

B U T C L O S E

In *SAINT THOMAS MORE* (1953), p. 186, I wrote :

The Ropers occupied the New Building at the time of More's death ; it was then known as Butclose.

This became in *THE FIELD IS WON* (1968), p. 295 :

The Roper portion was the south-east corner of the Chelsea estate, next to the church. It may have included More's New Building which could be adapted as a residence.

'The Roper portion' refers to More's assignment of his property to avoid its confiscation were he to be attainted. The legal implications were elucidated by J. Duncan M. Derrett in *Moreana* No.5 (1965).

The only part of this that I would now endorse would be the siting of the new building as I think John Aubrey's well-known anecdote about Danvers House justifies this location, but I must now withdraw the reference to the Ropers.

My statement about Butclose was based on a passage in *CHELSEA OLD CHURCH* (1904) by Randall Davies ; on p. 106 he gave what purported to be a quotation from the grant of the estate to Sir William Paulet ; it read :

The reversion of the house and one pightell [small field] or close of land called BUTCLOSE, with the barn, garden, etc., which William Roper Esq. held for the term of his life without rent by the gift of Sir Thomas More.

Not all of that, as we shall see, was a verbatim quotation from the grant ; however, at the time I accepted it. I ignored the old scholar's advice, 'You will find it a very good practice always to verify your references, sir !' In fact it has taken me a quarter of a century to get round to doing so ! Before going into details, I want to retract the statement that 'the Roper portion was the south-east corner of the Chelsea estate.' This was a shocking flight of fancy for a serious biographer ! I assumed that the land given to the Ropers was part of the actual estate. I had the impression that Thomas More did not own much land apart from his own park, as we may call it. Roper misled me here. He wrote (p. 55) :

All the land that ever he purchased was not, I am well assured, above the value of xx marks of the year.

This would be about £ 14 in Tudor money.

In his *Apology* (after his resignation) Thomas More wrote :

All the lands and fees that I have in England, besides such lands and fees as I have of the gift of the king's most noble grace, is not at this day nor shall be while my mother-in-law [step-mother] liveth ... worth yearly to my living the sum of full fifty pound.' (ed. Taft, p. 51).

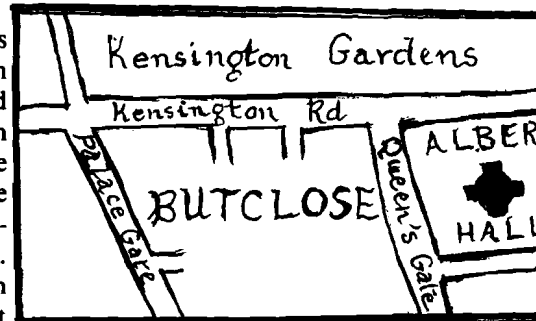
The land held by his father's widow was Gobions which she enjoyed for life. She died in 1545. Again the impression one gets is that Thomas More did not own much land. The documents I shall now examine give a different picture. Note however that both Roper and More were not very precise in their statements ; Roper speaks only of the land 'that he purchased', while More omits such lands as the king had granted to him. For these manors see *Moreana* No. 12 (1966).

The two documents I have so tardily studied are :

- (1) Patent Roll. 23 Henry VIII [1536] Part I. P.R.O., c. 66/668.
- (2) Patent Roll. 1 Edward VI [1547] Part. 3 P.R.O., c. 66/801.

The first gave Sir William Paulet 'the custody, rule and governance' of the lands that had belonged to Sir Thomas More. The King wants the rents paid 'to the hands of Thomas our Chamberlain for the time being'. This Thomas was, presumably Cromwell. Note that Paulet did not come into possession of the estate but was made its steward or administrator. Unfortunately this grant does not give any details of the property.

