
SOME UNWRITTEN HISTORY
OF
SPALDING PRIORY

BY

CHARLES BREARS

(Author of "A Short History of Lincolnshire," "Lincolnshire in the
Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries").

ONE SHILLING

Some Unwritten History of Spalding Priory

Being a Lecture given to the Spalding Gentlemen's Society

by

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THE PRIORY BUILDINGS.

Little information can be gathered from the records as to the disposition of the Priory buildings. In 1253 the Priory Court was extended outside the western wall to include a road leading from the Market Place to the Windmill of William, son of Ralph, while on the east it was extended to the river bank. In 1333, no doubt owing to the depredations of the Wakes of Bourne and Deeping, the wall separating the convent from the town was strengthened and crenellated; the plan in Dugdale shows that a moat formed the boundary towards the Marsh, running along the line of the present St. Thomas's Road.

The conventual church contained chapels dedicated to St. John and St. Stephen, and Prior John the Spaniard granted land in Pinchbeck at the rent of a flagon of oil for the lamp before the image of the Blessed Virgin at the door of the chapter house. Although the parish church, before removal to its present site about 1284, was contiguous to the conventual church, the latter contained the baptistry, which probably resulted in friction, as was the case at Sherborne.

The precincts contained an orchard, vine-yard and herb garden, while a garden was also made in the cloister garth—the history of horticulture in Spalding is a long one.

EARLY DRAINAGE AND LAND RECLAMATION

As in many other places some of the Priors were pioneers in land drainage and reclamation. The Charter of Disafforestation of 1189 mentions the dyke made by Prior Simon from Gudramsend. In 1198 an agreement was made by the Prior and Thomas of Moulton for the joint reclamation of the Marsh at Moulton. It was about this time that much land was reclaimed both from the sea and fen. On the Spalding estates from Wyberton to Holbeach this new land was termed “Offoldfal,” but further east at Sutton and Tydd it was always described as “newly gained.” Pope Alexander III granted the Priory exemption from tithe on their land at Sutton adjacent to their manor of Gannok because it had been recently reclaimed from the marsh; this exemption led to a dispute with the Prior of Castle Acre in 1243.

SOME OF THE PRIORS.

Some of the early priors, e.g., Gunnild, Galfrid, and Geoffrey I (who witnessed the gift of tithes in Sutton and Lutton by Picot the son of Colswegen in 1111) must remain mere names, but the records show that accounts of others, given in the early minutes of this Society, need revision. It would have been remarkable indeed if the house had been governed by a long line of men, all virtuous and excellent.

The only reference hitherto made to Prior Nigel is that in the Victoria County History that he was prior during the reign of Henry II. The charters show that he was prior when Goscelin, son of Helpo of Surfleet (who, like his father, died in the Holy Land), granted to the Priory the church of Surfleet and a salt-pan there. The gift was made at Surfleet with bellropes and the key of the church, but Goscelin afterwards came to Spalding and in the chapter house deposited as token his clasp knife, which, the charter adds, "Now lies folded in the secretary's office." The grant was confirmed by Goscelin's widow in 1133, Nigel still being prior. One of the witnesses of Goscelin's charter was "Alured, son of Prior Nigel," which may be the reason why no particulars have been given of Prior Nigel. Later records show that some of the Spalding Priors had concubines.

Two of the Priors, Simon of Alkborough (really born in Pinchbeck) and John the Almoner, who have received much praise, were guilty of appropriating the tithe of wool and flax in Pinchbeck to their own use. Prior Simon, "munificent above all the prelates of England," was threatened with deposition by the Bishop of Lincoln for making extravagant gifts as bribes. He was, however, supported by Bishop Grosseteste in opposing the presentation of Sinobald of Turin, the Pope's nephew, to the vicarage of Pinchbeck, and when the agents of the Pope's nuncio came in 1244 to treat on the matter, they were attacked and ill-treated by the people of this locality. The priors frequently had recourse to bribery, and among the gifts made by them to obtain local concessions were jewels worth £120, palfreys, casks of wine, falcons valued at 20s. each, and quarters of corn.

John the Almoner, a Justice in Eyre in the county of Essex, frequently broke the peace in this neighbourhood, sheltering murderers and felons in the Priory, and forcibly imprisoning people until they bought their freedom. In 1274, the Priory being reduced to a state of poverty, Prior John went on a pilgrimage to France, where he died. The brethren, who were with him, cleverly wrapped his body in cloths and brought it to Spalding, where it was buried on the left hand side of the church before the altar.

