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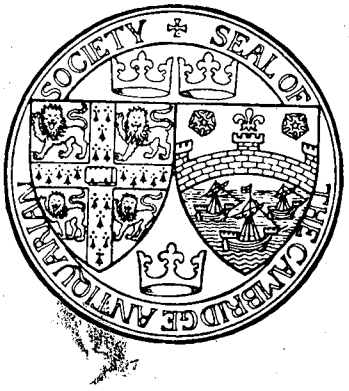

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SPALDWICK, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

C.C. TAYLOR

One of the most notable of recent advances in the understanding of the origins and development of English villages has been the recognition that a very large proportion of them acquired their present shape not in early Saxon times, but in the tenth–twelfth centuries and even later and as the result of conscious planning (Taylor, 1983, 133–48).

Such villages were first recognized in the north-east of England by Roberts (Roberts, 1977). Other scholars later discovered them in places as far apart as Yorkshire (Sheppard, 1976), Shropshire (Rewley, 1972) and Somerset (Ellison, 1976) while work by RCHME has led to their identification in considerable numbers in parts of Northamptonshire and Lincolnshire (RCHME, 1975–82 and forthcoming).

Until recently, however, little work has been carried out on Cambridgeshire villages with this aspect in mind. Certainly some villages in the county cannot be explained except as a result of late planning. Kimbolton is perhaps the best example. Other villages are known to have been re-planned following their re-siting, as for example Caxton (Taylor, 1983, 158–60). There is also an associated type of village which seems to have had planned additions, usually in the twelfth–thirteenth centuries. Dr Ravensdale has identified Cottenham as being of this form (Ravensdale, 1974, 121–4), while Sawston, Whittlesford and Burwell (Taylor, 1983, 152–3) are undoubtedly similar.

Yet, unless Cambridgeshire is very unusual, it should be possible to discover many more planned medieval villages in the county. The problem of identifying planned villages is two-fold. First, given the changes in village morphology that have inevitably taken place during both medieval and post-medieval times, it is often difficult if not impossible to see elements in the existing layouts which would suggest a planned beginning. Second, even in cases where the physical evidence suggests planning, it is difficult to assign a date, reason or persons to the process.

The purpose of this paper is to suggest that Spaldwick, in the old county of Huntingdonshire, may be an instance of a planned village. It is also intended to illustrate both the type and the interpretation of the available evidence as well as its limited nature.

The village of Spaldwick (TL 128728; Figure 1) lies 11 km west of Huntingdon in the bottom of the broad open valley of the east-flowing Ellington Brook. Spaldwick has a relatively simple plan, roughly in the form of a 'T'. The upright of the 'T' is the main east–west High Street which widens at its west end to form a small elongated green. The bar of the 'T' extends from the west end of The Green to the north-east and south-west on the Stow and Thrapston roads. The Thrapston road runs only a short distance north-east before turning sharply north-west to cross the Ellington Brook on a three-arch fifteenth-century bridge (RCHME, 1926, Spaldwick (4)). The Stow road too turns sharply west as it leaves the village and then south again on its way to the village from which it takes its name.

These two roads thus effectively curve round three sides of a broad flat north-facing promontory. The fourth, west, side is bounded by a deep abandoned hollow-way which continues the line of the Stow road northwards down the slope perhaps once extending to meet the Thrapston road near its crossing of the Ellington Brook.

This area is also bounded on the south-east, south and west by a broad flat-topped bank up to 1.5 m high and on the north-west by a scarp up to 2 m high overlooking the brook. No trace of a bank or scarp exists on the north-east or east but it seems likely that there was once a bank around the entire area. The existing village properties and the re-alignment of the Thrapston road have destroyed all trace there.

