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# **The Countess Lucy's Priory? The Early History of Spalding Priory and its Estates**

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In the opinion of the twelfth-century chronicler Hugh Candidus the remote islands of the medieval Fenland had been created by God expressly to encourage the development of the monastic life.<sup>1</sup> Monastic cells were first established in the region in the late seventh century at Ely, Crowland and Medeshamstede (Peterborough), but it was only with the tenth-century revival that monasteries came to dominate this potentially rich but inhospitable landscape. Bishop Aethelwold refounded the abbeys at Peterborough and Ely between 966 and 973, when he also founded Thorney Abbey on the site of a former anchorite cell. Bishop Oswald refounded Crowland Abbey in the same period. Previous studies of monastic land tenure and estate organisation in the Fenland have focussed on these Anglo-Saxon foundations.<sup>2</sup> They emphasise both the importance of their pre-Conquest endowments or their development after 1066 and the depredations they suffered at the hands of the Normans through the confiscation of estates and the imposition of the onerous burden of knight service.

The Benedictine Priory of St. Mary and St. Nicholas at Spalding in the Lincolnshire Fens was not established until the late eleventh century, despite the claims of neighbouring Crowland Abbey to have set up a monastic cell at Spalding before the Conquest. Spalding Priory soon grew to rival the wealth and power of its closest neighbours at Crowland and Thorney, largely because of the beneficence of its mighty patrons. The development of this alien priory - a dependency of the Abbey of St. Nicholas of Angers - from its foundation until it achieved conventual status in 1242 is the

subject of this article.<sup>3</sup>

### The Foundation of the Priory

According to a tradition which survives from the late thirteenth century, when it was recorded by the writer of the *Annals of Peterborough*, Spalding Priory originated as a cell of Crowland Abbey before the Conquest.<sup>4</sup> This tale was much elaborated upon in a medieval history of Crowland Abbey, known to modern historians as the *Pseudo-Ingulph*. This chronicle purports to be written by Ingulph, who was the abbot of Crowland in the late eleventh century. However the actual author, probably writing in the late fifteenth century, is now recognised as one of the most infamous of monastic forgers and his work needs treating with circumspection.<sup>5</sup> This Pseudo-Ingulph tells how Spalding Priory was refounded in 1074 by Ivo Taillebois, the husband of the great heiress, Countess Lucy. Ingulph's account, which has been accepted with some reservations by most modern historians, suggests that a monastic cell for six monks from Crowland Abbey was first established at Spalding in 1052 by Thorold of Bokenhale, thereby continuing the Anglo-Saxon tradition of settling monks in the Fenland. Ingulph goes on to describe how, after the Conquest, Ivo Taillebois, the chief tenant in Spalding, began to harass and injure the English monks at Crowland's cell in the town, finally driving them out 'at the instigation of the Devil'. Ivo, whom the Peterborough annalist describes as *comes Andegavensis, dominus Spaldyngae et totius Hoylandie*, then brought over three French monks from the abbey of St. Nicholas of Angers to serve in the church at Spalding.<sup>6</sup>

Whilst it may have appealed to the anti-French sentiments of its fifteenth-century readers, Ingulph's simple tale of Norman brutality does not bear close scrutiny. The bitter rivalry which then existed between the two neighbouring monasteries gave Ingulph a ready excuse to present Crowland Abbey as the aggrieved party from the outset of their relationship. Although there were many disputes between the two houses in the intervening centuries, particularly over their respective rights in the rich Fenland pasture, both the evidence of Domesday Book and the Priory of Spalding's own records suggest that Ingulph's story is dubious. Though complex, the subject of the Priory's foundation and the identity of its first patron is worthy of further investigation, not least because of the crucial role the patron's

family played in the subsequent development of the Priory.

Domesday Book informs us that there were three tenurial interests in Spalding before 1066. The chief manor, assessed at nine carucates of land, is described as belonging to Earl Algar, although other evidence suggests that this Mercian Earl died in 1062 or 1063. By 1086 this manor was in the possession of Ivo Taillebois. Alestan held a much smaller manor assessed at eleven bovates in 1066 which had passed on to Guy de Craon by the time of the Survey, and Crowland Abbey held a berewick of two carucates of land in Spalding at both dates.<sup>7</sup> An early twelfth-century manuscript illustration of benefactors of St. Guthac, Crowland's patron saint, shows that the Abbey's berewick in Spalding had been donated by Earl Algar.<sup>8</sup> Recent studies of the pre-Conquest tenurial history of Elloe wapentake suggest that the whole of the wapentake was at one time in the possession of Earl Algar or his predecessor.<sup>9</sup> Thus there is no evidence apart from the Peterborough annalist and Ingulph's history of Crowland Abbey to suggest that Thorold ever held land in Spalding. Moreover, it is not certain from the Domesday evidence that this Thorold was a pre-Conquest tenant in Lincolnshire at all, although the Survey states that he gave Crowland Abbey an estate at Bucknall in Gartree wapentake (see Map 1) before 1086, a gift also commemorated in the aforementioned manuscript illustration.

The later records of Spalding Priory confuse the issue of its foundation still further. The great two-volume cartulary of the Priory, which was written in the 1330's, opens with an account of the foundation written in a fourteenth-century hand.<sup>10</sup> It states that Thorold, described as *Luciae comitisae antecessor*, gave to St. Nicholas and the church of Spalding the tithes of Alkborough, Belchford, Normanby, Scamblesby and Tetney at some time before Ivo Taillebois became the tenant-in-chief in Spalding. Moreover the cartulary also contains a copy of a charter from the reign of Henry I, a charter inspected and confirmed by Edward III in 1330, which grants that the monks of Spalding should hold in peace their woods *quod pertinet manerio sicut melius habuerunt tempore patris mei et fratris mei et tempore Ivonis et Turaldi*.<sup>11</sup> Possible confirmation of Thorold's involvement in the establishment of a monastic cell of St. Nicholas of Angers in Spalding is to be found in a little-known seventeenth-century history of the Angevin abbey which is based on the abbey's own records, most of which have since been lost. This states that during the abbacy of Alderadus, who ruled the house in the mid-



eleventh-century, *Turolio* gave a church or churches in *Britannia* to the abbey.<sup>12</sup> If we discount the inherently improbable notion that an Anglo-Saxon named Thorold thus endowed a distant French abbey then some other explanation of Thorold's origin and status must be sought, since the evidence of the Priory's own records cannot easily be ignored.

An ingenious but credible solution to this problem was proposed by R.E.G. Kirk in 1888 when, in an attempt to establish the singularity of the mysterious Countess Lucy, he came to the conclusion that she was the daughter of this very Thorold who appears in the later records of Spalding Priory.<sup>13</sup> Kirk concluded that while this Thorold may be identical with the Thorold who gave land in Bucknall to Crowland Abbey, a possibility which may have inspired Ingulph's speculations in the first place, he was in reality a Norman lord who, though he became lord of Spalding after the Conquest, died before the Domesday Inquest was made. Spalding, along with other possessions in Lincolnshire, including those places where Thorold had given tithes to the monks thus passed through Lucy, his only daughter and sole heiress, to Ivo Taillebois, her first husband. This marriage took place before 1085 and therefore it is Ivo, and not Thorold, who appears as the successor to Earl Algar as chief tenant in 1086.

