

A Model Farm at Scarthingwell near York in 1793 and in 1986¹

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TOWTON and Scarthingwell lie at the western edge of the Vale of York where the magnesian limestone hills begin to rise out of the plain. The land to the west is good loam on limestone, while to the east there is first fen, then strong clay, and further away still a subsoil of running sand. In the late eighteenth century Admiral Lord Hawke, victor of Quiberon Bay in 1759, and in 1766 First Lord of the Admiralty, took the title of Baron Hawke of Towton from the estates he had built up in this area. His son the second Baron Hawke who succeeded to the title in 1781, was interested in the technicalities of modern farming and built a handsome new home farm at Scarthingwell. This was visited by the authors of the *General View of the Agriculture of the West Riding of Yorkshire* in 1793,² who described it in the following terms:

Here we beg leave to notice the suite of farm offices lately erected by the Right Honourable Lord Hawke, which affords an elegant pattern for his neighbours. His Lordship has built for his own use a large farmyard, conveniently formed and situated, with a threshing machine, a mill for grinding rape cake, stables for 25 horses and 32 oxen, besides cowsheds, barns for hay, corn etc. The whole is surrounded by walls 9 ft high, and divided by the barns, stables etc. into four yards, two of which have ponds, besides the pumps. The stables for the horses are placed on the East and West sides of the farmyard, which is free from buildings on the South, and sheltered on the North by the barn and oxhouses, which separate it from the principal stackyard. This yard is divided from the two others by open hay barns, tiled with slate eaves and with chimnies also of brick to let out the steam. The average of the boarded granaries amounts in length to 160 feet,

and in breadth to 21 feet. There are trap doors in them to let down the corn, when sacked, into waggons which may be loaded and locked up at the same time. The corn in the yard is stacked on wooden frames placed on stone pillars and capes. When we saw it, Lord Hawke proposed to make further improvements on it, and to build a house for his steward. The whole indeed forms a complete, elegant and convenient suit of farm offices, covering from one to two acres of ground, and is in every respect becoming a nobleman who justly considers the cultivation of the earth as the most useful and necessary of human employments.

The central part of the Scarthingwell Home Farm buildings and the farmhouse, are still standing and in use as a working farm, though not in the way they were used in 1793 (Figure 1). The buildings are designed in a striking architectural style characterized by Diocletian windows, circular bullseye vents, and round arches all framed in solid limestone blocks standing proud of the ashlar walling (Plates I and II). The central building along the north side of a double foldyard is the great barn, some 40 feet long roofed in twelve bays, with two waggon entries under porches, and at each end a stable for sixteen oxen with crop storage space above. The oxhouses extend into outshots on each side separated from the central space by square stone piers; at the east end the oxhouse has been added into the main floorspace of the barn in recent times. Over the two waggon entries there were originally large pigeonhouses; Mr Pick, the present owner, remembers the last of these collapsing some fifteen years back, and it was found to have a substantial deposit of dung on the floor, the production of which was its original purpose. Brick piers that supported the weight of the pigeon houses have been removed to make larger entries to the barn.

¹ This research was begun by Rachel Hellier before her untimely death in 1984. The photographs were taken by her.

² By Rennie, Brown and Sheriff, for the Board of Agriculture, here referred to as *General View*. Extract quoted begins on p 10.

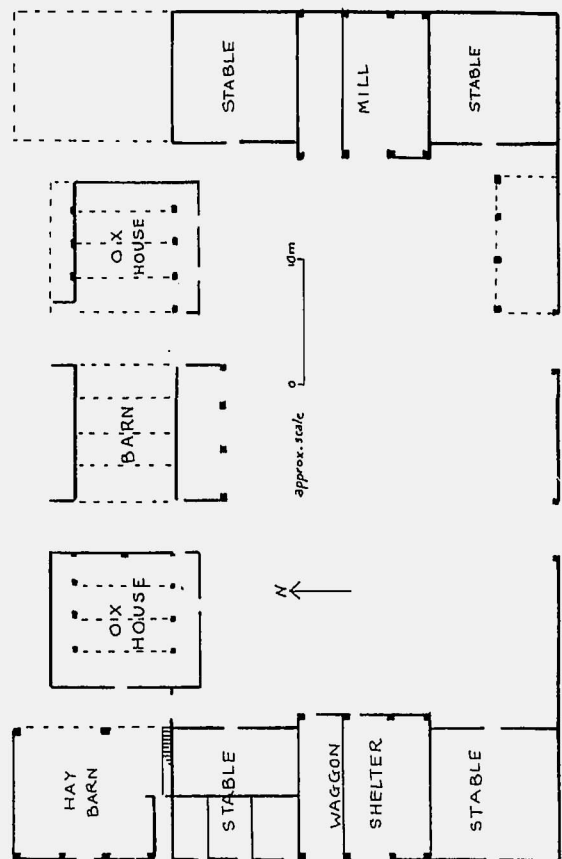


FIGURE 1

Sketch plan of the farm layout in 1980-86

The double foldyard has along the west side a granary over two stables flanking a waggon shed with arched doors, and the trapdoors by which sacks of corn could be delivered from the granary to the waggons below are still there. The granary itself, however, is roofed with low tiebeams which would seriously impede anyone trying to carry a sack, and the only way up into it was by a steep wooden stair, now replaced by rather less steep concrete steps, though it would still be difficult to hump a heavy sack up them. At the north end of this range is a hay barn, built of limestone where it could be seen, but with brick piers at the back; a further, narrower building to the north of the haybarn has collapsed and been cleared away.