The D-shaped enclosure thus bounded by roads, hollow-ways, banks and scarps now

contains the parish church, the Old Rectory and a line of village properties. The large fields to the north and south of the church and the Old Rectory formerly contained extensive earthworks. These have been largely destroyed by modern ploughing and other activities but enough remains, or was recorded by the Royal Commission in 1926 to make a tentative attempt at identifying their form and function (RCHME, 1926, Spaldwick (2)). In the northern field only some uneven ground, a broad shallow north–south ditch and a low bank survive, but in 1926 a series of terraces and scarps existed here. In the southern field immediately south of the church and between it and a modern pond are a group of very low stone rubble walls, undoubtedly the foundations of a very extensive former building. In the north-west corner is a circular mound 0.5 m high and 15 m in diameter, now much damaged, and with a shallow surrounding ditch. It has been suggested that this is the site of a former windmill. The centre and south of the field is now occupied by traces of very low and spread banks which appear to have once formed a group of rectangular paddocks and closes. These are bounded on the east by three marshy depressions now too degraded for interpretation but possibly once three linked rectangular ponds with a slightly better preserved very small fourth pond or tank to the east again. The south-east part of the field is devoid of any feature. In 1926 the Royal Commission recorded further traces of 'foundations' in the south-west corner. These no longer exist. The whole field, together with the earthworks, was described by the Royal Commission as 'village site'. Its names 'Danesfield' and 'Bury Close' have also been noted (RCHME, 1926, Spaldwick (2); VCH, 1932, 97).

There can be little doubt that this large enclosure and its associated earthworks, as well as the parish church, mark the site of a palace of the medieval Bishops of Lincoln which was also the centre of a considerable estate whose history is well-documented.

On his death at the Battle of Maldon in 991 Brithnoth, Ealdorman of Essex, left two estates to the Abbey of Ely, Somersham and *Spaldwick* (Hart, 1966, no. 25). It is clear from Domesday Book and later records (VCH, 1926, 342; VCH, 1932, 97–8) that the estate of Spaldwick actually comprised not only Spaldwick itself but Stow Longa, Easton, Little Catworth, Barham and Upthorpe (in Spaldwick), so forming a compact block of land on either side of the Ellington Brook. It is also clear that the mother church of this estate was that at Stow Longa as the place-name might suggest.

In 1109 this estate was transferred from Ely to the Bishopric of Lincoln as part of the compensation given to the Bishops when the new diocese of Ely was created. The estate remained the property of Lincoln until 1547 when it was exchanged for other properties and thus passed into lay hands (VCH, 1932, 98).

Few details are known of the management of this estate by the Bishops of Lincoln. Assarts in Spaldwick are recorded in 1155/8 and 1185 and in 1215 the Bishop gained permission to create a deer park there (Foster and Major, 1931, 115, 129). At the same time a general grant for a weekly market and an annual fair on all the Bishop's manors was obtained. In 1441 this grant was specifically confirmed for Spaldwick (VCH, 1932, 97).

More important perhaps was the use made of the episcopal palace at Spaldwick by the Bishops of Lincoln. These Bishops had a number of palaces which they seem to have used in their often extensive perambulations. Spaldwick was not as important a place as the two nearest palaces, Buckden or Lyddington. Nevertheless it did receive a succession of episcopal visitors. For example between 1286 and 1299 Bishop Oliver Sutton stayed at Spaldwick no less than ten times on visits which ranged from a single day to almost eight weeks (Hill, 1954, 207–14). In the light of this specific documentary evidence it is necessary to examine more carefully the archaeological material associated with the site, and the morphological arrangement of Spaldwick village and to place them in a wider historical context.

The first point to note is the function of the enclosure at the west end of the village. This was undoubtedly the administrative centre of the Bishop's estate as well as, presumably, a demesne farm. Thus at one level it must have operated in the same way as a large manorial site. However, it had the additional function of a palace, albeit only occasionally used, for the peripatetic Bishops. All this implies that the enclosure once contained not only the parish church and the palace itself, but also

