

BARNET AND DISTRICT RECORD SOCIETY

HALF-YEARLY BULLETIN

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No.6.

October.1952.

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GUBBINS IN NORTH MYMMS.

Gubbins lay in the parish of North Myrms, adjacent to Brookmans. The site and main features of the estate can be seen from the map. This map shows Gubbins as it was in 1836. In earlier times the property was probably less extensive.

It is likely that the name by which the property has commonly been known derived from some person or family associated with its early history. The surname Gobyon (Gubyun, Gubyoun) is frequently met with in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in reference both to Hertfordshire and to other countries. An entry on the Close Roll of 1391 mentions William Gubyoun of North Myrms. The story that Gubbins was held by Sir Richard Gobion in the twelfth century and takes its name from his remains unconfirmed. Gubbins has also been known as More Hall, a name clearly deriving from the More family which was associated with the property from the end of the fourteenth to the end of the seventeenth century.

The precise legal status of Gubbins is not easily defined , and was not entirely clear to contemporaries as will be seen presently. The courtesy title of "manor" was acquired at an early date and regularly applied in more recent times, but no legal warranty for this usage is known to exist.

Until the sixteenth century the history of Gubbins is obscure. This is not surprising, for even when the misfortunes of the More family brought it into prominence it was still comparatively small. Its residential rather than its economic possibilities determined its future as a pleasant and convenient home for successful merchants who could not be far from the capital. Of these there was an abundance in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but it is interesting to notice that, as early as the fourteenth century, the Swanlonds, a prominent mercantile family of London were lords of the manor of North Myms.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century the Gubbins property was held by Sir John More, a Justice first of the Court of Common Pleas and later of the Court of King's Bench. He married four times, Thomas, the future Lord Chancellor and saint, being born of the first marriage. Nothing has been found to suggest that Thomas More ever lived at Gubbins.

John More died in 1530, having previously assigned Gubbins to trustees to hold the property to the use of Alice, his fourth wife, with reversion after her death, to Thomas, his son. When Thomas More was attainted and executed in 1535, all his lands were forfeited to the Crown. His interest in Gubbins, however, was still only reversionary, and, as long as his step-mother lived, the property was safe from confiscation. Cresacre More,

in his seventeenth-century Life of the Lord Crancellor, stated that Alice was "a little before her death thrust out of all by King Henry's fury". This may be true, but the evidence is inconclusive. Two interesting lawsuits which were begun in the Court of Augmentations at this time throw some light on these events. (1) In 1545 Alice More, the younger, widow of Sir Thomas More, petitioned for payment of a rent of £40 a year charged upon lands in North Mymms. This, she claimed, was assigned to her by Sir John More in consideration of the money and land she had brought with her on her marriage to his son. This action serves to establish that Gubbins was in the hands of the Crown in or before 1545.

In the second suit, Elizabeth Coningsby, widow, sued for lands in North Mymms which had formerly been in the tenure of Sir John and Alice More. These properties were described as "Mylkesoppes", "Langborowes", "Annot Fryers", "Butters", "Shilbornes", "Baldwyns Croft", "Cley Croft", and "Redinges". It is not certain that all these lands were then part of the Gubbins estate, for none of these field-names was mentioned in a Crown lease of 1546 the best sixteenth-century description of Gubbins. But Upper and Lower Redings were the names of two fields on the estate in the nineteenth century. In this lawsuit Elizabeth Coningsby alleged that these lands had been held by John and Alice More by copy of the court roll of the manor of North Mymms, the lordship of which was in herself. If this was correct the lands not being freehold, should not have been forfeited to the Crown after the death of Alice More, senior. Elizabeth Coningsby accordingly petitioned against the beneficiary of the Crown lease of 1546, Sir John Mason, who replied with a flat contradiction

that the lands had ever been anything but freehold. The outcome of this case is not known; but it is probable that judgment was given for the Defendant.