This account has the merit of explaining why the lordship of Spalding and other estates in Lincolnshire and elsewhere were held after Ivo's death not by Beatrice, his direct heir and the daughter of his marriage to Lucy, but by the later husbands of Lucy, Roger fitz Gerold and Ranulph Meschines. It is probably no coincidence that, according to Farrer,<sup>14</sup> Ivo succeeded Thorold as Sheriff of Lincolnshire and that one of Lucy's heirs, the Earl of Chester, paid 20 marks in 1165 *pro feodo Turoldi vice comitis*.<sup>15</sup> J.H. Round, too, concluded that Thorold was not 'an English sheriff of the days before the Conquest, but a Norman, as were his fellows, who died before Domesday',<sup>16</sup> also pointing out that the name Thorold was a common Scandinavian personal name and therefore likely to occur in Normandy. It seems that Thorold was still alive in 1075, when William I addressed a writ to him concerning the translation of the see of Dorchester to Lincoln, and Round identifies him with the Thorold of Lincoln (*Lincolniensis Turoldus*) who took part in a judicial eyre at Bury St. Edmunds between 1076 and 1079.<sup>17</sup> Although he may not have founded a monastic cell at Spalding, it seems safe to conclude

that Thorold the Sheriff, a Norman, by his grant of tithes to the monks of St. Nicholas of Angers, began an association which flourished under his successors to the lordship of Spalding.

We are on more certain ground in the history of Spalding Priory with the role of Thorold's immediate successor, Ivo Taillebois. The cartulary of the Priory records that in 1085 Ivo gave to abbot Natalis and the monks of St. Nicholas of Angers the church of Spalding together with one carucate of land there sufficient to support three monks, confirming at the same time the grant of tithes first made by Thorold. He added the proviso that 'if the substance of the church increases the number of monks is to be enlarged and they are to make such charitable contribution as they can to the monks of St. Nicholas (Angers) every year'. This grant, which included Thorold's earlier gifts secured the French monks' foothold in Spalding.<sup>18</sup> There seems no reason to doubt the date or authenticity of this charter, since Ivo was clearly in possession of Spalding and many other estates in Lincolnshire in 1086, despite the claim made recently by the biographer of William Rufus that it was Rufus who gave the Countess Lucy to Ivo in marriage, presumably after 1087.<sup>19</sup>

The death of William the Conqueror prompted Ivo to increase significantly the substance of the church himself. In a charter made before 1093 he gave to the monks of St. Nicholas, for the souls of William and Matilda, the tithes of toll, salt and seafish, and a fishery in the Westlode *ad augmentum victus monachorum Sanctae Mariae de Spalding* (St. Mary's was probably the original dedication of the parish church at Spalding, St. Nicholas being added after the French monks arrived.) Furthermore, in memory of William I, his original benefactor, he granted the monks there 2,000 eels annually for their sustenance, while *ad lucernam monasterii et dormitorii monachorum* he allocated five shillings annually of his profits from his manor in Spalding, including the tithe of certain horses there (*decimam pullorum equarum suarum silvestrium*). In addition he gave the tithes of Spalding and the tithes together with a man (*unum rusticum*) in Alkborough, Belchford, Normanby and Tetney, and a sheepfold and pasture in Spalding itself. At the same time he gave to his chaplains there, Laurence and Henry, all the tithes of his lordship in Bolingbroke and Belchford, together with the tithes of Honington with one carucate of land there.<sup>20</sup> Present on the occasion of this gift and witness to the charter was Hugo de Brayboef, who granted the monks the tithes of his own manor of Claxby in Walshcroft

wapentake (see Map 2).<sup>21</sup>

This generous gift was not the limit of Ivo's benefaction. In a writ of 1094-95, about the time of Ivo's death, William Rufus notified Robert, Bishop of Lincoln that he confirmed the gift of the whole manor of Spalding which Ivo Taillebois had made to the monks of St. Nicholas of Angers. This document also states that 'the church of that manor and those who serve it there are to have the manor with soc, sac, toll and team and infangthef, their tenure to commence either before or after the death of the said Ivo, as he prefers'.<sup>22</sup> The Domesday Commissioners had valued this important manor at £30 in 1086, when it also owed a tallage of £30.<sup>23</sup> Although the precise significance of this latter term is not understood, it was usually only levied at important administrative centres such as Louth (£3), Folkingham, the caput of Gilbert de Gant's Lincolnshire estates (£50) and Bolingbroke, later the chief seat of the Earls of Lincoln (£80). Together with its appurtenant sokeland in Pinchbeck, Weston and Moulton and a berewick in Tydd, the manor of Spalding occupied a commanding position in the western half of the Elloe wapentake. There were several fisheries, salt pans and, most importantly, a market - one of only six mentioned in the Lincolnshire Domesday - attached to this manor, which constituted one of the largest in the Holland division of Lincolnshire. The manor house, which was situated between the two waterways of the Welland and the Westlode and close to the parish church to the south west of the market place, became the site of the Priory building during the next twenty years, and with this endowment the monks of Angers could challenge the hegemony of their English rivals in this already valuable and potentially even wealthier Fenland region.

The circumstances surrounding the Priory's foundation were to prove of lasting significance; its status as an alien house in a region of more venerable Anglo-Saxon foundations gave an edge to the disputes with Crowland Abbey, and none of its Fenland rivals could match the influence and patronage offered by the dynasties established by Ivo's wife Lucy. After Ivo's death she married Roger fitz Gerold by whom she had a son, William de Roumare, who was later created Earl of Lincoln. Kirk speculates that this creation was derived from Lucy's title to one of the towers of Lincoln castle.<sup>24</sup> Shortly after Roger's death, which probably occurred in 1116, Lucy took a third husband, Ranulph Meschines, who was created Earl of Chester after the White Ship disaster in 1120. When he died in 1129 Lucy paid the king a



large sum for the restoration of her husband's possessions and she paid a further 500 marks for exemption from being compelled to remarry for a further five years.<sup>25</sup> In the event she died without taking a fourth husband, but not before she had confirmed Ivo's gift of the manor of Spalding and its appurtenances to the monks of St. Nicholas to hold in frankalmoign.<sup>26</sup>

Lucy's marriages and her subsequent confirmation of the manor of Spalding to the monks there suggest that she was indeed an independent heiress, although it does not prove that Thorold was her father and she may, as Ingulph supposed, have been related to Earl Algar. Nevertheless, Ivo Taillebois clearly held the manor of Spalding and his other estates in Lincolnshire by virtue of his marriage to Lucy. At the time of the Dissolution it was Lucy rather than Ivo who was remembered as the founder of the Priory, and gifts were then still distributed on the anniversary of her death.<sup>27</sup> Her heirs (she had sons by her second and third marriages) intervened on the Priory's behalf many times during the following centuries, most notably in the long struggle to be free from the direct rule of the Abbey of St. Nicholas of Angers which began in 1230. It was the patronage of Lucy, her husbands and heirs which contributed most to the growth of the Priory and its possessions in Lincolnshire.

