



THE TURTON FAMILY: The Highs and The Lows

Sir Thomas Turton 1st Bart. 1764 - 1844

One time owner of Starborough Castle, Ford Manor, Chellows & Felcourt Manor, by the time of Sir Thomas' death only the Felcourt estate remained in family occupation. Sir Thomas and his wife, Lady Mary Turton lived their last days at Grosvenor St, Mayfair but are buried in a family vault in the Turton Chapel, Lingfield Church.

Thomas Turton was born on 27th September 1764, the youngest son of William Turton Esq. of Soundess, Oxfordshire, and his second wife Jane, daughter of Thomas Clarke MD of Hertford.

Thomas became a Barrister and rapidly made his fortune in the world.

In 1785/86 Thomas married Mary, only child of the Rev. John Mitchell, Rector of Thornhill in the County of York.

Thomas Turton's brilliant career as a barrister brought financial rewards and public recognition. He invested in property including several Lingfield estates: in 1793 he purchased 'Sterborough' Castle; in 1794 he purchased Ford Manor, and the same year purchased Chellows in Crowhurst; although in 1798 he exchanged with John Nicholls his Chellows land for Billeshurst lands.

In 1795 Turton was made High-sheriff of the County. Writing in 1809 William Bray recorded that Thomas Turton 'distinguished himself by his firm and steady conduct during the riots in St George's Field in 1795'. That year, following a series of bad harvests resulting in agricultural depression, unemployment, poverty and food shortages (in particular a shortage of bread) there were wide-spread food riots.

On the 30th April 1796 he was created a Baronet.

[Baronet is an hereditary title created in 1611, superior to that of a knight, but not of the peerage rank. He is addressed as "Sir" and after his surname the abbreviation 'Bart' is used. His wife is addressed as Lady and his children as Mr, Miss or Mrs.]

In 1800 Sir Thomas published: *An Address to the Good Sense and Candour of the People, on behalf of the dealers in corn: with some few observations on a late trial for regrating.*[*] By a Country Gentleman [i.e. Sir Thomas Turton]

[* regrating is to buy and sell again in or near the same market, thus raising the price – once a criminal offence in England]

He was clerk of the juries in the Court of Common Pleas, and a local Magistrate. In the role of Magistrate Sir Thomas heard several local smuggling cases. According to reports of the time smugglers were treated very leniently. It was a widely held belief in the 19th century that Sir Thomas turned a blind eye to smuggling in this area, even Hazell and Hayward recorded in 1933, 'it is said that it was not at all unusual for a keg of brandy to be left at Starborough Castle. On one occasion a valuable pony found its way there and was never reclaimed'.

Sir Thomas served as Member of Parliament for Southwark from 1806 to 1812.

He was the victim of a 'squib' [lampoon] in which it was suggested that he did not love women. He was also involved in a series of legal proceedings from 1814. The National Archive has lengthy correspondence of a land dispute between the Duke of Somerset and Thomas Turton from 1817. Sir Thomas was bound to the Duke for £10,000. All is evidence of a change in fortunes for Sir Thomas Turton Bart.

He died on 17th April 1844 and was buried in a tomb in Lingfield Church with his wife (who died in 1837) and two of his daughters (Mary died 1803, aged 16 and Lucy, who died 1815, aged 23).

Starborough Castle

Thomas Turton purchased Starborough [sic] Castle in Lingfield in 1793 from the trustees of Robert Burrow, nephew and heir of Sir James Burrow who had built a new house on the site of the ruined Castle. Sir James Burrow also built a Gothic-style pavilion on the moated island from stones found on the site. Under this room Sir James found some vaults which he made into a cellar.



According to Manning and Bray (ref. below) Turton added a good dining-room and drawing-room to Burrows' house. He also cleaned out the moat, preserving its original lines, supplied by a spring rising in one of the farms, about 2 miles distant and brought the last quarter mile underground by a wide drain. 'It has a constant current, and, after supplying the house and offices, falls into the River Eden'.