Although Spalding Priory was one of the richest monasteries in Lincolnshire it was at times considerably in debt. Although the Victoria County History states that Clement of Hatfield, dying in 1308 (recte 1318), left behind a good reputation for the management of the property of the house, in reality he left it more than £1,000 in debt. In 1351, owing to damage caused by floods, a Papal Indulgence was granted to all who rendered assistance, while the Priory was allowed to appropriate the tithes of Sibsey Church for the repair of the bell tower. A century later the poverty of the priory was due to mismanagement of its revenue—a common feature of monastic administration. Some of the priors in particular Clement of Hatfield and William of Littleport, provided for numerous relatives out of the Priory endowments.

Prior Clement has received due praise for ameliorating the conditions of the monks, although he was accused of supplying the Scots with corn and other victuals when at war with this country. Clement divided the monks into four sections for blood-letting, which was undergone every six weeks. Before Wykeham Grange was built for their reception he allowed those who had been bled to remain in the herb garden “consoling one with another.” They were also allowed to leave the precincts and walk out together towards Starfendike to take the benefit of the fresh air, except on Tuesdays when it was not permitted on account of the throngs of people attending Spalding market. Clement increased the rations of the monks, providing six trencher loaves instead of one, and increasing the second course both at dinner and supper from four eggs, herrings or flounders to the number of six. (The Priory owned its own quay and buildings at Burnham in Norfolk for curing herrings). It was also decreed that the monks were to be allowed to wash their hands in the lavatory after dinner.

Prior Thomas of Nassington has not received due acknowledgment for similar improvement. He established the office of Chamberlain and endowed it with £20 a year from Sutton, £10 from Alkborough, £5 from Moulton, and £5 from Spalding. This income was to be expended in buying wine if the two casks usually provided did not arrive. The monks who had been bled and were in residence at Wykeham were to have two monastic loaves and 1½ gallons of beer daily, in addition to their ordinary rations.

Monks visiting friends were to have 15 days' continuous leave of absence and to be provided with a good pack-horse and harness, or even a cart to neighbouring places. Flesh was to be served in the Infirmary throughout the year except in Advent.

£10 10s. was to be spent on 30 monks' tunics.

£3 10s. was to be spent on 30 fur-lined hoods.

15s. for 45 ells of linen cloth for covering the heads of 30 monks.

8s. for spices for those who had been bled.

4s. for a torch burning continually in the night in the chamber of those who have been bled.

When Mass was celebrated on the anniversary of Thomas' death 6s. 3d. was to be spent in feeding 100 poor with $\frac{1}{2}$ d. loaf each and $\frac{1}{4}$ d. on anything eaten with bread.

13s. 4d. on fish and wine for the convent.

6d. to the ringers of the bells.

2d. on the carrier of the little bell through the town.

RELATIONS WITH THE PARENT ABBEY OF ANGERS.

“ Divers temporal priors were successively appointed to the Priory by the Abbots of Angers, and also cellarers, sacristans and other officials, who were deposed and removed from their offices at the pleasure of the Abbots, and when they left Spalding Priory to return abroad they carried with them whatsoever they could collect in their said offices to the no small damage and injury of the Priory.”

Owing to this, Hugh of Wells, Bishop of Lincoln, and Randolph, Earl of Chester, the patron of the Priory, in 1232 made an agreement with Constantius, Abbot of Angers, that the Priors should be instituted by the Bishop and not be removed without due cause. Novices were to go to Angers in their third or fourth year for profession and the Abbot should make a visitation of the Priory with a moderate and suitable retinue whenever he deemed it necessary.

When Abbot Constantius died his successor James broke the agreement and, asserting that the Prior with certain of his partisans was giving himself up to gluttony and drunkenness and other allurements of the flesh, lavishly dissipating and wasting the goods of the priory and converting them to unlawful uses, came to Spalding to carry out a reformation. On arrival he was refused admission to the Priory, and Thomas, one of the monks, laid violent hands upon him, and his servants and companions were flogged and beaten. He therefore excommunicated them, “ but they, drinking in the curse like water, have profanely dared to celebrate divine service.”

A second agreement was made in 1242 and confirmed by Pope Innocent IV three years later. The abbot was to hold a visitation at Spalding at least once in every three years, lasting a month if necessary. He should be accompanied by 15 men and be received with a public procession, and while at Spalding he should take the professions of any novices. On account of the expense of these

visitations and the charges incurred in litigation, the Prior and convent of Spalding was to pay a yearly pension of 60 marks to the Abbey. The Abbot was also to have the right of sending four alien monks, of any nation whatsoever, to live in the Priory, who should be treated in exactly the same way as other cloistered members of the Priory.

