

CHRISTOPHER TURNOR 1809-1886 AND HIS INFLUENCE ON LINCOLNSHIRE BUILDINGS

By Stewart Squires

In 1829 at the age of 20, Christopher Turnor inherited some 20,000 acres of land in Lincolnshire, on the death of his father. For nearly 60 years thereafter he controlled the third largest estate in Lincolnshire and is reputed to have been the wealthiest commoner in England.¹ He used his wealth to improve and develop his estates according to the most up-to-date farming practices. He was the epitome of the improving agricultural landlord and was probably responsible for erecting more buildings in Lincolnshire than any other single person.

His interest in architecture and design cannot be disputed. Inspired by the construction work on Harlaxton Manor, described as the wildest and most fanciful mansion of the 1830's², he commissioned the same architect, William Burn, to work on a new house for himself, Stoke Rochford Hall.³ He pulled down his earlier home in 1841 and work began on the Manor. At the other end of the scale, he also designed his own funeral monument which can be seen in South Stoke Church. In between he built houses, cottages and farmbuildings on his estates. This legacy can usually be easily identified, as he has left his initials, and a date, on many of them. In addition to these domestic and farmbuildings he endowed village schools and financed the rebuilding of churches.

The family estates were found in various parts of the country, they were not confined to Lincolnshire. In Lincolnshire, however, the holdings were concentrated in four areas, the parishes of Binbrook and Kirmond-le-Mire; those of East Barkwith, East Torrington, Langworth, Lissington, Panton and Wragby; in Stixwold; and in Great Ponton and Stoke Rochford. Christopher Turnor expanded the family's County estate to some 20,664 acres.⁴

Turnor was a man with the interests of his county at heart; he was an MP for South Lincolnshire and encouraged new ideas, not the least in agriculture. He was also involved in the promotion of railways in the county. In the 1860's, the early peak of the industrialisation of agriculture, he built a series of sets of farmbuildings which incorporated some of the most progressive methods of the Victorian High Farming era.

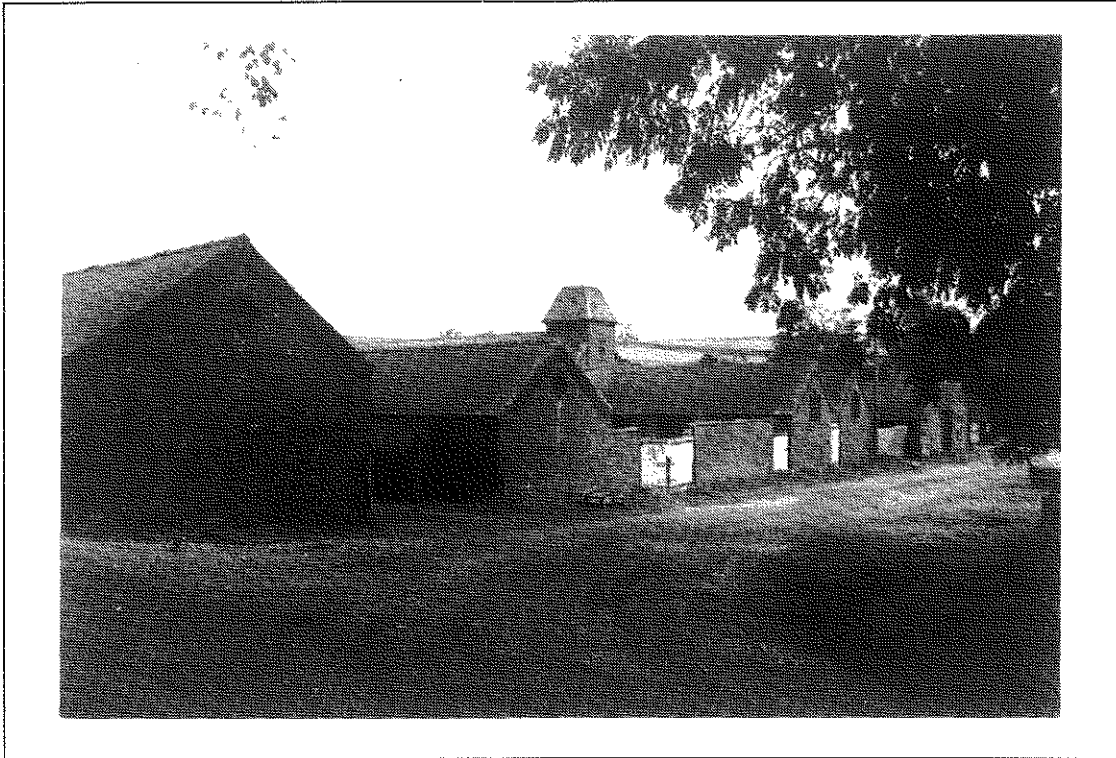
The basic farmyard layout is the square, with barn, cart shed, and stables on three sides, and the fourth, to the south, enclosed by a wall and gate to form a crew

yard. It was often built in Lincolnshire with two side-by-side to make an E-shaped building. Turnor built many of these on his farms, but his major contribution - a reflection of advanced contemporary thinking - was to increase this unit still further by building around the outside of the E, thus creating an internal access passage and, in the main central rear block, a fodder storage area and fixed machinery powered from outside by a driving wheel to which would be attached a belt driven from a portable steam or traction engine. His larger buildings were therefore important as an early example of the agricultural industrial revolution, and until the last thirty years or so, usually the largest agricultural building complexes seen in the countryside.

