

The Castle of More

BY HUGH BRAUN, F.S.A.

ONE of the most neglected of the important mediæval antiquities of Hertfordshire is the vanished castle of More. Despite the impressive part this once great house played in the history of Tudor times in this country, almost its very existence has been forgotten, and even those historians who have not forgotten the Treaty of the More have probably not the slightest idea as to the site of the More itself.

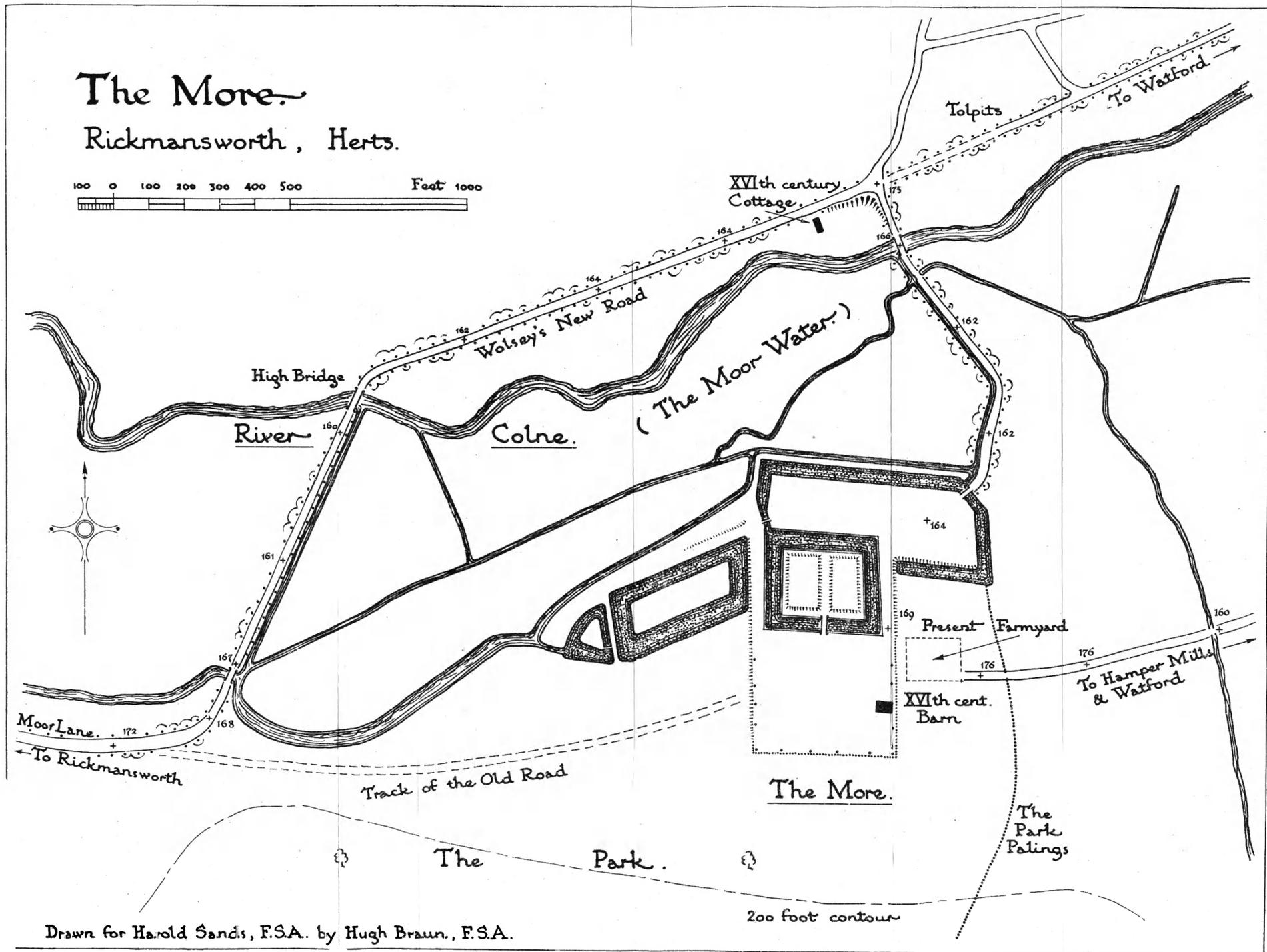
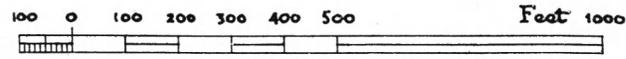
The broad marshy valley of the Colne below its confluence with the Gade or Cashio River has apparently been known from early mediæval times as "The More." The Colne itself was known in mediæval times as "The More Water."

The first mention of the Manor of More occurs about the year 1182, when it was granted by the Abbot of St. Albans to one Adam Aignel, who appears to have held it by knight service. The first mention of a house is in 1364, when it was described as "a principal messuage" attached to the manor. This house was presumably somewhere near the site of the castle, on the old "King's Highway from Woxebridge to Watford," and between the road and the marshy valley of the river. The track of the old highway may still be traced along the lower road from Rickmansworth to Watford, past the present farmhouse at Moor Farm, and thence by the footpath, now stopped, by the new Merchant Taylor's School, past Hamper Mill and along Eastbury Road to Bushey Arches and the Watford ford over the Colne.

