

BURROWS POINTER GUIDE MAP OF SPALDING – 1960's

"An island in a sea of flowers" is not too poetic a description of Spalding in its principal harvest time. For its harvests are gathered in the Springtime from fields radiant with the luminous gold of daffodils or, a little later, from the tulip fields, dazzling in their multi-coloured beauty, which adorn the surrounding countryside. Tulip time draws to the Spalding district from great distances visitors by the hundred thousand to feast their eyes on this floral pageant of the Fenland Spring.

"Holland" is an apt name for the division of Lincolnshire in which Spalding is located. The long, straight roads bordering the great dykes which drain the spacious level countryside, the occasional windmills, and, in Spalding itself, the River Welland traversing the town between tree-lined banks, create the illusion of a Dutch landscape. The resemblance to one special part of Holland is intensified in Springtime by the far-spread fields of flowers, product of an industry which has ranged this English town as rival to Dutch Hillegom in the growing and marketing of flower-bulbs.

The river banks which, in Spalding and for three miles seawards, confine the waters of the River Welland and protect the surrounding lowlands from inundation, are an enduring and beneficent legacy of those great civil engineers the Romans. But a fragment of the town's still earlier history is embedded in its name, recalling as this does the tribe known as the Spalds who in the seventh century inhabited the Fens and established a settlement here. Later history of the town records the existence in the year 860 of a chapel of St. Mary on a site where later, in 1051, a priory was built by Thorold de Buckenhale, brother of Lady Godiva. The priory fell a victim to the Dissolution of the Monasteries and itself dissolved and disappeared except for the vaulted room (formerly a monastic prison) of a shop in Sheep Market known as The Prior's Oven, the name of Priory Road, and fragments of masonry embodied in old cottages in that road. In this priory was buried the Conqueror's nephew Ivo Taillebois, lord of Holland, who ruled his domain from a castle standing eastwards of what is now Pinchbeck Street but of which nothing now remains save a trace of the castle moat. It was a prior of Spalding who in the fourteenth century built for a country retreat the Wykeham Chapel whose ruins are to be seen at 'Weston, three miles north-east of Spalding. A century before this, in 1284, another prior, William Littleport, had built on the site of an earlier chapel the nucleus of what is now the fine old parish church of St. Mary and St. Nicholas, which owes its present size and appearance to additions of the Decorated and Perpendicular periods. Proportionally the church is of abnormal width owing to the double aisles on each side of the nave, which provide an unusual vista from the south porch of as many as twenty-three different arches. In common with those of the neighbouring villages of Pinchbeck and Surfleet, the church has a leaning tower a reminder that the ground on which they stand has been won from the sea, although in the case of Spalding the tower, it is said, was actually built without foundations!

A pleasing and conspicuous landmark in the Spalding scene is the group of lofty and ancient yews of Ayscoughfee Hall close beside the church. The picturesque old mansion with its delightful grounds is now owned by the town. The windows of the Hall contain a fine array of stained glass English, French, Dutch and Flemish dating from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century. The grounds are now public gardens, in whose harmonious setting lawns for bowls and tennis have been provided. Here, too, are open-air aviaries and an

aquarium. An ornamental lake is overlooked by the town's war memorial an arcaded building wherein are inscribed the names of the Fallen.

Ayscoughfee Hall was the home of one Maurice Johnson, who in 1710 gave lustre to the town by founding "The Gentlemen's Society of Spalding". The Society, which still exists, was a pioneer of learned societies and preceded by seven years the birth (at which Johnson also assisted) of the London Society of Antiquaries. The members of the Spalding Society included such men of distinction as Sir Isaac Newton, the poets Pope, Gray and Gay, Addison, Sir Hans Sloane the famous architect, Stukeley the anti-quarian, and the engineer to the Czar Peter the Great, Captain Perry, engaged at the time, however, on the draining of Deeping Fen.

Historically, the flower-bulb industry of Spalding and district is of comparatively recent origin, having begun about eighty years ago through the vision and enterprise of a few men. Their success attracted others to the industry until in 1939, at the outbreak of war, some six hundred growers were annually planting over four thousand acres in the district with bulbs. Much of this area was devoted during the war to food production but has now returned to its former use. Food production is still, however, a major local industry. Vast quantities of potatoes and sugar-beet are grown the latter converted to sugar in Spalding's own factory, which yearly deals with some 200,000 tons of beet. Other vegetables also, as well as fruit, are grown on a considerable scale, much being absorbed by local firms engaged in canning or other treatment of the produce. Much of Spalding's picturesqueness derives from the River Welland which is tidal, and often at high tide attains a level above that of most of the roads in the district. 'Flood relief is provided by a " by-pass " of the river, the two mile Coronation Channel round Spalding which was opened in 1954 by the then Minister of Agriculture, Sir Thomas Dugdale. The channel, a masterpiece of skilful engineering, was designed by the late Mr. E. G. Taverner, then chief engineer to the Welland River Board. The town, which is an urban district, is the appropriate centre for the collective administration of the many authorities responsible for the vital land drainage systems on which the preservation of the Fenlands, and the livelihoods, and even the lives, of the inhabitants depend.