

A RIGHT FAIR HOUSE

- Lady Alice More : 'And seeing you have at Chelsey a right fair house, your library, your books, your gallery, your garden, your orchard, and all other necessaries so handsome about you, where you might in the company of me your wife, your children, and household be merry, I muse what a God's name you mean hear still thus fondly to tarry.'
- Sir Thomas : 'I see no great cause why I should much joy either of my gay house or of anything belonging there unto...'
(W. Roper, in *Lives of Saint Thomas More, Everyman*, 1963, p. 40).

In my account of More's house at Chelsea in *The Field is Won* (ch. xvii), I gave as references Randall Davies, *The Greatest House at Chelsey* (1914) and the Chelsea volume in the L.C.C.'s *Survey of London*. I have since come across another reference I had missed : it is Vol. 40 (1966) of the Walpole Society's publications. As no one seems to have noticed this omission, I do not feel apologetical ! The plan by John Thorpe is again reproduced in this volume and a few details add a little to our knowledge of the house at Chelsea. I am now disposed to give more credence to Thorpe's plan than I did when writing the biography.

The nearest description of the house is given in the above extract from Roper recording the conversation between Lady Alice and Sir Thomas in the Tower. (Incidentally, in our estimates of Lady Alice, we should take into account that she herself must have told the family of this conversation ; how else could Roper have known of it ? Stapleton (p. 161 in my edition of *The Life of Sir Thomas More*) also recorded part of the conversation.)

The important question is, 'Does Thorpe's plan show the house as it was in More's time ?' The plan was made for Lord

Burghley or his son Sir Robert Cecil, more likely the latter, when the house came into their possession in 1595; Sir Robert may have intended a rebuilding and this plan may have provided the basis for discussion. While it cannot be categorically stated that this is the plan of More's house, the probability of its being so is strong. There are no records of any rebuilding before the house passed to Lord Burghley.

The first owner after More's attainder was Sir William Paulet, later first Marquess of Winchester. He is chiefly remembered for his adroitness in clinging to high office, in spite of political and religious changes, during the reigns of Henry, Edward, Mary and Elizabeth — a prototype of the Vicar of Bray! His explanation was simple: 'I was born of the willow, not the oak.' On his death in 1572 his son inherited the property; his wife persuaded him to pass it on to her daughter by her first husband; she was now Lady Dacre and she entered into possession in 1575. Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst and later Earl of Dorset, lived with her for some years as many of his letters are dated from Chelsea. His share in *Gorboduc* (1561) and his contributions to the *Mirror for Magistrates* (1563) were written before he went to Chelsea. He became Lord Treasurer of the Council and also Chancellor of Oxford University. It seems appropriate that this accomplished poet, scholar and statesman should have lived in Thomas More's house.¹ Lady Dacre died in 1595 and left the property to Lord Burghley for life with remainder to his younger son, Sir Robert Cecil, later Earl of Salisbury. It is not known why Lady Dacre made this bequest; it may be that the Dacres had borrowed money from Burghley (a sharp business man) on the security of the house. After his father's death in 1598, Sir Robert lost interest in the Chelsea house since he now had Hatfield as his home. He sold the house to the Earl of Lincoln.²

We need not follow its later fortunes in detail. John Evelyn visited the house in 1679 when the Earl of Bristol was the owner. The diarist wrote: 'a spacious and excellent place for the extent of ground and situation, in a most sweet air; the house large but ill-contrived.' In 1681 it was bought by the Duke of Beaufort whose name was given to the house and, nowadays, to the road

passing over the site. The house was bought by Sir Hans Sloane in 1737, and, as it was in a delapidated condition, it was pulled down two years later.

In 1699, or perhaps a few years earlier, Leonard Knyff made a careful topographical drawing of Beaufort House and its grounds. An engraved version (by J. Kipp) is reproduced in *The Greatest House at Chelsea*. This picture does not suggest that there had been any substantial reconstruction of the house externally; it looks as though the front had been faced with stone in keeping with changing taste when Tudor brickwork was considered to be plebeian. The façade of the house in Knyff's drawing is exactly on the same ground plan as given by Thorpe; this supports my view that More's building was not radically altered externally by later owners.

I have made a simplified version of the main part of Thorpe's plan. He labelled some, unfortunately not all, of the rooms, with a few notes on the outside grounds. In what follows I have put his actual words in italics. Let us therefore imagine ourselves arriving by boat at the landing stairs; Battersea Bridge marks the position. A wall ran parallel to the river with a gate into the estate. Roper tells us of the occasion when Thomas More left home for the last time on the 13th April 1534.