#### The Development of the Priory before 1242

Ivo's gift to the Abbey of St. Nicholas of Angers of the manor of Spalding together with its appurtenances in Elloe wapentake gave the French abbey a commanding position in the northern Fenland. Domesday Book records that a total of 210 villeins, bordars and sokemen lived on Ivo's estates in Elloe which, using a conventional multiplier for the period, suggests an overall population of almost one thousand - a figure that was to increase dramatically during the following century as a result of land reclamation.<sup>28</sup> Judged in terms of its recorded value alone (including the tallage of £30) the manor of Spalding matched the value of the several estates held by Crowland and Thorney Abbeys at the time of the Inquest, although of course their precincts were omitted from the Survey.<sup>29</sup> Possession of this manor enabled the French monks to establish a Priory which challenged the authority of its more ancient ecclesiastical neighbours, not least in the town of Spalding itself where Crowland Abbey held an important berewick. Moreover these Anglo-Saxon foundations



could not depend on the support of such powerful patrons as those whom Lucy's propitious marriages brought to the aid of Spalding Priory, particularly in the matters of endowments and protection.

Lucy's second husband, Roger fitz Gerold, was soon called upon to act in the Priory's defence for, in a writ addressed to him and Robert, the bishop of Lincoln, dated between 1094 and 1100, William Rufus ordered that the:

*homines de Spald' iuste reddant monachis de Spald' firmam suam et quod iuste illis reddiderunt tempore Yvonis Tailbois et ad illos terminos ad quos suo tempore reddiderunt, et nolo ut Osbernus vicecomes vel Colegrim de eorum rebus se intromittat donec ego ipse inde alias preceperim.*<sup>30</sup>

Although this charter indicates that Osbern the Sheriff and Colegrim - two local lords - had probably been acting against the Priory's interests, other lords in South Lincolnshire were soon adding to its temporal and spiritual authority in the area.

In 1099 Joscelyn, son of Heppo the Arblaster, the Domesday tenant in Surfleet, gave the church of St. Lawrence of Surfleet to the Priory, together with the salt houses (*aream salinam*) and the land which belonged to the church, together with three bovates of land quit of all but the king's service. Shortly after this Joscelyn and his wife went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem from which they failed to return, but his gift was reconfirmed by his son-in-law in 1133.<sup>31</sup> Surfleet was situated in neighbouring Kirton wapentake (see Map 2) where, eventually, the Priory became a significant influence.

The Priory's dominance in Elloe wapentake was extended when, in 1111 at three o'clock in the afternoon on Sunday, 14 May, Picot, son of Colswain, who may have been related to Countess Lucy, granted to the monks of Spalding two parts of the tithes in Sutton and Lutton in the eastern part of the wapentake, an area which was greatly extended by land reclamation during the twelfth century. The witness list of the charter containing this gift also gives some indication of the growth in the number of monks supported by the Priory some twenty years or so after its foundation. The charter, which distinguishes the monks of Spalding from those of adjacent monasteries who were present on the occasion of this gift, lists the following:

*Hiis presentibus monachis, Gaufrido Nauecensi, priore, Reginaldo Calvo, Johanne Sancti Gregorii, Ricardo Scocardo, alio Johanne, Galfreido de Camleio, Ernulfo, Bernardo, Reginaldo*

*Martel, Thoraldo, Willelmo Virico, Gilberto et aliis pluribus.*<sup>32</sup>

Although the precise origin of these monks is uncertain, most of them probably came from the parent abbey in Angers.

After Ivo it was Lucy and her third husband Ranulph, however, who were the chief benefactors of the Priory in its early years. By the time of the Lindsey survey, completed circa 1115-6, the monks of Spalding had received four and a half bovates of land at Ludford from Ranulph.<sup>33</sup> Although not specifically mentioned in this later survey, it is likely that this gift included the church of St. Peter at Ludford, which was certainly in the possession of the Priory before 1177. The survey further records that the Abbot of St. Nicholas of Angers then held two carucates and two bovates of land at Willoughton in Aslacoe wapentake (see Map 2), although it is not made clear who made this gift.<sup>34</sup> This estate, like the others in Lincolnshire which were subsequently given directly to the French abbey (including Guy de Craon's small Domesday manor at Spalding), was administered by proctors of the abbot who resided at Spalding Priory. As we have seen, Lucy herself confirmed the tithes first given by Thorold and Ivo, adding the tithes of Donington and Stenigot. She and Ranulph also gave the churches of Belchford, Stenigot and Minting to the Priory, though the church of Belchford was later shared with the Priory and Convent of Trentham.<sup>35</sup>

With the death of Countess Lucy, which occurred shortly after that of Henry I, the patronage of the Priory passed to William de Roumara, Lucy's son by her second husband, Roger fitz Gerold. He gave the Priory the churches of Bolingbroke, Subsey and Stickney, half the church in East Keal,<sup>36</sup> and the church of Alkborough, together with the lands in these places and at Walcote, Miningsby and Hareby.<sup>37</sup> These gifts extended the Priory's spiritual and temporal authority in areas where it already had an influence, particularly in Bolingbroke and Gartree wapentakes (see Map 2). Also during William's lifetime Prior Herbert, who ruled the house between circa 1149 and 1156, gained the churches of Spalding, Pinchbeck, Moulton and Holbeach,<sup>38</sup> thus further extending the Priory's ecclesiastical authority in Elloe wapentake. The vast majority of these places had been held by Ivo Taillebois at the time of the Domesday Survey and were part of Lucy's original inheritance (see Appendix I).