When war broke out with France these alien monks caused concern to the authorities. In 1295 Edward I ordered them to be removed inland and their boats to be at once drawn up on land and the tackle removed. Spalding Priory was seized into the King's hands, but on the protest of Henry Lacy, Earl of Lincoln, and patron of the Priory, that the customary alms given by the monastery was withheld, it was restored, but the pension of £40, due to Angers was confiscated.

During the French war owing to this alien connection, the Priory was frequently heavily distrained in spite of the protection attempted by its powerful patrons. When Peace was made the Abbot of Angers endeavoured to obtain back payments of his pension, although the Prior had yearly paid the £40 into the Exchequer. After using threats of excommunication and much litigation in the King's Bench, the Abbot desisted from further prosecution in that Court, but persisted in ecclesiastical courts. The Prior had to appeal to Canterbury and Rome for protection.

This friction with the parent house recurred every time hostilities broke out in the intermittent Hundred Years' War until, by a Papal Bull of 1397, the Priory achieved complete independence. The land in Pinchbeck and Spalding which had belonged to the Abbey of Angers was granted to Sion Abbey, and is so described in the voluminous surveys in the possession of this Society.

RELATIONS WITH THE VICAR OF SPALDING.

The statement, often made in print, that the magnificent churches in this district are due to the rivalry between Crowland Abbey and Spalding Priory has been disproved, although as both houses owned quarries at Barnack they may have helped by providing good stone— at a price. At Spalding, as in other parishes from which the Priory derived its income, the convent did as little as possible for the cure of souls.

In 1229 when William of Alkborough, chaplain, was presented to Spalding, Bishop Hugh of Wells, as in very many other places, insisted on the ordination of a vicarage for his support. William was to receive monastic bread and ale with the rest in the kitchen and what was necessary for his palfrey in oats and fodder. He was also to receive the tithes of workmen and all the merchants of the town of Spalding, with bequests due to the chaplain, visitations of

the sick, mass pennies and pennies offered with the blessed bread, and the cheeses due to the church of Spalding at Whitsuntide and the hens at Christmas.

Robert of Hungerford, chaplain, was instituted in 1248 and four years later acknowledged the receipt of a messuage on Westlode side as a vicarage. The great Bishop Grosseteste, considering that the vicar could not be maintained out of the fruits of the vicarage, proposed to augment it, but was opposed by the Prior and convent. The Bishop died while an inquiry was pending, and the vicar, a poor man, realising that he could not go to law with the Prior and convent, entered into a composition prejudicial to himself. Robert of Hungerford appealed to the Pope stating that the parish extended for seven miles which compelled him to maintain four chaplains in Lent and two at other times and he could not maintain them out of the vicarage. As the Vicar could not obtain satisfaction he journeyed to Rome and in 1275 another comprise was arranged much more favourable to him.

When Bishop Oliver Sutton visited Spalding in 1282 he censured the Vicar, Richard Thurgar, for maintaining only one clerk instead of two to serve the church, and for preventing the bearers of holy water from attending school. When Richard Thurgar was a very old man in 1309, the Prior claimed that he had, not without the vice of ingratitude, encouraged and supported his nephew, Richard Thurgar, who had wickedly conspired to subvert the rights of the Priory, maliciously joined himself with the enemies of the house, and roused the greater part of the town against the monks.

No institutions of Vicars are recorded after 1413 and in 1462 the Priory received Papal confirmation of permission given at an earlier date to appropriate the vicarage as well as the rectory of Spalding (i.e. to take the entire endowments of the living).

In 1519 the Bishop of Lincoln found that the Priory supplied only one instead of two secular chaplains, and he was most unsuitable and unlearned. No honest priest could live on the salary offered. The secular chaplain for the chapel of Holy Rood (now standing in ruins), who should also help in the services of the parish church, had been superseded by a monk.

The Priory neglected the cure of souls in other places. In 1312 it was found that land in Walcot in the parish of Alkborough had been given to the Priory for the support of the chapel, and before the institution of the vicarage of Alkborough the cure of the whole parish was in the hands of two monks from Spalding and one secular priest. Owing to extravagant living the monks were recalled to Spalding, and the chapel had been left untended for many years.

Our sympathy and fellow-feeling goes out to the Rector of Bolingbroke, who in 1311 could not pay the pension due to the Priory. He explained, "Because sufficient money did not come into my hands I therefore put off payment in hope of better times."

