

Teachers' notes:

4. Tudor houses in Lincolnshire including Topholme Abbey after the Dissolution of the monasteries

Ordinary people's houses

Until the industrial revolution when the mass production and transport of goods around the country became possible, the homes of ordinary people throughout Britain were built using locally traditional techniques and the building materials that were most readily available. Because techniques and materials varied from region to region, distinctive building types emerged that were characteristic of and unique to their own areas. This type of architecture is known as vernacular architecture. In Lincolnshire the local vernacular style of building was a timber and earth-based construction called mud and stud.

During the Tudor period brick was still an expensive material that was largely the preserve of the wealthy, and stone cottages were only built in the limestone belt, especially on the Lincolnshire Edge that runs north to south through the county. Timber was in short supply in Lincolnshire, especially in the second half of the 16th century, which meant that the most easily obtainable material was earth (mud). Mud and stud used an earth mixture supported on a framework that required the minimum of timber. Building with timber and earth was not confined to Lincolnshire, but the particular method of mud and stud is unique to the county. Even in the 16th century building with earth and wood was an established tradition in the county.

In the Tudor period the main frame of the house would usually have been made of oak. It consisted of vertical wall posts and horizontal rails braced at the corners. The frame was set on a shallow plinth of stone or brick which kept the timbers out of direct contact with the ground and helped prevent them rotting. Thinner vertical strips of wood (laths) were nailed between the wall posts and rails. The laths formed the support for a covering of mud mixture which was made of earth mixed to a stiff consistency with water and chopped straw. The mixture covered the whole frame on the outside of the house, and most of the frame inside (usually only the wall posts were left uncovered inside). When the mud covering was dry it was painted with several coats of limewash which had either animal fat or linseed oil added to it to make it waterproof.

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The limewash had to be repainted regularly (about twice a year) to stop water getting into the structure of the house. The roof of the house was often half-hipped (the roof sloped part way down at either end of the building) and thatched with long straw or reed depending on which was most readily available.

Inside, some of the simplest Tudor cottages had only one room with a chimneyless hearth open to the roof, but the period was one in which changes and improvements to ordinary houses were being made. We know this from inventories (lists made of people's belongings when they died) that survive. As time went on cottages were more likely to have two ground floor rooms separated by a brick-built chimney piece, with the extra room being used as a separate sleeping area. The sleeping room did not always have a fireplace in it. Some of the later cottages also had upstairs rooms within the roof space (i.e. with little or no vertical wall space). Some had proper staircases but often these rooms were accessed by a ladder. The entrance door to the cottages was usually in the middle and facing the chimney stack.

Inside the cottages the ground floor rooms usually had floors made of earth or clay mixed with ox blood and ashes, which formed a surface that could be polished, although in stone areas limestone slabs were sometimes cheap enough to be used. Where there was an upstairs, the floors were either of wooden planks or of plaster. If they were of wood the planks tended not to be nailed down. This served two purposes. Firstly, as wood was expensive, the tenant of the cottage could take the floor boards with them when they moved, and it also meant that where bulky items needed to be brought upstairs they could be hauled up through a hole in the ceiling rather than having to negotiate a steep and narrow staircase or even a ladder.

Surveys carried out in the early 17th century indicate that there were differences in the standards of ordinary people's houses across the county, with cottages in the upland areas tending to be better than those in the marsh and fen areas. At that time the main living room was called the house. The surveys indicate that by that time the very simplest one room cottages had virtually disappeared, but the simplest form of two-room houses surveyed (house and parlour) made up 9.3% of the stock in the upland areas, 41.2% in the marsh areas and 41.7% in the fenlands. The figures for cottages with house and parlour plus an extra service room were 11.2 %, 41.2% and 28.4%. Those for cottages with house and parlour plus one upstairs chamber were 14%, 5.9% and 3.7%. For house and parlour and two upstairs chambers they were 8.4%, none and 1.8%. For house, parlour, service room and upstairs chamber they were 17.8%, 11.7% and 15.1%. For those with a hall (a slightly grander main living room), parlour, service room and two upstairs chambers they were 23.4% in the upland villages and 1.8% in the fen. 15.9% of houses in upland villages had more than five rooms compared with 7.5% in the fen. The marsh areas had no houses of that size.

