

Rochford Tower
Fishtoft
Boston
Lincolnshire



HISTORIC BUILDING REPORT



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LINCOLNSHIRE

BOSTON

FISHTOFT

NBR 87308

ROCHFORD TOWER

NGR TF 3509 4446

Summary

Rochford Tower is the only surviving building on a medieval manorial site. The four storeyed tower dates to the mid to late 15th century. It is of brick construction with ashlar window surrounds. It is square in plan with a projecting octagonal stair turret at the south-east angle. The accommodation comprised a barrel-vaulted ground floor, a single heated chamber on each of the upper three floors and a wall-walk at parapet level. Wall paintings survived on the first floor until the mid 20th century. At the west end of the north wall of the tower there was a narrow two-storeyed forework that linked the tower with buildings to the north. It is possible that the tower functioned as a solar tower to a hall range that lay to the north of the forework.

The ownership of the site during the period of the tower's construction is not known. By the early 16th century the site had been granted by Henry 7th to the Abbey of Westminster. 1 By 1640 the property was occupied by Nightingale Kyme Esq and it was held by this family until 1816. In <u>circa</u> 1807 much of the manorial complex was demolished, leaving only the tower. 2 The present two storeyed manor house is early 19th century in date with mid 19th century additions.

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Historical Background

In its present form the tower resembles the self-contained tower-

¹. Pishley Thompson, <u>The History and Antiquities of Boston</u>. (Boston 1856), p 320.

². Op. cit., p 321.

houses that are commonly found in the borders between England and Scotland. Rochford Tower, however, has more in common with the other brick " towers " found in Lincolnshire dating to the second half of the 15th century.3 It is possible that the inspiration for the tower at Rochford came from the great tower at Tattershall or possibly from the nearby Tower on the Moor, both of which were owned and built for Lord Cromwell. Tattershall was completed circa 14484 and it is possible that Cromwell's ideas on architecture were influenced by the time he spent in France during the first quarter of the 15th century. It was during this period that large tower-houses such as Cromwell's were being built as a sign of the prestige of the local magnate intending to impress his social equals. The proximity of the four brick towers in Lincolnshire and the stylistical similarities between them suggest both a contemporary date and common inspiration. The weight of probability indicates that Rochford Tower dates to the second half of the 15th century. It is therefore likely that it was constructed before the the granting of the site to the Dean and Chapter of Westminster.

 $^{^{3}.}$ Other examples are Tattershall Castle, Hussey Tower and The Tower on the Moor.

 $^{^4.}$ Thompson, Dr M. W., <u>Tattershall Castle</u>, (The National Trust 1974), p 15.

⁵. The construction of the Hastings Tower at the castle of Ashby-de-la-Zouch between the years 1474 and 1483 by Lord Hastings and The Yellow Tower at Raglan Castle built between 1450 and 1469 by William Herbert, first Earl of Pembroke can be cited as contemporary examples.

Report

Mid to Late 15th Century

Rochford Tower is of brick construction in English bond with stone ashlar dressings to the window openings. It is square in plan with an octagonal stair turnet at the south-east angle. The stair turnet has an external ground floor entrance and provides access to the upper three floors. The accommodation comprised a barrel-vaulted ground floor and a single heated chamber on each of the upper three floors with a wall-walk at parapet level above. It is reputed that the first floor chamber was decorated with wall paintings. The oversailing battlemented parapet is carried on a brick corbel course made up of trefoiled blind arcades. The octagonal stair turnet rises to form a battlemented turnet the south-east angle. At each of the other three angles a turnet rises a further level.

The accommodation provided in the tower indicates that it is unlikely that it could have functioned as an independent residence as it would have required additional service buildings. The high quality of accommodation provided by the tower suggests that it may have functioned as a solar tower to a separate hall range. Originally there was a two storeyed range at the west end of the north wall of the tower. The narrowness of this adjoining building indicates that it could not have functioned as a hall range but suggests that it formed a linking structure to

buildings to the north . A topographical print dated 1811⁶ shows an attached building to the north that may be such a hall range.