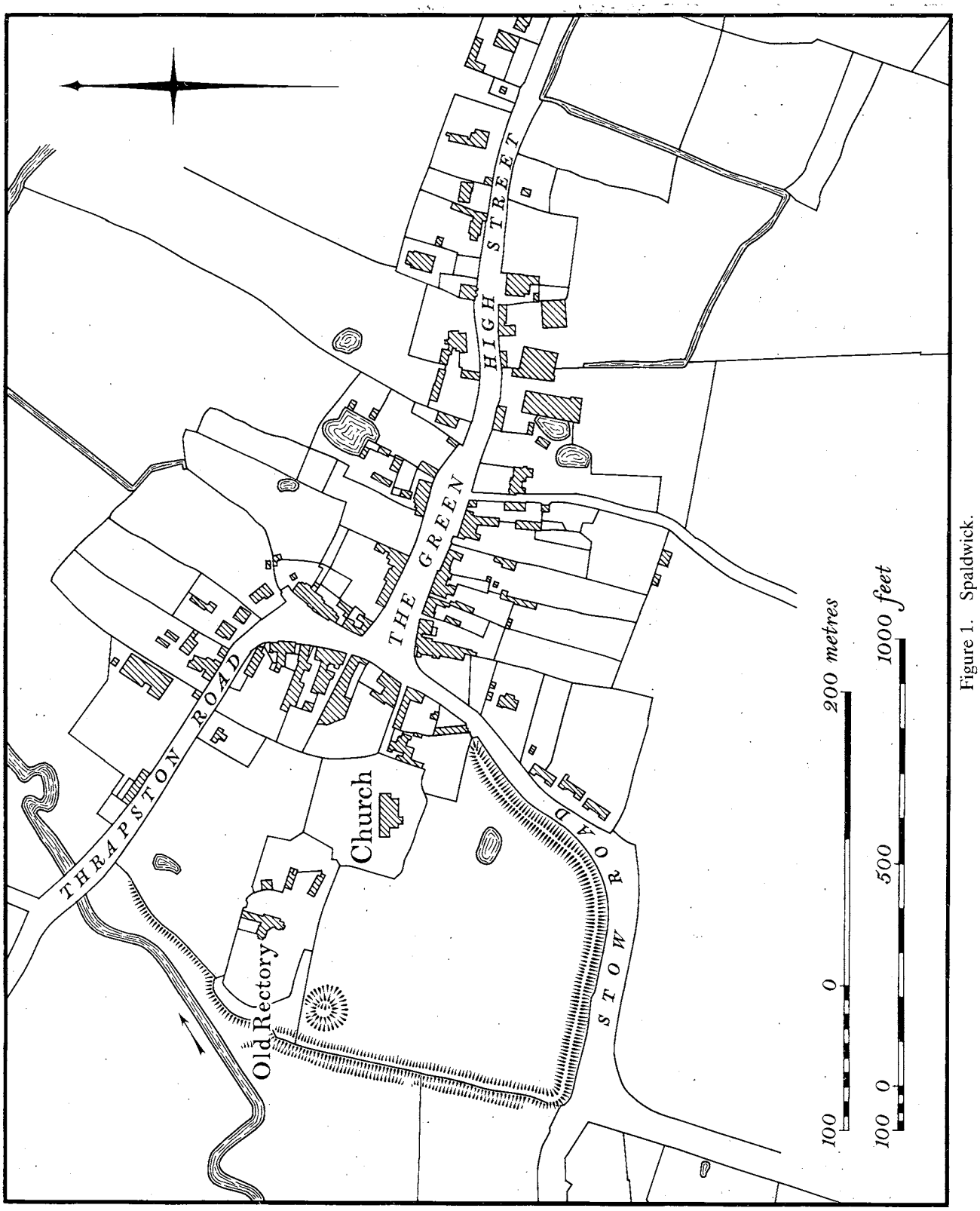

Figure 1. Spaldwick.

other extensive arrangements of buildings for both agricultural use and for housing visitors, retainers, horses, etc. It also perhaps contained various paddocks for the demesne farm which is one explanation for the closes there.

There is, however, another interpretation of these closes, together with the circular mound, former ponds and terraces. At the majority of the other medieval palaces of the Bishops of Lincoln there are associated gardens. The garden at Nettleham, Lincolnshire, of the mid fourteenth century still survives as earthworks and was quite small and totally enclosed. At Stow Park, also in Lincolnshire, the palace was surrounded by carefully contrived sheets of water as well as by gardens that seem to have been in existence by the twelfth century (RCHME, forthcoming). At Lyddington, Leicestershire, a late medieval stone gazebo and length of wall as well as ponds survive from the garden there (Pevsner, 1984, 483). At Buckden it is likely that at least much of the Inner Court and perhaps part of the Outer Court were gardens (RCHME, 1926, Buckden (4)). It may well be that a similar garden occupied a large part of the enclosure at Spaldwick. Certainly the mound, usually described as a windmill mound, might better be interpreted as a garden mount and the existence of the terraces on the north may also be significant.