Although most of Lincolnshire's mud and stud buildings no longer exist, nearly 400 do still survive. Often they are hidden behind more recent exteriors and are difficult to spot, but many have been rescued and restored. In fact mud and stud as a building technique is very environmentally friendly and sustainable. Its insulation properties are very good, it uses materials that are natural and relatively inexpensive and it does not involve the transporting of materials over long distances. The fact that Lincolnshire has so many surviving examples (some dating from at least the 14th century) shows that if the buildings are properly cared for they can last for hundreds of years.

The Lincolnshire Historic Environment Record holds details of mud and stud cottages in its database, and Rodney Cousins' book *Lincolnshire Buildings in the Mud and Stud Tradition* contains a useful gazetteer of where to go in the county to see surviving examples. One of the best places to go to see a number of mud and stud cottages together in a village context is Thimbleby to the west of Horncastle. Church Farm Museum in Skegness also has a reconstructed example that was moved from the village of Withern and rebuilt on the museum site.

Wealthy people's houses

During the 16th century a number of aristocratic families, gentry and wealthy merchants built important houses in Lincolnshire. Grand houses such as Grimsthorpe Castle and Burghley House (Burghley is just outside the present Lincolnshire border near Stamford), were built by some of England's wealthiest people. Doddington Hall, Irnham Hall, Ellys Manor House at Great Ponton and Thomas Cony's Bassingthorpe Manor House are all surviving examples of the homes of wealthy Lincolnshire Tudor people.

Whereas the homes of most ordinary people probably tended to become slightly larger and more comfortable over the course of the Tudor period their basic form and appearance remained more or less unchanged. However, much greater change took place in the houses of the wealthy. Rich people were much more likely to consider their houses not only as a place to live but also as an outward expression of their status and importance. The Dissolution of the monasteries led to changes in land ownership on a large scale as monastic land passed into new ownership. At that time the ownership of land went hand in hand with power and influence. Many families who benefitted from the redistribution of land built new houses which helped to emphasise their new social standing. The wealthy houses of the period therefore reflect the changes that were taking place in society at that time. Rich people were also able to afford to use materials other than those from their immediate locality and to build and alter their houses according to changes in fashion and design. The houses therefore did not necessarily reflect the characteristics of their regional style. This type of architecture is known as 'polite' architecture.

The 16th century was a period during which new styles in architecture were being adopted. The new styles were directly influenced by ideas from Europe, especially from Italy. They looked back to the classical architecture of Rome and Greece and were characterised by classical detailing, regularity and symmetry. The period during which they were adopted is known as the Renaissance. The new fashions began to reach the King and his Court in London in about 1510 to 1520 and spread out gradually from there. To demonstrate your knowledge of the new style through the design of your house showed that you were connected to the Court (or that you rivalled those who were in importance). However, there was not a revolution in design. The new ideas diffused slowly through the country and it took about 50 years for them to become evident in Lincolnshire.

The reconstruction drawing of the old and new Snarford halls in the resources pack illustrates the impact of the new styles. The old hall was in existence by the mid 1500s and the new hall was begun in 1606. The changes can also be illustrated by comparing the architecture of some of the county's important surviving houses of the period. Gainsborough Old Hall was largely rebuilt in the 1480s after a fire and further added to at the very end of the 16th century. It is essentially a late medieval house built around three sides of a courtyard. It is partly timber-framed and partly brick. It has the typical medieval arrangement of a hall (a large communal room) open to the roof with a raised platform (dais) at one end which is lit by a large bay window built of stone. At the other end of the hall was a screens passage. This was a corridor running crosswise at the end of the room which was partitioned from the hall by a wooden screen. It had three doors in it giving access to the service rooms of buttery, pantry and kitchen. The screen no longer survives but the doorways are still there. Other parts of the house contain private accommodation and lodgings.

Although parts of Grimsthorpe Castle date from the 13th Century it was substantially extended and remodelled in about 1540 by Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk. This was immediately after the Dissolution of the monasteries when Brandon had been granted the land and buildings of nearby Vaudey Abbey after it closed. As at Gainsborough Old Hall, the house is built round a central courtyard. The work, which was carried out using stone from the demolished abbey, is most evident in the south front of the castle. Although most of the window openings that are there now date from the 18th century the original Gothic Tudor range of eight irregular gables and projecting chimneys can still be seen. Although the new Renaissance fashions would have been well known in London by the time this range was built there is no evidence of them having influenced the design of Grimsthorpe. Instead it seems to have been built to compete with nearby Irnham Hall which which dates from between 1510 and 1531.