At the east side of the double foldyard is a range of building exactly similar in appear-

ance, the centre of which contained a horse wheel behind three open arches. The heavy beam that held the axle of the wheel remains but there is no indication which way the drive ran. Presumably on one side of the wheelhouse was the mill, for threshing and for cutting cattle cake, whilst the rest of the range was stabling. There is a similar granary above this range. At the north end there was a further building which was destroyed by fire some time ago; this would have been the second haybarn. Between the two and behind the great barn was the stackyard, enclosed along the north side by a high stone wall. The staddles mentioned in the *General View* are still lying in the corner of the stackyard or used as ornaments in the farmhouse garden.



PLATE I

Cattle shelter against the south wall in the southeast corner, 1980



PLATE II

Inner face of the east range, with one stable converted as a dwelling and shelter removed, 1981

There was a third foldyard to the west of the double yard, walled on the north and south sides and enclosed on the west by the farmhouse and its garden. The farmhouse is large but designed in a quite plain style without the architectural detail of the farm buildings. To the east of the double yard there was a fourth foldyard, of which nothing now remains except a ditch beyond its eastern boundary.

The first edition Ordnance Survey map, at a scale of six inches to the mile, which was surveyed in 1845-6, shows a plan of the farmstead at Scarthingwell which does not differ greatly from the present (Figure 2). There are two cattle shelters against the south wall of the double yard, one of which remained up to 1980 and is shown on the

1986 plan. On the OS map there is a north-south building partly dividing the double yard into two. The narrower extension at the northern end of the west range is shown, and this is matched in the east range. At the southern end of the east range there is a building running east, probably on the southern boundary of the lost fourth yard. There is a building against the north wall of the great barn, just where one would expect to find a wheelhouse for threshing, and presumably it is possible that there were two horse wheels, one adjoining the barn for threshing and another under the east granary for processing cattle feed. There is also a narrow building running north from the eastern oxhouse. No buildings are shown on the north sides of yards three and four, nor on their outer sides, so perhaps these yards were enclosed only by walls and the 1845-6 map shows all the buildings that were originally erected.

As well as the description of the buildings quoted above, there is in the appendix of the *General View* a further account of Scarthingwell, this time concerned with the system of farming:³

Waited upon Mr Beck, steward to Lord Hawke, upon his estate of Scarthingwell and Towton. His Lordship has taken about 1600 acres into his own hands; and is very properly putting it into good order by fallowing, manuring and laying parts of it down with grass seeds, with a view to let it in proper sized farms to substantial tenants. Besides the manure raised on this farm, his Lordship has expended yearly above £300 in purchasing manure, principally dung, from the towns and villages in the neighbourhood and by water from Hull, York etc.

The soil upon Lord Hawke's estate is of many different kinds: it is good loam in general: there is also clay upon limestone; strong clay upon blue till; hazle earth upon sand; and about 50 acres of moss or peat earth. About a fourth part is kept in pasture, though less pasture in general is kept. Lord Hawke cultivates sainfoin, red clover and trefoil, with white clover and hay seeds. He bred 350 sheep last year, and has this year increased his breeding ewes to 440; they are of the Oxford and Gloucestershire polled breeds; they have a cross also of the Bakewell and Fowler breeds; and the wethers are fed off when shearing at 38 shillings