In 1416, the More became the property of one William Flete, and ten years later this person, with others, obtained a licence to crenellate his house and make it a castle with crenellated walls and wall-towers. The terms of the licence are of particular interest in that in it is the first mention of brick used for fortification. Fourteen years later the fine brick castle of Hurstmonceux in Sussex was begun, and the fact that the remains of the castle of More show it to have been of about the same size as Hurstmonceux suggests that

The More.

Rickmansworth, Herts.



Drawn for Harold Sandis, F.S.A. by Hugh Braun., F.S.A.

the appearance of the Hertfordshire castle may have been similar to its fine Sussex cousin, for which it may even have been the model.

At the same time as William Flete obtained the licence to crenellate his house, he also obtained permission to empark 600 acres of the neighbouring countryside, thus founding the famous Park which is now a paradise for golfers.

In 1460, the More had returned to the Abbots of St. Albans, but was occupied as a residence by George Neville, Archbishop of York, who took a large part in the Wars of the Roses, and in 1471 was seized and imprisoned by Edward IV, and the More taken from him.

Thomas Wolsey became Abbot of St. Albans between 1516 and 1521, and in that capacity took charge of the More and greatly enlarged and embellished it with that skill he so ably demonstrated at his great palace of Hampton Court. Wolsey it was who spent so much on the gardens of the More as to make it one of the most beautiful residences in the country. He also stopped the old highway which passed the great house, constructing instead the new road which crossed the river by "High Bridge" and continued more directly to Watford by way of Cassio Bridge over the Gade. This road is still in use, although it has been diverted in several places.

To make his new road, Wolsey abolished a tenement called Tolpits, a revived successor of which has in its turn diverted his road, which remains as a romantic tree-lined cutting through its grounds. His royal master was often entertained at the More, and in 1525 was signed there the important treaty between this country and France, known as the "Treaty of the More." On Wolsey's diplomatic error over the matter of the royal divorce, Henry utilised the More as a "prison" for his unfortunate Queen, Katherine of Arragon, at the same time, incidentally, entertaining there her judge, the Papal Legate, who has left on record his impressions of the magnificence of the great house.

The More was, in 1529, put in the charge of Sir John Russell, who found it quite beyond his powers

to keep the place in order. In 1533 he complained bitterly to Thomas Cromwell that no money was available for its upkeep, and that even the park palings were falling to pieces, so that a large proportion of the deer had strayed and been killed by the local peasants.

When Thomas Cromwell followed his illustrious predecessor into disgrace, the More was bestowed on the Queen who had been the cause of *his* downfall, Anne of Cleves, who, however, possibly with memories of unhappy Queen Katherine, probably never lived there.

The More continued to be a royal palace, and a useful residence for the King and his court when the "sweating sickness" was abroad in the Capital. In 1542, the Privy Council met there a number of times.

The zenith of its fame was, however, during the days of the great Cardinal, after whose death it seems to have sunk gradually into disrepair. After the middle of the sixteenth century its history is finished, and the next century probably saw it rapidly becoming a ruin, in company with so many of the vast Tudor palaces.

It was probably finally pulled down about 1673, when the unlucky Duke of Monmouth used its materials to build a new house on the hill above the old castle. This new "Moor Park" was either in its turn pulled down or else entirely remodelled in the next century, when the present fine house was built.

The site is marked at present by a large moat, enclosing a rectangular area about 250 feet across from east to west and 200 feet from north to south. The area forms two huge mounds, now turfed over, but consisting of masses of broken brickwork, debris from the destroyed castle, and probably burying its foundations, which might thus be easily recovered by excavation. The entrance bridge was in the centre of the south front, and from it runs a deep groove between the two mounds of rubble, the way, presumably, kept clear by the demolition contractors of 1673. A few fragments remain of the south-east angle tower, but otherwise no brickwork remains above the surface.

Before the entrance bridge is the site of a great courtyard about 400 feet square, on the eastern side of which, now incorporated with the farm buildings of Moor Farm, is a small but interesting sixteenth century barn having a good roof with curved wind-braces.

At the back of the great moated site is another long moated courtyard which is now cut in two by the Metropolitan Railway. At its north-east angle was the site of the outer gatehouse, whence a road leads across the Colne to Wolsey's new road. Close to the road junction is a small sixteenth century cottage with moulded brick windows, possibly the tenement built by Wolsey to replace the destroyed Tolpits.

The outer courtyards were probably constructed by Wolsey, as may also have been the two western moats, the smaller of which, at least, was probably merely a garden, the moats having been possibly filled with water plants and designed more for æsthetic than military reasons. The arrangement of leats and guts for filling and draining the moats is interesting.

Such are the remains of the once great palace-castle of More, with its memories of Wolsey, Henry VIII and his sad Queen Katherine, and its destroyer, the ill-fated Duke of Monmouth.

The lonely moats are their memorials, and within the great mounds on the site of the original castle may still be some few mementoes of their days. At least there are probably the foundations of the first brick castle built in England.

(The accompanying illustration is from the *Sands' Collection of Castle Plans*.)