RELATIONS WITH THE TENANTS.

Compared with the services due on other Lincolnshire manors, the tenants of Spalding Priory were by no means in an enviable condition. When Prior Simon in 1232 achieved partial independence from the Abbey of Angers he revoked all former agreements with the free-tenants and increased the rents. Even in the Fourteenth century the free-tenants had to buy a licence before they could sell their land, a restriction not obtaining on other manors.

It was in the control of their bond-tenants, however, that the Priors were most strict, and a most meticulous account was kept of them and their progeny. It is recorded in one of the Spalding Registers that Prior Simon struck down the necks of his proud rustics to such an extent in order that the freemen might be terrified. In the fourteenth century a tenant at Moulton was commanded to the stocks because he disclaimed being a bondman while others were fined because they had not ground their corn at the Prior's mill. The fine for alienation of the land at Weston in 1418 was arbitrary, at the will of the Prior. Labourers in the same village had to work until the ninth hour, and if they were required to work later each was to have $1\frac{1}{2}$ loaves of black bread and 3 herrings to eat with it.

The following account of the services due from a bond-tenant in Spalding in the early 13th century is typical. "William of Corner (de Angulo) holds 40 acres of land for which he ought to work every day throughout the year at the lord's will, at whatever work the lord wishes, with cart, barrow, spade, whip, flail, fork and reaping-hook. He ought to plough with his own plough for 3 days, and harrow the land ploughed, and fetch the seed from the lord's grainary with horse. The same William ought to give for brewery 10s. 2d. a year, and for 'scoregeld' and 'wodefather' 26d. Also he owes tallage, merchet, leyrwite, pannage, 2 hens at Christmas and 1d. for frankpledge; and for every male of the age of 15 years 1d.; and if he has a young horse worth 20s. he may not sell it without the lord's licence, and in like manner if he has an oak tree growing above the height of his house he may not fell it without licence. Also he must defend against sea and marsh for one oxgang of land."

When the bond-tenants went to live on other manors the chevage exacted was much heavier than usual:—

1305 "Robert, son of Edmund, for licence to stay at Lynn for 7 years with a certain goldsmith £1.

- 1399 Robert Townsend, Lord's bondman, placed his son at the schools and won prizes, without the Lord's licence, wherefore he paid fine 6s. 8d.
- 1413 Nicholas, son of Nicholas Nunn because he received the sacrament of ordination, without licence of the Lord £1.
- 1430 Gilbert Goddock, Rector of the parish church of Birchamtoft in Norfolk paid chevage 6s. 8d."
- 1452 John Rump (son of a Spalding skinner), Vicar of Rainham St. Martin's, Norfolk, paid chevage as did John Dinaunt, Cannon of Leicester.

It is surprising the large number of bond-tenants who escaped from their obligations to the Lord of the Manor by becoming priests; many of them went abroad and no chevage could be levied.

In some cases the fines exacted from bond-tenants for the marriage of their daughters were extremely heavy; in 1327 Robert, son of Galfrid of Sutton, paid £26 13s. 4d. On other occasions the Prior seems to have taken whatever he could get, the marriage fees being commuted for 12 pullets, 12 goslings, 12 capons, and in one instance 24 fresh herrings.

All these items are taken from the Register of Laurence Myntling, the illuminator, which is in the possession of this Society. The same Register shows that the bond-tenants received their manumission—at a good price. Towards the end of the fifteenth century the Hobsons, the family which afterwards built the town-hall and greatly augmented the vicarage, were paying £10 each for their freedom.

In addition to pursuing a conservative policy and offering opposition to any advancement in the condition of their tenants, the Priors appear to have exceeded their legitimate rights on numerous occasions. In 1250 it was complained that the Prior after impounding the cattle of his tenants, kept them so long without food that they died. Turbary rights caused many quarrels, and led to open violence. On one occasion the Prior stated that his tenants had taken 14 foals worth £40 and turves worth £1,000 belonging to him. Every year the Prior enclosed a space for drying his turves, placing them first in small heaps and later in large mounds, and the cattle of his tenants were excluded from the enclosures. In 1294 it was alleged that the Prior had enclosed as much as 2,000 acres in this way, and kept it so enclosed for several years.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that the tenants frequently broke the by-laws which were made for the good government of the manor. Sometime between 1421 and 1444 the Fen Reeves bound themselves in the sum of 100s. each to present all transgressors, and admitted that they had previously failed to do so.

RELATIONS WITH THE TOWNSPEOPLE.