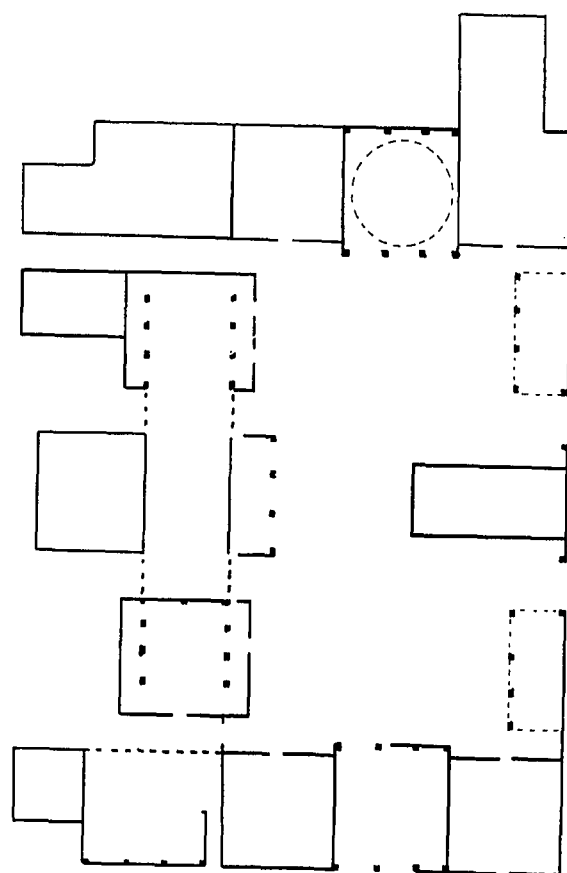


FIGURE 2

Sketch plan to same scale of layout, derived from 1st edition OS map, 1845-6

³ p 44.

[£1.90] each. He folds his ewes always from Mayday to Michelmas. He feeds also a few Scotch and Irish cattle.

The general rotation of crops is turnips, barley, clover and wheat. His plan now adopted, is to sow half his clover land with 12 pounds of red clover per acre; to mow it once, and then feed it. The other half is sown with 6 lb of white clover, 3 lb of rib-grass and 6 lb of trefoil per acre, and fed but not mown. By this rotation of crops, red clover is sown but once in 8 years on the same land. His plan is to lay 150 acres with sainfoin, the seed of which he sows with his barley; and has sometimes sown it on a clean fallow, when the ground laid down with sainfoin would have been broken up for wheat had it been sown with clover, he breaks up an old, worn-out pasture ground [instead] and sows it in the spring following with oats; after which it is fallowed, and falls regularly into course, instead of the ground sown down with sainfoin. The manures used are rape-dust, pigeon, farmyard and bought dung, soot, rape and bone-dust. Lord Hawke ploughs with two oxen abreast, without a driver, and sometimes with horses, but depends principally, and almost entirely, upon oxen for his ploughing and harrowing. His land in hand is all inclosed; inclosures vary from 8 to 30 acres. There are some pastures from 5 to 8. We think small arable enclosures hurtful in a corn country; and Lord Hawke is altering the size of his fields from 15 to 20 acres. Mr Beck is of the opinion that inclosing is very beneficial, and can never decrease population. Lord Hawke has land in a common field, for which he only got 5s 9d [29p] per acre, and can let the same land, when it is now divided and inclosed, at 20s [£1]. Wages are high; house servants cost, in board and wages, £30 p.a. Draining is much required here; but for want of a law to oblige neighbours to clean out their contiguous ditches, it cannot be done to advantage; although Lord Hawke is attempting it, and has induced many to drain with him. Paring and burning are practised on old grass land, and thought an excellent method of breaking up all coarse sward. Lord Hawke approves of it on low grounds, but on high ground thinks burning unnecessary, and rather detrimental.

The home farm itself, now called Old Hall Farm and owned by Mr G Pick, in 1986 had 200 acres which is much less than Lord Hawke had in hand in 1793, but the earlier figure of course included land being improved before letting to tenants. The rest of the former Hawke estate is no doubt now divided into independent farms; for example, Mr Pick's brother farms from a steading adjoining Old Hall Farm on the west, with limestone buildings that could be

of a very similar date, although vernacular in style and not designed by an architect. In the village of Towton there is at least one house architect-designed in exactly the same style as the buildings at Scarthingwell Old Hall Farm, which must also be part of the former Hawke estate.

Mr Pick at present grows some 140 acres of wheat and barley, 25 acres of rape, 20 of sugar beet and the rest of his land down to peas. He fattens a score of beef cattle, Hereford × Friesians. For this the original buildings are wholly inappropriate. The great barn is a machinery store, though until the pigeonhouse, supported on its brick piers, was removed there was not room to get the larger machines into the barn. The lofted west end is practically useless, and the east end has been converted by removing the oxhouse and opening the whole space up. The remaining oxhouse is used for cattle, as are the stables and the space in the east range where the mill once was. The granaries are useless, except for miscellaneous storage, and their floors are no longer sound. One end of the eastern range, however, has been converted sympathetically into an attractive modern dwelling for Mr Pick's assistant.

In the double foldyard there is a small pole barn, filling about half the open area, and a large modern pole barn, partly enclosed, has been built in the stackyard. The haybarn is also used for baled straw.

Naturally these large, stone-built and pantile-roofed buildings are very expensive to maintain as well as being inconvenient; but Mr Pick appreciates their outstanding historic interest as well as their handsome appearance, and is therefore prepared to make do with them as best he can.

No other farm in the West Riding is described in so much detail in the *General View*, and it is particularly fortunate that so much of this one has survived to be compared with the original description.

Acknowledgement

I am very indebted to Mr G Pick, the present owner, for showing me the farm and explaining it to me.