Sir Thomas sold Starborough Castle in 1812 to William Bruce Smith. Finally Sir James Burrows' house was pulled down and a new mansion erected near the lake by Mr John Tonge in about 1870. The folly on the island remained.

Ford Manor

Turton bought Ford manor in 1794, again from the trustees of Robert Burrow. Ford Manor House was then situated in the valley.

This map was drawn in c.1620 to show Sir John Gainsford's lands, it shows the site of the original 'Forde Manor' which seems to be to the rear of the Old Coach House, possibly the Coach House was built on the old 'Stable Year'.



In 1801 Sir Thomas sold Ford Manor to Colonel Henry Malcolm, recently retired from the Indian Army, who eventually sold the estate to John F Elphinstone in 1826.

New Felcourt Mansion

New Felcourt is sited due east of Old Felcourt; a medieval building with lands to the west and south of New Felcourt lands. The ancient land of Felcourt Manor was divided by the Turner family in 1656.

Purchased by Sir Thomas Turton in 1810 it was subsequently subject to mortgage agreements to raise sums of money in 1817 and 1822 to benefit Sir Thomas and Lady Mary.

In 1842 and 1843 Agreements were made between Thomas E M Turton, JP, St Clair, Henry Goodere and J S Judge to protect the estate in trust for the benefit of Thomas E M Turton's 10 children. The Tithe Award gives the total acreage of New Felcourt as 434 acres. 'New Felcourt Mansion' was occupied by John Hale Esq. All rents and dues from New Felcourt Estate were paid to Joseph Spencer Judge who held the property under the terms of the trust.

New Felcourt was eventually sold in August 1855 following the death of John Hale. Within the estate were "three ornamental residences" let on leases to Col. St Clair, Miss Turton and Mrs Ross.



Illustration of New Felcourt from the Sale Catalogue, August 1855

Described as a stone built and slated residence with verandah along the greater portion of the Front with 7 bedrooms, 2 dressing rooms, boudoir and WC. All ground floor rooms papered and finished with Marble chimney pieces.

The leasehold properties were:

1 Oaklands, a short remove from the road. 5 bedrooms and dressing room, servants room. Ground: Dining room, walls papered, Drawing room, conservatory, water closet, kitchen, dairy, larder, laundry and back kitchen

Offices: Hen House, Piggery, Stable, Granary, Tool House, Cattle Shed and Yard, Coach House, Straw House, Shed and Tool House

Let on Lease to Miss Sarah Turton (now aged 66 years) for her life at £15 p.a. but of annual value of £50

2 Adjoining freehold cottage residence known as Rosebank
Drawing room walls papered and finished with Marble Chimney piece Ditto Dining Room. Let on Lease to Mrs Ross, for a term of 21 years from 29 Sep 1847 at £7 p.a. and [in 1855] underlet by her to Rev. Mr Woodington at £55 p.a.

3 Another Villa residence known as Felcourt Lodge approached by Carriage Drive
4 bedrooms and 2 dressing rooms with Gardener's Cott.
Pleasure grounds, paddocks and Plantation Let, including to Col. St Clair for the joint Lives of himself and wife at £15 p.a. but of annual value of £50

Sir Thomas Edward Mitchell Turton 2nd Bart. 1790 - 1854

Thomas Edward Mitchell Turton was born on 6th November 1790, the only son of Sir Thomas Turton of Starborough Castle. He was educated at Eton. Dr Goodall, the then head master of Eton College regarded him to be one of his best classical scholars. Captain Gronan a fellow pupil admired his recklessness:
'He was a determined poacher...that led him to exert his abilities in Windsor Park itself where he contrived to bag game, in spite of the watchfulness of the keepers... On one occasion however, by some unlucky chance, tidings of his successes reached the ears of the royal gamekeeper, who formed a plan...to entrap him...so nearly were they pouncing upon Turton that he was obliged to take to his heels and fly, carrying with him a hare which he had caught. The keepers followed close on his heels until they came to the Thames into which Turton plunged, still holding his prize by his teeth, swam to the other side... He reached the college in safety and the hare served for the enjoyment of merry friends.'