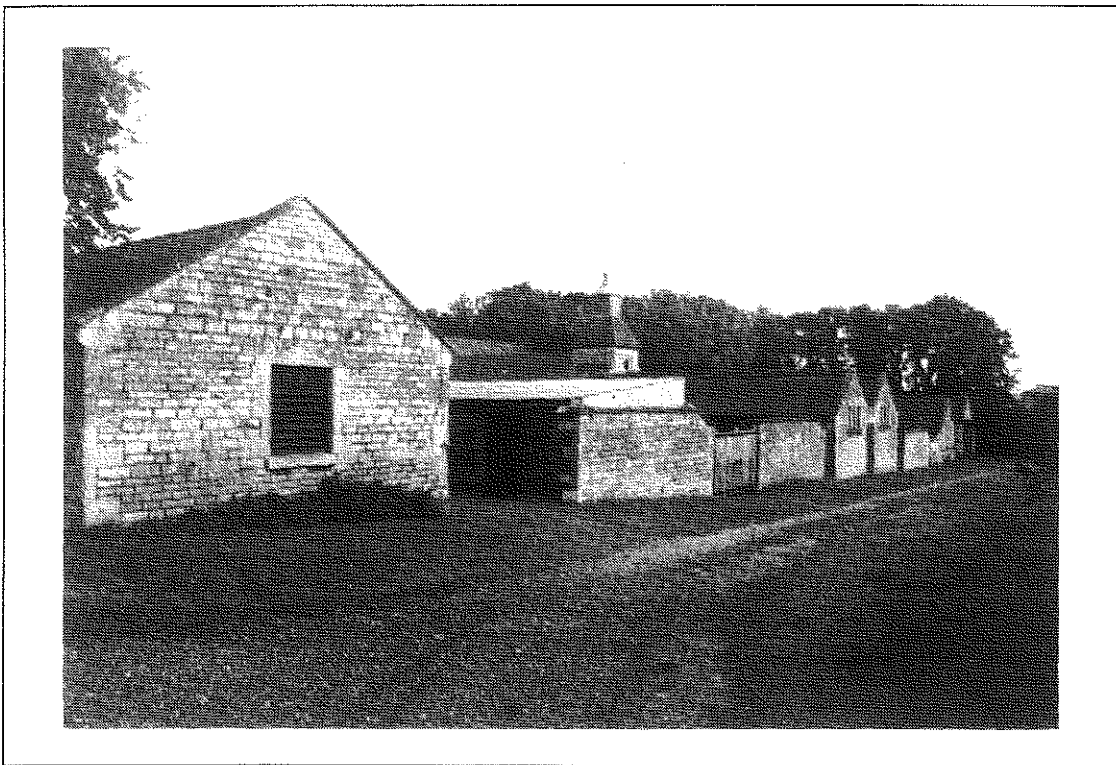
That the buildings were functional cannot be doubted. Within the complex, in addition to the storage and machinery areas, the needs of a variety of animals were catered for, heavy horses, cattle, pigs, hens and pigeons. There were also cart sheds, maybe a well to provide a water supply, earth closets for the men, and wheelwrights' and smiths' workshops. (See Kirmond-le-Mire layout).

Turnor also evidently determined that his buildings should be attractive to the eye. There is a symmetry to their design, with many small architectural details, dentilled eaves, small circular windows, window and door surround detailing, and tall louvred openings. Where the complex was built near to other buildings, usually staff houses of various sizes, the whole formed part of one design, and the farmbuildings given additional embellishment, including a pigeoncote. The materials of all his buildings were those indigenous to the local area, stone being used extensively in South Lincolnshire and red brick in the north.