Burghley House near Stamford is just outside the Lincolnshire border. It was built by William Cecil who became a Secretary of State in 1550, was knighted in 1551,

became Chancellor of the Garter in 1552, and Chief Secretary of State in 1558. He was therefore closely connected with royalty and the court and very well established both politically and financially. Burghley house was built between 1555 and 1587 out of local Barnack limestone. The design of the house shows that its owner was very well aware of the latest fashions in architecture. Built around a central courtyard, it has architectural details such as symmetrical facades, colonnades and chimneys in the form of classical Italian columns.

Doddington Hall near Lincoln was built for Thomas Taylor, the Bishop of Lincoln's Recorder, at the very end of the 16th century between 1593 and 1600. It is thought to have been designed by the architect Robert Smythson who also built such houses as Wollaton Hall in Nottingham and Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire. This period saw the emergence of architecture as a profession and Smythson was one of the first English architects. Doddington Hall is built of brick. Instead of having a central courtyard it is built to a very fashionable H-shaped floor plan with a central section flanked by two cross wings, and externally is rigidly symmetrical in its design. The H plan had first appeared at Wimbledon House in Surrey, which was begun in 1588. (Wimbledon House was built by Thomas Cecil, son of William Cecil of Burghley).

Although most houses will have been altered and updated since Tudor times many have elements of their interiors surviving, and inventories of the period show that these grand houses were lavishly and expensively furnished. The inventory taken after his death in 1613 of the contents of Sir George St Pol's house at Snarford describes soft furnishings of crimson velvet, embroidered and trimmed with gold silk, tapestries and hangings, 'fyne Holland sheets and 'a pair of verie fine pillows'. Other documentary evidence, for example the household accounts for the running of Grimsthorpe Castle, detail the numbers of staff that were needed to keep the house running and the expenditure that was laid out on wages, food and clothes etc.

What happened to the monastic buildings after the Dissolution?

Following the Dissolution of the monasteries some families who took over monastic lands demolished the monastic buildings and some converted them to country houses. As we have seen, the stone from Vaudey Abbey near Grimsthorpe was used to build the new Grimsthorpe Castle while Tupholme, Bardney and Barlings abbeys in the Witham Valley are all examples of Lincolnshire monasteries that were converted to become Tudor country houses after they were closed by Henry VIII.

Case study: Tupholme Abbey after the Dissolution of the monasteries

If you visit Tupholme Abbey today you will see that the most obvious surviving part of it is the wall that stands in the middle of the abbey field. This is the south

wall of what was once the abbey's refectory (the room where the monks ate their meals). This wall owes its survival to the fact that, since the abbey was closed at the Reformation, it has almost always been put to some use. This means that there has always been a reason to look after it and make sure that it remains.

When Topholme Abbey was dissolved in 1536 the site and buildings passed to Sir Thomas Heneage of Hainton. Sir Thomas became the new owner in 1538. He built a grand Tudor mansion here for his daughter Elizabeth and her new husband William Willoughby. He did this by adapting some of the existing abbey buildings including the south refectory range, and he also retained the abbey gatehouse, but it is likely that the church itself was demolished at this time. He laid out an elaborate Tudor garden around the house. Tudor gardens tended to be very formal and were set out in orderly enclosed compartments. The remains of this Tudor landscaping are still evident in the earthworks on the site.

The Willoughby family owned the mansion and the land around it for 125 years but in 1661 it was sold to the Vyner family. By this time the house was becoming unfashionable and new ideas about architecture were being adopted. Houses were now being built to follow the designs of the classical buildings of Rome and Greece.

In about 1700 the Vyner family built a new house at Topholme. The new Topholme Hall was built in the classical style about 750m to the north-east with the abbey site being retained as part of its surrounding parkland. The Tudor mansion was demolished but a fragment of the old abbey was retained as an eye-catching 'romantic ruin' in the landscape. The piece retained included the south wall of the refectory that we see today. Samuel Buck visited Topholme in 1726 and made an engraving of the ruin for the Vyners. In the engraving the new Topholme Hall is visible in the background.