Thomas married Louisa Browne daughter of General Browne on 2nd November 1812.

He was called to the Bar in 1818 and his career as a Barrister promised to be a brilliant one but that he offended against the moral attitudes of that time and lost his position.

Late in October 1821 it had been observed by Louisa's elder sister that "an improper, but not criminal [i.e. incestuous] relationship existed between her sister Adeline and Mr Turton". Early in January 1822 Louisa opened a letter from Adeline to Turton and after reading it 'instantly ordered horses and returned home [to Brighton]'. It was agreed by all parties that what had taken place be carefully concealed from the family, and that Thomas should go to India.

On 5th June 1822 Thomas bought a Bond of the East India Company for £1,000 to practice as a Barrister in Calcutta. Two weeks later his wife, Louisa and her sister Adeline Maria paid £400 for a Bond to travel as visitors to Calcutta. All three sailed to Calcutta together. At the time of the sailing Thomas acknowledged that Adeline Maria was pregnant and urged that all three should sail to India and that after the child had been born and the desired secrecy attained, she should be sent back to England.

In April 1823 Miss Browne was safely delivered of a daughter Emma. Ten months later Louisa Turton returned home to England alone. In January 1825 Miss Browne was delivered of another child [a daughter] also “begotten by Mr Turton”.

In 1829 Louisa obtained a sentence of divorce from the Ecclesiastical Court then appealed to Parliament for dissolution of the marriage and for the liberty to marry again. Louisa was meantime under the protection of the father of her husband and her own father.

The evidence against Thomas Turton was conclusive. In March 1830 his wife Louisa was given leave for a Divorce Bill. The Bill passed through all stages and finally passed in 1831. ‘Provided...that it shall not be lawful for the said Thomas Edward Mitchell Turton at any time hereafter to contract matrimony with the said Adeline Browne...’ Until 1857 divorces were rare, and obtained only by an Act of Parliament.

Thomas and Adeline went on to have five more daughters and three sons. They spent most of their time in India but made frequent visits to England where their sons were sent for their education, under the Guardianship of their Aunt Miss Sarah Turton. In India Thomas Turton enjoyed the hospitality and respect of his profession. It was reported in the India Gazette, Jan. 1829, that a Dinner in his honour was given by the solicitors of the Supreme Court to Mr Turton and his friends, upon the approaching departure of that gentleman for Europe. He was presented with ‘a beautiful and richly chased vase as a tribute of their professional regard. The party sat down 80 to dinner’.

Similarly a Farewell Party was given at the Town Hall by several gentlemen of the mercantile community. ‘About 100 people sat down to an excellent Dinner... a profusion of every delicacy of the season and excellent wine...the health of Mr Turton was pledged...amidst the most cordial peals of applause...It was a late hour before the last lingerers of the jovial party quitted the festive board’.

Thomas and Adeline made frequent trips between England and India, the journey then could take up to 6 months; sailing from Calcutta, crossing the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean, around the Cape of Good Hope, then sailing north across the Atlantic Ocean. On the way back to India in 1830 their first son, Thomas Trevor was born at sea, off Ushant (Isle de Ouessant, west of Brest) on board the East Indiaman ‘Carolina’ on 29th July 1830. The baby was eventually to rise to the rank of Lieutenant-General serving with the Indian Army. He died at Weir Courtney, Lingfield, in 1904.

Back in England again in 1837 Thomas stood as a Reform candidate for the Sudbury Election of August 2nd 1837, but was unsuccessful. The following year he was appointed a Secretary of the General Government of Canada. The Earl of Durham, Governor-General of Canada summoned Turton to the Executive Council on 2nd June 1838. The appointment did not last long as in 1841 he was back in India again and was appointed Registrar of the Supreme Court at Calcutta from 1841 – 1848. That same year 1841, Adeline Maria died, aged 41, she was buried at Calcutta on 14th July.

