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WHICH THOMAS MORE?  
A Retractation

We have all been warned of the danger of confusing our Thomas More with other Thomas Mores, and his father John with other Johns. Yet, in spite of this, I find I have fallen into the trap myself! I must now withdraw the statement that, in 1510 and on later dates, our Thomas More was appointed to the Commission of the Peace for Hampshire (*Saint Thomas More*, p. 75 of the 1953 edition, and p. 49 of the Image Book edition). In fact the whole paragraph is hereby withdrawn!

It happened because I did not observe Dr Routh's injunction, "Verify your references, sir". The reference I failed to verify is in Harpsfield (*E.E.T.S.*) p.307. It reads - "There was a contemporary Thomas More of the Temple, who is liable to be confused with his great namesake." Had I looked up the entry in the Middle Temple Records (the note did not say "Middle" or "Inner", but it turned out to be "Middle"), I should have read - "More, Thomas of Hants. Bencher, 1506, Reader Lent 1506 and Lent 1511." This is an interesting parallel professional sequence to that of our Thomas More. Let me add a note from the record though it has no direct bearing on this matter, but it is a sidelight on the life of the times. "Master More of Hampshire was chosen for Reader in the following autumn vacation (i.e.1506); but that vacation was not held on account of the unhealthy air, and the death of the butlers,cook and divers others." The full list of the appointments of "Thomas More" to the Commission of the Peace for Hampshire is as follows :

Hampshire: 26 Nov.1502; 12 July 1504; 22 Feb. and 15 Dec.1510; 15 Mar.1512; 3 June 1513; 24 Jan.

and 18 Oct. 1514; 16 Feb. and 6 July 1515; 1 Feb. 1518.

There is no point in giving the references to *Letters and Papers* for each of these appointments, but I have carefully checked them.

The next problem was to find out something about Thomas More of Hampshire to make sure he was the one appointed. The Hampshire Record Office could not help as the Quarter Sessions Records for the period are not extant. However, I carefully went through the long lists (pages of them) in *L.P.* of coronation pardons granted at the beginning of Henry VIII's reign, a business that extended over several years. To secure this it was necessary to sue (and pay) for it; it was a kind of insurance policy against trouble for past misdeeds. Judging by the thousands of names, an enormous number of people must have had uneasy consciences! At length I found, "Thomas More or Moore of Sherveld upon London (sic), Hants." This is, in modern terms, Sherfield-upon-Loddon in the north of Hampshire. The *Victoria County History of Hampshire, Vol III*, showed that the Mores had been domiciled in that County since the fourteenth century. The name died out with John More, Serjeant-at-law in 1620.

It seems certain that this Thomas More was the one who was a J.P. in Hampshire and not our Sir Thomas. Except for special reasons, magistrates were, and are, residents of the County.

This does not exhaust the Thomas Mores who were J. Ps. I think the following list is complete:

1) - 5 July 1509, Middlesex. I haven't been able to find another Thomas More connected with Middlesex for which County no Sessions Records survive from that period. So this may be our Sir Thomas though he was not then living in Middlesex. It may have been a special appointment.

2) - 19 September 1518, Kent. The full list of names reads - John Roper (father of William), John More, Thomas More, Sir Thomas Neville, Sir John Pecche, Sir Richard Weston, and Sir William

Fitzwilliam. The association here with John Roper and John More makes it certain that this is our Sir Thomas. This must have been one of those special Commissions appointed by the Council to look into the efficiency or deficiency of the local magistrates. Only two, perhaps three, lived in Kent. Sir Richard Weston (who succeeded Sir Thomas as Under-Treasurer) lived in Surrey; Sir William Fitzwilliam had been a Sheriff of London and later retired to Northamptonshire; Sir John Pecche (Peachey) belonged to a Middlesex family, but I cannot find anything further about him. Four of them, Neville, Fitzwilliam, Weston and Thomas More were members of the Council. Pecche may also have been a member. The Records throw no light on the purpose of this Commission; it was certainly not the regular Commission of the Peace for the County.

3) - 16 Dec. 1528, Middlesex. I see no reason for doubting that this was our Sir Thomas as he was now living in Middlesex (Chelsea).

All this has a value apart from clearing up my own errors. It has a bearing on More's dealings with heretics. One of the duties of a magistrate or J.P. was to investigate any case of suspected heresy and, if it proved of substance, to arrest the person and delate him or her to the ecclesiastical authorities. The Tudors made increasing use of the local J.Ps (who were, and are, unpaid) for all kinds of judicial and administrative work; one of the evidences of this is the Act of 1489 (4 *Henry 7* c.12) which defined the functions of J.Ps, "for the due executions of their warrants". Among the provisions it reminded magistrates of their duty (dating back to the reign of Henry V) of assisting the Church by arresting heretics and presenting them for trial in the spiritual courts. (No doubt this law has been abrogated by later legislation. Certainly during the seven years I was on the Commission of the Peace for Gloucestershire, I received no instructions about dealing with heretics; it would have been interesting

for me, a Catholic, to have delated my friend the local vicar who, under the 1489 Act, could be regarded as a heretic.) A proclamation on 5 March 1529 reminded magistrates of this duty.

Assuming that the 1509 appointment was of our Sir Thomas, this would empower him to deal with heretics, but as the commission was not renewed (as far as records show) it may have been for a particular purpose as he was not then living in the County. He would relinquish the position on becoming Under-Sheriff in Sept. 1510. At that period there was no anxiety about heresy. The Kent appointment of 1518 can, I think, be accepted as a special one for a definite purpose. What of his position as Under-Sheriff? He was the judge at the Poultry Compter dealing with matters of debt and personal actions, but, one of the anomalies of the constitution of the City was that neither the Sheriff nor the Under-Sheriffs were J.Ps. By Charter the City justices (in the full sense of the term) were the Mayor, the Recorder and those Aldermen who had been Mayors. Thomas More was not therefore at that period charged with any responsibility for seeking out heretics. He was present at the Bishop's Court in St Paul's in December 1514 when the heresy case against the dead Richard Hunne was tried. The Sheriff, or his deputy, had to be present at such trials as representing the civil power, and, if the prisoner was condemned for heresy, to receive him and later have him burned. It may therefore be that Thomas More had to see that the exhumed body of the condemned Hunne was burned according to law.

If we leave on one side the 1509 and 1518 appointments as probably special appointments, the first time More could deal officially with heretics was at the end of 1528. When he became Lord Chancellor a year later he was ex officio a member of all Commissions of the Peace.

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