Topholme Hall seems to have declined in importance during the 18th century. The Vyners moved to a new house at Gautby in the 1730s and a tenant moved in. The land began to be farmed and cottages were built on the south side of the refectory wall. In the 19th century Abbey Farm developed on the site and the wall became part of the farmyard enclosure. The farm buildings became derelict during the 20th century and were largely demolished in about 1986, although some remains of the farmhouse and a cottage still survive on the south side of the wall. Pop festivals were held on the site in the 1970s.

The Heritage Trust of Lincolnshire bought Topholme Abbey in 1988 and carried out work to stabilise the wall. The whole site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and is protected by legislation. The site is open to the public every day. It is one of the few areas of traditionally managed grassland in the area, and is home to a variety of plants and animals.

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Tupholme resources

Computer-generated reconstructions of Tupholme Abbey

The CGI's show what Tupholme Abbey may have looked like in the late 1300s. By this time the abbey had been in existence for over 200 years. The collection includes exterior and interior static views of the abbey. A short animated fly-through of the refectory range can be downloaded from Heritage Lincolnshire's website. The ruin that survives at Tupholme today is the southern wall of the abbey refectory range

Artist's impression of Tupholme Abbey after the Reformation when it had been converted into a Tudor mansion

The reconstruction drawing shows how the abbey might have looked in the late 1500s. The abbey church to the north of the cloister has been demolished and the west, south and east ranges have been converted to domestic accommodation. The abbey's refectory range probably became the hall of the Tudor house. The grounds have been laid out as formal, compartmentalised Tudor gardens. Medieval fishponds in the southern part of the abbey site which once provided food for the monks have now been adapted to create a series of elaborate water features.

Buck's engraving of Tupholme 1726

Buck's engraving was made after the Tudor house had been partially demolished and the new Tupholme Hall had been built to the north east of the abbey site. The ruins include the hall of the Tudor house which had originally been the

refectory part of the original medieval abbey. The new Tupholme Hall is visible in the background.

Annotated earthworks survey

Today the site at tupholme Abbey is covered by a large number of humps and hollows, or earthworks. These earthworks are the remains of buildings and other features that have been present on the site in the past. They are the remains not just of the abbey itself but also of all the things that have happened on the site since it was dissolved in 1536.

In 1989 an earthwork survey was carried out that measured the relative heights and exact positions of the humps and hollows across the site. The measurements taken were used to produce a plan of the earthworks on the site earthworks are shown by shading made up of a series of marks (hachures). The hachures show which way the ground slopes, with their wide ends being the top of the slope and their pointed ends being the bottom of the slope.

When the results of the earthworks survey were studied it became clear that most of the humps and hollows are the remains of the Willoughby family's Tudor mansion and its formal gardens, which came after the Reformation, and that there is not very much evidence of the abbey buildings left. The earthworks include the collection of ponds in the south-east part of the abbey site which were once the fishponds of the medieval abbey and later adapted by the Willoughby family to make a series of elaborate water features in their Tudor garden.

One feature that can be picked out quite clearly, however, is a rectangular-shaped sunken area ('E' on the earthwork survey plan) just to the north of the refectory wall ('A'). It measures 18m x 13m. Monastic houses tended to follow a standard layout with their most important buildings arranged a central cloister. They were nearly always arranged with their churches to the north of the cloister and their refectories to the south of it. Because of this pattern, and because we know that what still stands at Tupholme is the south wall of the refectory, we can be fairly sure that the square-shaped sunken area is the remains of the abbey cloister. Its outline may have survived because it was retained as part of the Willoughbys' mansion.

Aerial photographs

There are several aerial photographs of Tupholme Abbey. The photographs show features that are not visible from a viewpoint on the ground. In all of the photos the western precinct boundary is clearly visible. In the earlier photo (1963) it is clearly defined as earthworks just inside the modern field boundary, but in later ones it has been destroyed by ploughing. However, it still shows up either as different colours in the plough soil (soil marks) or as crop marks where the plants have grown differently due to variations in the soil beneath them. The layout of the surviving earthworks and ponds is also much more easily

discernible from the air than on the ground. Some of the photos were taken before the farm buildings were demolished in the mid 1980s and clearly show the refectory wall making up the northern side of the rectangular farm yard.

Black and white photographs of the refectory wall and farm buildings

The photographs were taken by John Turner and are an excellent record of how the farm and refectory wall looked on the ground before they were demolished.