



The Farmhouse  
The Square  
North Thoresby  
Lincolnshire

ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE HISTORICAL MONUMENTS OF ENGLAND

HISTORIC BUILDING REPORT

The Farmhouse  
The Square  
North Thoresby  
Lincolnshire

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The Farmhouse, The Square, North Thoresby, Lincolnshire

Contents

Report

Plan

35mm photographs



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Lincolnshire

North Thoresby: The Farmhouse, The Square

NGR: TF 290 985

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SUMMARY

The Farmhouse, North Thoresby, is a timber-framed house of 'mud and stud' construction dating from the late 17th century, possibly to 1683, the date inscribed on a tie-beam. It is of one storey with attic rooms in the roof space and has a linear plan of three cells with a lobby entrance. The central room, the hall or housebody, was originally heated by a firehood, but the other rooms, parlour to the west and service room to the east, were unheated at first. The service room was converted to a kitchen probably in the early 18th century, the addition of heating giving an arrangement of back-to-back firehoods. The structure, plan and accommodation of the house is typical of the poorer level of 17th century Lincolnshire rural housing (see E Mercer, English Vernacular Houses (1985), Monuments 287-9, 292-3, pp.187-8). Because such houses offered limited accommodation, they were commonly replaced as housing standards improved, and The Farmhouse is thus an interesting example of a characteristic regional type. One unusual feature of the house is the position of the carved date on one of the tie-beams; it is difficult to see due to the proximity of the firehood and does not appear, therefore, to be an object of display. The house was cased in brick in the 19th century, when a stack was added to heat the parlour. Some minor additions were made to the house, and the presence of two stairs in the building suggests that the dwelling may have been subdivided into cottages. It retained its thatched roof until a destructive fire in 1991.

REPORT

The Farmhouse lies on the main street in the village of North Thoresby. It faces south and has 19th century brick outer walls covering the fragmentary remains of a timber-framed 'mud and stud' house of late 17th century date. At the time of survey the building was roofless following a fire.

The late-17th century house

The mud and stud house is of four bays (A-E, see plan) and of single-storey height, floored to give chambers in the roof space. The main frame of the structure - posts, tie-beams, wall-plates and straight or convex braces - survives in part and one intermediate stud remains, in the north wall of the western bay.



The mud infill appears to have been entirely replaced by later brickwork. The timbers are of good but not heavy scantling and the carpentry is of good quality, with pegged mortice-and-tenon joints. The evidence of the exposed tie-beams and of the remaining fragments of the roof indicate that the roof was of common-rafter form, half-hipped at one and possibly at both ends; at the east end of the range the brick wall rises c1 metre above eaves level, terminating at an upper tie-beam which shows the seating for the rafters of the hip.

The present lobby entrance opens against the side of the firehood occupying part of a short bay (C-D) and heating the central room, the hall or housebody. The use of the short bay for heating suggests an original arrangement, and it is likely also that the present lobby entrance is original; all 16th and 17th century mud and stud houses described in English Vernacular Houses have a lobby entrance. The hood was supported by a timber bressumer still in situ in the present stack; the bressumer does not appear to have been jointed into the main structural frame of the building, for post C shows no evidence of a mortice to take its northern end. The fire area in the housebody may have been defined by brick walls; the present heck wall is of early brick and there is also fragmentary evidence of early brick in the reredos wall, partially exposed in a small room to the north of the back-to-back hoods. Above the bressumer the hood tapers sharply and is partly of mud construction, with the upper part of brick.

One piece of evidence raises the question of whether the hood replaces an earlier method of heating. In the tie-beam of truss C-C1 is an inscription reading 'BM 1683'. The date is credible for the building but the positioning of the inscription on the east face of the beam means that it is visible only with difficulty since the firehood is positioned only some 50cms away. If the date was intended to be seen, the hood must be an insertion, presumably replacing an earlier method of heating. It seems unlikely that a building of late-17th century date was heated by an open hearth, but any earlier and smaller firehood would still have obscured the inscription of the tie-beam. It is possible that the date was carved more as a record than as an object of display and that its awkward siting does not imply phasing within the heating arrangements. Local report indicates that there are other houses of similar type with carved dates in inaccessible positions on tie-beams, and this may represent a local custom practised by the builders of these vernacular structures.

It is likely, therefore, that the housebody was originally heated by a firehood sited in the narrow bay to its east. The room was probably floored originally, for the spine-beam appears to be of late-17th century date; it is of heavy scantling and is stop-chamfered, with long run-out stops. The beam is supported at its east end by the stack and at its west end by the partition wall, replacing a substantial post revealed by a mortice in the soffit of the beam. The western room was probably a parlour and was unheated originally. The remains of the ceiling are of later



character than that over the housebody; the spine-beam is of lighter scantling and supports joists spanning the whole width of the house and held on bearer beams applied to north and south walls. Visible in the eastern wall of the stair is a timber post ('x' on plan) with, at ceiling height, a mortice for the tenon of a heavy spine-beam, evidence probably of the earlier and original floor over the parlour.

The eastern room was also unheated originally and again has a 19th century ceiling. Its original function is not clear. There is no strong tradition locally of longhouse-style agricultural use for one end of vernacular houses, and it is more probable that the room provided service space, perhaps open to the roof, perhaps ceiled by an earlier floor.

The late-17th century house was, therefore, fully or partly floored to give accommodation in the roof space. The site of the original stair is not known. Attic rooms were low and lighting must have been by dormers.

#### 18th century alterations

In the early 18th century the eastern service rooms was converted to a kitchen by the addition of a firehood occupying part of the narrow bay C-D. The hood is not as substantial as that heating the housebody and there is no visible evidence either of the nature of the original fire area or of the structure of the hood itself. The brick cap of the hood is clearly added to that of the earlier hood heating the housebody.