The tower has a roll moulded plinth around the ground floor. It allows for three original doors at this level. The eastern door was external and has a four-centred head. It has a brick rebate and chamfer and a draw-bar socket (now partially blocked). The door at the west end of the north wall was undefended and would have provided access from the linking range to the north. The scarring for the side walls of this range can be seen on the north wall of the tower. The surviving evidence indicates that these side walls were built over the top of the plinth. Thus the linking range is a secondary build to the tower but it is probable that it was planned from the outset. This can be suggested since an original door was provided on the first floor of the tower in its north wall whose purpose was to allow access from the tower to the first floor of the linking range.

The ground floor barrel vaulted in brick and has an original window in the east and west walls. Both windows have four centred heads, are chamfered externally and have internal splays. The north, south and west walls each have a single wall cupboard. There was no direct access from the ground floor to the first floor of the tower. It is probable that the ground floor level

⁶. The print was published by W. Clarke and taken from a drawing by W. Brand - information from the Listing Description.

was used for storage.

The third original door at ground floor level is external to the tower and gives access to the octagonal stair turret. The external jambs of this door have been rebuilt in subsequent alterations. However, the internal rebates survive indicating that the door position is original. It is unusual for a stair turret to a tower to have an external rather than an internal entrance. This feature suggests that the tower was within a defensible enclosure. It is possible that the staircase functioned in a service capacity between the ground floor and the principal chamber on the first floor since the principal access to the first floor would have been through the linking range.

The main entrance to the first floor chamber (now blocked), at the west end of the north wall, has a four-centred head and chamfered jambs. This provided access to the chamber from the buildings to the north by the first floor of the forework. Additional external access was provided from the stair turret. Unusually the stone stair treads rise anti-clockwise in the turret. The first floor comprised a single chamber heated by a

⁷. A possible explanation is the relationship between the position of the stair and the height of the spiral required to rise between the floors in order to allow provide access at each floor level. A second possibility is that original owners of this tower were left-handed. Most spiral staircases in medieval towers rose clock-wise which always gave the advantage to a defender, providing they were right-handed. The reverse would be the case if the defenders were left-handed.

fireplace in the south wall. This has a four centred head and chamfered jambs. This room was lit by a window in each of the east and west walls. Both windows have hollow chamfers and four centred heads. A hood mould survives over the west window. Internally there is evidence that originally it was a three light window, probably with tracery. It is probable that the east window took the same form but later alterations have removed any surviving evidence. The central cross-beam is chamfered but not stopped and it appears to be a later insertion.

The chamber originally had three wall paintings:- the Annunciation, the Virgin and St. Anne, and St. Michael and St. Antony⁸. This decorative treatment indicates that the chamber was of high status and may have functioned as the principal chamber of the residence.

The second floor was reached by the octagonal stair turret. The south wall was heated by a fireplace with a four centred head and a chamfered surround. This chamber was lit by a window in each of the south, east and west walls. The original form of these windows is unclear as they have subsequently been blocked.

One of the treads in the stairs, between the second and third floors, has a small circular hole cut through its outer side. It is unclear what the function of this hole was but it may have been to house a rope for a flag.

 $^{^8}$. Pevsner, N., <u>The Buildings of England, Lincolnshire</u> (1964 p 633). These have been lost due to weather penetration resulting from the removal of the roof and internal flooring.

The stair turret gave access to the third floor. This chamber was heated by a fireplace (now blocked) in the south wall. The flue for this fireplace is housed in an external corbelled-out stack, which rises against the battlemented parapet. This chamber was lit by windows in the north, east and west walls. The north window is a single light and has a four-centred head. The other two windows have been blocked at a later date. The wall thickness thins back at this level indicating the probability that this was to accommodate original floor joists (now removed). There are numerous rectangular openings in the walls on the third floor. These do not appear original and may date from the 19th century when this floor was converted to use as a dovecote.

The stairs give access to the parapet level. This comprises a wall-walk which is carried forward of the wall-face on each of the four elevations on a course of slight brick corbels. These take the form of a series of blind arcades with tre-foiled heads. The battlemented parapet has coped merlons and embrasures, some of which were restored in the 19th century. The stair turret rises a further level. At each of the other three angles there is a small turret that is supported on external corbelling. There is no evidence that these three turrets were floored. They are open internally to the wall-walk. There is no evidence for the original roof structure of the tower. At the time of survey the roof had collapsed. Photographs from the mid 20th century show a pyramidal roof, probably a 19th century replacement.