The Priory seems to have thrived in the politically uncertain period which followed the death of Henry I. The following two charters, issued by King Stephen, confirmed and extended the liberties of the

Priory:

*Stephanus rex Anglorum episcopo Lincolnensi et baronibus et vicecomiti et iustitie et omnibus fidelibus suis Francis et Anglis de Lincolnie scira salutem. Sciatis me concessisse priori de Spaldinges et monachis suis ecclesias suas et terras et decimas et homines et omnes res suas tenere ita bene et in pace et quiete in bosco et plano et pratis et pasturis et mariscis, in aquis et extra, in burgo et extra, et in mercato et in omnibus locis cum soca et saca et tol et team et infangentheof et cum omnibus consuetudinibus et libertatibus cum quibus melius tenuerunt tempore regis Henrici et die qua fuit vivus et mortuus.<sup>39</sup>*

Particularly important to a mercantile centre such as Spalding was the freedom from toll contained in the second charter:

*Stephanus, rex Anglorum iusticiis, vice comitibus baronibus et omnibus ministris suis totius Anglie, salutem. Precipio quod totum courodiu(m) (sic) et omnes res prioris et conventus Sancte Marie de Spald(inge) quas affidare poterint homines sui esse suas proprias sint quiete de theloneo et passagio et omni consuetudine. Et nemo eos super hoc injuste disturbet super X libras forisfacture. T. etc.<sup>40</sup>*

These charters were later confirmed by Henry II.<sup>41</sup> Between 1133 and 1141, however, Abbot John of St. Nicholas of Angers felt it necessary to obtain a charter from the Empress Mathilda confirming his abbey's possessions in England, perhaps fearing that his abbey's rights were under threat in this troubled period:

*Mathildis imperatrix regum (sic) Anglie filia, omnibus fidelibus suis Anglie tam sancte ecclesie quam secularis potestatis, prelati et subjectis Francis et Anglis in burgo et extra burgum, salutem. Sciatis me gratuito concedere et confirmare ut elemosine que in Anglia date sunt ecclesie Sancti Nicolai Andegavensis sint stabiles a quocunque fuerint ei date sive tempore avi mei Willelmi regis Anglie, sive successoris eius filii Willelmi avunculi mei Anglorum regis, seu patris mei Henrici subsequentis regis Anglie. Inter quas elemosinas majores habemus (sic): ecclesia de Spalingua cum elemosinis ei datis, ecclesia de Kirkbeia cum elemosinis et datis, et ecclesia de Guuinuga (Wing in Buckinghamshire) cum elemosinis ei datis, et ecclesia de Guilgetona (Willoughton) cum elemosinis ei datis, et ecclesia de Holbecha (Holbeach) cum elemosinis ei datis et ecclesia de Soffleto (Surfleet) cum suis elemosinis. Volo igitur et constanter precipio ut ita libere et honorifice monachi prefati Sancti Nicolai ecclesie prememoratas elemosinas, et preter istas ceteras omnes ei datas in*



*Anglia teneant tempore meo, ut eas unquam liberius et honorabilius et quietius predictorum antecessorum meorum temporibus tenuerunt, et cum eisdem consuetudinibus, presentibus tunc Henrico filio meo, et abbate Johanne quo intercessore istud concessi ... cum multis aliis.*<sup>42</sup>

In the event Spalding Priory emerged from the Anarchy enriched not only by the gifts of its patron, William de Roumare, but also by the gift of a manor, with lands and men, at Kirkby Laythorpe (see Map 2), which was given by Gilbert de Gant.<sup>43</sup>

The Priory continued to receive gifts of churches and lands during the years following the accession of Henry II. Roger de Trehampton gave the churches of Gate Burton and Lea, both situated by the river Trent, and Guy de Lavalli gave the church of Addlethorpe in Candelshoe wapentake.<sup>44</sup> Territorially the Priory established a presence at Whaplode in Elloe wapentake, an area which it developed considerably during the thirteenth century and, by an exchange with the Abbot of Peterborough completed between 1189 and 1191, consolidated its position in Alkborough, strategically situated at the mouth of the river Trent on the Humber estuary.<sup>45</sup> Other gifts and their donors, where known, which were made at this time are included in the Appendix.

As Raban has pointed out, by the mid-twelfth century 'saturation point for gifts in frankalmoin had been reached in many places', including the Fenland.<sup>46</sup> In contrast with both Crowland and Thorney Abbeys Spalding Priory was fortunate both in the high status and consequent largesse of its founder's family. Most of the gifts made to Crowland and Thorney during the twelfth century came from benefactors from lower down the social hierarchy, and the bequests made to Spalding Priory easily matched those of its more ancient neighbours.<sup>47</sup> However, the flow of major gifts to the Priory did dry up towards the end of the twelfth century and thereafter its benefactors, usually local men from Elloe wapentake, were only able to make gifts of a few acres.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless the Priory continued to expand its territory during the thirteenth century, both through reclamation and an aggressive policy of purchase and exchange which was introduced once the Priors had achieved a greater degree of independence from the Abbots of St. Nicholas of Angers.<sup>49</sup>



The Role of the Abbey of St. Nicholas of Angers in the Management of Spalding Priory before 1242

The Abbey of St. Nicholas of Angers, which had been founded in 1020 by Fulk Nerra after he narrowly survived a perilous sea crossing, was still a relatively small house with few possessions in 1066, although it was the most popular Angevin house in the eyes of Fulk's successors. As a result of the Norman Conquest it received several estates in England from various benefactors.<sup>50</sup> Before 1086 the chief among these gifts was part of Geoffrey de la Guerche's manor at Monks Kirby in Warwickshire. The Angevin abbey established a daughter cell here in 1077, though it never rivalled the later foundation at Spalding either in the number of monks it sustained or in the extent of its estates.<sup>51</sup> The Abbey's other English possessions were at Shalcombe (Isle of Wight), Henlow (Bedfordshire), Harting and Arundel (Sussex) and Crafton (Buckinghamshire). Together these estates had a combined value of £18 in 1086. Ivo's subsequent gift of the manor of Spalding to the monks of St. Nicholas, which was valued at £30 in 1086 without the tallage, thus constituted the abbey's single most important acquisition in England. As we have seen, the Angevin abbots soon received other estates in Lincolnshire at Willoughton and Guy de Craon's small Domesday manor at Spalding, which had then been reckoned at eleven bovates. Spalding Priory itself became an increasingly valuable asset as it developed during the twelfth century, both because of its endowments and the great increase in land reclaimed from the sea and fen in Elloe wapentake.

The French abbey's estates in Lincolnshire were administered by proctors of the abbot who resided at Spalding Priory. The Prior himself was appointed by the Abbey and convent of St. Nicholas and was subject to recall at the Abbot's pleasure.<sup>52</sup> Between 1156 and 1200, when records became more plentiful, there were at least six different priors, most of whom seem to have been in office for a very short period (see Appendix). Once summoned back to Angers these dative priors usually collected all they could from the goods of the Priory and carried them abroad, thereby leaving the house in a state of almost constant dilapidation. According to an instrument in the Spalding cartulary from Prior Herbert's time (c.1149-1156) we learn that the Abbot was entitled to make frequent visits to the Priory, bringing with him an unlimited number of monks (*cum fratribus suis monachis quantum voluit*) and to stay for as long as he liked.<sup>53</sup>

Moreover novices from the Priory were expected to travel to Angers to make their profession unless the Abbot was present in Spalding.