As was the case at Bury, Dunstable, Burton, and St. Albans, the history of the Priors and the town of Spalding is one of continual friction and occasional warfare. Opposition to the payment of tithes, when the Priory starved the Vicar, was to be expected, and it was significant that it was a member of the family of Thurgar who aided the Wakes to despoil the Priory.

During the very many disputes between Crowland and Spalding, the full history of which would fill a volume, the lot of the tenants of the manor of Crowland in Spalding was not a happy one. The Priors, as was the custom in those days, often had recourse to violence and took every opportunity of enhancing their local prestige by ill-treating the Abbot of Crowland's tenants; the placing of William and Alexander, bakers, in the tumbrel in 1234, and the removal of the Abbot's gallows and its re-erection on the other side of Spalding "to the perpetual reproach of Crowland," are cases in point.

There was also considerable friction between the Priory and the merchants of Spalding. Many of the latter were engaged in the wool trade; in Norman times, St. Godric, who was saved from starvation by finding porpoises washed up on the shore at Spalding, became a successful merchant, and engaged in the export trade. In 1297 the King owed for wool taken from 15 merchants of Spalding, and the town owes Ayscoughfee Hall to Richard Aldwin, a wool stapler, whose son, Nicholas, was Lord Mayor of London in 1509. In all probability Spalding Priory, in common with many other religious houses in the country, not only exported its own wool, but also bought up the produce of smaller growers.

The Spalding merchants naturally objected to pay toll when bringing merchandise into the town. The Prior claimed on one occasion that his servant had been beaten and ill-treated when taking toll, so that for a long time he was deprived of his services. The men of Spalding obtained exemption from the King from stallage in the markets and fairs, but the Prior was confirmed in his right as being long established. In the same way he forced them to pay pavage, although it had only been granted to him for four years, as their carts wore down the paving of the town.

As might be expected, the merchants regarding the trading done by the Priory as unfair competition. In 1325 the Prior loaded his own ship at Stourbridge Fair and brought corn, ropes, timber and stockfish to Spalding. In 1438 wine was being sold by the sacrist in the cloister, a worldly procedure that would have been undreamed of in earlier days.

THE DISSOLUTION OF THE PRIORY.

Prior Thomas White put up a valiant fight against Wolsey, who desired some of the endowments of the Priory for his new college. In May, 1525, the Bishop of Lincoln came to Spalding to endeavour to persuade the Prior to resign. The latter was encouraged in his opposition by the Abbot of Peterborough, who, however, yielded to the Bishop's persuasion while the Prior of Spalding, "though very good and gentle," was determined to retain his office as long as he lived. Prior Thomas withstood all the efforts of the Bishop on behalf of Wolsey, but after sending "a poor present" to Cromwell, he vacated his office and enjoyed the pension of £33 6s. 8d. for many years.

During the Lincolnshire Rising of 1536, the Spalding neighbourhood, unlike the remainder of the county, remained singularly apathetic; this may have been due to the old deep-rooted antipathy to Lindsey, but more likely was owing to the influence of Anthony Irby, who raised a force of 150 well-armed men to join the Earl of Suffolk. The Prior refused to contribute to this force on the ground that he was a spiritual man.

On 20th October, 1538, John Freeman reported that there were only eleven monasteries still standing in Lincolnshire and he would like the farm of Spalding as he had been disappointed of Bardney. In 1534 the temporalities of the Priory were valued at £740 2s. 9d., including the site £50, Halmer Grange £53 16s. 10d., Sutton £32 11s. 4d., Gannock £23 11s. 11d., Pinchbeck £103, Moulton £78, Weston £76, and Wykeham £100 6s. 8d. In addition £109 was derived yearly from the appropriated churches. The yearly income according to Dugdale was £767 8s. 11d. and according to Speed £878 18s. 3d.

The site of the monastery was granted by Henry VIII. to his brother-in-law, Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, who allowed the Bailiff of Spalding, Thomas Kedby, to sell the materials to the townsmen. Many of the ornaments, vestments, books and organs were transferred to the parish church, and it is probable that in Spalding, as at Stamford and many other places, the local people confiscated much ecclesiastical property to prevent it becoming a prey of royal avarice, although when a commission enquired into the matter it was declared that the only thing missing was wax.

At the time of the Reformation, according to Lay Subsidy Rolls, the population of Spalding was smaller than that of many other places in the parts of Holland. Soon afterwards, however, the wealth of its merchants increased, the vicarage was very much augmented, a grammar school was established, and a town hall built. When the shadow of the Priory was removed the emancipated town achieved an importance which it has held ever since.