

More and Martinscroft of Thelwall

George Ormerod, in his 1882 history of Cheshire, made no mention of the More family of Thelwall. Furthermore, in describing the purchase of Thelwall property by Dr More, he was clearly unaware that Dr More came from Thelwall. He variously spelled the name as Moores, Moore and More.ⁱ The pedigree charts in the family papers do not take the More line any further back than Dr More's father Edward. While the family papers, and More's keenness to buy property there even whilst living elsewhere, imply conviction that this was where his roots lay, the evidence so far found remains inconclusive, and hardly indicative of gentility. Further comment is made on this in **Appendix 5** and in Part 2.

The 1580 Cheshire visitation list of freeholders includes 'John Markencroft' of Thelwall, and Ormerod quotes Sir Peter Leycester's listing of thirteen 'freeholds of inheritance' in the township in 1666, one of them in the hands of John Martinscroft of Thelwall - 'This hath for long continued in the name of Martinscroft, an ancient freeholder'.ⁱⁱ The list of freeholders in Bucklow hundred for 1578 also lists John Martinscroft of Thelwall, but no-one named More.ⁱⁱⁱ

A family paper displays below Alice Mar[tin]scroft's name a plain St Andrew's cross with fleurs-de-lys in points, but no confirmation of that attribution has been found, and in default of any supporting evidence, must be regarded as highly suspect, if not fanciful.^{iv}

Martinscroft appears to be a locative name, from the hamlet just a mile to the north-east of Thelwall, across the Mersey in Lancashire, and indeed the Mores' local purchases did include parcels of land there.^v A deed of 1649 by which John More II sold properties formerly purchased of William Marbury names as one of the attorneys he and his trustees appoint to act for them John Martinscrofte gent. of Thelwall.^{vi}

Dr John More's brother William's will of 1631, considered in detail in Part 2, appoints 'my cousins' John Martinscroft – impliedly, of Thelwall - an executor and William Martinscroft, yeoman of Standish, Lancs. an overseer. This declares kinship between the Mores and one of the several Lancashire Martinscrofts who were demonstrably recusant. Gillow gives an interesting outline of these Martinscrofts. Of William, he says

'William Martinscroft, probably brother to the mathematician, was a recusant, with his wife Ellen, in Standish in 1628, and died there in 1637.'^{vii}

William's inventory listing by Lancashire Archives describes him as a yeoman.^{viii}

Tenants of the More estates at Thelwall during sequestration, considered in Part 2, included three Martinscrofts - Jane, 'Widow', John, and John Martinscroft, surgeon. Gillow mentions a John who 'settled in Thelwall' whom he considered to be related to the family of Richard Martinscroft, a noted mathematician; his son Richard, a yeoman surveyor, joiner and clockmaker, who did highly esteemed work at Chetham College and Library; and his son George, who married into the gentry. These were noted recusants, strengthening the chance that Dr John and William's mother Alice may herself have had recusant

sympathies.

Whilst too much cannot be read into absences from parish registers at this early period, it is suggestive that the registers of St Wilfrid's Grappenhall, the parish church for Thelwall, do not appear to contain entries relating to Edward and Alice More and their family, with one possible exception to be mentioned later. There are Martinscroft baptisms from 1608, and the burial of a Robert in 1634 – late enough to make it improbable that he was Alice's father. Baptisms in nearby parishes did not always give a parent's name so do not assist – but what may possibly be significant is the scarcity of More or Martinscroft marriage entries in the area. The account of Woolston with Martinscroft given in *British History Online* suggests the possibility of marriage before a Catholic priest just over the river from Thelwall.^{ix}

All that said, as is shown in Part 2, Dr John's nephew George More described his parents – including Dr John's late brother – as 'heretical'.

The overall impression, flimsily based as it is, points towards cautious conformity with recusant connections.

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- i George Ormerod, *The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester: Compiled from Original Evidences.....*, 2nd edition, 1882, p. 749
- ii *ibid.*, p.748
- iii ed. W. F. Irvine, *A List of the Freeholders in Cheshire in the year 1578*, The Record Society, 1902
- iv HD HEN 9/1/1. The name Martinscroft is not listed as associated with armorial bearings in, e.g., Burke, *The general armory of England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales; comprising a registry of armorial bearings from the earliest to the present time*, 1884
- v indeed it is even arguable that Dr More's family surname could be locative in origin, as there is a small hamlet near Daresbury named More or Moore: Ormerod, *op. cit.*, p. 740
- vi HD HEN 6/5 dated 16 June 1649
- vii Joseph Gillow, *A literary and biographical history, or bibliographical dictionary, of the English Catholics from the breach with Rome, in 1534, to the present time*, Vol. 4 pp. 494-496, 1885
- viii <http://archivecat.lancashire.gov.uk/CalmView/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=DRCH%2f297&pos=21> [accessed 8 August 2013]. This records the date of the inventory as 3 May 1637, but the grant of probate on 8 May 1639 was to his executrix and widow *Elizabeth* Martinscroft
- ix <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/lancs/vol3/pp331-334#anchorn51> [accessed 13 August 2013], based on the *Victoria County History of Lancashire* vol. 3, pp. 331-334, states that 'The Hawarden family and their successors, adhering to the Roman Catholic faith at the Reformation, afforded shelter to the missionary priests during the times of proscription'....' A search by the priest-hunters at Woolston Hall in the early hours of a Feb. morning in 1584 is reported in Foley, *Rec. S. J.* ii, 117. In 1590 Adam Hawarden of Woolston, though in some degree of conformity, was yet 'in general note of evil affection in religion and a non-communicant'; *Lydiat Hall*, 245 (quoting S.P. Dom. Eliz. ccxxxv, n. 4). A fair number of names appear in the recusant roll of 1641; *Trans. Hist. Soc.* (New Ser.), xiv, 244'