



The Building of Hussey Tower

Hussey Tower was built in about 1450 - 1460 by Richard Benyngton who was a wealthy and prominent Lincolnshire man during the mid 15th century. He was collector of taxes in Boston in the 1430s and, alongside Ralph Lord Cromwell, was involved in the drainage of the fens at that time. Ralph Lord Cromwell was Treasurer of England from 1433 until his death in 1456, and one of the most powerful men in the country. Both men were justices of the peace and would have known each other. It is not therefore surprising that Benyngton chose to build his house in the same style as Tattershall Castle. Richard Benyngton died in about 1475.

Hussey Tower takes its name from Sir John Hussey who became the new owner of Benyngton's house after his death. Sir John lived from 1465 - 1537 (the late medieval and early Tudor periods) and was a privileged member of society. He was born into a wealthy family and was an important member of the courts of both Henry VII and Henry VIII. He was given influential positions, land and money that made him a very wealthy man.

Hussey Tower was built outside Boston's Barditch (the moat that surrounded the town on its eastern side). From the top of the tower Richard Benyngton would have had an excellent view of the ships

approaching the quaysides in the town.



Computer-Generated Image (CGI) showing what Hussey Tower might have looked like in about 1500

What did Hussey Tower look like at that time?

Hussey Tower is part of what was once a much larger complex of buildings that made up a late medieval



manor house. There would have been a series of other buildings as well as Hussey Tower itself, all arranged around and facing into a courtyard. Beyond the courtyard there would have been extensive gardens and grounds, with a gatehouse facing towards the west.



The Great Hall (CGI)

Wealthy medieval houses were centred round a Great Hall which was used for banqueting and for carrying out important business. In the early medieval period everyone would have lived and slept in the great hall as well, but by the time Hussey Tower was built towards the end of the medieval period people wanted more privacy and wealthier people's houses were built to

provide this. At one end of the hall there was a raised platform called the *dais* where the Lord of the manor and his family sat at their table for formal meals. There was often a large window at this end of the hall to throw plenty of daylight onto the dais area.

At the other end of the hall a cross passage separated the hall from the kitchen, pantry and other rooms used for storing and preparing food and drink.

Although nothing remains now of the other parts of the Hussey Tower manor house, because we know how houses at that time were arranged, we can be certain that it would have had a Great Hall. We know that there was once a building joined to the east side of Hussey Tower because there is a scar on the outside wall where its roof was once attached. There is also a door at first floor level and two stone corbels which would have supported an upstairs floor in the adjoining building (see diagram east wall).

We can tell by the width of the roof scar that the attached building was narrower than Hussey Tower itself. Because the Great Hall was such an important part of a medieval house we can be fairly certain that the attached building was not big enough to have been the Great Hall. It is



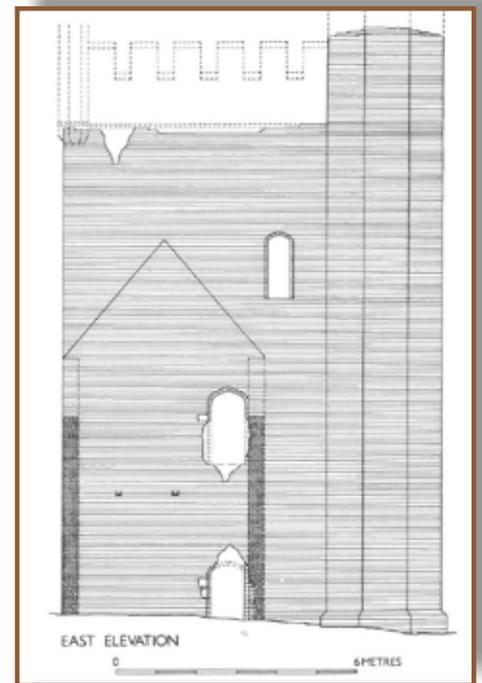
likely, however, that the Lord of the manor's private rooms would have been easily accessible from the dais end of the hall. It is therefore possible that the attached building connected the Great Hall to the east side of Hussey Tower.

As we have said, the kitchens and other rooms used for storing and preparing food would have been at the opposite end of the hall to the dais, and separated from it by a passage that ran across the width of the building. The main entrance to the passage would have been from inside the courtyard. This doorway was the front door into the house and is therefore likely to have been quite grand.

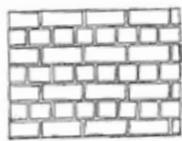
There would have also been lodgings for members of the household and visitors. Hussey Tower was part of one of the most important houses in Boston, so a lot of people would have been needed to keep it running smoothly. Nearly all the household would have been men. The only female staff would have been ladies-in-waiting to Lady Hussey, wet nurses to look after her babies and children, and dairy maids and laundresses.

Being able to offer lavish hospitality to visitors was also a way of demonstrating your wealth and importance, so Sir John Hussey would have made sure that there was plenty of room to accommodate his household and visitors. Even so, people would not have had their own bedrooms at that time. They would have been segregated according to their rank but they would usually have had to share a bed with someone of the same importance as themselves.