And whereas he evermore used before at his departure from his wife and children, whom he tenderly loved, to have them bring him to his boat, and there to kiss them all, and bid them farewell, then would he suffer none of them forth of the gate to follow him, but pulled the wicket after him; and shut them all from him. (op. cit., p. 36)

About half way between this 'wicket' and the house was another wall separating the more private part of the grounds. The gate in this was flanked on either side by two small lodges; Thorpe marked their internal dimensions as '10 f'; they had pyramid roofs and were still there when Knyff made his drawing a century later — another slight indication that there had been no considerable changes up to the end of the seventeenth century. I have not included this gateway in my modified plan as so much space would have been needed, showing just an open space which

was about 70 yds (60m) long.

We now reach the plan as here reproduced. Thorpe wrote immediately inside the gate, *The Orchard or garden heere*, and in front of the next wall (at A) *The Inner Greene Court*. Perhaps the division was marked by a path. The steps at A led up to *A large Terrace*, which brings us to the house itself. On the right of the entrance passage is the *hall* (C); this was no doubt the family refectory, especially as the *buttry* (E) and *pantry* (H) are nearby. It will be noticed that the extreme left is *lar* (F, larder?) and *kyt* (G, kitchen). I have not been able to work out a satisfactory difference between buttry, pantry, and larder. The O.E.D. is no help. Perhaps some reader will be able to sort them out. K is *A longe Entry throughte all* leading to L, the *chaple*. *Entry* is here used in its older sense of *passage*. Staircases are at O and P. On the first floor exactly over the *longe Entry* would be 'your gallery' to which Lady Alice referred. The gallery was an important feature of a Tudor mansion. It provided a covered walk when the weather was unclément. We may recall how on one occasion at Whitehall More said to Wolsey, 'I like this gallery of yours, my lord, much better than your gallery at Hampton Court' (Roper, p. 19). The gallery became a convenient place to hang pictures; these would provide topics for conversation as the host and his guest strolled up and down. Is our term 'art gallery' derived from this sensible arrangement?

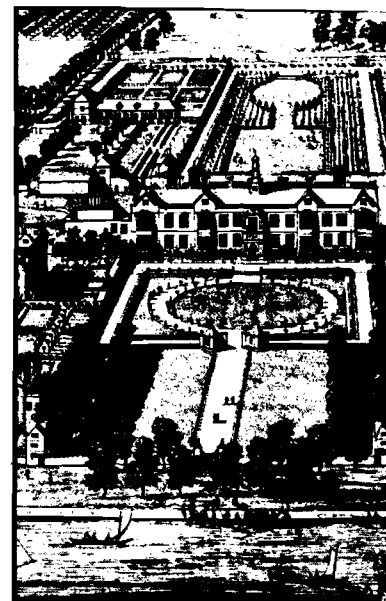
M was a *backe walke* with steps at N leading down into the garden. This walke was not covered in but was a kind of open-air complement of the gallery. One other room calls for mention. D was the *p'loure* (parlour), and it was surely here that Holbein grouped the family for his great painting. However there are difficulties. The window on the right of his sketch was only to be found in the parlour, assuming that the family was facing the main window. According to Thorpe's plan there was no door in the right-hand corner at the back. This may be an instance of internal rearrangement; this might include, for example, changing the window on the right into an oriel.

This survey of what evidence we have of the More house at Chelsea inevitably contains an element of speculation, but

there are sufficiently reliable indications in Thorpe's plan and Knyff's drawing for us to see the house as it probably was in Thomas More's day.

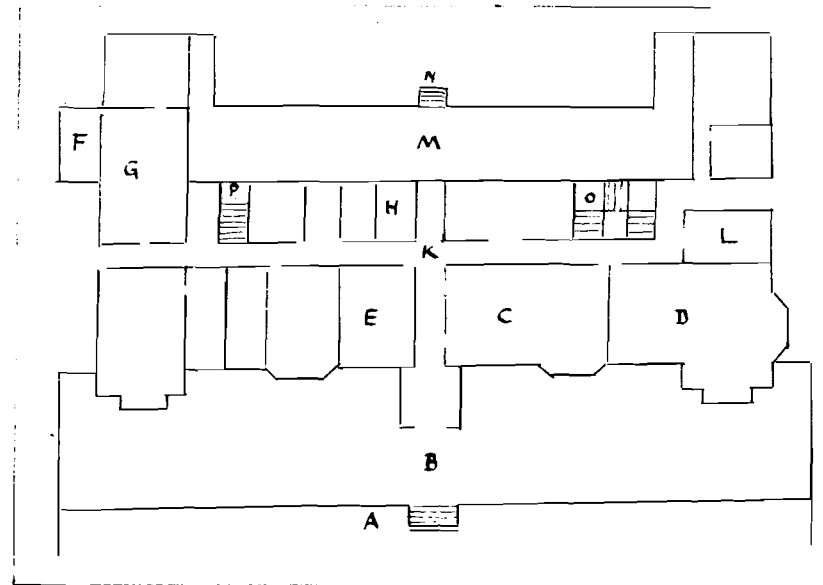
to the right :

Beaufort House, Chelsea, as drawn by Leonard Kyff, and engraved by J. Kip in 1699. The formal lay-out was later than More's time.