Sir John Mason held Gubbins as the assignee of William Honnyngs, gentleman, a clerk of the Privy Council, to whom the Crown had leased the property of 1546 at a yearly rent of £50.9s.8d. Apart from the capital messuage called "Gybynnes", the field-names mentioned in this lease include the "Poundeyarde", "Dovehouse Close" (18 acres of pasture), "Peryfeld" (10 acres of pasture), "Lonnsfeld" (10 acres of meadow) "Dyvemeade" (3 acres) "Dyvegrove" (4 acres) and "The Parke" (4 acres of pasture). At some date between 1546 and 1551, William Honnyngs assigned his interest in the property to Sir John Mason, who thus became the defendant in Elizabeth Coningsby's suit.

The freehold of Gubbins was granted by Edward VI to Princess Elizabeth in 1550 for the term of her life and in 1553, at the beginning of the Catholic reaction under Mary, the reversion of the property was granted to the grandson and daughter-in-law of Sir Thomas More. When this reversion matured is not known, but in 1586 Gubbins was still Crown land for Queen Elizabeth leased it for twenty-one years to Margaret Knolles. By the end of the sixteenth century, however, if not earlier, the Mores were again in possession.

The history of Gubbins in the next fifty years seems to have been uneventful, but in the second half of the seventeenth century the Mores fell into deep water. First in 1664, William More mortgaged Gubbins to Sir William Humble for £1,500. In the same year William More sold the property to Basil, his brother, a London merchant. Seven of Basil's children and three

of his grandchildren were born at Gubbins and Baptised in North Myrms parish church. This change of ownership may have infused some new money into the estate, but further mortgages followed until in 1693 Gubbins was sold to Sir Edward des Bouverie, a wellknown City merchant, who, after purchase, redeemed the outstanding mortgages. (2) Des Bouverie died in 1695 and his son, Jacob, sold Gubbins to Sir Robert Beachcroft, citizen and clothworker of London, in 1697. He in turn sold it to Jeremy Sambrooke, in 1708.

Thus, in less than forty years, three merchant families had owned Gubbins, while Jeremy Sambrooke, though not himself a business man, belonged to a family which had been connected with the City for at least a century. Jeremy, the purchaser of Gubbins was the second son of Jeremy Sambrooke, formerly agent at Madras for the East India Company, afterwards a director of that company, and a very wealthy man. Jeremy Sambrooke retained Gubbins from 1708 until his death in 1754, but little is known of him save that for a large part of his life he was blind. It is highly probable that he did much to improve both the house and the estate. In 1718, 1724 and 1735, he acquired lands and houses in North Myrms, (3) while surviving engravings of Gubbins indicate a magnificence and an eccentricity which were characteristic of the middle years of the eighteenth century. Engravings of the Bowling Green and the Canal in particular, show the formal layout of the gardens and the classical pastiche of the ornamentation. The Folly Gate (which still stands) almost certainly dates from this period, as does the Battle of Barnet memorial, which Jeremy Sambrooke erected in 1740. Both reveal the same romantic preoccupation with history.

Jeremy Sambrooke succeeded to the family baronetcy in 1740, upon the death of his nephew. He himself died unmarried, and Gubbins passed to his sister, Judith, for her life, and thereafter to John Freeman. In the following sixty years, Gubbins was owned in turn by Freemans, Hunters and Kembles, until in 1838 it was bought by the trustees of Robert William Gaussen. Caussen subsequently pulled down the house and incorporated the land in Brookmans Park.

An estate agent's description, dating from the time of the sale of the estate to Gaussen's trustees, shows that Gubbins then consisted of 328 acres, two-thirds of which was parkland. The house itself had accommodation, as the agent put it, "upon the scale of a nobleman's establishment".

K.G.DAVIES.

H.J.BUTCHER.

#### Notes

- (1) Public Record Office, E.321/8/21 and E.321/32/68.
- (2) The descent of Gubbins from this date can be traced from deeds preserved at the Hertfordshire County Record Office, Nos. 23702 and 23704.
- (3) Ibid.