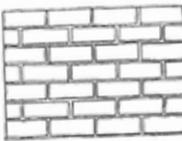
Hussey Tower would most probably have had a chapel within the complex of buildings. If all of the other buildings that once stood around Hussey Tower had been built of brick we would expect that traces of them would still survive today, but because nothing remains of them now it is quite



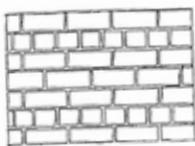
**East wall of
Hussey Tower**



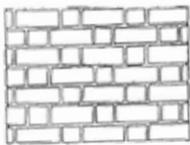
English bond



Stretcher bond



English garden wall bond



Flemish bond



Header bond

Brick bonds

possible that, unlike the tower itself, they were built of timber. The walls would have been built on shallow plinths (low walls) to keep them off the ground and help prevent the timbers from rotting. These plinths may well have been made of brick. We have shown them like this in our computer reconstructions.

Outside, Hussey Tower would have been surrounded by extensive gardens and grounds. Part of the grounds would have been used for growing food, but the gardens of wealthy houses by this time were also beginning to be planned for enjoyment. They were laid out quite formally and planted with flowers and herbs that were grown for their perfume and medicinal properties. There would have been spaces enclosed by hedges, and there may also have been a maze to provide entertainment for the family and their visitors. In our reconstruction we have included a maze to the south of the manor house buildings.

Hussey Tower – what can we see today?

Hussey Tower is three storeys tall. It contained the high-status private rooms of the Lord of the manor (Richard Benyngton and afterwards John Hussey). The ground floor room was a service room, probably used for storage, with two private chambers on the floors above. The most important, most private and expensively furnished of these would have been on the top floor. The upper rooms

were reached by the spiral staircase that still survives today. This also gave access out onto the roof of the tower.

The bricks that make up the tower were all hand-made locally. They are laid in a pattern called *English bond*. This is a very strong and expensive way of building. The bricks are



The vaulted ground floor room (undercroft) (CGI)



Vaulting remains

laid with their longest and shortest sides showing in alternate rows (courses). Most modern houses, including the ones next door to Hussey Tower, are built in *stretcher bond* with the bricks all laid with their longest sides showing. Other buildings in the town have their bricks laid in different ways.

Hussey Tower's window surrounds are made of stone. Some of the openings are blocked now but they would originally have had glass in them, made up of small diamond-shaped panes joined together with lead strips (comes). When the tower was built glass was very expensive and only wealthy people were able to use it. Some of the glass was decorated, often with the owner's family crest. The windows are splayed on the inside to let as much light into the rooms as possible. Above each window a brick arch helps to take the weight of the wall above it. These are made of alternate lighter and darker fired bricks to add extra decoration.

The top of the tower was crenellated (the tops of the walls were shaped like castle battlements). They had a small turret at each corner. Some of the crenellations and the turret are still on the south-west corner of the tower.



The staircase



The ground floor room had a vaulted ceiling made of bricks. The vaulting was made up of two pairs of intersecting arched ribs side by side with a central arched rib between them. The spaces between the ribs were filled with brickwork. The remains of this vaulting can still be seen on the walls inside the tower). This room was most probably used as a service or store room.

The staircase, steps and handrail are all made out of brick. Some of the bricks were specially made and shaped to create certain



architectural features such as the handrail and the central newel (the vertical post that runs right up the middle of the staircase and supports all of the steps). The steps are supported on a series of arches that radiate off the central newel. The moulded handrail spirals all the way up the building.

The first floor room above this has two windows and two fireplaces. Could it originally have been divided in some way? Rooms at that time tended not to have specific functions in the way that the rooms in our houses today have. Whereas we might have separate sitting, eating and sleeping spaces, this room would probably have at least been used for relaxing and eating and it could even have had a bed in it. The walls would most probably have been covered with tapestries. The room was probably used by the Lord of the manor for entertaining small groups of guests more informally than in the Great Hall. This room had a door that once led through to the upstairs of the connecting building. The blocked door opening can still be seen today. There could have been stairs leading down to its ground floor from here, which would have provided the Lord of the manor with a route to and from the Great Hall without having to go through the ground floor store room of the tower to reach his private apartments.



The first floor room (CGI)

The top floor room had a wooden floor. If you look at the inside of Hussey Tower you can see where the walls get slightly thinner at that stage to form the ledge that once supported it.

This room had two main windows and a fireplace. Another narrower opening looks out to the east towards the main doorway into the Great Hall. Could this have been for the Lord of the manor to keep an eye on the front door to see who was arriving and leaving? This upper room would have been the most important and private part of the house.



The top floor room (CGI)

It would have been used as a sitting room, a bedroom and a private dining room. It would have been richly furnished with wall hangings and cushions.

The rooftop. The roof had a very shallow pitch that sat down behind the crenellations at the top of the tower (the battlement-shaped tops to the walls). It would not have been

visible from the ground. The stairs lead up beyond the top floor room to a doorway out onto the roof, and they also continued up beyond this doorway. The top of the stair turret is missing now but there was access out onto the roof of this too, which would have provided an excellent view of everything that was going on in the surrounding area, and of the ships approaching and leaving the busy port of Boston. Nathan Drake's mid 18th century engraving shows two people looking out over the river and the town from the stair turret roof. You could see from this picture what a good view Richard Benyngton would have had of the ships on the river from the tower when he first built Hussey Tower. The engraving also shows that in the 18th century Hussey Tower was already a roofless ruin and that it was still surrounded by open fields.



Drake's 18th century engraving of Boston