The second document is far more informative. By 1547 Sir William Paulet had become Lord St John and President of the Council. King Edward later made him Earl of Wiltshire and finally Marquis of Winchester. He continued to serve Mary and Elizabeth, a kind of baronial Vicar of Bray ! The opening section of this document does not concern us ; it grants Paulet pardon for having built, without royal warrant, a tower on the coast near Southampton. It then turns to the Chelsea property, 'all



which premises the King knows that his Father intended to give Lord St John.' First to be mentioned is 'le ferme', but I cannot explain the use of this hybrid term (Law French ?) in a deed that is otherwise in English. The 'farm' down by the river was on the land More bought, and he and his family may have used it while the Great House was being built. Later it became Lindsay House, as it remains, but nothing is left of its Tudor structure, apart, possibly, from some oak work revealed during some reconstruction. The farm lands were outside the More park (33 acres) and amounted to nearly 81 acres, arable and meadow. Then follows a catalogue of tenants and lessees of other 'messuages and tenements.' Some of these no doubt were in More's mind when he wrote to his wife about the burning of the barns (Rogers 174, S.L. 42). No details are given for most of these holdings which were in Chelsea or Brampton. The entry that concerns us reads :

and all those messuages or tenements and one pightell [small field] or close called BUTCLOSE and all the houses, buildings, barns and gardens with appurtances situated, lying or being in Chelsea aforesaid which WILLIAM ROPER Esquire now held (*sic*) for life in the tenure or occupation of WILLIAM ROPER or his assigns, besides all that messuage or tenement now or lately in the tenure of WILLIAM WARNER or WILLIAM ROPER and his assigns, besides all those messuages or tenement in BRAMPTON in the parish of KENSINGTON...

William Roper is the only tenant to be given the 'Esquire' ; this would be in recognition of his standing in the law. 'Brampton' is presumably our 'Brompton'.

Butclose and 'le ferme' are the only two properties named. I have already admitted that I was wrong in thinking that Butclose was part of the park. I dared not hope that it would be possible to locate it now ; however, I wrote to the archivist of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea on the off-chance that there might be a reference to it in the records. You can imagine my joy when I got this reply :

There was a piece of land called variously BUTT'S FIELD , BUTTS CLOSE, or THE BUTTS at the top of Gloucester Rd to the east of Palace Gate. The earliest reference to the name here appears to be in the Earl's Court manor rolls of 1641. The then owner was William Muschamp who sold the land to the Campden Charities who still own the estate. This area is not quite Brompton.

The site was immediately west of the Albert Hall ; since 1641 the value of the land must have increased a thousandfold or more. The acreage is not given but it was clearly a substantial property.

Here let me deal with a statement made by Cresacre More. He was writing of More's plans for economising after his resignation.

Wherefore his children went to their own livings, all but my uncle Roper and my aunt, who lived in the house next to him (ed. Hunter, p. 205).

Where was 'next unto him' ? My guess is that it was 'le ferme' as this was the only house apart from the mansion itself within the park until Georges House and Danvers House were built in the the 1620s.

These two documents suggest an explanation for the burial of Margaret Roper in the More vault at Chelsea and for the failure to carry out William Roper's wish to be interred there also. From the attainder of Thomas More until 1547 the estate and church were Crown property ; this meant that permission for burial in the vault had to be granted by the Council ; so, in 1544 when Margaret died, William had to seek this authority. It will be recalled that the Council had earlier dealt leniently with her over the possession of her father's papers, and they again acted sympathetically and granted the necessary permission. When, however, William died in 1578 the position had changed. The former More estate and church had now become the private property of the Dacres and the vault was now *their* family vault. They must have refused permission for William Roper to be buried there. This is not surprising. He was not related to the Dacres, and he was (*temp.* Elizabeth) a well-known Catholic recusant. So he was interred in his family vault at St Dunstan's, Canterbury.

Was Dame Alice interred in the More vault ? Unfortunately we do not know the year of her death, but, if it came before 1547, no doubt the Council would have given permission as she had continued to live in Chelsea. It seems probable that she died before 1547 as in that year she would have been seventy-five or more years of age -- a very advanced age for that period. One further note about the chapel ; when an inventory of the Old Church was made in 1549 the chapel was referred to as 'Lady More's Chapel.' She would, of course, have attended there regularly, but the persistence of the name suggests how closely people had come to associate the Chapel with her. Does it not also suggest that she had endeared herself to the people ?