

**Dr John More's Armorial Bearings**

The Mo(o)re family of Thelwall is not mentioned in the 1580 or 1613 Visitations of Cheshire.<sup>i</sup> An apparent lack of proven links to recusant More families elsewhere in the country is matched by the absence of any evident connections to other More gentry families in the area, such as the More family of Bank Hall at Kirkdale near Liverpool, who were at this period strongly Protestant and who had a quite different coat of arms from any of those granted to Dr More.

Undoubtedly Dr John was very interested in establishing arms for his heirs. Ormerod relates that he obtained five grants, though Joseph Foster suggested that they may have related to two different Doctors More.<sup>ii</sup> Some antiquarian writers had fun at More's expense - in 1870 the then owner of Thelwall Hall, James Nicholson, quoted the sarcastic comments of Humphrey Wanley, first keeper of the Harleian Collection, who a century and a half earlier concluded that

'whatever fancy the Dr. might get into his head about his family and arms, of which the last are ascribed to one Sir William de la More, whose family might be extinct long since, the Heralds, we see, took not only his money, but care to preserve his name, and all the alterations he had procured from time to time.'<sup>iii</sup>

However a generation before Nicholson's quotation, the compiler of 'Chronicles of Thelwall, co. Chester, with notices of the successive lords of that manor, their family descent, etc.', after laying out that quotation and citing the alleged five grants, had gone on to observe that

'It may be a fair matter of question how far these strictures on the part of Mr Wanley were warranted, and whether they really had any foundation in justice; for not only does it appear that Dr Moore was a physician of eminence and high respectability, but, moreover, that he was a man of large landed estate, facts which do not at all seem to have entered into the contemplation of the above writer, from whose observations it might be inferred that he was both a parvenu and a quack.'<sup>iv</sup>

A family paper signed by Clarenceux Herald, Sir Richard St George (whom More apparently knew personally) in January 1626/7 describes the simple coat of *sable, a cross plain argent* as 'anciently belonging to the name and family of the Mo(o)res'. A further, elegantly produced pedigree signed by Richmond Herald, Sir Henry St George in 1634 in anticipation of the marriage of Dr More's heir presumptive, shows Dr More's father Edward, and his grandfather 'More of Thelwall', as bearing it. This implies that the family was rooted in the area well back in the sixteenth century – yet while the pedigree records the given names of his sister-in-law's forebears over three preceding generations,<sup>v</sup> that of Dr John's own paternal grandfather is not stated, so that there must be a question as to whether he had forgotten it, or indeed ever knew it.

Clarenceux states in the 1626/7 document that Dr More's arms were lacking a crest, and furnishes one consisting of *a Moor's head* (standard among various, seemingly unconnected More families) *in profile proper, on the head a cap of maintenance gules, turned up ermine, pendant from the ear an earring argent*. In the 1633-35 Visitation of London, Clarenceux confirms all this, giving the maternal surname as Marscroft, of Cheshire.<sup>vi</sup> This is the final version, certified in the Dugdale pedigree of 1662 by a great-nephew who, even if mistaken about ancestors' names, would surely have known his own coat of arms.<sup>vii</sup>

Other elements of the manuscript material mentioned below confirm this impression of a sustained, even slightly compulsive, drive by Dr More to establish a securely gentle pedigree for the family, as a basis for active participation by his heirs in gentry circles, and in Catholic endeavours.

What is not evident in this armorial progression is kinship with the family of Sir (St) Thomas More. Without even considering the Cresacre quarterings in Sir Thomas' coat of arms, none of Dr John's versions includes *argent, a chevron engrailed between three moorcocks sable* (the moorcock appears to have been granted to or adopted by numerous, evidently unconnected More families as a pretty obvious punning allusion, as was the Moor's head.)<sup>viii</sup> Again, Dr John's, as described above, has nothing resembling the *Moor's bust in profile proper, from the ear two annulets conjoined or, shirt also proper* of Sir Thomas' arms.<sup>ix</sup> It seems unlikely that Dr John, and indeed his More (of Sir Thomas' line) and Roper contacts, would have been unaware of this lack of resemblance – which again leaves problematic the paradox of allusions to kinship between them.

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- i See Part 1, endnote<sup>81</sup> for 1580 and 1613 Visitations of Cheshire. The Mo(o)re family is not even shown in the list of freeholders in 1580, or as disclaiming in 1613
- ii *Grantees of arms named in docquets and patents to the end of the seventeenth century, in the manuscripts preserved in the British Museum, the Bodleian Library, Oxford, Queen's College, Oxford, Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, and elsewhere, alphabetically arranged by the late Joseph Foster and contained in the Additional MS. no. 37,147, in the British Museum* (ed.) W. Harry Rylands, Harleian Society vol. 66, 1915. In fact it seems unlikely that the five grants cited were actually all Dr John More's, as the one attributed to St George on 22 January 1626/7 differs significantly from that cited in the Dugdale pedigree of 1662
- iii *Notes and Queries*, 2 April 1870, pp.347-348
- iv *The Topographer and Genealogist*, vol. 1(ed.) John Gough Nichols, 1846, p. 435
- v HD 9/1/1. The entry for Dr More's heir Edward makes specific provision for a wife but leaves the details blank
- vi HD 9; *The Visitation of London A.D. 1633, 1634 and 1635*, part II: (eds.) J.J. Howard and J.L. Chester, Harleian Society vol. 17, 1883
- vii *The Visitation of Nottinghamshire begun in 1662 and finished in 1664*: (ed.) G.D. Squibb, Harleian Society New Series vol. 5, 1986. It is interesting that the HD 9/1/1 document signed by Richmond in 1634 depicts Dr More's brother William's children as bearing the More coat quartered with, in respect of William's wife, Vaudrey, Mores and Duncalfe, but the pedigree certified by William's grandson in 1662 mentions only Dr More's own coat of *sable, a cross plain argent*
- viii on the moorcock, see James Parker, *A Glossary of terms used in heraldry*, 1894, and J.W. Papworth and A.W. Morant, *An alphabetical dictionary of Coats of Arms belonging to families in Great Britain and Ireland; forming an extensive Ordinary of British Armorial....*vols. 1 & 2, 1874. The More of Barnborough arms are depicted in, e.g., 'Pedigree of More, of Barnborough Hall' in Joseph Foster, *Pedigrees of the county families of Yorkshire*, vol. 2, 1874
- ix mention might also be made of the possibility that Sir Thomas' father, Judge Sir John More, had a brother Abel: his will, TNA PROB 11/23, includes a 'maister Abell More' among those, mainly kin, to be prayed for, and Germain Marc'hadour in *Moreana* no. 63, 1979, pp. 13-16, believes it likely that this was the Abel More DCL of Exeter d. 1486 recorded from a tomb in St Michael Bassingshall in London; however again there is no sign of a link between the Thelwall Mores and Exeter, nor do they appear to have used the name Abel in naming their children. T.E. Bridgett, *Life and Writings of Bl. Thomas More.....*, 1891, p. 446 quotes E. Bellasis, Lancaster Herald, as referring to a manuscript by Augustine Vincent, Windsor Herald, which states that Sir John had brothers named Richard and Christopher, the latter of whom was married, and indeed Sir John's will named Christopher More, gent. an executor, and left a legacy to his daughter - however there is no mention of a son, and again the name Christopher has not been found in use by the More of Thelwall family (although it was a name used by the family of More of Loseley from which Sir John took his fourth wife: usually these families are supposed to have been unrelated but might there

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have been some earlier connection?)