined by stately and well built

houses of the 17th and 18th Centuries, the river gives Spalding a pleasantly Dutch appearance, but enhanced by the rich green of its English verdure and the best style of English housing.

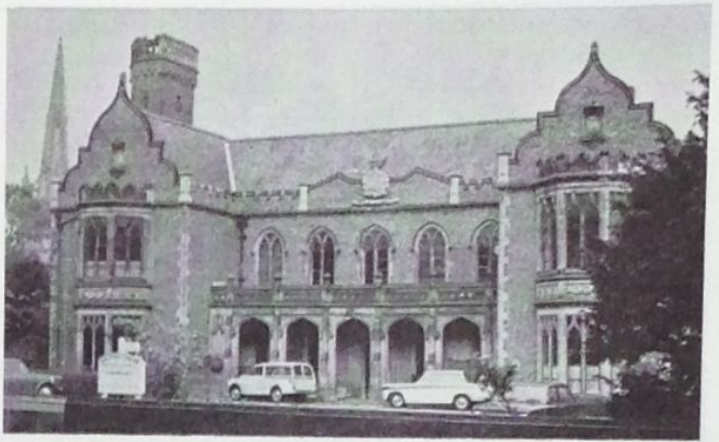
On the right bank, away from the bustle of the Market and the shops, there have been new developments in an area hitherto monopolised by the most charming old buildings. Next to Ayscoughfee Hall is the new Town Hall in pleasant surroundings. Beside it there is a Vista from the river bank to the graceful spire of St Nicholas' Church, near which is the new Church Hall. Close by is the Bull Inn, rebuilt in a pleasing modern style. Those who might be tempted to imbibe too freely can take warning from William Cross, a stonecutter, who in 1782 erected the new weathercock on the church spire. After this nerve-racking piece of work, he became intoxicated in the Bull Inn and was drowned in the Welland the same night.

In addition to the magnificent Priory Church of the early 13th Century, there were two, and perhaps three, other churches on the Priory's boundary wall facing the Market Place, those of the Holy Cross, of St. Mary Stokys and of the Holy Trinity. They were pulled down in 1284 and the new Parish Church, built very largely from the materials of these, was founded across the river, William de Littleport being then Prior. It was built in the already existing cemetery, where the Chapel of Thomas a Becket stood. The measurements were almost identical with those of the present building. It was completed when Clement Hatfield was Prior, the builder of the Wykeham Chapel.

Like all these churches of Fenland and Marsh, it is a magnificent and very unusual edifice. Originally built in the shape of a cross, an outer south aisle was



The fine Sessions House looking on to the Sheep Market was built in 1842.



The much restored Ayscoughfee Hall built in 1420 was the home in the 18th Century of Maurice Johnson, founder of the Gentlemen's Society of Spalding. It now belongs to the town council and with its gardens is one of the town's most attractive features.



These charming houses on Churchgate facing the river have a doorway at the bottom right which is still used although little over four feet high.



Fulney House near Springfields bulb gardens has been modernised from the ancient stone dairy of Spalding's 12th Century priory.



An old photograph by Stanley Jepson showing the thatching of the buildings built out of priory remains. The thatching surface covers 5,000 square feet, the thatch was 20 inches thick and 1,000 bundles of reed were used in what is believed to be the largest thatched surface in England. The work took eight weeks.



Little remains of Spalding's 11th Century Priory, but this range of stone buildings off Priory Road was probably the dormitory where the monks slept.

added in the 14th Century as well as the Lady Chapel, which was used as the Grammar School. The outer north aisle and porch followed in the 15th Century. This porch with its fan-tracery roof is of exceptional beauty, but so is the whole interior of the church, which thus has a nave and four aisles, while the transepts also have double aisles. If you stand by the south door and look to the north east, the array of pillars resembles trees in a wood with their varying lights and shades. The windows too are of great interest, and two modern additions on the south show Spalding's recent activities in the bulb-fields and

in agriculture, as well as other attractive aspects of life in the present-day community. The tower, with its spire and cross, rise 160 feet. When the top was reset during restoration, the weather was exceptionally clear, and it was possible to see from that height the three Cathedrals of Ely, Peterborough and Lincoln. When first founded, it was only allowed two bells on condition that they were not rung while the monks were in their dormitory. However, three more bells were added, whose ringing caused the Prior to appeal to King Henry IV. There is now a very fine peal of 8 bells.