It is easily understood why the Angevin abbey was resented by the indigenous monks at Spalding, causing them in 1230 to enlist the help of their patron, then Margaret de Lacy and her husband, Walter Marshall, together with the Bishop of Lincoln, to fight in the papal court for the right to elect their own prior rather than accept the nominee sent by the French abbot after the death of Prior Ralph Mansell in 1229.<sup>54</sup> The litigation dragged on for twelve years, and was finally resolved in favour of Spalding Priory by papal ratification in 1245. Apart from the expense of maintaining an advocate at the papal court in Rome for most of this period, the Spalding monks had to pay a fine of one thousand marks for the privilege of electing their own prior. This expensive composition also limited the visits of the Angevin abbots to no more than one month every three years, and they were to be accompanied by no more than fifteen mounted men. Novices could henceforth make their profession at Spalding, but the Priory still had to maintain four proctors of the Angevin abbey to administer its possession in Lincolnshire and elsewhere, and, most importantly, to ensure that the English monks paid the £40 annually to the Abbey of St. Nicholas which was the price of their greater independence.<sup>55</sup>

The actions of the first prior to be elected at Spalding, Simon of Alkborough, (1229-53) further illustrate why he was prepared to embark on such a long and costly dispute. He was remembered for having considerably enlarged the Priory to accommodate more monks and he began a lengthy process, continued by his successor John the Almoner, of recovering lands which had been alienated by his dative predecessors. Prior Simon, we are told, was born of knightly class and he used his greater authority to some effect; the Peterborough chronicler reports that 'the necks of his proud rustics rising against him he struck down to such an extent by his own strength that by this his freemen might be terrified.'<sup>56</sup> Called the Munificent, Simon entertained Henry III at the Priory and at lodgings which he purchased in London and his successor John attended the royal councils.

Nevertheless it would be wrong to suggest that the Angevin abbey was totally negligent of the affairs of its daughter house in Spalding. Whilst it may have been self-interest which prompted Prior Nicholas to allow his grange at Weston to be used as a base for the infamous invasion of Crowland Abbey precinct in 1189,<sup>57</sup> his successor Joolen



(sic), later abbot of St. Nicholas, fiercely upheld the interest of Spalding Priory in the subsequent dispute over seisin of this ill-defined marshland. Prior Nicholas also paid one hundred marks to King Richard in 1189 to free that part of the Priory's demesne which had lain under the onerous forest law since the reign of Henry I.<sup>58</sup> It was Nicholas again who consolidated the Priory's position in Alkborough, which was an important centre for the administration of its possessions in Lindsey. The Angevin abbots themselves seem to have taken little direct interest in the affairs of the Priory, although when Abbot Hugh visited Spalding between 1199 and 1206 he arranged a grant by the Abbot of Whitby of the toft with land and as much wood as was necessary for drying the Prior's herrings landed at this Yorkshire port.<sup>59</sup> These acts show that the dative priors and their French superiors were concerned to increase the profitability of Spalding Priory, even if it was usually for their own benefit.

#### The Economy of the Priory and its Estates before 1242

Although there is little direct evidence concerning the relative value of the Priory's various estates during the twelfth century, both the Domesday valuations and the papal taxation of 1291 confirm the impression that, of all the lands held, the manor of Spalding, together with its appurtenances in Elloe wapentake, provided the major contribution to the Priory's economy throughout the period. It has been estimated that between 1086 and 1205 some five thousand acres of land was reclaimed from the sea and fen in Elloe wapentake, and, by papal dispensation, the Priory enjoyed the privilege of not paying tithe on new land brought into cultivation.<sup>60</sup> The Priory's estates in Elloe provided a rich and diverse agriculture: in addition to the rights of fish, fowl and turbary from the fen, the Priory had the right to wreck of the sea, which could include the occasional beached whale, for three leagues along the coast.<sup>61</sup> Salt, that vital commodity in the medieval economy, was produced at Spalding, Pinchbeck, Weston and Moulton in Elloe, and at Surfleet in neighbouring Kirton wapentake, which had been given to the Priory by Joscelin, son of Heppo the Arblaster, in 1099. Although evidence of Spalding's role as a fishing port in the twelfth century is scarce, the Priory's fishing fleet clearly sailed as far as Whitby, and, later in the thirteenth century John the Almoner extended the Priory's coastal possessions with purchases at Grimsby, Burnham and Wells.<sup>62</sup>

Farming on the Priory's home manor in Spalding was predominantly arable, even on reclaimed land.<sup>63</sup> Indeed it was the shortage of meadow and pasture there that led Prior Nicholas, together with other men of Holland, to invade the precinct of Crowland Abbey in 1189 because, as the Crowland chronicler states, 'the men of Holland ... had converted it (their own marsh) into good and fertile arable so that they have considerably less than the usual amount of common pasture for their stock, of which they have little'.<sup>64</sup> The adverse effect that an imbalance between crop and stock could have on yields is well known and in the thirteenth century John the Almoner purchased many acres of pasture and meadow in Kesteven and Lindsey, though it appears that his dative predecessors condoned a more direct, if violent method of acquisition.

Despite the overriding importance of Spalding and the other estates in Holland, the temporal possessions of the Priory elsewhere in Lincolnshire constituted an important source of revenue during the twelfth century. From a list of the services owed by the Priory's sokemen which was issued in circa 1219 we learn that they owed carting services from Belchford, which was the collecting point for the Priory's several estates in Gartree wapentake in Lindsey.<sup>65</sup> Corn from those estates was ground on the Priory's mills at Asterby and Scamblesby (see map 2) and the area was also an important source of pasture and woodland. Alkborough and Walcote were especially valuable to the Priory's economy. In the thirteenth century the Priory maintained a court at Alkborough, and there is a suspicion that there may have been a daughter cell at the Priory established there in the early part of that century.<sup>66</sup> The Priory's tenants there owed sixty-five sheep washing days per annum, suggesting plentiful meadow and pasture and, since it was a port, Alkborough also served as a useful collecting point for the produce of the fisheries, and mills sited further along the river at Gate Burton and Lea.<sup>67</sup> All these estates, together with the Abbot of St. Nicholas' manor at Willoughton, were supervised by a proctor who was entitled to visit the various manors in Lindsey with no more than four mounted attendants once a month, a practice which probably continued after 1242.<sup>68</sup> The Priory's extensive lands at Kirkby Laythorpe and Obthorpe in Kesteven, being much closer, apparently lacked such an official.