Later Alterations

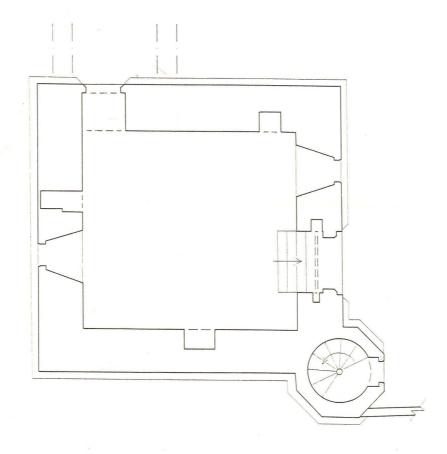
It is likely that the tower ceased to function as solar tower in the 17th century. It is probable that it continued to provide additional accommodation within the manorial complex. There is no evidence that the tower was adapted or modified in the years preceding the demolition of the rest of the manorial complex.

In the early 19th century the buildings to the north of the tower were demolished and the present manor house was built. It appears that later in the 19th century the first floor windows in the east and west walls of the tower were partially blocked and six light mullion and transom wooden windows inserted. Most of the windows on the upper floors were blocked at this time. The ground floor was used for storage and the third floor as a dovecote. The battlements at parapet level were restored at this time. It is possible that the tower also functioned as a folly and viewing platform at this date.

Visited by GARRY S CORBETT COLUM GILES
Report written by GARRY S CORBETT

AUGUST 1991
DECEMBER 1992

forework





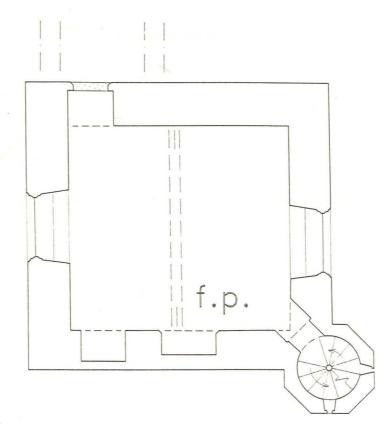


based on an original survey by J. Morrey RCHME

Drawing no: 1 of 4 Grid ref: TF 3509 4446 NBR no: 87308

ROCHFORD TOWER, Boston, Lincolnshire. ground floor plan









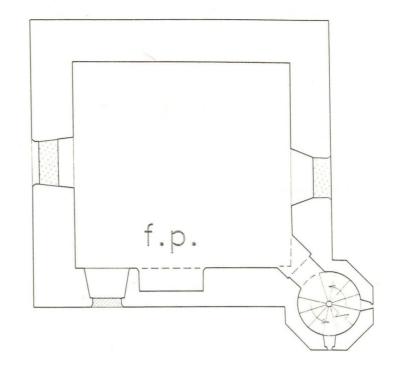
based on an original survey by J. Morrey RCHNE

Drawing no: 2 of 4 Grid ref: TF 3509 4446

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ROCHFORD TOWER, Boston, Lincolnshire. first floor plan









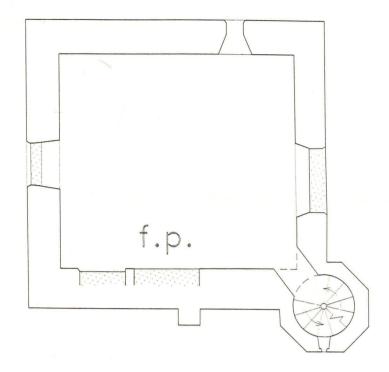
based on an original survey by J. Morrey RCHME

Drawing no: 4 of 4 Grid ref: TF 3509 4446

NBR no: 87038

ROCHFORD TOWER, Boston, Lincolnshire. second floor plan









based on an original survey by J. Morrey ROHME

Drawing no: 3 of 4 Grid ref: TF 3509 4446 NBR no: 87308

ROCHFORD TOWER, Boston, Lincolnshire. third floor plan