Maria's obituary refers to the 'wife' of Thomas E M Turton, although they never could marry. 'As a faithful affectionate and devoted wife, a fond, indulgent and ever anxious mother, she lived respected and beloved and died deeply lamented by her husband and numerous family...'

On 23rd September 1842 Thomas married Maria Louisa Hume Denman in Calcutta. His father having died in 1844, Thomas inherited the title of 2nd Baronet.

By 1848 Sir Thomas was in debt and insolvent. He presented his petition to the Court for the relief of insolvent debtors at Fort William, Bengal. On 22nd February 1849 relief was granted. Another Court at Calcutta ordered that the real and personal estate and effects of Sir Thomas Edward Mitchell Turton, both within the limits of the Charter of the East India Company and without, except the wearing apparel and certain other chattels were to be offered for sale at Public Auction.

Lands in Lingfield were included in the above order. The majority of the Turton estate, at Felcourt, was subject to trust administration for the benefit of Sir Thomas's 10 children. The remainder of his lands at Clays Farm, Apsley Town, Dormans Land, and at Plaistow, Lingfield were sold to pay creditors. At that time Sir Thomas was living on the Island of Ceylon.

Sir Thomas Edward Mitchell Turton died on 13th April 1854 at Port Louis, Mauritius, he had been on his way to England to recover his health. He was 63 years old.

His widow Maria Louisa Hume Turton was remarried at St George's Church Hanover Square in 1858.

Miss Sarah Turton 1789 - 1860

The third daughter of the first Baronet, who in his will referred to as 'my beloved daughter Sarah'. She inherited an additional legacy of £2,000, beyond the equal shares of herself and her siblings 'in consideration of the care and attention she has paid me for so many years...and a reasonable portion of furniture and effects to be taken out of my house...as may be sufficient to furnish any house she may move to'.

Sarah moved to Oakhurst Cottage on the Felcourt Estate paying rent of £15 p.a.

Her neighbours at Felcourt, according to the 1851 Census, were Col. James Pattison St Clair, who was absent on the night of the Census, and his wife Susannah (nee Turton) who was one of Sarah's sisters. They lived at Felcourt Lodge, approached by a Carriage Drive; in Rosebank, the adjoining cottage to Oakhurst, lived Mrs Frances Louisa Ross, Sarah's widowed niece. Frances was the widow of Rev. William Hunter Ross who officiated at the wedding of another sister, Elizabeth. Rev. Ross was Junior Chaplain of St James Church, Calcutta, Bengal, from December 1843. He died on 7th August 1844, aged 36 years. On Sunday 4th August he was at his post but on the Tuesday following he complained of feeling ill, he died the following day of 'apoplexy'. At the time of his death his wife, Frances Louisa, was pregnant. Their daughter was born in Calcutta on 20th December 1844. The baby was baptised on the 15th January 1845 with the name William Euphemia Frances Ross.

Sarah was a loving Aunt and Guardian to all three sons of Sir Thomas and Adeline Maria. She oversaw their education in England.

Sarah died on 15th September 1860, aged 71. She left £2 16s 8d yearly for six widows [the charity is now part of the Lingfield United Charities].

The Turton Chapel in Lingfield Church, with the window in memory of Sir Thomas Edward Mitchell Turton in the east wall and the three wall tablets, is testimony to the pride, loyalty and affection of the Turton family each to the others.

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Sources:

British Library, India Office Collections

Surrey History Centre (Surrey County Record Office):

- (i) G54/2/40: For sale by auction Wednesday 8th August 1855, late residence of John Hale, Esq. deceased, description of property including Plan of Felcourt Estate

- (ii) Ref. 6722/8: Lingfield Churchyard Surrey 1875

The House of Lords Papers: Turton's Divorce Bill (Lords Journal lxiii)

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