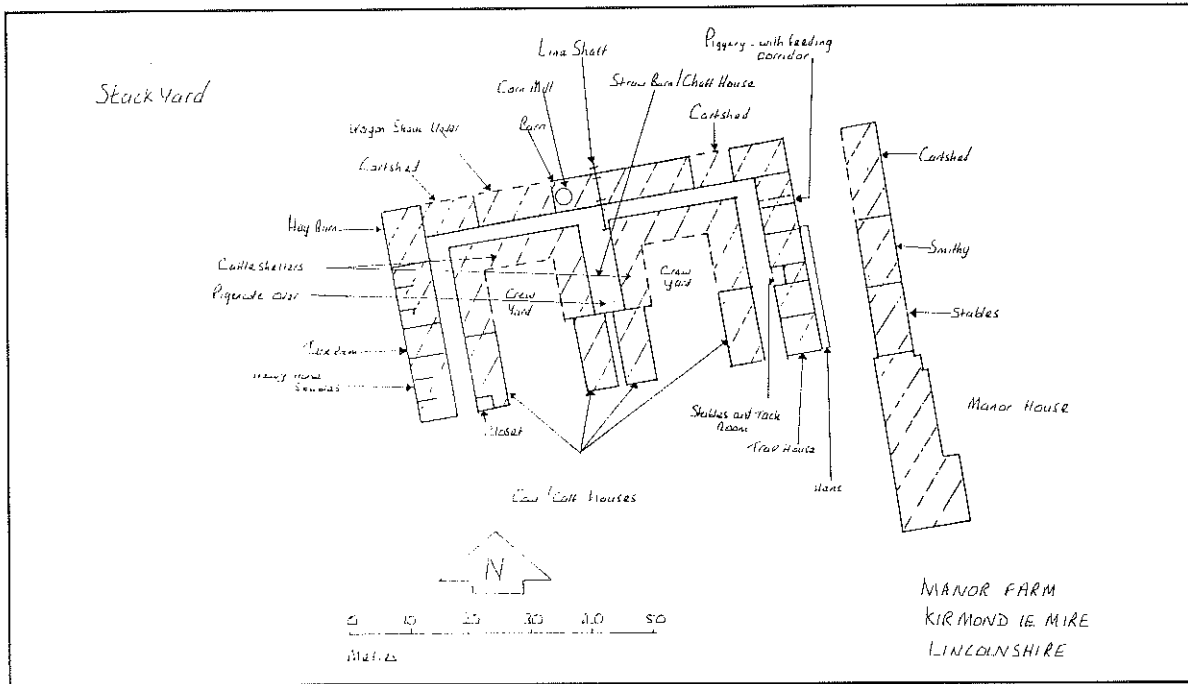
Whilst a reasonable number of Turnor's houses and cottages survive, his farmbuildings have fared less well. Well-built though they were, they are no longer suitable for present day needs and many have become largely redundant. Some have been demolished, but despite agricultural change, many of his farmbuildings survive. Most, because of their small size, rural nature, and lack of a datestone, go unrecognised. At least four sets of model farms are known to survive in reasonably complete and original condition, with part of a fifth. These are at Woodnook, c1870, and Grange Farm, 1866, both in Little Ponton Parish, south of Grantham; at Manor Farm, Kirmond-le-Mire, 1868; and at Chestnuts Farm, c1860, Binbrook. The northern range of buildings only survives at Binbrook Top Farm, 1866. The buildings at Woodnook and Chestnuts Farm are undated, but nearby houses are. Both those at Little Ponton are stone built, the others are red brick. The Grange Farm complex comprises a group including a substantial farmhouse and



South Front - Manor Farm, Kirmond le Mire



South Front - Grange Farm, Little Ponton



farmworkers' cottages. The buildings are in an excellent state of repair. It has a pigeoncote centrally placed as a tower, crowned by a weathervane, and is well maintained.

Kirmond-le-Mire also has a pigeoncote, is in a poor state of repair, but sees occasional use. It retains its line shafting, external drivewheel, and a Clayton and Shuttleworth Mill. Chestnuts Farm is similar in appearance to Woodcock, but is in a generally tumbledown state, and has not been used for some time. That at Binbrook Top is well maintained and used in conjunction with a large modern building recently constructed adjacent to it on the south side. The best surviving examples, therefore, are at Grange Farm, Little Ponton, and Manor Farm, Kirmond-le-Mire. They are both listed Grade II. That at Manor Farm, however, is more complete, and, as the only one with surviving machinery, can be considered to be the best example.

Even a cursory survey of a selection of Turnor's surviving farmbuildings reveals a standardisation of design. This is not surprising as they were functional buildings, but it is clear that the basic design of each element remained the same; for the large complex the unit was extended. For example, barns at Grange Farm, Mareham-on-the-Hill, and Abbey Farm, Stixwold, are the smaller versions of those at Binbrook and Kirmond-le-Mire.

Like many of his farmbuildings, Turnor's cottages are scattered and usually found in the open countryside. There is, again, a strong "house style". Cottages dated 1862, two pairs, are at Binbrook; at Langworth,

1845; at Panton, 1857, 1858 and 1870; and at Stixwold there are two dated 1836 and one, 1855; at Kirmond-le-Mire are examples of 1859, 1861, 1868, 1871 and 1873. At Stixwold he rebuilt the church in 1831, and built the school in 1851. At Kirmond-le-Mire the church was rebuilt in 1847, the school is of 1871.

Christopher Turnor died in 1886, and his final memorial, again to his own design, is the monument to him and his family below the east window of the north chapel in the Church of St Mary and St Andrew at Stoke Rochford. This composition in marble includes portraits of both of them, in roundels, on its face.

Much more research remains to be done in the county on the influence and surviving buildings of this remarkable man. This short article can do little other than to highlight his influence, and encourage that research.

References

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2. Pevsner, N. and Harris, *Buildings of England: Lincolnshire*, London, 1989.
3. Ibid
4. Leach, op. cit.
5. Whitehead, R.A., *Steam in the Village*, Newton Abbot, 1977.