



British engineering firms: The works of ER & F Turner, including the Carter roller system in the course of manufacture at St Peter's & Grey Friars Works, Ipswich - Part two

Milling journals of the past at The Mills Archive

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Last month I introduced a series of articles in *The Miller and Milling* in the 1880s and 1890s that dealt with the British engineering firm ER & F Turner. The story, of course, continued as "ER & F Turner went on, over the following years, to manufacture roller mills of modern design to give years of efficient

trouble-free service".

The next episode in their history, in 1902, was summarised in a headline at the time "The Irony of Fate: Too Much Water and Too Little". The opposing elements of fire and water caused catastrophes over which the successful firm had no control. An August issue of *Milling* reported a serious fire that struck just after midnight on the evening of the 16th of that month.

The fire at the Grey Friars works in Ipswich was stopped by a wooden partition that was full of wooden patterns. If the fire had reached the shed of the main woodworking shop the damage would have been enormous as it was full of wooden centrifugals,

purifiers and reels, both finished or partly constructed.

The shed in the centre of the illustration escaped but, as can be seen, the damage was extensive and ran into thousands of pounds. The principal loss was the paint shop where milling machinery had been stored ready for delivery. The outbreak was distinguished by two features, the violence and rapidity which the flames spread and the difficulties which beset the Fire Brigade as a result of the inadequate supply of water.

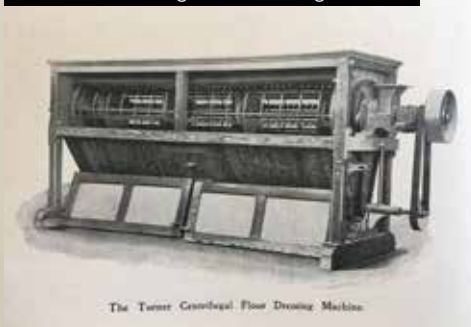
Ironically, a few weeks later, the same journal was reporting serious flooding at Turner's other Ipswich site at St Peters, only 200 yards away from the site of the fire. The flooding, due to excessive rain, flooded the works on either side of the road shown in the photograph, to a depth of eight-and-a-half inches. Neither of these catastrophes deterred the owners of this busy firm and work recommenced shortly after both incidents.

By December of that year, *The Miller* was able to report on a visit to both of Turner's sites. They examined the erecting shop at Grey Friars, with its work in progress on all kinds of machines, centrifugals, chaff and corn mixers, along with all sizes of roll purifiers and inter-elevators. The workshop employed overhead,

Turners "Vibromotor" rotary scalper and sifter

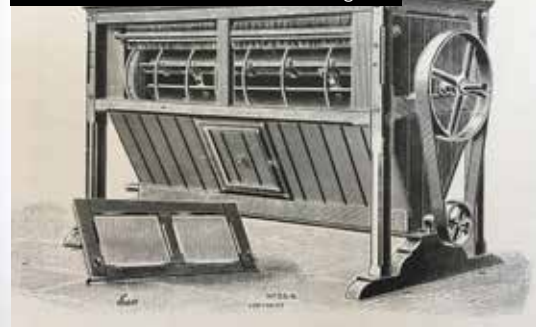


The Turner centrifugal flour dressing machine



The Turner Centrifugal Flour Dressing Machine.

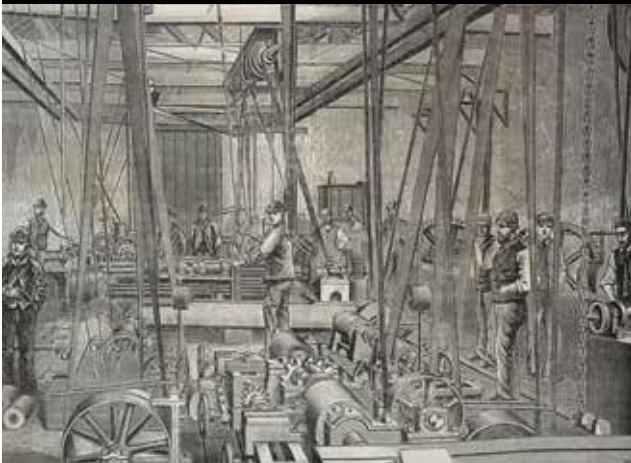
The Turner inter-elevator flour dressing reel



Interior view of middlings roll and break roll fitting and erecting shop



Second view of middlings roll and break roll fitting and erecting shop



Site of the fire at the Grey Friars Works



electrically-driven cranes and bogey tramlines which ran through the buildings, so that both machines and parts could be handled, with the minimum amount of labour.

The reporter described how everywhere was filled with the sound of saws and hammers; all was motion and animation and there was a feeling about the whole place which was pleasant to see and hear. The buildings themselves were lofty, well lighted, and everything placed to advantage. Everyone employed there had his special place, making the work go smoothly. The majority had been with the firm for many years, and there were seldom needs to change the workforce.



The Turner patent first break roller mill with automatic vibrating feed



Fire damage at the Grey Friars Works

In the roll turning and grooving shop, the journalist encountered a wonderful grooving machine, designed and patented by Mr Pierson Turner. Each machine held two rolls and each roll was operated upon simultaneously by three grooving tools. These were entirely self acting and very accurate. Much material was cut away to make sure that the casting was perfect, and that there were no blow-holes. The firm had a policy always to cut away freely so as to be absolutely certain that their rolls gave satisfaction.

On entering the millstone shed it came as somewhat of a shock to discover that the trade had not been long since lost. The group of men who were wrapped up in their work, building and dressing millstones as in the days of the past, showed that Turners were still

doing considerable trade in millstones, both at home and abroad. Several of the illustrations here come from a 1907 catalogue, completing the picture of a busy and successful British engineering firm, successful because of its innovation and high quality standards.

The holdings at the Mills Archive mean that I can only provide geographical and historical snapshots. If you would like to know more please email me at mills@millsarchive.org



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