#### 19th century alterations and additions

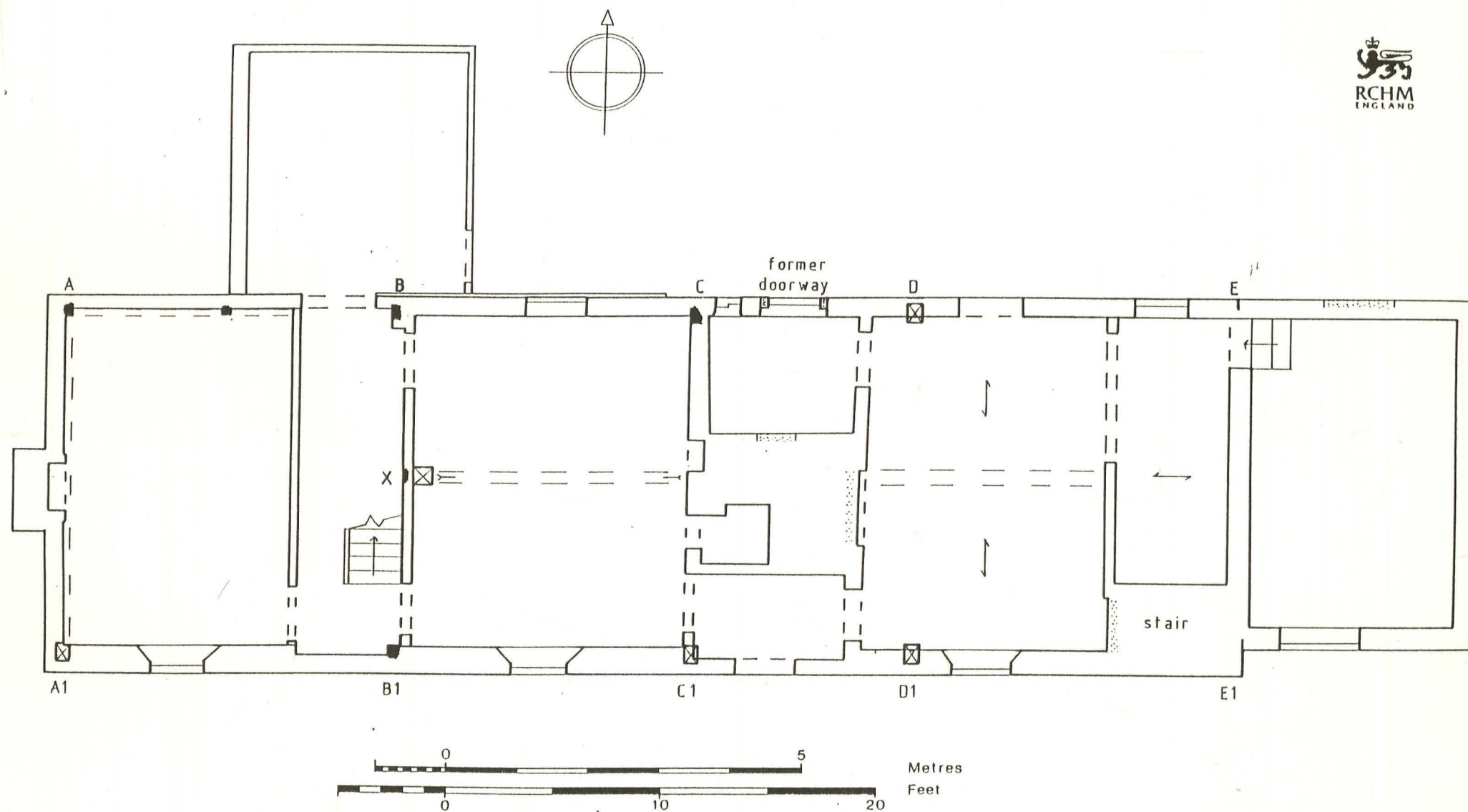
Many of the features of the present house date from the 19th century. The outer walls of brick were probably built in the early-mid 19th century. They include an extruded stack on the west wall, indicating the addition of heating to the western parlour. The suggested re-flooring of western and eastern rooms may be contemporary with the brick casing, as might the creation of a new stair position between housebody and western parlour. This stair is defined at attic level by walls of mud over laths, showing the persistence of the use of mud as a building material for internal work. A small room was created in bay C-D to the north of the hearths heating housebody and eastern room; this room may have been a dry storage area using the heat of the adjacent stacks. A doorway, now converted to a window, formerly opened into this small room, perhaps simply to provide access to the yard at the rear, but perhaps indicating subdivision of the dwelling into two cottages. This suggestion receives some support from the existence of a second stair, sited in the eastern room, perhaps intended to serve one of the dwellings following the suggested subdivision. This eastern room has an unusual flooring pattern, joists at the east end running east-west rather than north-south as in the main part of the room; the reason for this arrangement is not clear. At first-floor level on the eastern

side of the tapering kitchen firehood are low mud walls out to and below the tie-beam of truss D-D1. The walls appear to define a storage area, the association of which with the firehood suggesting the intention to utilise borrowed heat, probably for keeping grain dry.

A small single-storeyed room was added to the east end of the house in the nineteenth century. It has a sunken floor level and was probably used for storage originally although latterly it has been a kitchen. Its addition may be connected with the suggested subdivision of the house. A further addition was made at the rear of the house (not shown on plan).

Visited: Colum Giles, Garry S Corbett, 18 April 1991  
Report: Colum Giles  
Plan: Garry S Corbett





THE FARMHOUSE, NORTH THORESBY, LINCOLNSHIRE

GROUND FLOOR