Whilst these temporal possessions stimulated the growth of Spalding as a mercantile centre and entrepôt, causing Prior Simon to ask Henry III to ask for, and receive, a second weekly market in the



town in 1241-2, the spiritual endowments of the Priory were also a valuable source of cash revenue and, especially, renders in kind. In all, some sixteen churches, together with a chapel at Walcote and a mediety of the churches of Belchford and East Keal, had been granted to the Priory before 1200 (see Appendix I). The Papal taxation of 1294 shows that the churches of Pinchbeck (100 marks), Spalding (80 marks), Moulton (80 marks) and Weston (40 marks) were by far the most valuable.<sup>69</sup> Together with the tithes owed to the Priory the total value of all the churches was £243.6s.0d, which almost matched that of its temporal possessions, valued at £271.3s.0d. in 1294. Although Crowland Abbey had slightly more churches in 1200 (21), including those given before the Conquest, Thorney Abbey, with only thirteen churches, six of which had been given before 1086, had fared less well than Spalding Priory in the matter of such valuable endowments.<sup>70</sup>

Despite the considerable progress made by the conventual priors in increasing the wealth of the Priory after 1242 it is clear that the earlier gifts of the Countess Lucy and her three husbands and heirs were the main source of the Priory's revenue. In common with the other Fenland abbeys in the post-Conquest period, Spalding Priory was never endowed with whole villis, although most of its possessions were clustered in easily manageable groups all within Lincolnshire, unlike its neighbours whose estates were scattered in five counties. Neither Crowland nor Thorney Abbey received such valuable temporal gifts as the manors of Alkborough, Wyham, Kirkby Laythorpe and, especially, Spalding during the twelfth century, and the total amount of land given to the Priory - more than forty carucates - far exceeded that of its neighbours.<sup>71</sup>

### Conclusion

In his report of the lengthy dispute over seisin of the marsh which lay between Crowland Abbey and Spalding Priory, which preoccupied both houses from 1189 until 1202, the Crowland chronicler complained that 'there is hardly anyone living in the county of Lincoln who is not in some way bound to the house of Spalding or to William de Roumare' (Lucy's great grandson).<sup>72</sup> Later, when the matter went before King John himself, the chronicler describes how Ranulph, Earl of Chester, 'diligently favoured the Spalding Party as their patron and advocate ... wherefore he urgently prayed the king,

his household and counsellors that they would promote the cause of his monks, for what they did for them, he declared, was done to himself.<sup>73</sup> While prejudice and exaggeration probably inform these remarks (although Crowland won the suit), they vividly demonstrate the role of the heirs of Countess Lucy, both as patrons and protectors, in fostering the growth of Spalding Priory.

Once freed from the rapacity of their Angevin superiors, the conventual priors of Spalding presided over a rate of growth on their manors in Elloe wapentake which was unparalleled elsewhere in the kingdom. These estates were, to borrow Hallam's phrase, 'swarming with tiny sokemen'<sup>74</sup> and the town itself developed as a major east coast port and mercantile centre, until the delicate system of drainage upon which its prosperity depended began to deteriorate in the fourteenth century and the town was eclipsed by Boston. Nevertheless when the Lay Subsidy was taken in 1334 the Priory's manors of Pinchbeck, Weston, Moulton and Spalding had a combined value exceeded only by London and Bristol.<sup>75</sup> The endowments of the Priory throughout Lincolnshire helped to stimulate the growth of the town, and the Priory itself became one of the most influential ecclesiastical establishments in the region, a position it retained until the Dissolution, when the debt owed to the Countess Lucy was still commemorated by the distribution of 'pardon' beans on the anniversary of her death.

APPENDIX ITHE POSSESSIONS OF SPALDING PRIORY IN 1200

<u>Churches</u>	<u>Lord in 1086</u>	<u>Tithes</u>	<u>Lord in 1086</u>
Spalding	Ivo	Spalding	
Weston	Ivo	Weston	
Moulton	Ivo	Moulton	
Pinchbeck	Ivo	Pinchbeck	
Holbeach	The king	Tetney	Ivo
Surfleet	Heppo	Alkborough	
Sibsey	Ivo	Cabourne	Ivo
Stickney	Ivo	Normanby	Ivo
Bolingbroke	Ivo	Glentham	Ivo
Addlethorpe		Donington	Ivo
Honington	Ivo	Stenigot	Ivo
Lea	Count Alan	Scamelsby	
Gate Burton	Count Alan	Belchford	
Alkborough	Ivo	Wyham	Ivo
Scamelsby	Ivo	Obthorpe	Ivo
Minting	Ivo		
1/2 Church		2 parts of the tithe	
East Keal	Ivo	Sutton	Count Alan
Belchford	Ivo	Lutton	
		Edlington	Ivo
Chapel - Walcote		Claxby	Ivo, Hugh, his man
		Langton	
		Frampton	Count Alan/ Guy de Craon

TEMPORAL ACQUISITIONS

Spalding	9 carucates
Pinchbeck	10 carucates
Weston/Moulton	10 carucates 1 bovate
Tydd	3 carucates 2 bovates
Whaplode	land called Wrangbenethrith
Sutton	2 carucates 2 bovates



Surfleet	3 bovates
Fishtoft	a toft
Hareby	10 bovates
Sibsey	2 carucates 1.1/4 bovates
Miningsby	2 carucates
Bolingbroke	lands, tofts, woods
Belchford	lands
Scamelsby	watermill
Asterby	mill
Honington	1 carucate
Ludford	4.1/2 bovates
Alkborough	1 carucate, a manor
Walcote	1 bovat
Obthorpe & Wilsthorpe	1 carucate & men
Laythorpe & Evedon	a manor, 1 carucate & men
Lea	lands
Normanby	a man and a toft, 1 bovat of land
Wyham	a manor?
Lincoln	buildings in the Castle ditch
Willoughton	a manor

Further information on the donors is to be found in Sumner, op.cit., Tables I and II.

## APPENDIX II

### THE PRIORS OF SPALDING BEFORE 1274

Gaufrido Nauecensi	occurs 1111
Herbert	c. 1149-56
Reynold	c. 1176
Geoffrey	N.D.
Nicholas	occurs 1189-91
Warin	occurs 1192
Jocelyn	c. 1194-8
Nicholas	occurs 1203-4
John the Spaniard	occurs 1219
Ralf Mansell	1224-1229
Simon of Alkborough	1229-53
John the Almoner	1253-74

The chief source for this list is B.L. Add MSS 35296, fol. 421, though it is not complete and other priors have been included where charter evidence exists.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *The Chronicle of Hugh Candidus, a monk of Peterborough*, ed. W.T. Mellows, pp.4-5, 1949.
- <sup>2</sup> These works include: E. King, *Peterborough Abbey 1086-1310*, Cambridge University Press, 1973; E. Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*, C.U.P., 1951; F.M. Page, *The Estates of Crowland Abbey*, C.U.P., 1934; S. Raban, *The Estates of Crowland and Thorney*, Cambridge University Department of Land Economy, Occasional Paper No.7, 1977; and J.A. Raftis, *The Estates of Ramsey Abbey*, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto, 1957.
- <sup>3</sup> This study develops part of an M.A. thesis presented at Reading in 1987; N. Sumner, *Spalding, the Origins of a Fenland Community*. (Course History of Agriculture and the English Landscape). I would like to express my thanks to Dr D.R. Roffe and Dr Anne Curry for their help and encouragement during the preparation of this article though they are not of course responsible for its contents. Also I would like to thank my father, Mr A.G. Sumner, for preparing the maps.
- <sup>4</sup> *Chronicon Angliae Petroburgense*, ed. J.A. Giles, p.149, 1845.
- <sup>5</sup> ed. H.T. Riley, *Ingulph's Chronicle of the Abbey of Crowland*, Bohn's Antiquarians Library, 1873, p.173. On Ingulph's reliability see H.T. Riley, *The history and charters of Ingulph considered*, Archaeological Journal, XIX, 1862, and W.G. Searle, *Ingulph and the Historia Croylandensis*, Cambridge Antiquarian Society, 1894.
- <sup>6</sup> H.T. Riley, p.173ff., and Giles.
- <sup>7</sup> eds. C.W. Foster and T. Longley, *The Lincolnshire Domesday and the Lindsey Survey*, pp. 60, 89, 184. Lincolnshire Record Society, vol. XIX, 1924. Clearly it is wrong to state, as Darby has recently done, that Spalding as a whole was a berewick of Crowland. See H.C. Darby, 'Domesday Book and the Geographer' in *Domesday Studies*, ed. J.C. Holt (Woodbridge, 1987), p.109.
- <sup>8</sup> British Library, Harley MS Y6, reproduced as the frontispiece in F.M. Page.

