

Dr John More and 'Little More' ⁱ

The warrant issued under the royal sign manual in November 1617 ⁱⁱ reads

'To our trustie and welbeloved John More Esquire: Whereas wee have fownd it necessary for the good of our service to continue the course of private Intelligences, w^{ch} was held by y^e late Secretary of State S^r Raphe Winwood knight; and are well pleased to entrust you with the managing of the same: wee doe therefore hereby require and authorise you to correspond wth such persones as our said Secretary late heretofore used in our private service, or wth so many of them as with such others as our right trusty and right welbeloved cousin and counsellor the Earl of Buckingham Maister of our Horse and of our privy counsell shall lyke and approve. And of all such Intelligences as you shalbe able to collect, to make a true reporte unto us or to our said cousin and counsellor the Earl of Buckingham, and the same to continue from tyme to tyme, until our pleasure shall be signified unto you to the contrary. And for so doing this shalbe your sufficient warant. Given under our Signe manuell the 7 of November 1617'.

A career civil servant named John More, later Clerk to the Signet, had been in the service of Secretary of State Sir Ralph Winwood before the latter's death less than two weeks earlier: very much the straight-laced organisation man, an orthodox Anglican, and apparently nicknamed at the time 'little More'. ⁱⁱⁱ This John More's early will, made in 1620 (he lived on until 1638) has much to say about cash owed him by Lady Winwood of Ditton Park, stemming apparently from some debt which John More took on in 1613 whilst Winwood was in the Netherlands, for 'my much honor'd Master M^r Secretarie Winwood' - to please him and for his private ends - for which Winwood seems to have paid More an annuity of £30 until Winwood's death, when it stopped. More believed that had his 'honble Master' lived, he would rather have augmented the sum according to 'the trust he imposed on mee' and 'those happy services which it hath pleased God to grace me with towards him' - but Winwood had died without putting his affairs in order. He wants Winwood's executors to see him right, but does not give the impression of having known how to approach and tackle Lady Winwood in the meantime.

Even allowing for the formalities of the era, the Will does not read as if More considered himself to be at anywhere near the same professional or social level of seniority as Winwood. Indeed it is not apparent that this John More actually undertook any secret service activity in the years prior to becoming a clerk to the signet in 1630 - and inasmuch as Winwood had been a supporter of Buckingham's predecessor Somerset, his loyal man-of-business would hardly seem the most obvious choice to undertake Buckingham's secret commissions.

Nonetheless, on balance it seems probable that the John More of the commission was indeed Winwood's assistant, and that what he was in fact being commissioned to do was not to replace Winwood as the recipient of confidences, but to confide to Buckingham what he had hitherto sent to Winwood. John More the physician seems invariably to have been known as Dr More, even when the term Esquire was appended.

Shortly after Winwood's death, John Chamberlain told Sir Dudley Carleton (see Part 1, endnote ⁴⁹) that 'John More and Abraham Williams have reversiones of the clerkship of the signet'. ^{iv}

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- i I am indebted to the late Dr C.S.L. Davies of Wadham College, Oxford for his valuable help and advice on this topic
- ii copy in Bodleian Library: Mss. Add. D.109 - Fortescue, SP 29015: p.321, doc. 155*
- iii see e.g. F.M.G. Evans, *The Principal Secretaries of State 1558-1680*, 1923
- iv T. Birch and R.F. Williams, *The Court and Times of James I: illustrated by authentic and confidential letters...*vol. 2, 1848. In the event, Abraham Williams' career took a different course