Below :

Thorpe's plan, analysed by E.E.R. on p. 8.



AUTHOR'S NOTES ANSWERING EDITOR'S QUERIES.

1. To my knowledge no one has pointed out a curious link between the Sackvilles and the Mores. Anne Cresacre, after the death of John More, married a West, and one of their descendants married a Sackville, thus giving us our Sackville-Wests, Lords Sackville, their most distinguished member being V. Sackville-West the poet (and wife of Sir Harold Nicolson).

2. There were two Lord Dacres, known respectively as "of the North" and "of the South". The former was important in the defence of the Scottish border, but he got mixed up with the Pilgrimage of Grace. It is to him that More refers as "my Lord Dacre" or "the Lord Dacres" in letters to Wolsey in 1522 and 1533 (Rogers, p. 260/29 and 280/22,29). His namesake "of the South" was of no distinction, and, as far as I know, had no connexion with Thomas More. His wife was of little note except as sister of Sackville.

Marie Ney writes, in a letter of 19 August, about the "Dacre Monument on the south wall of Chelsea Old Church, almost in the More Chapel ; it's very large and impressive with the two recumbent figures. The lettering reads : Gregory Fiennes, Lord Dacre of the South, 1594 ; Anne Sackville his wife, 1595." Though impressive, "I find it hideous in relation to the size of the church" (E.E.R.)

3. In Lady More's enumeration (line 3 of initial quote, above p. 5) "your garden, your orchard" implies two sundry things, the garden presumably designating the larger ground at the back of the estate. And yet "orchard or garden" is what Thorpe wrote. My guess is that the ground had been allowed to go a bit wild, so it might be difficult to decide whether it was meant to be an orchard or a garden. Thomas More's orchard could not have been fully matured in his lifetime, and may have been in some other part of grounds. Another explanation is that this is how Thorpe (or another) thought this piece of the ground could be developed. In Kyff's view it had become a formal garden.

E.E. REYNOLDS

A PRESIDENTIAL MISCELLANY

After the 6 pages on More's "right fair house", we treat you to a presidential miscellany, or a buffet of various tidbits from E.E. Reynolds' letters of last summer and fall, with sub-titles added by *Moreana*.

G.M.

A GLANCE AT MOREANA No. 46

I found the article on Burnet's version of *Utopia* interesting because I've always had a liking for his translation. I think it was last published in Sidney Lee's edition which also included More's poems. I welcomed your reference (p. 41) to Allen's anthology—it was, as you suggest, 'a balanced menu'. What a pity it is out of print! It was in a series of English Literature books for schools, but, presumably, it did not catch on. Your reference to Fisher's prose was also refreshing. The best appreciation is in George Saintsbury's *Short History of English Literature*. He follows that with what seems to me to be a fair estimate of Thomas More's prose. Saintsbury is, of course, out of fashion with present-day Eng. Lit. specialists, but he knew a thing or two, and had a wider knowledge and scope than his successors.

THE RAGE OF A WOMAN DESPISED.

Have you seen the novel *Saint Thomas's Eve*? I am sending you a copy in case it is lacking on your shelves. Jean Plaidy, as you will see, is a prolific author and has created a fiction-form that has its points ; it is not really the historical novel or romance that is fairly common. She uses only historical persons ; what she does is to take a bit of history (and she is careful of her facts) and puts it into what may be called conversational form. Her results naturally vary somewhat, but I think this one is fairly good. Of course, like most Protestant writers, she does not grasp the significance of the Supremacy problem, but tends to imply that it was the Divorce that led to T.M.'s death. Now it is true that at his trial he said that the Divorce was the cause of his trial, but in fact (and this point has not perhaps been made sufficiently clear) the Divorce was not *to him* a crucial matter. He kept his side of the bargain, i.e. he would keep silent on the subject ; he had, of course, as Chancellor, to speak in the king's name, but he did not, as far as the records go, express his opinion on the matter either in his own household or in public. In fact the appearance is that he put the matter on one side, leaving it to the theologians and canonists to deal with. This is true but for one startling action

(which did not involve speech), i.e. his refusal to attend Anne Boleyn's coronation. We may not appreciate all that this implied. It was a most conspicuous and decisive action for the past-Lord Chancellor to decline such an invitation. I have sometimes thought that it was this that turned Anne Boleyn against him ; as you know, the family tradition was that she was the prime mover in his downfall.