- <sup>9</sup> Sumner, Chapter 3; also D.R. Roffe, 'The Lincolnshire Hundred' in *Landscape History*, vol. 3, p.30.
- <sup>10</sup> The cartulary is in two volumes; British Library Additional Manuscript 35296 and B.L. Harley 742. This account, entitled *De l'Inchoatione sive Fundatione Spaldingensis...* is on folio 2 of the Additional Manuscript. It was probably written in the time of Prior Walter de Hatton who ruled the house in the 1330's. Otherwise the cartulary mostly contains material from earlier centuries, often written to imitate an earlier style of hand writing.
- <sup>11</sup> B.L. Add. MSS 35296 fols 87, 99. Calendar of Charter Rolls, vol. IV, p.162. This charter was made before 1123.
- <sup>12</sup> C. Ballu, *Historia Abbatiae Sancti Nicolai Andegavensis*, Angers, 1902, p.6. This history was originally written in 1648 by a monk of that Abbey, Dom Petro Leduc.
- <sup>13</sup> R.E.G. Kirk, 'The Countess Lucy: Singular or Plural?', *Genealogist*, (New Series); 5, 60-75, 131-44, 153-73, especially 143-44 and 163 ff.
- <sup>14</sup> W. Farrer, *The Sheriffs of Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, 1066-1130*, *English Historical Review*, 1915, p.272-79.
- <sup>15</sup> Pipe Roll 2 Henry II, p.37-8.
- <sup>16</sup> J.H Round, *Feudal England*, London, 1909 reprint, p.329.
- <sup>17</sup> Farrer, op.cit., p.278.
- <sup>18</sup> B.L. Add MSS 35296, Fol. 8d. Also H.W.C. Davis ed. *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum*, vol. 1, no. 288a, Oxford, 1913.
- <sup>19</sup> Frank Barlow, *William Rufus*, Methuen, 1983, p.172.
- <sup>20</sup> B.L. Add MSS 35296, fol. 8d.
- <sup>21</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, fol. 8.
- <sup>23</sup> Foster and Langley, p.89.
- <sup>24</sup> Kirk.
- <sup>25</sup> Pipe Roll 31. Henry I, p.110.
- <sup>26</sup> B.L. Add MSS 35296, fol. 9.
- <sup>27</sup> *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, Records Commission, IV, p.98, eds. J. Caley and J. Hunter (1810-34).
- <sup>28</sup> Foster and Langley eds. p.89. For the multiplier see H.E. Hallam, *Some Thirteenth-century Censuses*, *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, vol. 10, No. 3, 1958, p.341.
- <sup>29</sup> S. Raban, *The Estates of Thorney and Crowland*, C.U.P. 1977, Appendix I.
- <sup>30</sup> B.L. Add MSS 35296, fol. 87. Also in *Regesta Regum Anglo-*



*Normannorum*, No. 386.

- 31 B.L. Add MSS 35296, fol. 360.
- 32 *ibid.*, fol. 412.
- 33 Foster and Langley, p.256.
- 34 *ibid.*, p.240.
- 35 B.L. Add MSS 35296, fols. 87b, 386.
- 36 *ibid.*, fols. 371 and 378.
- 37 *ibid.*, fol. 283, B.L. Harley 742, fols. 281 and 289, Calendar of Charter Rolls, vol. IV, p.162.
- 38 B.L. Add MSS 35296, fol. 283.
- 39 Calendar of Charter Rolls, vol. IV, p.162.
- 40 B.L. Add MSS 35296 fol. 132.
- 41 Calendar of Charter Rolls, vol. IV, p.162.
- 42 Davis and Cronne, *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum*, vol. III, Oxford 1968, No. 20, pp.7-8.
- 43 B.L. Harley 742, fol. 287b. Gilbert also gave the monks 40 shillings rent. A certain Kistegar also gave the monks extensive lands here at this time.
- 44 B.L. Add MSS 35296, fols. 391 and 382.
- 45 B.L. Add MSS 35296 fol. 330. For Whaplode see Calendar of Charter Rolls, vol. IV, p.163, and a confirmation given by Pope Alexander III in 1177, in Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, vol. III, p.219.
- 46 Raban, p.44.
- 47 *ibid.* Chapter 4 and Appendices 2 and 3 pp.94-96.
- 48 The cartulary of the Priory contains a thorough record of these gifts. Some of the most important are given in Calendar of Charter Rolls, p.167ff.
- 49 Sumner, Chapters 5 and 6, also E. Jones, 'Some Economic Dealings of Prior John the Almoner', *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology*, 12, 1977, p.41.
- 50 A recent summary of these possessions is in Jacques Beauroy, 'La conquête cléricale de L'Angleterre; *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, 1984, pp.35-48.
- 51 Victoria County History, Warwickshire, vol. II, p.129-31, London, 1908.
- 52 This information, and most of that which follows, is taken from documents concerning the composition between the two houses which I hope to publish shortly. The documents are in B.L. Add MSS 35296, fols. 11-18.
- 53 Dugdale, p.207, note 2.
- 54 Rotuli Hugonis de Welles, pt. III, p.182-85. Lincolnshire Record Society,

vol. 9, 1964.

<sup>55</sup> See note 52.

<sup>56</sup> Giles, p.137 ff., also B.L. Add MSS 35296, fols. 10, 421d.

<sup>57</sup> The best version of this tale is in D.N. Stenton, *English Justice 1066-1215*, The American Philosophical Society, 1964, pp.148-212.

<sup>58</sup> Pipe Roll 2 Richard I, p.89.

<sup>59</sup> B.L. Harley 742, fol. 2264d.

<sup>60</sup> H.E. Hallam, *The New Lands of Elloe*, Leicester University Press, Occasional Paper no. 6, 1954, p.6 ff.

<sup>61</sup> Rotuli Hundredorum, p.271. These rights, together with others pertaining to the lordship of Spalding, were held 'ab antiquo'.

<sup>62</sup> Sumner, Chapter 6, E. Johns.