If the enclosure at Spaldwick was the site of the Bishop's Palace, gardens and estate centre, what of the village itself? It is possible that the general line of the High Street existed before the establishment of the main enclosure and that the latter merely blocked the west end of an established street or even led to the destruction of part of the earlier village. Certainly an original east–west road could have continued the line of High Street across the area of the palace enclosure to join the line of the north–south hollow-way. On the other hand, the detailed arrangement of Spaldwick village, and in particular the way in which the green is butted up against the perimeter of the main enclosure suggests that it must post-date that enclosure. That is the village was deliberately laid out, i.e. planned, with a broad open green set against the enclosure, perhaps with the main entrance to the enclosure/palace at the head of the green.

If Spaldwick is therefore a created village, planned, with its green, in association with the adjacent estate centre and episcopal palace, when could this planning have taken place? There are three possibilities. First, at some time before 991 when the presumed earlier estate centre at Stow Longa was moved to Spaldwick, which is the name of the estate by that date. There is no evidence to support or reject this suggestion. The second period during which Spaldwick might have been planned could have been soon after the acquisition of the estate by the Abbey at Ely in 991. This is possible but there is no evidence elsewhere in the Ely estates that the Abbey was engaged in such alterations at this time.

The third period might have been sometime after 1109 when the Bishops of Lincoln gained Spaldwick. This is perhaps the most likely. In general terms a 12th-century date for the re-planning of Spaldwick would fit in with similar evidence from all over England. More specifically and locally too it is clear that this type of re-organization was taking place at this time. Cottenham, quoted above, is an example of this. In addition it is of particular interest to note that Spaldwick's sister estate of Somersham, though it remained Ely property, was given to the Bishop of Ely in 1109 (VCH, 1932, 225). There too an episcopal palace and garden were established (Taylor, 1989). The work also involved the re-location and re-planning of Somersham village.

A twelfth-century date would also agree with the evidence from elsewhere on the Bishop of Lincoln's estates which were clearly being exploited on a large scale at this time. At one level there are records of new assarts in the woodlands, from the mid 12th century onwards not only at Spaldwick but also at Buckden for example (Foster and Major, 1931, 115–6). More important is the evidence from most of the Bishop's lands of planned and re-planned settlements. The mid twelfth century saw a remarkable development of this type of settlement by the Bishops of Lincoln. The most notable are a series of new towns that appeared at this time. Sleaford, Lincolnshire (1223–47) (Beresford, 1967, 466), Thame, Oxfordshire (*c.* 1146) (Beresford, 1967, 477; Emery, 1974, 200), Biggleswade, Bedfordshire (*c.* 1140) (VCH, 1908, 210, 212), and Banbury, Oxfordshire (1123–47) (Emery, 1974, 198–9). Eynsham, Oxfordshire, though the property of the Abbey there, which certainly laid out a new

borough in 1215 (Beresford, 1967, 476), was held of the Bishops of Lincoln. The original town seems to have been founded in 1135–9 and its appearance may have been influenced by the Abbey's overlord (Emery, 1974, 191–2; Aston and Bond, 1976, 81–3).

The smaller estates also held directly by the Bishops of Lincoln are not so easy to recognize as having had planned beginnings. Of the surviving villages of these estates, Stow and Nettleham in Lincolnshire both have remarkably regular plans (NAR Records), Copredy, Oxfordshire, and Kilsby, Northamptonshire, have somewhat distorted grids while Lyddington, Leicestershire, also has elements of regularity in its layout, as does Buckden.

At none of these villages can the putative planning be dated. The layout of Stow, centred as it is on a rectangular market place, may have existed by the late twelfth century when a formal market was in existence. In Nettleham personal-names indicate the existence of the large green there by the early thirteenth century (NAR Records). At Lyddington, the relationship of the village to the perimeter of the grounds of the Bishop's Palace implies that it is later than the latter which was certainly in existence by the late twelfth century.

On the whole, therefore, a twelfth-century origin for Spaldwick seems the most likely. If this is so, it is also just a possibility, but no more, that Bishop Alexander (1123–47) might have been the person responsible for its appearance. Certainly he seems to have been responsible for the planning of Sleaford, Thame, Biggleswade and Banbury. It may be that he also re-planned the villages on his episcopal estates during his life, and that Spaldwick is merely one example.

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