From *LETTERS OF WILLIAM COWPER*, ed. by W. Benham (1884).

(Note : The Revd James Hurdis, 1763-1801, was vicar of Bishopstone in Sussex ; he made his name as a poet with his *The Curate*, and was Professor of Poetry at Oxford from 1793).

William Cowper to J. Hurdis. 6 March, 1791.

'I wish to know what you mean to do with Sir Thomas [More]. For though I expressed doubts about his theatrical possibilities, I think him a very respectable person, and with some improvement well worthy of being introduced to the public.'

Presumably Hurdis sent Cowper his MS, which Cowper revised ; Hurdis then sent a new version. On 23 March 1792, Cowper wrote to him :

'I have read your play carefully, and with great pleasure ; it seems now to be a performance that cannot fail to do you much credit. Yet, unless my memory deceives me, the scene between Cecilia and Heron has lost something that pleased me much when I saw it first ; and I am not sure that you have not otherwise obliterated an account of Sir Thomas's execution with I found very pathetic ... If the play were designed for representation, I should be apt to think Cecilia's first speech rather too long, and should prefer to have it broken into dialogue by an interposition now and then from one of her sisters. But since it is designed, as I understand, for the closet only, that objection seems of no importance ; at no rate, however, would I expunge it, because it is both prettily imagined and elegantly written.'

On 25 March 1792, Cowper wrote to his cousin Lady Hesketch,

'To Mr Hurdis I return *Sir Thomas More* to-morrow, having revised it a second time.'

From *LETTERS AND DIARIES OF JOHN HENRY NEWMAN*, Vol. XIX (1969), p. 138.

(Note. Richard Simpson was a convert who had been an Anglican parson ; as he was married he could not be a priest. He was a notable scholar ; his best work was his life of St Edmund Campion, which has not been superseded ; he was also a considerable Shakespearean scholar and was the first to suggest, in 1871, that two pages of 'The Booke of Sir Thomas More' were in Shakespeare's hand. Simpson was a thorn in the side of Wiseman as he was so critical of the hierarchy.)

Simpson sent Newman a letter for *The Rambler*, May 1859, of which Newman was then editor. Newman wrote (18 May 1859), 'Your letter is very good — but it should contain some sketch of the *school* of divines whom More is ridiculing. They are often spoken against — but the high and legitimate Thomists and Augustinians might say they were a mere corruption and clique of the day, and that it was an insult to compare or confuse *them* with them.'

Simpson had quoted a passage from More's Letter to Dorp in discussing the contrast between the theology of the schools and real and patristic learning. On 19 May, Simpson replied to Newman, 'Alas for the sketch of the school of divines whom More attacks ! I know no more about them than I had picked up from Audin's history of Luther, and Hamilton's article on Hutton's *literae* (sic) *obscurorum virorum*. My acquaintance with Sir Thomas More is quite new and I only found the passage by accident.'

(I have not been able to see *The Rambler*, so do not know what Simpson quoted)

FURTHER RESEARCH ON THOMAS MORE.

The Cowper Hurdis exchange of letters over a play on More leads me to the suggestion that some younger amicus should study how T.M. appears in fiction and drama.

Fiction would begin of course with Ellis Heywood's *Il Moro* of 1556, and drama with *The Booke of Sir Thomas More*, about which we do not seem to have had much in *Moreana*. The pages that are believed to be in Shakespeare's hand are worth studying. T.M. is only referred to in *Henry VIII*, where Wolsey calls his successor 'a learned man'. I can't think of other English plays until this one by Hurdis. Coming to the 19th century, we have Anne Manning's *Household* – a good piece of work but it is a pity she wrote it in a pseudo-archaic vocabulary.

I think this project might prove interesting and throw light on the reputation of T.M. at certain periods.

Yes as ever
EF



Last July 6, Gordon Rupp said in Canterbury that More's silences alone – the questions he would not answer and the statements he would not make – were matter enough for a book. One could likewise study More's gestures, his symbolic actions or omissions – why he wore his golden chain to the prison gate, why he refused to sit at his Tower interrogatory, why he insisted on blindfolding himself on the scaffold, etc.

More's *loyalty* has given us a fine thesis. Other themes worth investigation are love, equity, pride, woman, Jews and Jewry, etc.

William Roper's death centenary (1578) calls for a book on him and his family, including Mary Bassett. There is material also for a monograph on Cresacre More, his brother Thomas the priest, his daughter Dame Gertrude. Considerable information on them is scattered in articles or footnotes, as also on the Clements, Heywoods and Harrises.

Several important biographers of More are still without a proper "Who was...?", among them la Princesse de Craon, Désiré Nisard, Anne Manning, R.W. Chambers with the London team of More's editors in the 1920's through the 1940's.

G.M.