<sup>63</sup> H.E. Hallam, *Settlement and Society*, C.U.P., 1965, p.176.

<sup>64</sup> D.M. Stenton, p.155.

<sup>65</sup> B.L. Add MSS 35296, fol. 144d.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid* fols. 329-37. B.L. Harley 742, 269-70.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>68</sup> B.L. Harley 742, fol. 262.

<sup>69</sup> Dugdale, pp.224-6.

<sup>70</sup> Raban, Appendix II.

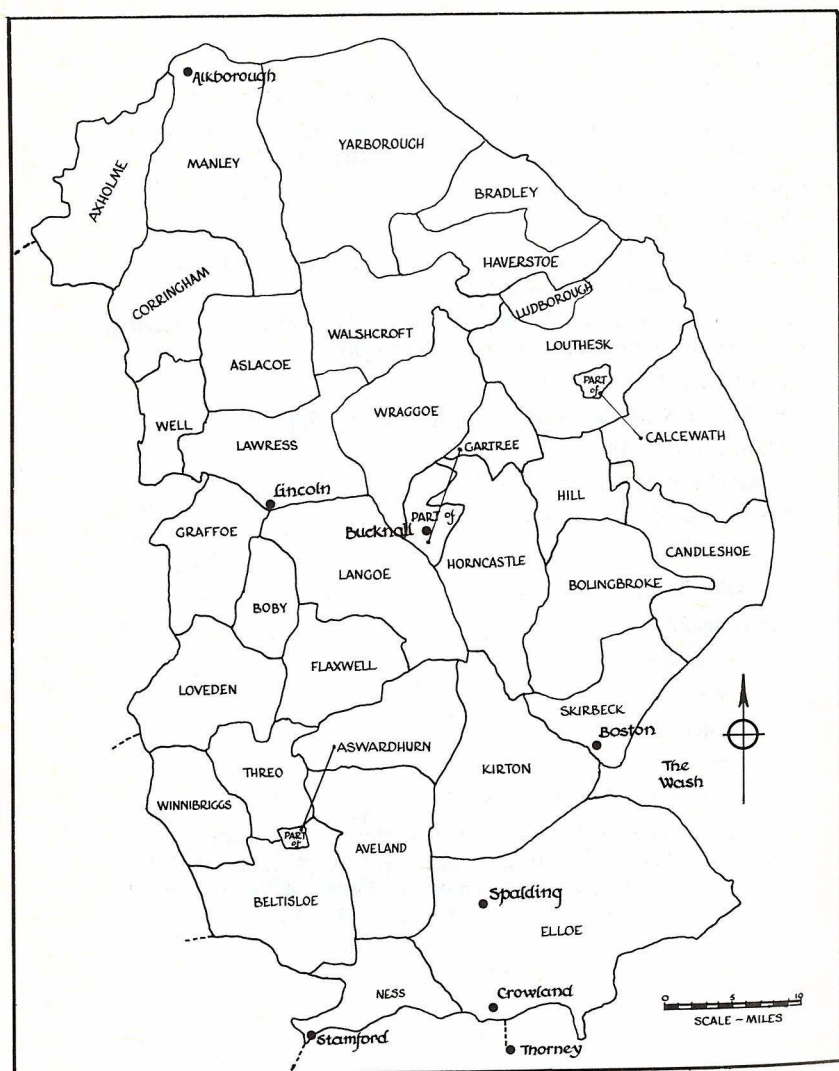
<sup>71</sup> *ibid*. Appendix III.

<sup>72</sup> D.M. Stenton, p.161.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid*., p.199.

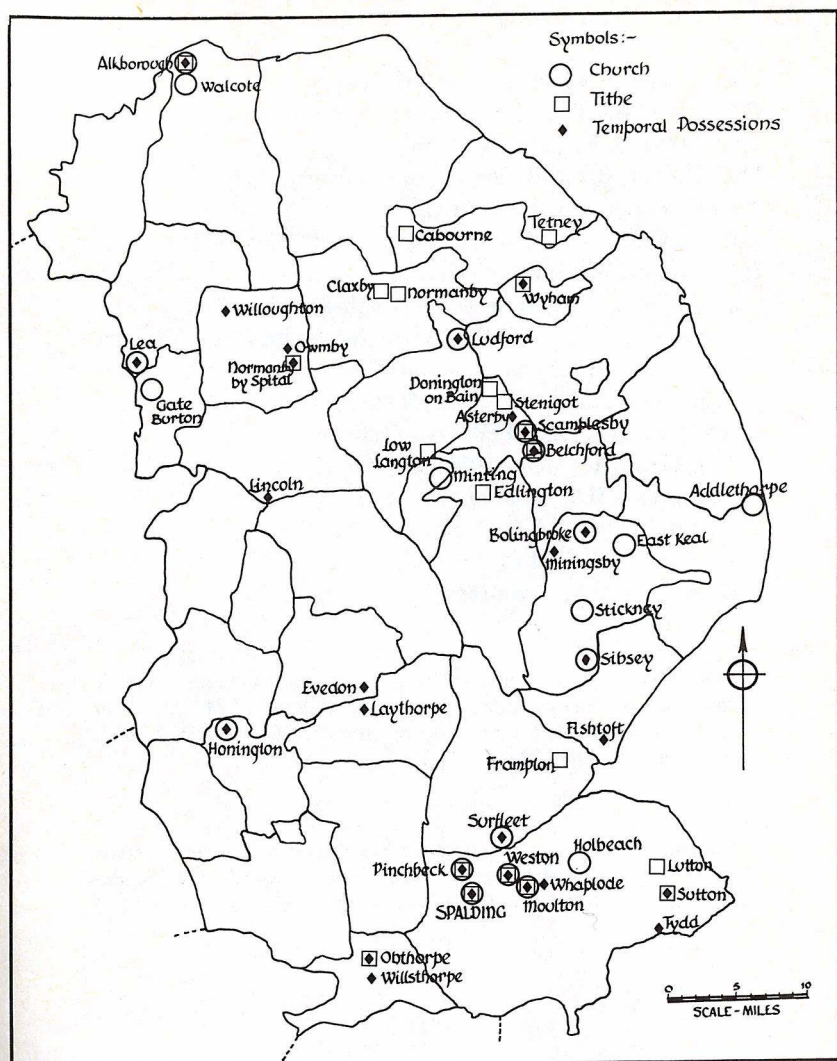
<sup>74</sup> Hallam, *Settlement and Society*, p.202.

<sup>75</sup> R. Glasscock, 'The Lay Subsidy for Lincolnshire', Lincolnshire Architectural Society Reports and Papers, vol. 10, pt. 2, pp.115-133. Calculation based on the table given in H.C. Darby, *A New Historical Geography of England before 1600*, C.U.P. 1973, p.181.



Map 1. Wapentakes of Lincolnshire.





Map 2. The Possessions of Spalding Priory in 1200 A.D.